

# 1917

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International."

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*Imperialist Rivalries Sharpen*

## New World Disorder

The cheap victory over Iraq won by the United States and its coalition of rivals, hirelings and vassals opens a new and dangerous period of heightened inter-imperialist rivalry. Weeks before the final offensive began, George Bush announced his strategic objectives: "When we win, and we will, we will have taught a dangerous dictator, and any tyrant tempted to follow in his footsteps, that the US has a new credibility and that what we say goes," (*Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 10 February). "What we say goes" is the leitmotif for Washington's proposed "New World Order." Yet it is one thing to

reduce the cities of an insubordinate neocolony to rubble, and quite another to dictate terms to America's resurgent imperialist competitors.

The relative impunity with which U.S. forces devastated Iraq has done much to lay the "Vietnam syndrome" to rest. The *New York Review of Books* (28 March) reported that when Saddam Hussein initially invaded Kuwait even Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advised against military intervention on the basis of the disastrous experience of the U.S. military in Vietnam. The article went on:

"He had also absorbed the lessons of October, 1983, when the ill-considered deployment of Marines in Lebanon had ended in catastrophe. Now Powell expressed reservations about sending troops to the Arabian desert."

This time U.S. forces were unfortunately not blown out of the region. The easy triumph over Iraq whetted the appetite of the world's most dangerous and aggressive military machine for future adventures. Democratic Party politicians who had timidly questioned the tactical wisdom of Bush's strategy before the conflict are now desperately trying to match the Republicans in flag waving and patriotic rhetoric. Bush's 90 percent approval rating in the polls was paralleled by an outburst of enmity to San Francisco as a nest of peaceniks, liberal wimps, satanic homosexuals, Marxist professors and other "un-Americans." The triumph of U.S. arms in the Gulf intensified popular arrogance toward foreigners and produced a pronounced increase in racist hostility toward Arabs. This aggressive xenophobia was aptly described several years ago by Fred Halliday as "a self-pitying, suspicious, vicious streak which has found its expression in the torrent of laments for America's lost power."

The jingoist celebration of the "heroism" of the U.S.-led forces and the sagacity of their leaders overlooks the fact that the war against Iraq turned out to be one of the most one-sided military conflicts in recorded history. As Martin Woollacott observed in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* (10 March) "the very occasional Western casualty was more akin to industrial accident than anything else." The horrendous and criminal murder of perhaps a hundred thousand Iraqis, highlighted by the "smart" bombing of a few hundred women and children in a residential shelter in Baghdad, has been systematically downplayed by the Pentagon's servile media publicists.

The U.S. possesses the most formidable military machine in the world. In the giddy post-victory atmosphere Bush crowed: "We have a unique responsibility to do the hard work of freedom. Among the nations of the world, only the U.S. has both the moral standing and means to back it up" (*Newsweek*, 4 March). The most dangerous result of the coalition victory over Iraq is the perception among many in the U.S. that political and economic problems can be solved militarily. But military power is, in the last analysis, a coefficient of the economic strength of a nation. And the simple fact is that after three decades of economic decline, the U.S. can no longer enforce a Pax Americana. The growth of protectionist sentiment within the U.S. ruling class is an implicit recognition that American industry can no longer compete in the world market without tilting the playing field.

Bush's "New World Order" rhetoric is a sentimental harkening back to the Eisenhower years, when American imperialism commanded the unquestioning obedience of all the other capitalist powers. But while the U.S. remains supreme militarily, it no longer has the clout to compel its allies to submit on questions they consider to be in their vital interests. As the presumed danger of "Soviet expansionism" has evaporated with the unravelling of Stalinist rule, international politics is

returning to the more classical model of the intensifying inter-imperialist competition that characterized the period before the First World War. And the U.S. military advantage is one which cannot long be maintained in the face of its declining economic strength.

## Reunified Germany's Great Power Ambitions

In the aftermath of World War II, the American bourgeoisie flirted with the idea of deindustrializing Germany and Japan. After the consolidation of Stalinist regimes in East Europe and the victory of the Chinese Stalinists under Mao, this option was abandoned in favor of using its defeated imperialist rivals as regional bulwarks against the USSR. The American bourgeoisie intended to reopen Europe (and Japan) as a field for American investment and a market for its exports. U.S. capital found it particularly profitable to invest in Germany because of its impoverished but highly skilled industrial proletariat. By participating in the reconstruction of the productive infrastructure destroyed in the war, the U.S. helped the German bourgeoisie get back on its feet. In 1947 in the Anglo-American sectors of occupied Germany, industrial production was only 38 percent of what it had been in 1936. By 1951, as the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* ("economic miracle") commenced, industrial production had already reached 136 percent of its 1936 level.

Through the 1980s the Reagan administration invested hundreds of billions of dollars preparing for a nuclear Armageddon to obliterate the Soviet Union. The German bourgeoisie, however, pursued a two-track policy of loyal participation in the American-dominated NATO alliance, and *Ostpolitik*—Willy Brandt's policy of

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## 1917

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# The Degeneration of the Soviet Secret Police From Guardians to Executioners

One unintended result of Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost has been a rash of books by and about people who had been on the inside during the Stalin/Khrushchev/Brezhnev years. None of these offerings provides an analysis of Stalinist rule from a revolutionary perspective, and many of them have a decidedly anti-communist bias. However, they do provide a more detailed picture of how the October Revolution was betrayed, and how the workers state founded in 1917 degenerated within a decade into a regime of bureaucratic corruption and police-state repression.

The degeneration of the Bolshevik Revolution and the rise of Stalinist absolutism was a process which molded every element of political life in the Soviet Union. The information which has come to light as a result of glasnost helps illuminate the inter-relationship between the destruction of the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International (Comintern) as revolutionary organizations, and the transformation of the security police and the state bureaucracy. This was most evident in the increasing use of the State Political Directorate (GPU) against party members who opposed Stalin's faction and its anti-Leninist doctrine of "socialism in one country."

As the nascent bureaucracy, with Stalin at its head, solidified its control over the party, the revolutionary-internationalist traditions of the early years of the regime, when Lenin and Trotsky stood at the head of the Soviet state, were destroyed. The Comintern became a tool for the *destruction* of revolutionary cadres as it lurched from rightist opportunism in the mid-1920s, to the lunatic sectarianism of the "Third Period" and then, in 1935, to the abject class-collaborationism of the Popular Front. The Soviet security apparatus paralleled this degeneration at every step. From the revolutionary days of the civil war, the political police came under the control of a series of increasingly sadistic and amoral Stalinist thugs. By the mid-1930s the GPU specialized in pathological lying, petty score-settling, torture and mass murder.

## Bolsheviks Confront Counterrevolution

The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 was a remarkably bloodless affair, and the period that immediately followed was notable for the leniency shown to the defenders of the old regime. Many of those arrested who gave assurances that they would not take up arms against the new government were simply released under little or no supervision. But as the White armies readied themselves for civil war, the coalition government of the Bolsheviks and the Left Social Revolutionaries (SRs) found it necessary to resort to extraordinary measures in defense of the young workers state.



SOVPHOTO

**Felix Dzerzhinsky: head of the revolutionary Cheka in 1917**

On 21 February 1918, as the German army continued to advance prior to the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Soviet government issued a decree entitled "The Socialist Fatherland Is in Danger." The decree included the following three points:

"(5) The workers and peasants of Petrograd, Kiev, and of all towns, townships, villages and hamlets along the line of the new front are to mobilize battalions to dig trenches, under the direction of military experts.

"(6) These battalions are to include all able-bodied members of the bourgeois class, men and women, under the supervision of Red Guards; those who resist are to be shot.

"(8) Enemy agents, profiteers, marauders, hooligans, counter-revolutionary agitators and German spies are to be shot on the spot."

—*First Decrees of Soviet Power*

The "Cheka"—the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Speculation, Sabotage, and Misuse of Authority—was the agency that carried out the directives of the Council of People's Commissars. Established in December 1917, the Cheka grew out of the Petrograd Soviet's "Military Revolutionary Committee," which, under Trotsky, had

organized the October uprising. The Cheka was instructed, as its name implies, to suppress crime, bureaucratic abuse and counterrevolution.

Anticipating an imminent eruption of proletarian revolution in Western Europe, the Soviet leadership initially saw the Cheka as a temporary expedient until the workers state was consolidated. As the civil war against the Whites dragged on, leading Bolsheviks and Left Social Revolutionaries began questioning the severity of the Red Terror. Throughout 1918, Nikolai Bukharin, Lev Kamenev, Maxim Gorky, Victor Serge and I.Z. Steinberg (a Left SR and Commissar of Justice and Home Affairs) were among those who voiced misgivings over the growing power of the Cheka to operate free of any independent review. Lenin and Trotsky dismissed their concerns and asserted that responsibility for the use of terror lay with the enemy.

In 1919 Bukharin again approached Lenin to urge that the Cheka's power to impose capital punishment be reined in. At Lenin's initiative he was appointed to the Collegium of the Cheka "with the right of veto" over executions. According to Stephen Cohen in *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, Bukharin supported the use of coercive measures against counterrevolutionaries, but "worried about the recurring mistreatment of non-Bolshevik political figures and intellectuals" and often intervened on their behalf. He perhaps began to reconsider some of his misgivings when, on 25 September 1919, anarchists bombed a meeting in Moscow where he was speaking. Twelve people were killed and 55 wounded in the attack, including Bukharin himself.

## Dzerzhinsky and the Cheka

The first head of the Cheka (which in 1922 was reorganized as the "State Political Administration" or GPU) was Felix Dzerzhinsky, a Polish intellectual and a founding member of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL). Dzerzhinsky, who joined the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1917 following his release from Moscow Central Prison, was known as "Iron Felix" for his dedication and powers of endurance. He led the Cheka until his death in 1926.

There were abuses in the early days of the Cheka, and some of the original Chekists were little better than adventurers. Under Dzerzhinsky, however, abuses were generally punished when exposed. In his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, Victor Serge reports one infamous exception to this policy. In January 1920, as the civil war and the threat of internal counterrevolution were receding, Dzerzhinsky, with the approval of Lenin and Trotsky, proposed the elimination of the death penalty except in areas where military operations continued. A decree was promptly passed by the government and signed by Lenin, but before it could take effect, defiant Chekists in Moscow and Petrograd hurriedly executed several hundred prisoners. Serge reports, "The Politbureau...deliberated the question without daring to answer it." Apparently Dzerzhinsky (and Lenin) felt unable to punish the culprits.

Personally incorruptible, Dzerzhinsky sought by ex-

ample to have each Chekist conduct him or herself as a "Knight of the Revolution." In his first year as head of the Cheka he worked, slept and ate in his office. An "Old Chekist," Fyodor Fomin, eulogized Dzerzhinsky's determination to refuse any privilege denied to other Chekists:

"An old messenger would bring him his dinner from the common dining room used by all the Cheka workers. Sometimes he would try to bring Feliks Edmundovich something a bit tastier or a little bit better, and Feliks Edmundovich would squint his eyes inquisitively and ask, 'You mean that everyone has had this for dinner tonight?' And the old man, hiding his embarrassment, would rush to answer, 'Everyone, everyone, Comrade Dzerzhinsky.'"

—quoted in *KGB: The Inside Story*, Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky

Dzerzhinsky's record was not pristine: he allied himself with Stalin in seeking to strengthen the central apparatus at the expense of the national rights of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR, notably the Georgians. On 30 December 1922, Lenin wrote that in the resurgence of Great Russian chauvinism: "The rashness of Stalin's administrative zeal and his spite have played a fatal role. I fear that Dzerzhinsky too...has distinguished himself by his truly Russian state of mind (it is well known that Russified aliens are always much more Russian than the Russians themselves)." When Lenin was on his deathbed, he appealed to Trotsky to carry out a fight in the Central Committee against Stalin, Dzerzhinsky and Ordzhonikidze.

In May 1940, Trotsky recalled that, "Dzerzhinsky was brought into the Political Bureau after Lenin's death. This step was taken by Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev in order to attract to their side the honest but vain-glorious Dzerzhinsky. They succeeded completely." But despite his political support to Stalin, Dzerzhinsky and the organization he headed take an honorable place in Soviet history as defenders of the world's first workers state against those who sought to restore the old regime. Under "Iron Felix," the Cheka/GPU existed to protect and advance a new and just world order—not, as under Yagoda, Yezhov and Beria, to terrorize the Soviet working class and guarantee the despotic rule of a privileged caste.

Dzerzhinsky died as the conservative bureaucratic faction headed by Joseph Stalin was consolidating its grip on the USSR. While he had a long personal friendship with Stalin, Dzerzhinsky opposed the growing arrogance of the bureaucracy. Three hours before his death, in a speech delivered to the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, he said: "When I look at our apparatus, at our system of organization, our incredible bureaucracy and our utter disorder, cluttered with every conceivable sort of red tape, I am literally horrified" (cited in *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*, Boris Souvarine).

Dzerzhinsky's successor, Vyacheslav Menzhinsky, was not originally part of Stalin's faction. During the civil war he had visited Trotsky at the front and warned him that Stalin was conducting "a very complicated intrigue" against him. When he joined the Cheka,

Menzhinsky was, according to Fomin, already fluent in twelve languages, and he went on to master Chinese, Japanese, Persian and Turkish. He was a polymath as well as a polyglot, an intellectual of great scholarly breadth, and his interests included physics, chemistry, astronomy and mathematics. But he was a machine man who lacked the political authority of Dzerzhinsky, and often acquiesced to Stalin's intrigues. Under Menzhinsky, in the fall of 1927, the GPU began to play a larger role in the internal factional disputes in the party. When Stalin wanted Trotsky and Zinoviev expelled from the Central Committee in October 1927, Menzhinsky obligingly produced a report implicating them in a non-existent military plot involving a White officer who was, in fact, a GPU operative. In his biography of Stalin, Trotsky relates how, when Kamenev confronted Menzhinsky, and asked him if he thought Stalin had the political capacity to lead the revolution forward: "Menzhinsky dodged the issue. 'Why then did you let him grow into such a formidable force?' he answered question for question. 'Now it is too late.'" After an extended period of ill health, Menzhinsky died under mysterious circumstances in 1934.

With Menzhinsky gone, effective control of the GPU was in the hands of his deputy, Henrikh Yagoda. Yagoda, who had originally supported Bukharin in the intra-party faction fight, was a crude, unsophisticated careerist. However, he was also efficient, energetic, and ambitious; and he would—within limits—do what he was told. The inveterately anti-Semitic Stalin never completely trusted Yagoda, due as much to his Jewish background as to his political loyalties.

### The Kirov Assassination and the Great Purge Trials

The assassination of Sergei Kirov on 1 December 1934 provided a pretext for unleashing a wave of purges in which millions of Soviet citizens perished. Kirov, as head of the Leningrad party organization, had acquired a substantial independent base and, next to Stalin, was perhaps the most powerful individual within the bureaucracy. Kirov, an Old Bolshevik who had supported Stalin in the factional struggles of the 1920s, was considered a liberal within the bureaucracy. He favored a relaxation of pressure within the party, and a policy of reconciliation with the defeated political opponents of the ruling faction.

A large section of the party tops were worried that Stalin had concentrated too much power in his own hands. They considered him ill-suited for a period in which the repression that had accompanied the forced collectivization of the peasantry should be eased. In the elections for the Central Committee at the 17th Party Congress in February 1934, Kirov polled almost 300 more votes than Stalin. He was approached by a group of senior cadres who proposed that he replace Stalin as General Secretary. This story, long retailed by various samizdat historians, was confirmed in the 13 December 1987 issue of the Soviet magazine *Ogonek* (cited in *Stalin and the Kirov Murder*, Robert Conquest). When Stalin



Stalin and Kirov

was informed of this approach, some say by Kirov himself, he set to work arranging the latter's assassination.

Kirov's death provided a justification for launching a series of show trials and mass purges that consumed tens of thousands of party activists and whole layers of the Soviet population. Stalin, seeking to appropriate the authority of the Bolshevik Revolution, deliberately targeted the old party cadres whose political authority posed a potential obstacle to his absolute power. Virtually all surviving members of Lenin's Central Committee were branded as anti-Soviet traitors and murdered.

In the course of the purges, a majority of the delegates to the 17th Party Congress (exclusively composed of the top layers of Stalin's own faction) were liquidated. Of the 139 Central Committee members elected at the Congress, 110 were shot or sent to the camps. At the next Congress five years later, only 59 of the 1,966 delegates of 1934 reappeared.

The first of the great show trials began in January 1935: Grigorii Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, who in 1926-7 had briefly joined forces with Trotsky in opposition to Stalin, were tried, and "confessed" to, among other things, "moral responsibility" for the death of Kirov. In August 1936, Zinoviev and Kamenev were convicted again, with Trotsky as co-defendant *in absentia*. This time they took *direct* responsibility for the Kirov murder and for setting up a "Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Center."

At the second trial some of the "confessions" also implicated Alexei Rykov, Mikhail Tomsky and Bukharin, leading figures in the rightist faction of the party in the 1920s. However, in September 1936, when Yagoda

was given the assignment to frame Bukharin, his former leader, he balked. He was quickly replaced, via telegram from Stalin's summer villa, by the homicidal Nikolai Yezhov.

Under Yezhov, all restraints that hindered the liquidation of Stalin's enemies were removed. In the next two years, the terror, known in the USSR as the *Yezhovshchina*, swept across the land. Seventeen of Yagoda's eighteen commissars of state security were arrested and shot. The remaining one was poisoned. Yuri Pyatakov, Karl Radek and fifteen others were eliminated in a trial in which Trotsky was alleged to have been an agent of the secret services of Nazi Germany and militarist Japan. The last of the show trials were held in March 1938: Bukharin, Rykov, Nikolai Krestinsky, Christian Rakovsky and Yagoda were all convicted of being members of the "Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyites," and participating in plots against Stalin, acts of sabotage and various other crimes. For good measure Yagoda was also charged with murdering Menzhinsky and planning to kill Yezhov. Tomsky did not wait to be convicted, and instead committed suicide.

The purges also decimated the leadership of the Red Army. It has recently been revealed that Hitler's Gestapo, playing on Stalin's paranoid delusions, leaked information in Czechoslovakia to suggest that Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, hero of the civil war and the USSR's pre-eminent military leader, was plotting a coup. Stalin took the bait and seventy-five of the eighty members of the Supreme Military Council were shot. Half of the officer corps, more than 35,000 men, were liquidated along with them. The early success of Hitler's 1941 invasion of the USSR is at least partly attributable to the Stalinist scythe which had cut through the Soviet military cadre.

The trials and frameups swallowed wave after wave of new victims—including those who had carried out earlier purges. In a secret report to the Politbureau in 1956, the KGB revealed that approximately 19 million arrests had been made in the period from 1935 to 1940; of those, at least seven million people were shot or perished in the gulag.

The *Yezhovshchina* destroyed what remained of the idealism and revolutionary dedication inherited from the early Cheka. The new recruits who filled the ranks of the GPU under Yezhov, and later Beria, were mostly careerists with little or no political understanding of what was happening. The lowest level of the GPU were the executioners. Most of these were alcoholics who were given a glass of vodka when they checked out their weapons in the morning. They then proceeded to pits dug by criminal convicts, lined up their political prisoners, and began shooting. Some became so hardened to what they were doing that they would line up prisoners sideways and try to see how many they could kill with a single bullet. At the end of the day, they turned in their guns and were given as much free vodka as they could drink ("The Executioner's Song," *Moscow News*, 1988, No. 41, quoted in *KGB: The Inside Story*).

Yezhov also supervised the hunting down and murder of many members of the Trotskyist movement in Europe. A GPU agent, Mark Zborowski, managed to

infiltrate the inner circle of the fledgling Fourth International in Paris. He arranged the murder of Trotsky's son, Sedov, and also of Rudolf Klement, who was in charge of organizing the International's founding conference. Zborowski was also probably responsible for the assassination in 1937 in Switzerland of former Soviet intelligence agent Ignace Reiss (Poretzky), who only a few weeks earlier had broken with the counterrevolutionary Stalinist murder machine and declared his solidarity with the Fourth International.

Eventually Yezhov too outlived his usefulness to Stalin, possibly because he knew too much, and was replaced by Lavrenti Beria. Once again the GPU was purged: by 1940, Yezhov and 101 of his top 122 officers from the 1937-38 period had been liquidated. Beria, without doubt the most sinister and blood-soaked of the Stalinist butchers, was free to indulge himself in depravities that rivalled those committed by the Nazis in the territories they occupied. Aside from the murder and mayhem that had become standard practice, he would frequently have attractive young women—frequently schoolgirls—snatched from Moscow streets for his own sadistic sexual purposes. Husbands or parents who complained were likely to end up in the gulag.

In retrospect, the degeneration of the party and government bureaucracy can be charted by the quality of the leaders of the GPU in the 1930s. First the uncertain Menzhinsky; then the crude but effective careerist Yagoda; next, the bloody Yezhov; and finally the monstrous Beria. At each step, more absolute and arbitrary power was concentrated in the hands of Stalin.

## The GPU's International Terrorism

Terror against Stalin's supposed political opponents in the USSR abated somewhat under Beria, more for lack of new victims than any other reason. However, the persecution of the Left Opposition in exile continued. Throughout the 1930s Trotsky had been hounded from France to Norway to Mexico. Finally, in 1940, a GPU agent recruited in Spain, Ramon Mercader, infiltrated Trotsky's compound in Mexico and struck him down with a mountain-climbing pick.

After the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact and the dismemberment of Poland, the Gestapo and the GPU set about the task of ridding their respective zones of any potential political rivals. GPU targets included Polish communists who had survived the bloody purges in Moscow. Wladyslaw Gomulka, a future head of the Polish deformed workers state, decided that it was safer to take his chances with the Gestapo, and fled to the German-occupied zone.

The GPU routinely collaborated with the Nazis in this period, exchanging German communists from the gulag for Russian emigres and Ukrainians held in fascist prisons in Germany. One German communist, Margarete Buber-Neumann, was handed over to the Nazis at a bridge in Brest-Litovsk. Later she bitterly recalled the experience in an interview:

"When we were half-way across, I looked back. The [GPU] officials still stood there in a group, watching us



AGUSTI CENTELLES

### Andres Nin: murdered by the GPU

go. Behind them was Soviet Russia. Bitterly, I recalled the Communist litany: Fatherland of the Toilers; Bulwark of Freedom; Haven of the Persecuted."

—*Deadly Embrace*, A. Read, D. Fischer (quoted in KGB: The Inside Story)

Many GPU agents who organized intelligence networks and partisan units during World War II were veterans of the Spanish Civil War. Major General Leonid Aleksandrovich Eitingon, second in command of partisan operations behind the lines of the German army after Hitler's invasion, had been a GPU agent in Spain. He was also the organizer of Trotsky's assassination. Another GPU agent in Spain was Walter Ulbricht, the future head of the German Democratic Republic: his job was to hunt down and murder German, Austrian and Swiss Trotskyists in the International Brigades.

The Comintern sent the following message to the Spanish Communist Party in December 1936:

"Whatever happens, the final destruction of the Trotskyists must be achieved, exposing them to the masses as a fascist secret service carrying out provocations in the service of Hitler and General Franco, attempting to split the Popular Front, conducting a slanderous campaign against the Soviet Union, a secret service actively aiding fascism in Spain."

One of the most famous of the GPU's many leftist victims in Spain was Andres Nin, a founder of the Spanish Communist Party, a former close associate of Trotsky, and a leader of the Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista (POUM). In May 1937, Nin was kidnapped, tortured and finally flayed alive when he refused to "confess" to collaborating with the fascists.

Even in its so-called heroic phase, during and after the "Great Patriotic War" when the Stalinists gained new authority based on the Soviet army's defeat of fascist Germany, the GPU continued business as usual. Thousands of returning Soviet POWs were condemned

to death in Siberia as "fascist collaborators."

Wherever the victorious Soviet army went as they drove across Eastern Europe they were followed by the NKVD (GPU). The "security forces," at the height of the war, had 53 *divisions* of its own, totalling nearly three quarters of a million troops. These divisions were used by Beria and Stalin to set up a string of regimes in Eastern Europe essentially identical to that in the USSR.

### The Jewish Doctors' Plot

The final days of Stalin's life were marked by a witchhunt orchestrated by the viciously anti-Semitic Beria: the Jewish Doctors' Plot. Stalin interpreted the death of one of his proteges, Andrei Zhdanov, as evidence of an elaborate "plot" against the state. On the strength of a letter from a junior Kremlin medical *aparatchik* (whom Nikita Khrushchev later described as "mentally unbalanced"), it was claimed that Zhdanov had been poisoned by Kremlin doctors. Dozens of doctors were arrested, beaten and forced to confess to Zhdanov's poisoning. In reality, according to Khrushchev, Zhdanov had died of the effects of acute alcoholism. Only Stalin's timely death saved the doctors.

After the "Doctors' Plot" investigation, the GPU was once again purged, this time of all "pro-Zionist" (i.e., Jewish) elements. None of those purged were rehabilitated after Stalin's death, and to this day there are virtually no Jews in the Soviet secret police, now known as the KGB.

Beria, Stalin's trusted hatchetman and obsequious stooge, secretly hated his master. Khrushchev described Beria on the night of Stalin's death as "spewing hatred" for his boss:

"But, interestingly enough, as soon as Stalin showed these signs of consciousness on his face and made us think he might recover, Beria threw himself on his knees, seized Stalin's hand, and started kissing it. When Stalin lost consciousness again and closed his eyes, Beria stood up and spat."

—*Khrushchev Remembers*

In the power struggle that followed Stalin's death in 1953, Khrushchev allied himself with Marshal Grigori Zhukov, hero of the "Great Patriotic War" against German fascism, and promptly had Beria arrested, tried and shot—not for his anti-working class crimes but, as was the fashion, for being an "agent of British Imperialism" who was "attempting to restore capitalism" in the USSR.

### Personal Courage and Political Program

The USSR is a society with a profound contradiction. The collectivized property forms on which the Soviet regime rests were established by the October Revolution of 1917 and must be defended. But political power in the Soviet Union has, for over six decades, been monopolized by a corrupt elite answerable only to itself. To guarantee its own immense privileges, the parasitic ruling caste has resorted to extreme repression, often reaching insane proportions.

The connection between the criminality of the GPU



**Leopold Trepper, heroic Soviet spy in Nazi-occupied Europe**

and its successors under Stalin, and the degeneration of the October Revolution in the 1920s and 30s, was more than just a casual one. The failure of working-class revolution to spread to the industrialized countries of western Europe promoted the growth of bureaucratic tendencies within the Soviet state apparatus, which soon found their reflection in the Communist Party. Yagoda, Yezhov and Beria were very much the creatures of Stalin—but Stalin himself was also a creature of the bureaucracy. As Trotsky remarked in his unfinished biography of the provincial mediocrity who established himself as dictator:

“He is needed by all of them—by the tired radicals, by the bureaucrats, by the *nepmen*, the *kulaks*, the upstarts, the sneaks, by all the worms that are crawling out of the upturned soil of the manured revolution. He knows how to meet them on their own ground, he speaks their language and he knows how to lead them.”

While the Soviet security services were guilty of horrendous crimes against the working class, they were, at the same time, part of the apparatus of a degenerated workers state under perpetual siege from a hostile capitalist world. On the basis of Stalinism’s posture as a defender of socialism, many fine and idealistic young men and women were recruited to the Soviet security apparatus. Many Soviet operatives—such as Kim Philby, Leopold Trepper and Richard Sorge—showed great personal courage and performed heroic services in the defense of the USSR against imperialism.

But the *decisive* role of the organizations into which they were absorbed was not the advancement of the international proletariat; rather, it was to ensure the survival of the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy. The Kremlin oligarchy feared above all the prospect of successful proletarian revolution outside the “Socialist Fatherland,” for this would inevitably spark independent working-class mobilizations in the USSR.

One of the most reprehensible crimes of Stalinism was that men and women who wanted to struggle for socialism were thrust into a crucible that turned them

into moral worms, or liquidated them, and sometimes both. Many subjective revolutionaries in Stalin’s time were hypnotized by an identification of the interests of world socialism with the rule of the Kremlin oligarchy. Many, who were initially disgusted by what they saw, came to accept the notion that to attempt to expose the crimes of the apparatus was to play into the hands of the imperialists and the enemies of socialism. This, as well as the cruder devices of torture and threats against loved ones, was why so many innocent victims at the purge trials confessed to absurd crimes. In his memoirs, Leopold Trepper, the organizer of an important Soviet intelligence operation in Nazi-occupied Europe, noted that in the 1930s only the Trotskyists upheld the ideals of genuine communism:

“Following the example of their leader, who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice-axe, they fought Stalinism to the death, and they were the only ones who did. By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated. In the camps, their conduct was admirable. But their voices were lost in the tundra.

“Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed. They did not ‘confess,’ for they knew that their confession would serve neither the party nor socialism.”

Today the once-powerful “international communist movement,” headquartered in Moscow, is no more. All around the globe the Kremlin-loyal Communist Parties are disintegrating as the leaders of “actually existing socialism” quarrel among themselves over the timetable for capitalist restoration. While Trepper and others like him could only see Trotskyism as a noble but futile moral posture, in fact it represents the only “coherent political system” capable of advancing the interests of the oppressed and downtrodden. ■

#### KGB officers in training



TIME

# Class Struggle Candidate in SF Printers Union

Fred Ferguson, editor of *Militant Printer*, a union newsletter politically supported by the Bolshevik Tendency, ran as a candidate in the November 1990 elections of the San Francisco Bay Area Typographical Union (BATU). Running on a class-struggle program, Ferguson stood for the Local Executive Committee and Elected Scale (contract negotiating) Committee. His campaign was supported by a wide layer of the ranks of the union.

The Typographical Union, now affiliated with the Communication Workers of America (CWA), was formerly known as the International Typographical Union. It is one of the oldest craft unions in North America. Over the last 25 years it has suffered the effects of a technological revolution in printing that has seen a huge increase in individual productivity. Work once done by highly skilled compositors is now done by less skilled (and lower paid) computer operators outside the traditional composing rooms of most of the country's newspapers and commercial printing plants (see: "The Decline of the Printers Union," 1917 No. 6).

This process was aided and abetted by the cowardly union bureaucrats, who signed attrition agreements that "guaranteed" jobs for printers already on site, while allowing the employers to assign the work wherever it could be done cheapest. As a result, membership in the union has declined by nearly two-thirds in 20 years. For example, at the *New York Times*, the workforce has shrunk from over 1,000 to fewer than 300.

In 1965 the *New York Daily News* employed more than 900 composing-room printers. In the recent strike at the *Daily News*, the printers were contractually required to cross the picket lines and act as strikebreakers against their fellow workers. The gutless union leadership refused to violate this rotten deal. The printers' "reward" at the end of the strike was that 100 of them (half the total) were laid off.

## Union Control of Hiring Threatened

Unlike workers in the rest of the industrialized world, American workers have never attained the class consciousness necessary to form a national political party of their own. Yet they have in many cases obtained control over hiring in the plants. In longshore, union-run hiring halls dispatch workers to the shipping companies, day by day, on a seniority basis. In the printing trades the control was restricted to new-hires in plants with a steady workforce.

Whatever the method, the result was that the bosses were denied the right to pick and choose among the available workers. Employment applications, "security checks" and all the hat-in-hand humiliation of job hunt-



Robert Maxwell, new *Daily News* owner, congratulated by labor bureaucrat George McDonald

ing in North America was replaced by a fair and, in most cases, more dignified process. In the Typographical Union the system gradually evolved into a complicated method of mandatory hiring of substitutes whenever workers in the regular workforce were absent. The system even included a provision that forced the companies to hire a substitute worker every time the equivalent of a shift of overtime had been worked by a member in the regular workforce. The owners hated this arrangement and repeatedly tried to get rid of it. As the bureaucrats gradually weakened the union over the years, the union hiring system was eroded bit by bit. Today, it is fully in effect in only a few places on the West Coast.

In BATU/CWA the system remained more or less intact until July 1989, when the bureaucrats negotiated a ten-year supplemental agreement to the main contract that retained nominal union control over *who* would be hired, but gave the companies the right to say *when*, or rather *whether*, they would be hired. In return, 18 substitute workers were added to the list of workers who were "guaranteed" employment for the rest of their working lives. This was only pushed through after a bitter internal union fight in which the labor bureaucrats used the bait of the "guaranteed" jobs to convince enough workers to approve the gutting of union-controlled hiring.

## *Militant Printer's* Campaign

The 1989 fight angered a substantial minority of union members, including many substitute workers. They have been looking for revenge against the bureaucrats ever since. For eight years, *Militant Printer* has campaigned against the givebacks and treacherous

class-collaborationist policies of the union tops. Ferguson's November 1990 election campaign, which drew wide support, was a continuation of this struggle.

BATU/CWA is one of the more political unions in an area of the United States long noted for left-wing political activity. For many years, the leadership was dominated by a generation of supporters of the reformist Communist Party. Demoralized by the results of its own class-collaborationist policies, the entire leadership announced its retirement in early 1990. When nominations for union elections were held later that year, the majority caucus, which had dominated the political life of the union for 20 years, was so thoroughly discredited that it did not try to run a slate of candidates.

Instead, individual supporters of the caucus nominated Charles Tobias, a former full-time Local 21 organizer, for president. Tobias then presented an "independent" slate to run on his ticket. George Williams, an unaffiliated candidate, was nominated by an ad hoc rank-and-file committee of shop-floor activists, some of whom had engaged in reformist community organizing projects for the elderly. The majority caucus (operating under a classic misnomer as "the Progressive Club") attempted to deny Williams a spot on the ballot on a technicality. At a subsequent union meeting, rank-and-file members rejected this bureaucratic maneuver and voted by a two-thirds majority to allow Williams to run.

*Militant Printer* published its program early on and, in so doing, forced the other candidates to do the same. The election campaign took place in the midst of the *Daily News* strike and a hotly-contested round of contract negotiations at the major San Francisco area newspapers. The issues in these negotiations—job losses and declining real wages—became the central focus of the election campaign. It was clear from the beginning that the other candidates could offer only mushy platitudes and vague statements of "concern" over the predicament

the union found itself in after 20 years of give-back, sell-out contracts. Both presidential candidates published programs full of vague generalities that avoided posing class-struggle solutions for the problems facing the BATU and the union movement. On the basis of their programs, neither candidate warranted even critical support.

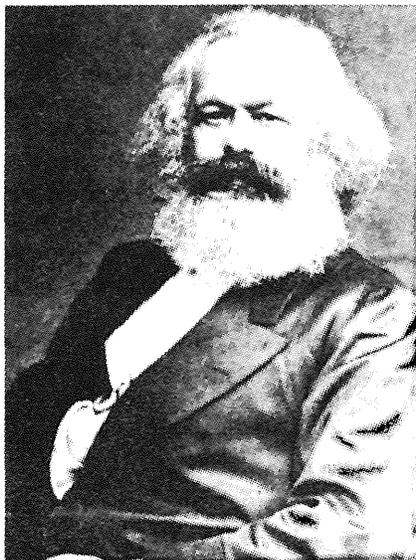
Ferguson traveled throughout the 3,000 square miles of the union's geographical jurisdiction and visited virtually every concentration of more than a half-dozen members. Thousands of copies of three campaign issues of *Militant Printer* were distributed.

When the votes were counted, it turned out that Ferguson had lost a very close election. He received 593 votes for Executive Committee, losing by a mere 13 votes. The top candidate of the five elected polled 758 out of a total of 1,005 votes cast. In the race for Scale Committee, Ferguson's total of 584 was only 12 votes short of election. This was remarkable considering that in the presidential race, the "independent" candidate, covertly supported by the Stalinist-led "Progressive Club," buried the unaffiliated reformist in a near two-to-one landslide (615 to 378).

*Militant Printer* has a wide readership among the working printers, and is respected as a serious and sane political alternative to the bureaucrats, even by those workers who do not necessarily agree with parts of its program. For example, one of the younger members of the Stalinist caucus told Ferguson confidentially that he was going to vote for him because he thought the contract negotiating committee needed a "little yeast." The nearly 600 workers who cast their ballots for the only class-struggle candidate represent a solid base for socialist politics in the union. One of the lessons of this campaign is that, even in a reactionary period, it is possible to raise the flag of class-struggle unionism and get a hearing. ■

## Proletarians, Capitalism & Technology

BETTMAN ARCHIVES



*"John Stuart Mill says in his Principles of Political Economy: 'It is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being.' That is, however, by no means the aim of the application of machinery under capitalism. Like every other instrument for increasing the productivity of labour, machinery is intended to cheapen commodities and, by shortening the part of the working day in which the worker works for himself, to lengthen the other part, the part he gives to the capitalist for nothing. The machine is a means for producing surplus-value."*

\* \* \*

*"But machinery does not just act as a superior competitor to the worker, always on the point of making him superfluous. It is a power inimical to him, and capital proclaims this fact loudly and deliberately, as well as making use of it. It is the most powerful weapon for suppressing strikes, those periodic revolts of the working class against the autocracy of capital."*

—Karl Marx, *Capital* (vol. 1)

# Militant Printer's 1990 Election Program

## 1. Break with the Strikebreaking Democratic and Republican Parties!

The labor movement must have its own political party, a workers party based on the unions, committed to the fight for our interests, up to and including a workers government! Not a dime, not a vote for the strikebreaking, racist Democrats and Republicans! The Democrats and Republicans have taken us to war four times in this century and now threaten to do it again. It is our sons and daughters who will die in Saudi Arabia—No to Bush's war for Big Oil!

## 2. For a Four-Day, 30-Hour Workweek, With No Loss in Pay!

The answer to unemployment, homelessness and poverty is not some phony "guaranteed job" that disappears when the individual named on a list retires (or the company goes bankrupt). The answer is a shorter work-week with no loss in pay. The right to a job should be the birthright of every worker!

## 3. For a 100% Cost-of-Living Clause in Every Contract!

The "Voodoo Economics" of the Carter/Reagan/Bush administrations have resulted in a loss in real wages for the American worker. The real wages (after inflation) in the newspapers in Local 21 have declined more than \$100 a week since 1975.

## 4. For a Merger with the Guild and GCIU!

The day of the print crafts is over. The employers we face today are multi-national conglomerates, and the crying need in this industry is for one big union of all communication and print workers, with company-wide and industry-wide contracts.

## 5. For a Fight to Protect and Regain our Jurisdiction!

In their haste to appease the employers, previous administrations signed contracts that gave away much of our jurisdiction on the spurious basis that it was "lost" to automation. In reality, much of the work was only moved to other departments and is still being done there. Page makeup, proofreading and typesetting *is our work!*

## 6. Picket Lines Mean Don't Cross!

No crossing of picket lines for *any* reason. The last 15 years have seen a virtual orgy of union-busting with the employers using us and other unions to break strikes (Chicago, Washington D.C., etc.).

## 7. For Union Action Against the Racist Skinhead Nazis and Klan!

For a return to the days when the union movement in this country stood with the oppressed against the

night riders and Hitler-loving thugs like the Nazis. For Labor/Black defense against Klan/Nazi terror!

## 8. Organize the Unorganized!

For a serious and aggressive organizing drive to get the hundreds of non-union printers in the Bay Area into this union! An aggressive, fighting union that wins a few struggles will have the appeal to pull in the unorgan-ized—who in turn will increase the union's clout in future confrontations. Only by reversing the attrition of the union membership can we ensure that the industrial pension remains sound. Let's not have tomorrow's pensioners end up on welfare, as happened when the ITU Fraternal Pension went broke!

## 9. No Lawsuits Against the Union!

Every time a member sues the union, the courts and government use it as an excuse to gain just a little more control over our affairs! (Six years ago we had the ludi-crous example of then-First Vice-President Robert McMichen and his fellow playmates in Colorado Springs dragging the union and each other into court over "election irregularities").

## 10. Take Back and Use the Strike Weapon!

Local 21, the CWA and much of the rest of the labor movement have virtually abandoned the strike as a weapon. Most of the problems facing the union can be traced in the long run to this policy. Organizing unorganized workers, for example, can hardly succeed when the employers know that even in the unlikely event that there is a strike, the worst that will happen is an impotent consumer boycott (Chicago, Vallejo, etc.). The same is true in the fight for a shorter workweek, cost-of-living contracts, etc. The employers must know that we are able and that we have *the will* to strike.

The strike, the only real weapon workers have, is essentially a political question. A strike, any strike, almost immediately becomes a confrontation with the city, state or national government when the employer asks for and gets police to bring scabs into the plant and a court injunction against pickets (PATCO, meatcutters, Greyhound, Eastern Airlines, etc., etc.). A militant leadership must be prepared to show active solidarity with other unions engaged in struggles with the corporate pirates.

The problems we face as a union have been a long time in the making and there certainly are no overnight answers, but taking back the right to strike is the place to begin. Carefully prepared, militantly prosecuted strikes, with mass picket lines and a leadership committed to winning, are the key to putting this union back on its feet.

*Let's get this union off its back!*

# New World Disorder...

*continued from page 2*

promoting capitalist restoration (and achieving a certain measure of independence from the U.S.) through economic cooperation with the Soviets and their satellites. The victory over Soviet "communism," and the collapse of the bureaucratized workers states of Eastern Europe, which Reagan took credit for, has furthered the interests of America's competitors. The big winner was West Germany, which is now busy trying to digest the former DDR, as it pushes ahead in the economic penetration of Eastern Europe.

German imperialism has become increasingly independent of the U.S. Today Germany is by far the most powerful and dynamic state in Europe. While the "common" market scheduled for 1992 will not overcome the inter-imperialist rivalries in Europe, it is a preparatory step for trade war with North America and Japan. The projected unification of the European market is above all a triumph for German capitalism. Forty-five years after the defeat of the Third Reich, Germany is once again the leading power in Europe. It has considerable leverage over Britain and France, which twice this century combined to block German hegemony.

Last December's collapse of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks highlighted the sharpening inter-imperialist hostilities. The GATT was established at the initiative of the U.S. in 1947, as an attempt to open international markets to American penetration. At the December talks, the European Community (EC) flatly rejected American demands for ending agricultural export subsidies. The U.S. responded with threats of doubling duties on European food imports. Recently there have been attempts to get the talks started again, but the trend is clearly toward regional economic blocs sheltered behind tariff walls. The U.S. would dominate the Western Hemisphere; Germany would be hegemonic over Europe, with Africa as a resource base; Japan would revive its prewar "Greater

**Expanding German industry seeks new markets, at imperialist rivals' expense**

DER SPIEGEL



East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere." As Doug Henwood commented in the 4 March issue of *MERIP Report*: "Since about 45 percent of world trade occurs within these three major blocs, that would leave over half of world commerce vulnerable to restriction—a portion reminiscent of the 1930s trade contraction."

Besides opening enormous opportunities for German expansion into its traditional Eastern European hinterland, the crisis of Stalinism in the USSR has weakened Germany's military dependence on the U.S. The 1989 decision by Germany, Britain, Italy and Spain to spend \$40 billion on the production of a "European Fighter Aircraft," rather than buying upgraded American F-16 or FA-18 fighters, exemplifies the determination of the European imperialists to move out from under the thumb of the U.S. While the overhead costs of this project are higher than purchasing American hardware, the European imperialists are thinking of the long term. Francois Heisbourg, director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, observed:

"If the Europeans had bought the American aircraft, they would presumably lose the capability to design and develop their own aircraft. Then, for the next generation of aircraft, Americans could impose whatever terms they want."

—*New York Times*, 21 February 1989

In the 1980s European aircraft makers collaborated on the Tornado fighter and the civil Airbus. Current joint European projects include the development of Euromissiles, a space shuttle program, a high-definition television system and advanced computer chips. The existence of such projects does not mean that the contradictions between the various European national bourgeoisies have disappeared. At every step there are complicated disputes over the sharing of costs and benefits, as each country haggles for the best deal for its own monopolists. The Germans, for example, threatened to pull out of the Eurofighter program if the consortium chose a British rather than German radar system. There is also growing sentiment within the EC, led by the Germans, to move away from lavishly funded hot-house development projects toward a system of more open bidding, particularly in the electronics sector. However, the pressure of Japanese and American competition has compelled each national ruling class to give up a measure of its autonomy in order to cooperate in the pursuit of its larger interests.

The three-cornered struggle for capitalist hegemony between the U.S. and its two major adversaries contains within it the seeds of future conflicts. The destructive capacity of modern military technology is qualitatively greater than ever before, but the fundamental irrationality of a social system based on competition—which periodically explodes into global war—has not changed since the beginning of this century. What has changed is the relative economic and military clout of the different imperialists and their political alignments.

## An Epoch of Wars and Revolutions

As Lenin noted almost 80 years ago, ours is an epoch of wars and revolutions. This epoch was inaugurated

with the carnage of World War I. During the preceding four hundred years of capitalist growth, the system of generalized commodity production had spread from Europe to the rest of the world. This was not a process of gradual and peaceful transformation of pre-capitalist economies into industrial ones, but rather one of aggressive conquests of one territory after another by capitalist monopolies, each backed by the gunboats of its own imperial state. The collision of the opposing European empires in 1914 was only the first of a series of struggles for the division and redivision of global spheres of influence.

The cataclysmic inter-imperialist conflict of 1914-18, touted at the time as "a war to end war," laid the basis for a larger conflict two decades later. World War II prostrated German and Japanese imperialism, bankrupted Britain, marginalized France and established the U.S. as the undisputed ruler of the capitalist world. In comparison with all major combatants, U.S. losses in the war were negligible. Between 1939 and 1945, America's productive capacity doubled while that of its rivals shrank. In 1950 the U.S. accounted for 40 percent of the world's total gross national product (GNP). Thirty years later, at the beginning of the Reagan years, this had fallen to 20 percent.

The only other major power to emerge from World War II in a strengthened position was the Soviet Union. The USSR was the product of the revolutionary seizure of power by the Russian workers in the midst of World War I. Isolated and besieged, the revolutionary regime established in 1917 gradually degenerated. From 1924 on, political power was wielded by a bureaucratic stratum, headed by Joseph Stalin. Nonetheless, even under a brutal, anti-working class dictatorship, the system of collectivized property created by the revolution remained.

Unlike the U.S., the Soviet Union suffered enormously from World War II. Twenty million Soviet citizens died in the struggle to drive the Nazis out of the USSR and Eastern Europe. Yet almost before the conflict was over, the victorious Western allies, led by the U.S., began a campaign to "roll back" the Soviet degenerated workers state. After pro-Moscow communist parties were ejected from post-war popular-front governments in Italy and France at Washington's behest, Stalin moved to eliminate pro-capitalist elements from the governments established in the territory occupied by the Soviet army, and expropriated the indigenous capitalists. This strengthened the situation of the USSR politically but did not compensate for the enormous economic devastation caused by the war.

For forty years the fundamental axis of world politics has been the global struggle of the U.S. and its allies to contain social revolution in the Third World and to reconquer the Soviet bloc, China and the other deformed worker states for the world market. The recent implosion of the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe, and the seemingly terminal crisis of Stalinism in the Soviet



**New World Order means renewed military competition. British arms makers display goods at Farnborough air show**

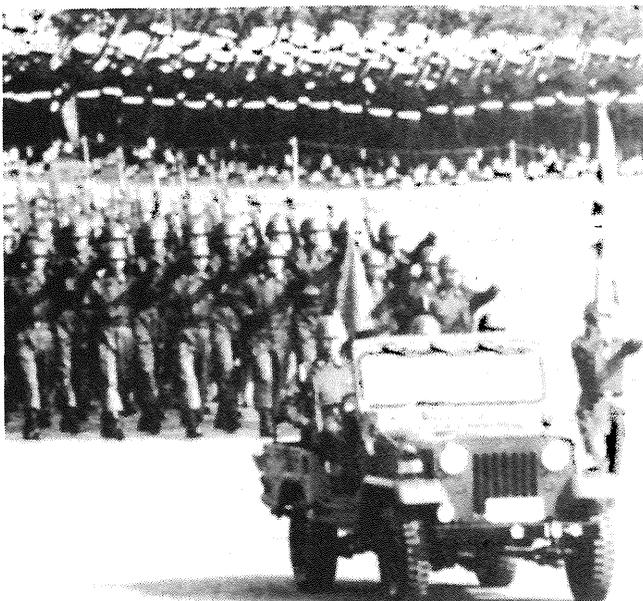
MARIO FOURMY—REA SABA

Union itself, have decisively changed the configuration of world politics. The eclipse of the USSR as a "superpower" was highlighted by the American president's offhand dismissal of Gorbachev's last-minute attempts to broker an Iraqi surrender. Gorbachev's reward for five years of craven capitulation to imperialism on every front was to be publicly humiliated by his "friend" in the White House.

But even though the reconquest of the deformed workers states of Eastern Europe, already far advanced, represents a significant victory for the imperialists, it cannot solve the fundamental contradictions of capitalism. The uneven capacity of the various imperialists to benefit from this historic opportunity can only aggravate inter-imperialist antagonisms. While massively expanding the world market, as well as permitting access to new sources of raw materials and a cheap, relatively skilled pool of labor, the successful incorporation of the Soviet bloc into semi-colonies would tend to depress the price of labor within the imperialist states. This intensifying exploitation could, in turn, touch off renewed outbursts of working-class resistance in the imperialist heartlands. In any case, Eastern Europe promises to be an extremely unstable region for years to come, as millions of workers come face to face with the brutal reality of life in an "underdeveloped" market economy.

### Japanese Imperialism Resurgent

While Bush is unable to impose any kind of order in world politics, neither of America's major rivals yet possesses the ability to overtly defy Washington. Japan, which imports most of its oil from the Middle East, was initially inclined to seek a diplomatic resolution to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The Japanese high command took a different view and openly advocated participation in Bush's coalition. It saw the conflict as an opportunity to breach Japan's constitutional ban on sending members of its "Self Defense Force" overseas,



DAVID/SYGMA

### Tokyo's "Self-Defense" force: ready to project Japanese power overseas

and to undermine the substantial anti-militarist sentiment in the population. But widespread popular opposition blocked Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu's proposed compromise of dispatching Japanese military planes to the region for "humanitarian" missions. After the U.S. victory, a substantial section of the Japanese ruling class expressed its regret for not having signed on. However, it will not be long before Japanese military power is once again projected internationally.

After three decades under the American military umbrella, Japan accelerated armament production in the late 1970s. Between 1978 and 1987 Japanese domestic military production quintupled, from \$2.7 to \$13 billion: "in military spending Japan now ranks second behind the United States among the major non-Communist industrialized nations, according to a recent report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London" (*New York Times*, 10 October 1989). Yet Japan spends far less as a percentage of its GNP. For years the U.S. has been pressuring Japan to increase its military spending and assume a greater part of the burden of imperialist war preparations against the Soviet Union. At the same time, though, Washington wants to maintain its military hegemony. This fundamental ambiguity in U.S. policy has become a source of considerable tension. After years of regarding Japan as a junior partner, the American ruling class is having difficulty coming to terms with its changed relationship.

Several years ago a wrangle broke out over the production of a new fighter for the Japanese military. Originally Japan's Defense Agency planned to produce its own plane, but it eventually succumbed to American pressure, and agreed to a joint project between General Dynamics and Mitsubishi to produce the FSX fighter, an advanced version of the American F-16. After the deal was hammered out, several influential American congressmen began to complain about Japan getting access to American military technology. The project has gone

ahead, but the Japanese have made it clear that in future they will develop their own weapons systems without American assistance.

The FSX dispute helped fuel a growing nationalist sentiment in Japan, where America is increasingly seen as a shrill and undisciplined ally. Shintaro Ishihara, a senior member of the ruling party and Akio Morita, a founder of Sony, wrote a 1988 best seller entitled *The Japan That Can Say "No"*, which argued that Japan should cease deferring to America. Ishihara attributed the U.S. government officials' decision to drop the A-bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to "their racial attitude toward Japan" and suggested that Japan show its ability to "upset the military balance" by selling computer chips to the Soviet Union instead of the U.S. The Pentagon was sufficiently alarmed by all this to pay for an English translation, which was duly entered complete into the Congressional Record.

In the U.S. since the late 1970s, there has been a steady rise of overtly racist and protectionist attitudes toward Japan. A rash of books have appeared on the theme that Japan, not the Soviet Union, has become the number-one international threat to America. A poll conducted by the *New York Times* and CBS in February 1990 revealed that the number of Americans who had "generally unfriendly" feelings toward Japan had trebled in five years.

By the 1980s the American bourgeoisie was seriously concerned about Japan's growing penetration of the U.S. domestic market. In 1985 the U.S. sought to restore its competitive position by pressuring for an upward valuation of the yen (to make Japanese imports more expensive for American consumers). However, doubling the value of the yen against the dollar only promoted Japanese investment in the U.S., while increasing American dependence on Japanese capital inflows to sop up government securities. The increased value of the yen simultaneously accelerated Japanese penetration of the more vibrant economies of East Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, etc.). By transferring manufacturing to these low-wage areas, Japanese companies managed to keep their costs low enough to preserve their market share in the U.S. and elsewhere. The revalued yen propelled Japan past the U.S. in terms of foreign "aid," thereby providing a powerful new lever for economic and political influence in former American neocolonies. Despite the rise in the yen, American cars and computers still did not sell in Japan because, as one Japanese executive commented, "If you want to sell, you have to improve products, not shift exchange rates. Now the most important things we can buy from America are land, companies and buildings" (*New York Times*, 28 November 1988).

Recent Japanese purchases of such American landmarks as Rockefeller Center have been met by squeals of protest in the U.S. The Japanese media take a different view:

"More than at any time in recent memory, the United States is being portrayed here as an emotional, often irrational ally that foolishly puts its choicest assets on the auction block for quick profit, then blames the buyer for snapping them up. Yotaro Iida, the president of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, seemed to reflect that view



TIM CLARY—AFP

### 82nd Airborne back from the Gulf: American imperialists hope to offset economic decline with military might

when he compared America to a bullying husband who 'tends to behave badly when he is drinking,' but who 'believes that his wife will never leave him.'"

—*New York Times*, 24 November 1989

If the Japanese bourgeoisie is not yet prepared to "leave" its American partner, it at least intends to renegotiate the terms of the relationship.

### The Decline of American Capitalism

The 1971 suspension of the gold convertibility of the dollar signaled the end of American economic hegemony. U.S. supremacy had been instituted at Bretton Woods in 1944 when the dollar was made the chief instrument of international exchange and payment, at a fixed parity of \$35 per gold ounce. But the viability of this whole system rested on the productivity of American labor. The inflationary effects of the Pentagon's massive outlays for the war in Vietnam accelerated the decline of the dollar. But Europe's growing reluctance through the 1960s to hold reserves in dollars, instead of gold, reflected America's decline in productivity.

In the first half of this century America's labor productivity was the highest in the world, as was its rate of growth. From 1950 to 1975 the U.S. remained ahead in productivity, but its lead shrank, largely due to a deceleration in capital investment. In the early 1960s U.S. investment poured into European and, to a lesser extent, Japanese subsidiaries of U.S. manufacturers. Between 1958 and 1965, U.S. assets in Europe almost quadrupled. "In 1964 the amount of high-technology goods sold by European-based subsidiaries of American companies was four times the amount directly exported from the United States" (H. Van der Wee, *Prosperity and Upheaval*).

The immense export of U.S. capital had the effect of reducing the relative technological superiority of American industry over its rivals, and thereby enhanced the latter's ability to compete internationally. During the 1960s in West Germany, gross investment accounted for a quarter of the GNP; in Japan the figure was 35 percent, but in the U.S. gross investment only made up 17 percent. Between 1978 and 1988 total capital investment in

Japan nearly quintupled (from \$160 to \$750 billion), while in the U.S. it went from \$275 to \$500 billion.

America's relative economic decline is also reflected in the disparity in investment in research and development (R&D). "For 20 years, America's non-defense R & D has stuck at about 1.8 percent of gross national product, while Japan's has risen steadily, to 2.8 percent" (*New York Times*, 9 January 1989). One third of American R&D goes to military research, which has little commercial application. In recent years U.S. research has also been shifting from long-term to short-term projects, that is, from the development of new technologies and products to the improvement of existing ones. The relative fall in American investment in research is accentuated by parallel declines in education and the level of savings. Currently, U.S. savings as a percentage of GNP are half of the average of those in the rest of the imperialist world.

In the past decade and a half, U.S. industry has lost ground in one field after another. Even in military technology, the most important area of U.S. technical superiority, America's lead is shrinking. U.S. defense contractors are using a growing number of parts manufactured abroad in their weapons systems. While the U.S. remains a net exporter of military products, the gap has been narrowing throughout the past decade. In 1983 U.S. military-related exports had five times the dollar value of imports. By 1987 the ratio was a little over two to one.

For the U.S., the very success of the high-tech weaponry against Iraq is cause for concern. All of the successful new weapons systems were based on sophisticated computer technology, a field in which Japan has been gaining on the U.S. for at least a decade. In November 1989 the U.S. National Advisory Committee on Semiconductors reported with alarm that research spending by the five largest Japanese computer memory chip makers was roughly double that of their American counterparts, and there was increasing evidence that the U.S. was abandoning this vital and complex technology.

The Pentagon is concerned about the military implications of the decline in U.S. industrial capacity. A 1988 report by the Defense Science Board, a U.S. military think tank, proposed that "the Pentagon should exert



1917 PHOTO

### Bolshevik Tendency contingent in demonstration against imperialist assault on Iraq, Toronto

more influence over such economic factors as taxes, trade laws, environmental regulations and education" (*New York Times*, 19 October 1988). Pentagon studies of "economic security" have also pointed to the dangers of increasing foreign ownership of American manufacturing facilities because "foreign owners tend to maintain control over critical manufacturing technologies" (*Ibid.*)

Japanese and German growth in the last decade has been based on the increased competitiveness of their manufactures, whereas U.S. growth has been financed by massive government borrowing. In the 1980s aggregate public and private debt in the U.S. trebled, from \$3.4 to \$10.6 trillion. This saturnalia of debt-financed fiscal stimulation drove the Reagan expansion, accelerating a demand for imports. The Federal Reserve had already jacked up interest rates into the stratosphere to repress the double-digit inflation of the 1970s. High interest rates drew in capital from Japan and Germany. Like Blanche Dubois, America has been dependent "on the kindness of strangers" to finance its deficits.

The growing U.S. trade deficit transferred billions of dollars to its competitors, while chronic government deficits fueled by enormous increases in military spending and wholesale tax cuts for the wealthy pushed up interest rates. This attracted foreign capital and kept the dollar high. Besides military production, the most dynamic growth sectors of the U.S. economy during the Reagan expansion of the 1980s were financial speculation, junk bonds and dubious real estate transactions.

Spending on social services, education and even maintenance of the physical infrastructure for transportation and shipping shrank. Sixty percent of paved roads now need renovation and 40 percent of bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. At the same time, potentially explosive social contradictions have accumulated throughout American society. During the 1980s real income for the poorest families fell 10 percent, while that of the richest families rose 40 percent. A growing percentage of the population has sunk beneath the poverty line, as industrial employment contracts and low-paid service-sector jobs proliferate. After five years of the Reagan "boom," the *New York Times* reported that: "20 million Americans do not

get enough to eat every day" (27 October 1987). The Physician Task Force on Hunger in America commented: "Economic growth has not reduced hunger in any significant way because of the nature of that growth. The economic pie has gotten bigger, but the unevenness of that growth leaves millions falling further behind." There are immense social costs associated with this: increased child abuse and violence against women, homelessness, disease, crime and every other symptom of social disintegration. The pervasive racism of American society ensures that blacks, Hispanics and other oppressed minorities, forcibly segregated at the bottom of the economic ladder, are disproportionately victimized by capitalist decline.

The most spectacular example of U.S. economic decay is the enormous savings and loans debacle. The Reagan administration's deregulation of the financial industry permitted tens of billions of dollars in government-insured deposits to be "invested" in junk bonds and absurdly inflated real estate. According to Stephen Pizzo:

"Prestigious accounting firms repeatedly cooked the books for client thrifts to hide the larceny. Appraisers grossly inflated appraisals to fatten their own fees, allowing crooks to get huge loans they never intended to repay.

"Law firms held off regulators for months at a time while crooked thriftowners continued their looting. Members of each of these professions sold their ethics for a juicy piece of the thrift action."

—*New York Times*, 2 April 1990

The official estimate of the cost of covering the savings and loan collapse is already \$500 billion, and could easily double. By comparison, as the *New York Times* of 29 May 1990 pointed out, "the Marshall Plan, which bailed out Western Europe 40 years ago, cost a mere \$65 billion in today's dollars." The U.S. banking system itself is in a precarious situation. One sixth of the 200 biggest banks are in danger of bankruptcy, and the government insurance fund that supposedly protects investors against bank failures is vastly underfunded.

The assets squandered by the U.S. bourgeoisie over the past several decades are gone, while the enormous

debts accrued continue to mount. One way or another, the books will eventually have to be balanced. The swelling U.S. government deficit (projected at \$325 billion for this year) continues to undermine industrial competitiveness and weaken American capitalism against its rivals. This is the context within which the imperialist New World Order is born. The disproportion between U.S. military supremacy and its relative economic decline heightens the danger of future conflicts. As we noted in the midst of the Gulf war:

"the U.S. does not intend to relinquish its supremacy. The Pentagon still commands the most awesome arsenal of destruction on the planet. The more the position of the U.S. in the international economic order slips, the more America's rulers feel driven to compensate by naked force. The more markets they lose for cars, computers and high-definition TVs, the more they are compelled to assert their superiority with B-52s and cruise missiles.... "Domination of the Gulf gives the U.S. considerable leverage in the intensifying economic struggle with its two principal capitalist rivals. The assault on Iraq simultaneously warns other neocolonial regimes of the blood-price to be paid for challenging the imperialist status quo."

—1917 Supplement, 1 February

The Kuwaiti monarchy announced that the U.S. will get 70 percent of the estimated \$100 billion in postwar reconstruction. This is welcome news for American contractors who, since the 1960s, have routinely been underbid in the Middle East by cheaper European and Asian firms. As a sop to the Americans, the Japanese government is actively discouraging its construction companies from even bidding on any of this work. Washington is well pleased by this arrangement, as well as its apparent success in off-loading much of the costs of the Gulf adventure on its Middle East clients and German and Japanese challengers.

Washington's vision of a New World Order is one in which America's "allies" pay for reversing its economic decline. After some vigorous arm-twisting, the Germans reluctantly agreed to cough up an \$11 billion subsidy for the American adventure in the Persian Gulf, while Japan pledged \$13 billion. There is, however, a contradiction between pressing its imperialist allies to take up the military and foreign "aid" costs of maintaining the global status quo and simultaneously preserving America's political and military predominance. Embedded in this contradiction are the makings of a new and terrible inter-imperialist conflict.

### **Revolutionary Internationalism: The Only Road**

Capitalist development is necessarily uneven, as the grotesque disparity between the wealth of the imperialist countries and the so-called underdeveloped world attests. This also applies to relations *between* the imperialists themselves. After each of the inter-imperialist conflicts this century, the world was redivided by the victors. But shifting economic relationships between the imperialists constantly require a renewed division of spheres of influence and political power. In

1918 Lenin noted:

"Half a century ago, Germany was a miserable, insignificant country, as far as its capitalist strength was concerned, compared with the strength of England at that time. Japan was similarly insignificant compared with Russia. Is it 'conceivable' that in ten or twenty years' time the relative strength of the imperialist powers will have remained *unchanged*? Absolutely inconceivable."

Today we are living in the midst of a dangerous period of renewed rivalry between the great powers. Capitalism in its ascendancy was an enormous engine of human progress. It vastly accelerated the growth of science, technology and human mastery over nature. For the first time in human history, it connected every part of the globe into a single world economy. These accomplishments constitute the precondition for the liberation of humanity from the realm of scarcity and subsistence, and open up the possibility of virtually unlimited abundance and the full development of every individual. Yet the very factors that made capitalism such a dynamic factor in human history have become obstacles to further progress. The inherent tendency of capitalist competition to spill over into predatory trade wars—which in turn periodically erupt into shooting wars—acutely poses the danger of the destruction of civilization. Only by wresting possession of the productive apparatus from the hands of their capitalist masters can the workers and oppressed masses eliminate the cruel and irrational disparities constantly reproduced by the present world order.

History is not an automatic process; it is a product of class struggle. In all the imperialist blocs today, the trade-union bureaucrats are pushing the poison of protectionism and class collaboration in an attempt to pit worker against worker. Yet the future of humanity

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<b>Hamburg</b>	Gruppe Spartakus PLK 079 731 2000 Hamburg 203

hinges on the elimination of the whole system of international piracy and chaos, and the creation of a rational, globally-planned economy. In every imperialist state the main enemy of the working class is its "own" capitalist rulers. It is the duty of class-conscious workers in every country to struggle against the suicidal nationalism of the labor lieutenants of capital, and to fight for the program of revolutionary internationalism. The struggle for world revolution is not an easy one, but

there is no other way out.

"The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only 'ripened'; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership."

—Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program*

## *PRG in NZ Anti-War Movement*



1017 PHOTO

In January and early February, the Permanent Revolution Group (PRG—New Zealand section of the International Bolshevik Tendency) helped organize a series of successful demonstrations against the U.S.-led aggression in the Middle East. The vehicle for these protests was the Wellington Gulf Crisis Committee, a united front based on the slogans, "U.S. and Allies Out of the Gulf!" and "No NZ Troops!" In February, however, sections of the Committee, seeking broader backing, bent to the anti-Iraq war hysteria, and moved to change the political basis of the united front. In particular, they wanted the endorsement of the leadership of the Council of Trade Unions. The Council, however, would endorse a "Day of Action" only if the Committee agreed to denounce invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi army.

The majority of the Committee, including the Communist League (the NZ affiliate of Jack Barnes' reformist Socialist Workers Party), agreed to add this new plank to the platform of the united front. As Leninists, the PRG comrades took no side in the

falling out between Hussein and the Emir of Kuwait, and were therefore forced to leave the Committee. The trade-union bureaucrats, whom the majority of the Gulf Crisis Committee had been so eager to attract, made only token efforts to mobilize against the imperialist assault on Iraq. These same union tops are currently doing their best to head off growing sentiment among rank-and-file workers for militant struggle against the new National government's union-busting legislation.

The photo above shows Bill Logan of the PRG addressing a rally of 4,000 outside the parliament buildings in Wellington on 15 January. The rally was called to oppose the imperialist intervention in the Gulf. Comrade Logan had been asked to speak on the experiences of the movement against the war in Vietnam. In his remarks he stressed the necessity of connecting the struggle against the imperialist assault on Iraq to the fight to end the whole system of capitalist violence once and for all. ■

# Workers Political Revolution in the DDR? Robertsonites in Wonderland

The tragic infatuation of the East European working class with the restoration of capitalism is a result of decades of Stalinist corruption, repression and gross economic mismanagement. The bureaucrats and their police thugs falsely claimed the heritage of the Bolshevik Revolution, only to discredit it and thereby pave the way for its destruction. They were unwilling and unable to establish the democratic proletarian states envisioned by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky: free societies of free men and women, "freed at last from the drudgery of wage slavery," as the great American revolutionist James P. Cannon once put it. In the absence of revolutionary organizations rooted in the working class that could represent a socialist alternative to the brittle Stalinist regimes, popular hostility to the status quo was channelled into capitalist-restorationist movements.

In the former German Democratic Republic (DDR), there was an opening for the growth of a pro-socialist, anti-Stalinist current in the working class. The political tenor of the demonstrations that brought down Erich Honecker's regime is proof of this. (Honecker was the leader of the SED, the ruling Stalinist party, and the DDR head of state until October 1989.) Unfortunately, the handful of revolutionaries who intervened in the struggle with a Marxist line (who came together last year to found the Gruppe Spartakus, German section of the International Bolshevik Tendency) did not possess the social weight to play a major role. Nonetheless the political analysis and programmatic positions advanced by our comrades were proven correct.

James Robertson's International Communist League (ICL—formerly the international Spartacist tendency) has a different record. On an organizational level, the ICL's intervention in the DDR in 1989-90 was probably its most ambitious undertaking to date. Politically, the intervention was a disaster. In its own small way, the ICL contributed to disarming the pro-socialist elements in the DDR politically. This should give those who still think of the ICL as a revolutionary organization something to ponder. Moreover, every step was directly supervised by the ICL's central leadership. This same leadership is now testing the credulity of its most loyal members by attempting to blame the ICL's spectacular failure on the ranks of its German section, the Spartakist-*Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SpAD), formerly the *Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands* (TLD).

Defeat in the face of long odds and making some tactical errors in the course of a campaign are in themselves no dishonor. But to misrepresent political reality so fantastically, while *knowing better*, requires a particular sort of cynicism. The ICL's DDR intervention was based on a patently false supposition: that a proletarian political revolution was actually unfolding. (For more on the ICL's imaginary political revolution, see 1917 No. 8). Furthermore, the ICL's strategy centered on an op-



Krenz and Modrow

portunist adaptation to the Stalinist SED (which subsequently changed its name to the Party of Democratic Socialism—PDS). When this failed, it executed an abrupt turn into what can only be characterized as sectarian hysteria.

Gruppe Spartakus, German section of the International Bolshevik Tendency, has prepared a detailed account of the ICL's misadventures in the DDR (to be published separately in German). This study is not only of historic interest. The workers of the former DDR are beginning to engage in large-scale mobilizations against the "benefits" of the "free world": poverty, unemployment and hunger. In coming to political consciousness, militants in the German workers movement must necessarily grapple with the lessons of the historic defeat represented by the capitalist reunification. They must also carefully investigate the records of those in the workers movement who claim to represent the traditions of revolutionary Marxism.

Below we print some excerpts from the forthcoming pamphlet.

After the fall of Honecker, [Egon] Krenz's [Honecker's successor] line of safeguarding the privileges of the bureaucracy, while maintaining the economic foundations of the workers state, prevailed at first. Then, as a result of massive popular pressure, Krenz was replaced

by [Hans] Modrow's faction, [Modrow was the liberal SED bureaucrat who took over as Prime Minister after Krenz resigned] supported by [Gregor] Gysi [Krenz's successor as SED/PDS leader]. This faction represented the part of the bureaucracy that sought to save itself by further concessions to capital and the rightward-moving "democracy movement."

With his perspective of a "treaty community" between the DDR and the BRD [West Germany], Prime Minister Modrow had already signaled his readiness to capitulate to West German imperialism when the new government was formed on 17 November 1989. The concessions he offered did not, however, give the bureaucracy its anticipated breathing space, but only provided further impetus to the counterrevolutionaries. The right won on the ground, while confusion prevailed among the more politically conscious workers who trusted the "honest, reformed" Stalinists. This is why the Modrow regime was *especially dangerous*, and why it was *imperative to warn* the workers against it.

The ever thinner threads that had connected the bonapartist regime to the proletarian economic foundations of the DDR (state control over the means of production) were finally severed. With the formation of a "grand coalition" at the end of January 1990, Modrow revealed his political bankruptcy. After the formation of this bourgeois coalition, Modrow was transformed initially from a *sellout leader* of the DDR deformed workers state to a *buyer* for the West German capitalists, and by this to their direct representative. At this time the Gruppe IV. Internationale [one of the Trotskyist organizations that fused to form the Gruppe Spartakus, see 1917 No. 9] wrote:

"A new Modrow regime with the bourgeois opposition exerting the dominant influence has, as a pro-capitalist regime, the task of ensuring the safety of the social counterrevolution through the politics of *Anschluss* with the BRD. Pushed to the wall by imperialist pressure, and threatened with the dissolution of their apparatus of power, the rightist faction of the Stalinist bureaucracy seeks a capitalist ticket to the salvation of their privileges and makes itself the direct agent of the bourgeoisie. Berghofer's [one of the first SED leaders to join the social-democrats] hasty conversion to the democratic counterrevolution exemplifies the attitude of these parasites and careerists in the state apparatus and factory management who don't want to come away empty-handed from the formation of a new bourgeoisie and the re-establishment of old capitalist conditions. The weak bonapartist Modrow distances himself from the SED-PDS and shows his definitive capitulation with the removal of the last hurdles for West German capital."

—*Bulletin* No. 1, January 1990

And where did the ICL stand? As we will show, it hoped for a potentially revolutionary faction in the bureaucracy. *The ICL avoided a sharp confrontation with the Modrow regime.* Fearing isolation, it saw such a confrontation as inopportune, since all tendencies in the Stalinist party supported Modrow to the end. Such a confrontation would have endangered the ICL's policy of "Unity with the SED."

In this period, the ICL did not *focus* on attacking Modrow as a sellout whom the workers must sweep

away in defense of the DDR. Instead, they criticized him only in passing....

It was impossible for the ICL, without roots in the proletariat, to directly influence events in the DDR. However, the pressure of the sweeping political developments demanded an answer. At that time, the SED was the only organization with significant influence over the leftist sections of the working class. The ICL leadership adapted to the pressure, and attempted *to bloc with sections of the shaken SED bureaucracy*, which led the ICL straight to opportunism. Robertson's efforts to find a shortcut to building a party gave the ICL's revisionism new impetus.

To break the base of the SED-PDS from its reformist leadership, the Gruppe IV. Internationale said: "SED members! Instead of a 'third way'—draw the revolutionary consequences from the Stalinist betrayal! No new edition of the Stalinist SED—Fight the pro-social-democratic course of Modrow, Gysi, and Berghofer—For a Leninist-Trotskyist Party" (*Forderungskatalog*, 11 December 1989). Revolutionaries know that when it is necessary to "swim against the stream," authority cannot be won by adaptation to what is popular, but only by taking clear positions. Therefore our comrades said that "a Leninist-Trotskyist faction must be formed in the SED" (*Bulletin* No. 1).

By contrast, the ICL attempted to swim with the stream. Formulations like "We need a new communist party based on Leninist norms" (*Arprekor* No. 5, 13 December 1989) were *deliberately* unclear about how would-be communists in the SED should organize against the Gysi leadership and its support for the Modrow regime. It was *left open* as to whether the Leninist party the ICL advocated could be a reformed SED....

The two greetings from the ICL leadership to the SED's extraordinary session in mid-December 1989 exemplify this anti-Leninist concept of party building. Not a word was said about the *actual* politics of the SED! Instead, the ICL assumed the manner of a school teacher with appeals to share Lenin's ideas (*Arprekor* Nos. 8 and 9, 18 and 19 December 1989). The International Secretariat [IS] of the ICL gave the SED a couple of tips on how to stabilize the economy, as if this confused, demoralized and increasingly powerless party stood at the head of a militant pro-socialist workers movement. This parody of Trotskyism reached its peak in the codex [contained in the IS greetings] which set forth rules of behavior specifying what kind of strikes the proletariat could count on the ICL leadership's support for. The ICL leadership did not want to take a position on strikes over wages and working conditions, which were underway at the time and were being strangled by the SED/FDGB [Stalinist-dominated union body in the DDR] bureaucracy.

## TLD Opposes Workers Strikes

At a forum on 18 November 1989, TLD central committee spokesperson Max S. came out in opposition to strikes [in the DDR] on the grounds that the workers should not strike against themselves and their own

interests. Throughout the course of further events in the DDR, the TLD remained unwilling to say anything more on this point...

Why did the ICL attempt to avoid the question of economic strikes? They did so because such strikes *obstructed their plans for unity with the SED-PDS*. Support for the strikes would have meant a direct confrontation with the Modrow regime which the SED-PDS was backing. Instead, the ICL took *responsibility* for the Stalinists' economic mismanagement. A member of the Spartakist-Gruppen on 4 February 1990, with the approval of the TLD/ICL leadership (*Arprekor* No. 22, 8 February 1990), demanded that the proletarians: "Work better, more cleanly, in a more orderly manner! No factory should be uneconomical." The TLD/SpAD thereby supported the anti-working class austerity politics of Modrow....

"The planned economy is fundamentally sound," (*Arprekor* No. 25, 27 February 1990) said the ICL, as it extended its hand to the Stalinists....

### Stalinist Contradictions and Political Revolutions

The ICL attempts to justify its policy of currying favor with the Stalinists by citing Trotsky's analysis of the bureaucracy. The ICL knows that the bureaucracy of a deformed workers state is not homogeneous. The politics of the Stalinists are contradictory: on the one hand, the pressure of imperialism drives them to ever broader capitulation at the expense of the working class. On the other hand, they attempt to safeguard their power and privileges, which derive from the proletarian state's control over the means of production, against the capitalists. "As history shows, parts of the bureaucracy will go over to the side of the workers in a political revolution," the TLD quite correctly wrote in *Arprekor* No. 4 (12 December 1989). Hungary in 1956 is a classic example of this. But the ICL makes two decisive mistakes in the application of this Trotskyist theory. First, the development of those elements of the bureaucracy that go over to the side of the workers depends *decisively on the level of proletarian class struggle*.

"A real civil war could develop not between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the resurgent proletariat but between the proletariat and the active forces of the counterrevolution. In the event of an open clash between the two mass camps, there cannot even be talk of the bureaucracy playing an independent role. Its polar flanks would be flung to the different sides of the barricades."

—L. Trotsky, "The Class Nature of the Soviet State"

Only through a consistent struggle against *all* factions of the bureaucracy can parts of this caste be drawn to the revolutionary side—a policy that the ICL in an opportunistic manner omitted.

Secondly, the development in the DDR did not occur as Trotsky anticipated. The social revolution carried out from above in the territory of the SBZ [Soviet Occupation Zone] was accompanied by the systematic annihilation of the independent initiatives of the East German proletariat. The ensuing 40 years of Stalinist repression reinforced illusions in the social democracy and its "successful" organization of the "social market economy"



Hungary 1956: workers challenge rule of Stalinist bureaucracy

[in West Germany]. Although the state of class consciousness in the various sectors of the working class was certainly not uniform, it was nonetheless generally at a very low level. In addition, the workers did not have enough time after the fall of Honecker to develop the political consciousness necessary for the tasks at hand. There were no *revolutionary* class struggles. Considering this background, *the capitulation of the Stalinists all along the line* is not so surprising. Once again, contrary to the ICL's thesis of an unfolding proletarian political revolution and its hopes for parts of the bureaucracy, *no* wing of the Stalinists was prepared to come out actively and openly for the defense of the DDR.

So the opportunist policy really hung in mid-air when [the ICL] said "Many thousands of SED members, parts of the leadership [!] not excluded, want to tear out Stalinism by the roots and defend the collectivized foundations of the DDR against capitalist repossession [Wiedervereinnahmung]" (*Spartakist* No. 66, 3 January 1990).

The capitulation of the ICL, evident from the publications of the TLD/SpAD, is underscored in their inter-



Anti-Nazi rally at Treptow

nal documents. The slogan "Unity with the SED" is not our invention. This bizarre opportunist course was baptized at the mass anti-fascist demonstration in Treptow.

### SpAD's Debacle at Treptow

On 3 January 1990, 250,000 people streamed to Berlin-Treptow to protest Nazi vandalism at the Soviet war memorial. This powerful demonstration frightened the German bourgeoisie and its lackeys in the DDR, who had considered that any such mobilization against the right wing, especially by the SED's base, was no longer possible. The bourgeois press responded with an anti-communist outcry. They accused the SED-PDS of having instigated the vandalism in order to conjure up...a non-existent fascist threat to justify retaining power. The pressure on the Modrow regime was massively intensified and the isolation of the Stalinists was increased.

The further Treptow recedes into the past, the greater it becomes in SpAD legend. *Spartakist* No. 72 (5 June 1990) proclaimed:

"Our German comrades initiated a call for a massive workers' united-front action to stop the fascists. We

brought the call directly to the SED leadership and invited them to take part. The SED was so far removed from the working class and feared it so much that at first they declined our invitation. But when our call was distributed in factories all over Berlin, the Stalinists mobilized their forces and ultimately took over the demonstration."

What really happened? Comrades Melt and Dahlhaus contacted the local SED-PDS committee on behalf of the TLD, and only *after* SED sponsorship had been obtained was the call printed! The TLD/SpAD was not, and is not, capable of organizing a mass mobilization of the East Berlin proletariat. So much for the facts—now for the politics.

In the TLD's call for the demonstration there was *absolutely no criticism of the SED-PDS's* course of capitulation, and *not one word* about Modrow bowing to BRD imperialism and German nationalism. But it was these politics that had initially emboldened the Nazis who had carried out the attacks [at the war memorial].

In her speech at the Treptow demonstration, TLD/SpAD comrade Dahlhaus laid out the "SED-Unity" line in full: "Our [!] economy is suffering from waste and obsolescence. The SED party dictatorship has shown that it is incompetent [!] to fight this." (*Arprekor* No. 15, 4 January 1990). This statement, along with "the SED's monopoly on power has been broken" was all that was said about the politics of the Stalinists (*Ibid.*). In Dahlhaus' speech only Honecker's SED, which the demonstrators wanted nothing more to do with anyway, was mentioned. But the actual illusions in the "reformed" SED-PDS were not attacked.

The next day the TLD initiated the myth that the speech was answered with tens of thousands of whistles [a form of booing in Germany] as a result of its "sharp political criticism of the SED" (*Ibid.*). But what was the real cause of the whistling? Dahlhaus used the word "Ostdeutschland," which set off a commotion. This term was correctly associated with the traditional refusal of the West to recognize the DDR. Poor comrade, she had received the speech (in English) straight from New York, and in making an impromptu translation stumbled over "East Germany"! After this slip hardly anything else [she said] could be heard in the square....The ICL managed to discredit itself and, what is worse, Trotskyism, in the eyes of tens of thousands of DDR leftists.

Even weeks after Treptow, the ICL leadership rejected requests from its DDR comrades to initiate united actions against the Nazis in Leipzig on the grounds that it might endanger the SpAD electoral campaign. Leninists have a name for this: parliamentary cretinism.

### SpAD's Turn—Away from the SED-PDS

Now, a year later, the ICL leadership feels compelled to note the "tendency [of its German comrades] toward liquidating into a strategic united front" (*Spartakist* No. 45-46, Winter 1990-91). By rights, the Robertson clique in New York should take the blame for the SpAD disaster, since they directed the intervention in the DDR. *Workers Vanguard* editor Jan Norden was responsible for

the editorial line of *Arprekor* and *Spartakist*, and Helene Brosius of the International Secretariat looked after the organizational side of things. One of the ICL crown princes, Al Nelson, coordinated operations, and was constantly in touch with Robertson via cellular phone. In mid-January 1990 the guru himself came to Berlin to personally carry out the attempted bloc with the Stalinist bureaucrats. It was Robertson's idea that meetings should be arranged for him to confer directly with [Soviet General B.V.] Snetkov, [Stasi master-spy Markus] Wolf, and Gregor Gysi!

"Workers leader Robertson meets top representatives of the Soviet military command and the state party of the DDR,"—so the headlines of *Workers Vanguard* and *Spartakist* could have read. How unfortunate that the SED-PDS turned him down. This initiative of Robertson is noteworthy in itself. It not only demonstrates a complete misappraisal of the Soviet Stalinists in particular; it also illustrates how out of touch with reality this Lilliputian dictator is, to think that he could force the lords of the Kremlin into a "revolutionary" bloc....

Confused and groping, by the end of January 1990 the ICL leadership turned away from the SED-PDS, without any discussion of its previous political orientation. The available financial resources were running out. The PDS leadership and General Snetkov had rebuffed the ICL. Gorbachev had given his consent to reunification. In short, the capitulation of the Stalinists could no longer be denied, any more than the running aground of the SpAD's opportunistic "SED-Unity" line could be denied. To avoid responsibility, Robertson and his clique had to cover their tracks. In a timely manner, the master returned to New York to resolve a "financial dispute," as it was called. Here he could, from a safe distance, allow it to be intimated that: "Jim [Robertson] has again said that we should stop giving so much thought to the SED, since it is dissolving, and that our main rival on the left is the KPD [a Stalinist party founded by former SED members]" (translation of Supplement by Lizzy to the reports of William and Rachel on the iSt financial deliberations, 2 February 1990).

As for the previous line on the SED, which Robertson had fully endorsed, and at a decisive point had personally attempted to carry out (the Snetkov initiative), in his usual cynical manner he now allowed it to be suggested that:

"On the question of 'Unity with the SED,' comrades have the feeling that this was not merely the product of a single person who misunderstood and incorrectly repeated what Jim had said, but that this was in part the result of the exhaustion of the leading cadre there and in part a reflection of the panic that many felt in the DDR."

—*Ibid.*

One can only be disgusted at the cowardice of this leadership clique which unloads political responsibility on its subordinates. And woe to any who are not prepared to play along with Robertson's maneuver and attempt to look for deeper political reasons—they soon find themselves out of the organization! Comrades in the IBT know this from personal experience. The leadership of the ICL must be infallible—or the house of cards would fall apart!...

The SpAD now began to modify its politics and set its course for "mass-oriented" independent action. Little had to be changed from the methods used in the previous period. Since the PDS did not want to organize the defense of the DDR, the SpAD proclaimed that it wanted to carry this out *in its place*.... After a *New York Times* article reported that a quarter of the DDR's population was against capitalist reunification, Nelson demanded of the SpAD central committee that they organize these masses. The SpAD parliamentary electoral campaign was supposed to serve as the vehicle for this maneuver. The SpAD sallied forth to organize its next defeat.

The boastful "mass method" of the SpAD has continued to this day—only the slogans have changed. "The Fourth Reich has won the Volkskammer elections," *Arprekor* No. 30 (10 April 1990) reported. At this point the SpAD modified its line on the defense of the DDR, making the struggle against the "Fourth Reich" a central part of its propaganda. Anyone halfway interested in politics, in Germany or internationally, associates the "Fourth Reich" with the regime of the Third, i.e., Hitler's terror. *The SpAD tends to identify the BRD with fascism.* This new mobilization ploy was designed to avoid critical reflection by the membership on the electoral campaign and the entire DDR intervention. Don't think, act! "Who wants to be awkward and argue when fascism is around the corner?," some members may have thought....

From mid-1990 this propaganda became more and more hysterical: "Aldi—Supermarket of the Fourth Reich" (*Spartakist* No. 72, 5 June 1990); "Whose Creature is Kohl? The Man Who Wants to be Fuehrer" (*Spartakist* No. 73, 3 July 1990); "What Hitler couldn't do with the Wehrmacht, they want to do now with the D-mark. All the parties of the 'democratic' [!] Fourth Reich are participating, particularly the social democracy..." (*Ibid.*).

### The SpAD's Phobia Regarding the Social Democracy

When we refer to the SpAD's "turn," we mean the change from its SED/PDS orientation to the blustering representation of itself as *the* revolutionary mass alternative. In its sectarian attitude toward the social-democratic workers, there was no turn—this sectarianism has been characteristic of the TLD/SpAD since 1989. This phobia toward the SPD was expressed by the ritual repetition of slogans like "Bloodhounds of the SPD"....

In the DDR everyone knew that among the opposition groups the SDP/SPD [the DDR/BRD social democratic parties] fought hardest for the capitalist *Anschluss*. Hypnotized by the allegedly unfolding proletarian political revolution, with its gaze fixed on the SED-PDS, the ICL did not consider it necessary to worry about the growing influence of the SPD in the DDR working class....

In this connection Treptow is worth mentioning again. An invitation to the SDP/SPD to participate in the mass demonstration against the fascists was indispensable. Workers had to be broken from the SPD. One way to raise the class consciousness of the SPD's base

would have been to challenge its leadership to take a position *before* the demonstration took place. When Vogel, Boehme, Meckel & Co. [SDP/SPD leaders] initiated the bourgeois outcry against the demonstrators *after* January 3, the anti-fascist mobilization naturally had to be defended against these SPD scoundrels. Revolutionaries had to try to win SDP workers and SDP branches to support this defense....The ICL, on the contrary, refused to try to draw the SDP into a united action, and justified this a week later on the grounds that the SDP had "no proletarian mass base" (*Arprekor* No. 18, 12 January 1990)....The TLD [SpAD] *deliberately* sought to involve *only* the SED in the Treptow demonstration. [For the Robertsonites] obviously the SDP/SPD workers were part of the "reactionary mass," and the TLD even had the gall to cite Trotsky's writings against fascism as a basis for this (*Arprekor* No. 16, 8 January 1990).

### Abstention Toward the *Betriebsraete*

[The *Betriebsraete* are a peculiar German institution that arose initially in the revolutionary turmoil of 1918-23. The West German capitalists attempted to co-opt them by enshrining them in labor law as workplace committees elected every three years to represent the interests of employees in "consultation" with management. For example, *Betriebsrat* members have a legally defined right to "confidential" information on a company's financial state, but are not supposed to reveal any of this to other workers. They must be consulted in the case of layoffs or hiring, and overtime must be cosigned by them. Members of the *Betriebsraete* get time off from their regular jobs and the committees therefore fre-

quently serve as a training grounds for aspiring union officials. However, because they are elected by the rank-and-file, and therefore responsible to them, they are not simply capitalist organs. Militants and leftists frequently stand for election to the *Betriebsraete* against conservatives. Participation in such contests, like participation in general elections, can be an important means for revolutionaries to fight for influence in the proletariat.]

"West Germany's *Betriebsraete* are purely and simply organs of class collaboration;" "*Betriebsraete* at best serve more to split the working class than to unite it" (*Spartacist* No. 68, 1 March 1990) the SpAD proclaimed during the West German *Betriebsraete* elections in 1990....It is one of the ABC's of revolutionary trade-union work in Germany that the *Betriebsraete*—a product of the German revolution of 1918-1923—must be brought back under the direct control of the employees. In the *Betriebsraete*, communists, with the perspective of building workers councils, must struggle against social-democratic class collaboration and the *Betriebsraete* law which requires "confidential cooperation" with the capitalists.

### Afterword

We had already written the greater part of our brochure when the documents from the ICL's discussion on the "Collapse of Stalinism" (*Spartacist* No. 45-46, Winter 1990-91) came to our attention.

Robertson did not undertake to draw an official balance sheet—instead he published signed articles from his pet writers, Seymour and St. John, that "did not necessarily express the editorial viewpoint."

Having geared up the membership to pursue a non-existent SED left on the grounds that a mythical political revolution was underway, the ICL tops now announce that the SED program, and that of the other leftists in the DDR, "ran at an angle of 180 degrees to the objective interests and periodic impulses of the working class." It now turns out, according to St. John, that "the proletariat in the DDR did not mobilize" because, as he quotes Trotsky, "Workers in general do not easily break with the party that awakens them to conscious life." Indeed the "false consciousness and clinging to the SED" by the working class was reflected in the illusion that "the SED could be reformed."

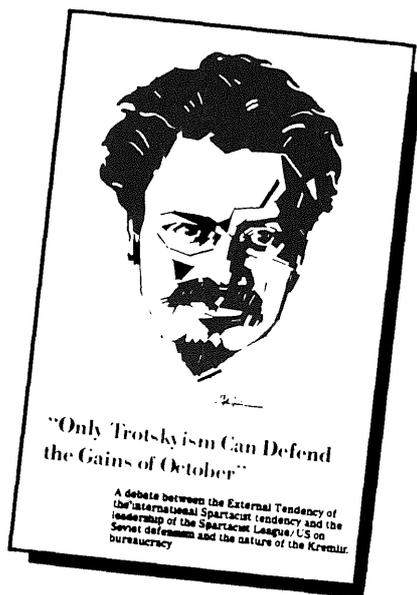
A reader could hardly guess that instead of calling for a break with the SED, the TLD had pursued a policy of adaptation to it and/or its imaginary left wing....

Why didn't the DDR operation fulfill St. John's hopes...?

"the failures of the earlier period were due—as was Lenin's (!) problem in 1905—primarily to political resistance to turning our face to the masses and historic weaknesses within the TLD itself, *which more or less oscillated between sectarianism and passivity and a tendency toward liquidating into a strategic united front.*"

—*Spartacist* 45-46, emphasis added

The same people who led their German comrades into the swamp and controlled their every move now denounce their obedient servants as sectarians and capitulationists. ■



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# Workers Power on the Russian Question: Doubletalk in the 2½ Camp

The British centrists of Workers Power greeted the overturn of Ceausescu's regime in Romania with the enthusiastic declaration that: "a spectre is haunting the world's rulers. It is the spectre of workers' revolution and its decade has arrived" (*Workers Power*, January 1990). Revolutionaries have to be more sober in their judgments. The mass "pro-democracy" movements of Eastern Europe were soon dominated by a pro-capitalist intelligentsia, and their growth was paralleled by a wave of hyper-nationalism. The "spectre" turned out to be that of the restoration of the capitalist system of exploitation and misery—not a renewed impulse toward communism.

In this period of working-class retreat, the question of defense of collectivized property is posed with unprecedented urgency. The fruits of Stalinism's utopian goal of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism are being gathered, as mass unemployment and catastrophic declines in wages and living conditions devastate Eastern Europe, bringing a resurgence of racist and even fascist sentiment in their wake. The incapacity of the bureaucratic rulers of the deformed workers states to defend the collectivized property forms upon which their rule is based has been laid bare.

Today, as the Stalinists abandon any pretense of loyalty to the "socialism" they long claimed to be building, the program of Trotskyism stands as the undisputed heir to the political legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution. For over sixty years Trotskyists have insisted that the defense of the gains of 1917—the expropriation of private property and the creation of a planned, collectivized economy—is inextricably linked to the perspective of world revolution. This is what James Cannon meant when he said that the Russian question, the question of the defense of the existing bureaucratized workers states, was inseparable from the question of proletarian revolution in the future. And it is on this question that the claim of Workers Power (and its international co-thinkers in the League for a Revolutionary Communist International [LRCI]) to represent the revolutionary Trotskyist program is most clearly revealed as bankrupt.

## Workers Power Arrives

In early 1980 Workers Power publicly renounced the third-campist "Neither Washington nor Moscow" position of Tony Cliff's Socialist Workers Party (SWP), out of which it had emerged in the mid-1970s. Rejecting the SWP's description of the USSR as "state capitalist," Workers Power announced that it now subscribed to Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers state, and that henceforth it would defend the USSR against capitalist restoration despite its



JAMA SCHNEIDER—SIPA

## Soviet troops in Afghanistan

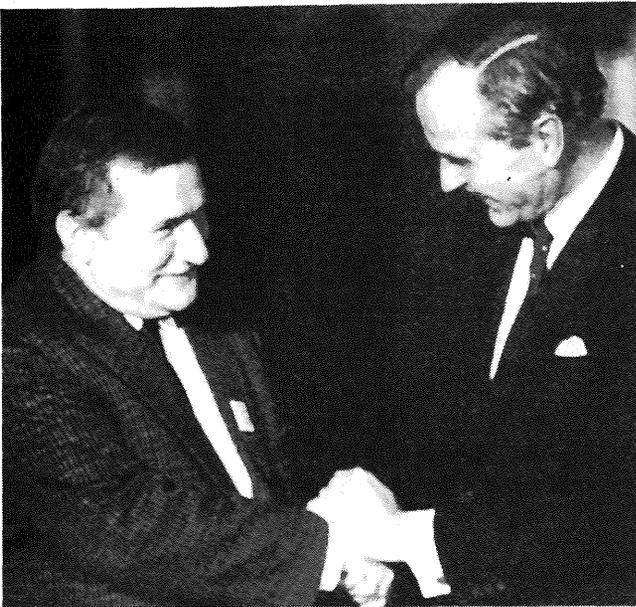
bureaucratic deformations.

Workers Power's break with its past proved, however, to be only superficial. On all the central questions of international class politics of the last decade, in which the defense of collectivized property was posed, Workers Power couldn't find its way to the proletarian side of the class line.

Workers Power's particular brand of centrist confusion crystallized around its response to the 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. This was for much of the Reagan decade an important dividing line between defensists and those who bent to the pressures of the imperialist war drive against the USSR. Revolutionaries defended the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which bolstered the modernizing regime of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and prevented the establishment of an American ally on the USSR's southern border. We took a side in this conflict, and called for the military victory of the Soviet army and the PDPA over the tribalist fanatics of the *mujahedeen*.

Workers Power responded by placing a bet both ways. It denounced the 1979 intervention and said that it was strategically in favor of Soviet withdrawal. However, at the same time, it suspended its call for withdrawal for "tactical" reasons.

The attraction of this double-edged position became clear when, later in the decade, a Soviet withdrawal became imminent. In 1988 Workers Power's Movement



**Solidarnosc's Wałęsa hails his chief**

TIMOTHY MURPHY

for a Revolutionary Communist International (the precursor to the LRCI) passed a resolution which, while omitting the need to defend the USSR, continued to "condemn the [1979] invasion as counter-revolutionary" (*Trotskyist International* No. 1, Summer 1988). At the same time, these centrists warned against any "treacherous withdrawal" by the USSR, which would confront "the Afghan left, workers and peasants with the imminent threat of a bloodbath at the hands of the reactionary forces."

Workers Power candidly admitted that the intervention they denounced had prevented just such a bloodbath, in the context of "an escalating civil war [in which] the disparate forces of Islamic and monarchist reaction threatened to completely destroy the weak and faction-ridden PDPA regime." What's more, these sophisticates of confusion demanded that the Soviet armed forces "provide the necessary troops, ammunition and economic aid to make land reform, industrialisation, literacy and the defeat of reaction really possible." In other words, they called for the extension of an intervention which they condemned as "counter-revolutionary"! Workers Power replaces Trotskyist analysis with simply damning the Stalinists if they do and damning them if they don't.

### **Solidarnosc: Going With the Flow**

Polish Solidarnosc presented revolutionaries with an acid test. While it embraced millions of Polish workers, Solidarnosc had a program that sought the re-introduction of capitalism. Deliberately closing their eyes to the openly reactionary politics of Lech Wałęsa and his cohorts, the fake left went with the flow and backed Solidarnosc all the way.

Revolutionaries assess political movements not on the basis of popularity, but chiefly according to their political program. Solidarnosc in its early stages was an

indeterminate and contradictory movement, but this indeterminacy was resolved at its September 1981 Congress, where it adopted an unequivocal capitalist-restorationist program. Ostentatiously rejecting any mention of "socialism," the Congress declared that it was "necessary to separate the apparatus of economic administration from political power" (see: *Solidarnosc: Acid Test for Trotskyists*). Solidarnosc openly advocated dismantling the mechanisms of central planning and the abolition of the state monopoly on foreign trade. When Jaruzelski's crackdown came in December 1981, revolutionaries called for blocking militarily with the Stalinists against this capitalist-restorationist movement.

In its approach to Eastern Europe, Workers Power is guided by two things: anti-Stalinism and an affinity for mass movements. When the Stalinists and the capitalist-restorationists came to blows, Workers Power sided with the counterrevolution and climbed aboard the "Solidarity with Solidarity" bandwagon. Workers Power did not go so far as Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat, which alibied Solidarnosc's ties to the Pope, the IMF and the CIA by declaring that it had an objectively socialist "dynamic." Workers Power was more critical of Solidarnosc's reactionary leadership, but decided to back it anyway.

A July 1982 resolution listed the features of the "dominant tendencies" in Solidarnosc: "subordination to the Catholic hierarchy;" "illusions in the bankrupt policies of Polish nationalism;" a "programme for the Polish economy that could strengthen the forces of capitalist restoration;" and "crippling illusions in western imperialism" (*Trotskyist International* No. 4, Spring 1990). They were also openly critical of the reactionary nature of the much-vaunted "self-management" movement. According to Workers Power and its co-thinkers, the program of Solidarnosc was:

"in tendency...for the dismantling of the planned economy, opening the road to the accumulation of private capital in Poland and, through the destruction of the monopoly of foreign trade, to open the floodgates to foreign capital."

Well, at least they knew what the stakes were. The problem is that Workers Power did not care. After itemizing the pro-capitalist character of the movement, they concluded that all this "does not mean that we do not solidarise with Solidarnosc, as a movement of the Polish workers against their bureaucratic oppressors." While admitting that its program was essentially counterrevolutionary, they argue that Solidarnosc's mass base meant that it was, "despite its leadership...not a counter-revolutionary organisation per se." If a political movement has mass support, Workers Power is prepared to say that it's "rife with contradictions," and back it no matter how reactionary its program.

In their resolution Workers Power maintained that they opposed the slogan, "Solidarnosc to power." They wrote: "We do not advocate that restorationists take political power from the Stalinists." Yet they criticized these same restorationists for their reformist stratagem that "avoided a direct challenge to the armed central power of the bureaucracy." With the Polish proletariat

arrayed behind a squad of rabid free marketeers, Catholic intellectuals and Pilsudskiite nationalists, the issue was not one of reform or revolution, but of defending collectivized property against counterrevolution. And despite their disclaimers, in the crunch Workers Power came down on the wrong side.

After the crackdown Workers Power echoed the imperialist calls for sanctions against the Jaruzelski regime, calling on workers to "boycott all imports from Poland whilst the repression continues." It also called to "Take Poland out of the Warsaw Pact!" This is not the only time these supposed defensists called for the dissolution of the military alliance between the armed forces of the Soviet bloc.

The fake-Trotskyist left has, mercifully, little pull with the Polish working class. Still, Workers Power's role was to offer a left cover for the Western imperialist drive to put Solidarnosc into government, and get the restorationist ball rolling in the deformed workers states. The headline of the September 1989 *Workers Power* read "Poland—No Return to Capitalism!" But these slippery centrists cannot evade their share of political responsibility for the fact that today Walesa is the Polish head of state and Solidarnosc is busy implementing the return to capitalism it promised in September 1981.

## The Crisis of Stalinism

The Soviet bureaucracy's decision to permit a Solidarnosc-led government in Poland in August 1989 signaled that the Kremlin was no longer prepared to guarantee its East European satellites militarily. This changed the whole political landscape of the region, as the Stalinist regimes began to crumble. While the armed forces at the core of the deformed workers states were still intact, openly pro-capitalist governments were established across Eastern Europe.

The "pro-democracy" movements that sprang up in one country after another were increasingly dominated by restorationist forces. Amidst the euphoria, revolutionaries had to tell the truth: the reimposition of the system of private property in Eastern Europe would be a defeat for the international proletariat.

Workers Power enthused about the "political revolutions" supposedly sweeping across Eastern Europe. Workers Power's fine print occasionally cautioned that we were not yet seeing the *proletarian* phase of these political revolutions. Yet its headlines and slogans played on the resonance that the formulation "political revolution" has for the Trotskyist tradition. They suggested that we were seeing another Hungary 1956, that is, a revolutionary workers movement aimed at destroying the Stalinist political monopoly while retaining and defending collectivized property.

The crisis of East European Stalinism has revealed the extent to which Workers Power retained the anti-Soviet third-campist methodology of its Cliffite parent. This is chiefly evident in a tendency to depict Stalinism as counterrevolutionary through and through. In the fine print, Workers Power remains capable of offering a

more nuanced picture of the divisions and tensions within the Stalinist bureaucracy, and even of describing it in orthodox terms as a petty-bourgeois layer split by the sharpening polarity of the class struggle and the onslaught of capitalist restoration.

Yet there is an unmistakably Stalinophobic thrust to the group's positions. The Stalinist bureaucrats are depicted as having a capitalist-restorationist mission on a par with that of the imperialists. The November 1989 LRCI statement on the DDR, entitled "The Political Revolution in East Germany," demanded: "Down with Stalinist and imperialist plans to restore capitalism!" The problem with this slogan is that it fails to distinguish between the treachery of the Stalinist bureaucrats who capitulated to capitalist restoration and the imperialists who engineered it. In its July 1990 account of the demise of the DDR, Workers Power declared that "the principal enemy of the working class within the GDR" had not been the burgeoning forces of a renewed pan-German capitalism, but the rapidly disintegrating "bureaucratic state apparatus" (*Trotskyist International* No. 5, Autumn 1990).

Only after the *Anschluss* did they retreat a little on this. In an undated polemic they published early this year against Gruppe Spartakus (GS—German section of the IBT), the LRCI's German section, Gruppe Arbeitermacht (GAM), argued: "The main enemy (on the military level) in East Germany is now no longer the Soviet troops but the Bundeswehr and NATO troops.... But an essential point remains the same: the function of the USSR's troops is pro-capitalist" ("Kritik und Phrase—Eine Antwort auf die Kritik der 'Gruppe Spartakus' an der 'Trotzkistischen Plattform'"). What then is there to choose from between Stalinism and imperialism? Not much, according to Workers Power.

## Third Campism: Neither NATO nor the Warsaw Pact

Perhaps the clearest evidence of Workers Power's third campism was their call in November 1989: "For the expulsion of foreign troops from both [German] states" (*Workers Power*, November 1989). This position was reiterated in "The Political Revolution in East Germany." Addressing the question of Warsaw Pact troops in East Germany, Workers Power wrote: "We demand that they be removed, just as we demand that the NATO troops be kicked out of the BRG (sic)" (*Trotskyist International* No. 4).

Workers Power admits that the Warsaw Pact was "created in response to the imperialist threat to the Soviet Union and those states it had conquered," and that "its troops were and are a form of defence of the post-capitalist property relations of those states." Despite this, they "are in favour of its dissolution and the withdrawal of its troops" (*Workers Power*, March 1990). What difference is there between the classical third campism of "Neither Washington nor Moscow" and Workers Power's refusal to choose between NATO and the Warsaw Pact?

Workers Power pretends that in calling for "the



DER SPIEGEL



PIERO GUERRINI—GAMMA-LIAISON

**American/NATO troops (left) remain; Warsaw Pact collapses as Soviet troops (right) pull out of East Europe**

Soviet occupation troops" to get out of the DDR they were somehow fighting *against* capitalist restoration, as Gorbachev had already decided to cede the DDR to the Frankfurt bankers ("Stalinism in Crisis: The Road to Working Class Power"). But Gorbachev's willingness to withdraw Soviet military backing for the DDR and to pull his troops out was an essential aspect of the Soviet bureaucracy's betrayal of the working class. After the October 1990 reunification, the Bundeswehr and the West German police were free to enforce capitalist austerity on the workers of the former DDR.

Trotskyists recognize that, while Stalinism is indeed fundamentally counterrevolutionary, the bureaucracy is sometimes forced to defend the proletarian property forms on which it rests. In such cases revolutionaries call for a military bloc against restorationist forces. Workers Power will allow the theoretical possibility of a "tactical united front" with the Stalinists; but every time in the last decade when the defense of working-class property forms has actually been posed, Workers Power has failed to call for such a bloc.

Workers Power characterizes the Stalinists' postwar expropriation of the bourgeoisie in Eastern Europe as "counter-revolutionary" (*Workers Power*, January 1990). Since the birth of the German Democratic Republic was "counter-revolutionary," not to mention a "reactionary denial of the right of self-determination," (*Trotskyist International* No. 4) it's no wonder that Workers Power's opposition to capitalist reunification was so tepid.

In November 1989 these centrist muddleheads laid the groundwork for dodging the necessity to come out clearly against a possible *Anschluss*: "in principle," they wrote, they would argue for "revolutionary re-unification" and for the defense of collectivized property—but of course, in practice, "after the election the task will be to resist each and every attack on the workers and prevent a grossly undemocratic fusion of the two states" (*Ibid.*). Their German affiliate's August 1990 "action programme," proclaimed: "No to the undemocratic imposition of unification" (*Trotskyist International* No. 5). So while "in principle" Workers Power stood for counterposing revolutionary to bourgeois reunification, in practice they counterposed *democratic* capitalist reunification

to *undemocratic* capitalist restoration.

In fact revolutionary reunification was not immediately on the agenda: the mass movement that brought down Honecker was a heterogeneous one with massive illusions in bourgeois democracy. The danger posed in the DDR was that of capitalist counterrevolution. But the LRCI was chiefly interested in getting in on the action: "Trotskyists must be prepared to support and participate in the ousting of Stalinist dictatorships even where the majority of the working class has no other clear objective and even when pro-capitalist forces are involved" (*Trotskyist International* No. 4). Just as it had earlier backed Solidarnosc, Workers Power hopped on the movement against the DDR's Stalinist regime without regard for who was taking the lead in that struggle or in what direction it was heading.

Workers Power has a tendency to view anything that is anti-Stalinist as inherently progressive. Even in a retrospective assessment of the developments in the DDR, they remain hypnotized by the "mass movement:"

"from the beginning of December 1989 until January 1990 there were the objective conditions for a successful political revolution: the irresistible disintegration of the central structures of the bureaucracy and its repressive apparatus and an unbroken continuing mass movement with clear demands for the overthrow of the bureaucracy—both in the setting of a sharpening economic crisis in the DDR."

—*arbeitsmacht* No. 6, June 1990

It is undeniable that the bureaucracy was collapsing, but this is only a necessary, and not a sufficient, condition for "a successful [workers] political revolution." The political character of the "unbroken continuing mass movement" was a critical factor in determining events. The demand for "the overthrow of the bureaucracy," however "clear," is not in itself a program. The capitalist restorationists of the DDR, including the openly fascistic elements, wanted the "the overthrow of the bureaucracy." The Trotskyist program of proletarian political revolution is premised on preserving collectivized property and instituting the democratic rule of the producers.

In the DDR in the winter of 1989-90, the "mass movement" had no such commitment. This distinguished it from the insurgent Hungarian working class in 1956. In a special German edition of 1917 distributed in the DDR in January 1990, our comrades wrote:

"There is an immediate critical danger for DDR workers. None of the main opposition groups has a program to save the DDR from becoming a second-rate appendage of Western capitalism. From the explicit call for capitalist restoration by the DDR Social Democracy (SDP) to the confused program for a non-existent 'third way' through 'social market economy' of the SED/PDS [DDR Stalinist party] reformers, all roads lead sooner or later to a capitalist counterrevolution. The intellectuals and Kombinat managers already show an appetite to become the administrators and bureaucrats serving FRG capitalism.

...  
 "The urgent task of the moment is to prevent capitalist reunification through workers soviets to fill the power vacuum in the DDR."

Throughout the winter of 1989-90, the mass mobilizations in the DDR became increasingly nationalist and pro-capitalist in character. To this day Gruppe Arbeitermacht insists that even after the pro-capitalist de Maziere government took office, the "task of the day" was *not* the defense of the DDR, but the struggle against Stalinism. "Kritik und Phrase" takes the Gruppe IV. Internationale (one of the forerunners of the GS) to task because:

"There was no revolutionary situation for them, so they did not call for the overthrow of the bureaucracy as the task of the day; their programmatic declaration of May 1990 was entitled: 'For workers' action to defend the DDR!'"

The LRCI centrists were thoroughly disoriented by events in the DDR. In March 1990 they said: "As a result of the first phase of the political revolution a kind of democratic revolution has taken place" (*Trotskyist International* No. 4). In June they asked:

"Has the East German working class sustained a decisive and irreversible defeat? No, the question is more complicated. The workers in the DDR achieved an historic victory by overthrowing the SED-bureaucracy after forty years' rule and depriving the bureaucratic apparatus of power. They did not use this victory, however, and did not take the power. This is not yet a defeat, simply a delay of the decisive struggle."

—*Arbeitermacht* No. 6, June 1990

The replacement of the SED by the openly restorationist de Maziere government was indeed a "historic victory"—but for German capitalism, not the working class! In the next issue of their paper, the GAM semi-retracted its earlier estimation: "Now, has the working class not sustained a defeat? Yes, it has!" But—they added encouragingly—it has not "already lost the whole battle" (*Arbeitermacht* No. 7, July 1990). By October, however, their attitude was more sober:

"The end of the workers' state on German soil, however degenerate and bureaucratically deformed it was, constitutes an historic defeat of the German working class. It is a catastrophe made all the worse in that its historical significance is not recognised by the workers of the east or west."

—*Trotskyist International* No. 5

The LRCI shares responsibility for this catastrophe. Instead of trying to attract the most class-conscious elements of the working class to resist the demolition of the workers state, these ostensible Marxists did their best to convince the workers that the destruction of the deformed German workers state was a "historic victory." Once again Workers Power proved incapable of either swimming against the stream or telling the truth.

Today, just a few months after reunification, the working class is experiencing the effects of the capitalists' victory—millions of workers are thrown on the scrap heap while prices and rents spiral upward. Many of these workers are asking themselves why they are even worse off than under Honecker. The LRCI has a lot to answer for.

But for Workers Power, yesterday's politics were for yesterday. Today they are mourning the DDR that they did nothing to save:

"For all its oppressive SED command-socialism, the GDR was a real counter-weight to Federal German imperialism. It was, with all its tragic history, a proof of another—non-capitalist—Germany. It was...a state which could guarantee its citizens fundamental rights: the right to work, the right to a home, the right to a state funded pension in old age....It was evidence that the rule of the exploiter, the factory owner and the *Junker* is not eternal....It was this positive side for which the west would never forgive the GDR, not the bureaucratic despotism, the trampling on human rights, the orders to shoot, the lack of freedom of thought, the Stasi-spying and all the other things constantly raised by the patrons of human rights among democratic imperialists."

—*Trotskyist International* No. 5

We can only wonder if this sudden turn has anything to do with the GAM's new tactical perspectives. For, as a postscript to their betrayal, Gruppe Arbeitermacht joined the PDS (the successor to the Stalinist SED) to fish for new members.

## Break With LRCI Centrism!

Gramsci wrote that revolutionaries should be guided by pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will: Workers Power consistently inverts this dictum. As each new defeat looms, they offer cheery images of the "spectre" of working-class triumph. After "breaking" from the Cliffites, they soon discovered that Soviet defensism had a central drawback: it was unpopular in the petty-bourgeois radical milieu from which Workers Power seeks to recruit.

The LRCI is incapable of offering a revolutionary program to those who wish to struggle against the forces of capitalist reaction because it is organically incapable of seeing the class line. The problem is not essentially a theoretical one. It is one of appetite: for the LRCI centrists are consistent in one thing only, the impulse to "go with the flow." Subjective revolutionaries in Workers Power must break with their leadership's Stalinophobic methodology, for those who cannot defend the gains of the past will never win new ones in the future. ■

# The National Question in the USSR



Lithuanian separatists at Vilnius rally

The national question has been a central issue in Soviet politics since the time of Lenin. By guaranteeing the peoples held captive in the Tsarist empire the right to separate and form their own states if they wished, the Bolsheviks gained important allies in the civil war that erupted after the revolution.

All the non-Russian peoples of the USSR have suffered national oppression under Stalinism. The 1979 Soviet census listed 102 nationalities, 22 of which numbered over a million. Fifteen of these have their own republics, 20 others have the lesser status of autonomous republics, and 18 more reside in autonomous regions and national areas.

The Kremlin oligarchy, saturated with Russian chauvinism, has for decades attempted to extinguish the national cultures and languages of minority nations in the USSR. Sometimes the Stalinists resorted to jailings, deportations and police repression, but a variety of more subtle techniques were also used to promote Russification. Russians make up only 50 percent of the population of the Soviet Union, yet more than 80 percent of books and newspapers are printed in Russian. Access to

many branches of higher education is effectively restricted to Russian-speakers.

Faced with a resurgence of separatist sentiment across the USSR, Gorbachev has sought a "resolution" of the national question that retains all 15 republics within a unitary state. Unlike the chauvinist Soviet bureaucrats, Trotskyists are internationalists. As such we are indifferent to the question of state boundaries. Lenin made this clear in 1917:

"They tell us that Russia will be partitioned, will fall apart into separate republics, but we have no reason to fear this. However many independent republics there may be, we shall not be afraid. What is important for us is not where the state frontier passes, but that the union of workers of all nations shall be preserved for the struggle with the bourgeoisie of whatever nation."

Free and equal development for the peoples of the Soviet Union depends ultimately on the extension of the world revolution. For only through an internationally planned economy, based on workers democracy, can the material basis be laid for abolishing scarcity, which lies at the root of every form of oppression. In the USSR the international extension of the revolution is inextricably linked to the overthrow of the Russian-chauvinist Kremlin bureaucrats through proletarian political revolution. A key element in the program of such a revolution must be the intransigent defense of the equality of all nationalities and, in particular, the right of oppressed nations to self-determination.

Yet, in upholding the general democratic right of nations to self-determination, Marxists do not automatically support the demands of all nationalist currents. Separatist movements that lure the oppressed nationalities to embrace capitalist restoration can only result in the brutal subordination of those peoples to imperialism. It is the duty of Leninists to say so forthrightly, and to oppose such movements. This vital distinction is ignored by most of the ostensibly Trotskyist left. Instead, they have hailed the growth of nationalist movements in the USSR, regardless of the latter's attitude toward capitalist restoration.

Trotsky rejected the arguments of those "socialists" in his day who, in the name of "democracy," made national self-determination their ultimate criterion:

"The national problem separate and apart from class correlations is a fiction, a lie, a strangler's noose for the proletariat.

"...it frequently happens with formalistic thinkers that while denying the *whole*, they reverently grovel before a *part*. National self-determination is one of the elements of democracy. The struggle for national self-determination, like the struggle for democracy in general, plays an enormous role in the lives of the peoples, particularly in the life of the proletariat. He is a poor revolutionist who does not know how to utilize democratic institu-

tions and forms, including parliamentar-ianism, in the interests of the proletariat. But from the proletarian standpoint, neither democracy as a whole nor national self-determination as an integral part of it stands above the classes; nor does either of them supply the highest criterion of revolutionary policy."

—"Defense of the Soviet Republic and the Opposition," 1929

Addressing the resurgence of Ukrainian nationalism in the 1930s, Trotsky proposed that the call for an "Independent Soviet Ukraine" could drive a wedge between those who stood for capitalist restoration and those who simply opposed the Kremlin oligarchy's chauvinist attempts to Russify the Ukraine. This slogan was a clear statement of opposition to capitalist counter-revolution, even when it wore a cloak of resistance to national oppression. It also served to link the struggle against national oppression to the struggle against the parasitic Stalinist ruling caste.

### Lithuania: Nationalism and Social Counterrevolution

Today within the Soviet Union the national question is posed most sharply in the Baltics. In March 1990, Lithuania declared its independence from the Soviet Union. The bourgeois-nationalist Lithuanian *Sajudis* government is openly committed to regaining the republic's prewar status as an imperialist satellite on the edge of the USSR. The imperialists, in turn, have loudly proclaimed their support for Lithuanian self-determination.

Chronic economic mismanagement and corruption, overlaid with bureaucratic and national oppression, have, in the absence of an organized socialist opposition, turned the nationalist movements throughout the USSR into vehicles for the generalized hostility toward Stalinism. One striking result of the referendum endorsing independence held in Lithuania last February was that "more than half the Russians, Poles, and other minorities in the Soviet republic had voted with them [the separatists]" (*Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 17 February). This is a significant indication of the level of frustration with Moscow felt by wide layers of the Soviet population as the country slides into economic chaos. Tragically, this sentiment has translated into widespread resignation to the "inevitability" of capitalist restoration as the only way out of the present morass.

Faced with this situation, the centrist League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) argues that revolutionaries must go along with the pro-capitalist independence movement because the majority of Lithuanian workers want it. In a polemic with our comrades, the LRCI's German section wrote:

"We say: for an independent workers state, let the masses go through their own experience with these false leaders. If we stay neutral, let alone support the attempts of the central government to maintain their rule, we will push the masses much more into the hands of radical right-wing elements. Of course there is the immediate danger of capitalist counterrevolution. But we can fight

it best by cutting the ground from under the feet of the bourgeois forces...."

—"Kritik und Phrase"

This is a typical example of centrist confusionism. The call for "an independent workers state" serves as a left cover for the LRCI's capitulation to the "false [i.e., pro-capitalist] leaders." The LRCI backs the bourgeois restorationists because it fears that neutrality would "push the masses" further to the right! It would never occur to these centrists to oppose the counterrevolutionary *Sajudis*.

The LRCI's leading section (the British Workers Power grouping) is no better. They admit that a victory for the restorationist Lithuanian nationalists would mean disaster for the workers who, "would suffer as Lithuania fell into semi-colonial servitude" ("*Let Lithuania Go!*" *Workers Power*, April 1990). Despite this, they flatly maintain that if it came to blows: "Within Lithuania a revolutionary Trotskyist party... would bloc with the nationalists in their confrontation with Moscow, including fighting Soviet troops sent in to crush the independent republic." Again, there is an attempt to camouflage this capitulation to the bourgeois nationalists. This time, it is a worthless promise of a "determined struggle against the nationalists if and when they move to dismantle the state owned property relations and restore capitalism." This ignores the fact that for the pro-capitalist *Sajudis* government, secession from the USSR is a crucial and indispensable step toward dismantling state-owned property.

When Gorbachev responded to the secessionists by economically blockading Lithuania, Workers Power urged the imperialists to break the Soviet blockade. In May 1990 *Workers Power* advised: "We should demand that the British government recognises Lithuania and supplies goods requested by Lithuania without conditions." They denounced the imperialists for offering only token support to the Baltic counterrevolutionaries.

The fight to defend proletarian property forms against capitalist counterrevolution is not counterposed to, but intimately connected with, the struggle for the right of each nation in the USSR to establish an independent socialist republic. The struggle against the Great Russian chauvinism of the Stalinist bureaucracy will be a vital factor in mobilizing for workers political revolution. Trotskyists oppose all forms of national oppression: political, economic and cultural. We also oppose the straitjacket "union" run by the Kremlin bureaucrats. In advocating the voluntary unification of the peoples of the USSR on the basis of socialist republics, revolutionists simultaneously support the right to national self-determination, i.e., the right of nations such as Lithuania to secede. This does not mean the right to establish an independent *bourgeois* state. For the Lithuanian working class, as for those of the other oppressed nationalities in the USSR, independence won through capitalist restoration would be a profound defeat. The job of Marxists is not to indulge in wishful thinking, or attempt to prettify reactionary forces, but "to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be." For only by understanding reality is it possible to change it. ■

## Soviet Stalinism...

*continued from page 40*

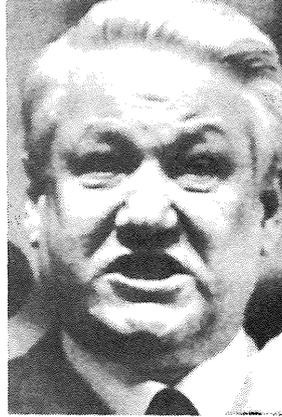
crowd resisting the assault. Moscow declared that Lithuania would henceforth be ruled by a "Committee of National Salvation," based on Kremlin-loyal elements of the local Communist Party. Five more people were killed a week later in a similar incident in Riga, Latvia, where another "National Salvation Committee" was set up. These committees have so far refrained from attempts to dislodge the separatist governments in either republic, but the shootings underscore the willingness of the Kremlin to maintain the status quo by force if necessary.

Gorbachev apparently hopes that a combination of military muscle and a new Treaty of Union for the USSR's 15 constituent republics can contain the nationalist upsurge. On 17 March the Kremlin held a USSR-wide referendum in which 77 percent voted in favor of preserving the union. The results, however, were inconclusive, as six republics boycotted the vote entirely while others passed local initiatives contrary to the spirit of the plebiscite. Besides, the fact that the majority of Soviet voters favor the status quo is a matter of indifference to those peoples intent on separation.

Moscow has also taken aim at the despised "cooperative" entrepreneurs (i.e., private businessmen) and black market speculators who have flourished under perestroika. The KGB has been granted new powers to enter the premises of private businesses and confiscate records. Joint police-military patrols have been deployed in the streets of 86 of the Soviet Union's larger

cities to crack down on economic and street crime. Artyom Tarasov, member of the Russian Parliament, advisor to Boris Yeltsin and leading perestroika profiteer, was an early target of this campaign. In February the KGB broke into the Moscow offices of Tarasov's multi-million dollar foreign-trading firm and seized documents and equipment. The Ministry of the Interior branded Tarasov a black-market extortionist. This clampdown on "free enterprise" has not escaped the notice of foreign capitalist investors, who are already scaling back their plans.

The growing influence of the "hardliners" is also evident, if less pronounced, in foreign policy. No sooner had Shevardnadze vacated the Foreign Ministry than the Kremlin began to express concern about Bush's carpet bombing of Iraq. When Moscow's last-minute effort to broker an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait was spurned by Washington, Gorbachev swallowed his pride, but with the understanding that Bush's reaction to the Baltic events not go beyond the obligatory verbal condemnation. U.S.-Soviet negotiations on the START treaty for the reduction of conventional forces



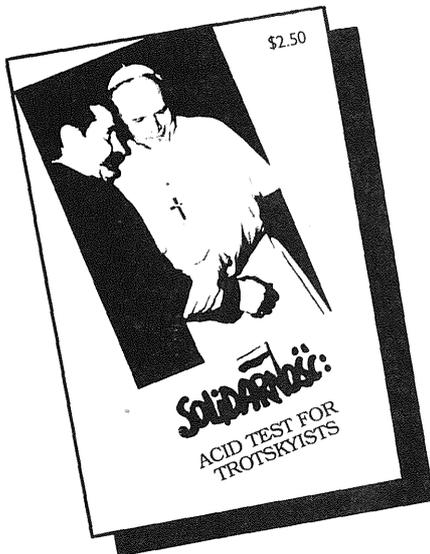
**Boris Yeltsin**

in Europe have recently bogged down over final details, and the Soviet military is campaigning against giving in to Japanese demands for the return of the Kurile Islands, which the USSR occupied after World War II. Gorbachev has staked far too much on cooperation with the West to let the corpses of 100,000 victims of U.S. terror bombing 700 miles from the Soviet border ruin the relationship. Yet rumblings of discontent with his line of least resistance are audible nonetheless, as the Washington-friendly faces that previously dominated the Soviet leader's entourage yield place to grim-visaged party stalwarts and men in military tunics.

### Yeltsin: Gorbachev's Nemesis

Gorbachev's retreat from perestroika has sent many of his estranged "democratic" supporters scurrying to the camp of his best-known critic and principal antagonist, Boris Yeltsin. From his newly-acquired platform as President of the Russian Republic, this apparatchik-turned-demagogue is lashing out against his former boss in a series of increasingly audacious thrusts. His intentions of replacing Gorbachev are barely concealed. Yeltsin presents himself as the champion of affluent technocrats and poverty-stricken pensioners, of newly-prosperous "co-operative" hucksters and striking Donbass miners, of Baltic secessionists and Great Russian chauvinists, of those who venerate "free enterprise" and those who fear its consequences—in short, for all who oppose the continued rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The only common thread in

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Yeltsin's politics is his claim that the problems of Soviet society can be solved with "democracy" and the "free market," and that these panaceas can only be applied by a single individual: Yeltsin.

To every move by Gorbachev to strengthen his own authority and that of the central apparatus, Yeltsin has responded with an equally daring countermove. Immediately after the Congress of People's Deputies approved Gorbachev's personnel changes, the Parliament of the Russian Republic, which Yeltsin heads, voted to cut the republic's contributions to the Soviet state budget by 90 percent, a reduction that would have brought the economy to a standstill. Yeltsin eventually suspended this threat, but it served as a reminder of the immense power wielded by the republic that contains over half the USSR's population and the bulk of its industrial capacity and natural resources. A week after the confrontation in Lithuania, Yeltsin went on live television to denounce Gorbachev's "anti-people policy," call for his resignation and demand that Kremlin power be turned over to the new Federation Council, composed of representatives of the republics. Yeltsin answered Gorbachev's unity referendum by attaching to the ballot a local initiative that called for the direct popular election of the Russian Republic's President. The initiative passed overwhelmingly. Yeltsin currently owes his office to the Russian Parliament, which elected him by a narrow majority. A direct popular mandate would greatly strengthen his hand.

Yeltsin has taken his anti-Gorbachev crusade to the streets of Moscow. On several occasions in recent months, huge crowds have assembled at the doorstep of the Kremlin to demand that the Soviet President step down. On 28 March, over 100,000 supporters of the opposition umbrella group, Democratic Russia, defied a government ban and demonstrated their support for Yeltsin. In what could be the most crucial development of all, a key section of the Soviet working class has thrown its weight on to the scales. Three hundred thousand miners in Siberia and the Ukraine downed tools. Unlike an earlier strike in 1989, in which economic demands predominated, the miners are concentrating this time on a single, political objective: the removal of Gorbachev, his parliament and his government.

## Two Tracks to Counterrevolution

The unfolding Soviet crisis has provoked a debate among bourgeois politicians and Sovietologists. Has Gorbachev outlived his usefulness to imperialism? Should the U.S. and other capitalist governments cast their lot with Yeltsin and the Baltic secessionists? Or would such a move be premature? These are the questions that now perplex the custodians of the New World Order.

In the wake of the January crackdown in the Baltics, U.S. politicians unleashed a barrage of cold-war rhetoric. They were furious that Gorbachev had seized a few buildings within his own borders and left 20 dead at the very time when the world was distracted by the Pentagon's mass bombing of hundreds of thousands of



SHONE—GAMMALIARSON

Latvian nationalists on the march

Iraqis. "Gorbachev has shown he is no longer to be trusted," fumed one member of the House of Representatives, who suggested that Gorbachev be stripped of his Nobel Peace Prize and that Bush "hold [his] feet to the fire" (*New York Times*, 18 January). A somewhat cooler statement of the same view appeared three days later in a piece entitled "Put Moscow in a Deep Freeze," by Utah's Republican senator, Orrin Hatch:

"After the Soviet use of force in Lithuania and...Latvia, the U.S. should call off the planned summit meeting, and should terminate the \$1 billion in agricultural credits and cancel the planned waiver of the Jackson-Vanik restrictions on most-favored-nation trade status. Mr. Bush should also foster direct ties with Soviet republics that hold genuinely free elections and adopt far-reaching market reforms"

At the other end of the spectrum from those who would chastise Gorbachev with fire and ice is Stephen F. Cohen, dean of liberal Kremlinologists in America:

"[Gorbachev] has undertaken the most ambitious changes in modern history. Their goal is to "dismantle" the state controls Stalin imposed and to achieve an "emancipation of society" through privatization, democratization, and federalization of the 15 republics. Such proposals were bound to face old traditions, social obstacles and political opposition. They could not have unfolded quickly or smoothly. Even if successful, they will need decades to sink roots, with traumatic setbacks along the way.

"[Gorbachev] has entered history as a great reformer and, if Eastern Europe is included, liberator. If reform is to succeed, another and different kind of leader eventually will be needed. But for now there is no persuasive evidence that one has approached center stage or that his time has come."

—*New York Times*, 11 March

Harvard University's Richard Pipes, who served on Reagan's National Security Council and has just pub-

lished a pseudo-scholarly book denouncing the October Revolution as a "coup," advocates a middle course:

"Washington cannot continue to act on the premise that the U.S.S.R. alone is a legitimate partner. Whether we like it or not, the power of its central government has already eroded to such an extent that the loci of effective sovereignty are located below the all-union level. This reality calls for a two-track policy: contacts with the Soviet central government on issues that, as of now, it alone is qualified to handle, such as arms agreements, supplemented by direct communication with the republican authorities."

—*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1

The policy of the Bush administration seems to be evolving along the lines suggested by Pipes. While Bush stopped short of extending direct diplomatic recognition to the Baltic states, he did postpone a planned February summit meeting with Gorbachev on the pretext that he was preoccupied with Iraq. The U.S. has not cancelled its billion-dollar food-aid package to the Soviet Union, but has recently delivered a portion of the money directly to the Baltic governments. In a mid-March visit to Moscow, the U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, balanced words of praise for Gorbachev with a series of bold overtures to the opposition. Baker met separately in Moscow with representatives of the Baltics, and paid Shevardnadze a personal visit. A private meeting with Yeltsin did not take place only because Yeltsin declined Baker's invitation and sent a representative instead. When queried by reporters Baker announced: "We are going to be encouraging [the leaders of the republics] to have contacts at the state and local levels with officials in the United States."

The forces gathered around Yeltsin are still too weak and diffuse, and the party and government apparatus too formidable, for Washington to scuttle its relationship with Gorbachev. Yet, as the *New York Times'* Leslie Gelb observed on 13 March:

"Until last Sunday [the date of one of the largest anti-Gorbachev demonstrations], the idea of revolution seemed remote to most Administration experts. Then with upwards of a half-million Muscovites swamping the streets and calling for Mr. Gorbachev's resignation, the alarms went off. Soviet experts in the Administration began thinking about the 'R' word."

### Things Fall Apart, The Center Does Not Hold

The immediate causes of the polarization in Soviet politics are clear enough. From the beginning, Gorbachev's "reform" program was resisted by elements of the party, state and military bureaucracy. To counter their influence, he opened up the channels of popular expression and created a plethora of electoral institutions, the Congress of People's Deputies foremost among them. While many in the bureaucracy saw this democratization as a threat to their power, the reforms were a response to a very real impasse in the economy and society (see "Perestroika: A Pandora's Box," 1917 No. 6). As long as Gorbachev commanded popular support, his foes in the apparatus were willing to bide their time. Now the verdict is in. Five years of perestroika have brought economic ruin, national disintegration,

GENNADY GALPERIN—REUTER



**Soviet economy collapsing: soldiers used to pick crops**

paralysis of the central authorities and the eclipse of the USSR as a world power.

Perestroika was initiated to arrest a decline in the Soviet economy's growth rate. Instead, it has resulted in an *absolute drop* in production. Soviet GNP declined by 3 percent last year, and is expected to go down another 11 percent in 1991; industrial production is projected to fall more than 15 percent this year, and agricultural output by 5 percent. Even in those few areas where production has held steady or improved, the breakdown of the distribution system has prevented products from reaching consumers. Last year the Soviet Union had a record harvest, but only 58 percent of the produce found its way to state shops. The rest rotted in transportation and storage, or was diverted onto the black market where it was priced beyond the reach of most Soviet citizens. This sent Gorbachev to the West begging for emergency food aid. Although the European Community and the U.S. agreed to chip in \$1 billion each, there is no guarantee that foodstuffs purchased with this money will not also disappear before they get to store shelves.

The catastrophe engulfing the Soviet Union today is not only the result of problems inherited from the past; it is also the direct consequence of perestroika. Under Brezhnev the economy stagnated but did not contract. Why, with the Soviet industrial plant, farms and workforce still intact, can the economy no longer deliver the goods?

The answer must be sought in the political sphere. The Soviet Union is fundamentally different from capitalist countries, where the economy functions independently of the state and is governed by its own laws of motion. Because the Soviet economy is state-owned, it operates on directives issued by the central authorities. A properly functioning planned economy depends, above all, on the willing participation of those who carry out the instructions, and on their ability to control and correct the plan. In Leon Trotsky's classic study of the contradictions of the USSR under Stalin, he observed:

"But the farther you go, the more the economy runs into the problem of quality, which slips out of the hands of a bureaucracy like a shadow. The Soviet products are as

though branded with the gray label of indifference. Under a nationalized economy, *quality* demands a democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative—conditions incompatible with a totalitarian regime of fear, lies and flattery.

"...Soviet democracy is not the demand of an abstract policy, still less an abstract moral. It has become a life-and-death need of the country."

—*The Revolution Betrayed*

The stagnation of the later Brezhnev years was a product of six decades in which political life was monopolized by the Stalinist ruling caste. Under Brezhnev the corruption, cynicism and indifference of the Kremlin elite, as well as the local bureaucrats and plant managers under them, reached new heights. They neither believed in a socialist future nor feared Stalin's gulags, and carried out their instructions in a reluctant and half-hearted way.

### Perestroika Disorganizes Soviet Economy

Gorbachev's perestroika reforms have weakened the center to the point where it is hardly obeyed at all on the local level, and the chronic ailments of Soviet society have become acute. Despite the expansion of the role of private speculators and merchants in recent years, the state remains in control of the main economic levers. The central planning agency, Gosplan, still issues production targets, and Gosbank continues to draw up the budgets of the biggest industrial and agricultural combines. But, in an effort to shake up the local bureaucracies, the Soviet Parliament, at Gorbachev's behest, passed a series of measures granting sweeping powers to authorities at municipal, regional and republic levels. A law passed in April of 1990 gave local councils the right to levy taxes and engage in foreign trade; another law gave them control over local land. But this legislation created more problems than it solved.

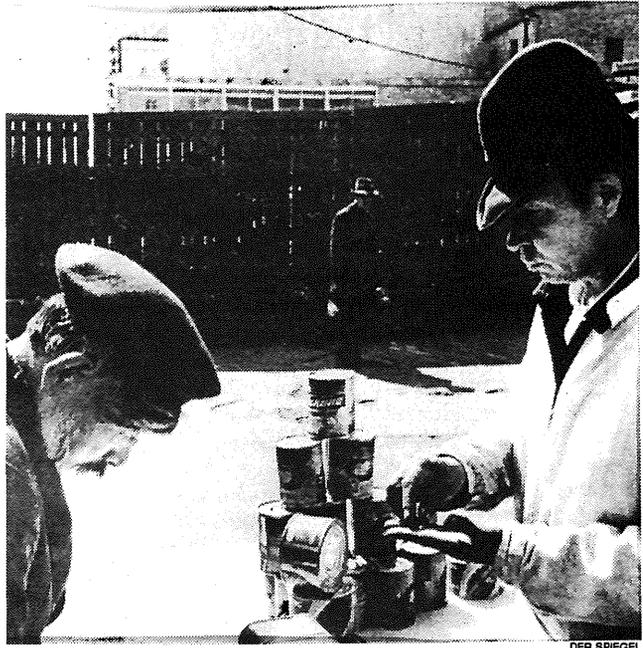
How much in taxes and profits are to be retained by the local authorities and how much are to be handed over to Moscow? Do local councils have the right to privatize farms and factories? If so, would newly created private farms still be able to buy tractors and fertilizers from the state at heavily subsidized prices? The legislation left many of these questions unanswered, and only succeeded in blurring the lines of authority between central and local governments.

"Each level wants to keep as much authority and spending power for itself as possible. So, as presidential decrees filter downwards, they are challenged at every level."

—*Economist*, 27 October 1990

In the pre-Gorbachev era, local bureaucrats simply followed orders from the top, if unenthusiastically. Gorbachev's innovations did not give the republic, regional and municipal authorities enough power to exercise their newly acquired autonomy consistently, but did enhance their ability to thwart the directives of the central apparatus.

The paralysis of state planning has led many managers and officials to circumvent official economic channels altogether. Production quotas go unfulfilled,



DER SPIEGEL

**Black marketeers profit from economic collapse, cash in on food shortages**

and goods are hoarded, stolen, bartered or sold on the black market, as more and more of the wealth slips out of government hands. The result is a shortage of consumer goods that many describe as worse than at any time in living memory, including the darkest days of World War II. This growing scarcity is primarily responsible for the precipitous decline in Gorbachev's popularity among the Soviet masses over the past two years. On 25 March *Time* magazine reported that:

"A poll published... by the Soviet National Public Opinion Studies Center asked, 'What does the Soviet Union offer its citizens?' The response given by 65% of those interviewed: 'Shortages, waiting in lines and a miserable existence.'"

If economic collapse is one major symptom of the breakdown of central authority, the revolt of the nationalities is another. Most of the USSR's constituent republics and national minorities have taken advantage of the loosening of Moscow's control to assert themselves against the all-union government, and, in many cases, to pursue longstanding grievances against one another. The most recalcitrant of the insurgent nations are the Baltic states, which have openly declared their complete independence, as well as their desire to restore capitalism and join the West. The Kremlin responded with an economic blockade and, in January, a military intervention. But so far there is no resolution to the impasse: the central government and the Baltics continue to pass decrees and legislation against each other, which both continue to ignore.

The nationalities problem has also led to two other military interventions by Moscow: one to quell communal warfare between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and another to suppress nationalist riots in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. Many republics have set up national militias, and the Ukraine has issued its own currency. Thirteen of the 15 republics have declared that their own



**"Democratic Russia" movement pushes Shatalin's 500-day plan for capitalist restoration**

constitutions take precedence over Soviet laws. As the Russian republic under Yeltsin becomes ever more strident in its defiance of the Kremlin, it is clear that resurgent nationalism presents the Soviet government with more than a dilemma over policy. It poses the question of the survival of the central government itself.

Gorbachev's domestic failures have been compounded by stunning reversals on the world stage. Most of the Soviet high command were, by all reports, resigned to the loss of Afghanistan. The collapse of the Warsaw Pact states and the reunification of Germany, however, were a different matter. The senior officer corps, weaned on memories of the Soviet victory in World War II, regarded the European borders established in the aftermath as sacred. Moreover, Gorbachev has nothing to show for the loss of Eastern Europe. His entire foreign policy was based upon the premise that appeasement of imperialism would usher in a new era of peace, leaving the Soviet Union free to concentrate on internal problems.

The U.S.-led aggression against Iraq proved the opposite: Gorbachev's prostration before the imperialists has only emboldened them. As long as the Soviet leader toed the State Department line, he was fulsomely praised by Washington for his "statesmanship." But as soon as he showed the slightest independence, in a last minute bid to secure Saddam Hussein's withdrawal from Kuwait, he was politely told by Bush to mind his own business. Many at the top correctly perceived the failure of Gorbachev's Iraqi gambit as a profound humiliation, and a symbol of the demise of the USSR as a "superpower."

### Hardliners Resist

The chain of disasters brought about by Gorbachev's policies forced his opponents within the party, state and

military apparatus onto the offensive. Unlike its former Eastern European satellites, the Soviet bureaucracy is not the artificial creation of a foreign power. It is an enormous social stratum with indigenous roots, whose privileges and prestige are inseparable from the Communist Party's monopoly of state power. Its upper echelons are certainly not yet prepared to go the way of Honecker and Jaruzelski. If the party apparatus is losing its grip on the country as a whole, it still has the power to appoint the top military and KGB officers, and to ensure that they owe their loyalty to the apparatus. These three pillars of the Soviet bureaucracy—the apparatus, the KGB and the military—are acutely conscious of their common interests and, although weakened, remain capable of acting in unison. With their collective life at stake, they began to mobilize within the party and forced Gorbachev to give ground.

Why did Gorbachev, the great "reformer," retreat in the face of this pressure? One academic commentator, Michael Scammell of Cornell University, suggests that Gorbachev is:

"a true believer in communism. Not the communism of Stalin and Leonid Brezhnev, of course, nor even quite of Nikita S. Khrushchev, but certainly of Lenin.

"Letting the Eastern European countries go was different from allowing any of the states in the original [Soviet] union to secede. Lenin put that union together and Mr. Gorbachev does not wish to go down in history as the man who destroyed Lenin's legacy."

—*New York Times*, 25 January

Explanations like this can only jeopardize Cornell's academic reputation. Nothing in Gorbachev's career suggests a firm attachment to any principles, let alone the proletarian internationalism of the leader of the October Revolution. His speeches omit even the ceremonial invocation of Lenin's name, and he recently proposed to drop the word "socialist" from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Events in the USSR are not being guided by the President's beliefs; his "beliefs" have never been anything more than a makeshift response to events beyond his control. It was out of a deeply ingrained pragmatism that he embraced the "free market" as the answer to the USSR's economic malaise. It was this same pragmatism that caused him to retreat once it was clear that perestroika had led to what he repeatedly described before December's session of the Soviet Parliament as "razval:" chaos, breakdown, anarchy.

### The Impending Catastrophe...

The Soviet Union stands on the brink of an abyss. Last November Gorbachev himself was beginning to worry aloud about the danger of civil war:

"If we begin to split from each other, there is going to be a war. A terrible war will take place.... We cannot divide the army, the nuclear weapons. All this may turn into a catastrophe not just for our country but for the whole world."

—*Foreign Policy*, Spring 1991

Prior to the December Congress, Gorbachev attempted to counter the paralysis of the central authorities by



HANS-JÜRGEN BURKARD—BILDERBERG/SABA

### Soviet military: an important political factor

investing himself with the power to rule by presidential decree. But the fragmentation of the bureaucracy at the local level made his decrees unenforceable. Elements within the party and the population at large, began crying for someone to step in and restore a semblance of order. If the state he headed was to survive, Gorbachev had no choice but to turn to the only remaining institutions with the coherence and the muscle to answer that cry: the apparat, the army and the secret police.

The polarization of the Soviet bureaucracy poses important political questions for Trotskyists. How do we stand in relation to the contending forces? In the first place, there can be no doubt concerning our attitude toward Boris Yeltsin. Although heterogeneous in composition, his coalition, Democratic Russia, openly advocates capitalist restoration. Some, like the liberal technocrats and Baltic nationalist chiefs, have a material interest in Yeltsin's victory. Others, particularly the leaders of the striking miners, follow him because he is seen as the only alternative to the powers-that-be. To maintain his working-class support, Yeltsin promises capitalism without astronomical prices, mass unemployment and slashed social benefits. But workers in Poland and the former DDR are already getting a bitter taste of "market magic."

Anyone who wants capitalism must inevitably dance to the tune of American, German and Japanese capitalists, who will turn the USSR into another Brazil, not another Sweden. And Yeltsin has no qualms about

playing to Western bourgeois audiences, who are responding with enthusiastic applause. He is a deadly danger to the Soviet working class.

But what of the Stalinist apparatchiks? Right now many of them are undeniably directing their fire at the Yeltsinite and Baltic restorationists, perestroika millionaires and the conciliators of imperialism: the very forces revolutionaries despise the most. Trotskyists have always held that the Stalinist bureaucracy, in defending its parasitic privileges, also at times defends the proletarian property forms upon which its rule is based. Is this the significance of the latest turn? An answer can only be sketched by examining fundamental Trotskyist premises regarding Stalinism, and measuring them against the present reality.

Trotsky regarded Stalinism as the dictatorship of a privileged stratum that had raised itself above the working class due to the isolation of the Russian Revolution. Under the banner of "socialism in one country" Stalinist rule meant the destruction of workers democracy at home and a futile search for "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism abroad. As a parasite on the workers state, the bureaucracy nonetheless had an objective interest in defending collectivized property against imperialist attack and domestic attempts to reimpose capitalism.

Through repeated betrayals of the struggles of workers abroad, the Kremlin bureaucrats undermined the only force that could preserve the gains of October



VLADIMIR BUMOVSKY—ZOJA PICTURES

### Moscow demonstration against Communist Party rule

and open the road to the creation of a socialist society: the international proletariat. The triumph of Stalinism over the Soviet workers paved the way for future defeats. This is why Trotsky remarked, in the 1938 Transitional Program, that:

*"the chief political task in the USSR still remains the overthrow of this same Thermidorian bureaucracy. Each day added to its domination helps rot the foundations of the socialist elements of economy and increases the chances for capitalist restoration."*

Yet, for all its betrayals, the Stalinist oligarchy was still capable of defending collectivized property *in the short run*. Since capitalist restoration threatened the social foundations of the October Revolution, it was the duty of revolutionaries to block militarily with the Stalinists in defense of collectivized property. This poses two questions about the current situation: will the Stalinists act to defend the state-owned economy? And are they *able* to do so, if only for the time being?

To the first question, concerning the intentions of the "hardliners," no definitive answer seems possible at this point. In all likelihood they have not answered it for themselves. They lashed out to counter a mounting threat to their power, but have not given any clear indication of their long-term objectives, or even that they have any. They are profoundly demoralized, and most of them have lost confidence in the historical viability of socialism of any sort. In light of recent events in Eastern Europe, it is conceivable that they could hand over power to a pro-capitalist government, or even participate in the formation of such a government themselves. Given a choice between earning an honest living and retaining some sort of governmental sinecure, few

of them would choose the former. At present there is little reason to think that their differences with the Yeltsinites have anything to do with preserving collectivized property.

Capitalist restoration in the USSR would be best served by a unified national market backed up by a stable currency. These preconditions are unlikely to be attained without a strong central government. Right now the ruble is highly unstable due to chronic government budget deficits. The government has subsidized basic items such as rent and bread by printing money. Since there are few items to spend this money on, much of it has found its way into private savings accounts. This huge "ruble overhang" is resulting in wild inflation as prices are decontrolled.

Retail prices increased 123 percent in the first quarter and then doubled again in early April when the Kremlin hiked the costs of many basic commodities. Before that, an attempt was made to soak up some of the surplus cash in the economy through the simple expedient of calling in 50 and 100 ruble notes. Gorbachev is certainly not travelling along the road to "free enterprise" as fast as the IMF or Yeltsin would like, but he appears to be moving to establish the prerequisites of a market economy. He knows that the path to the market is fraught with the peril of popular revolt, and that embarking on it means discarding democratic pretensions at some point. As the 22 December issue of Britain's *Tory Economist* noted:

*"If Mr Gorbachev chooses the smack of firm government, it could turn out to be as lethal to reform as martial law was in Poland. But it might, just might, be the Soviet Union's turn for what could be called the Pinochet ap-*

proach to liberal economics."

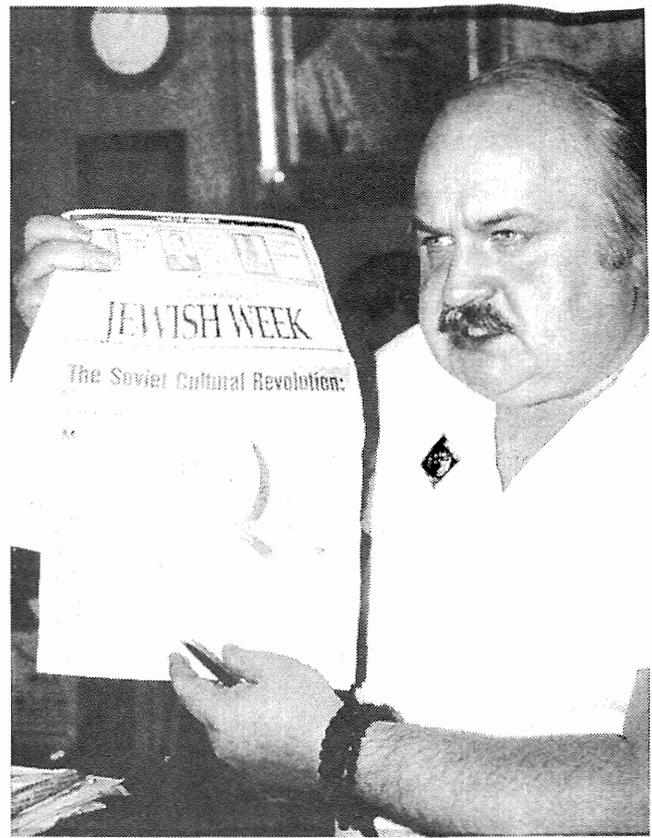
A Marxist appraisal of Stalinism cannot be based solely on the intentions of the apparatchiks. In the present circumstances the second question is equally important: are the Stalinists *capable* of defending socialized property in the USSR for any length of time? It is possible that leading sections of the bureaucracy may attempt at some future point to arrest the process of capitalist restoration. If that happened, it would be our duty to side militarily with the "conservatives" against the Yeltsinites. The Stalinist caste is incapable of *solving* the problems which gave rise to the "reforms" in the first place, but slamming on the brakes could at least buy some time.

Gorbachev launched perestroika because the Soviet economy could no longer move forward on the basis of the bureaucratic-commandist methods inherited from Stalin. Those methods were exhausted under Brezhnev, and trying to go back to them now would be to attempt to put the genie back in the bottle. Many in the *nomenklatura* would no doubt like to see a return to the old days when everyone obeyed without question. However, the workers obeyed the Stalinists not only out of fear, but also because they believed that they were building socialism and a better life for their children and grandchildren. Having abandoned even the rhetoric of socialism, the Stalinists can now offer the Soviet masses only a regime based on force. This is an offer the workers are bound to refuse.

Right now, the bureaucracy exhibits no intention of defending the historic gains of the working class. The attempts the apparatus has made to win popular support only testify to its bankruptcy. The "hardliners" appeal to the people on the basis of their meanest, most parochial and retrograde instincts. They attack Western investors not because they are capitalists, but because they are foreigners. They call for order not on the basis of proletarian discipline, but by appealing to the slavish traditions engendered by centuries of serfdom and absolutist rule. At "patriotic" meetings and military rallies, holy icons and portraits of the czars appear side by side with pictures of Stalin. They calumniate the liberal democrats in the Yeltsin camp not because they are anti-communists, but because many of them are Jews. The vilest aspect of the apparatus' attempted comeback is its thinly-veiled alliance with Pamyat, an organization of open Russian chauvinists and anti-Semites. Xenophobia, national chauvinism and anti-Semitism have always been weapons in the Stalinist arsenal. But in the past they were tempered by socialist phrases. Now the socialist pretensions have been thrown aside, and only the dross remains.

### ...And How to Avert It

Soviet Stalinism is at the end of its historical tether. The current counteroffensive by the apparatus is but a spasm in the death throes of a dying caste. We are witnessing the debacle that Trotsky predicted would result from trying to defend collectivized property with bureaucratic methods. The economic gains of the Oc-



Dimitri Vasiliev, Pamyat fascist, rails against Jews

tober Revolution have not yet been eradicated. But now, more than ever, the task of protecting them from imperialism devolves directly on the Soviet working class.

From the Donbass to the Kuzbass to Minsk, Soviet workers are already in motion. Because the state still controls the economy, their fight to defend their standard of living has turned political far more rapidly than similar struggles under capitalism. The fact that they have been driven into the arms of Yeltsin attests to the complete vacuum of proletarian political leadership in the USSR today. But they cannot be victorious by following either pro-capitalist demagogues or hidebound bureaucrats. They must look instead to their own peerless revolutionary history.

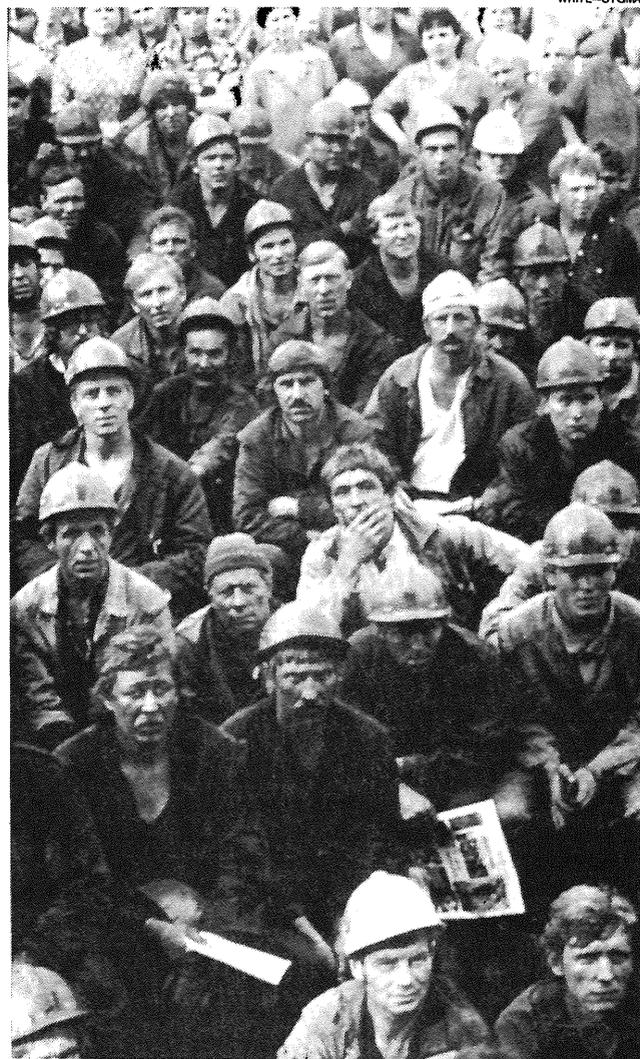
In that history they will find a party, the Bolsheviks, that led the world's first and only proletarian revolution, and a leader, Lenin, the main strategist of that victory, who was very different from the official icon. They will also find another leader, Trotsky, who resisted the degeneration of the revolution, and who told the workers the truth: that the idea of "socialism in one country" was a reactionary lie. Against the autarkic fantasies of the Stalinist oligarchs Trotsky fought to redeem the bright promise of October through a proletarian political revolution linked indissolubly to the world revolution. These traditions and that program have been obscured by decades of Stalinist falsification. Only by rediscovering them, and building a revolutionary party that embodies them, can the Soviet working class avert catastrophe and resume the offensive that shook the world in 1917. ■

# Soviet Stalinism In Extremis

During his first five years as head of the Soviet regime, Mikhail Gorbachev's "accomplishments" went beyond imperialism's wildest dreams. He drastically curtailed aid to third-world allies and national liberation movements. He withdrew Soviet troops from Afghanistan and pulled the plug on the Kremlin's Warsaw Pact client states. The resulting collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe allowed the capitalist powers to proclaim victory in the cold war and the "death of communism." On the home front, Gorbachev abandoned the Communist Party's jealously guarded monopoly on political expression, loosened central controls over the economy and gave unprecedented scope to private enterprise and foreign investment. Brezhnevite holdovers were pushed out of high positions, as the Soviet leader surrounded himself with a team that seemed willing to carry perestroika to its logical conclusion: the full-fledged restoration of capitalism and the integration of the Soviet Union into the system of imperialist states. Gorbachev soon won a warm place in the hearts of George Bush, Margaret Thatcher and capitalist rulers the world over, as well as "Western Civilization's" supreme token of affection, the Nobel Peace Prize.

But lately the bourgeois politicians and ideologues are worrying that their highest accolade may have been prematurely bestowed. Last October, when the Soviet leader backpeddled on an agreement with the Russian Republic's President, Boris Yeltsin, to dismantle state planning and introduce a full-scale market economy in 500 days, the imperialist leaders were not pleased. Gorbachev is still talking about marketization, but now he projects a more cautious pace. Western doubts about Gorbachev multiplied with the surprise resignation of his Foreign Minister and chief lieutenant, Eduard Shevardnadze, at the Fourth Congress of People's Deputies on December 20. "Comrade democrats...", he exclaimed, "you have scattered. The reformers have gone to ground. Dictatorship is coming" (*Economist*, 19 January).

Shevardnadze's warning was given credence during the Congress when Vladimir Kryuchkov, head of the KGB, indignantly accused Western capitalists in the USSR of conducting espionage and trying to wreck the economy. For vice president, Gorbachev chose Gennadi Yanayev, by all accounts an obedient tool of the party apparatus. The liberal Minister of the Interior, Vadim Bakatin, was replaced by Boris Pugo, former Latvian KGB chief. By the end of December, most of the original architects of perestroika, including Stanislav Shatalin and Nikolai Petrakov, authors of the discarded 500-day plan, had vanished from Gorbachev's inner circle. At



this point the apprehensions of Western Kremlinologists hardened into a conviction that the Soviet Union's course toward the "free market" was in deep water.

## Gorbachev Changing Course?

The personnel changes at the Congress set the scene for a crackdown on the secessionist governments of the Baltic states during the following month. With the eyes of the world riveted on the Persian Gulf, the Kremlin dispatched paratroopers to the Baltics in order to round up draft dodgers. On 13 January Soviet troops stormed and seized the main communications center in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, killing 15 of the nationalist

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