

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Crackdown in the USSR

Down with the military coup!

The ousting of President Mikhail Gorbachev by the bosses of the KGB and of the army is no less than a military coup.

Like the coups in Poland in 1981, or Chile in 1973, this coup is likely to be followed by murderous reprisals against the independent trade unions and the working class.

Over the years of "glasnost", sizeable new trade unions independent of the state have developed in the USSR — particularly among the miners — despite attempts by Gorbachev to stop strikes. The new regime has already declared a ban on strikes. It is likely to follow up by trying to return to the old system, where only government-run stooge "unions" were allowed.

Bloody repression is also likely against the many oppressed nationalities in the USSR, as the new

Support the resistance strikes!
Support the new trade unions!
Support the oppressed nationalities!
Support the fight for socialist democracy!

regime strives to restore the Kremlin's imperialist rule over the Baltic nations, the Ukrainians, the Georgians, the Azerbaijanis, the Moldovians, and others. All those nations should have the right to self-determination.

Any claim that the new regime defends "communism" or "socialism" is a sham. In reality it is almost certain to continue Gorbachev's course of converting to capitalist market economics and reintegrating the USSR into world trade; only it will seek stronger, more brutal control over the working class and the oppressed nationalities during the process.

Even if the new regime should restore more centralised control over the Soviet economy, that would never "justify" suppressing and crushing of the working class. Exploitation of the working class by a privileged bureaucracy through a centralised command economy is in no way an improvement on capitalism, or a step towards a democratically-run cooperative commonwealth.

Socialists in the West should support the small minorities in the USSR who fight for socialist democracy — such as the Socialist Party led by Boris Kagarlitsky — but also fight for freedom for the whole working class and the whole Soviet people, in-

cluding those many who now have illusions about capitalist market economics, to think, to debate, to organise, and to work out their own future.

The Soviet working class, the new trade unions, and the oppressed nationalities, will resist the new regime. Western socialists should support the resistance.

Crushed nations

The USSR is not a country but an empire. Russians are only a minority of the population.

Under the Stalinist regime, the other nationalities faced forced Russification, deliberately worsened famines, and even (for some smaller nationalities) wholesale deportation. The Baltic nations, Moldova (a Rumanian-populated area), and the western Ukraine were seized by Stalin during World War 2. The Ukraine's 60 million people makes it the biggest oppressed nation on earth.

Decades of suppression made nationalism fester and turn rancid, and many of the USSR's oppressed nations have adopted oppressive attitudes towards minorities in their areas. The only answer — the only alternative to reimposed Moscow dictatorship or bloody civil war and messy disintegration — is *consistent democracy*, recognising the right of every nation to self-determination and the right of every minority to autonomy and equal status.

Economic chaos

In the first half of this year, production in the USSR went down by 12 per cent.

Productivity in the state sector decreased by 11 per cent, imports went down by half and exports by nearly a quarter, and prices went up 48 per cent. The state budget deficit was 46% bigger than planned.

All those are the official figures. The chief statistician also reckons that 1200 or so of the country's 20,000 biggest enterprises are idle for lack of supplies at any given time.

Gorbachev has not achieved a smooth slide towards capitalist market economics — something which requires a government with a strong grip. Instead, his efforts for change have sent the USSR's ruling bureaucracy breaking apart into factions divided on political national lines, and the old command economy collapsing into a welter of corrupt special interests.

A military dictatorship probably "makes sense" for those who want free-market measures quickly and effectively.

Only revolution ca

As we go to press, at noon on Tuesday 20 August, the centre of Moscow is split between armed camps and miners in Siberia and in the Ukraine are on strike, in what may be the beginnings of a general strike to stop the Stalinist military-police takeover in the USSR.

The elected leader of the Russian Republic, Boris Yeltsin, has called for a general strike to smash the coup.

They control the radio and TV stations. In the era of satellite broadcasting such control has a limited effect. In Poland, during the strikes in 1980, broadcasts beamed in from beyond Poland's borders broke the state blockade of news about the strikes at Gdansk and helped the strikes to spread.

Two decisive questions will govern events in the USSR now.

Has the chaos unleashed by Gorbachev's economic "reforms" created such an antagonism to Gorbachev and all he stands for that large numbers of workers will back the coup, or refuse to do anything to stop it? The new rulers have promised the hard-pressed people of the USSR wage rises and price freezes, and an end to chaos.

That must have some effect. But Boris Yeltsin may be decisive here. Unlike Gorbachev, Yeltsin — who so far has been a pro-capitalist populist demagogue — has great popularity. His brave defiance of the Stalinist establishment will help workers to see what the issues are — an opening society, with the beginnings of the rule of law and some degree of democratic self-control, on one side, and stifling ice-age Stalinist dictatorship on the other.

A general strike could destroy the coup. The clearest precedent is Germany in 1920. An attempt at a military takeover — the "Kapp putsch" — was defeated by a great general strike by a labour movement responding to the lead of middle-of-the-road socialists.

The USSR's working class can stop this attempt to restore Stalinism.

The second key question is whether the armed forces remain united or split into factions willing to fight each other.

Armies and militarised police forces are hierarchical: they obey orders, until they shatter. Will the armed forces hold or shatter? The soldiers are conscripts; but conscripts have been used in coups many times, in Chile in 1973 for example. The fact that many of the conscripts are from nationalities claiming independence may destabilise the USSR's army: the example of the Yugoslav army, riven by ethnic conflicts is now before our eyes; yet a Serbian-dominated Yugoslav army still exists.

In what may be the beginning of a major split in the armed forces, a cluster of 20 tanks has gathered to defend Boris Yeltsin's Russian Federation parliament. Crowds are gathering there, and have built barricades. Should the Kremlin use force, the moment of truth will come when the soldiers it sends into action have to decide either to act for the new dictators or to go over to the people.

The attempted military-police coup was probably inevitable. For decades the USSR ran a command economy controlled by a massive centralised bureaucracy. That economy stagnated and fell behind the West. The new bureaucratic Tsar, Mikhail Gorbachev, who came to power in 1985, faced the desperate need to revitalise the economy.

He found he could do little against the dead weight of the bureaucracy. The previous reforming Stalinist Tsar, Khrushchev, had found that too, before he was overthrown in 1964. So Gorbachev decided to take a cudgel to the bureaucracy. He opened it up to the light of day and to public criticism.

But by introducing chaos and confusion and uncertainty into the bureaucracy, "glasnost" — openness — made the existing system even more inefficient. "Perestroika" — restructuring — followed. And more chaos. The dead weight of the bureaucracy was immense.

Model motion

"This... condemns the military coup in the USSR;

Calls on the [Labour Party NEC/ your union executive] to give all support possible to the independent trade unions, oppressed nationalities, and anti-Stalinist socialist groups fighting against the coup; and

Resolves to affiliate to the Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc and make a donation of £... to the campaign".

The Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Bloc was set up in 1987, at a conference sponsored by numerous Labour MPs and leading trade unionists. Among its honorary presidents is Boris Kagarlitsky of the new Socialist Party in the USSR; Eric Heffer MP was also a honorary president until his recent death. The Campaign worked before 1989 to raise support for democratic and anti-Stalinist movements in the Eastern Bloc, and has campaigned since 1989 more specifically to send aid to the new anti-Stalinist socialist groups in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Contact: Mark Osborn or Jill Mountford, 071-639 7967, or write to CSWEB at 56 Kevan House, Wyndham Road, London SE5. Affiliation: £5 waged and organisations, £2 unwaged; please also send donations; cheques payable to CSWEB.



Will the armed forces split? A woman argues w

The bureaucracy began to fall apart. Some bureaucrats — in the first place Yeltsin, the former Moscow party boss — openly advocated the restoration of capitalism. Responding from day to day as the crisis grew, Gorbachev inched towards formally abolishing the political monopoly of the "Party" — it had already been broken in fact by the first fruits of "glasnost". A month ago he went further and at a Communist Party Central Committee plenum formally broke with "communism" — that is, Stalinism, the system Stalin created at the end of the 1920s.

At the heart of the Stalinist system, and of the command economy fallen into chaos because the centre had become too weak and uncertain, was now a leading team steering the USSR towards the restoration of capitalism.

As a by-product of his attempt to escape from the contradictions of a vastly overstretched, economically backward world empire — maybe *one third* of the USSR's income was going on military spending — Gorbachev allowed the East Euro

an secure liberty



a soldier in Moscow.

pean satellite states to escape the feeble grip of the local Stalinist dictatorships imposed by the USSR in the late '40s.

The new dictators in the USSR pledge themselves to continue the drive to private enterprise. "Developing the mixed character of the national economy, we will also support private enterprise, granting it the necessary opportunities for developing production..." Most of them are reformists appointed by Gorbachev. There is no reason to doubt their sincerity here.

They know that the old command system was hopelessly moribund. It is against "glasnost" that this coup is aimed — against openness, against the beginnings of democracy, against self-determination for the non-Russian nationalities — not against "perestroika".

It is the experience of many economically backward countries that market economics demands authoritarian militarised rule and is incompatible with democracy. It was always true of the USSR — and we said it often in *SO* — that the restoration of capitalism would not produce Western-style

democracy. China, where Stalinist-level authoritarianism has been the political framework for a controlled restoration of the market economy, is perhaps the model the Moscow putschists now have in mind.

The bourgeoisie knows this, and it is likely to influence their behaviour after their first shocked response to the fall of their golden boy in Moscow. Listen to the *Finan-*

The new trade unions

Before 1985, the only "trade unions" in the USSR were government agencies.

Their job was to police the workers and to distribute state benefits such as holidays and sick pay. Gennadi Yanayev, the front man for the military coup, is a former boss of this fake union movement. A previous official trade union boss, Alexander Shelepin, came to

cial Times:

"Business leaders... suggested that — in business terms at least — an authoritarian economy was preferable to an anarchic one, and some executives believe Mr Gorbachev's removal might lead to a clarification of recent uncertainties.

"Economic progress can still be made in the shadow of authoritarian rule. China is the prime example of this", said one executive".

The choice in the USSR now is either what the putschists want, Chinese-style authoritarianism and a growing sphere for market economics, or else a radical popular revolution which destroys the power of the old state.

Gorbachev's course — democratic reform from above by an enlightened despot — has failed: now it is either reaction or revolution. If the working class and others rally now round Yeltsin and his similars, it will be a revolution having more in common with the French Revolution of 1789 than the working-class Russian Revolution of 1917. Yeltsin wants to clear the way for capitalism: but for now he has chosen the side of democracy.

A mass popular revolution to break the old state and win political and civil liberty — including the right to organise the free trade unions and working-class political parties now outlawed by the putschists — would be an immense step forward from Stalinism. In the course of such a revolution, workers who now follow Yeltsin, and who are not against the capitalist market, which they see as going with the comparative liberty and prosperity of the West, will find their political feet and begin to gain a class awareness of the need for socialism. That happened in very different social and industrial conditions during the Great French Revolution.

If the neo-Stalinist, quasi-fascist backlash now triggers a deep popular revolution, it may not end quite as Yeltsin and the Russian neo-bourgeoisie want.

Socialists in Britain must give their unqualified support to the resistance to the neo-Stalinist dictatorship. Long live the Russian Revolution!

the job from being head of the secret police, the KGB.

Since 1985 new, independent, trade unions have emerged, especially among the miners.

These new trade unions are generally not socialist. They tend to support Boris Yeltsin and favour the free market as the most "realistic" alternative to the tyranny and clumsy wastefulness which they have been told for decades is socialism. Yet they represent the rebirth of workers' self-organisation in the USSR, and thus the beginnings of the rebirth of authentic working-class socialism.

The rise and fall of Gorbachev

The roots of the rise and fall of Gorbachev lie in the crisis of the "command economy" created by Stalin in the 1930s.

That "command economy" built an industrial base — at terrible cost. But by the 1960s terror had slackened and slid into bumbling, time-serving inertia. The crude, clumsy methods of centralised planning-by-decree were unable to shift to producing more varied and more complex goods.

As early as the 1960s the rulers tried to use more market mechanisms to modernise. Bureaucratic inertia swallowed up the experiments. Brezhnev, in the 1970s, marked time. Corruption mushroomed. By the 1980s, the USSR was clearly falling further and further behind the West.

Gorbachev came to power in 1985. He was no democrat: his chief sponsor had been Yuri Andropov, former head of the KGB. But he was determined to shake up the economy.

He started with an administrative drive against corruption and alcoholism, and limited shifts towards market economics. He soon decided that to break the bureaucratic logjams he must release some pressure from below. He allowed a freer press and genuine elections.

He also pulled Soviet troops out of Afghanistan, and negotiated arms deals with the US, hoping to lessen the huge drain on the USSR of military spending.

All Gorbachev's economic measures have had little positive effect. On paper they have become more and more radical — going so far, by last year, as open conversion to the capitalist market — but in reality they have only dislocated the old system of central command, replacing it by a chaos of corruption, ad-hoc deals, log-rolling and black markets.

His political measures, however, have led further than he wished. The old monolithic Stalinist party, the backbone of the state, has disintegrated (although the new rulers may try, and even succeed, to reconstruct a smaller "state-party"

from the ruins). The claims of the minority nations in the USSR, long repressed by iron dictatorship, have exploded, starting with the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988 and spreading to the Baltic nations seized by Stalin in 1940 and to Moldova, the Ukraine and Georgia.

In summer 1989 miners struck all across the USSR. They started by demanding better pay and conditions, but soon went on to call for an end to the bureaucrats' privileges, a new constitution and an end to central government control of the mines. Other workers also struck. A new independent trade union movement began to grow up, in place of the old government-controlled fake unions.

The miners struck again in March this year.

In 1989 the decline of the Kremlin produced sudden and dramatic results in Eastern Europe. Poland's government had been unable to crush the workers' movement Solidarnosc, and after a strike wave in 1988, began to negotiate with it. Moscow signalled that it would not intervene. Poland had genuine elections in which Solidarnosc won almost all the contested seats.

Within months the old Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe had been swept from power by mass movements, usually headed by such long-persecuted dissidents as Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia.

After autumn 1990, things got worse and worse for Gorbachev. In September 1990 he got powers to rule by decree — on paper — but in fact he had less and less control over local and departmental bosses.

In November-December 1990, Moscow, Leningrad and the Ukraine started rationing basic foods. In January 1991 troops cracked down in rebellious Lithuania and Latvia. Gorbachev supported the military, though probably the army commanders had moved without consulting him: after years of zig-zagging between reformers and conservatives, he seemed to be tacking back towards the conservatives.

Stalin buried the ideals of 1917

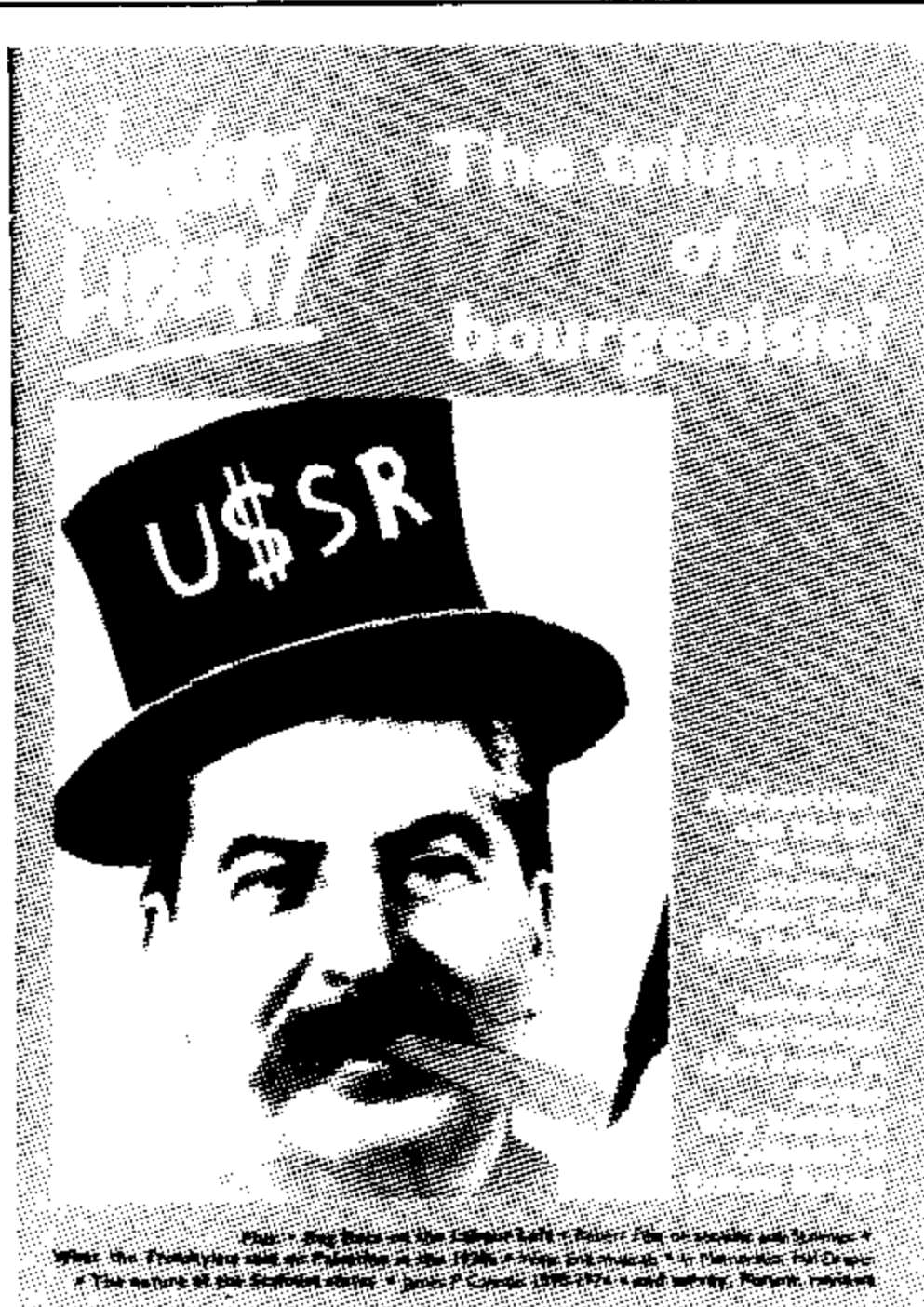
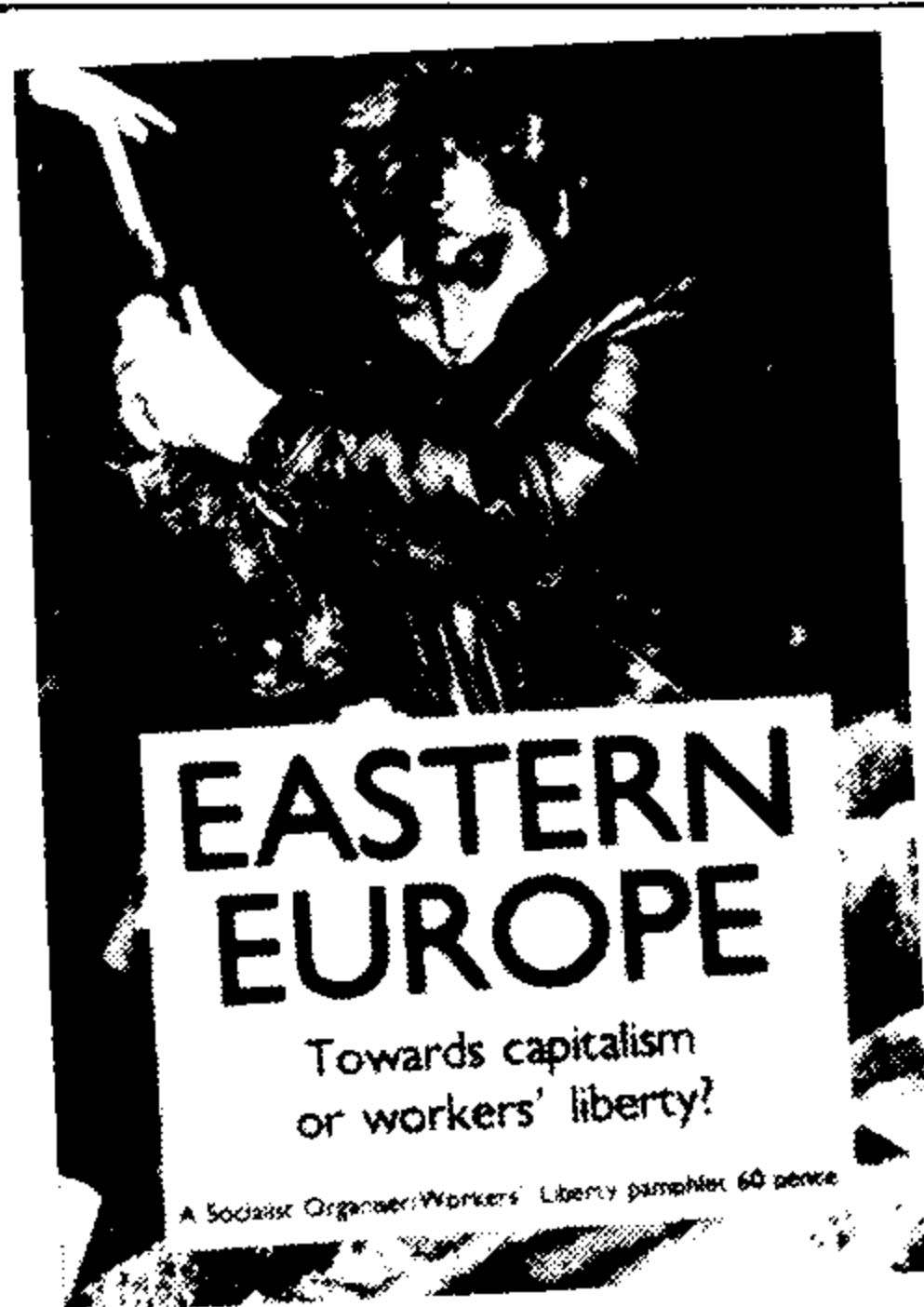
The coup came shortly after Gorbachev had persuaded the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to consider a new platform which scrapped "Marxism-Leninism". Maybe the coup-makers will justify themselves as defenders of the old faith.

But official "Marxism-Leninism" long ago ceased to have any relation to the ideas of Marx or Lenin.

There was a real workers' revolution in 1917, establishing a workers' government democratically controlled through workers' councils and offering freedom to the nations of the old Tsarist Empire. But Lenin, Trotsky, and the others that led the revolution knew that socialism was not possible in a single country, and least of all in backward Russia: the revolutionary regime could survive only if revolutions in Western Europe brought in the industrial and human resources of countries like Germany, France and Britain.

The workers' uprisings in Western Europe were defeated, and the workers' revolution was left isolated in backward Russia. A new bureaucratic class developed from the state officials of the revolutionary regime.

Gradually it crystallised out, solidified, and gained independence from the working class. It defeated and ousted those who remained loyal to the ideals of the revolution — the "Left Opposition", led by Trotsky.



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