

Lenin and Trotsky:
not guilty!

See page 6



SOCIALIST

*The people shatter
Stalin's system*

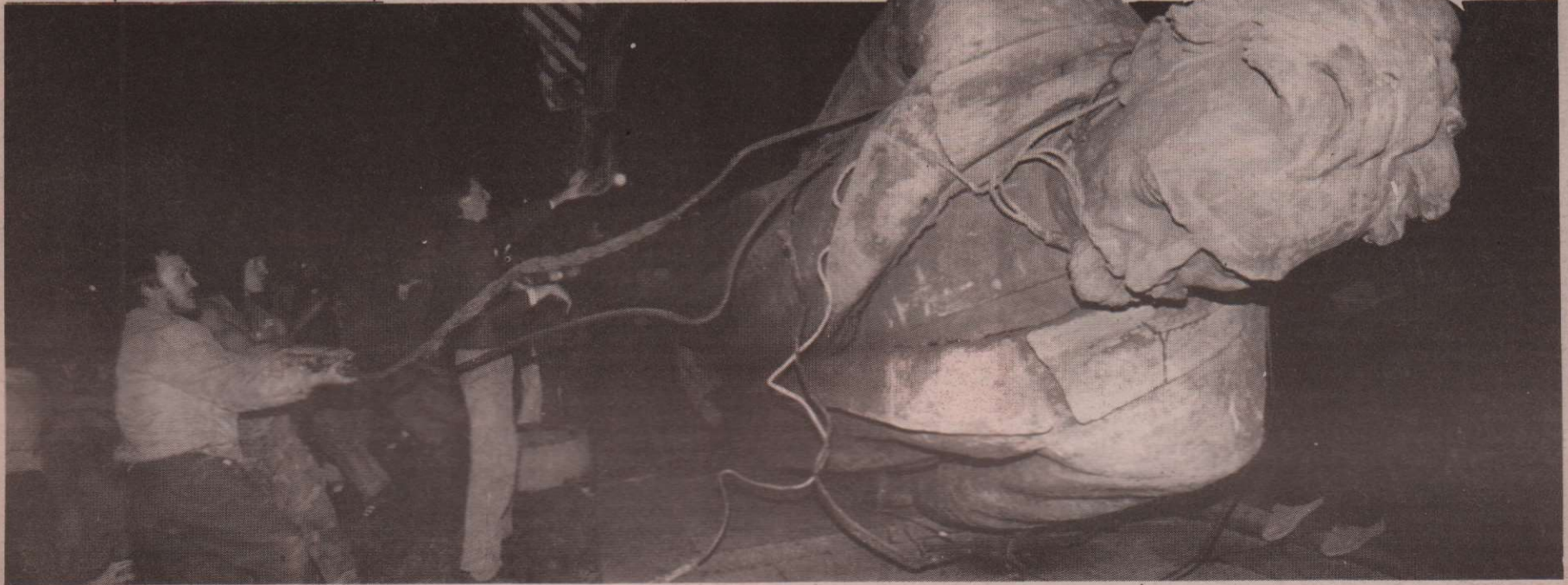
Into

ORGANISER

Unite the left!

the dustbin of history

Demonstrators pull down statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky



Inside: ten pages of news, analysis and background to the August revolution

TUC battle looms on union laws

By Gerry Bates

The trade union laws are almost certain to be the issue at this year's Trades Union Congress to be held in Glasgow next week.

As we go to press, it is not yet clear in what precise form this issue will come up. The initial resolutions book has a series of reasonable resolutions including one from the TGWU which calls for the repeal of all anti-union laws by the next Labour government.

Unfortunately, the TUC leadership will be doing their utmost to water down any demands on Kinnock.

The left must do everything it can to prevent this happening and organise around the idea of a positive charter of workers' rights.

This idea has already won support from the RMT and NALGO union conferences and from the North West Labour Party.

To this end, the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee is organising a fringe meeting at conference around the theme of 'Unshackle the Unions'.

The Workers' Charter adopted at last year's NALGO conference includes the following demands:

- the right to belong to a trade union for all employees including those employed in GCHQ, the police and the armed forces;
- a legally recognised right to strike, to picket effectively and in whatever numbers chosen, and to take other forms of industrial action;
- the right to strike for all trade unionists, including secondary or solidarity action, without fear of dismissal, fines or sequestration of union assets;
- legally enforceable rights for unions to gain access to workplaces to organise workers to join unions and for unions to gain recognition;
- the right of unions to determine their own constitutions and rule books in accordance with their own democratic procedures, free from interference from the state;
- the right to stop work whenever health and safety are threatened;
- the right of workers and their unions to be fully consulted and informed by employers on all decisions relating to working conditions, job prospects, strategic investments, mergers and takeovers;
- the right to employment free from discrimination on grounds of gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation or political persuasion;
- full-time rights for part-time workers;
- inclusion of homeworkers in employment protection legislation and financial sanctions on those who exploit them;
- the right of trade unions to take political action and collect a political levy.

Race riots in New York

Barry Finger reports from New York

Communal violence has swept through Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York, after a car driven by a Hasidic Jew jumped a kerb, killing a seven year old black child and injuring his cousin.

A Hasidic-operated ambulance removed the injured Jewish driver, under police instructions, from the middle of an outraged crowd. The children were left unattended.

Two hours later, in apparent retaliation, a Jew was stabbed to death. Two black youths were charged. No arrests were made in connection with the child's death.

Four days of rioting followed

— scores of injuries, over 400 arrested, \$500,000 of damage to local, mostly Jewish-owned, property. It all came soon after a particularly tawdry confrontation between Jews and blacks, when a black academic made an anti-Jewish speech and broad sections of the Jewish community called for him to be sacked.

Crown Heights is also a special case. The Jews there are a readily-identifiable, disciplined, ultra-orthodox sect. They have brought from Europe, and preserved, the political culture of the Jewish ghetto, which often means currying favour with the powerful in order to stave off the next pogrom.

Neither machine politics nor demagoguery will provide a way out for Jews, blacks, or anyone else, in a city in an advanced state of decay and ethnic balkanisation.



A protest march on 17 August at the shooting of Ian Gordon ended at Wellington railway station where Ian Gordon, holding

an unloaded air pistol, was shot dead by police marksmen on Monday 12 August. Photo: John Harris.

Capitalism shunts aside another Hyde

By Colin Foster

John Gutfreund was one of the most powerful men in the world, or at least he thought he was.

Last week he and his deputy John Meriwether resigned in disgrace from their New York investment bank, Salomon Brothers after admitting to fraudulent dealing in US government bonds.

Before that, as Michael Lewis reports in his deservedly best-selling exposé of Salomons, *Liar's Poker*, "Gutfreund loved to point out that Salomon was the world's most powerful investment bank..."

"Often he would point out that Salomon Brothers carried \$80 billion of securities on its books overnight, every night. He would follow this observation by saying that, in asset size, Salomon Brothers was 'the largest commercial bank in the world' and 'one of the forty largest countries in the world'."

The gathering-together of idle cash into a few hands, the expansion of credit, and the growth of enterprise based solely on juggling and dealing with that credit, are built-in tendencies of the most sober and Quaker-spirited capitalist system. In the 1980s those tendencies mushroomed, thanks to the easing of limits on capital flows between countries.

International bank lending rose from \$127 billion in 1983 to \$624 billion in 1986; international bond issues from \$44 billion in 1981 to \$220 billion in 1986; international share issues from \$0.2 billion in 1984 to \$17.7 billion in 1987; and foreign exchange dealing to maybe \$200 billion a day in 1986.

Salomons was the biggest dealer in these expanded world-wide gambling dens. Gutfreund was probably wrong about its power, at least any power over constructive development. A

capitalist business, small or large, developing new technologies would not look to Salomons for credit: Salomons wanted big short-term profits, not long-term prospects.

Salomons did have destructive power. One of its specialities was financing deals in which quick-money men raised huge loans to buy out big corporations — industrial giants like RJR Nabisco — and then axed them to bits, selling off chunks and raising rapid profits by lean, mean running of the core business.

Thousands of workers lost their jobs in such operations, and among the first overhead costs to go was always research and development.

One Wall Street dealer quoted in *Barbarians at the Gate* (another best-seller, about the buy-out of RJR Nabisco) reckoned that Gutfreund was losing his bite even at the start of the 1980s. His marriage to Susan Kaposta had done it.

A rich man slipping into old age (he was 51 when they married in 1981) had married a ruthlessly ambitious and greedy young woman.

Vanity took over. According to Michael Lewis, "[Gutfreund] and others ceased to view Salomon Brothers as an instrument of wealth-creation, and began to treat it as an instrument of power and glory, a vast playground in which they could be the bullies."

Gutfreund spent as much time and energy flaunting his wealth in Manhattan's "Shiny Set" — the tiny clique of the super-rich who lord it over upper-class New York rather like top aristocrats at an absolutist court — as on his business.

Unfortunately Gutfreund is still very comfortable, with wealth of at least \$27 million. The workers who lost their jobs in deals financed by him are not so lucky.

Gutfreund is the latest, and the biggest so far, of the



John Gutfreund — Mr Hyde

series of capitalist whizzkids of the '80s who have fallen into disgrace: Ivan Boesky, Michael Milken, Ernest Saunders, BCCI, Nomura... In these more austere days, capitalism's Dr Jekylls — prudent, sober, mean and doggedly exploiting — are taking the foreground from the equally capitalist Mr Hydes, with their risk-taking, extravagance, flair and impatience.

Pickets block poll tax seizures

POLL TAX

By Peter Burton

On Friday 23 August, 200 people joined four pickets in the Cambuslang area of Glasgow.

Sheriffs (bailiffs) could legally have turned up any time between 8am and 8pm, but were told not to by police.

The sheriffs were sent by the Labour council in Strathclyde, where the Anti-Poll-Tax Federation claims that 91.5% are not paying, and 2.4 million people are in a position to be pursued by sheriffs. The council says it is not pursuing the most vulnerable, but the four people due to have property seized on 23 August were all unable to pay their poll tax, and included one woman dying of cancer.

The anti-poll-tax struggle is not over, and anti-poll-tax unions must explain that non-payers should not automatically bin poll tax mail — it is now likely to be a seven-day notice of a poinding [seizure of goods] — and should contact their local group.

Meanwhile, Strathclyde Regional Council and the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities have decided to spend £100,000 on an advertising campaign to try to get people to pay their poll tax, and Lothian council has also moved to seize non-payers' assets.

Bailiffs fail in Notts

By a member of Notts Anti-Poll Tax Federation

The Anti-Poll Tax Campaign in Rushcliffe, Notts, has been very successful. The £2 million owed to the Council works out at 10-15% non-payment, a high rate for a rabidly Tory area.

Because of the successful campaign the Council has stepped up the pressure with summonses for liability orders, committal proceedings and bailiffs.

Since September, £30,000 has been spent on bailiffs and still they have not managed to seize any goods. Two firms have been used, A.A. Johnsons of Leicester and Gaults.

Ideas that can beat the Tories

A Workers' Liberty day event celebrating 500 issues of Socialist Organiser

Saturday 5 October 10.30 — 5.00
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- creche • food • stalls • social

Special September ticket offer!

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during September	£2.00	£4.00	£6.00
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For more information phone Mark on 071-639 7967. For tickets and details write to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA

WHAT'S ON

Wednesday 4 September

'Unshackle the Unions' SMTUC meeting. Central Hotel, Central Station, Gordon Street, Glasgow, 7.30. Speakers include Tony Benn and Ronnie McDonald.

Friday 6 September

Hunger strike commemoration. 7.30pm to 1.00am, Kelvin Park Lorne Hotel, 923 Sauciehall Street, Glasgow. Speakers include: Ken Livingstone MP; Noel Ellis (father of Dessie Ellis) — Irish anti-extradition campaign; Father Des Wilson

Saturday 7 September

Hunger Strike Commemorative March. Blythswood Square to George Square, Glasgow.

Sunday 8 September

Anti-Fascist Action Carnival. 2.00-7.00, Hackney Downs, London E8

Monday 9 September

'Socialists and Democracy' SO London Forum. 7.30, Lucas Arms, Gray's Inn Road

Campaign Against the Witch-Hunt

National Working Conference
1pm-5pm, Saturday 21 September, Manchester Town Hall.

With Terry Fields and representatives of witch-hunted comrades in Birkenhead, Brighton, Lambeth, Liverpool, Nottingham, Sheffield, and Southampton, plus speaker from the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.
Lobby the National Executive Committee: 9am 25 September, 150 Watworth Road, London SE17.
Contact: 108 Windsor Road, London N7 6JG.



Muscovites defy the coup

Stalin's system collapses

Last week the system Stalin built in the old Tsarist empire collapsed irretrievably.

The USSR is collapsing, too: most of its republics have now declared themselves independent.

In most of those republics the so-called "Communist Party of the Soviet Union" has either been banned outright, or banned from activity in such institutions as the army and the KGB, and in factories.

For decades the cells of the 17-million strong "party" — in reality the machinery of a vast privileged bureaucracy, not a political party — have been the local institutions through which the central state-party has controlled

society. Now the party's property has been seized and put into the hands of the city councils.

The people who made up the CP still have immense power as managers and administrators; but all the structures which bound them together into an exclusive ruling class, with the ritual exclusiveness of a caste, have been shattered.

Radical reforms from above by the reforming Stalinist Tsar Gorbachev, the enlightened despot who wanted desperately to present himself as an ex-despot, have given way to revolution, which is shattering all the old ruling-class structures and clearing the debris out of the way of the development of capitalism.

The state has been prised away from the party. The army remains intact, and with an enhanced stature, ready to play the role of arbiter in the future.

The astonishing ease with which the Stalinist system finally fell asunder has few parallels in history. The nearest is perhaps the day in 1943 when the Fascist Grand Council in Rome met and, arresting Mussolini, declared the fascist movement dissolved.

This collapse began not with a Stalinist decision to self-liquidate, but with an attempt to organise an authoritarian neo-Stalinist coup.

On 19 August a committee of eight, headed by Gorbachev's depu-

ty Gennady Yanayev, declared a state of emergency, "suspending" political parties and trade unions. Gorbachev was arrested and held at his dacha in the Crimea. A curfew was imposed.

The prime minister, the head of the KGB, the Minister of Defence, and the Minister of the Interior, were all part of it. Within three days

"The army remains intact, and with an enhanced stature, ready to play the role of arbiter in the future"

the coup had collapsed. There are a host of unanswered questions about what happened, and why.

Some of the organisers of the coup had had experience in such work in places like Poland, where martial law was imposed in December 1981. Yet the Moscow coup was utterly bungled.

They arrested Gorbachev, who had little popular support and was still a man of the apparatus they were defending. (They had, it seems, even had talks with Gorbachev about helping him to impose just such a state of emergency). They did not arrest Boris Yeltsin,

who has both popular support and the will to destroy the apparatus which ejected him four years ago.

The initial reaction of most people to the coup was, it seems, one of passive acceptance. Yeltsin, and the elected deputies of the Russian Parliament, changed all that.

They set up a centre of resistance to the coup, denied its legitimacy, and called for resistance to it at all levels, including a general strike. Miners in the Urals and Siberia struck. But even the call for a general strike was essentially a failure: there were strikes, but there was no general strike.

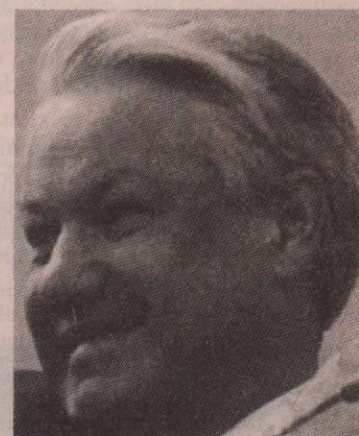
Resistance was growing and spreading round the country. Most of the republics rejected the claimed authority of the coup committee.

Some tens of thousands of people gathered round the Russian Parliament building to protect it from expected attack. Even there the forces mobilised were not overwhelming.

The decisive thing that sealed the fate of the coup was its own lack of will to impose itself. Having made their initial declaration, the coup-makers were then paralysed.

The army command was divided. The coup organisers could not even get KGB forces to act as shock troops. Thereafter, the coup just melted away.

The neo-Stalinist group which seemed to have control at the beginning of the week had dissolved by Wednesday 21st, with only three casualties on the street. And as it



dissolved popular activity guided by the Russian Parliament grew.

Yeltsin and his friends seized the hour. The CP was implicated in the coup attempt. When the coup collapsed, it was on the run. Yeltsin turned the Russian Parliament into a revolutionary committee, issuing

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"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of sex or race."
Karl Marx

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Why the workers want

By Sean Matgamna

Socialists like ourselves, watching the replacement of the Stalinist state economies not by socialist workers' power and a democratic collectivist system, but by capitalism, are in a position roughly similar to the pioneering Marxists George Plekhanov and Karl Kautsky when they watched the Russian workers take power although their dogmatic expectation was that only the bourgeoisie could replace the Tsar.

In fact not the Russian bourgeoisie, but the working class led by the Bolsheviks, replaced the Tsar. The parallel has lessons for us.

What we are witnessing in the USSR is a bourgeois revolution. The leaders of the anti-Stalinist revolution and their ideas; the ideas in the heads of the mass of the people (including the working class); the West European and US social models they look to — all define it as a bourgeois revolution. It is not a bourgeois revolution against the working class, or against feudalists, but against the rule of the collectivist bureaucratic ruling class, the class which clustered around the once all-controlling state which was, so to speak, its property.

It is a bourgeois revolution having much in common with the revolutions against absolutism in France after 1789 and in various parts of Central Europe in the mid 19th century. It has more, a great deal more, in common with the (abortive) bourgeois revolution against the decayed oriental despotism of China at the beginning of this century, though the USSR is greatly more developed and it would probably be misleading to draw an exact equivalence between the Stalinist system and oriental despotism.

Nevertheless, a bourgeois revolution it is. It faces tremendous difficulties. But they are material, practical, technical difficulties — the lack of markets and of an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, the tremendous weight of the bureaucracy even after it is certifiably brain-dead, etc. — not difficulties arising from the resistance of the working class, or by the coherent resistance of any other class.

The bureaucracy is a class — the class which has organised the system of production and appropriated the surplus product for over 60 years — but it, too, or its thinking layers anyway, favours the full bourgeoisification of Stalinist society. When Gorbachev now calls himself a "Scandinavian social-democrat", it is just an

The legacy of Stalinism

euphemism for a bourgeois society. When he talks — and Yeltsin, too — about democracy, that is an euphemism for the same thing.

Where Yeltsin and Gorbachev differed was not in their programme, but in their relationship to the old decayed, disintegrating, bureaucratic ruling class. Until he suddenly cut loose last weekend, Gorbachev was still half-tied to it; Yeltsin was outside. Now the failed coup has unleashed mass revolutionary action and destroyed the power of the bureaucracy. Its collective institutions — its party property, its private economy-within-the-economy, access to which came not from money but from caste status — all that is being hacked down now.

Gorbachev has been a cross between the nobles who overthrew the Tsarist autocracy with a palace coup, and Kerensky, who tried to hold the balance between left and right until displaced by the October Revolution in 1917 — except that the movement is not from a half-shaped bourgeois society to workers' power, but from Stalinist collectivism to a bourgeois society, whose champions now have the upper hand.

It is a bourgeois revolution with a still feeble bourgeoisie — even more feeble than the bourgeoisie reared under Tsarism and blighted by economic symbiosis with it, then pushed aside by the Bolshevik party leading the workers and peasants. But bourgeois ideas are a great power because they have indeed "gripped the masses".

For many decades, in the West and South, millions fervently looked to the Soviet Union as their model for liberty and prosperity (and many in the Third World probably still do: myths do not evaporate easily). Today the masses in the ex-Stalinist states have an ironically identical attitude to capitalism. The workers are locked in behind the aspirant bourgeoisie and the intellectuals and the Churches, into an ideal of a free and prosperous market-organised society. The ideas of liberty, and the hope of prosperity, have for them become fused with support for the market.

The great common enemy of "society" is the bureaucracy and the old system. Though opinion polls may show some mass support for socialist values



Stalinist slave labour camp

(and liberty and prosperity are socialist values), ideas of class interest seem to be rudimentary and trade-union level.

The very conception of class consciousness is discredited and tainted by its misuse in the ideology of the bureaucracy, who presented their savage repression as a matter of fighting the proletarian class struggle.

Worse than that, the experience that has shaped and is still shaping the working class in the Stalinist societies propels them away from socialist collectivism, towards marketism and individualism: the hated old system was collectivist.

For masses of workers to form the idea of their own democratic collectivism would be difficult in the circumstances even if a respected and big working-class-based democratic-socialist anti-Stalinist organisation had presented and argued for such a programme in the heat of the struggle against Stalinism. No such party exists: the Stalinists saw to that.

No tradition of independent socialism has been allowed to survive: Stalin saw to that, too, extirpating socialists and even socialist ideas as well as presenting grotesque caricatures of those ideas as his own ideological self-justifications.

The negative impact of bourgeois market capitalism and the exploitation of workers by private capitalists allied to the state helped shape the anti-capitalist labour movements in Europe and pre-1917 Russia, pushing workers struggling against the system towards collectivism, and allowing the socialists to be the most conscious element of the class, rendering the gut reactions of workers in struggle coherent and scientific.

All that is turned inside out and upside down in the crazy mirror-image society created by Stalinism.

Whereas in the 1890s the first great wave of mass working-class strikes could link up with the Marxists and the young Russian working class began the work of hammering out an independent working-class programme and an organisation to fight for it, now the very opposite course is almost mechanically imposed. The instinctive reflex reaction against totalitarian collectivism pushes the proletariat not towards its own necessary programme, the alternative to all exploitation, capitalist or bureaucratic, but *organically*

towards the programme of the bourgeoisie.

The weak socialist groups in the Stalinist states have to argue against the grain, paralleling perhaps the few honest utopian liberal democrats back in 1917.

The collapsing system was imposed by Stalin on a largely petty bourgeois society and economy. Nothing in the Marxist programme indicated such all-embracing collectivism, even for a far more developed and less petty-bourgeois society; Trotsky criticised it, though not enough.

In fact Stalin's action in this grew from the competition of the bureaucracy with the petty bourgeoisie and aspirant bourgeoisie for the surplus product: it arose in the bureaucracy's struggle to root out all competitors. The natural evolution would have been to collectivise the "commanding heights" of the economy, controlling and regulating the rest, making controlled links with the world market.

That was the policy after 1921 of Lenin and Trotsky. Even when the Left Opposition argued, between 1923 and 1929, for more "socialistic" measures, they argued within the market-based "New Economic Policy": Stalin broke it entirely.

Now the Stalinist economy is unravelling because for nearly 4 decades it has had neither the Stalinist terror that energised it and controlled the bureaucracy in the early decades, nor conscious working-class democratic self-control in society and the economy.

The consequence for socialists now in the USSR who want to stand against the tide is that they have to argue for a better and different sort of collectivism in face of the utter failure of the Stalinist totalitarian collectivism. It is probably a task difficult to the point of impossibility: that is why the socialist groups remain tiny and isolated, unjustly tainted with both Stalinism and utopianism. They are powerless to demonstrate except in words — words worn away and debased by the Stalinist counterfeiters — what their socialism is; and powerless also against the pressure of international capitalism.

The political force able to conduct the necessary struggle — a democratic socialist party — will have to emerge out of the

The Gorbachev years

Gorbachev became CP General Secretary in March 1985. His first moves were for arms cuts, and, in the economy, an administrative drive against alcoholism and corruption.

1986: Gorbachev proclaims "glasnost" — openness — and "perestroika" — economic reconstruction, meaning in the first place having state factories keep their profits (or go bust if they have losses) and allowing some private enterprise. In July, Gorbachev says he will withdraw from Afghanistan.

1987: In January, Gorbachev promises genuine elections though the party will still vet candidates.

1988: Violence breaks out in the southern Soviet Union as the Armenian-populated area of

Nagorno Karabakh demands transfer from rule by Azerbaijan to Armenia. In October, Gorbachev ousts leading conservatives Ligachev and Gromyko, and KGB boss Chebrikov.

1989: The last Soviet troops pull out of Afghanistan. In March, reformers poll well in the first genuine parliamentary elections since revolutionary times. In July, a miners' strike across the USSR, starting on pay and conditions but going on to political demands, marks the beginning of a new workers' movement and new independent trade unions.

At the end of the year, popular revolutions clear away Stalinism all across Eastern Europe.

1990: January — Gorbachev sends troops into Azerbaijan; massacre in Baku. March — Lithuania declares independence, and the CP aban-

dons its "leading role". May — Russian Parliament elects Yeltsin president. September — Gorbachev gets powers to rule by decree... on paper. His advisers produce the "Shatalin plan" to switch to a market economy within 500 days; Gorbachev shies away from it, but Yeltsin adopts it.

The economy begins to collapse: food rationing introduced in Moscow, Leningrad, and many other areas.

1991: January — troops crack down in Lithuania and Latvia. March-May — a new wave of miners' strikes. Gorbachev makes a deal with Yeltsin to end the strikes: mines transferred from central to Russian Federation control. New "9 plus 1" Union Treaty drafted, proposing to transfer most powers and industrial assets from the centre to the republics.

to restore capitalism



Defiant demonstration of the Left Opposition on the 10th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution

immediate class struggles — both the sectional economic struggles and the political struggles to win, consolidate and defend democracy, in which the socialists should take the lead, competing with the Yeltsins — and out of the discussion of what went wrong with Stalinism.

There is on another level, too, a lawfulness about the bourgeois character of the revolution. In terms of human liberty — freedom of utterance, organisation, sexuality, habeas corpus, the rule of law — the Stalinist world until recently had fallen backwards in history hundreds of years, further back even than some of the notoriously brutal Third World authoritarian regimes.

It was as if all the advances since the Middle Ages associated with the rise and spread of bourgeois civilisation had never happened: except that they existed and flourished in Europe and the US and other places, side by side with but beyond the borders of the Russian Empire. Inevitably this system acts as a great magnet and beacon for the lost tribes of the Stalinist world. They have looked across the borders — especially the thinking intelligentsia in the Stalinist states — at the advanced bourgeois world as from across hundreds of years of historical time.

No independent working-class outlook was formed, for all the reasons above and because of repression, but also because Stalinism was above all characterised by a propensity to disguise itself in forms taken from advanced bourgeois society. Thus you had "unions" that were police-state unions, anti-unions; empty political parties; and you had the old socialist ideas of self-organising democratic collectivism transmuted into ideological camouflage for the bureaucratic-collectivist ruling-class exploitation.

Vast difficulties were thus placed in the way of the proletariat developing its own outlook; those difficulties still operate now, after the era of savage police-state repression has passed.

And yet the only way that the road from Stalinist totalitarianism to democratic working-class socialist collectivism could be a direct one, eliminating the capitalist stage now at hand, would be for the working class to be able to formulate its own clear programme

and organise itself. For the totalitarian state economy to be replaced by a working-class, democratically-planned socialist economy and not by chaos, as now, the working class would have to take central directing control of the economy. Everything has militated against the working class being prepared to do that.

Stalinism in its long, but until recently still savage, stagnation and decay, pinned the working class under its own dead weight. To change the image: it was not working-class socialism that could gestate within the womb of the Stalinist society. At the same time, a bourgeoisified layer of the bureaucracy, and a sizeable "middle class", developed. The only way the system could open up was when its own central rulers acted to paralyse it at the centre.

The Bolsheviks in 1917 knew that the Russian workers' state could not escape from world capitalism and build socialism. They could only act as a pioneer for the West European workers who would overthrow advanced capitalism.

Neither did it prove possible for the Stalinist system — which also counterposed itself to the bourgeoisie and proposed to find its own way to the future, competing with advanced world capitalism — to supplant Western capitalism starting on the basis of the backward Russian empire: they were too poor for the competition; and the bureaucratic ruling class never succeeded in establishing an articulated, coherent, self-regulating economic system.

Everything including the empire and the pretensions to world power status rested on the grotesquely inflated military machine, which devoured maybe a third of the gross product of the empire! Collapse was inevitable.

As I have argued above, only a sharp degree of independent class consciousness would make independent working-class politics possible, a sharper degree of historical and theoretical awareness than was necessary to make independent working-class politics possible in 1917. Inevitably, since independent working-class politics in the Stalinist state require the working class to go against the grain of its own repulsion from the system of its immediate oppressors and exploiters, vastly greater masses of workers would have to consciously understand and

hold to a broad historical perspective than held the socialist perspective of the 1917 Bolsheviks.

Its existence in misery and oppression, without free speech or free organisation or honest information, under the control of the bungling, ignorant, hierarchically-organised, medieval-minded bureaucracy, was the worst possible conditions for the working class to achieve that, or for the socialists even to prepare the ground for it. The reviving socialist movement in the USSR is at an even more rudimentary stage than it was 100 years ago.

Everything seemed organised by some malign spirit of History to push the working class behind a bourgeois revolution in the Stalinist states.

And not only behind it: one of the most remarkable events of history is the fact that the Polish nation came after 1980 to re-form itself around the labour movement, and still it was a bourgeois anti-Stalinist revolution that issued from the ultimate victory.

And yet what happened in Poland corresponded more than any revolution since the Russian Revolution of 1917 to Trotsky's formula of the permanent revolution — "the reconstruction of the nation under the leadership of the proletariat".

The working class took the lead, with a great revolutionary strike and the creation in 1980 of the Gdansk soviet, rallying all the people around it against the autocracy and against foreign domination — and produced a bourgeois revolution. The facts above, and the "consciousness of priests" and pro-capitalist intellectuals, influencing Solidarnosc in the dog days of its 1980s outlawry, explain that result.

At the core of this experience is the ideological defeat of the working class and its consequent political enslavement to alien forces, the terrible havoc wreaked by Stalinism and by its ideological forgeries and palimpsests on the old working-class socialist ideas and programme. It is all, in its own way, a terrible negative proof of the truth of the Marxist teaching about the class struggle and about the need for a political organisation of the working class able to play the vanguard role of political and ideological trailblazers. As the Communist Manifesto defined it: the Communists have no interests

apart from those of the working class, but they represent the future of the movement in the movement of the present.

For all the bourgeois propaganda that the idea of a working-class vanguard organisation is inevitably, even organically, Stalinist, they have won their victory and are set to win more because they have their "vanguard" in place — their coterie of priests and academics and groups of defecting bureaucrats.

Despite the vast propaganda equating Marxist organisation with Stalinist pseudo-parties, what the USSR, like Eastern Europe in the last two years, shows us most powerfully is that its own class-conscious, fighting Marxist party is irreplaceable for the working class if it is to free itself from bourgeois influence.

These are the explanations why socialists like ourselves see things developing in a radically different direction to the one we hoped for — why we are reduced to Kautsky's and Plekhanov's fury at history's perversity. But it is not perversity. One consequence of Stalinism is to ensure that those who insisted that Russia could develop only by way of capitalism towards the possibility of working-class power are, after a detour of three quarters of a century, proved right!

They were not inevitably right: the victory of the working class in Western Europe which was possible would have saved the Russian Revolution from the Stalinist counter-revolution and the world from Nazism. It was not inevitable, but it is what is happening now.

A strong socialist movement in the West might have helped ensure a different evolution for Solidarnosc, the only real mass working-class movement to have been consolidated in the Stalinist societies. If the Western labour movements had not — under Stalinist, and sometimes "Trotskyist", influence — scabbed on Solidarnosc, or had effectively helped independent trade unions in the other Stalinist states instead of junketing and hobnobbing with the police-state "trade unions", then things might have gone differently. But things have gone the way they did.

Our hopes and expectations that after this system would come workers' power are now shown to be so many delusions which must be painfully shed. Without illusions, we must support the democrats in the revolutions now taking place. Recognising that the more thoroughly democratic these revolutions are, the more the old Stalinist state is destroyed, the better for the free development of the future working-class struggles and for the growth of a socialist labour movement, we must do what we can to help them. In the first place we must try to understand them.

Above all, we must give practical and moral support to the tiny groups of socialists now painfully beginning to rebuild a real socialist movement and a socialist labour movement in the states where Stalinism is collapsing on the ground poisoned for so long by the Stalinist counterfeit of socialism.



"To say that conscious leaders cannot divert from its path the movement created by the interaction of the environment and the material elements is to ignore the truth that consciousness participates in this interaction. Catholic labour unions are also the inevitable result of the interaction of the environment and the material elements. The difference, however, is that it was the consciousness of priests... and not that of socialists that participated in this interaction!"

Lenin

Not guilty!

By John O'Mahony

What is happening in the USSR now was symbolised in one scene in a Moscow street last weekend.

A group of monarchists stood by, singing the Tsarist national anthem, as the statue of Jacob Sverdlov, the Bolshevik who signed the death warrant for the murdering ex-Tsar Nicholas II, was pulled down.

Socialists who respect Lenin and Sverdlov, and who believe that the Russian Revolution of 1917 was one of the great liberating moments in humanity's history, that men like Sverdlov were heroes of human liberation, will nevertheless cheer the pulling down of their statues in cities all across the USSR.

And it will be a good day for Lenin's cause when they burn or bury the great iconoclast's poor mummy, and shut his mausoleum forever.

Those statues, like Lenin's mummy, were the icons of the bureaucratic ruling class. The images of socialists were used as the semi-religious monuments of the anti-socialist bureaucracy.

The socialists honoured in those statues died before the Stalinist counter-revolution, and could safely be used to help sustain the Stalinist regime's lying socialist pretences.

Jacob Sverdlov, who was the organiser of the revolutionary Bolshevik party, its general secretary before that title existed, died of typhoid in 1919. Lenin died in January 1924, having made a heroic attempt from his deathbed to get rid of Stalin. Even Felix Dzerzhinsky — the tabloids' "Iron Felix" — the founder of the police who organised the Red Terror during the civil war, was not a Stalinist.

He died in 1926. He was an ally of Stalin in the faction struggles of that time, and Trotsky wrote that had he lived he would not have hesitated to "shed the Opposition's blood". Nevertheless he was not one of those who set up the Stalinist totalitarian regime at the end of the 1920s.

Lenin's General Staff of 1917

STALIN, THE EXECUTIONER, ALONE REMAINS



It is not Lenin and Sverdlov and Dzerzhinsky who are coming down, but the filthy images of the Stalinist regime. A socialist system would not have had such images in the first place. Lenin was dead before they renamed Leningrad for him; his widow Krupskaya was against the worship of the mummy in the mausoleum.

It is understandable that the Soviet peoples should hate those icons; understandable, now, that they do not want to bother with the question of whether or not the system they hate was really the

continuity of what Sverdlov and Lenin and Dzerzhinsky stood for.

For the neo-bourgeois intellectuals, as for the gloating press in the West, it is a game of cynical propagandist pretence that the Stalinist system they are pulling down is identical with the 1917 Revolution. *There is one aspect of the Stalinist edifice they have every intention of preserving: its lying self-identification with socialism and the October Revolution now serves their interests as it once served Stalin's.*

Yet it is a transparent lie, this



to the Ukraine to Lithuania. The October Revolution organised the rule of the working class: Stalinism has been a savage decades-long rule by a privileged new exploiting class over the workers.

The October Revolution was a revolution of socialist internationalists, seeing themselves as the first wave of an international movement. For over 50 years the Stalinist system has been a system of savage Russian chauvinism.

And it is a matter of history that almost all those who led the revolution, and survived more than a few years after it, were massacred by the Stalinists. Only a smattering of people who had been in the Bolshevik Party at the time of the Revolution survived the Stalinist purges of the 1930s.

Yet they tell us that the Stalinist system and the Bolshevik revolution on whose grave Stalin built are one and the same thing.

The victim is also the murderer; Abel is Cain; the fascistic regime of Stalin, keeping the workers down in the interests of the new bureaucratic exploiters, is the same as the workers' regime which suppressed the exploiters and took the power to exploit away from them!

The truth is encapsulated in that scene of the Tsarists singing their song as they hauled Sverdlov's statue down. Where were the political offspring of Sverdlov and Lenin? Extinguished by the bureaucratic dictators, from Stalin to Brezhnev and afterwards — purged, repressed, and bound hand and foot far more than the neo-monarchists have been.

In any other field of history or science, someone who asserted the identity of such opposites would be classified as either clinically schizoid or dominated by ideology. The idea that Stalinism and Bolshevism are identical is the ideology of the anti-socialist bourgeoisie (including the Kinnockite "socialists" who pant for a chance to run the capitalist system, and find it useful to be able to assert that if you try to overthrow the bourgeoisie then you will wind up with Stalinism).

This is their day. Let them have it. The removal of Lenin and Sverdlov from the position of icons for those who overthrew the workers' state they set up in 1917 is the beginning of the process of allowing the real Lenin and Sverdlov to return where they belong — to those who have been the victims of Stalinism for so long and who are still, by the political confusion it engenders in them, its victims.

Stalinism was the opposite of Bolshevism

By Jill Mountford

As Mikhail Gorbachev resigns as leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and calls for the party to dissolve, the bourgeoisie celebrates the death of communism.

Neal Ascherson in the *Independent on Sunday* (25 August) typically talks of the current events being the "end of more than 73 years of Bolshevik rule" — seeing Bolshevism and Stalinism as the same thing.

For hundreds of millions of workers around the world, "Bolshevik rule" is what has existed in the USSR for all the last 70-odd years. For them, the words *communism* and *Bolshevism* have become synonymous with *Stalinism* and *totalitarianism*.

In the USSR and Eastern Europe, great revolutionary leaders were turned into icons to be worshipped and revered — but no-one was allowed to study their ideas independently. The icons are now being dismantled, many years after the real ideas of the real people were

distorted and corrupted.

One-party rule, state-run trade unions, purges and labour camps; repression of nations and national rights; crushing of independent workers' groups and movements; oppression of lesbians and gays, Jews and women; incredible privileges for a minority, and bread queues for the majority — those are some of the hallmarks of "communism" as millions of workers the world over have come to know it.

The people of a third of the globe lived under that so-called "communism". The system they experienced was a far cry from the communism fought for by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and by Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg.

There has been only one successful workers' revolution in history, though there have been many abortive attempts.

There is not now, nor has there ever been, any working example of a communist society. The bourgeoisie and their agents said that the regimes in countries like the USSR were "communist" because that suited them — it conveyed the idea that workers' revolution could only end in disaster — and the dictators backed them up.

Leon Trotsky, one of the foremost leaders of the 1917 Revolution, spent the last years of his life in exile in Mexico, hounded, and eventually to be murdered, by Stalin's agents. He made great attempts not only to record the events of the revolution and its subsequent degeneration, but also to explain scientifically why it happened the way it did.

In his pamphlet *Stalinism and Bolshevism* (1937), Trotsky worked through the arguments popular at that time, and pretty much unchanged today, that Bolshevism inevitably led to Stalinism. He argued that "to represent the process of degeneration of the Soviet state as the evolution of pure Bolshevism is to ignore social reality in the name of one of its elements".

The writers of bourgeois history often mention the raging civil war, the mass starvation, the economic crisis which forced half the urban population to flee to the countryside, and even the invasions by imperialist armies trying to defeat the Red Army.

Some go as far as quoting Lenin, stating categorically that there could not be socialism in one country. But they then discard all that as irrelevant. The point they want to

drive home — and they are doing it now with renewed vigour — is that Bolshevism, that is, a democratic centralist party dedicated to revolution, is inextricably linked to Stalinism.

They separate off the social reality as if it had no bearing on the day-to-day decisions our Bolshevik comrades had to make.

It is true that the Stalinist bureaucracy, on its way to the supreme power which it finally got by crushing and massacring the revolutionary Bolshevik party, gained advantage from measures taken in desperate straits by the Bolsheviks. But, for example, deciding to ban other parties and factions within the governing party — which the Bolsheviks did in early 1921 — was a temporary emergency measure. It was not an iron law of "democratic centralism" any more than banning strikes and conscripting youth to fight wars are an iron law of bourgeois democracy. They are measures employed in times of crisis.

As Trotsky puts it: "As far as the prohibition of other soviet parties is concerned, it did not flow from any 'theory' of Bolshevism, but was a war measure of defence of the dictatorship [i.e. the workers' rule] in a

backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies on all sides".

He goes on: "For the Bolsheviks it was clear... that this measure... signalled tremendous danger".

The opposition parties were, however, involved (to varying degrees) in civil war against the workers' government. The alternative was to "ban" the entire workers' state, that is, to drown it in the blood of the workers at the hands of the counter-revolutionaries.

The recent events in Eastern Europe and the USSR have, as the papers say, finally laid to rest a "colossus", a "dictatorship".

But what is dying is not communism, but Stalinism, a distinct system of tyranny.

Trotsky truly wrote: "It is absolutely indisputable that the domination of a single party served as the juridical point of departure for the Stalinist totalitarian system. But the reason for this development lies neither in Bolshevism nor in the prohibition of other parties as a temporary measure, but in the number of defeats of the proletariat in Europe and Asia".

Boris Kagarlitsky explains the Moscow coup

Boris Kagarlitsky, leader of the new Socialist Party in Moscow, explains how he sees the Moscow coup, and the tasks of the left in Russia now.

You could say that the coup was a tremendous success! In fact there was more than one coup. Or: there was a very complex coup. Or: what was known as the military junta was only a small part of the coup.

On the surface it would appear that the plotters acted in a very strange way. They did not arrest Yeltsin. They did not take over the buildings of the Russian government or the Moscow Soviet. They did not cut off their phones or electricity or the telecommunications of the Russian government. They did not try to arrest any of the other major figures of the Russian government. In fact, they did nothing. More than that, they even disarmed the soldiers which moved into Moscow. Not only did the soldiers have no ammunition, but even the officers had had their pistols unloaded.

This contradicts normal army procedures!

All these strange procedures could not be explained by the incompetence of the people who made the coup. For example, Kryuchkov is the leader of the KGB — well known for organising coups all over the world.

Kryuchkov himself was connected to the Polish coup of 1981, which from a technical point of view was well-executed.

The only explanation seems to be that the junta expected the Yeltsin administration to be their partners or potential allies — or at least to be ready for some compromise for co-management of the country. Otherwise, what they did is incomprehensible.

Moreover, the junta leaders could not have been fooled by illusions in this possibility. They must



Moscow youth on the barricades

have had some communication with the Russian government which convinced them that the Russian government was more or less capable of making a deal with them sooner or later.

I think that the Russian government just provoked them. The Russian government decided that they could get more without any compromise. They turned the coup around to make the coup's organisers be the main victims.

While the plotters were pretending to make a coup, without making a real coup, without establishing any real control over the administration, the Russian government was doing exactly the opposite. It was establishing real control over all spheres of administration. It was taking over or destroying the functions of central government.

On the late afternoon of Monday 19th August the coup leaders realised that they had been cheated. Then they tried to make the coup serious — into a real coup d'état. Then they brought in the real troops. Armed troops.

Just today (27th August) we learned only on the afternoon of 20th August were the Moscow police given orders to crack down and arrest people.

After losing about 10 hours they realised they had to act seriously or be wiped out. People like Kryuchkov and Pugo tried to act seriously while Yanayev and pro-

bably Pavlov were in a state of shock and despair.

The people from the repressive apparatus — like Kryuchkov — tried to get tough.

This is confirmed by Kravchenko's — the TV chief — recent interview. He said that he was invited to come to a plotters' meeting on Tuesday 20th August where Yanayev was utterly hysterical. Yanayev was demanding that Yeltsin be told that the Russian parliament buildings would not be stormed. But Kryuchkov replied that if it had already been announced that they were outlaws — then they had to do it.

They were only reacting to what Yeltsin did. This was not their original plan.

By the time they really tried to act seriously, Yeltsin was already firmly in control of everything, including most of the army. They were then sabotaged by their own structures.

During the first stages of the coup they had discouraged the military from taking any action.

So, late on 20th August, Yeltsin was already capable of arresting them. It seems that Yeltsin was waiting for someone to die. He was waiting for something inhuman to happen to blame the plotters for. He wanted to ride a tide of moral indignation. My guess at Yeltsin's thinking is that an atrocity could then be used as a further reason to ban the Communist Party and to close its newspapers. I do not know

how else to explain Yeltsin's lack of activity from the afternoon of Tuesday 20th August.

On the 21st of August, after the three people had been killed near the Moscow White House on the Tuesday night, the plotters were quickly wiped out.

It is interesting to note that the plotters ran to Gorbachev for support, rather than to Cuba or North Korea. They expected Gorbachev to protect them.

This has led so-called democratic newspapers to accuse Gorbachev of being more involved than he pretends.

But the problem is that if Gorbachev was even partially involved, this underlines the connection of the coup with Yeltsin.

Yeltsin was the one to gain. The Yeltsin coup was covered by the junta coup.

The result is that the Communist Party is dissolved. The Communist Party is banned. There is no major opposition party left in Russia. This is not anything like democracy.

Yeltsin has announced the triumph of democracy. But we have the opposite. We have the end of the democratic intermezzo. We have the transition from Communist dictatorship — which degenerated into democracy! — into an anti-Communist dictatorship.

This anti-Communist dictatorship is more dynamic and more capable of suppressing the people. It is a tragic situation.

Now we have to explain the spate of suicides in Moscow in the wake of the coup.

Pugo is reported to have shot himself, then crossed the room and placed his pistol on a table, returned to the place he shot himself (without losing a drop of blood) and then died.

The official explanation is that he was shot by his wife who then shot herself.

But then this story has the same flaw: she was lying next to him. This is all impossible!

Pugo was the most active man in the junta. A logical explanation is that he was killed by someone who did not want him to reveal the true facts behind his action.

His house was surrounded by people from the Russian KGB. There are no reports of anyone entering the house.

Was Yeltsin personally coordinating all this? It is not clear. It is possible that Yeltsin was being used himself, by people around him.

Yeltsin is easy to manipulate — for people who are professionals at this type of thing.

The proofs of what I say will be hard to come by unless people begin to speak. And instead of speaking, they die. One by one.

Finally, there has been a vacuum created by the collapse of the Communist Party. The government is using this vacuum to construct what is already being called an "inverted one-party state".

On the other hand, the left could begin to fill the vacuum.

The position of the Socialist Party is much stronger. There is now a big discussion which is turning into practical action about the formation of a party of labour.

We do not want a party modelled on the one in Britain. The union connection should be through the participation of union activists in such a party and through, perhaps, union financing for such a party. Not through direct union affiliation.

The organising committee is in the process of being formed together with other forces. Details will be clearer in a few days time.

Stalin's system collapses

From page 3

bureaucracy which has sent uncoupled millions untimely to theirs.

The unbelievably inept character of the coup, and what its failure led to, has made people of widely different politics speculate that it not a real coup attempt at all, but a put-up job, designed to achieve what it has achieved — the destruction of the CPSU and a radical acceleration of the reform movement. There are other explanations.

There is a striking parallel in the history of the 1917 Revolution. There the socialist workers' councils, with increasing Bolshevik influence, vied for power with a Provisional Government, trying to straddle the left and right poles in politics.

The Government had little authority. Things were falling apart. General Kornilov tried to organise a coup, to destroy the democratic working-class movements. Provisional Government leader Kerensky vacillated; some accused him of collusion with Kornilov, but he opposed the coup.

The Bolsheviks organised the decisive opposition to Kornilov. They "defended" Kerensky, as Lenin was to put it later, "as the rope supports the hanged man".

The Kornilov revolt melted away almost as surprisingly as the recent coup. Trotsky, who organised the

Bolshevik-led resistance, explained the collapse of the coup from the utter decay, demoralisation, and disarray of the old order.

Astonishing as is the coup-makers' failure to arrest Yeltsin, and even if we assume that there were all sorts of murky intrigues and double-crosses in the background, the fundamental explanation for the feebleness of the coup is probably the same explanation as for Kornilov: the decay, disarray, and demoralisation of the old order.

It is a different order of things to organise a coup in Moscow amidst great difficulties than to organise a military takeover in Warsaw in 1981, backed by the still-solid Soviet military machine.

During the hours when it seemed that the coup had been successful, the West was shaken but mostly reconciled to the coup.

The *Financial Times* put it like this: "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.

In the *SO* broadsheet on the coup we

put out last week (most of the paper's staff were, like Gorbachev, on holiday) we said this:

"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!"

There has not yet been that deep popular revolution. Far from it. Much of the state apparatus remains intact, the army high in prestige. The economy of the USSR spirals downwards daily into hyper-inflation and probable famine.

Yeltsin will now have to take responsibility. He will not work miracles.

The army has, by its shotgun divorce from the CP, been rendered a more credible contender for the Third World army role of providing a military scaffolding when the bourgeoisie is weak and the society in chronic crisis.

Last week's failed coup and the radical backlash it licensed tumbled the system Stalin built into history's dustbin. It may also have decided what kind of authoritarianism — one controlled by the vacillating Gorbachevite apparatus-men or one controlled by the radicals — will be imposed in the period ahead.

The headline of our broadsheet last week remains true: Only revolution — that is, the destruction of the state apparatus, including the army — can secure liberty.

The tyrant's night

"The coup has played some positive role by leading to the destruction of the old structures of the Communist Party and the high ranking bureaucracy"

Anatoly Voronov, Moscow Socialist Party



Victory march on Thursday August 22



Barricades in Moscow



Army officer surrenders Tuesday night August 20

"The real political game starts now"

Anatoly Voronov, from the Socialist Party in Moscow, spoke to Socialist Organiser on 27 August

A big role in defeating the military coup was played by the workers' organisations, which unanimously supported the legitimate constitution and the legitimate government.

A lot of places are known where the workers declared strikes — coal mines in Vorkuta and Kuzbass, and workers in Donetsk, in the Ukraine.

The coup failed because of massive popular support for the constitutional structures and lack of support for the plotters. The armed forces did not support the plotters, either. A major role was played by the air force, which opposed the coup.

Democratic ideas are widespread in the army as well as in the population. We can

now see the difference between the very conservative and reactionary top commanders, and the mass of the soldiers and even of the officers.

The coup was sparked off by the new Union Treaty [which was due to be signed on 20 August, the day after the coup] because under that treaty all power is delegated to the republics. The structures of the nomenklatura are centralised in Moscow, and all those structures would be destroyed by the Union Treaty. The plotters were afraid of losing their positions and privileges.

Characteristic of the situation now is the practical non-existence of the old Soviet Union. Almost all the national republics — Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the Baltic states, Byelorussia, Moldova... — have proclaimed independence.

I think the probability of violent conflicts between the nationalities has got less after

the recent events. Every republic is claiming independence, and all the problems with borders will have to be solved on the basis of negotiation. But there are still difficulties in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Some of the troops there are still defying the orders of the new Minister of Defence, and getting involved in the conflict on the side of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan was the only republic that supported the coup.

The coup has played some positive role by leading to the destruction of the old structures of the Communist Party and the high-ranking bureaucracy.

There is much discussion about the real role of the top Communist Party leaders in the coup, and many have already been ousted. Gorbachev has lost much of his strength and power, and the main figure now is

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Yeltsin.
The problem is that Yeltsin is in favour of the free market. He will now pursue a lot of measures to install the free market system in Russia — and people will support him, because he is now a national

'The resistance to the coup was at a general democratic level'

who gained a great deal from the coup.

A wide range of people now think that free enterprise is the answer. But when free enterprise is really introduced, the struggle against the drawbacks will begin.

Yeltsin is appointing special representatives as local rulers in different regions of the Russian Federation. He is trying to seize all power in the regions, because the local councils there

were very conservative, dominated by the Communist Party.

A decree signed by Yeltsin last month banned political activity by any party at places of work. Only territorial party structures are permitted. The decree was a terrible blow to the existing Communist Party structure, because the CP had the only workplace party structures that existed. It has done no harm to new parties, like the Socialist Party, because they do not have any workplace structures yet.

The Socialist Party fraction on Moscow City Council participated in all the Council's actions against the plotters, but the Socialist Party has still not issued a statement of its own about the events. The resistance to the coup was at a general democratic level, without distinction of parties.

The real political game starts now that we have freedom.

Defiance in front of the tanks

The economic crisis behind the coup

The survey article on these pages — written by Marilyn Vogt-Downey, and abridged from the US socialist magazine 'Bulletin in Defence of Marxism' — covers events in the USSR this spring, up to the beginning of June.

The next two-and-a-half months, from early June to the coup on 19 August, were dominated by three developments.

- The controversy about the "Yavlinsky plan", drawn up together with economists from Harvard University in the USA, which proposed a rapid drive for market economics in the USSR, eased by financial aid from the West.

- Talks about the new "Nine plus One" or "Union Treaty" — a formula for transferring most powers from the Kremlin to the republics which had the broad support of nine of the 15 republics.

- Boris Yeltsin's increased power after being elected as president of the Russian Federation.

The crucial dates were:

12 June: Yeltsin wins the election for president of Russia with 58% of the vote. The people of Leningrad vote to change its name back to St Petersburg.

17 June: Gorbachev's prime minister, Valentin Pavlov, rejects the Yavlinsky plan and demands that powers held by Gorbachev be transferred to him (Pavlov). Yazov, Kryuchkov, and Pugo — who are to be his co-conspirators on 19 August — back him; Kryuchkov de-

nounces foreign interference in the Soviet economy.

21 June: Gorbachev forces Pavlov to withdraw his demand.

26 June: "Black Beret" troops (under Pugo) seize the telephone exchange in Vilnius, Lithuania. Gorbachev denounces the action.

15-17 July: Gorbachev attends the "G7" meeting of top capitalist powers in London; attempts to get support for the Yavlinsky plan and is fobbed off.

20 July: Yeltsin signs a decree banning all party political activity in workplaces, and also the activity of all other groups except trade unions, and then only by agreement with management.

25 July: Communist Party Central Committee approves a draft platform scrapping "Marxism-Leninism". Gorbachev denounces Yeltsin's decree (but it will go into effect nonetheless from 4 August).

29 July: Yeltsin signs a treaty with Lithuania recognising its independence.

11 August: Yeltsin announces a plan for "governors-general" to be appointed by him as local rulers in the various regions of Russia.

13 August: Pavlov denounces the republics, especially Russia, for wrecking attempts at economic reform.

19 August: The day before the Union Treaty is due to be signed by five republics, Pavlov, Pugo, Kryuchkov, Yazov, Yanayev and Lukyanov launch their coup.

far north, and 10 mines in Chelyabinsk. Metal workers, rail workers and aviation workers had pledged support.

Neither the much-publicised March 17 referendum on the maintenance of the Soviet Union nor an offer of a large pay increase made by the government in the first days of April stopped the strikes.

In April, new events fueled popular unrest and the strike waves spread. The lifting of price controls over products sold in the state stores incited widespread anger. Among the first workers to resist were those in Minsk, capital of the Belorussian Republic.

The price increases caused strikes and demonstrations that shut down Minsk throughout much of April. Workers from the giant tractor factory and the electrical-mechanical works led the protests that were joined by numerous other industrial and transport sectors. They were demanding that the central government and the Belorussian government resign, an emergency session of the Belorussian Supreme Soviet to enact more democratic laws, new elections based on broader democratic rights, and nationalisation of the property of the Belorussian and central Soviet Communist Party — with proceeds to go to help the victims of Chernobyl and to improve health and education. They were also demanding Belorussian sovereignty, according to *Moskovskiy Novosti*.

Meanwhile, on April 9 in the Georgian Republic, where the nationalist movement has been in control of the parliament since the November elections, the parliament voted unanimously for a declaration of independence. In fact 14 of 15 republican parliaments — all except that of Kirghiz — have asserted that their laws take precedence over those of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

Georgia did not participate in the March 17 referendum to preserve the Union sponsored by the Kremlin to try to bolster its thin pretensions to authority. However, 90 per cent of the registered voters turned out on March 31 for Georgia's own plebiscite with nearly 99 per cent answering "yes" to the question "Do you agree that the state of independence of Georgia should be restored on the basis of the independence act of May 26, 1918?"

Gorbachev tries to ban strikes

On April 10, Gorbachev called for a ban on strikes and demonstrations during working hours for one year. While he withdrew that call the next day, the Supreme Soviet in a closed session outlawed strikes again on April 16. On April 17, independent trade unions from the Russian Federation announced that they were going to meet in Moscow to call for a Russian-wide one-hour strike in solidarity with the coal miners' demands. On April 23, Prime Minister Pavlov, unveiling his new "anti-crisis" plan, announced it included a ban on strikes and rallies during working hours.

Nevertheless, the Russian Independent Trade Union Federation went ahead with its call for a one-hour strike with the date set for April 26. An estimated 50 million workers throughout Russia took part. Walkouts spread throughout the Russian and non-Russian regions.

It was in this context that Gorbachev and Yeltsin decided to make their peace. Their economic plans had never been very different. Yeltsin claimed to be for accelerated steps towards more thoroughgoing market measures. However he, like Gorbachev, has been unable to implement such measures because they are vastly unpopular.

Nor was there much substantially new in

their economic accord. The Russian Federation was granted jurisdiction over the coal mines in its territory. However, the Russian parliament on October 31, 1990, had passed a law on economic sovereignty that declared its control not only over the coal, but over all the natural resources in Russian regions. When Gorbachev had annulled this law neither the Russian parliament, nor Yeltsin, offered much resistance. So nothing much had come of the disputes.

What was important about the agreement between the two leaders was that the Kremlin agreed to publicly collaborate with Yeltsin in the hopes that he could use his wider popularity to end the strikes. Yeltsin had shown himself capable of attracting support among the discontented masses because he alone, of the prominent political figures, seemed to stand up to the bureaucracy's hated privileges. He seemed opposed to the encrusted bureaucratic apparatus; he defended and made overtures to some of the national independence movements and had opposed the dispatch of Kremlin troops to Vilnius, Lithuania, in January; and, of course, he had called for Gorbachev's resignation, which added to his broad appeal.

His support coalesced in January around the "Democratic Russia" movement claiming over 1.3 million adherents. It pulled together a cross-section of political currents from the Milton Friedman-minded reformers like Gavriil Popov, mayor of Moscow, to pro-Marxist activists in the Socialist Party of Russia, to mass independent workers' movements involved in the strikes.

Following the "dacha" meeting, Yeltsin travelled to Siberia to meet with the striking coal miners to promise them that the mines would be transferred from Kremlin to Russian jurisdiction and to tell them that they would get a share of the foreign currency from the sale of the coal for their own use. While some miners apparently applauded Yeltsin's deal, others — in Siberia, Vorkuta and in the Ukraine — were very sceptical.

By May 7, one-third of the Kuzbass mines were still idle. By May 10 however, it appeared that the coal miners' strikes had ended. The Russian Republic now has jurisdiction over the coal mines in Russia, the Kazakhstan government now has jurisdiction over the coal mines in Karaganda, and the government in Ukraine has jurisdiction over the coal mines in the Donbass region since January. Such divided jurisdiction over the coal mines under present conditions only serves to diffuse the unified miners' movement. Such a state of affairs will not serve to improve the living or working conditions of the coal miners. However, it does take the heat off the Kremlin for the time being.

The strikes in Belorussia had been called off at the end of April in anticipation of a meeting of the republic's Supreme Soviet called for May 21.

Failure of 'marketisation'

In the meantime, the ruling apparatchiks are in a bind. Their goal was the introduction of market mechanisms and controlled privatisation — which would be more attractive to foreign capital while at the same time remove them from direct responsibility for the economic crises.

However, even limited steps toward these goals have only worsened the day-to-day lives of the masses with whom they are massively unpopular. Gorbachev advocates fundamentally what Yeltsin does. Neither has been able to implement the market scheme, however, despite the extensive personal power their legislatures have bestowed upon them.

In the meantime, policies zig and zag,

Six years of policy edicts aimed at introducing market measures, privatisation of state-owned property, and attracting infusions of foreign capital and technology to reverse the economic stagnation caused by decades of Stalinist totalitarian rule, have worsened the Soviet Union's economic crises.

The heads of eight republics along with maverick "radical" Yeltsin joined Gorbachev in the April 23 secret "dacha" meeting to support Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov's "anti-crisis" plan.

Most notable was that three of its five points were calls to workers to end their strikes and threats against workers' anti-bureaucratic organisation. This shows who the bureaucrats think the enemy is.

While the first three points promised a new constitution, new elections, review of the new price increases and of the 5 per cent sales tax, point three also stated: "Towards the aim of stabilizing the state of the people's economy in the country, the participants of the meeting called for the introduction of a special regime of work in basic branches of industry, in enterprises producing consumer goods and in railroad transport.

"When necessary, organs of power in the republics will adopt additional measures to guarantee the normal workings of the people's economy."

Point four added to this "the leaders of the Union and of the republics appeal to the miners and all workers to end their economic and political strikes and direct their efforts toward making up for the lost work time in the shortest term possible."

Point five commenced with "Considering the exceptionally sharp crisis situation in the country, the leadership of the Union and of the Republics considers intolerable attempts to achieve political aims by means of inciting civil disobedience, strikes or calls for overturning the existing, legally elected

organs of state power."

Strikes and protests

While these pleas and threats aimed at the striking workers can unite the bureaucrats, they are unlikely to have much impact on the workers. Strikes in vital industrial sectors, including the energy industries were made illegal by the Supreme Soviet following the coal miners' strike of the summer of 1989. This has made no difference to the workers, as has been shown by the strike wave that hit the country in early March when hundreds of thousands of coal miners in Ukraine, Siberia and Vorkuta stopped working. Their main demands were political: the resignation of Gorbachev and the dismissal of the Supreme Soviet.

The Donbass miners in Ukraine, according to the *Financial Times* of March 25, were demanding the resignation of the Ukrainian Republic's leadership and an independent Ukraine.

The miners were also demanding the expulsion of Communist Party organisations from the enterprises, from the security police, and from the Ministry of the Interior. Among their other demands were a 100 per cent pay increase, the lifting of censorship of the mass media — that has been progressively more pronounced since the Kremlin's invasion of Lithuania in January — a law indexing wages to prices, decent housing, more and better food, etc.

As in most parts of the Soviet Union, food is rationed in the mining regions. Miners in the Kuznetzk Basin in Siberia and in Vorkuta can receive only 10 eggs, about 5 pounds of meat, and two and a half pounds of flour and sugar each month, according to the *Financial Times* of March 1. Sometimes even that much is unavailable.

Before March ended, and on the eve of the new round of price increases on April 2, the strike had been joined by coal miners in southern Rostov, gold miners in Chita in the



Crowds cheer Edouard Shevardnadze, leader of the Movement for Democratic Reform, in Moscow on Monday

creating havoc as the government tries first one empirical manoeuvre and then another.

For example, on January 1, 1991, by government decree, the price of fuel and energy doubled, as did the price of lumber and lumber products. The price of metal went up 50 per cent, and machine tools 40 per cent. This had disastrous effects throughout an economy where enterprises have been put on a system of self-accounting and subsidies and state orders have been cut. Enterprises must survive on their own. But if the prices they must pay for supplies and fuel double, while their income remains the same, the enterprises are obviously in trouble. They must raise the prices they charge for the goods they produce. This has an obvious inflationary effect.

To meet increased demands for funds, the government prints more money. For example, to meet the demands of the striking coal miners (their demands were never really met), the government increased the money supply by 55 per cent. This practice, plus decreed price increases, plus the shortage of consumer goods have led to what Soviet economists called a "ruble overhang", or more money than there were goods to purchase.

A visitor notices, for example, that people in the Soviet Union must have considerable cash in their pockets on any given occasion to be prepared to buy some item in short supply that may suddenly turn up. Brown vinyl women's winter boots from Yugoslavia can unexpectedly turn up in Leningrad during the hottest day in July. Dozens of people suddenly line up to buy the boots which are selling for a hefty 120 rubles a pair — almost half the average monthly pay.

One bureaucratic solution for eliminating this "ruble overhang" was announced to the population on the evening news on January 22. As of midnight that day, 50- and 100-ruble notes would no longer be legal currency! People had three days to redeem money held in such denominations, but they were only allowed to redeem the equivalent of one month's pay. Imagine what this meant to pensioners who had saved money in large bills or working people who kept large bills around in case they came across winter boots in mid-July!

To make up for the hardships the April 2 price rise would cause, the government promised to increase wages 60 rubles per month and increase pensions. However, this was no

help to the unemployed who got no such compensation. TASS called the price increases of April 2 "the most unpopular of all the decisions taken by the Soviet leadership since 1985," a statement not to be taken lightly.

By May 1, the Council of State Prices issued a report showing that these price rises had moved more than half the population below the poverty line. The extra 60 rubles per month compensated for only about one-third of the price increases. The minimum monthly income a person needed to survive had doubled — from 97 to roughly 200 rubles a month.

Fear of military repression

A report issued by four imperialist financial institutions — the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation of European Cooperation and Development, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development — in December said Soviet economic output had fallen four per cent in 1990, something unprecedented in a major industrialised country in the postwar period and more descriptive of the economic downturns in the capitalist world of the Great Depression era. The USSR's GNP dropped 3.5% 1986-90. By mid-December, shortages of basic food products had prompted pleas from Soviet government officials for international relief. Around \$4 billion was contributed in food and other forms of aid from 13 countries: even India, where more than half the population goes to bed hungry each night, sent food!

In mid-April, in the midst of the strike wave, TASS published statistics showing a further economic decline in the first quarter of 1991: the GNP was down eight per cent, exports and imports were down 30 per cent, and labour productivity was down nine per cent. The IMF in its much-awaited April report announced that it was refusing any credit to the USSR until it saw reforms designed to change its "rotten structure".

The "9 plus 1" accords that Gorbachev and Yeltsin put forward after the secret dacha meeting on April 23 is a desperate attempt to show imperialism that the bureaucracy is in fact in control and united. In addition to taking a strong stand against strikes and worker protests, the "anti-crisis" plan includes the following proposals:

- It promises by June 1 a bill guaranteeing foreign capital that its profits can be repatriated. Without a convertible ruble this will be tricky. No specific plan was proposed, however.

- It also promises to go further toward guaranteeing the protection of private investments.

- It projects backing up the value of the ruble by guaranteeing it with state buildings, land and other properties.

- In addition, it projects swapping Soviet energy resources for farm technology "within a pan-European plan".

Gorbachev's October plan had put forth similar proposals. The "500 days" plan adopted by the Russian parliament and promoted by Yeltsin had similar inducements to foreign capital.

Some people profit

Not everyone in the USSR is suffering under the new economic conditions. Not only are the black-marketeers now able to set up legal operations, those in the right position can set up illegal "redistribution" networks that channel goods intended for state stores into private distribution

networks where prices are much higher. It is also important to note that although there have been shortages of goods in the state stores where prices were subsidised, there were often plentiful supplies of food in the private markets at prices most people could not afford.

There are of course some individuals who can afford these high prices and others still who have their own private distribution centres with much more copious supplies.

Among those who qualified as a candidate to run against Boris Yeltsin in the June 12 elections for president of the Russian Republic was Aman Tuleev, chairman of the Kemerovo regional soviet in the heart of the Siberian coal mining region. His platform asserted that Yeltsin betrayed the workers' cause by signing the agreement with Gorbachev in support of the "anti-crisis" plan.

An approach like this surely represents the sentiments of many worker activists in Russia. Whether or not it finds expression in the voting, it is certain to promote the growth of the new layer of leadership — representing the workers' point of view — that is vital if there is to be economic and political renewal in the USSR.

It is here, not with the capitalist economics experts from Harvard, that a progressive solution to the current crisis of the Soviet Union will be found.

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Those who do not learn from history are condemned to relive it

After the coup: lessons from Portugal

By Martin Thomas

The nearest parallel in recent history to the USSR after its failed coup is Portugal after March 1975, though in Portugal some of the processes now under way in the USSR appeared "in reverse" or "upside down".

Portugal had a fascist regime, long since cooled down to become stifling and cumbersome rather than terrorist, and a big African empire, the military costs of which greatly overstretched the dim metropolis.

It was the last European power to let go of its colonies in Africa: from the early 1960s through to 1974 it fought a long, losing war against guerrillas seeking independence in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.

In April 1974 the old regime was overthrown from the top by an army coup. In the USSR, by 1985, the KGB had become keenly aware of the need to modernise, and pushed Gorbachev forward; in Portugal, by 1974, the officer corps had become convinced of the need for independence in Africa and democracy at home.

Strikes, factory occupations, and demonstrations followed the April coup. The more conservative generals became alarmed. On 11 March 1975 they tried a counter-coup. It failed even more quickly than the Soviet coup: most of the army, and even of the officers, blocked it.

The counter-coup radically discredited and disorganised the old ruling elite, much as the 19 August attempt has discredited the "Communist Party" elite in the USSR. General Spínola, who had been the front man for the April 1974 coup, fled the country; some 45 leading capitalists were jailed.

Workers seized the factories — sometimes the owners had fled the country — and demanded nationalisation. By early summer some 75 per cent of industry was nationalised, as well as all the banks and insurance companies. Elected workers' committees held varying degrees of workers' control in the workplaces.

Farm workers seized the land and set up cooperatives. "Neighbourhood commissions" grew up in working class areas. Later in the summer a radical rank-and-file soldiers' movement was organised.

A big element of what will happen in the USSR now — the self-assertion of the USSR's various different nationalities — had no equivalent in Portugal in 1975. In some other respects what is likely to happen in the USSR now will be an upside-down version, so to speak, of what happened in Portugal.

In Portugal workers took their workplaces out of the empire of private profiteers to put them under the state. In the USSR, what has happened already — in some coalfields for example — and is likely to happen more in coming months, is workers taking their enterprises out of the empire of state command and putting them under the market.

In Portugal, workers had illusions in a state which for some months was dominated by leftist junior army officers; in the USSR, they have illusions in the market.

The revolutionary effervescence in Portugal was stopped by another counter-coup on 25 November 1975. The ruling class had deep reserves: even after the overthrow of the regime that had served it for decades in April 1974, and even after most of the military top brass and most of the country's top capitalists had fled or been jailed in March 1975, there were people able to regroup and restore control.

That experience has lessons for the Soviet nations. Much of the old top brass there may soon find themselves jailed or in disgrace. But the old ruling bureaucracy still has resources. The people around Yeltsin are only a faction of that bureaucracy, linked up with sections of the middle class who aspire to power and profit.

Despite all the differences, the experiences of the left in Portugal may have lessons for radicals in the USSR.



Revolution in Portugal in 1975. Armed Forces Movement activists

The greatest failing of the revolutionary left groups in summer 1975 was that they tagged along with the Armed Forces Movement — the leftist junior army officers, converted by their experiences in Portugal's African wars to a populist state-socialism vaguely modelled on Cuba or Vietnam or Algeria, who dominated the government between March and November 1975.

In August almost all the revolutionary left groups hitched up with Portugal's strong and very Stalinist Communist Party for joint "defence" of the current (fifth) Provisional Government, one in which the more leftist officers had particular weight. Then they excluded the CP from the alliance (on the stated grounds that it had held discussions with the Socialist Party leaders!) and formed a new "revolutionary united front" without the CP which proclaimed as its basis the programme for the "People-Armed Forces Movement" alliance put out by the most radical of the leftist officers, Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, and demanded the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly (elected soon after March, with a CP-SP majority) in favour of that vaguely-defined mix of leftist military rule and local direct democracy.

(In Britain, incidentally, *Socialist Worker* supported all of this, with enthusiasm and without any criticism. It was trying to make links with the biggest of the Portuguese revolutionary left groups, the PRP-BR.)

The policy of the Portuguese revolutionary left must have helped to disarm the Portuguese working class by leaving it dependent and reliant on the left military leaders like Saraiva de Carvalho. In November 1975 the counter-coup leaders were able to gain stable rule at astonishingly little cost. Once they had isolated and disbanded Saraiva de Carvalho's military unit, resistance collapsed.

The revolutionary left's policy also helped to divide the working class. The Portuguese Socialist Party was, as the revolutionary left said, the Portuguese party of NATO. It

united with rightists in the more conservative north of the country in a campaign of violent attacks on CP and trade union offices in the summer of 1975.

It also had a significant working class base; and many workers and middle-class people must have been pushed, or kept, behind it by the revolutionary left's disdain for formal democracy and sectarianism towards the Socialist Party.

Yeltsin's faction and the nationalist movements outside Russia are, as it were, the USSR equivalents of the Portuguese Armed Forces Movement. Yeltsin's courage after 19 August does not undo the comparison: Saraiva de Carvalho, after all, was not a calculating careerist, but a man genuinely radicalised by his own lights, who fought the established order after November 1975 and paid for it with a long spell in jail.

Western socialists know that Yeltsin advocates western-style capitalism, and we know what that means. Radicals and worker militants in the USSR, however, probably see the dangers of support for Yeltsin as unclearly as Portuguese and western socialists saw the dangers of support for Saraiva de Carvalho in 1975.

In 1975 some Marxists outside Portugal — though none, as far as I know, in the country — made the flipside mistake of almost uncritical rallying to the Socialist Party because of its words about democracy. The equivalent mistake in relation to the USSR — again much more likely to be made by radicals outside the country than those on the spot — would be to shun the pro-Yeltsin workers' movement in a sectarian way and relate instead to neo-Stalinist groups who utter words with which we can agree about the inhumanity of the market and the need for economic planning.

Everybody was "for democracy" in Portugal in 1975, and everybody is "for democracy" in the USSR today. But what does it mean?

Yeltsin's decrees banning all party-political activity in workplaces, and suppressing the Communist Party, are acclaimed in the name of "democracy", rather as in 1975, the left

said the Constituent Assembly should be disbanded because it was bourgeois and should be replaced by local Popular Assemblies. In both cases a half-truth ends up aggrandising an elite, Yeltsin's faction or the military leftists.

In Eastern Europe, already, democratic and anti-Stalinist sentiment has been used to justify measures against the old trade unions, formerly government stooge organisations, but now forced to base themselves on the working class and often displaying some militancy.

Popular democratic movements, like the Civic Forum in Czechoslovakia, Walesa's Solidarnosc in Poland, and most markedly the Croatian Democratic Union in Croatia, have sought to suppress rival political forces by claiming to represent "all the people". Leftist movements of any sort are vulnerable to attack as "red", "Bolshevik", somehow tainted with the old regime.

A recent study of Hungary found that there was strong support in the working class for social-democratic or socialistic values. It had found almost no expression in elections because the old Stalinist party, now calling itself social-democratic, is discredited, and the new social-democratic parties are wrecked by internal conflicts: very many workers abstained.

There are probably similar attitudes in the Soviet working class. The future of that working class depends on whether it can throw up leaders capable of uniting the workers' aspirations for democracy and freedom and their desire for security and human cooperation.

The crucial idea for radicals in the USSR today, as for revolutionaries in Portugal in 1975, is that the liberation of the working class must be the task of the workers themselves, led by their own democratically-controlled organisations and not by populist "strong men", whether state-socialist like Saraiva de Carvalho or market-capitalist like Yeltsin.



"A lot about prejudice"

Young soul bravado

Cinema

Vicki Morris reviews *Young Soul Rebels*

This film is a lot about prejudice of all different kinds and how it so nearly stops a basically nice bunch of young people getting on with each other.

No-one is immune from all of the prejudices touched on it seems: I went to see the film with at least one — that a film about black working class youths would say that they at least *felt* that they could have nothing to do with, or nothing much in common with white youths — that turned out to be wrong. But I will still say that in this respect, as in many others, the film struck me as being naive if rather sweet. Maybe things have changed for the worse since 1977 when it is set, but integration and tolerance are not as widespread as they seemed, at bottom, to be in this film.

Or it might just be that, trying to tackle so many subjects in the time, and to get his own message across, the director had to deal with complex matters a bit simplistically.

If I say that it all turned out a bit like a late-century, urban Enid Blyton, I don't think that would be unfair. And it might give you a sense of the excitement of the whole adventure.

It starts with the murder of a young black gay man in a park by someone he thinks he has picked up. Much of the rest of the plot is taken up with the unwitting pursuit of his mystery killer by our young, black heroes, Cass and Chris. Except that Chris is actually not considered to be black by Chris's Rastafarian brother because he is half-caste, while he still has to endure all the baiting of the skinhead layabouts who live on his estate. Yet more prejudices to be overcome.

Being otherwise of a fairly liberal cast of mind, I was not at all shocked by many of the naughtier activities of the young people — the drugs and all sorts of sex — but I

know that some people are meant to be.

The director, Isaac Julien, intended especially to highlight prejudice in the black community against homosexuals. This is what allows the white liberal to feel comfortably relieved that the fire is not at all aimed against white prejudice solely. The black community is as riven with divisions as larger society, something we can sometimes forget. There is no black voice which can speak for the whole community — there are black people who rebel against the system, there are black people who work to change it from within (Tracy in the film). Well-meaning white people — like Chris's SWP boyfriend slapping a reggae record on for his boyfriend's benefit — do well to



remember this when they relate, often patronisingly, to "black people" as a homogeneous lump.

Chris and Cass like sweet soul music — and so do I, and so must the director — but there is not too much snobbery about this in the film. There is a bit of punk, and a bit of reggae, all peacefully co-existing within the very same clubs — another contraction which aims to give an idea of *everything* that was going on at the time, but probably blurs the mad rivalry that went on between adherents of each genre. But then, after all, in retrospect, as in this film, we can all

acknowledge the best of each.

The one type of music we do not hear is that played by the legit radio stations on which Chris, the pirate DJ, aims to get a spot. It doesn't seem to matter what it is — we'd probably like that too if we heard it now. What matters is that Chris and Cass's music — too black — just like punk — too irreverent in this jubilee year — are given no airspace by the established music industry. They are out on their own competing for adherents with punk and reggae.

It's an odd film in this respect. That the players, outlaw DJs, have a good time, with all sorts of people who are, by and large, social misfits. Even the skinheads on the estate are largely without real malice. The killer of the young black gay turns out to be like the men he is killing except that he suppresses his own sexuality. There aren't any real baddies.

But there is a sense of the vulnerability of the young people to baddies. They live on the streets. They pass people who might at any stage turn nasty. It is a jungle out there but by sticking together and keeping cheerful our heroes rise above the dangers. It's almost as if they are too brave to even acknowledge them.

The whole film has a mouldy appearance — the scenes are colourful, but luridly so, like mouldering cereal packets on a dump. Most colourful of all are the scenes on the estate celebrating the Queen's Silver Jubilee — and menacing in that we all know what that kind of institutionalised patriotism can lead to. Individuals are biddable but some of their ideas are dangerous to other people with whom they might otherwise get on.

In the end it turns out one of those 'affirmation of life and love and optimism' films.

But with the Enid Blyton happy ending goes the recognition of the fact that things might very easily have turned out worse. I don't know if he intends it to be so. If he doesn't, I suspect that Julien did not really exorcise the fears that haunt him in this film, and that they will be worked out in another.

Soapflake politics

Book

Mick Ackersley reviews "A Question of Character" by Thomas C Reeves, and "Kennedy v. Khrushchev" by Michael R Beschloss.

"We'll sell Jack like soapflakes" said Joseph Kennedy, ex-ambassador to the Court of St. James, ex-bootlegger, all round scoundrel. Who was he selling Jack to? The American people.

Jack was his son, John F. Kennedy, a US senator. It was 1960 and Jack was running for president of the USA, the dominant power in the world. It was early in the history of modern media beauty contest politics. But already politics and showbusiness were engrafted and cross-bred.

So how was Jack presented? "Jack" was politically conservative; he was a physical wreck kept going by drugs since World War 2, when he had lost his US Navy ship due to incompetence or negligence; he was a philistine and a boor, whose main interest in life was fucking, which meant that he was a perennial adulterer. He wasn't all that literate, either.

So they bought advertising experts, speechwriters and image makers, and they presented "Jack" as a liberal, a war hero in youthful good health, and a fanatically conventional family man devoted to his "glamorous" wife Jackie and their small children! They also got hacks to write him a book, for which he won — or Joe bought him — a Pulitzer prize.

He beat his opponent, Richard Nixon, by a whisker, and he would have lost the election without the added boost of his father's money. Some of it was used to buy votes at

\$50 each.

When he took the White House, John F Kennedy, the conservative-liberal, athletic-cripple, ignominious war hero, and satyriasis-affected faithful husband, captured the imagination of the liberal intellectuals and large sections of the left (*Tribune* in Britain, for example). The enthusiasts named his White House after the mythical King Arthur's capital, "Camelot on the Potomac".

Weeks after coming to power, Kennedy let the CIA invade Cuba. When the black civil rights movement was rising, he let himself be blackmailed by J Edgar Hoover, the irremovable head of the FBI (he had "the files" on his supposed political masters), into allowing the FBI to harass Martin Luther King.

In October 1962 he took the world to the brink of war when the Russians put missiles on Cuba. In fact the missiles were no special threat to the US, but Kennedy the ignominious war hero had an image to keep up. The world came very close to destruction as a result. Khrushchev finally backed down and let Kennedy have his victory.

Kennedy made the moves that embroiled the US after his death in Vietnam. When he was assassinated in November 1963, after 1000 days in office, the mythology mills ground on. His court intellectuals wrote books to his glory.

Now it is becoming fashionable to knock him. Thomas C Reeves takes us on a tour of Kennedy's sex life; Michael Beschloss anatomises the Cuba crisis.

Kennedy's career epitomises two fundamental things in our society: the immense power of money to buy anything, and the utterly degenerate state of the American democracy where such a story could unfold. Think of Reagan, and you realise things have not get better since Joe Kennedy sold Jack like soapflakes in 1960.



Kennedy and Labour prime minister Harold Wilson

Feelings of a republican on the fall of Bonaparte

I hated thee, fallen tyrant! I did groan
To think that a most unambitious slave,
Like thou, shouldst dance and revel on the
grave
Of Liberty. Thou mightst have built thy
throne
Where it had stood even now: thou didst
prefer

A frail and bloody pomp which Time has swept
In fragments towards Oblivion. Massacre,
For this I prayed, would on thy sleep have
crept,
Treason and Slavery, Rapine, Fear and
Lust,
And stifled thee, their minister. I know
Too late, since thou and France are in the
dust,
That Virtue owns a more eternal foe
Than Force or Fraud: old Custom, legal
Crime,
And bloody Faith the foulest birth of
Time.

Percy Shelley 1816

LETTERS

Dave Hughes

Pete Radcliff writes of Dave Hughes, an old comrade who died on 13 August

It is with sadness that *Socialist Organiser* heard of the premature death of Dave Hughes, a founder of the Workers Power group. He was forty-three.

Dave spent the bulk of his political life in the Workers Power group.

But the formative years of Dave's life were spent as an organiser with the International Socialists, the predecessor of the SWP. Within the International Socialists, whilst still a student, Dave was a charismatic organiser in the Birmingham branch, fiercely proud of his work and his contacts at Longbridge and other engineering factories.

Dave witnessed, and was indeed party to, the IS's early bureaucratic degeneration. He supported the first political expulsions in late 1971, those of the Workers Fight group. Courted by the IS leadership, Dave seemed destined for a career as a loyal Cliffite!

But Dave was repelled by the rightward direction of IS at the time — on Ireland, for example: this was before it became safe and meaningless to adopt the current SWP's vague support for the Republicans. He was troubled by their failure to retain or



First meeting of the National Committee of the International Communist League, December 1975, at the Keskeidee Centre, Gifford Street, Islington. Dave Hughes is in the back row, seventh from the left, in front of the exceptionally tall Dave Spencer. Others in the picture include, in the front row, from the left: Susan Carlyle, Fran Brodie, Rachel Lever, Dave

educate their recruits from industry away from their Stalinist or right-wing Labour backgrounds.

I can remember Dave's horror at the time of the expulsion of Workers Fight when a new engineering shop steward recruit stood up and argued that IS would have to clear out the Trotskyists (meaning Workers Fight) just as the Labour Party had had to. That was before IS/SWP found it convenient to present themselves as Trotskyists. No-one attempted to correct him, Dave Hughes included. But Dave started thinking about it.

Soon after, Dave Hughes and his friend Dave Stocking found-

ed their own opposition in IS, the Left Faction, which fought the Cliff leadership on and off for a period of four years. It was essentially a group founded under the influence of Workers Fight, but retaining many of IS's ideas; it was also, at its core, as much a group of personal friends — going back to college or even school days — as a political formation.

In 1975 the "Left Faction", too, was expelled. After a period of collaboration on a new paper, *Workers' Action*, with a number of people now associated with *Socialist Organiser*, and common membership in the International Communist League, Dave

Stocking, Andrew Hornung, Sue Thomas, and Phil Semp. In the back row: Cheung Siu Ming (second from right), Bas Hardy (third), Stephen Corbishley (fourth), Martin Thomas (eighth), Pat Longman (tenth); from the left, Sean Matgamna, Paddy Prenderville (third), Bruce Robinson (fourth), Steve McSweeney (sixth).

Hughes and some three dozen others went on to found the organisation and paper Workers Power. There can be no doubting Dave's considerable organisational abilities and political drive in helping sustain Workers Power since its founding in September 1976.

WP, good or bad, is to a considerable extent Dave's legacy to the socialist movement. Dave was, and WP remains, a strong opponent of *Socialist Organiser*. WP holds to a disastrous analysis of Eastern Europe, saying that the old regimes were "deformed workers' states", and WP supporters went so far as to justify the bludgeoning of democracy

demonstrators in Bucharest. However, there are many groups on the left far worse than WP.

It is doubly sad that at this time Workers Power should be denied Dave's knowledge and his enthusiasm for links with the new trade union movement in the Soviet Union. The historic events now taking place there must be a time for a major reassessment for WP. That will be a task far harder to do without Dave Hughes.

We send our deepest sympathy to Dave's comrades and friends. A memorial meeting for Dave Hughes will be held on 15 September, from 3pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London.

'1871' is a good film

In reply to Tony Bruce (*SO* 494), I should point out that my review of *1871* had to be shortened by the editor, and so a few sentences were left out.

To summarise some points:

(1) The "slow pace" provides dramatic contrast to the violent events at the end, lulling viewers (who will not all be dedicated revolutionaries) into openness to watch the film, and thus a possibility of being persuaded to support the Commune.

On first seeing *1871* I felt uneasy that we see only plush rooms, and no starving people or slum garrets, but in the context of how the film works, we see a facade of supposed normality overthrown as would happen in any revolution.

(2) As Tony Bruce points out, the film focuses on a theatre company, but also it is important that the film presents itself as a staged spectacle in a Brechtian sense, which encourages a certain distancing in the viewer, allowing rational thought as well as emotional identification.

The theatre setting also is a metaphor for the limitations of politicised art; one of the reactionary characters states that "your weapons belong to the theatre! Ours are real!"

(3) I agree that more time could have been devoted to introducing the characters and providing some background information, at least to the 1867 war in Mexico.

(4) Tony describes *1871* as "confused, deliberately obscure", which is the way Stalinist and bourgeois critics deride anything that doesn't conform to "socialist realism" or the (less obviously manipulative) Hollywood conventions.

As a fellow *SO* reader, I'm sure that Tony doesn't support these positions and probably just disagrees with me over whether the film works.

(5) Tony refers to the film's "non-naturalistic style" (which is not something separate from its political and emotional content). Alain Robbe-Grillet among others has shown that the conventions in cinema and literature are determined by conditioning rather than being truly realistic. McMullen's film concerns events from 1867 to 1871, but no-one would expect the film to go on for four years.

I would side with such diverse critics as Adorno, Benjamin, Breton and Schnebel in arguing for art that tries to communicate possibilities of emancipation (this attempt being of necessity in opposition to dominant conventions, which of course often gives rise to communication problems).

I agree with Tony that *Zina* is a better film, and that people should read Marx on the Commune.

Steven Holt
South London

Anglo-Catholics in British Trotskyism

LETTERS

It is a pity that since Al Richardson wished to query my comment on Sam Bornstein's account of the origins of the Balham Group he did not so do when Reg Groves and Sam Bornstein were alive.

Even if he did not see my earlier published accounts, he is presumably aware that I had an exchange of letters with Sammy, referring him back to Reg.

I assume that copies of that correspondence survive in Socialist Platform files.

No one doubted that the Grosner-Purkis-Groves group broke with the Catholic Crusade. If Richardson will refer back to Groves' account

of the decision to rejoin the CPGB (which was published in *IS* magazine in the 1970s) he will find that, even though reference to the Crusade was cut by the *IS* editors, that Reg still clearly states that the decision was made in Fr. Grosner's sitting room, and that their host was involved.

The grouping met as one of the Chapters of the Crusade, and opted out. The grounds for that break were that the Crusade had grown too critical of the Soviet Union, and was no longer sufficiently oriented to the CP.

They rejoined the CP, though at first all retained criticisms of the party. Subsequently John Grosner and the rest split. I do not know whether or when he left the CP, but certainly he was not to be part of the Balham Group. Since they had broken with Noel (temporarily, as it happened) before re-

entering the CP obviously they would not have held meetings at Thaxted, but until the break with Grosner they did use his house.

Given that Fr. Grosner's views were quoted in the CP leadership's answers to Purkis and Groves, Richardson's argument that the absence of any reference to Purkis's and Groves's religion proves something, is hardly conclusive.

Stuart Purkis edited the *Socialist Christian* (journal of the Socialist Christian League) from the time of the war, until the majority of the SCL voted to wind up to enter the new Christian Socialist Movement in 1960. (Four votes were cast against this liquidation, Reg, Stuart (editor), Fr. Gresham Kirkby (chair) and mine.)

Though I had subscribed from the early '50s I did not attend a meeting until the

1959 AGM. It was there that I met Reg and Stuart; and it was at a tea-break there that I asked whether Trotsky had known they were spikes (Anglo-Catholics). They were both very emphatic that "of course" they had mentioned this in their first exchange of letters with Trotsky, though there had been no occasion for it to be mentioned subsequently.

My connection with Reg Groves didn't cease with the end of the SCL (Stuart didn't approve of non-violent Direct Action — 20 years earlier Desmond O'Neill Belshaw had been expelled from the Crusade for advocating it) and so he disapproved of my Direct Action Committee and of Committee of 100 role.

Reg was on the subscribing list for Logos which I edited in the late '60s and early '70s; he published a reprint of the Catholic Crusade's Manifesto in 1969, and I helped sell this. He and I were amongst the early members of Jubilee (named after the Year of Jubilee in Deuteronomy), founded by Fr Leech in 1973.

Fortunately some of the

editors of *Revolutionary History* have a more definite regard for historical accuracy than Al Richardson.

P.S. One extra circumstantial note — and if Reg's files were as complete, and have been examined as carefully, as Richardson suggests, it can hardly be new to him.

In 1975 or '6, Jubilee published a three-foolscap-page account by me of the anglo-catholic role in the origins of British Trotskyism. Ken Leech let me know a little after that Reg was not completely happy with it, but did not say why; so I wrote Reg (I think, but can't be certain, with a copy to Ken) a fairly lengthy letter elaborating my account and the reasons for saying those things which I thought might be debatable.

I didn't hear at first, so I wrote again, and then heard from Reg to say that there was nothing in my account with which he disagreed, but he was not convinced of the wisdom of publishing it.

Laurens Otter
Wellington
Salop

Why not sit on the fence?

Let me apologise for bringing up the exhausted subject of Walton again, but I have a question to ask about your stance over the issue.

O.K., you believe that the Tories should above all else be kicked out of office and replaced by Labour. This is a priority which has its good and bad arguments. You were very brave indeed to stand for that principle.

The Real Labour candidate did perhaps hold a threat of splitting the Labour vote and letting in the Liberals. Thus showing the weakness of the Labour Party at such a vital time, with the general election coming ever closer on the horizon. But why didn't *SO* sit on the fence on this issue?

It may have been the easy thing to do, agreeing with both sides, but it would have perhaps lost you less respect with other left-wing

organisations. It's fair to say that you're not the most popular left-wing group out at the moment.

No doubt some people would have criticised you for sitting on the fence, as it is the easy way out, but it would have enabled you to warn Militant and the SWP of the dangers of the venture while at the same time sticking with their and your fight for a left-wing alternative to a right-wing Labour Party.

Forgive me if you have already explained this in your newspaper, but I have only just started to buy it.

Richard Kirk, Leicester

Editor's note: If you have to choose, it is better to be right than to be popular. To be loved is pleasant: to tell the truth to the labour movement, however unpopular, is an all-defining duty. On Walton, as on so much else, the kitsch-Trotskyist left, itself incapable of learning, has nothing to teach anyone.

Appeal for support

I am standing for election to the Labour Party's National Constitutional Committee and write to seek your support.

My nomination by Mid-Sussex Constituency Labour Party is backed by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs. I want to ensure that no-one is expelled for "mere holding or expression of beliefs and opinions" (Clause III, Part 4). I believe that all comrades committed to Common Ownership (Clause IV, Part 4) — the cornerstone of our Constitution — are entitled to their Labour Party membership cards.

I would be grateful if your CLP would consider supporting me at Conference, to represent the rank-and-file, help safeguard Socialism and defend democracy on the NCC. A brief summary of my political beliefs is set out below.

AGAINST: Privatisation; Race/Sex Discrimination; Commercial Exploitation of workers, animals or environment; WITCH-HUNTS.

FOR: Common Ownership; Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament; No to NATO; Production for need not greed; Welfare not Warfare; LABOUR PARTY DEMOCRACY.

Richard Hanford

NALGO: why the pay ballot was lost

Fighting back in Lanarkshire



500 mainly women workers are on strike at Tunnocks Full story, back page

Against the CPSA-NUCPS merger

CONTROVERSY

By Michael Ronan,
Branch Secretary,
Merthyr Tydfil CPSA

I read with interest the article in SO 495 by Mark Serwotka and Steve Battlemuch regarding the upcoming merger ballot of CPSA members.

I respect their honesty when saying that they were opposed to the merger ballot which was originally run in 1990. I would also agree that the ballot result of last year should have stood. Like Mark, Steve and countless others, I am fed up with the right-wing dictatorship in CPSA who re-run ballots whenever the original result goes against them.

Unfortunately, like it or not, hard-pressed CPSA reps have to organise yet another ballot, but the reality is that the arguments in the ballot have not altered since last year. Activists in my Branch unanimously agreed to oppose the merger, as we did last year, and I know that members in my Branch will almost unanimously vote against it this time.

The reason for this is that a merger with NUCPS is not and never will be in the interests of CPSA members.

Mark and Steve's article is quite lengthy and I do not intend to reply to it all but some parts

cannot go unchallenged or commented on.

1. "Socialist Organiser supporters in the CPSA will also be calling on members to vote yes." Rather presumptuous I thought and simply not true, some may but not all.

2. Mark and Steve try to cloud the issues with statements like 'a gut hatred of NUCPS'. Not true. But what is true is that at the end of the day both unions have different interests on a large number of issues. You only have to look at the fact that CPSA represents workers earning a maximum of £10,000 per annum, while NUCPS represents members earning up to £30,000 per annum.

3. "The existence of two separate unions allows the management to divide and conquer". What is conveniently forgotten is that the 'management' referred to will be in the merged union, so what will change? Will that management suddenly change tactics because they are suddenly in a merged union?

The impression is given that the day after a merged union comes into existence, the management team will be joining the picket line.

4. I particularly liked the comments about the 'difficulties' like management at union meetings, annual reports and different traditions being overcome. How?

5. Finally, I agree that more unity is needed amongst Civil Servants especially with the uncertain future facing the Civil Service. There has to be a militant and collective response from trade unionists in the Civil Service. But why do we have to merge to achieve this?

The real answer is for Civil Service trade union leaders to give that leadership and campaign amongst members to fight back. Until we have that, one union or 30 unions, it makes no difference.

The only other point I would make is that if there are to be mergers among Civil Service unions, they should be among clerical staff unions, a view Mark, Steve and I used to share. But for the time being CPSA members should think long and hard about the arguments, and equally importantly, vote on this vitally important issue.

Left must lead fight in DHSS

By Rob Howard-Perkins,
CPSA DHSS Section
Executive

The CPSA DSS Section Election results have finally been officially announced — six weeks after they should have been.

The unholy alliance of the Kinnockites and so-called "Moderates" under the banner of the Charter Group has been defeated, after three years in control, by the Broad Left, in which Socialist Organiser plays a part. The left now has sixteen members of the Section Ex-

By Tony Dale,
Manchester
NALGO

White collar council workers have voted two-to-one against strike action for our 1991 pay claim.

In response to NALGO's claim for 12 per cent and a minimum wage of £9,330, the employers offered 6.4%. Following the ballot, in which 96,000 voted yes and 202,000 voted no to action, the offer will be accepted.

The central reason for the no vote was the recession. Many workers were thankful that they still had a job, and had little confidence in their ability to win a decent rise.

But the result was not a

foregone conclusion. NALGO's leaders made a fatal error which helped lose the ballot. At the June national conference, the discussion and planning of industrial action was postponed to a reconvened delegate meeting in July. That gave the employers valuable time.

The claim was due to be settled on 1 July. The employers stalled in the hope that inflation would fall and their offer would look better. The lost time boosted the no vote.

At the July delegate meeting, a number of branches influenced by the *Morning Star* and the Kinnockites organised opposition to the national leadership's plan for a strike wave of ten days. They wanted to reduce it to three days.

The amendment was defeated, but damage had been done. The signals were sent out that a significant section of branch officials felt that a yes vote could not be won. That defeatist at-

titude encouraged members to vote no.

Now the employers will come back in 1992 with an even lower offer, five per cent.

The ballot defeat is a setback, but there is still growing determination that something must be done over low pay in local government. A quarter of a million white-collar council workers earn less than the Council of Europe's Decency Threshold of £9,330 a year. That is half of NALGO's local government membership. The vast majority of NALGO members earn below the national average of £14,890 per year.

NALGO's national local government committee is proposing a national low pay strategy to a delegate meeting on 18 September. And council workers in many areas may fight for better pay through demands on local councils to regrade them.

GKN workers win justice

By John Robinson, shop
steward, GKN Hardy
Spicer

Two workers won back their jobs at GKN Hardy Spicer in Birmingham on 15th August after threats of industrial action forced bosses to climb down.

More than 1,000 workers had attended a mass rally on 12th August to show support for the two.

George Hannigan worked at the company as a machinist and was also the chairman of the firm's social club in his spare time. Bob Collins, an assembly worker, is a shop steward for MSF as well as being the club's entertainments secretary.

They were accused of pocketing £182 from a gaming



Bob Collins and George Hannigan

machine at the club and both were sacked. Internal appeals went against them. MSF put in to take the case to an industrial tribunal.

Meanwhile both were charged with theft by the police and the case was heard at Birmingham Crown Court. On 9th July, the jury returned unanimous not-guilty verdicts against both men.

Then the workers sacked on suspicion of theft were told by the company they could not have

their jobs back, even though they had been cleared of stealing by a jury.

At the mass rally on 12th August a show of hands approved calls for an overtime ban and productivity cut unless the men were re-instated. If talks with management failed, the union planned to hold a ballot.

Innocent people can still find themselves on the dole as firms only have to convince industrial tribunals, which rule on unfair dismissal claims, that they have "reasonable grounds" for suspicion, whereas courts are supposed to acquit if there is "reasonable doubt" of guilt.

Birmingham MPs, lawyers and trade union leaders are fighting to get the law changed, and they are to take the struggle to the House of Commons. It is grossly unfair for an employer to refuse to take someone back once they have been acquitted by the courts.

Livening things up

I wrote last week about the problems of actually finding a union branch to get active in, and how you may get lucky.

But it isn't all down to fortune.

There are people who have ended up in a branch whose activity consisted of a room booked for a couple of hours one night each month for stewards to come in and pay the members' dues. No doubt the "union business" was all done in the bar afterwards. But out of that branches have been regenerated into formal meetings at which all union business is openly and democratically discussed.

At a less extreme level you might find a branch

THROUGH THE MAZE

An introduction to the unions



By Rob Dawber

that meets but is dull. How can you liven it up?

First of all, are the meetings in a convenient place? Can it easily be reached by public

transport, without travelling long ill-lit roads that will discourage many women members?

Is it at a convenient time and day, one that doesn't conflict with childcare and other responsibilities. I once had a delegate to the District Council confess to me that she hadn't been able to come to the meetings all that year because her husband insisted on getting his Sunday dinner. Could the meetings actually be in work time?

At the meetings themselves you could introduce a bit of controversy. There's always somebody ready to complain that you're always talking about South Africa, even though you might not

have mentioned Nelson Mandela for a year, or ever. And (they'll say) it's because you're always talking about South Africa that attendance is so low at the branch.

Don't be intimidated. You'll never convince someone like that even if you show them the minutes book, as I once offered. And don't make the mistake that when they say South Africa, they actually mean South Africa. They might mean Israel, CND, Latin America, Labour Party witch-hunts, or anything else that can't be narrowly defined as trade unionism, or, more accurately, Head Office circulars and members' claims.

In fact members generally aren't put off by such discussion. Everybody likes a good row and a clash of ideas so long as they can follow it, so long as it is

made clear and the issues are understood. Some members in the branch will give the impression of being irritated by your resolutions, but even they will often secretly admit that at least someone is livening things up.

But don't overdo it. Don't only bring resolutions and contributions on issues other than narrow trade union ones. Establish that you are serious, that you have something constructive to say on immediate trade union concerns, and that you are prepared to take your share of the responsibility of carrying out decisions.

Don't give the impression that you are there only to show off to others about how left-wing the resolution was that you got passed at your branch.

Rob Dawber is Secretary of the Sheffield and Chesterfield District Council of the RMT

TGWU election

Adams says: 'Repeal anti-union laws'

Activists in the TGWU will be delighted that the Broad Left candidate for Deputy General Secretary, Jack Adams, has come out with a clear and unambiguous statement about the relationship between the Union and a future Labour government.

"Jack Adams believes that our union should not be in anybody's pocket. That's why he supports free and independent trade unionism. The only way we can ensure that trade unions in Britain are free and independent is to ensure that the next government repeals the Tory anti-union laws."

Pit strike ends

The three week long strike against the victimisation of a fitter at Frickley colliery ended this week.

The strikers were demanding his reinstatement after being sacked for being asleep at work.

Usually this 'offence' only receives a fine. Many rank-and-file miners therefore felt that this case could set a precedent.

The decision to end the strike came after a ballot for solidarity action from other pits in the area was lost.

SOCIALIST

ORGANISER

Support the Tunnocks strikers!



BNP supporters attack black car driver after Saturday's march

Fascists surface in South London

By Liz Dickinson

The ugly face of fascism surfaced with a vengeance in South East London last Saturday.

The fascists attacked a peaceful anti-fascist march from Peckham to Southwark Park, Rotherhithe.

The march, over 500 strong, was organised and stewarded by black community groups. Black and

white marched together in solidarity, applauded by many onlookers. Then the march reached Bermondsey, where the British National Party had organised a counter-demonstration.

As we passed a pub called "The Tropics", bottles came flying out into the march. Police forced the fascists back into the pub and barricaded them in. Enraged, they battered on the windows from inside.

The stewards did an excellent job of calming the marchers and keeping the demonstration moving.

The media have reported that those in the pub were Millwall FC supporters. That can only be speculation, as it was well past kick-off time at Millwall's home match, and I saw no sign of the usual football regalia.

But the applause that had accompanied the early part of the march had now been replaced by ugly taunts and abuse from local residents. One man, his face contorted with hate, ran to attack us, but was held back by the police. Then we caught our first sight of

the BNP counter-march. It was a horrific sight — row upon row of fascists wielding union jacks, held back by police vans parked across the road. The balconies of the flats overlooking the road were packed with residents chanting, jeering, and waving union jacks. On the upper floors I caught sight of some black residents looking through their windows, obviously terrified to venture out.

The BNP were now hurling stones and missiles across the road and trying to clamber over the police vans to get at us. Chants of "scum, scum" went up from the anti-fascists, but we kept our ranks and moved towards the park gates.

Several fascists had been arrested. Then, for some unknown reason, the police arrested one of our marchers. This caused chaos, with his companions resisting his arrest and the police trying to tug him over the barriers.

Suddenly there was a roar from the park. I saw a large crowd of fascists running across the park to attack the march. It was very frightening: we were outnumbered

two to one by the fascists, and in danger of being crushed against the park railings.

The police drove back the mob in the park, but the lull was soon broken. In the middle of a group of SWP placards someone started to burn the union jack — an act of great stupidity in the circumstances. The BNP redoubled their efforts to get at us; missiles were flying all over the place.

In the park the two groups were kept separate by rows of police. Banks of the Special Patrol Group were at the ready outside the park, with riot shields.

One of the most disturbing sights was ten and eleven year olds wearing fascist stickers and mindlessly reinforcing racist propaganda.

The fascists are well organised in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe, cynically manipulating the divisions that years of national Tory and local Labour rule combined with recession have carved in the working class. We must continue to carry the fight into the hotbeds of fascism. But next time we should be better organised!

Five hundred workers at the Tunnocks Bakery in Uddingston near Glasgow are on all-out official strike for a 10% pay claim. The workers are mainly women in the TGWU plus the drivers. Lanarkshire has been devastated by the years of Tory government first with the closure of Gartcosh Steel Mill and the Caterpillar factory in Uddingston and now with the imminent closure of Ravenscraig and the Dalzell Strip Mill. Many of the Tunnocks strikers are the sole bread winners in their families. Some strikers on picket duty spoke to SO.

"We're out for 10% after an overwhelming vote for action — there were only 11 against. We've rejected 6.9% — that adds up to nothing on our basic which means we take home only £109. For some the offer amounts to 70p a week! Our conditions are terrible — the back shift gets no shift allowance and twelve minutes break in a 5 and a half hour shift, and we have to do

"The dockers and railwaymen aren't touching Tunnock's stock"

the work of cleaners when we've finished. We even have to buy our own hats!

"Now we're out and we've got 24 hour pickets going. Management are filling the bowls and Boyd Tunnock has got workers from London and his daughters working. But we are still solid and will be out for as long as it takes — and we've dented his £26 million turnover.

"We've had support from the dockers and railway men, who aren't touching Tunnock's stock and the lorries with the flour deliveries are turning around. He must be losing money hand over fist and now he wants to talk — but not about pay increases. We'll be out until we get 10% as a minimum."

Support has come from women's groups in Scotland, workers at Lairds and on the railways, and from west of Scotland Labour Party Socialists and other Labour Party groups. Though the strike has stopped production in Tunnock's only factory, supervisors and bakers are still working.

ACAS talks on Friday 23rd broke down. Tunnock refused to put any more money on the table. The talks "were a complete waste of time", said the TGWU convenor.

A strike bulletin, *Taking the Biscuit*, is being produced by SO supporters in Glasgow, and is warmly received on the picket line. A victory for the Tunnocks strikers would start to stem the tide in the Lanarkshire area.

Messages of support and donations to Helen Knight, 3 Easterwood Avenue, Viewpark, Uddingston.

Picture page 15

"The police ordered us into the park saying that it was empty.

When we went in there was one copper and loads of BNP"

A black woman marcher who wishes to remain nameless.

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