

SOLIDARITY

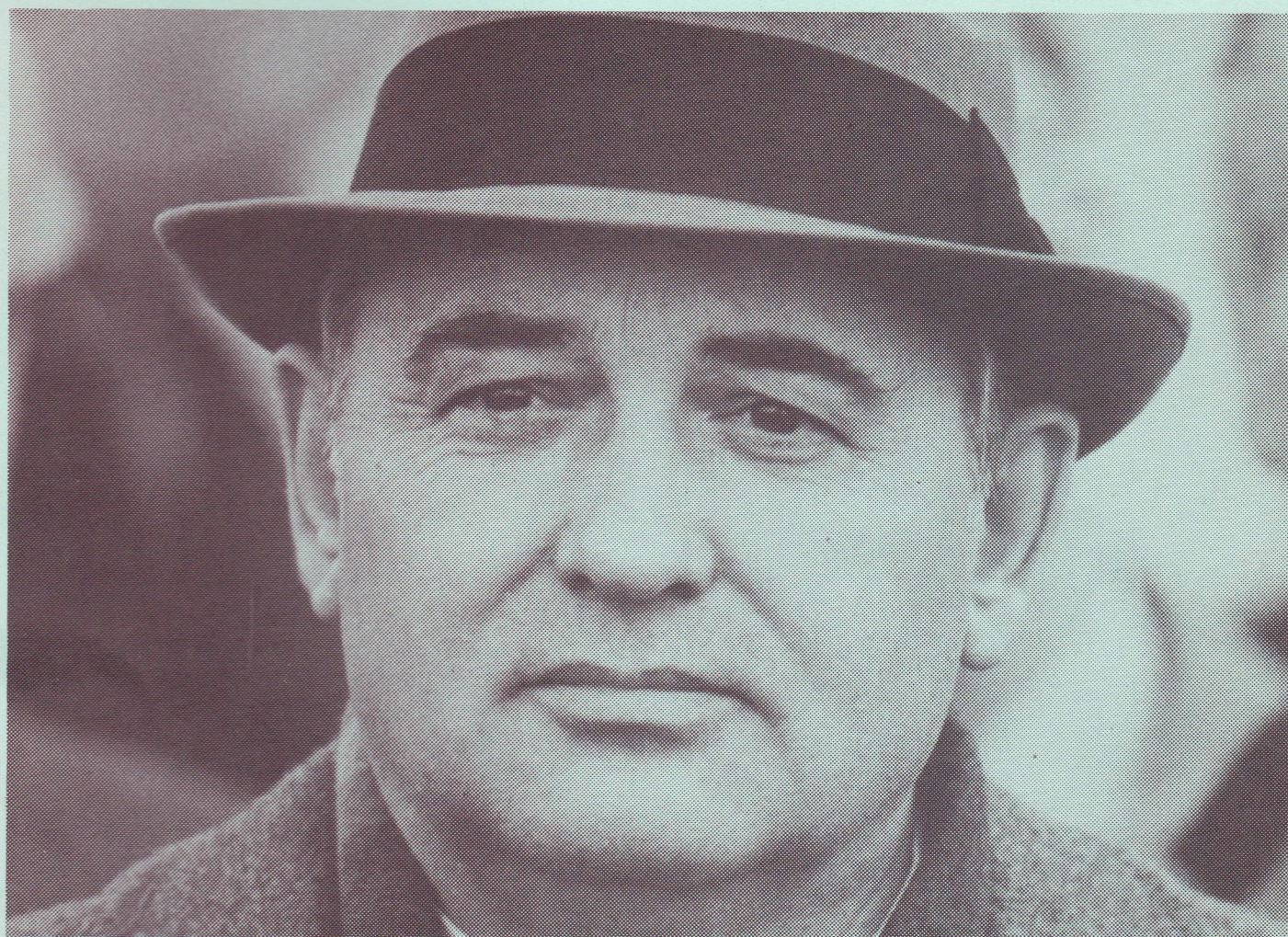
A Journal of Libertarian Socialism. Issue 19. Winter 88-89. 80 Pence

Labour Turmoil

Why Ron Todd bloodied Neil Kinnock's rose

Gorbachev's Reforms

Sugar - coated austerity or Soviet spring?



CONTENTS

AS WE SEE IT

- 3 IN MOSCOW'S VAULTS
As fresh details of Stalin's atrocities continue to emerge, KEN WELLER asks how long the Soviet state can survive the open public discussion of the Party's role in these crimes, that its 'glasnost' policy fosters.

ANALYSIS

- 5 IMPOSED REFORMS OUTPACED BY MOOD FOR REAL CHANGE
Contrary to Western perceptions, perestroika is not so much a liberalisation of the Soviet economy as a desperate package of austerity measures. PATRICK KANE examines the severe shortcomings of the Russian reform programme.
- 11 DAMAGE LIMITATION POLITICS
The debacle of the Labour Party conference should have surprised no one, concludes HENRY WORTHINGTON.

CORRESPONDENCE

- 13 Letters from LAWRENCE GAMBONE and TOM COWAN.

SOLIDARITY JOURNAL 19 (NEW SERIES)

WINTER 1988-89 ISSUE

PUBLISHED quarterly by Solidarity (London), c/o 123 Lathom Road, London E6 2EA, United Kingdom.

EDITED and produced collectively by the Solidarity (London) Editorial Group.

MEETINGS: The London Solidarity group meets on the first Sunday of every month for informal political discussion. Interested readers are encouraged to write for details of time and place.

PUBLISHING HISTORY: The present Solidarity Journal is the latest in a line of magazines produced by the Solidarity Group stretching back to the early sixties. Solidarity for Workers' Power, first in this sequence, was founded in 1960 and ran to 89 issues. This was succeeded by the nationally produced Solidarity for Social Revolution, which ran for 16 issues, and was in turn succeeded by the present title. Our publishing history is complicated further by the existence, in the sixties and early seventies, of six or seven regional Solidarity magazines, among them those produced by the Scottish, South Wales, and North Western Solidarity groups; and by the publication of the short-lived, nationally produced magazine, Solidarity for Workers' Self-Management.

SOLIDARITY is also the imprint of a series of pamphlets and books which now numbers more than sixty titles; and which have been variously translated into fifteen foreign languages. A list of current titles is normally to be found elsewhere in this issue.

PRINTED by the Aldgate Press, London.

COVER PICTURE: Rex Features

AS WE SEE IT

GLASNOST

In Moscow's vaults

While the new 'openness' strengthens Gorbachev's hand in the short term, KEN WELLER questions whether the Kremlin can survive untrammelled discussion of the Party's role in Stalin's atrocities.



AT EVERY STAGE of the development of Soviet society large sections of the British left have regarded the USSR as embodying socialism either completely, or in some more or less 'deformed' state. (Not an illusion we have shared; even the most grotesque mutation retains some characteristics of its ancestry, but the Soviet Union demonstrates nothing we recognise as an element of socialism). Now that it is clear, even to the regime itself, that the Soviet economy is a shambles, the chickens are coming home to roost. Hence the endless desperate apologies.

If the Soviet bureaucracy is the wave of the future then revolutionaries had better look for some very high ground. The fact is that, 70 years after the Russian revolution, fifteen per cent of the gross national product is devoted to the relatively efficient military sector while a Soviet citizen needs backdoor connections to get her child a decent schooling, buy decent food, or get her television repaired.

The Soviet Union, the last of the old-fashioned world empires, has been faced with ever-growing tensions both within its own

borders and within its satellite states. Something had to give. The restructuring of the economy, as in Thatcher's Britain, is being carried out at the expense of the working class. They will be expected to produce more and in many cases receive less, and unemployment is to be reintroduced.

The new glasnost ('openness') has several aims. Free (or relatively free) exchange of information is an essential component of an efficient economy. While an exposure of some of the crimes of the past will neutralise much of the party apparat's opposition to Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, such a policy has terrible consequences for the system. In a recent article ('The Gorbachev Interlude', New Politics, Winter 1988), the French writer Cornelius Castoriadis puts it thus:

"Quite likely, glasnost is also a weapon in Gorbachev's hands against his political enemies within the bureaucracy, against the conservatives. But in this case, above all others, Gorbachev seems to be under the illusion that he can unleash a 'search for the truth' and control it or stem it where he chooses. Would it ever be possible, under the present regime, to start discussing the true history of Russia over the last seventy years? Is the real question whether Stalin killed thirty rather than twenty or sixty million people; or is it how and why Stalin could exercise such power, and what the hell the Communist Party was doing during this period? And does the story stop with Stalin, or have we to fear that some crazy historian may come up with Kronstadt, Mahkno, the terror against the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries from 1918 on, the 1920-23 events in the Caucasian region? And what about the Hitler-Stalin pact, what about the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, etc, etc? Why are our divisions in Afghanistan? What about if economists and sociologists start

talking about income distribution or social groups and classes, etc? Would a philosopher be allowed to write that Materialism and Empirico-criticism is just silly? This last is an eternal and really uninteresting question. But here comes Comrade Gorbachev and declares in Prague: "No party retains the monopoly of truth". Really? Then why not many different parties?"

New horrific details of the Stalinist era now emerging go far beyond anything so far admitted. Krushchev's speech at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in 1956 now appears more in the nature of a whitewash than an expose. For example, Moscow News of 5 October 1988 has an article by Zenon Poznyak on the investigation of a group of mass graves in the Kuropatky Wood near Minsk, capital of Byelorussia, which are estimated to contain at least 102,000 bodies of men and women, mainly peasants, murdered by the NKVD (forerunner of the KGB) between 1937 and the German invasion of Russia in 1941. The Kuropatky Wood site is only one of five mass murder sites discovered in the Minsk area. How can the Party explain the fact that such a massacre was carried out by its own predecessors without calling into question its own right to rule?

Whatever the aims of the party leadership in introducing the recent changes, the actual consequences of opening Pandora's box are a different matter, as events in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the Baltic states demonstrate. There are also solid signs that the Soviet working class is on the move. As Hungary showed in 1956, totalitarian party dictatorships, however solid they may appear, are extremely brittle institutions. Recent 'reforms', themselves the product of growing tensions within the regime, have only made them worse. Long live the next Russian Revolution!

PERESTROIKA

Imposed reforms outpaced by mood for real change



This smuggled picture shows an outlawed demonstration in the Ukrainian city of Lvov on July 7, calling for greater democratic participation in 'perestroika', and typical of many such protests across the Soviet Union in recent months. (The banner heralds the formation of the 'Democratic Front in Support of Restructuring'). PATRICK KANE explains just how far Gorbachev's reforms fall short of popular expectation.

IN JANUARY 1988 three of the highest bodies of the Soviet state apparatus, the CPSU Central Committee, the USSR Council of Ministers and the All Union Council of Trade Unions passed a resolution 'On Ensuring the Effective Employment of the Population'. A look beyond the deliberations of the recent Extraordinary Conference of the CPSU, to the January legislation, gives a far clearer picture of Mikhail Gorbachev's reform programme, and what it means in actual practice for the Soviet working class.

The resolution's implementation will result in Soviet workers soon facing redundancies of far greater order than that seen in the West in the past ten years. It is an unmistakable move towards the official introduction of unemployment in the USSR. Such is the scale of the so-called "re-distribution of labour" being proposed, that even the best of Gorbachev's propagandists will be unable to disguise the reality of the mass lay-offs which lie ahead.

No sooner had the official press agency TASS announced this top level decision to reduce the "share of people in industry" than there appeared in the pages of Pravda (January 21) an article quite unfitting for a paper named 'Truth'. Yegor Prostyakov, Chairman of the Bureau for Social Development, replying to criticisms of the new measures (one Moscow worker had written in to say that "it was as though old forgotten times were repeating themselves"), stated that the "historic process" does not mean a revival of "the troubles of the old unemployment". Despite the efforts of Pravda to dispel the worker's worries on this score, Prostyakov went on to admit that the "reduction, or release of workers is one stage in this process".

Minister Prostyakov says that while "the right to work is a very important gain for the people", the

people are warned that the "requirements of the national economy are also taken into account". Despite his attempts to prevent any undue "concern", with promises of "nobody who wants to work will be left without a job", his talk of figures such as 16 million being released from industry by the year 2000, can only have fed the anxieties of Soviet working people.

Paradoxically the resolution on employment, the new State Enterprises law (which came into effect on 1 January 1988 this year), and even the blessing given perestroika by this summer's CPSU Conference, are all flatly at odds with official ideology. As Pravda pointed out earlier this year, though in 1929 there were officially 1,365,000 people unemployed in the USSR, the first five-year plan introduced by Stalin "abolished" unemployment as a "socio-economic phenomenon". The reality has of course, been a little different. Unemployment may have been officially abolished, (or to be precise, benefits may have been halted), but the wastage of human labour continued in one form or another, not least as unemployment.

A report in last December's issue of the London Economist highlighted the fact that Soviet economists concede that the unemployment attributable solely to the fact that one worker in five changes their job every year, amounts to two per cent. While this may have been an acceptable number of "releases from industry", most people without work are harshly repressed and branded as "parasites".

Work in the USSR is not only a 'right', it is compulsory. For decades the longstanding 'anti-parasite' laws have been a weapon by which corrupt managers controlled the workforce. Many workers who have proved too critical of a system which forces them to produce wealth for the

state, have suffered the fate of being sacked in a country where there are no welfare benefits, and where every worker carries an internal passport containing work records, (which is no less than legalised blacklisting).

The Economist report estimated the effect of the political use of unemployment by management in the USSR at a further one per cent. In official jargon this hidden unemployment, which is especially high in areas with a high birth rate like as Central Asia, is termed "surplus manpower".

Under Yuri Andropov's rule, a section of the bureaucracy did make efforts to come to grips with the stagnation of the crisis-ridden economy. Unemployment was openly countenanced as a method of forcing increased productivity, and to kick the economy into shape. Campaigns were also launched by the Komsomol (Young Communist League) and by the official state trade unions to encourage workers to inform the relevant authorities who was late, drunk or slacking. Being informed upon generally meant instant dismissal.

In his own attempt to overcome the crisis which faces the Soviet economy, Mikhail Gorbachev has taken into consideration the shortcomings of the same bureaucracy which placed him in power. He has declared it "impermissible" that management should cause "delays and incomplete implementation of the radical reform". In order to ensure the full success of the reforms, half the bureaucrats in Republican ministries and one third at regional level "will be made redundant" (again according to Prostiyakov's Pravda apology). In Moscow alone one hundred thousand administrative jobs are to be cut by the end of this year.

Observers of these attacks on the middle layer of the bureaucratic

apparatus, should not mistake them for the first steps to the introduction of widespread freedoms and progressive reforms, let alone to any higher degree of so-called "existing socialism". Gorbachev may claim to have the interests of the "workers' state" at heart, but he certainly does not have those of the workers. Writing in Pravda on the occasion of the enactment of the new law on State Enterprises, Yegor Prostiyakov made it clear that the intention of the reforms is the "strengthening of the management apparatus".

Loafers, sloth and drunkenness are words on the lips of every manager in the USSR these days. The condition of the economy is entirely blamed on the inefficiency and lack of the incentive of the workers. In turn, managers are criticised by bureaucrats for not achieving sufficient productivity from their work force. To this, managers retort that their (widespread) powers over workers' rights are not enough. Indeed, as one sarcastic Soviet economist put it, at present the "workers are the bosses". And he did not mean they have too much control, just that it is too hard to fire them.

An indication of what is on the way for the working class under Gorbachev can be glimpsed in a recent article by economist Nikolai Shmelev, a pro-Gorbachevist, in the reformist current affairs journal Novy Mir. Shmelev writes:

"The real possibility of losing one's job, of being shifted to temporary unemployment subsidy, of being forced to move to a new place of employment, is not all that bad a medicine as you would believe. Many experts believe it would be far better to pay unemployment benefit than to keep on loafers".

In tandem with tougher management, the new State Enterprises law, with its system of industrial self-financing, will strengthen the bosses' hand when it

comes to implementing perestroika. Managers will have greater powers to lay off workers when profit margins get low. Unmistakably, Gorbachev has placed hard times on the agenda for the Soviet working class. In the steel industry alone, ten thousand workers are to be laid off within two years. Both Minister Prostyakov and the Deputy Chairman for the USSR State Committee for Labour and Social Problems, Viktor Buinovsky, admit that between 15 and 17 million Soviet workers will probably lose their jobs by the end of the century.

Guarantees of severance payment are, so far, the only definite promise made to those who will be thrown out of work. Redundancy payments will be made until a workers finds a new job, but they will only have two months to find one. So "while unemployment threatens nobody", a system of finding people work is being established little different from the ones we have in the West. "As soon as a worker is released the process of finding them a job begins". What has not been taken into consideration so far, is the fact that loss of employment automatically brings with it loss of company-allocated housing. There is already a huge housing shortage.

While work in new industries, or other areas of the economy, has been promised for "released workers", it is clear that, however limited, preparations are under way to cater for long-term unemployed. A "state-wide system is being set up which strengthens the Soviet man's social guarantees on that most important matter of life - labour" states Prostyakov, reassuringly. In other words, despite the denials, something like a Ministry for the Unemployed is being set up.

Just as under Brezhnev, those thrown out of work under Gorbachev will not have much of a say in the matter of where they find work, if they find it. Already there are

indications that plans exist to use mass redundancies as a method of exploiting the underdeveloped wealth of Siberia and Central Asia. If higher wages could not encourage people to move to inhospitable regions then poverty and unemployment will.

However, it is not inevitable that Gorbachev's policies will be introduced with complete success. First of all, there is major resistance to the reforms within the ruling class itself. Privileged directors and petty bureaucrats are not known to surrender their comfortable positions easily. For this massive middle layer, the prospect of being pushed down the hierarchical ladder is not relished.

Second, large scale opposition exists inside the Communist Party apparatus, led by those such as Yegor Ligachev, and encountered in more open and extreme form in such reactionary organisations as the 'Pamyat' (Memory) group. Extreme Russian nationalism and Great-Russia chauvinism put many of these people in power under Brezhnev. The Ukraine is a prime example.

Here Vladimir Sherbitsky, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Ukraine, rules one of the most corrupt regional apparatuses undisturbed since the day Brezhnev installed him. Interestingly, the previous incumbent, Petro Shelest, had attempted to maintain his rule by allowing oppositionists greater freedom to express discontent with Russification policies. This expedient provoked a Russian nationalist backlash and in 1972 Shelest was deposed.

September 1988 saw a shrewdly timed and decisive reshuffle of the Politburo, Mikhail Gorbachev's most serious effort yet to deal with conservative opponents, a move consolidated later that week by his assumption of the Presidency. Undoubtedly these manoeuvres

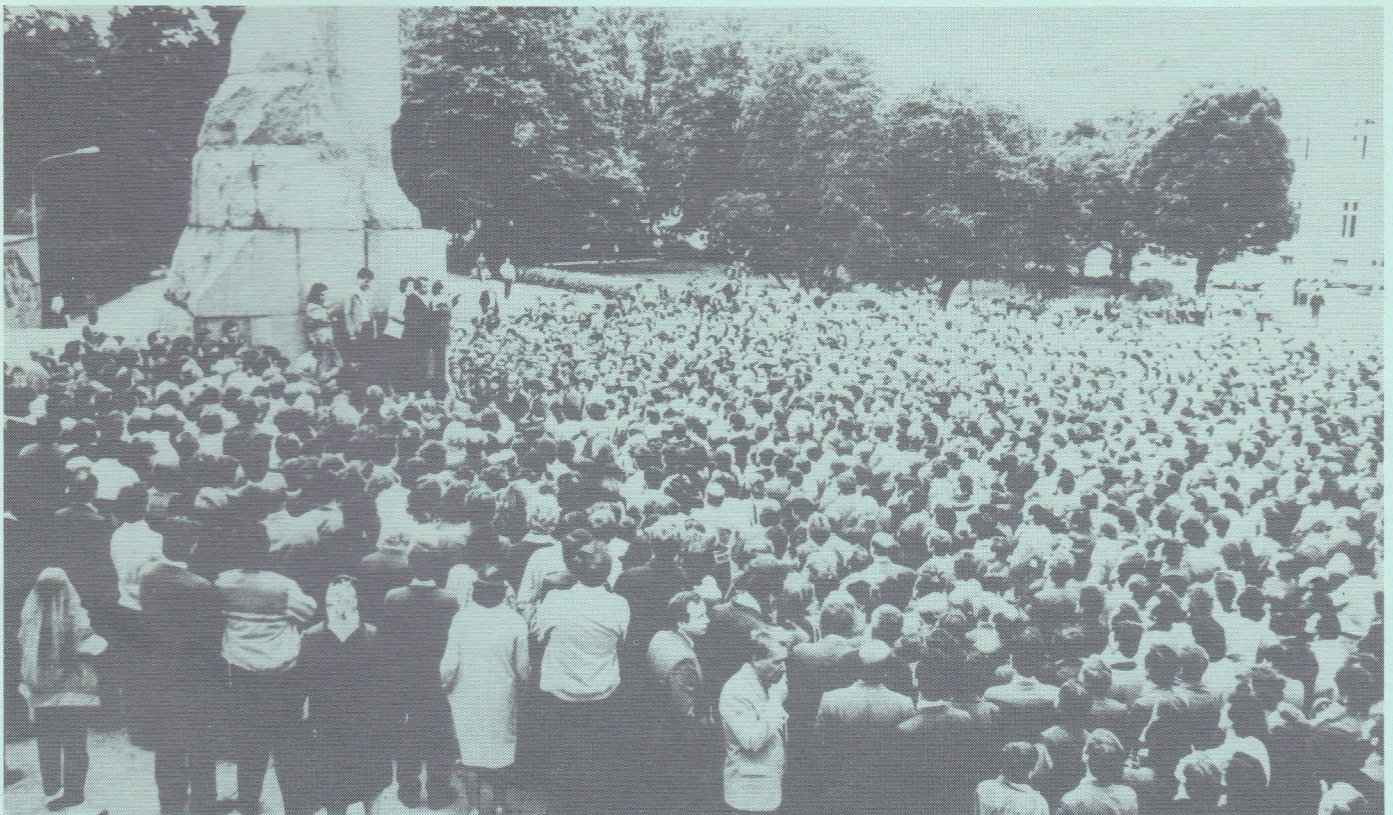
succeeded in ousting many of the old guard, but serious opponents still remain in high office.

Victor Chebrikev, for example, KGB frontman, was actually promoted to the position of Central Committee Secretary, while Ligachev found himself drafted, probably more sideways than down, to confront the intractable problems of the Ministry of Agriculture. Moreover September's reshuffle wholly failed to displace Sherbitsky, now possibly Gorbachev's strongest opponent.

The simple explanation for this failure is that moves against such figures would open up the programme of austerity measures to its most serious threat: that of the Soviet people. Last August, for example, the Ukraine, which has felt no real benefits of glasnost, not even for its intelligentsia, saw massive unrest. In the city of Lvov, lying close to the Polish border,

demonstrations of up to fifty thousand strong challenging the more conservative rulers, and calling for greater participation in the reform process, met with an iron response: troops from the riot squads went berserk; there were mass arrests.

All indications are that the Soviet workers are capable and willing to resist both the policies of the Brezhnevite conservatives, and those of the reformists following Gorbachev. For perestroika to be introduced without mass unrest interrupting a purging of resistance within the regime's ranks, the reformists have to present the people with something more beneficial. Gorbachev, however, appears to have nothing to offer. As one Ukrainian worker said when asked for his opinion of the reform process in a recent unofficial survey, "Glasnost has nothing to do with ordinary people. No one consulted us when



LVOV, 16 JUNE 1988: Some seven thousand people gathered in Ivan Franko park to protest at the undemocratic selection of Ukrainian delegates for the 19th Communist Party Conference. Speakers included Mikhail Horyn, the editor of the samizdat bulletin Ukrainian Herald. Later, after further rallies, the authorities bulldozed the park.

glasnost started, and no one has asked us how far it should go. The bosses are using glasnost to settle old scores".

However Gorbachev's limited thaw has, while being most beneficial to the Russian intellectuals, raised mass expectation for not only popular participation in the reforms, but for running Soviet society itself. This radicalisation, and corresponding disillusionment with Gorbachev, has significantly increased in the wake of the extraordinary 19th Party Conference, this July.

In the run up to the Conference there was clear anticipation that dramatic changes, from which workers would benefit, were afoot. In particular, there were fresh demands for greater rule by the Soviets (workers councils). Undoubtedly the slogan "All Power to the Soviets", freshly resurrected for the occasion, captured many hearts and minds. Not least, perhaps, the seven thousand people who attended a rally in Lvov, and heard Mikhail Horyn (of the oppositional group, the Ukrainian-Helsinki Union) declare the whole period from 1929 to the present counter-revolutionary, because it saw the demise of the power of the Soviets.

Yet expectations of a radical outcome to the Conference, hopes of a regeneration of working class democracy, and self management in the form of factory soviets, were soon to shatter. As I Abalkin, Director of the Economics Institute of the Academy of Sciences, wrote in Pravda soon after, referring to the elections to the proposed "democratised" soviets: "It will only be a vote of confidence, not a choice of many options... And it is unclear, anyway, how this fits in with the concept of delineating the functions of Party and Soviet bodies".

The response of the workers to the 19th Party Conference, and to

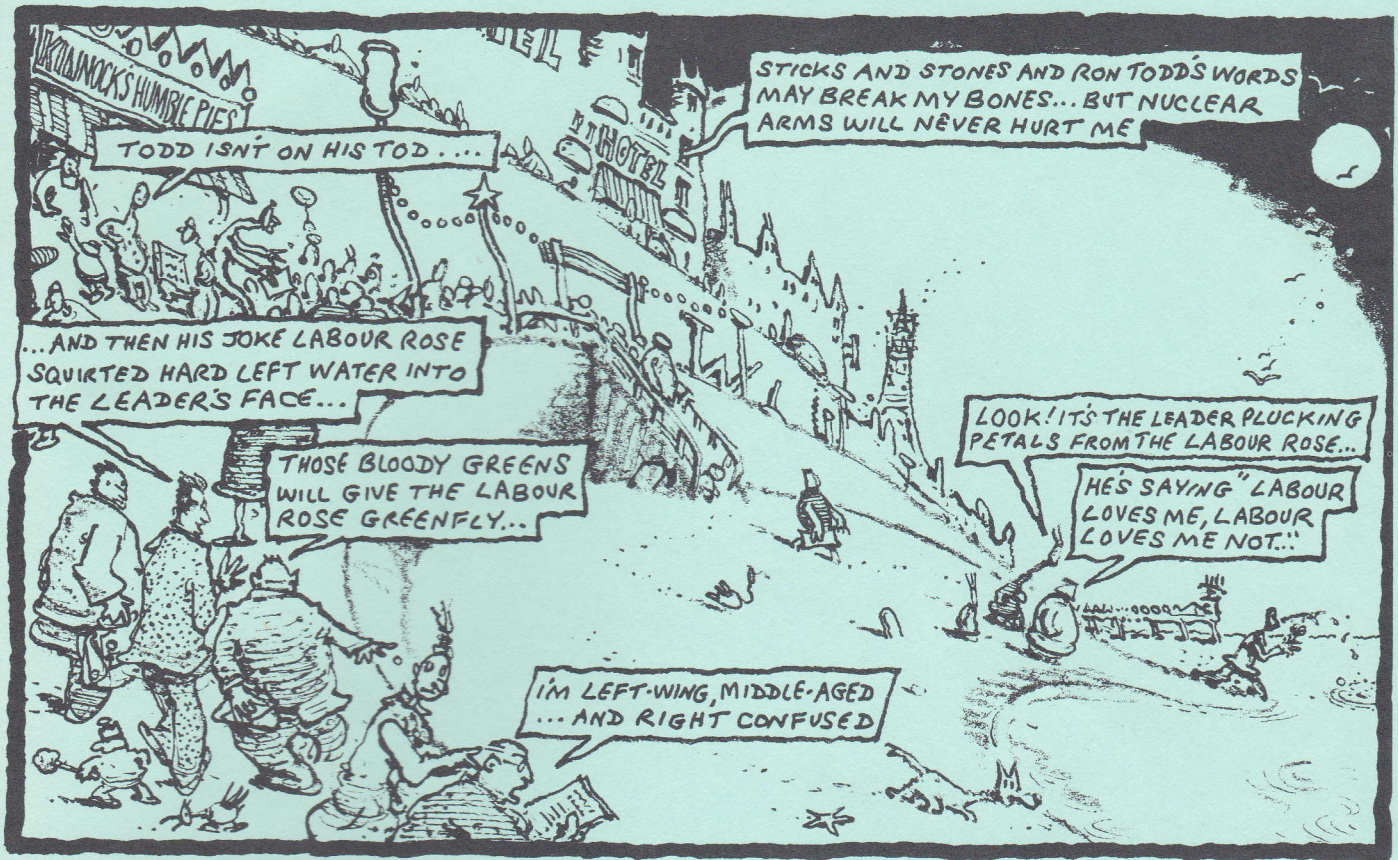
Gorbachev's perestroika as a whole, may be best expressed by quoting from an oppositional leaflet distributed in Leningrad factories in early September, which stated:

"Bureaucrats and Party officials do not wish to lose their power and undeserved privileges - they are ready to stop reform at any cost! Today we are deciding the future of our children and future generations! One cannot stand aside and wait - what will Gorbachev achieve? If we want to live in a free country then we must act! We have nothing to lose except unlawfulness and a threshold to poverty... Let each one ask themselves, what have I done to get rid of the spongers who sit on my neck?"

The leaflet reiterates the demand for workers self-management, "All power to the deputies of the people!". This is merely the tip of the iceberg: in practically every Republic of the USSR there have been strikes, demonstrations and the creation of popular independent organisations, the most interesting being the formation of free trade unions in the Ukraine and other regions.

Contrary to the image presented in the West, of widespread support for perestroika as proposed by Gorbachev on the one hand, and of sabotage by the conservative bureaucrats guilty of the worst repressive excesses on the other, the overwhelming majority of Soviet workers seek a third alternative. It is too early to characterise this politically, or speak of objectives, but one thing is certain: the most progressive movement for change is not emanating from either wing of the ruling bureaucracy but coming from below. While perestroika is no more than austerity politics, whereby the working class is to pay for the crisis of the USSR's economy, the reforms have unmistakably seeded expectations which could ultimately bring down the system that proposed them.

LABOUR AT BLACKPOOL



John Watson

Damage limitation politics

Labour's Annual conference this year was intended as a triumphant rally for Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersly, a demonstration to the television cameras that the left had been completely marginalised within the party and that modern managerialist social democracy was now firmly in charge. HENRY WORTHINGTON, Solidarity's secret Labour double-agent, explains why this plan came spectacularly unstuck.

AND IT ALMOST went to plan. Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley's easy victory in the leadership election was just as expected. So too was the conference's endorsement of a vague statement of principles, some equally vague policy proposals put together by the party's policy review groups,

and a batch of rule-changes to make the party more centralised. Kinnock made a rousing speech emphasising that getting a Labour government elected took precedence over anything else - and some said it was the best speech he had ever made.

But then, to the apparent surprise of the pundits, Ron Todd,

the leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), spoiled it all. Speaking at the Tribune rally, he voiced doubts about the direction the party was taking, particularly on defence. Todd's speech was widely reported. And within 48 hours, the leadership had suffered a humiliating defeat on defence policy. Brother Ron had, it seemed, given Neil an unexpected bloody nose.

In fact, neither Todd's speech nor the defeat for the leadership on defence should have come as any great surprise. Kinnock and his cronies had spent the whole summer "crawling up everyone's arse to get votes for Roy in the deputy leadership", as one trade union official put it. They hadn't bothered to get the union bosses' support for their position of endorsing union participation in the government's Employment Training (ET) programme, which meant that Kinnock's speech at the TUC in favour of union participation in ET came as a snub to the TGWU, which was firmly against participation.

Nor had they lobbied effectively for their plan to drop any mention of a timetable for implementing a non-nuclear defence policy. Perhaps their hope was that no-one would notice that a change was in the offing; as it was, however, the left did notice (well before Todd's speech), and by the time of the conference defence debate the leadership had only damage limitation in mind, fixing it so that only the bogey-man Todd was allowed to speak in favour of going non-nuclear "in the lifetime of one parliament".

All in all, then, a set of extraordinary cock-ups by a leadership that is supposed to be supreme when it comes to party management: "At least when Wilson and Callaghan tried to carve things up they didn't make a total mess of it" was the verdict of one stunned left-winger. More by accident than

intention, Kinnock has now bounced himself into having to "fight and fight and fight again" to try to ensure that next year's conference backs him on defence.

It is now clear that, despite his unilateralist past, he believes that Labour's current defence policy is the major obstacle standing in the way of Labour being elected to government; and however well that might go down with the Labour right and the opinion pollsters, it is anathema to many on the left who have hitherto supported him. Moreover, even if Kinnock wins his struggle over defence with the left, a year of internecine warfare could easily cancel out any improvement in Labour's poll standing. It could well be that Kinnock, in his enthusiasm for winning, has guaranteed losing yet again.

Kinnock is clearly gambling much on the 'mandate' given him and Hattersley by their thumping victory in the leadership election. But he could be overestimating the value of his hand; everything suggests that, even before the defence fiasco, he was not so much popular in the party as merely preferable to the greater evil of Tony Benn and his loony trotskyist crew.

Certainly, the constituencies have supported Kinnock as 'hammer of the trots', but for little else, at least outside Wales. The 'Labour Listens' campaign which launched the policy review conspicuously failed to involve ordinary party members, and there have been growing fears that Kinnock is leading the party too far to the right. There is also much scepticism about what is seen as the "all style and no substance" emphasis of the party's image-makers, and their influence on the leadership.

So far these sentiments have been nascent - well enough formed for a fair number of constituency Labour

Parties to vote for John Prescott against Hattersley for deputy, but certainly not for the Benn-Heffer ticket to pick up serious support - but they could easily grow and multiply, particularly if given intellectual and organisational coherence by a section of the anti-trotskyist 'soft' left of the party withdrawing the support it has given Kinnock since his election in 1983.

There is also unease among the union bosses. They are prepared to sanction plans for a mass-membership party because they are sick of bailing out Walworth Road; and they are prepared to allow some reduction in their influence over Labour in return for a Labour election victory and a return to beer and sandwiches at number ten. But they will not accept not being consulted by the party leadership, and they certainly don't want Kinnock humiliating them in public, under instruction from the public relations boys, in order to boost his 'tough' image. Todd's Tribune rally speech was a warning shot which the leadership will ignore at its peril.

Neil Kinnock has fewer problems with the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), which he controls through skilful use of his powers of patronage. Nevertheless, he is disliked in the PLP for his unapproachability and over-reliance on a kitchen cabinet of sycophantic advisers, and his competence is widely doubted. Nearly half the PLP registered a small protest by voting against Hattersley for deputy; more important, many senior party figures (including several on the left) would have jettisoned Kinnock in favour of John Smith, the shadow chancellor, this summer, after his disastrous meanderings on defence policy, if only there had been an easy way.

But there wasn't: there is no simple mechanism to get rid of a

Labour leader who doesn't want to go, and Kinnock made it quite clear that he intended to stay. In the end, the rumblings of revolt died down completely after Smith's heart attack. But Smith (assuming he recovers), Bryan Gould, Robin Cook and others who covet Kinnock's job are just biding their time until he goes, building their support in the constituencies, the unions and the PLP.

All this gives contemporary Labour politics an eerie feel. Everyone is thinking about scenarios for Kinnock's downfall, to the exclusion of any serious discussion of policy or strategy. Hardly anyone outside the Communist Party and the traditional right is at all enthusiastic about the modernising social democratic managerialism that has emerged from the policy review, yet there is no coherent alternative visible apart from the hard left's programme of nationalising everything bar the corner shop and getting out of the European Community.

Something tells me that this could all change very fast if most of the soft left, where many of the seventies libertarians who joined Labour after Margaret Thatcher's first victory are now to be found, abandoned its support for the leadership: green, decentralist and radical democratic ideas are widespread in this milieu, and could yet provide a basis for a new Labour left consensus.

Which is not to say that they will: green and radical democratic ideas don't go down too well with the trade union bosses with whom the disillusioned soft left could find itself in bed. Nor is it claimed that if a few more libertarian socialists now active elsewhere joined the Labour Party all would be well: we've been there before. But there just might be something going on in the belly of this bureaucratic beast that is worth more than the usual disdainful shrug.

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS

Well within the sell-by date

From LAWRENCE GAMBONE, Ville Saint Laurent, Canada:

I normally enjoy reading Solidarity Journal, but I just have to respond to the interview with Cornelius Castoriadis which you ran in issue 17: it was not worth the space it took. Thirty years ago Castoriadis challenged the hegemonic pseudo-marxist ideologies and by doing so helped many to discover libertarian socialism. At that time, the weaknesses of his analysis did not matter; of greater importance was the rejection of authoritarian leftism. Today, however, is a different situation, many people are familiar with the libertarian view, and there has been much scholarly work on Marx and the early socialist movement. Now it is the problematic aspects of Castoriadis' thought which should be examined.

Perhaps it is best to begin with his statement that he was once a 'marxist'. In fact, he never was a follower of Marx's theory, but a leninist-trotskyist - an ideology composed of the positivist ideologies of Lasalle, Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky, having little to do with the marxism of Marx. Like so many ex-leninists, Castoriadis has never been able to overcome the experience - the straw Marx he batters down is a Marx created and conceived of by a leninist.

In the interview, he produces a new variety of that old chestnut, 'Marx-the-rigid-determinist' - something you don't expect to see given as a serious critique of Marx. Castoriadis finds this

contradiction in Marx's thought: if there are laws of social development, then people are simply functions of these laws and hence have no freedom to determine their lives; if on the other hand, workers have the freedom to make the revolution, the laws are therefore meaningless (and hence so is marxism). This weighty analysis might impress a naive first year university student, but anyone who has done any reading of Marx knows that he always thought in terms of tendencies and not absolute laws.

Marx's followers did misinterpret him, reading into the theory of historical materialism their own positivistic scientism. In the English-speaking world, problems of translation furthered these misunderstandings - bestimmen (to limit or condition), the word used by Marx, was translated as determine! The mythical nature of Marx's 'absoluteness' is well known among scholars of marxism. Further, in his use of formal logic to discredit Marx, Castoriadis says more about himself than the author of Capital. He reduces everything to an absolute either-or: either laws or no laws; either rigid determinism or complete indeterminacy; by using such patriarchal logic Castoriadis is the absolutist!

The claim is also made that Marx was never in favour of self-management, and an attempt is made to portray him as a bureaucratic state-capitalist. This 'critique' shows an appalling ignorance of Marx's theory. Marx's central critique of capitalism is contained within his concept of 'alienation-reification-commodity fetishism', the essence of which is that the workers are treated as things or objects when in fact they are conscious human beings or subjects. For Marx, capitalism reverses the subject-object relationship and the essence of socialism is therefore

the re-establishment of workers' subjectivity. Furthermore, Marx criticises the crude socialisms of his day for failure to recognise this necessity, and whenever he defined socialism, the phrase was 'co-operative production or the free association of the producers'.

The very essence of Marx's theory makes it impossible for him to have favoured bureaucratic management or state capitalism. Again, as with the case of 'Marx-the-determinist', this is not uncommon knowledge. Furthermore, organisations which were close to the spirit of the marxism of Marx, such as the Socialist Labour Party, the IWW, the Socialist Party of Canada, One Big Union, the SPGB, and the Council Communists, are or were in favour of the democratic management of industry by the workers themselves. Neither Castoriadis nor traditional anarchism has a monopoly of the concept of self-management.

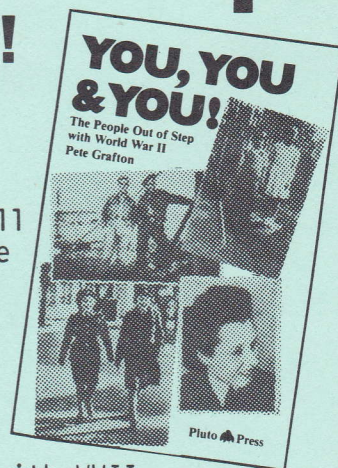
Marx has his limitations, to be sure, but these are the limitations of his era, such as in confronting sexism, ecological or psychological matters. In the essential elements of his theory, in particular the critique of bourgeois political economy, Marx has not been surpassed.

The total rejection of Marx's theory, which is Castoriadis' central concern, would not only be incorrect from a theoretical standpoint, but would also be a disaster for libertarian socialism. The 1960s should have taught us that lesson by now, but he seems to have totally ignored it. Back then, everyone from right to left, even the Situationists, believed that capital had solved its economic contradictions and that cyclical crises were things of the past. Then it seemed that the contradictions of the system could be reduced to a struggle between those who controlled production and those who did not, and the catch-phrase upon everyone's lips was that 'Marx was out of date'. Only a tiny

Special free book offer to all new subscribers!

Don't let yourself miss the next issue of Solidarity Journal.

Subscribe now and we will send you completely free with your first issue a copy of You, You and You!, Pete Grafton's remarkable account of the human underside of Britain's war effort, the people out of step with WWII.



Please fill out this form, ticking appropriate boxes and send (making your cheque payable to 'Solidarity') to SUBSCRIPTIONS, SOLIDARITY, c/o 123 LATHOM ROAD, LONDON E6, UNITED KINGDOM.

- ☐ Please send me Solidarity Journal and Solidarity publications as they are published, to a total value of £6 (including postage).
- ☐ Please send me Solidarity Journal and Solidarity publications as they are published, to a total value of £12 (including postage).
- ☐ I am filthy rich, and having nothing better to do with my money am enclosing an extra £10 towards your efforts.
- ☐ Please send me my free copy of You, You and You!

Name: _____

Address: _____

Zip / Post code: _____

Remember: Subscriptions are the capital of the anti-capitalist press. We need your subscription to survive.



VERBATIM

"Alan Bleasdale's 'The Monocled Mutineer' made a star of Paul McGann and outraged the old brigade who refused to believe its historical accuracy".

'TIME OUT'

"What are the proper limits of the state? What properly belongs to the public sphere and what to the private? Now for the first time... since socialism vanquished anarchism as the voice of radical progress, the questions are being asked again".

SARAH BENTON

New Statesman and Society
Political Editor

"Chomsky and Gore Vidal are the only dissident writers who have consistently analysed American foreign policy rightly as far as I'm concerned".

JOHN PILGER

"We have overcome, on the whole, two mistaken ideas of Stalin, his trust in the absolute power of violence, and the seductive idea that we could take one giant leap into communism. But still inviolable remains Stalin's major idea, that of state socialism, the theory that the state plays a decisive role in building socialism. Not the working class, and its party, but the state - even though it produces nothing of its own, no shoes, no machinery".

FYODOR BURLATSKY

Gorbachev political aide

majority of genuine marxists (such as Paul Mattick) struggled against this tide of optimism. When the crisis returned with a vengeance in the early seventies, the left itself went into political crisis. Truly, it is not Marx who is destined for history's dustbin, but Castoriadis and his ilk!

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS

Form and tempo

From TOM COWAN, London:

As a hardened marxist-leninist I cannot agree with Cornelius Castoriadis (Solidarity Journal 17). His views on Marx I find very superficial. His proposition that Marx was essentially incorrect, that "Either history is really governed by laws, and in that case a truly human activity is impossible... or human beings really make their own history... ", used to disprove Marx's basic theory, is an argument as old as the hills.

Human beings are the means of expressing the laws of society's development, and within the parameters of these laws of historical development, the human race can impede, accelerate and even for a time reverse them. In this respect the form and tempo of history are determined essentially through human forces. Consider: if humans, through nuclear war, utterly destroyed the human race, society ceases to exist and 'society' is no longer subject to historical laws. The agency for its application, human beings, organised into and constituting society, or the system, is a precondition for the evolving of the laws. It is what is referred to dialectically as the unity of opposites - and can involve a long and intricate discussion.

All the best.