

## The USSR at the crossroads

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Since mid-November 1990 Mikhail Gorbachev has sponsored a creeping coup against his own policy of glasnost. Fragile and limited democratic rights have been conceded by the bureaucracy since 1985 and extended de facto by the struggles of the new workers' movement and the revolt of the nationalities. They are all under attack.

The advocates of a renewed bureaucratic dictatorship are on the offensive. Rumours abound that at the Politburo of 16 November 1990 the army, the KGB and the party conservatives gave Gorbachev an ultimatum: take action against the 'forces of disintegration' or get out. His critics were not limited to the Politburo.

The conservative forces were headed by the 500 strong Soyuz group in the Congress of Peoples' Deputies, led by Colonel Viktor Alksnis and the Russian Communist Party leader Ivan Polozkov. They publicly attacked the economic chaos, the rampant criminality and the national antagonisms which they claimed were threatening the Soviet Union with destruction. They openly threatened to take action to 'save the Union' if Gorbachev would not act.

Gorbachev did act, however. In essence he gave in to their demands, executing an almost complete factional re-alignment. At the December 1990 Congress of People's Deputies he demanded and got a massive increase in his powers as President to rule by decree. In December the bonapartist clique that surrounds him underwent a radical change of personnel. Out went the architects of perestroika and glasnost: Yakovlev, Petrakov, Medvedev, Shevardnadze. In came representatives of bureaucratic conservatism: Yazov, Kryuchkov, Pugo, Yanayev and Gorbachev's new Prime Minister, Pavlov.

Gorbachev's closest allies are now the KGB, the army high command, the MVD (Interior Ministry), the CPSU bureaucracy and the industrial managers. Gorbachev has allied himself with the main forces of old-style bureaucratic rule and repression. Their view of the situation facing the ruling caste was crisply expressed by Kryuchkov in his television address in early December: 'Today the situation is formulated like this: should our great power exist or should it not? KGB officers have made their choice?'

Kryuchkov also uttered dark threats about foreign attempts to destabilise the USSR. Combined with Shevardnadze's resignation speech these warnings set the alarm bells ringing in Washington and the major West European capitals. But on the issue of the 'new world order' Gorbachev hastened to reassure the imperialists that there would be no change in foreign policy, especially as it affected the Gulf War. Washington and Bonn need to keep Gorbachev in the Kremlin, at least until the war and the post-war settlement are out of the way.

And Gorbachev needs their continued support in order to bolster his bonapartist position against his present conservative die-hard allies, many of whom would like to remove him and return as much as is possible to a pre-1985 situation in the realms of both foreign and domestic policy.

In short Gorbachev seeks to restrict his turn to domestic law and order questions and a limited re-centralisation of economic affairs. He intends his bloc with the conservatives to be of limited scope and duration. The question is, who is using whom? This will be decided over the coming months in the unfolding struggles with the rebellious nationalities and the workers' movements.

The roots of the present political crisis lie in three areas:

- a) the imminent disintegration of the Union-wide planned economy;
- b) the moves to unilateral secession of the Baltic, Georgian and other republics;
- c) the ousting from power and threatened collapse of the All-Union Communist Party.

### **Irreconcilable contradictions in the economy**

In December 1990 Gorbachev conceded the need to 'allow a breathing space' in his reform programme. He did this without abandoning his declared commitment to the plans for a turn to a 'socialist' market economy. He has obliged the enterprises to register their agreements with Gosplan (the Soviet planning ministry) and has unleashed the KGB to attack corruption, economic sabotage and the so-called mafia. He has put the KGB in charge of policing food distribution. They will almost certainly strike at the informal and illegal market economy that has mushroomed in the last few years.

The reasons behind Gorbachev's about face lie in the failure to draw up an operable plan for marketisation, or rather the failure to mobilise sufficient support within both the bureaucracy and the new social layers mobilised by glasnost for any one plan.

In July 1990 Gorbachev appeared to decide on a radical plan of transition. He reached agreement with Yeltsin and charged Shatalin to draw up what became the 500 Day Plan. But by September Gorbachev had yielded to pressure within the bureaucracy in general, and from Gosplan in particular. Whilst he expressed a personal preference for the Shatalin plan as against that of Ryzhkov, he objected to the former's tendency to weaken the central power of the Union.

After some hesitation he called in Aganbegyan to draw up a new Presidential Programme. However, this programme too has been shelved. Instead the role of Gosplan has been re-asserted, as has the role of the managers of the large enterprises. The result has been the resignation of all the leading 'market economists' from Gorbachev's team of advisers.

The background to this retreat is the acute economic crisis and the near disintegration of the Union-wide Soviet economy. This crisis hits every Soviet worker hard. At the present time most important consumer goods are regularly unavailable in the state shops. Ever-lengthening waiting times for consumer goods combined with large nominal increases in wages, have massively increased the involuntary savings of Soviet workers over the last three years. Savings are now reckoned to stand at around 500 billion roubles. In order to claw these funds back into the state coffers the regime decided, by presidential decree, to abolish the old large denomination notes and limit savings withdrawals. This policy was carried out under the guise of attacking speculators but in fact particularly hit the lowest paid and retired workers. Recent western estimates suggest that the real living standards in the Soviet Union are well below those of Hungary and even Bulgaria. On 17 October 1990 Izvestia published statistics showing that nearly 79 million Soviet citizens lived below the minimum subsistence level.

The collapse of the Soviet economy signifies the failure of the old system of bureaucratic command planning and of the marketising reforms of perestroika. The fall in oil prices in the mid-1980s made the

rotten basis of the Soviet command economy ever more visible. Economic restructuring was not simply a policy option for the bureaucracy, it was an absolute necessity. Something fundamental had to be done. Perestroika represented a consensus amongst the bureaucracy's chief ideologues that the old system could no longer be maintained intact.

As a caste founded on a political counter-revolution against the proletariat, the bureaucracy could only envisage reform as involving yet further concessions to capitalism. As in all their previous attempts at reform, the ruling layers turned to the introduction of market mechanisms. But perestroika did not represent a unanimous agreement over the pace and tempo of marketisation. It involved agreement only over the desired goal of a marketisation process. Thus although perestroika was meant to overcome Stalinist stagnation, it has in fact contributed to intensifying the economic crisis for at least the last two years.

The old mechanisms that held the Soviet economy together, even if they did not stimulate it, have either been dismantled or are on the verge of collapse. In the sphere of distribution recent years have seen an accelerating process of dislocation. The individual production units, ordered to become self-accounting, were obliged to fend for themselves, to become independent of the central planning agencies. But of course no capitalist market institutions existed to replace the directives of the ministries and of Gosplan. Often only crude barter deals between enterprises kept production going. This chaos strengthened the hand of speculators both within and outside the official bureaucracy. Products disappeared from state shops only to reappear on the 'grey' or 'black' markets at hyper-inflationary prices. Regions and republics withdrew from the all-Union distributive system in favour of providing for themselves. For the mass of Soviet workers this has meant ever greater shortages, longer queues and higher prices. Plans to cut price subsidies in 1991 can only make this situation worse for the Soviet masses.

By all accounts output is declining sharply. The OECD/IMF/World Bank joint report forecasts a drop of around 5% for 1991, while the Economist estimates that such a fall occurred in 1990 and that it could well double to 10% in 1991. Investment has slumped even more dramatically. Since 1988 the budget deficit has declined slightly but is still causing serious alarm in the central bureaucracy. At the same time the indebtedness of state enterprises has grown enormously due to declining productivity (itself a result of lower investment) combined with rising wages and relatively stable official prices. The increasing enterprise debts are, ultimately, also an increase in state debt, even if they lie outside the budget itself. Even a bumper harvest in 1990 was so disrupted by bureaucratic mismanagement and the underdevelopment of the storage and transport infrastructure that the USSR had to use its scarce hard currency resources to purchase grain on the world market. The USSR even had to appeal for international economic aid from the USA and the EC.

Although theoretically still sovereign the planning agencies are less and less able to carry out their tasks. Formal enterprise autonomy, however, is not the main cause of this. 90% of production is covered by ministerial orders which can override autonomy. Rather, it is regional dislocation and the black market which are undermining the planning authorities. The republics are increasingly refusing to collaborate with the central planning mechanisms. This is not only the case in the republics of the Baltic region and the Caucasus which have declared independence. The Russian Republic threatened to cut its contribution to the central state budget by over 80%.

The compromise budget for 1991 represents the recognition by a majority of republics that they are faced with economic collapse if planned trading links are not maintained or restored. Without real sovereignty and a legal market, bi-lateral trading links simply will not work.

Enterprises throughout the Union will be cut off from both their suppliers and their markets. In addition the hoped-for assistance from the west—the USA, the EC, the Scandinavian countries—has failed to materialise.

to any worthwhile degree. The republican and regional administrations are likely to transform the implementation of the 1991 plan and budget into a new arena of struggle with the centre and with each other.

In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky identified the origin of the bureaucracy's bonapartist dictatorship in the 'necessity' of policing the queue for scarce resources. Now the disorderly queue consists of the rival nationalities and regions struggling over investment. Once more the Great Russian bureaucrat comes forward as the policeman to restore order—but at a heavy price.

### **The national question and the break up of the USSR**

Gorbachev's glasnost initially served to mobilise pro-perestroika popular fronts in the majority of Republics. Gorbachev looked to the non-Russian peoples that make up nearly half the USSR's population as enthusiastic supporters of radical change. And so at first they were. Weak nationalist groups emerged from clandestinity and began to mobilise mass forces against the old guard. Newly installed Gorbachevite bureaucrats were obliged to form popular fronts in alliance with the nationalists and to compete with them in nationalist demagogy. But as perestroika has delivered fewer and fewer results, so these movements have increasingly fallen into the hands of openly pro-capitalist separatists.

In Georgia and in the Baltics the working class has powerful illusions that its needs can be met by going along with the project of independent capitalist statehood. The nationalists claim that such a development will bring prosperity to these small but relatively developed sections of the USSR. Nevertheless, the imperialists have already indicated that this is a utopia and that they cannot promise large scale investment. The future of these 'independent' countries, like that of Poland, would include massive cuts in workers' wages, the dissolution of the social security system, mass unemployment and closures, and the prostration of these states before imperialism both economically and politically. Despite the fact that the restoration of capitalism would represent a historic defeat for the proletariat of these countries, as long as the Kremlin maintains its brutal refusal of independence and enforces this by bloody repression, the nationalists will retain their influence over the working classes.

1990 saw the mass nationalist movements oust the Communist Parties from any influence or leadership in a number of republics. The central government's refusal to grant free and unhindered self-determination has enormously inflamed nationalism in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldavia, the Western Ukraine and in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

After the spring 1990 elections to the republican parliaments the new nationalist governments began either to declare outright independence, or the superiority of republican to Soviet law, the creation of republican tariff barriers and customs posts and the project of creating national militias or armies. In the forefront of these moves have been Lithuania and Georgia.

Feeding into this eruption of nationalism has been the inter-ethnic conflict in the republics. The Armenian-Azeri conflict over Karabakh exploded in the anti-Armenian pogroms of Sumgait and Baku and the forced exodus of hundreds of thousands of Azeris. Soviet army intervention ended in hundreds of deaths at the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990. In Moldavia the Gagauz and Russian minorities attempted to set up their own republics. In Georgia the Abkhazian, South Ossetian and Azeri minorities have likewise resisted being 'imprisoned' in an independent Georgia. In Uzbekistan anti-Meshketian riots broke out in 1990. As Lithuania moved to a unilateral declaration of independence the Russian and Polish minorities protested through strike action.

It is certain that the conservative bureaucratic forces inflamed and manipulated these events to discredit

and divide the forces fighting for democratic freedoms for the nationalities. But it is also true that leaders like Vytautas Landsbergis (Lithuania) and Zviad Gamsakhurdia (Georgia) are blinkered national chauvinists who will lead their countries' workers and peasants to disaster. In the Ukraine the Rukh has also moved sharply to the right, yielding to the poisonous influence of the Ukrainian Autocephalous and Catholic Churches. The stress on language restoration and the pro-Tsarist counter-revolutionary traditions of the civil war have resulted in a cold split between the western and eastern Ukrainian wings of the Rukh.

Great Russian nationalism, masquerading as 'internationalism' and Soviet patriotism, is a major force for reaction in the USSR today. But the responsive small nation chauvinism which it has engendered in the republics divides not only the working class but also the nationalities themselves. The popular and national fronts like Sajudis and the Georgian National Forum are indeed socially counter-revolutionary forces that must be combated by the class conscious proletariat. This is not a hopeless task, despite their present strength. The cross-class composition of these fronts produces internal contradictions that can and will lead to splits and the building of different political parties. This is evidenced by the formation of independent labour organisations within the national republics and the struggle of Lithuanian workers against price increases proposed by nationalist leaders.

The nationalities'especially in the Baltics and in Georgia's stand in the path of Gorbachev's presidential coup. The coup claimed its first victims in January 1991 in Vilnius and Riga, but workers and nationalists in the Baltic republics have demonstrated their continued determination to resist. The referendums called in there, in opposition to Gorbachev's imposed referendum, reveal the level of support for independence. In Lithuania this was not just amongst ethnic Lithuanians but also amongst large sections of Russian and Polish workers. Gorbachev's attempt to use an all-Union referendum to forcibly retain pro-independence republics within the USSR will not put an end to the struggles, but it is likely to consolidate the nationalities and Russian populists such as Yeltsin in their opposition to the regime.

### **The Soviet bureaucracy's lack of perspectives**

The bureaucracy is experiencing a deep crisis of political direction caused by the combined crises of the economy and the nationalities. Over the summer and early autumn of 1990 Gorbachev and the two major factions of the bureaucracy'the radicals and the conservatives'debated how to steer the USSR towards a market economy. In August and September Gorbachev appeared about to decide on forming an alliance with Boris Yeltsin and adopting something close to the radical 500 day plan drawn up by Shatalin.

This envisaged a drastic price reform which would devalue the massive private rouble savings accumulated in the economy, cut credit to unprofitable enterprises, introduce hard currency trade and investment in the USSR and allow mass unemployment as a result of closures and privatisation. Such a plan would have meant a qualitative increase in the pace of capitalist restoration. The adoption of such a plan would have amounted to a decisive break: from 'restructuring' the centralised planned economy by market reforms to dismantling it altogether.

Yeltsin, who has broken with the conservative CPSU apparatus in order to concentrate on building a power base in the Russian Federation, was and is whole-heartedly in favour of such a programme. His base in society, in the bureaucracy and in the army, has the goal of a capitalist Russia linked by trading and defence treaties to sovereign republics. Since his election as President of the RSFSR he has sought to pull Gorbachev'sometimes by proposals of a coalition government, sometimes by threats to undermine and destroy his power'towards the radical market option. Gorbachev, as the bonapartist arbiter of the bureaucracy, has repeatedly avoided a final decision, seeking to play off the radicals against the conservatives.

## The crisis and the conservatives

The economic crisis which surfaced at the end of 1990 narrowed the ground for this balancing act to a pinpoint. The economic crisis strengthened the conservative forces who had been in retreat for at least two years. These forces are based on the vested interests around Gosplan, the central ministries and what Ryzhkov called the Soviet military industrial complex.

They defend and always have defended the key elements of the old bureaucratic system. There are millions of bureaucrats who know of no other way of operating. Any radical marketisation threatens their jobs. The July Congress of the CPSU, which saw the departure of the radical marketeers around Boris Yeltsin, Anatoly Sobchak and Gavril Popov, and a mass exodus of 2.3 million rank and file party members, conversely strengthened the hold of the conservatives on the remaining apparatus.

Despite the fact that the radicals controlled many city and regional soviets, including those of Moscow and Leningrad, this did not give them real power. The foundation of an all-Russian Communist Party provided a new bastion for the conservatives. They still controlled the vital levers of the bureaucratic military machine, which they could use to obstruct and discredit the radicals who had been elected to improve the dire conditions of the masses on the basis of free market promises. The radicals had no effective alternative to break the stranglehold and the sabotage of the conservatives. Their only force, the mobilised masses, grew increasingly disillusioned and apathetic. That is why the November sessions of the Supreme Soviet saw a major revival of the hitherto silenced voices of Soviet bureaucratic conservatism.

The Soyuz group proved to be extremely influential despite its minority position in the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of Deputies. Major concessions had already been made to them in the two months before the December Congress—the appointment of a conservative as head of state television and radio and the actions taken in defence of army conscription in Latvia. In early December came the replacement of the pro-glasnost Interior Minister, Vadim Bakatin, by the KGB apparatchik Boris Pugo, the appointment of the ultra-conservative army general Gromov as Deputy Interior Minister and the speeches of KGB chief Kryuchkov against the independence movements in the republics. The whole offensive of the bureaucratic conservatives was aimed at forcing Gorbachev to take, or at least support, decisive action against the separatists all over the USSR. Gorbachev was thus obliged to decide in favour of the conservatives in the final analysis.

Gorbachev's turn to the conservatives to bolster and save his all-Union bonapartism threatens shipwreck for the whole marketising project. He has increasingly become a prisoner of the most conservative elements within the bureaucracy. The military was dismayed at the consequences of the evacuation of Eastern Europe. The popular resistance to the military parades in Kiev and Minsk on 7 November showed that anti-centralist anti-militarism had already spread far beyond the Baltics. The KGB became increasingly alarmed at the breakdown of Soviet security in the republics. From mid-autumn 1990 they staged a serious fightback. Gorbachev and the conservatives needed one another again, but this time the deal was done on the conservatives' terms. The explicit basis of the conservatives' coalition with Gorbachev was obviously the law, order and unity question, not that of the plan or market, but the two are necessarily linked. As the repressive apparatus in the bureaucracy becomes strengthened, the market reforms, privatisations and similar ideas—endorsed by Gorbachev only a few months ago—will be dramatically slowed down.

One consequence of this fightback by bureaucratic conservatism was the increase in Gorbachev's formal powers in December. The pendulum of his bonapartism swung towards centralist dictatorship. This also showed quite how spineless the liberals in the talking shop Congress of Deputies really were. The majority of them supported Gorbachev's new powers: they could put forward no alternative. They hoped to rescue at least some liberal and pro-market ideas as long as the dictatorship was in Gorbachev's hands. In their

home towns Popov and Sobchak had already introduced local rationing systems. Now, together with the Soyuz, these erstwhile 'democrats' voted for draconian powers for President Gorbachev.

Despite the new turn the bureaucracy remains fragmented. This is illustrated by the extremely contradictory statements issued by Yazov, Pugo and Gorbachev over responsibility for the crackdown in the Baltic states. However, there can be little doubt that the fragmentation is giving more and more authority to local hardliners in the military and security forces and has already paved the way for a re-assertion of power by the hardliners in the all-Union apparatus.

Gorbachev still expresses his desire to preserve the market-oriented reforms that his former advisers advocated. But at the same time he wants to restore and preserve bureaucratic power in a unified Soviet state. Many of his advisers had always been authoritarians, not interested in glasnost or democratisation so much as seeking the power to impose perestroika. For them perestroika means the privatisation of the USSR's resources and the marketisation of its economy whilst preserving their own political power and economic privileges. This programme is a political expression of significant sections of the nomenklatura which want to transform themselves into capitalists or managers for capitalists.

The most consistently restorationist forces, represented by Yeltsin, face terrific obstacles. Where will the capital to effect this restoration come from? The west will not provide it. Most of the 2,800 joint ventures are still only shop windows for western exporters, or fronts for Soviet co-operatives to escape taxes or launder black market profits. Many exist only on paper. The prospects for major industrial investment by imperialist capital in the midst of recession and war are grim.

Can the bureaucracy create out of itself a substantial layer of capitalists? Those sections of the nomenklatura most linked with the mafia and the speculators may have accumulated a large amount of hard currency but they are deeply unpopular and vulnerable to their rivals. The co-operatives and the petty entrepreneurs which now employ around five million workers and account for up to 7% of GNP face the same kind of problems. None of these strata have the resources to buy up any more than the tiny portion of state industry that seems profitable. Unlike their Chinese counterparts the Soviet bureaucrats have failed to lure the Soviet agricultural workers into 'enriching themselves'.

An important sector of the bureaucracy co-operates more or less openly with the speculators and the stratum of corrupt officials, managers and gangster elements collectively referred to as the 'mafia'. This sector includes conservatives who collaborate with the mafia to improve their own incomes and/or to discredit the marketeers, as well as certain 'democrats'. In other regions, bureaucratic collaboration with the mafia has included stirring up nationalist and chauvinist sentiments as, for example, in the Uzbek pogroms against the Meshketians. In the bigger Russian cities such as Moscow and Leningrad, with their 'democratic' majorities the liberals have worked with speculators and criminals in, for example, the privatisation of communal facilities. For some of the ultra-liberal economists, who want to legitimise the market as soon as possible, these are precisely the 'suppressed capitalists' who could transform the Soviet economy. But all the marketising plans penned by Aganbegyan, Abalkin and Shatalin have been blocked by the immovable object, the vast bulk of the parasitic bureaucracy.

Although the radical marketisers are excluded from the inner bonapartist clique around Gorbachev, they still have positions of mass influence. Yeltsin and company were able to mobilise mass demonstrations in Moscow and other cities against the clampdown in Lithuania. Middle ranking officers and senior commanders in the army have expressed support for Yeltsin. He remains the most well known and popular alternative figure to Gorbachev. Gorbachev's plebiscite on preserving the USSR and accepting the new Federation proposals will be a major trial of strength. Yeltsin's own referendum for a popularly elected Russian and all-Union Federation is aimed at mobilising mass support and giving himself a 'democratic

mandate? to defy Gorbachev. Together with the Baltics, the western borderland republics and the Caucasus, the Russian Federation still presents a major obstacle to the conservatives.

The final outcome will rest upon the attitude of the masses in general and the soldiers in particular. The working class has no interest in the triumph of either side in this debate between bureaucrats. Its historic and immediate interests lie in the preservation and extension of democratic freedoms and the nationalised and planned property relations. Independent class forces will be obliged to defend these liberties alongside Yeltsin and company, whilst not for one minute supporting the Yeltsinites? seizure of power. On the other hand independent class forces are obliged to defend the statified economy alongside the conservatives whilst not for one minute abandoning the objective of overthrowing them.

### **The crisis of proletarian leadership**

The years of glasnost have seen a flowering of independent working class trade union and political organisations. During the 1989 miners? strike strike committees were created in all the mining regions?an enormous step forward for the Soviet workers? movement. In addition the miners united across national lines. This international solidarity was an important counter-weight faced with the prevailing flood of nationalism. The strike ended with the conceding of most of the miners? demands and the strike committees were charged with overseeing their fulfilment. Since this did not occur further strike action was launched in the autumn of 1989 and the following summer. But by the middle of 1990 the miners? fighting power and unity had been already undermined, at least temporarily, by nationalism, regionalism and a growing demoralisation.

The strike committees became the basis for the foundation of a general workers? organisation?the Confederation of Labour?in May 1990. But the decline of the miners? strike committees and the lack of mass independent unions amongst other powerful sectors of workers facilitated the formation of the federation along bureaucratic lines.

The founding congress of the Confederation of Labour demonstrated the variety of forces at work in the new unions. It is influenced by the National Labour Union (NTS), a far right organisation which had links with fascism in the 1930s and 1940s and which had worked within the illegal underground union grouping SMOT in the early 1980s. The NTS describes itself as a Christian-social, Russian orthodox organisation and claims it is opposed to outright marketisation, to the ?free market mafia? and to domination of Russia?s economy by foreign imperialist multinationals. Its real objective is a corporatist ?solidarist? Great Russian imperialism. It has a significant base amongst the Vorkuta miners.

The majority of miners at the congress were, however, influenced by pro-marketeers. They were influenced in particular by the liberals of the Inter-Regional Group in the Congress of People?s Deputies, with their demagogic promises that the market means control by the workers of their factories and their products. The extremely elastic term ?self-management? was used to embroil the new leadership in schemes for free enterprise zones and other reactionary utopias. However, once spelled out in black and white, the actual marketisation plans of Shatalin and company, with their threats of millions of redundancies and raging inflation, have tended to undermine support for the liberals.

There is a confused spectrum on the left of the Confederation which opposes mass unemployment, ?free prices?, inflation and the break up of social guarantees and provision. Amongst this stratum the ?United Front of Toilers?, a conservative-bureaucratic and Russian chauvinist organisation, has gained influence. Elements in SOTSPROF also have some influence.

Within this growing layer of workers determined to resist unemployment, declining real wages, and the lack



of the necessities of life, the influence of the new generation of hardline conservatives could grow rapidly. If this does happen then it will spell doom for an independent democratic trade union and labour movement. The conservatives' leftism, their talk of defending socialism and fighting capitalism, is entirely bogus. They want to use the masses, just as the liberals did, as a blind instrument for the preservation of their privileges and power.

### **A crisis of leadership**

The Confederation of Labour is crippled by an acute crisis of leadership. It has so far failed to mobilise the workers against the projected attacks of the liberals (Shatalin's 500 Day Plan), nor has it mobilised against the new wave of bureaucratic repression since December 1990.\*

Perhaps reflecting an impatience and disillusion with the Confederation, the activists in the remaining strike committees launched an independent national miners' union in October 1990. But regionalism had already begun to undermine the potential strength of a united organisation. Donbass miners initially looked for a Ukrainian solution to defend their pits, but they have now turned again to Moscow. The leaders of the Kuzbass spoke in terms of the economic independence and sovereignty of their mining region.

Deputies to the Russian Parliament from mining areas had already voted in support of the Shatalin plan and the old official union was attempting to regain some influence by offering use of its facilities to the independent miners' representatives. Thus, if the new union manages to function at all, it could be seriously weakened and fragmented from the very outset.

In the summer of 1990 the new enterprise laws, which increased management's powers, effectively reduced the powers of the Work-Collective Councils (WCCs). In 1987 Gorbachev gave the WCCs powers to supervise and veto certain management proposals as a counter-weight to conservative forces working against his reforms. Although the WCCs had been bureaucratically created and led, their protests did lead to increased rank and file activity. The outcome was a national meeting in Moscow in December and, under the influence of the Marxist Platform of the CPSU, the adoption of a reformist self-management position which already had considerable resonance among sections of workers.

Revolutionaries must support the development of all expressions of class independence at factory level. Democratically-elected factory committees with recallable delegates would be a powerful weapon against both capitalist restoration and bureaucratic repression. But militants must also be won to the need for a political revolution to overthrow the ruling bureaucracy. Such factory committees must combat syndicalist notions, which strive for independent factories linked by an idealised market without capitalists. An authentic workers' state will have to go beyond self-management and establish democratic centralised planning.

It is possible that some of the local independent trade unions, elements from the WCCs, the miners and perhaps some of the Baltic trade unions could come together under the impact of the approaching economic attacks. The creation of basic trade union organisations is one of the main tasks of the Soviet working class at the present time.

Revolutionaries must intervene in this work, arguing that the building of trade unions based on democratic factory committees is not primarily an organisational task but a political one. The failure of the many new unions and groups within the working class to overcome the chronic crisis of leadership amongst those fighting the bureaucratic centre has fundamentally been a failure to break from the political programmes of a spectrum of anti-working class tendencies ranging from Stalinists to fascists and including liberals and nationalists. In addition the AFL-CIO and other counter-revolutionary international organisations, including

the current leadership of Solidarnosc, are strengthening their influence.

### **Forces independent of the bureaucracy**

The political forces independent of the bureaucracy which are active within the working class and which, in words at least, identify with its immediate and historic interests, are small and in disarray.

The Confederation of Anarcho-syndicalists (KAS) has a sizeable constituency amongst the youth and produces a weekly labour bulletin. Their fierce rejection of Bolshevism in favour of Makhno, Bakunin and Lavrov, puts them firmly in the populist tradition, opposed to Marxism. They display the characteristic political idiocies of anarchism. Thus they were unable to come out for or against the freedom to form political parties! Clearly they cannot even recognise the crisis of leadership, let alone resolve it. Their lack of any clear class principles is reflected in their taking money for their publications from US government agencies and broadcasting regularly on the Voice of America radio station, seeing this only as ripping off the gullible Americans.

The Social Democratic Party claims some hundreds of members in 78 towns. It denounces Bolshevism and even 'socialism', proclaiming the need to restore and defend private property whilst 'using it for the people'. It claims to base itself on German Social Democracy, though its opponents, such as Boris Kagarlitsky of the Socialist Party, assert that it is not a Social Democratic party at all. Certainly it has little significant base in the working class although it has such ambitions and it did intervene in the Confederation of Labour.

The Socialist Party, founded in June 1990, claims 300-500 members, mainly in Moscow and Leningrad but with some important supporters in strike committees in the Kuzbass. It is sharply opposed to privatisation of industry, sees some sort of role for planning, but places a heavy stress on self-management of the enterprises and a role for the market to co-ordinate them. It advocates parliamentarism as a political system.

Among its principle representatives are Boris Kagarlitsky and Nicolai Preobrazhensky. Kagarlitsky has praised the miners' strike committees as 'like the soviets of 1917' but the Socialist Party clearly has no programme for defending and democratising the planned property relations nor for a restoration of workers' council power. It is equivocal on the Bolshevik heritage, clearly striving to take a middle path between revolutionary and reformist positions. It has no revolutionary perspective for the overthrow of the bureaucracy. With its present leaders and on its present programme it will not resolve the crisis of leadership in the USSR.

The Marxist Platform (MP) of the CPSU, founded in January 1990, claims support in 102 cities in party clubs and base organisations. It has three CPSU Central Committee (CC) members. Alexander Buzgalin, a CC member and representative of its left wing, has outlined a programme of moving to socialism via democracy at enterprise level as well as multi-party parliaments and other measures. He calls this 'a real self-management democracy at all levels'. He claims the MP 'says yes to the market . . . under the control of mass democratic organisations'. The MP calls for the transformation of the CPSU into a parliamentary party competing with others and abandoning its 'leading role'.

Such a strategic orientation to the transformation of the ruling party must be opposed by revolutionaries, whose programme is predicated on the revolutionary overthrow of its rule, although this does not of course preclude tactical interventions aimed at the working class elements of the party's membership.

There are reports that other, more left wing groups such as 'Proletarian Dictatorship', which it is claimed

is orthodox Leninist?are also emerging. However, the burning task of the moment remains the construction of a revolutionary Trotskyist party committed to political revolution: the working class will be the subject of the crisis of the USSR unless it can resolve its own crisis of leadership.

### **For a proletarian political revolution**

For the oppressed nationalities, for the proletariat of the whole USSR, for the intelligentsia who fear the return of the unbridled thuggery of the KGB, there is only one answer: the living programme of Trotskyism. This programme starts now with the the fight to block the bureaucratic counter-revolution and hurl it back in disorder. Democratic rights, the right to strike, the right to demonstrate and to publish newspapers independent of the bureaucracy, must be defended tooth and nail. They are the vital air the proletariat must breathe in order to develop its class consciousness. Only thus can it learn who its true friends and enemies are. But such freedoms can never be developed and made permanent by reform of the bureaucratic state. Self-reform by the liberalising bureaucracy is a sham and a delusion. The fight to defend democracy for the working class must develop into the fight to open up a political revolution that can sweep the nomenklatura from power.

At the same time as fighting Stalinist oppression, the programme of Trotskyism fights to prevent the workers of the USSR having to suffer the agonies that capitalist restoration will bring?agonies which the workers of Eastern Europe are now facing or may face tomorrow. It is a programme for the defence of the remaining gains of the October Revolution?the nationalised means of production, the monopoly of foreign trade and planning?as against the misery, chaos and waste that is the reality of capitalism.

Trotskyism alone can really defend the USSR against internal counter-revolution and subjugation to US, European and Japanese imperialism. These world devourers have no interest whatsoever in creating a powerful prosperous (imperialist) rival to themselves. On the contrary they seek to divide the USSR into semi-colonies, spheres of influence and super-exploitation for their multinational corporations.

The programme of Trotskyism is a return to the liberating goal of the world revolution. It necessitates a once and for all break with the defeatist slogan of socialism in one country, which from Stalin to Gorbachev, has meant repeated betrayal for the international working class and the peoples oppressed and exploited by imperialism. To fight for this programme a new party must be formed. This party must be modelled on the genuine Bolshevism of 1903 to 1923, rooted amongst rank and file workers, with a living internal democracy based on a high political level of cadreisation. It must be a disciplined combat party able to make a revolution at the head of the millions of proletarians. In short it must be a Leninist and not a Stalinist party.

Once again the proletariat needs councils of workers? deputies, the revolutionary soviets of 1917. This time they will have to fight against bureaucratic oppressors and defend the working class against the onslaught on its wages and social rights that all steps towards the market will bring.

The proletariat must invest all power in the hands of councils of recallable delegates. Genuine councils of deputies have nothing in common with the sham soviets which exist in the USSR today. They would be elected bodies representing workers in the factories, the offices and on the farms; they would have delegates from rank and file soldiers in the armed forces, and from the workers? districts of the towns and cities. These forms of democratic organisation and power are the only way in which a workers? state can truly be in the hands of those it claims to represent.

Workers must pledge themselves to support the struggle of the oppressed nationalities. They must build a voluntary federation with a common democratic plan of production.

This would have nothing in common with the forced incorporation and subordination of nations which Gorbachev is seeking to maintain. For those republics in which the majority have clearly expressed their wish to leave the Union, workers throughout the USSR must support their exercise of that right, and fight for the establishment of independent workers' council states.

But it is only with a co-ordinated plan throughout the USSR that the entire population's material and cultural level can be raised.

Such a plan would set as its medium term goals the raising of the underdeveloped regions of the USSR to the level of the highest, the reversal of the ecological disasters that Stalinist bungling has created, and it would renew the advance to full equality for the sexes by liberating women from the burden of privatised domestic labour.

Here and now, faced with an impending economic catastrophe and bureaucratic counter-revolution, all socialists and class-conscious worker militants must fight in all the workers' organisations for an action programme. Its immediate measures should include:

? Stop the bureaucratic counter-revolution! Down with the bonapartist presidency and its organs of repression! Get the KGB and all interior ministry troops out of the Baltics and all other republics seeking separation or autonomy. Immediately disband the Black Berets and all the shock troops of the MVD and the army deployed against the nationalities and workers.

? Defend and extend democratic rights! the freedom of assembly, the press, radio and TV! Against the bureaucratic censors. For the freedom to demonstrate, the right to strike and to form political parties (except fascist parties).

? Defend the democratic rights of all nationalities! Defend the right of the republics to secede from the USSR. Resist the imposition of the new Union Treaty. Soviet troops out of all republics that have clearly and democratically decided to withdraw from the USSR. Fight for the voluntary transformation of the Soviet Union into a genuine federation of free and sovereign republics.

? Drive the 'ruling party' of the nomenklatura from power! Dissolve its fake 'soviets'! All power to a nationwide congress of genuine councils of workers', collective farmers' and soldiers' deputies.

? Smash the sabotage of the bureaucrats, the speculators and the 'mafia' with workers' and collective farmers' inspection and control of production and distribution! Down with the privileges of the bureaucracy. Open the bureaucrats' special shops to all. Resist all price increases and defend the state subsidies. Prices and distribution must be placed under the immediate control of committees of producers and consumers. End the hoarding of goods by bureaucrats and speculators. Where real, as opposed to bureaucratically created, shortages exist there should be emergency rationing based on the priority needs of the workers, the young, the old and the sick under the control of the workers and collective farmers themselves. Oppose all job losses and wage cuts, cut the hours not the jobs, open the books of the enterprises. Committees of workers must divide available work and determine wage levels in line with a cost of living index drawn up by workers and in particular women workers.

? For workers' inspection and control of Gosplan, the Economic Ministry and the State Statistical Commission! For an emergency plan drawn up by the workers themselves at all levels to solve the crisis of production and distribution It must oppose all attempts to solve the Soviet economic crisis by driving women back into the home, forcing them to work part time and closing childcare and other social facilities.

? Defend the property of the workers and peasants from bureaucratic, private capitalists and imperialist

monopolies! For social ownership of the means of production and a democratic workers' plan drawn up by a congress of workers' delegates.

? Elect genuine councils of recallable delegates in the enterprises and barracks as organs of struggle against bureaucratic counter-revolution and against the restoration of capitalism.

? For a restoration of revolutionary internationalism as the only foreign policy possible for a workers' state. For an immediate break with the imperialists' war in the Gulf. For military and other aid to the Iraqi people and all those struggling against imperialism.

? Arm the workers and fraternise with the soldiers! For the election of all officers by the rank and file soldiers. For a genuine mass workers' militia to counter bureaucratic repression, economic sabotage and those who incite pogroms.

The USSR stands at the crossroads. Two catastrophes face the Soviet proletariat. One is the restoration of a savage KGB dictatorship which may prolong the nomenklatura's death agony but cannot reverse it. The other would be the triumph of the restorationists, sending the USSR careering down the road being taken by Poland today.

The only way forward is proletarian political revolution towards workers' council power and an economy planned by the working class in the interests of all the toilers. But this road has to be fought for consciously by an organised vanguard—a Leninist-Trotskyist party that is also fighting to build a Leninist-Trotskyist International.

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