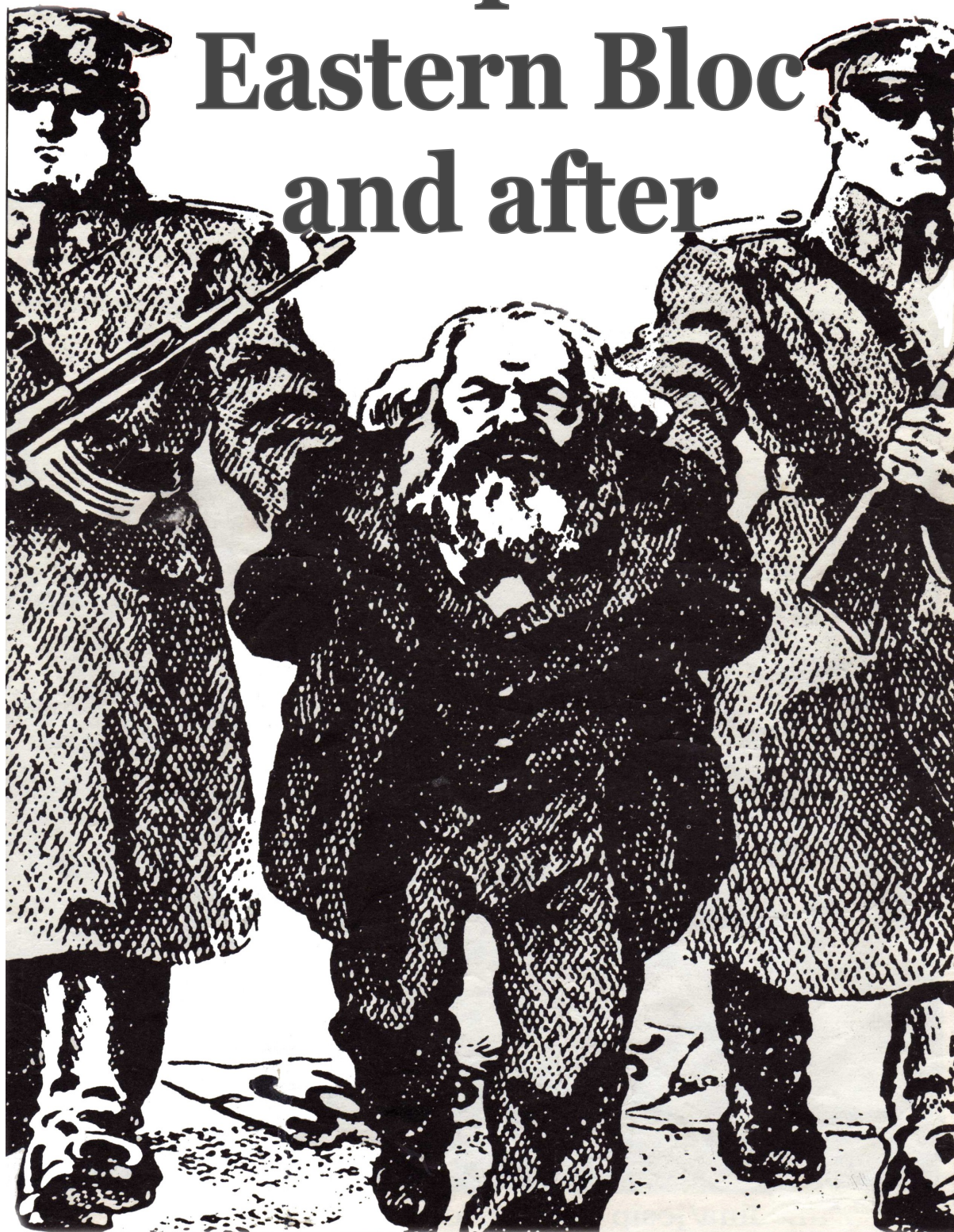


The collapse of the Eastern Bloc and after



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- ★ Stalinist state socialism in perspective
- ★ Transition and shock therapy
- ★ Oligarchs and neo-liberal capitalism
- ★ The meaning of communism today

A symposium of critical Marxists from Hungary, Russia, Ukraine, and Bosnia on the twentieth anniversary of the historic events of 1989-91 and the lessons for communists today.

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Tamás Krausz

A revolution which never was: from state socialism to multinational capitalism

Towards a historical interpretation of the change of regimes in Eastern Europe

Tamás Krausz is an editor of *Eszmélet* (Consciousness), a Marxist journal of social critique and culture published in Hungary. (<http://eszmelet.hu>.) It is named after the journal of the same name founded in 1956, which could count George Lukács among its first editors. A leading historian of the USSR Tamás is author with Péter Szigeti of *State Socialism: Interpretations, Debates, Conclusions* (2007.)

Towards a historical interpretation of the change of regimes in Eastern Europe

The title summarizes the main argument that I will develop in my presentation. Eastern European mainstream literature sacrificed the historical approach in order to shamelessly glorify the events of 1989-1991. In the theoretical, historical, economic and political literature on the history and consequences of the change of regimes, there is a fierce struggle among the different schools (labeled as discourses and narratives) for the “right” terminology. Nonetheless, the free competition of ideas seems to me illusory. The mainstream literature dismissed Marx’s theory of social formation as an unverifiable “grand narrative”, and excluded it from the set of competing paradigms. This exclusion can be closely linked with a previous development.

In the 1980s, Marxist theory was equated with the legitimating ideology of the state socialist system, which was widely criticized at the time by Eastern European dissident intellectuals. After the change of regimes this criticism developed into a new legitimizing ideology, which was used to justify the rule of the new elite. The real aim of the attempts to discredit Marxist theory in general in Eastern Europe was to divert attention from the crucial issue of the transformation of property relations. The distribution of state property, which in the old times was called the property of the people, was inseparable from the issue of power relations. Therefore, the issue of the distribution of state property had a decisive role in the formation of the new nation states as well.

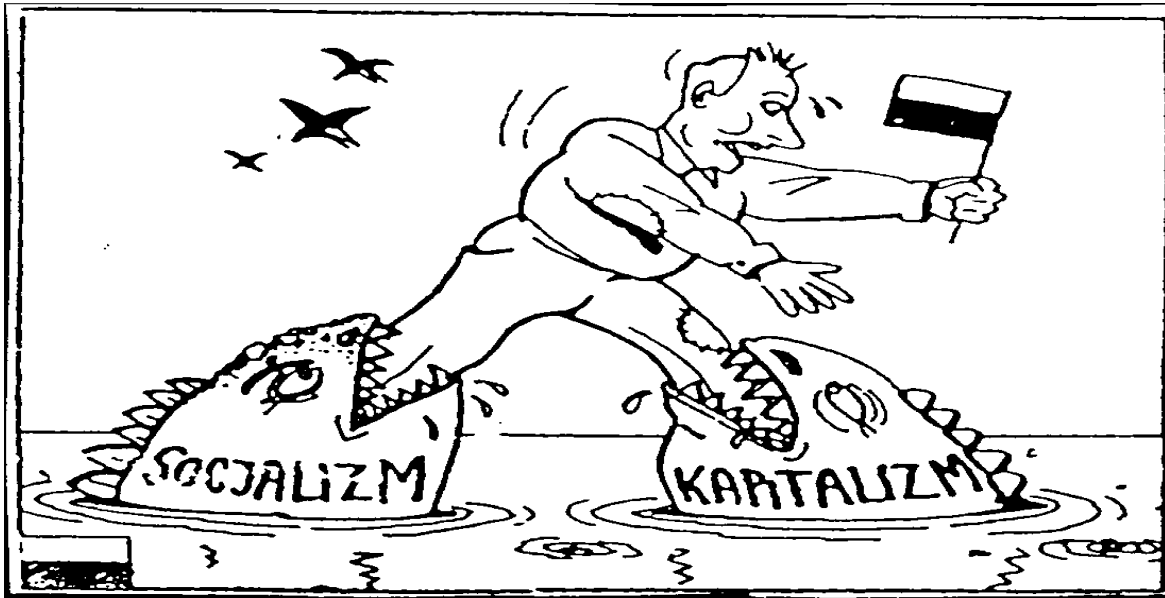
In line with the ideological considerations that I outlined above, the mainstream approach sought to explain the change of regimes in terms of simple categories of dichotomy such as democracy versus dictatorship, and market economy versus state economy. I can mention here a third thesis, which shows strong



resemblance with this manicheistic way of thinking: namely that in reality the system has not changed. We can only speak of the change of elite. In my view, the historical approach and the social formation theory can offer a better explanation for the change of regimes than the mainstream narratives that dominate the present Eastern European political and intellectual sphere. If we really want to understand the transition from state socialism to multinational capitalism, we need to take a long durée approach on the history of the change of regimes.

1. Under the spell of “catching-up”

In Eastern Europe (needless to say, not only there) even twenty years after the events it is still political rather than academic interests that dominate the study of systemic change in nearly all of the fields of social sciences.[1] On the 20th anniversary of the collapse of state socialism, we witnessed an unscrupulous and tasteless self-celebration of the local ruling elite in the media, on posters in the street and the underground stations, in scientific journals, and even at the Academy of Sciences. This “scientific” self-celebration highlights only partial events and heroic



state property into private property.

2. State property in Eastern Europe

In contrast to superficial theories of “modernization”, the Eastern European region always lacked the structural forms that we know from the history of the Western countries. Compared to the Western core countries, the Eastern European historical region had many specific, distinctive features. There is an extensive literature on the specificity of the Eastern European region that I cannot introduce here. [6] I will only give a brief historical outline.

The theoretical analysis of the semi-periphery (Arrighi) defines the position of Eastern Europe in the world system. Thus, it shows that the century-long national and regional dream of catching-up is nothing else but a utopia. The last twenty years likewise proved that the change of the semi-peripheral status in the global system does not depend on a political or ideological will. It is also shown by the fact that both the capitalism before the Second World War and state socialism (“actually existing” socialism) had to cope with similar structural problems. The Western part of the Eastern European region – the Czech Republic and Slovenia – had the best historical conditions for a bourgeois development in comparison with the other Eastern European sub-regions. Consequently, this sub-region had the best chance for catching up with the Western core countries. Nevertheless, the geopolitical power relations were never favorable for this outcome. Still, I have to point out that not even in this region could bourgeois democracy be firmly embedded thanks to the

weak social and material basis of capitalism and the unfavorable international conditions. In the Central-Eastern European area (the Baltic countries, Poland, Hungary and Croatia) the bourgeoisie was not only weak but it also differed ethnically and nationally from the great masses of the local populations. These countries were characterized by an authoritarian rule and the survival of certain “feudal” elements. The Russian-Ukrainian-Belarus region was characterized by a traditional society until the end of the 19th century. Finally, in the countries of the Balkan – and from this aspect Slovakia also belongs to this category – we can observe the formation of an “incomplete” society (see Zoltán Tóth), that is, a kind of society which had no power elite of its own and also lacked other characteristics of the bourgeois societies. The regional historical characteristics, which are well-known for historians and which have specific features in each sub-region, can be summed up as follows: the decisive role of the state in the economy; the importance of the state property and the omnipotence of the state; the general weakness of civil society; the lack of a democratic bourgeoisie capable of governance. All these characteristics helped the turn to state socialism after 1945 and also played an important part in its fall in 1989, since these historical features supported the transmission of the semi-peripheral forms of the multinational, supra-national capitalist rule. State socialism as a special kind of “incomplete society” had no ruling elite, so at the end of the 1980s, during the neo-liberal re-structuring, the high-ranking party bu-

speeches while it essentially fails to grasp the totality of the phenomenon. In this way we are presented with an ahistorical picture of the change of regimes. No-one speaks of the contradictions, which have emerged in the new system. The stress on the political sphere overshadows the social and economic consequences of the collapse of state socialism. The Eastern (and also the Western) European mainstream literature rendered small groups of opposition, dissident intellectuals and homo politicus the main and only actors of history. It passes unnoticed that the Communist propaganda had created and widely propagated a similar myth of the Russian revolution back in the old times.

In this mainstream narrative of the change of regimes, the negative social phenomena such as the rise of new poverty, the cultural deprivation of many people and rapidly increasing social inequality, appear to be secondary problems, which can be “administered” by the relevant social institutions. The optimists, however, forget that the solution of the negative social phenomena requires a deeper understanding of the “specific” Eastern European development. This specificity did not originate in the establishment of Communist rule. The process of systemic change was determined by the contemporary trends of the world economy and the unequal structural positions. Thus, the emergent negative social phenomena cannot be interpreted adequately without speaking of the problem of the peripheral integration of the Eastern European region in the world economy. The neoliberal elite conveniently forget this connection because the whole problem of peripheral development would be in direct contradiction to their interpretation of 1989 as “liberation” and “revolution”.

Jürgen Habermas was presumably the first important thinker who argued that the Eastern European changes classify as revolutionary transfigurations when he spoke of the Eastern European “correctional”, “rectifying” or “catching-up” revolutions.[2] The German philosopher did nothing else but reformulated the old theory of catch-up development, which was by the way also the dream of the old Communist elite.[3] What actually took place in Eastern Europe during the last twenty years had, however, nothing to do with dreams of any kind. What the revolution of thinking achieved in this field – similarly to Fukuyama’s unimaginative hypothesis about

the end of history – was to connect catching-up with the uncritical adoption of the institutions and values of the core capitalist countries. Thus, while in the mainstream narrative the idea of a catching-up revolution became the main goal of the change of regimes, in fact, a peripheral integration took place, which renders it unlikely that the region would any time soon catch up with the capitalist centres.

Twenty years after the fall of state socialism the great masses of the Eastern European peoples still live at the same level – and in many places worse – than they did under the “evil Communist” regimes.

Today we can observe all over the region that “returning to Europe” (even within the framework of the European Union) means a return to the intellectual, political and social structures of the interwar period. The old capitalist and surviving feudal structures coexist with the modern global institutions of capitalism. The expectation of 1989 was that Hungary (or any other Eastern European country) would soon catch up with Austria, Japan or Finland.[4] Some even dreamt of Switzerland. The chosen country of destination as a “model” depended only on the local media’s taste and preference. But the actual facts clearly – and from the perspective of the Eastern European countries sadly – disproved this theory. Twenty years after the fall of state socialism the great masses of the Eastern European peoples still live at the same level – and in many places worse – than they did under the “evil Communist” regimes.

The Eastern European political elite use the theory of catching-up as a justification of its own existence. Well, it would be hard for any political elite to admit that its main source of legitimacy was built on lies and falsifications from the very beginning. In Hungary, certain factions of the ruling elite (the coalition of the socialist-socialist democratic and liberal political forces) fabricated the following alternative: we can choose between a modern, neoliberal capitalism that will help us catch up with the West and a feudal, pseudo-romantic conservative-authoritarian model associated with the nationalist-conservative political elite. This intellectual-



The revolution in Romania in 1989—soldiers sided with the mass demonstrations and turned their guns on the hated Securitate security force of dictator Ceaușescu.

political sphere leaves no room for an authentic leftist, anticapitalist, critical discourse.

The leaders of the Eastern European national movements of the 19th century believed in the possibility of catching-up and so did the state socialist elites together with their leaders from Stalin to Gorbachev. In the new system it again became an “official” doctrine as a political legitimating ideology. The social-liberal government stresses the importance of “global values” (free market, multi-culturalism etc.) while the nationalist-conservative political elite put their stress on “national values” and, in case of their electoral victory, they will add some new “spice” (i.e. racism and extreme rightist-revisionist sentiments) to this mix. Nonetheless, both remain under the spell of catching-up just like the old state socialist elites.

Neoliberal thinkers advertise the same catchwords of “freedom”, “democracy”, “Western culture” and last but not least, “catching up” all over the world. They tell us the story of the change of regimes as the outcome of an inevitable evolutionary process. Nonetheless, they cannot even explain why state socialism collapsed at the end of the 1980s, and how it could survive its historically most difficult periods: the civil war of 1918-1920, the great famine of 1932-1933, and the attack of Nazi Germany in 1941.

In the liberal narrative, the fall of state socialism is explained through doctrinal, ideological reasons as if the collapse of the system had been encoded in the communal ideals and theories of socialism, as if these ideas had been realized during the Stalinist or Brezhnevist eras. All the

essentially different phases of state socialism disappear under the cover of Stalinism, dictatorship and totalitarianism each of them loaded with Cold War ideology. By using an ideological trick, neototalitarianism squeezes Nazism and state socialism into the same category of “socialism”, which stands in direct opposition to democracy and market economy. Mainstream writers explain the degeneration of socialism into “state socialism” directly through Marx’s theory on socialism while they fail to take into account the limited historical conditions and the specific development of the countries where Communists got to power.[5] This specificity, I repeat, existed historically well before the establishment of Communist rule. The main reason for this approach is to discredit any communitarian alternative to capitalism as utopian.

This ideological approach was an outcome of the change of regimes, and it reached its climax in equating free market with political freedom. The notions of freedom, democracy were “dissolved” into political-legal terms, while their economic and social aspects were forgotten. Consequently, the neoliberal narrative celebrates the overthrow of the one-party system as “the victory of freedom”. In reality, in Eastern Europe bourgeois democracy as a slogan and an institutional import was nothing else but a technique to acquire property and power, and it never became the reincarnation of the Western European bourgeois democracies, though it is fashionable to present the story like that. The newly formed institutional system was appropriate for solving the crucial issue of the change of regimes, and this was the transformation of

reaucracy and the elite could easily find themselves in the position of the new propertied class, although for a while it seemed that they could find their historical role as representatives of the working class.

Still, in spite of all the specific historical features in the four sub-regions of Eastern Europe, the absolute dominance of state property is indisputable. This was the result of a historical process and it was further strengthened by the Eastern European export of Stalinism. This form of property is considered as something historically brand new and original because this kind of state property was not rooted in the capitalist property relations. Before 1989 state property in Eastern Europe could not be sold or bought, nor inherited, even though there was a hierarchy of the beneficiaries from the unskilled workers to the first secretary of the party. The change of regime was necessary to get rid of state property, since neoliberalism could not carry out privatization in its "classical" form – in contrast to Thatcher's Great-Britain or any other traditional capitalist countries where state property had originated in private property and it could be privatized without changing the whole system. [7] According to the words of the Constitution, state property was controlled by the laboring classes. In practice, however, state property never became direct social property. Moreover, all the experiments to put this idea into practice were defeated. This was the fate of the workers' councils in Hungary both in 1919 and in 1956, while the leftist wing of the Polish Solidarity was shamelessly deserted by the new liberals, who favored the restoration of private property over experimenting with workers' self-governance.

The first consequence of the change of regimes was that the Constitution banned the socialization of state property, thus it put an end to any communitarian experiment. In other words, since privatization was not possible under state socialism, the power elite had to change the whole system in order to preserve their privileges and political-economic power. It is not accidental that the so called "expert committees" and the financial-political power groups of the West and mainly of the United States rejected all collective forms of ownership, arguing that "the powers of world market" and the capitalist multinational firms could play a positive role in restructuring, while the working classes

the leftist wing of the Polish Solidarity was shamelessly deserted by the new liberals, who favored the restoration of private property over experimenting with workers' self-governance.

lack the necessary abilities to control this historical process.[8]

In the mainstream liberal historical and economic narrative, state property became an obstacle to technological development because it was unable to compete with the market economies based on private property, and it led to dictatorship. Nonetheless, the Eastern European semi-periphery could never compete with the Western capitalist countries! In fact, state socialism was relatively successful for some decades in comparison with the capitalist periphery. State socialism became a "dead end" because the bureaucratic elite prevented the socialization of state property in the name of a socialist catching-up development, and in the defense of their own privileges. In the historical moment when they felt that these privileges were threatened, various groups of the elite appropriated state property with the assistance of supranational and multinational capital. They used the liberal ideology to present the apotheosis of private interest and privatization as a common national interest. They stressed publicly that privatization was a secondary issue in the great process of the change of regimes while in fact all parties fought a life-and-death struggle for the appropriation of state property.

At the time of the collapse of state socialism the alliance of the nationalistic and neoliberal intellectuals and the oppositional Marxists was built on the socialization and democratic control of state property almost all over Eastern Europe. In the course of the power struggles these social groups got gradually converted to the ideology of the market, which was the internationally widely propagated panacea for the economic problems of the region. The alliance of the liberal and nationalistic elite learnt three things in the second half of the 1980s. 1. They understood that the idea of workers' self-management and direct social control won't get the support of

the West. They started to argue that property, after all, was not such a crucial issue as they had thought before. They pretended to overlook that the distribution of state property was a decisive issue in the struggle for political power. 2. They understood that privatization helps them to get rid of the bureaucratic rule of the party apparatuses, and they can occupy the elite positions as capitalists or the representatives of the multinational capital. 3. Thereafter, they used the slogans of “freedom” and “democracy” in their fight for a capitalist restoration. In many countries they even declared this fight as a revolutionary struggle, which, in effect, led to the massive economic and social dispossession of the Eastern European peoples.

3. The change of regimes and the newly formed nation-states

The newly formed nation-states played a decisive role in the eventual dispossession of the peoples all over Eastern Europe. These nation-states were created on the ruins of the federal state-formations, which were established during the state socialist period. These new states were appropriate means for the local and global capital to organize their control over the local societies.

So, the birth of the new nation-states cannot be separated from the crucial issue of the distribution of state property. I have stressed above that the economic power of the old and new local elites in the whole region (including the Soviet Union) was based on the appropriation of state property, which was central to the process of systemic change. This was reflected in the disintegration of the great federal units and the birth of the small states, the political use of the ethnical, national differences and the conscious sharpening of the national conflicts. These new, weak states satisfy the needs of global capital: nations or more exactly nation-states ceased to exist in the economic sense, and the “nation” survives only as a cultural and political entity.

The disintegration of the state socialist federations can be seen everywhere as a natural consequence of the global geopolitical interests and the expansion of global capital. The historical background described above and the nationalistic ideologies of the new power elites should be, of course, analyzed together with the specific, local conditions.[9] There were national variants of the same historical problem: that behind a bourgeois democratic facade there was no de-

mocratic bourgeoisie. The weaker the civil traditions, the greater is the danger of the establishment of a new, authoritarian rule, which ruthlessly oppresses the anti-systemic leftist movements while it readily serves the interest of the supranational firms and institutions. The nation-states are thus becoming loyal tax-collectors in the hands of these institutions.

4. The ideological legitimization of the new nation states

Systemic change (i. e. the management of the global expansion of capital) took place in Eastern Europe in the name of the most extremist forms of nationalistic and/or liberal ideologies. In order to gain a new legitimacy, the Eastern European power elites replaced all forms of Communist ideology with religious-spiritual and nationalistic doctrines.

Though in various forms and degrees, the new power groups all over Eastern Europe (with the exception of Russia) based their intellectual-ideological legitimacy on the conservative-reactionary traditions of the interwar period and the myth of an anticommunist “national resistance” (in collaboration with the Nazis) during the Second World War. In order to achieve this goal, the elite had to construct a new national history as a constant fight for national liberation. (As an example see the “new” trends in the Ukraine: the apotheosis of Bandera, who participated in the Holocaust and the SS and Wehrmacht officer Roman Suhevits, who was honored posthumously by president Yushchenko, and intended to name a military school after this “hero”.) These trends confirm that there was a rehabilitation of an ethnic way of thinking in the new EU countries with a strong support of Western Europe. But the local elites do not turn to traditional nationalism. They use the rebirth of ethnicity for the construction of a racist national myth. This essentially ahistorical myth is presented as a defense of the interests of the local national population against the expansion of global capital, namely the consequences of the change of regimes... Lenin argued that capitalist development had two contradictory trends: integration and disintegration. The new political classes constructed their official national ideology in terms of ethnicized categories. This ideology partly reflects and partly disguises the social and economic interests, which are determined by the global and local conditions. Driven by the fierce competi-

tion for ever higher profit, the local representatives of global capital (“national bourgeoisie”) are the main generators of the most extremist forms of racism.

In short, while the bombing of Yugoslavia put a symbolic end to the social and economic dispossession of the Eastern European peoples, they could console themselves with the free development of an ethnicized discourse under the banner of democracy and freedom. Thus, capitalist restoration has been completed even in an ideological sense. Leftist ideologists of the old, democratic opposition speak of the failure of the change of regimes, albeit in my view it was only the illusions of a “good, liberal capitalism” that have failed. Capitalism always showed anti-humanistic tendencies in the region similarly to any other semi-periphery or periphery. In this sense the change of regimes has not failed but on the contrary, it has achieved its goal with the restoration of the semi-peripheral forms of capitalist rule. The core countries can produce and extract the profit from the region in a practically uncontrolled way under the banner of democracy and freedom. This is all that I wanted to tell about the Eastern European “revolutions”, whose ideological function is to legitimize the new forms of power.

NOTES

[1] I have to point out that Eastern European intellectuals also developed a leftist critique of the change of regimes. See for example László Andor, “Capitalism in Eastern Europe”, *Links. International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, No. 4. 1995, 54-62; Tamás Krausz, “The East European Systemic changes”, *ibid.*, 63-69. For a critical review of the main paradigms see: Eszter Bartha, “Transition, transformation, ‘postsocialism’. Theorizing systemic change in Eastern Europe”, *After Twenty Years. Reasons and Consequences of the Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe*. Ed. by Krisztián Csaplár-Degovics, Miklós Mitrovits, Csaba Zahorán. Berlin: Ost-Europa Zentrum, 2009.

[2] Jürgen Habermas, „What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left”, *New Left Review*, No. 4. Sept.-Oct. 1990.

[3] It is worth stressing that it was Stalin who strongly propagated an “authentic” catching-up development with the West. On the intellectual roots of the Stalinist turn see: Tamás Krausz, *Szovjet thermidor: A sztálini fordulat szellemi előzményei 1917-1928*. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1996.

[4] It can be documented that the members of the leftist Eszmélet-circle including the author had no such illusions, and we gave a correct prognosis of the Hungarian situation. See as an example László Tütő, *Eszmélet No 83*; Tamás Krausz, *Megélt rendszerváltás*, Budapest, Cégér, 1994.

[5] A “classical” example of this ahistorical approach is János Kornai’s extensive analysis on the political economy of socialism, see on this Tamás Krausz, “Ahistorical Political Economics”, *Social Scientist (New Delhi)*, vol. 24. No 1-3, Jan-March 1996. pp. 111-127.

[6] During the last fifty years in Hungary alone the most important historians published dozens of books on the subject: Emil Niederhauser, Endre Arató, Jenő Szűcs, Péter Gunst Péter and György Ránki to mention only the most well-known authors.

[7] While in Chile a neoliberal turn could only be achieved with a coup d’état and political mass murders, the state socialist elite voluntarily gave up their position.

[8] I gave a detailed description of the role of the international capitalist institutional system in the change of regimes in the Soviet Union: Tamás Krausz, ‘Perestroika and redistribution of property in the Soviet Union: political perspectives and historical evidence’, *Contemporary Politics (London, South Bank University)* Vol. 13. No. 1, March 2007, 3-36.

[9] For the specific case-studies see for example: *Az új nemzetállamok és az etnikai tisztogatások Kelet-Európában 1989 után*. Ed. by József Juhász and Tamás Krausz. Budapest, L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2009.

Goran Markovic

Workers' Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina



*Radničko-komunistička partija
Bosne i Hercegovine*

SLOBODA • MIR • DEMOKRATIJA • SOCIJALIZAM

My name is Goran Markovic and I come from Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am one of the co-editors of the socialist/Marxist regional magazine 'The New Flame' (*Novi Plamen*) which is published in the Croatian capital Zagreb. I am also the president of the **Workers' Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina**. *Novi Plamen* is a magazine which deals very much with the development of workers' and leftist movements in former Yugoslav republics and worldwide and carries analyzes, mainly from a Marxist viewpoint, of current economic and political events in former Yugoslavia and worldwide. The Workers' Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a party established in the tradition of workers' self-management and self-managing socialism.

How do you evaluate the events of 1989-1991 in the USSR, Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia in light of aspirations at the time?

These were revolutions against the corrupt system of the Soviet Union and its satellites which saw itself collapse because of its economic inefficiency and the inability of its ruling class to adapt to people's needs and aspirations. The revolutions fought for more human rights, especially in the political sphere, and for better living conditions. Unfortunately, in many people's minds, these revolutions were understood as anti-communist revolutions, which they objectively were not. They caused great damage to the communist idea, that is for sure, but they were not revolutions against a communist or socialist society, which never existed in Eastern Europe. However, it is quite sure that people who were drawn into these revolutions didn't expect to achieve what happened later and what is still going on – crude neoliberal capitalism.

How would you characterise the society that existed before 1989-91? Is there any continuity between them?

The society that existed in the Soviet Union and other countries of its bloc were bureaucratic collectivist or étatist societies. It was a new socio-economic formation which historically was situated between capitalism and socialism. However, it could by no means be characterized as the first phase of socialism. It was a new kind of exploitative society with the bureaucracy as a ruling class. Working class was sovereign only nominally: in practice as well as ac-

ording to the legal system and production relations it did not change its social position in comparison to pre-war situation. Of course, this does not mean that its living conditions did not improve but that is not the most important criteria for evaluation of a society's nature. After the 1989-1991 revolutions things changed in many ways but not in one of the most important – namely, one society based on exploitation in the economic sphere and dominance in the political sphere only changed for another society based on these same principles. Only the ruling classes changed – instead of the old bureaucracy a new capitalist class together with parts of the old bureaucracy became the ruling class.

For most people, communism means concentration camps, lack of democracy, inefficient economy, ideological indoctrination,

Do you think the events of twenty years ago represent the historic triumph of capitalism and the defeat of communism?

The events of twenty years ago cannot represent the historic defeat of communism because communism or socialism did not exist as a society in Eastern and Central Europe. It could be said that it was a historic defeat of bureaucratic collectivism in its Stalinist variant. On the other hand, these events were not the historic triumph of capitalism because one social system does not triumph if it overbears its alternative but if it is unable to solve contradictions on its own terrain. Capitalism proved unable to do that and that is why it cannot be seen as eternal social system.

Before 1989 there were dissident communist currents, such as the *Praxis* group. They tried to develop a vision of a more emancipatory communism, engaging with Marx's humanism and concepts of self-management. What happened to this tradition, why did it not re-emerge in the face of the other forces such a narrow nationalism?

The defeat of the existing regimes in Eastern Europe was seen as defeat of socialism as such. That is why all of its variants and currents were defeated or, better to say, were not able to re-emerge. Indoctrination with what was called vulgar Marxism in Eastern

Europe was so strong and the ideology of the ruling bureaucracy was so much in incongruity with the objective social role of working people that when this ruling ideology collapsed no one really wanted to search for true Marxism or some other socialist currents because all of them were connected with the defeated bureaucratic system.



Since the collapse of the USSR some on the left view America as the main imperialist power to be opposed, do you think Russia is also imperialist? How do you think communists should relate to the power struggle between Russia, USA and other powers?

Russia is trying to recuperate from heavy economic, political and military blows it received during the capitalist restoration. That is why it still cannot play the role of imperialist state it would like to. However, it is an imperialist state in its intentions and goals and therefore communists should not have any hopes in its role in international relations.

During the recent crisis of capitalism there was a revival of calls for state ownership such a greater nationalisation of the banks etc. In light of historical experience, what attitude do you think communists should take towards nationalisation?

Nationalisation is not a socialist measure that is for sure. That is why communists should not look for nationalisation as a measure in new socialist society. Socialisation of the means of production has to be their goal. However, in a capitalist environment nationalisation is a very positive step forward for two reasons. First, it lays a more solid basis for introduction of workers' participation or workers' control, which is another measure which must go along with

Warsaw Pact troops suppressed the Prague Spring which proclaimed 'Socialism with a human face' in 1968—Left: A Czech protest poster of Lenin weeping.



nationalisation. Second, the state as an employer and a “businessman” has to take care not only of its social and economic goals but also about the fact that it is a political institution formally accountable to its citizens. That is why it is easier to put pressure on it for certain economic and social policies.

What do you think the legacy of official and dissident communism is?

Experiences of so-called communist regimes, on the one hand, and of communist movements which tended to liberate themselves from so-called official communism, on the other hand, give us plenty of useful conclusions. First of all, socialism cannot rest on the state, but on self-organized workers and citizens who govern the economy and the state by themselves, directly and through democratically elected delegates. Secondly, as each society, even the socialist one, is divided on different groups, with different interests and opinions, ideas of human rights, especially political liberties and political pluralism, are inseparably connected to socialism. Thirdly, there is no one group, even the communist party, that could claim to have historic or any other right to be a priori avant-garde and to have a special or privileged position in process of decision-making. E.g. the communist party is only one of many political and social organizations which is trying to persuade people in the correctness of its ideology, proposals and ultimate goals. Fourthly, the struggle for new, socialist society is in the first place struggle against the bourgeoisie and against the bureaucracy that has already been formed in the framework of the workers’ movement while still in opposition. There are two main means against the bureaucratization of workers’ movement and hence of socialist society: new forms of organization and reliance on extra-parliamentary forms of activity. The parliamentary orientation of many communist parties and “walk through institutions”, although they did and can have significance, captured these movements in chains of bureaucracy.

How do you think genuine communists should organise and operate?

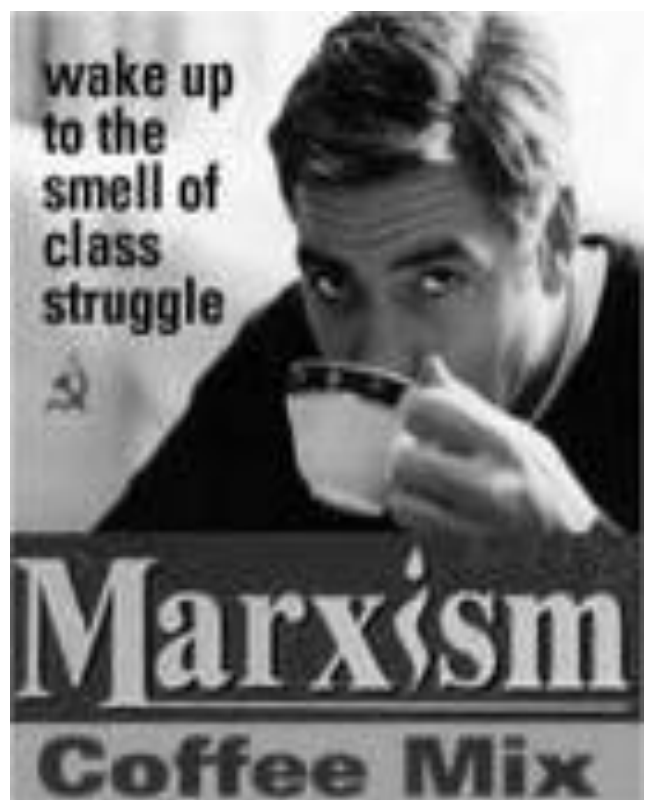
Through democratically organized political parties and grassroots movements. All these organizations should have some joint principles such as maximum possible decentralization, a delegate system of election of members of executive bodies and of making decisions, the right to recall elected officials and principle of rotation of elected officials. Professionals in workers’ parties can have only administrative and not political functions. The right of tendencies should be guaranteed. In terms of their mode of operation, communists should combine parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forms, with prevalence of the latter. This means that they will have to orientate toward trade unions, students’, women’s and other social organizations in order to try to gather them into a united social movement against oppression, for social and other rights, and, in its perspectives, for a new society. A communist party should be only one of many organizations that participate in this social

socialism cannot rest on the state, but on self-organized workers and citizens who govern the economy and the state by themselves

movement and its popularity and possible avant-garde role should depend upon its ability to persuade other social movement militants of its programme. Parliamentary activities could be only useful as an addition to activities of this social movement, where communist and other leftist MPs could put pressure on government only in coalition with the extra-parliamentary pressure of social movements.

What do you think real communism means today?

For most people, communism means concentration camps, lack of democracy, inefficient economy, ideological indoctrination, even hunger, like in North Korea, etc. However, real communism does not have anything to do with these features and with societies where these things happened. Real communism means an end of economic exploitation and political domination. It means an end of division of society into elite and masses. It means self-organization and self-activity of all members of society who wish to be active participants of processes of decision-making, with almost limitless pluralism of organizations, opinions and activities of different subjects who do not oppress each other. It is a society based on social ownership and social self-management, economically self-sustainable so that it guarantees free and universal health care, education, access to culture, without unemployment and with possibilities to its members to cultivate themselves as full persons.



Borys Chervony

Defence of Labour

independent trade union, Ukraine

My name is Borys Chervony. I'm a member of the executive committee of the "Zakhyst Pratsi" (Defence of Labour) independent trade union, a member of the "New Left" movement and a member of the organisational committee of the Ukrainian Left Party (ULP). The ULP is supposed to be an international revolutionary organisation; the program of the ULP will be based on the principles of communism and social liberation in all its forms; and will stand, in particular, on the traditions of Ukrainian left thought.

It is said that the declaration of independence by the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1991 marked the end of USSR. How do you evaluate the events of 1989-1991 in the Ukrainian SSR in light of aspirations at the time? Was it a victory or a defeat?

The events of 1989-1991 represented a mass movement, the main aims of which were, apart with fight for democratic rights, destruction of the USSR and a struggle for Ukrainian independence. As long as these aims were, at least in a formal way, achieved, in this sense it was a victory. At the same time, bourgeois forces succeeded in leading the movement and intruding into the movement with "traditional capitalist" values and aims; at that time a very typical opinion was that after achievement of the aims of the movement "Ukrainians will live happily and richly, like the civilised people in the West".

How would you characterise the society that existed before 1989-91 and Ukrainian society today? Is there any continuity between them?

The society that existed before 1989-91 was a dictatorship, calling themselves "communist". In my opinion, it was a state-capitalist system. Ukrainian society today is a capitalist society, which some people describe as "traditional capitalism". Presently Ukraine plays the role of a third-world country in the framework of this "traditional capitalism" dominating the world. Continuity between these two systems means that both systems represent capitalist society, while different in stages. And, correspondingly, both systems have all the features of capitalism – the operation of the law of value, alienation of labour etc.

Do you think the events of twenty years ago represent the historic triumph of capitalism and the defeat of communism?

Surely, no. It was a defeat; but it was the defeat of Stalinism and the dictatorial system represented by it. It was a triumph, but it was a triumph of one part of the world capitalist system over the other.

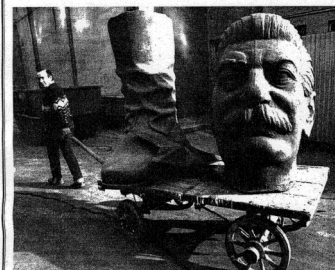
Many people considered that western style capitalism would be progressive compared to the USSR, is that still the case?

Визволення робітників – справа самих робітників!



Профсоюзные бароны

Дорогие читатели! Мы начинаем историю о жизни профессиональных баронов – баронов и владельцев управленческой Фабричной профсоюзной Украины. И особенно, о том, как именно так себе чувствуют – бароновладельцы шарканье, которое не распространяется активные профсоюзы и интерес их десяти миллионов человек, а уже стали считать себя извне извне и даже. Власти имеют свои законы. У профсоюзных баронов нет постоянных друзей, а есть постоянные интересы: власть и деньги. Профсоюзные бароны кто они? Кто их защищает и обслуживает? Почему они не хотят друг за друга горой, то есть друг друга, а не лавина в бабине? Об этом на 2-й стр. нашей газеты.



Отнетье мошенники, или Как украсть профсоюз?

Профсоюзы всегда и в любой стране были так называемые «карманные» общества, являлись фактически защитником интересов как рабочих и служащих, так и бизнесмена и предпринимателя. Общественно-политическим для профсоюзов всегда на Украине всегда выступала Фабричная профсоюзная Украина (ФПУ) – во всяком случае, призванием у этой организации с самого начала украинской независимости были именно защита и обогащение интересов кадров, занятых в той или иной отрасли...

Однако в Украине ситуация с профсоюзом давно уже оказалась перекручена с ног на голову – собственно, если учитывать, что профсоюз является не только обществом, то улавливать тут не приходится. Высокотехнологичная структура, так и профсоюзные деятели заняты своими административными обязанностями, а в мажоритарной структуре профсоюзов в Украине сегодня ситуация следующая: Социальное сотрудничество профсоюзов в стране сегодня уже отвалилось и на работе ФПУ – фабричная реализует свои цели и реализовала, а приращение в руководстве ФПУ и в виде «органной власти» профсоюзом уже не исполняют и не имеют в свои «коричневые игры» дублирование в отрасли. Дублирование, по крайней мере, автору этих строк, вызывает ощущение легкой шапки и шапка не оторвана того, что каждый день страна дублированием разворачивается профсоюзом, а в Украине же, «должником» до легкой шапки.

Вот тебе, Фабричная, и Юркин дядя.

Последние профсоюзные вожди довольно успешно «адаптировались» на

ВІД РЕДАКЦІЇ

Шановна трудова громадо України,

Невідомий час, коли публікували профсоюзний ріст Фабричної Профсоюзної України (ФПУ) має стосовно співзвучності з тим, що в лютому «найкращий» час з купом кооперативно-приватизації профсоюзного майна, ми сподівалися, що профсоюзний ріст ФПУ. Соцпартію назвали «Заступником Голови ФПУ Сергія Костюка», який був затриманий в лютому 2008 року співробітниками УБОРУ під час проведення виборів у році 50 тисяч доларів США за призначення чергового профсоюзного офісу. Тим же доповіддю, виконавчий керівник зрозумів, що він виконав український профсоюз, а профсоюзний ріст ФПУ. На чолі профсоюзів «Заступник Голови» ступили німецькі британські дії суцільного кооперативно-приватизації профсоюзного майна. Ми сподівалися профсоюзів та громадянський запити України як виконавця профсоюзного рісту. Ці питання в Міністерстві Конфедерації Профсоюзів (МФП) загрозли остаточний дискредитації українського профсоюзного рісту в очі світової профсоюзної спільноти.

Але ж у той же час, профсоюз «Заступник Голови» ще до того, як розпочав свою роботу, що з'явився в голубу структуру ФПУ не мав ФПУ в нелегальній структурі свого керівництва профсоюзів. Ми впевнені, що лави Юркин, Костюк, Луцкевич, Українська Ю, які сподівалися зрозуміти ФПУ, не мають морального права й надалі представляти інтереси широких профсоюзів.

«Рубина з Голови» – як вийти в народі. І це самотньо справді, як у відношенні до колегіальної Голови ФПУ Юркин, так і до всіх тих його найближчих оточення т.д. «заступник-подвійник» не лави голубу ріст і сподівалися на лави Голови ФПУ, але тимчасово замовили у наступних кризових ситуаціях з особистими прихильниками Юркин та його найближчих оточення Костюка.

«Заступник Голови» звели, що не може стати у відношенні від ФПУ, що відбувся останнім часом в структурі ФПУ.

Ми вважаємо, що кооперативна керівництво Прем'єра ФПУ у повному обсязі падає в відставку, щоб негайно припинити подальшу кооперативну діяльність профсоюзів України.

Ми вважаємо, що лави Голови ФПУ не мав ФПУ в нелегальній структурі свого керівництва профсоюзів України. Ми впевнені, що лави Голови ФПУ не мав ФПУ в нелегальній структурі свого керівництва профсоюзів України. Ми впевнені, що лави Голови ФПУ не мав ФПУ в нелегальній структурі свого керівництва профсоюзів України.

Редукція

Not at the moment. The first blow to these ideas was "shock therapy" in the early 1990s, resulting in huge continuing growth of prices and unemployment. The economic crisis of 1998 and especially the present one successfully undermined illusions in western style capitalism. From that point, a lot of people know about life in Western European countries via the Internet and/or satellite TV and even taking into account the fact that this information is provided by the bourgeois media, and in this way is distorted, it is clear even from these sources, that the West, to put it simply, is not a paradise, as it was presented by perestroika ideologists. The current mainstream feeling, at least in a considerable part of society, apart from left-wing thought, is paternalistic and even nostalgic ideas.

Before 1989 there were dissident communists, such as Leonid Plyushch and Ivan Dzyuba and there was a long tradition of Marxists who envisioned national liberation as a far more radical social transformation. What happened to this tradition, why did it not re-emerge?

This tradition is still alive, while still quite weak. The main problem is that the defeat of Stalinism in 1989-1991 is still viewed by a lot of people as the defeat of Marxist ideas itself. At the same time, facing all the problems connected with capitalism, quite a lot of people have nostalgic ideas like “back to the USSR”, including great-Russian chauvinist attitude to any national liberation ideas as “anti-Soviet” and “counterrevolutionary” “Banderism”. Under this pressure from both sides even such people as Leonid Plyushch, Ivan Dzyuba and Yuriy Badzyo moved to the right, into the “broad democratic camp”, considering their early Marxist views to be “honest mistakes of their youth”. At the moment, there are some attempts to re-vitalise this tradition by some small groups; I’m the member of one such nucleus – the organisation committee of the ULP. However, these attempts presently are at a very incipient stage.

Did the ‘Orange Revolution’ represent the continuation of the struggles of 1989-91?

To a certain degree, yes. As during the struggles of 1989-1991, among the main declared goals of the ‘Orange Revolution’ was the struggle for democratic rights, in particular, freedom of meetings and speeches, as well as achievement of real political and economic independence of Ukraine from Russia. In the both cases, the movement was led by bourgeois forces; and the masses were quickly disappointed with results of their “victory”.

Russia has been reviving as a state power and asserting itself, how is this viewed in Ukraine today?

A lot of people in Ukraine view Russian imperialism as a danger to Ukrainian independence; attempts of Russian imperialism to increase its influence, including in a military way, as it was in Chechnya and quite recently in Georgia, are viewed by a lot of people as a big threat both to the political and economic independence of Ukraine. At the same time, a lot of politicians are making use of nostalgic and/or pan-Slavic ideas; and in these cases Russia is seen as a power, which should smash separatists, which, in turn, are viewed as the obstacles for returning to the Soviet Union or Great Russian Empire. Such ideas have some influence, in particular in Eastern and Southern Ukraine.

Many on the western left view America as the main imperialist power to be opposed, do you think Russia is also imperialist? How do you think the left in the West should relate to Russia?

Surely, Russia is also an imperialist power. I think that the present Russian state completely corresponds to Lenin’s definition of imperialism. In my opinion, the relation to Russia of the left in the West should not be differ from the relation of the left in other parts of the world – Russia is a growing imperialism, which is trying, quite successfully, to re-emerge as one of the main world imperialist powers.

War in Georgia, continuing occupation of Chechnya and the recent series of “gas wars” are just a few examples of this. Any attempts to support “good” Russian imperialism against “bad” US or whatever imperialism, as is done by a lot of leftists not only in the West, but also in Ukraine and Russia, are absolutely unacceptable for real communists.

What is the current situation of the Ukrainian working class and the prospects for the labour movement?

The Ukrainian working class, as anywhere in the world, is presently in a very difficult situation. The Ukrainian bourgeoisie is trying to force the working class to pay for the crisis. A huge growth of direct and hidden unemployment rates, salary cuts as a result of inflation and sharp increases in the prices for public services and public transport are only a few among the features of the present situation in Ukraine. As long as “official” left parties are not interested in the workers’ and trade union movement at all and the “radical left” in fact are very small dogmatic grouplets, in my opinion, the main prospects for the labour movement are in the development of trade unions and an independent workers’ movement. Trade unions have considerably accelerated during last few years and their influence is constantly growing. I think that one of the main tasks of the left in Ukraine is to intervene actively in trade unions. The recent case of the occupation of the Kherson Mechanical Plant is a good example both of the high level of working class preparedness for action given the present situation, and the necessity of workers’ organisation in trade unions, and all the disadvantages of the absence of such organisations.

What do you think the legacy of official and dissident communism is in Ukraine?

The legacy of official communism is the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, which were easily available in Soviet Union. Apart from them books by such philosophers as Lifshits, Ilyenkov and Bosenko were more or less available. After 1986 the works by Trotsky and other left oppositionists, democratic centralists and workers’ oppositionists also became relatively available. The legacy of dissident communism in Ukraine is in works by Roman Rozdolskyy, Lev Rybalka (Yurkevych), UKPists, Borotbists and a lot of others. Works by Leonid Plushch, Ivan Dzyuba and Yuriy Badzyo written in the 1960s-1990s are also of great importance. But it’s necessary to note that the legacy of dissident communism is known to an insignificant number of people in the present Ukraine. The academics, which serve the present bourgeois power in Ukraine, are trying to popularize the idea that all national liberation opposition in Ukraine consisted from “integral nationalists” inspired with Mykola Dontsov’s ideas, leaded by Bandera, by doing so cleverly hiding the real history.

What do you think the prospects are for the post-Stalinist left today? How do you think genuine communists should organise and operate?

Hard-line Stalinist organisations, such as Union of Marxists, VKPB, PKBU and some others are continuing to be marginalized. The members of these organisations are getting older; the recruitment of new members, especially young people, is almost absent. On the level of ideology their slogans are limited to the need to return to the Soviet Union, punishment of all those who are guilty in its destruction and a “happy life in the family of Slavic people”. In some cases these ideas are expanded with anti-Semitism, sexism and homophobia. At the moment the best possible position for hard-line Stalinists is the role of junior partners in the numerous temporary local electoral blocs. “Big” post-Stalinist organisations, such the parliamentary and ex-parliamentary parties like the CPU, SPU, PSPU, SDPU (o), “Spravedlyvist” and Union of Left Forces (SLS) have only two ways to avoid marginalisation – a movement toward social-democracy or becoming open Peronist-type paternalist parties. It looks like the recent establishment and self-promotion of the Block of Left Forces, which consists of the CPU, SDPU (o), “Spravedlyvists” and SLS, proves that they prefer the first course of action. It is clear that genuine communists have nothing in common with all these organisations and efforts: our task is to build our own organisations, most probably in the form of a network of nuclei and individuals, both in Ukraine and internationally, which should in a pluralist way discuss and decide on the best form of self-organisation, programme and operation of this network. I think that in doing so it’s absolutely neces-

sary to take into account the negative experience of the “radical left” and its “traditions” since at least the second half of last century; and avoid their vanguardism, dogmatism and sectarianism.

What would you say are the main influences on left thought in Ukraine today?

One of the main influences on left thought in Ukraine today is the recent occupation of Kherson Mechanical Plant by the workers protesting against closing the plant. This occupation provoked very serious discussion regarding such points as nationalisation, unionisation, the role of trade unions and revolutionary organisations and, consequently, imperialism and the present state and role of the bourgeoisie and bureaucracy etc. Almost all left organisations, not only in Ukraine, in particular, New Left, the Organisation of Marxists, Vpered and a lot of others actively intervened in such discussions. The great importance of this discussion is determined by the fact that it is the result not of pure abstraction, but of direct mass working class action.

What do you think real communism means today?

I think real communism means a classless and stateless self-managed society based on the principles of collective ownership of the means of production and distribution, and an economy which oriented not for the market, but for real human needs. Communism will abolish all forms of oppression; and will see the realisation of the idea of liberation in all its forms. Communism can come only from below, via diverse forms of workers’ self-organisation.

strategy for industrial struggle

pamphlet 3, october 2008

A 1971 *Solidarity* pamphlet about different tactics for the workers’ movement, including strikes, work-ins, occupations and work-to-rules. New introduction by Chris Kane about the lessons for today.

nationalisation or workers’ management?

pamphlet 2, october 2008

Are communists in favour of the state centralising the levers of economic control... or for workers to take over their own workplaces? Articles and arguments by the Institute for Workers’ Control, *Solidarity*, LEAP, Tony Benn, Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield.

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Volodymyr Ishchenko

*Commons/Спільне,
Journal of Social Criticism, Ukraine*

I am one of the editors of “Commons” (<http://commons.com.ua>), a Ukrainian left-wing intellectual web-site aimed at filling the gap in quality leftist analysis that might contribute to social struggles here and now, in Ukraine and across the globe. There is a gap between existing leftist theories and the practical work of grassroots social movements, the latter not receiving satisfactory analysis. Local movements often fail to use practical experience and theoretical discussions from other regions of the globe.

At the same time, there is a lack of information in English on important events of grassroots social struggles in Ukraine. Besides, we are very worried about the small quantity of leftist texts in Ukrainian while there is a widespread cliché that “leftist” = “pro-Russian”. We also want to create an independent source of information beyond sectarian conflicts caused by petty political ambitions.

What was the society that existed before 1989-91, and was its collapse the historic victory of capitalism over communism?

There are a lot of rather boring discussions in the left-wing movement on “class nature” of USSR, whether it was “state capitalism”, a “degenerated workers’ state” or anything of this kind. Often a specific position on this question becomes a basis for founding political organisations and sectarian rivalry; often such discussions substitute for the real political actions necessary here and now. This is not to ignore this discussion at all, but to point out that it is not so important what exactly we call the Soviet society but what we think should and could have been done to improve it.

Was revolutionary action necessary or was it possible to push the Soviet nomenklatura to some progressive reforms? The answer to this question largely determines our attitude to the 1989 protests. With hindsight we can say that the 1990s neoliberal reforms were disastrous for the Ukrainian economy, culture and society in general. But should we consider the 1989 mass protests as just legitimating cover for privatising property by the part of the old Soviet elite? I would say no. Many people in Ukraine and in the USSR in general genuinely aspired towards some kind of democratic socialism with a “human face”, some even for a self-governing, libertarian socialism.

The Confederation of Anarcho-syndicalists was not a small organisation in the end of 1980s and the first title of the People’s Movement of Ukraine (Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy) was People’s Movement of Ukraine for Perestroika [restructuring]. It was a strategic mistake by this popular wing of the 1989 events that

they were closely allied with the so called “democratic” part of the split nomenklatura.

But many – even great – revolutions were defeated because of the lack of independent revolutionary organisations and we cannot disdain them for this. 1989 was a victory and a defeat at the same time: the victory of the emerging elite of a peripheral capitalist society and a defeat of the movement for genuine socialism. It would be absurd to call what we have now in Ukraine “western-style capitalism”. It is not “western-style” but it is becoming more and more similar to colonial-style, Third World capitalism with huge inequalities, the predominance of low surplus-value export production and mass migration from impoverished regions to wealthier countries. But we should also understand that the basis for this was laid down much earlier in the Brezhnev period when the USSR integrated to the world economy primarily as a supplier of natural resources.

Putin’s Russia cannot be viewed as any kind of progressive or anti- imperialist regime

Did the ‘Orange Revolution’ represent the continuation of the struggles of 1989-91?

For nationalists and liberals obviously “yes”. They can symbolically connect the celebration of national identity and confirmation of their pro-Western orientation between 1989 and 2004. But, of course, this is not true for the left. In contrast to the 1989 movement the “Orange Revolution” did not include any significant and meaningful discussion of substantial reforms in Ukraine. The people were destined only to shout “Yushchenko! Yushchenko!” at Maidan.

What is the current situation of the Ukrainian working class and the prospects for the labour movement?

And, of course, the “Orange Revolution” in no way reduced class exploitation. On the contrary, the new Labour Code which was adopted in the first reading in the Ukrainian parliament gets rid of many important rights inherited from the Soviet time and fixes the new balance of forces between labour and capital (to the benefit of the latter). In the same time we see new independent trade unions emerging and the radicalisation of workers’ struggle. This February workers of Kherson Engineering Plant occupied the factory in protest at huge wage arrears and the closure of the enterprise. This was the first occupation in post-Soviet Ukraine. The struggle in Kherson



ended this September when the state forced the Kherson plant owner to pay the arrears and to hire back half of the staff.

Many on the western left view America as the main imperialist power to be opposed, do you think Russia is also imperialist? How do you think the left in the West should relate to Russia?

Of course, instances of anti-American and “patriotic” rhetoric should not deceive the left. Definitely Putin’s Russia cannot be viewed as any kind of progressive or anti-imperialist regime even of the Chavez or Morales type. The Russian oligarchic elite is quite well embedded in transnational ruling class networks whilst revenues from natural resources export are not spent on education, public health or any kind of social infrastructure. Instead, Putin continued with neoliberal reforms reducing labour rights in the new Labour Code, privatizing housing and the public sector. But at the same time Russia should not be demonized. In the same way as nationalist rhetoric is used in Russia for ruling class legitimacy, an opposing nationalist rhetoric is used in Ukraine shifting responsibility for all problems to Russia’s hostile policies and its “fifth column” in Ukraine. Appeals to Russian imperialism as the most dangerous threat for the Ukrainian nation has become a common way to justify even neofascist movements. It became clear when ultra-right activist Maksim Chaika was killed in Odessa this spring. Many mainstream journalists and even president Yushchenko himself presented him just as a “patriot”. Antifascists at the same time were deceitfully presented as “pro-Russian paramilitaries”

What dissident left existed during the Soviet era, and what are the prospects for the post-Stalinist left today?

We can be highly sympathetic to the Ukrainian vernacular socialist tradition but we cannot ig-

nore the fact that Ukraine has greatly changed since 1900-1920s. This is the most important reason why we did not see the resurrection of a mass national communist movement in post-Soviet Ukraine. Ukraine is not anymore a predominantly peasant country. Ukrainian national identity now appeals to only roughly half of Ukraine (the Western and Central regions) and in these regions it was taken over by right-wing nationalists since World War II. We can take some important insights from Ukrainian Marxists about the past but we cannot copy their analysis, rhetoric and action if we are striking for mass working class support not limited to certain regions and subcultures.

This is true not only for the Ukrainian Marxist tradition but for other more internationally recognized left-wing schools of thought. The left has to reconstruct and develop its theory in close connection with emerging grassroots movements: working-class, urban, environmental... The left’s theory should be once again reconnected to practical mass struggle. The problems of grassroots movements’ strategy, organization and mobilization should be the primary issues for the left. Only in discussing and solving practical problems of progressive social change can we develop our theory further, making it more adequate to the task of changing objective reality. Another problem is that the Ukrainian left should be more aware and connected to debates and struggles in global anti-capitalist movements, learning its lessons and taking on inspiring examples and models of organisation.

I do not dare to give exhaustive definitions of what real communism could mean today. But what is most important is that real communism now must be with the masses and for the masses. It is definitely not another subculture or chat room for a handful of freaks pretending to be a “real vanguard” just because they have read a few more 100 or 150-year-old books.

Vpered/Вперед

Debout, les damnés de la terre

Ukrainian Marxist Journal

Vpered (Roman): My name is Roman, and I am with a Ukrainian Marxist journal Vpered (<http://vpered.wordpress.com>). There are two of us in the board of editors, me and Myroslav. Our journal is theoretical and historical. We put out texts by classic Marxists, documents on Ukrainian history seen from a class struggle perspective, translations from contemporary Marxist thinkers and historians. The Vpered is published in the form of a blog now, but we have plans to go paper one day. We've been on-line since February 2009.

Vpered (Myroslav): There's little I can add to what Roman has just said. So, I would like to simply make one point. Our interests also include environmental problems, in particular the making and development of a contemporary ecosocialist discourse. It's extremely topical in Ukraine where old technologies are still in use, nature reserves are systematically destroyed, biological disasters are many, and unrecovered rubbish and uncontrolled dumping are commonplace, and Chernobyl is still there.

It is said that the declaration of independence by the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1991 marked the end of USSR. How do you evaluate the events of 1989-1991 in the Ukrainian SSR in light of aspirations at the time? Was it a victory or a defeat?

Vpered (Roman): I have to admit I wasn't interested in Ukrainian politics much at that time, and I think I was too young (fifteen in 1989) to clearly understand what was going. Having said that, I don't think Ukrainians voting in December 1991 was a real watershed in the history of the USSR. Centrifugal forces had been at play long before that event. National movements in Georgia and the Baltic states formed earlier and seemed more radical than that in Ukraine. As far as 'aspirations' are concerned, I would not misrepresent facts and feelings if I said that people had been expecting a lot from independence and 'market economy'. They were enthusiastic and thought it was a victory. They couldn't imagine capitalism was so horrific.

Vpered (Myroslav): It's hard to say. On the one

hand, the largest stateless nation finally slipped away from a 300-year nutcracker of the empire. On the other hand, who told you that we had gained by having got to the periphery of capitalist world? Of course, it was a historic necessity at that time, and it was possible because of a special concourse of circumstance. Ukrainians contributed little to it. Such was the conjuncture.

How would you characterise the society that existed before 1989-91 and Ukrainian society today? Is there any continuity between them?

Vpered (Roman): Well, it's an important but very complicated issue. You don't think I can give an answer in a couple of sentences when others write books just to tackle one aspect of this issue, do you? What was that? Real socialism? State capitalism? State slavery? Asian-type system of production? Degenerated workers' state? Superetatism? I can't say. I don't know it yet. What I can say for sure is that the wealth of the Ukrainian nation is in hands of former Communist Party nomenclature, Komsomol secretaries and KGB senior officers, and organized crime bosses, today. Thus I can clearly see continuity in the establishment ('elite' as they call themselves).

Vpered (Myroslav): The society that existed before the independence epoch was historically heterogeneous. People before 'perestroika' and after make two very different social breeds. The emergence of 'wild capitalism' with its 'primitive capital accumulation', decline of paternalist modes of relations with the state, and simultaneous pauperisation of majority of the population quickly turned everything on its head. A large element of social outsiders came out, and this element continues to grow every year. The country, which had used to occupy a stable place, was in the shake of a lamb's tail transformed into a 'banana ghetto' of Europe.

The continuity of process is apparent. Whatever caused the death of the USSR, a significant section of the population, including ourselves, was born and lived in that country. That's why the society before the Independence Day and



The old order appears to have gone—but the old ruling elite has been transformed into the new ruling class

after is like twins, who were from birth brought up in different families. They share only faces and certain behaviour reflexes. Social and economic structures of the society, of the labour market, of the work motivation, etc. differ greatly. The cultural intervention and the intrusion of consumer principals foreign to us are present.

Do you think the events of twenty years ago represent the historic triumph of capitalism and the defeat of communism?

Vpered (Roman): Are you joking? No. I don't think the collapse of the 'really existing socialist' states in East Europe, and only in East Europe (please note that Cuba and North Korea didn't fall, Maoist guerrillas in Peru, India, the Philippines didn't lay down their arms, etc.), represents the historic triumph. It was a retreat of a kind. The struggle continued. Now after twenty years of realignment and regrouping, we can see a new wave of revolt against the unjust social system coming (think Nepal).

Vpered (Myroslav): Absolutely, There's no doubt about it. We don't think that the Soviet Union was communist but at the same there's no doubt that the path we chose twenty years ago has turned out the worst social and economic scenario. The so-called 'civilized world' doesn't need us. Our role is to be a buffer zone between Russia and the West, to supply cheap labour force and brains, and to be a sump for migrants. That's it.

Many people considered that western style capitalism would be progressive compared to the USSR, is that still the case?

Vpered (Roman): Yes. Many believe that the capitalism we have in Ukraine is 'false', 'deformed', and there is a 'right', 'true' capitalism awaiting us out there, which 'we will build'

some lucky day. The financial crisis, economic depression and capitalism's inability to make it good ought to sober them up.

Vpered (Myroslav): It's even worse now. Twenty years of propaganda by the state, mass media, and non-governmental organizations have done their work. The West and its consumer standards remain our orienting point. Marginal left groups are on an equal footing with others involved in this business, since their members are intellectuals and professionals, i.e. mere wage earners at best, or petty bourgeoisie, professional grant users, and journalists serving the ruling class. Everybody's trying to fit in. The mainstream is drawing all on. The left doctrine functions as an intellectual trend imported from West Europe. That's why 'capitalism with a human face' propagated at all levels represents the future for the majority. Another is beyond their imagination; they rarely dream about another.

Before 1989 there were dissident communists, such as Leonid Plyushch, Ivan Dzyuba, there was a long tradition of Marxists who envisions national liberation as a far more radical social transformation. What happened to this tradition, why did it not re-emerge?

Vpered (Myroslav): They are dead as activists now. As a result of the historical development, two traditions from the past, monarchist and national communist, left outside of the ideological field of Ukraine. Only few know that once there was a specifically Ukrainian Marxist theory. Our task is to propagate its best exemplars by way of theoretical and practical work in opposition to Sovietophile post-Stalinist sects and cosmopolitan anarchist squeezes.

Did the 'Orange Revolution' represent the continuation of the struggles of 1989-91?

Vpered (Roman): I heard this opinion expressed by a Russian Marxist... well... I'm not quite sure he's a genuine Marxist but anyway, that Ukrainians had their 1991 in 2004. And when he said '1991', he meant the failed GKCP coup d'état and mobilisation of the masses to oppose it on the streets of Moscow. It implies that Ukrainians are retarded politically. I warn myself and everybody against being too simplistic in interpreting that event and reaching at quick analogies. I think it was similar to the events in 1989-1991 and at the same time different from them.

Vpered (Myroslav): No, unfortunately it didn't. In 2004, most of those who came out on the streets of Kyiv and supported Yushchenko, thought it did. We had a feeling that it was a second phase of the national democratic (bourgeois democratic) revolution, i.e. a social revolution. But everything went wrong. Today I'm convinced that the 'orange revolution', as well as a number of other 'rainbow revolutions', was a grandiose U.S.-backed provocation aimed at creating a destabilization belt around Russia.

Russia has been reviving as a state power and asserting itself, how is this viewed in Ukraine today?

Vpered (Myroslav): There are different views. Though, even those politicians who inspire Russophile tendencies in eastern and southern Ukraine are far from being true proponents of Russo-Ukrainian integration. In their instance, their recourse to Soviet-Russian historical and cultural archetypes means exploiting the mood of voters in their regions. They understand it better than anyone else that in the event that sovereignty is lost, even if it is lost only partially, their business, political role and place in the society will soon vanish, since they will be unable to resist Russian capital because of difference in scales. This happened in Byelorussia. Thus pro-Russian politicians' recourse to common origins, history, language, etc. is just another kind of electoral simulacrum.

In general, Ukraine as a state is explicitly following the anti-Russian line, though I'm not sure what will happen when a new president enters the office.

Many on the western left view America as the main imperialist power to be opposed, do you think Russia is also imperialist? How do you think the left in the West should relate to Russia?

Vpered (Myroslav): Russia is not an empire, though the policy it's trying to pursue is aimed at restoring one. A country, which is being rapidly depopulated, which is dependent on selling oil and gas and does not invest in manufacturing, can hardly play the role of an empire. Of course, it is the regional leader and not the weakest country in the capitalist periphery. However, the cultural intervention, economic blockades and military victories over patently weaker enemies

are not enough to treat it as an empire.

The western left's attitude towards Russia must be based upon a clear understanding of its social and economic and geopolitical situation. It's hard for me to draw a parallel between Russia and any other country but let me repeat it again, Russian isn't an empire. It's true that it isn't monolith, and I think the country will disintegrate in the future, but only time will tell.

Vpered (Roman): Russia is an empire but a regional one. It lacks resources, both economic and military, to be an imperialist power on a global scale although its ruling class is definitely keen to stand at the controls of a global empiricist vessel.

What is the current situation of the Ukrainian working class and the prospects for the labour movement?

Vpered (Myroslav): The situation is extremely difficult. Firstly, it is not extant as a political subject. It can be explained by the fact that it exists as a 'class in itself'. Secondly, the existent division of labour erodes the term and makes it uneconomic to organizationally revitalize it in the future. Thirdly, the mass media propaganda promoted by the ruling class (mostly by oligarchs) leaves no chance to produce an acceptable image of a working man, a producer who stands up to defend his rights. The consumer has taken over him, a subject whose sense of life is determined by ability to consume various goods of status, services, etc.

Workers' sporadic attempts to self-organize around trade unions and actions of disobedience return no result. The labour movement is not even in an inchoative stage. The social revolution only has it in its reproduction plans, or sexual dreams, if you wish.

What do you think the legacy of official and dissident communism is in Ukraine?

Vpered (Myroslav): The official communism exists politically and in other forms. It is a mix of Soviet myths tending to increasingly become Russian chauvinist myths. It is conditionally related to communism and Marxism. In Ukraine, the official communists also constitute a sort of '5th column', Little Russian archetype of a colonized subject. They are genetically Ukrainophobic and have nothing to do with the revolutionary left tradition.

The dissident movement is existent neither in reality, nor in public opinion. Archives and researchers only know about this great Marxist tradition. We are those who are trying to make it known in Ukraine. However ambitious it may sound, we see the establishment of a strong political organization similar to the Ukrainian Communist Party, as the ultimate goal of our propagandist's activity.

What do you think the prospects are for post-Stalinist left today? How do you think genuine communists should organise and operate?

Vpered (Myroslav): Their prospects are vague. They can continue relying upon pensioners and some mentally-engaged groups but only for a certain period of time. If they don't seriously modernize themselves, they will endure two or three election campaigns more and will take their exit. They don't seem to be eager to change, re-brand following the example of the Social Unity Party of Germany (who have reinvented themselves as Die Linke).

The Communist Party of Ukraine represents Ukrainian post-Stalinist left today. Chinese-type state capitalism is their ideological orienting point. That is why Stalinist views are nothing but part of their history and aesthetics. In fact, they try to follow the line of revisionists such as Deng Xiaoping.

Vpered (Myroslav): It's even simpler than that. If we put aside ideological revisionists and retrogrades from official parties, the youths who are dedicated to representing the left wing of public opinion, calk theories and practices of their West-European comrades thus being uncritical and often unproductive. Ideological colonization of our protest discourse by western ideological directives expands our theoretical horizons but narrows our theatre of practical operations building a kind of a ghetto for groups who are concerned about and preach inadequate weapons of resistance. Thus irrelevant subcultures and sects arise.

Vpered (Roman): Myroslav has raised an important point. So I would like to add that, in my opinion, if Ukrainian left want to originate a theory that would lead to a breakthrough in practice, they need to make one step back and one step aside. When I say, one step back, I mean they should come back to Marx, Lenin, Lukács,

Gramsci, whose work are full of brilliant theories and practical advice as relevant to our today's circumstances as the critique of trendy intellectuals from the academia. And to step aside is to look beyond West Europe and North America and discover the struggle that has been going on in Latin America, Africa and South East Asia for fifty years now. That is where the main influences must come from.

What do you think real communism means today?

Vpered (Myroslav): I don't know. No one has ever gained the shore of that fairy island, so I don't know what it looks like. I like Subcomandante Marcos and Zapatistas but labeling means making fetishes of the reality. I think communism is a path not an aim. It means correcting the society constantly in social and environmental terms. It's about the fair distribution of wealth and stabilization of environmental situation. This is an aim worth gaining.

Vpered (Roman): I think of it as a social formation rather than a process. It shall come in the stead of capitalism and overcome major antagonisms between labour and capital. It may not necessarily be pure and free of minor contradictions but exploitation and alienation shall certainly be phenomena of the past under real communism.

Vpered (Myroslav): The truth is a dialectical combination of the best from the traditions of direct and representative democracy. Unfortunately, the history of Ukraine and the Ukrainian revolutionary tradition can't give any answer to this question. At least, I don't feel like building revolutionary models or idols based on them.

Marxist Labour Party - Russia

Марксистской рабочей партии

Can you briefly introduce your organisation?

The Marxist Labour Party was founded on March 24-25 1990 in Moscow. Our organisation was one of the first Marxist organisations in the USSR that pointed to the non-communist character of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was then the ruling party.

Some of our comrades had been “red dissidents” under the power of the CPSU. By the decision of the MLP Council, there was created the all-Russia independent workers’ union ‘Defence of Labour’ under the leadership of a member of the MLP Council Yuri Leonov.

In the early 1990s the ‘Workers’ Information Agency’ created by the party worked actively: it had several dozen correspondents all over the USSR. The MLP published five issues of the scientific and political journal *Marxist*. Now the organisation publishes the newspapers *Left Turn* and *The Workers’ Path*. The latter is being made together with trade unionists from the city of Togliatti. We maintain the web-site <http://marxist.su> or <http://marxistparty.ru>

Today we maintain effective contacts with the trade unions and individual activists of the working class movement. We consider this to be one of the priorities in our work.

It’s twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a few years later saw the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic. How do you evaluate the events of 1989-1991 in the USSR in light of aspirations at the time? Was it a victory or a defeat?

It was an objective historical process, and, as this often happens, a dialectically contradictory one. It led to the destruction of much of the productive forces of the USSR, to the impoverishment of a large segment of the population of the country. At the same time, it destroyed the “Iron Curtain” and thus provided the inclusion of Russian and other post-Soviet economies into the mechanism of global productive forces.

The events in the USSR of the late 80s and early 90s of the last century, up to the liquidation of the Soviet Union itself, signified the completion of the Russian bourgeois revolution “in the broad sense”. This revolution lasted for almost 100 years – 1905-1991/93.

Here’s what V. I. Lenin wrote about revolutions in “the broad” and “the narrow” senses in his article “Notes of a Publicist” (Completed Works, Russian Edition, Vol.19, March-May 1910):

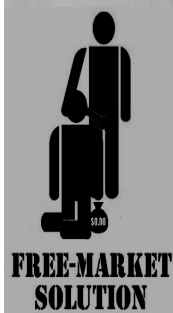
“... Now let’s see what the authors of the platform “understood” by the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution? Generally speaking, two things can be understood by this term. If it is used in the broad sense, then they mean by it the solution of objective historical tasks of the bourgeois revolution, the “completion” of it, i. e. the elimination of the ground able to give birth to a bourgeois revolution, the completion of the entire cycle of bourgeois revolutions. In this sense, for example, in France, the bourgeois-democratic revolution was completed only by 1871 (but begun in 1789). If this word is used in the narrow sense, then they mean a separate revolution, one of the bourgeois revolutions, one of the “waves”, if you like, that beats the old regime, but does not deal it the final blow, does not eliminate the ground for the following bourgeois revolutions. In this sense, the revolution of 1848 in Germany was “completed” in 1850 or in 1850’s, having not eliminated by this the ground for the revolutionary rise of 1860’s. The revolution of 1789 in France was “completed”, let us say, in 1794, having in no case eliminated by this the ground for the revolutions of 1830, 1848.”

How would you characterise the society that existed before 1989-91 and society today? Is there any continuity between them?

In the USSR there existed a catch-up model of state capitalism. The temporarily nationalised property allowed the Soviet Union (Russia) and many other countries of the “socialist camp” to successfully overtake the developed countries, as well as to quickly eliminate vestiges of feudalism.

Indeed, in the USSR there existed commodity-money relations, wage labour, classes and other attributes characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. The classics of Marxism maintained: where there is hired labour, it generates capital.

These notions are inseparably linked. The “socialist state” making investments in certain sectors of the national economy, like other capitalist countries, was in fact a capitalist society,



in which the functions of private capitalists were performed by the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. This wasn't, of course, a traditional capitalist society in the superstructure, but its basis was certainly a capitalist one.

It should be noted that Marx and Engels criticised the petty-bourgeois, bourgeois, state, etc. "socialisms", which had no relation to the Marxist socialism. For all this the "state socialism" is a state capitalism in its essence. Today there exists in Russia a "normal" private-ownership capitalism, and Russia itself is an imperialist country of, so to speak, second order in contrast with the leading imperialist powers.

The continuity between the USSR and modern Russia is, first of all, in an enormous influence of the state bureaucracy on society, and in the absence of traditions of organised class struggle within Russian workers. The point is that in the Soviet Union this struggle, on the one hand, was forestalled by a wide range of social benefits and guarantees, and, on the other hand, if it occurred, it was severely suppressed by the repressive organs. The continuity also shows itself in the personal composition of the elite of society: many of the former party functionaries now occupy prominent positions in business and in the government bureaucracy.

Do you think the events of twenty years ago represent the historic triumph of capitalism and the defeat of communism?

As we have said, the disintegration of the Soviet Union was an objective process of the catch-up

development of Russia's capitalism. There can be no question of any communism in the USSR. Accordingly, it is impossible to talk about the defeat of communism, although the disintegration of the USSR, of course, struck a blow on the world communist movement, on the Russian one in the first place.

Many people considered that western style capitalism would be progressive compared to the USSR, is that still the case?

Today in Russia there is not any influential movement for the restoration of the USSR and the order corresponding to it. In general, society has submitted to the transition to private-ownership capitalism, i.e. ultimately, it has realised the objective nature of the changes occurred. The majority of Russia's citizens prefer not to think whether it was progress or regress.

Before 1989 there were dissident communists, there was a long tradition of Marxists who envisioned a far more radical social transformation. What happened to this tradition, why did it not re-emerge?

In the USSR this tradition was practically destroyed or it existed in the deep underground with no real influence upon social processes. Today there exist in Russia radical-communist organisations. But they have no serious influence due to the fact that the historical stage the country is experiencing is still far from the struggle for communism. Russia's society is too consumer-bourgeois; there are almost no more or less large-scale sprouts of communist relations.

Accordingly, there is no “demand” for communist activities...

Russia has been reviving as a state power and asserting itself, how is this viewed in Russia today?

Most Russians are proud of the successes in the formation of Russia’s imperialism, although there are strong critical sentiments concerning the crying social inequality, the arbitrariness of the bureaucracy and capital. However, these sentiments are still very far from practical attempts to change the situation.

Many on the western left view America as the main imperialist power to be opposed, do you think Russia is also imperialist? How do you think the left in the West should relate to Russia?

As we have said, Russia is an imperialist power. And one should relate to it accordingly! At the same time one shouldn’t simplify things and reduce everything only to this. After all, Russia is a very multinational country and it continues to be a federation of national entities. In Russia there has not yet been completed the process of forming a number of bourgeois nations, and this imposes a significant imprint on the political situation. And the Left in the West should take into account this bourgeois-progressive factor in the development of these ethnic groups. At the same time, some national autonomies of the Russian Federation still have not got their national proletariat; besides, strong tribal remnants are still in place there, and the local ruling elites, as well as the population as a whole, are reluctant to abandon them.

What is the current situation of the Russian working class and the prospects for the labour movement?

In general, the Russian workers are not yet organised into a class. The class’s trade unions are being created, but this is the exception rather than the rule. There is an understanding of their oppressed position. But the struggle against capitalists is mostly led spontaneously and individually – through courts, changing places of employment, primitive forms of sabotage. As for prospects for a way ahead, we see them in the interaction of the organised Russian workers, first of all, with the organised Western proletarians.

What do you think the legacy of official and dissident communism?

The legacy of official communism is expressed in parliamentary reformism and in the national-conservative ideas of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and of the organisations

close to it; the legacy of dissident communism lies in the broad spectrum of radical left-wing groups that comprehended its ideas in some way or other: but the first prevails over the second a great deal.

In general, society has submitted to the transition to private-ownership capitalism, i.e. ultimately, it has realised the objective nature of the changes occurred.

What do you think the prospects are for the post-Stalinist left today? How do you think genuine communists should organise and operate?

We hold that the development of the Left is directly connected with the development of the proletarian movement. They are like a political superstructure over this movement. Accordingly, a reliable basis for the organisation of communists can be only in proletarian class organisations. And their formation and growth occur in the real class struggle, in which communists must occupy an important place as well. As for the organisation of the current work of communists, we believe that one must proceed from the real present-day situation. Today we are in need of an all-Left information network based on the new advanced technologies, as well as joint actions. We try to work in these directions.

What would you say are the main influences on left thought in Russia today?

It is strongly influenced by Soviet nostalgia and bourgeois national-patriotic sentiments. But the slowly spreading class struggle of proletarians influences it too! Even now people’s mentality is adversely affected by the collapse of the USSR, at the helm of which there stood “communists”. Their ideological orientation is lost. Left thought is vulgarised and subjected to the strongest obstruction by the official mass media and the majority of oppositional political associations.

What do you think real communism means today?

It is a historic overcoming of class and commodity-money relations on the basis of globalisation of the world’s productive forces and production relations, the abolition of private property and, ultimately, of national states... To be short, everything that Marx and Engels envisioned in their works ‘The German Ideology’, the ‘Communist Manifesto’ and ‘Critique of the Gotha Program of German Social-Democracy’.

Valeriy Predtechenskiy

Валерий Вениаминович Предтеченский
События и комментарии

Can you briefly introduce yourself?

Valeriy Predtechenskiy, the developer of the structure of dialectical method in sociology and political economy, and – on this basis – of a system of communist self-administration by communes of production enterprises. I cooperate with the SB of the MLP, participate in [Russian-language] e-mailing lists "Impulse", "Working Struggle", "Marxist review". http://predtechenskij.fromru.su/curriculum_vitae.htm

1 It's twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a few years later saw the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic. How do you evaluate the events of 1989-1991 in the USSR in light of aspirations at the time? Was it a victory or a defeat?

- Against the background of the highest technical achievements of the productive forces of the USSR and the people's democracy countries there occurred an ideological decomposition of the society. The class of managers, of all ranks and levels, were striving for their liberation from the tyranny of the Central Committee of the CPSU (together with the KGB – the guard of the ideology). The working class, in a Communist manner despising their chiefs and managers, were disappointed with the ideological directions of "building up communism", which was allegedly being built but could not for the life of them have been achieved.

The USSR suffered a defeat in the Cold War, in its competition with the more powerful economic grouping of imperialism. The democratic ideology of personal liberties and the higher personal and living standard achievements of the imperialist encirclement were beyond compare after the lifting of the "Iron Curtain". The destruction of the "Concrete Wall" only accelerated the process of degradation of the countries of socialism (i. e. of the state monopolism, the history does not know any other genuine socialism - the Swedish "socialism" and the Italian and German national-socialisms - do not count as being imperialist ones)*.

* NB. Any socialism is bourgeois, but not communist, since socialism – the public – envisages a universal mass meeting of individuals and, subsequently, leaders of a non-organised people and of peoples. (It envisages) the exploitation of man by man. That's just what occurred in the USSR.

As to communism, it, on the contrary, envisages a production self-management – the self-activity – in the concrete collective process of production, the freedom of the organised and directly interacting working people. (It envisages) a system of communes.

The difference is essential.

After the destruction of the "socialist camp" (having lost the support of the USSR there suffered all the socialist countries except China) there came the turn of moral as well as technical degradation of the rest of the countries – of the victorious imperialist ones.

2. How would you characterise the society that existed before 1989-91 and society today? Is there any continuity between them?

- Historically, according to the level of concentration of material means of production in money terms (i. e. in capital), three phases of capitalism can be distinguished:

(1) The capitalism of landlords and merchants - the "feudal", small-scale commodity one. Free labour, wage slaves, proletarians do not yet exist in it. Only isolated enterprises have been capitalised. The free competition of entrepreneurs is still bounded by the power of landlords, the manpower of society being concentrated in their property.

(2) The labour force has been liberated from its serfdom and abruptly fills up the labour market. Small enterprises are dramatically absorbed by their stronger competitors. There arise magnates of industrial sectors, monopolies of industrial sectors and "empires" of industrial sectors. This capitalist phase of the sectoral monopolism was called "imperialism" by Lenin.



The nationalistic 'Communist Parties' in Russia seek a return to the USSR, but not of the revolutionary period— but of Stalin's dictatorship.

(3) Following the victory of Soviet Russia in the Civil War the same Lenin practically organised, and Stalin subsequently totalised, under the name of "socialism", the third, state-capitalist phase. This is the third and last phase of capitalism - the highest and last capitalist mode of production, the highest level of concentration of material means of production. However, the state monopolism (as well as any controversial-in-itself capitalism) is not able to claim for the world supremacy.

The society with domination of state monopoly on the material means of production, the Soviet Union, represented the highest level of capitalist concentration of public material means of production in hands of the state. – The state as a unitary capitalist, represented by the Politbureau [i. e. the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU – *translator's footnote*]. There was a unitary system of forming the productive forces. All the sectors of the [national] economy were subordinated to a unitary state

management.

The population of the country was universally proletarianised in a unitary system of payment for works.

Only the people of the agricultural branch of production "dropped out" of this system. With their 'personal subsidiary holdings', the farmers seemed to remain in the small-scale capitalism. However, the same Lenin had wrongly identified the "peasants" as a separate social class, "friendly" to the working class.

But then again a class-like "layer" of intelligentsia took its clear shape. Officially, people were divided into "workers" and "employees", the latter included military men and managers.

The third class - the upper one - (the CC of the CPSU) was also attributed to the notorious "layer".

The USSR ideologists in a "Marxist-Leninist" manner, i. e. dogmatically, always contrasted (and this opinion still remains) two classes - workers and peasants (although only workers belonged to the state-monopoly mode of production). And the managerial class, "the layer of intelligentsia", was shamefully passed over in silence. As for the masters of life - the CC of the CPSU – the universal capitalists, even thinking about them was not encouraged.

The USSR collapsed, with the mode of production directly falling through two phases (from the highest to the lowest one) – down to the small-scale commodity capitalism. That's why the aristocratic regalia for the new bourgeoisie as well as religious cults for the "people" corresponding to the feudal and small-scale capitalism were urgently called for. The predatory people quickly went on looting, selling out and squandering the material wealth accumulated over the whole period of the heroic efforts of Soviet toilers.

At present, Russia is struggling up to the "civilised" sectoral monopolism (imperialism). However, this "rise" is again due to squandering the mineral wealth and in no case due to the production of means of production. So Russia's oligarchs, the richest billionaires are not a patch, as the saying goes, on their Western competitors as regards the productivity level.

Only the remains of the productive forces of the

country have preserved their Soviet continuity in terms of their longing for the state monopolism and for planning their own lives.

The history of social development is shown in my book, http://predtechenskij.fromru.su/social_dialectics.htm, called *Dialectics of Social Development*. See also its Section 9.2., Figure 21 - "Combined diagram (of linear-stepped and chronological characteristics) of social development with the imposition of variation of means of living from anthropogenic impacts". In this paper with the help of dialectical method I succeeded in identifying the correspondence of material epochs (i. e. of productive forces) to the modes of production (i. e. to the relations of production). They are four economic formations (primitive communist, slave-owning, capitalist, civilised-communist ones). The triple character of each formation corresponds to the twelve phases of social *development*.

3. Do you think the events of twenty years ago represent the historic triumph of capitalism and the defeat of communism?

- The defeat of the USSR is not yet the defeat of communism. And the triumph of imperialism is like a feast after a pyrrhic victory and during a plague as well.

Due to efforts of the USSR leaders who implanted the idea of building up communism, we have got the Marxist communist teaching in its primary sources.

We have got a negative experience of forming a socialist society with universal proletarianisation of population (with universal wage labour).

We have got a positive experience of non-commodity exchange in the sphere of production of means of production.

Among other things, the history has shown that it is easier to make the qualitative revolutionary leap from the previous phase of development, and not from the final one. Or from the "weak link", having timed, as it was in 1917, the general crisis of imperialism. To skip the "dead-end", highest stage of capitalist development, even though it has much more basic accumulations for the future social order (not to ignore the now half-ruined Russia).

So the matter depends on the dialectical Marxist communist social science which is qualitatively

different from the bourgeois formalist, chaotic compilations.

4. Many people considered that western style capitalism would be progressive compared to the USSR, is that still the case?

- Such formalist opinions about the backwardness of the USSR were and are a good few. With their opinions of this kind many left-wing Marxist ideologists close up with right-wing bourgeois apologists. Exactly such "various readings" of Marxism engendered, in general, a discord in the working-class communist movement.

The sectoral monopolism of the Western type (imperialism, in Lenin's definition) is the capitalism in the phase of its particularity (i. e. the capitalism proper). Therefore, it is most consistently defined constitutionally and is conservatively stable (although being subject to systematic crises) economically than the small-scale commodity (feudalised) and the state-monopoly (totalitarianist "statecap") "transitional", developing modes of production of the capitalist formation.

5. Before 1989 there were dissident communists, there was a long tradition of Marxists who envisioned a far more radical social transformation. What happened to this tradition, why did it not re-emerge?

- I myself and my father were dissidents communist. But we were sure of the solidity of the USSR socialism, and appealed only to the CC of the CPSU and to the institutes of social sciences over the deviations from Marxism in the social development.

I've heard about Sablin who was the commander of a destroyer. I read, after the 1990, some works by Fetisov. I know nothing else about the tradition of Marxists who envisioned a more radical transformation of society. Gorbachev's "glasnost" [openness] did not generate any united front of dissident Marxists.

The philosophical seminars, "universities of Marxism-Leninism" and institutes of social sciences, where we tried to act alone in a production-commune manner, more and more inclined to the pro-Western private-consumer opportunism.

6. Russia has been reviving as a state power

and asserting itself, how is this viewed in Russia today?

- Just how Russia "has been reviving" and "asserting itself" - you can see it from my reply to your 2nd question. Here the views of the Left are mostly common.

As for the right-wing blood-suckers, they are not worth mentioning: this world is theirs.

7. Many on the western left view America as the main imperialist power to be opposed, do you think Russia is also imperialist? How do you think the left in the West should relate to Russia?

- Russia is a country of the sectoral monopolism (see my reply to your 2nd question). It is, of course, an imperialist country, but on the lowest level of this capitalist phase, on the level of private seizing and squandering of the public natural resources. That is why the Western imperialist countries, and first of all the USA, view Russia as an object of absorption.

This absorption, is, of course, being realised by the way of liquidating the remains of the highly-developed in the past productive forces with their community-communist traditions. And this should be in no way allowed, since the first communist revolution is to be most easily realised in the weak link of imperialism.

The Left movement in the West already knows the communitarian movement: the LIP in France, there's probably something of the sort in England; encouraging information systematically comes from the United States. So, I believe, the Left communitarians of the West must in no case support Russia's pro-Western trade unionism. On the contrary, they should detect and scientifically "spud" the shoots of production self-management.

The Western Left should always remember that the Left of Russia are not always dependents in the communist movement. The Russian Left had and they still retain a powerful Marxist school with the primary sources of works by classics. Besides, the working-outs of self-management procedures appeared in the USSR with entirely Marxist filling.

8. What is the current situation of the Russian working class and the prospects for the labour movement?

- The working class of Russia, being subject to trade-unionism, is disoriented in their protest actions.

However, there are facts of take-overs of enterprises by their work collectives into self-management. And some collective bodies of dockers, car-assembly workers, railway workers even tried to control the financial and sales activities of their enterprises. If only the activists of liberation of the working class from exploitation are provided with the technique of self-management, the positive prospects won't wait for them.

9. What do you think the legacy of official and dissident communism?

- The legacy of official "communism" manifests itself in the propaganda of returning to the socialist system of the USSR. This is the common sin of all the present "Communist" parties headed by the openly pro-bourgeois CPRF.

The dissident communism (of the Left) defines the socialist system of the USSR – as a bourgeois one – the "statecap". However, there prevails the view of the "backward statecap". This opinion accents the fact that the USSR state monopolism used feudal forms of governing the agriculture (restricting the possibility of persons to move) as well as the fact that the total state-capitalist [i. e. the State as 'Gesamtkapitalist' if we use the famous expression by F. Engels – *translator's footnote*] neglected to provide the population with domestic appliances.

I, personally, treat the USSR as an advanced statecap. After all, despite the adverse natural conditions, it ponderably competed with the sectoral monopolies of the West, having been able to totally get its own branches of industry under the state. Even Hitler had never dreamt of that in the racist Germany. And with us it was solved relatively easy in the course of Stalinisation due to the mere hope of people for the communism to come. The sectoral monopolism does not suppose to generate such expectations.

10. What do you think the prospects are for post-Stalinist left today? How do you think genuine communists should organise and operate?

- Post-Stalinism now exists in the minds of humanistic part of Russia's people. However, it

has no future and cannot have it at all, because you cannot disregard the resulting historical experience of deception with Stalin's apologetic "communist" idea: "communism" without having communised the society, with no collective power, with no self-motivation, without self-management in the production process. That is the "communism" with hired labour. Moreover, the new "dear God in the flesh", Stalin, is not expected in the foreseeable future.

Hitlerism, in its national-racist manifestation, is all the more not intrinsic in the Russian working class who form the majority of population in Russia.

Therefore, the genuine Communists must, first of all, set themselves the aim of achieving genuine communism (see my reply to your 12-th question), as well as organise themselves in a Communist manner, i. e. not in a bourgeois democratic-centralist manner, but in a communitarian one – by self-management and interchangeability. Thereafter, [they must] gather in a fist the progressive Marxist scholars who are proficient in dialectical logic (for calculating the relation between the value and the use-value of labour product) and the labour movement forces prone to self-management (for taking-over enterprises by their production collectives).

11. What would you say are the main influences on left thought in Russia today?

- The biggest influence on left thought is now exerted by the dispersional and dogmatic Marxism in its opportunist and trade-unionist character. Further the subjects of influence are: Trotskyism, anarchism, a pure-bourgeois trade unionism.

A very weak influence in the "left thought" has got the dialectical Marxism. It is in use, but again in a dogmatic form, in the circles of the old com[munist]-professors.

Spontaneous protests by workers against the bourgeois robbery and mockery are taken by the Left exclusively from the standpoint of statistics and information. Being unorganised themselves, the Left do not even prepare any methods for taking and holding power by workers in their enterprises.

12. What do you think real communism means today?

- Today the concept of "real communism" is interpreted by many as the Stalinist socialism, but in a philistinist manner - "with a human face". I.e. state monopolism without totalitarian repressions is meant, i. e. utopia. Moreover, the versions of such utopian constructions are as numerous as their authors: you cannot count them.

Whereas the real (true) concept of the real (true) communism, even according to the most simple and primitive logic, should be determined as the highest scientific achievement of mankind in its social structure. Moreover, even in the slightest Marxist manner communism is characterised "in the liberty and happiness of the ancient gentes" (Morgan, Engels and Marx). I. e., real communism represents a primitive communism, but at the highest level of social development, using all the best in the achievements of mankind.

The modern, social notion of "gens" is objectively, economically represented by the work collective of an enterprise – the collective body, which is responsible for the output of labour product suitable for public exchange. Today these operative "gentes" with their work force and their technological organisation are owned by the merchant-capitalist, the owner of building and tools. But if the ownership of work force and production technologies is transferred into the hands of this production collective body (numbering about 100 persons), then we get a self-reproducing, and self-governing collectivity – a gens – of a new, civilised generation, i. e., using the modern language, a commune, a production and reproduction social cell.

The cell structure of the communist society liberated from the private, capitalist owners-hucksters should envisage a scientific and objective equivalent of exchange of labour product with respect to its value and use value. The scientific and objective equivalent of exchange will also determine the functional structure of the communist social system. The calculation of this equivalent and of the communist system, as well as the ownership of the material means of production in the first phase of communism entirely fall on the shoulders of the state of dictatorship of the proletariat. By the way, that's where the succession of the first phase of communism and the last phase of capitalism lies.

платформа-“комуни”

Ми – комуністи: ми боремося за нове самокероване суспільство, що базується на колективному володінні засобами виробництва та розповсюдження та економіки, що організована не для виробництва на потреби ринку, але для добробуту людства та гармонійно з нашим природним середовищем. Комунізм скасує систему найманої праці так що наша спроможність до роботи більше не буде товаром, що продається наймачу; це буде справді безкласове суспільство; не буде ніякої держава, у цих самокерованих працівників не буде ніяких менеджерів або начальників .

Ми – інтернаціоналісти: ми прагнемо до найбільшого можливого співробітництва з комуністами у інших країнах; ми будемо солідарність з робітничими рухами всього світу; ми проти будь-яких кордонів та перешкоджанню іміграції; та ми безумовно підтримуємо право націй на самовизначення.

Ми знаємо, що комунізм може бути побудований тільки знизу, через самоорганізацію працівників. Ця концепція комунізму не має нічого спільного з підробним “соціалізмом” сталіністського державного планування у колишньому СРСР, потогінними виробництвами Китаю, та соціал-демократичним “гуманним” капіталізмом . Ніяка нація в світі сьогодні не є комуністичною, ніде економіки наразі не управляється працівниками. Зазначені вище моделі “соціалізму” довели свою повну нежиттєздатність, підтримуючи, а у багатьох випадках і підсилюючи відсутність самовизначення робітничого класу. Немає ніякого особливого зв'язку між соціалізмом та націоналізацією з боку держави, яка просто заміняє одну групу менеджерів іншою; разом з цим у сьогоднішній повсякденній боротьбі ми пропонуємо боротьбу за введення робочого контролю „тут і зараз” як підготовчий крок до реального

робочого самоуправління та колективної власності.

Ми є найбільш стійкими прибічниками соціального визволення у всіх його формах. Ми боремось проти статевих репресій, сексизму та гомофобії та виступаємо за сексуальне визволення; ми стоїмо в авангарді антирасистської та антифашистської боротьби; ми проти будь-яких обмежень свободи слова та вільного культурного вираження. Ця боротьба не є якимось додатком до боротьби робітничого класу, але є основою боротьби за демократію та свободу людства.

Ми знаємо, що для робітничого класу неможливо боротися за побудову комуністичного суспільства, якщо він не може контролювати свої власні організації: ми підтримуємо рухи рядових працівників проти бюрократів, які панують в профспілках та лівих партіях; ми за відкритість та демократію у робітничому русі.

Ми не маємо богів, навіть революційних. Ми відхиляємо практику використання робіт того чи іншого соціаліста минулих років як „священних текстів”, які, неначе євангелія, можуть “відкривати істину”. “Традиції”, до яких апелюють традиційні ліві групи, є універсально аісторичними та анахронічними, та використовуються заради створення історичної легітимізації, а не критичного вивчення та отримання уроків з минулого.

Ми вважаємо, що поразки робітничого руху за останні три десятиріччі; занепад лівих та абсолютна бідність їх ідей та гасел; їх розрив з класовою політикою; та сектантство груп, що конкурують за перевагу їхньої власної кампанії та так званих проектів об'єднання; є свідченнями потреби в докорінному переосмисленню лівого проекту перебудові робітничого руху.

what is the commune?

1. Our Politics

Our Platform is the political basis of our unity:

We are communists: we fight for a new self-managed society based on collective ownership of the means of production and distribution and an economy organised not for value production but for the well-being of humanity and in harmony with our natural environment. Communism will abolish the system of wage-labour so that our ability to work will cease to be a commodity to be sold to an employer; it will be a truly classless society; there will be no state, no managers or organisations superior to those of workers' self-management.

We are internationalists: we seek the greatest possible collaboration with communists in other countries; we build solidarity with workers' movements around the world; we are opposed to all borders and immigration controls; and we are opposed to all forms of oppression of nationalities.

We know that communism can only come from below, through the organisations of the workers themselves. This conception of communism has nothing in common with the fake "socialisms" of the Stalinist state planning of the former USSR, of the sweatshops of China, and social-democratic "humane" capitalism. No nation in the world today is communist, nowhere is the economy managed by the workers. These models of "socialism" have all proven to be complete failures, maintaining and in many cases aggravating the working class's lack of self-determination. There is no particular connection between socialism and nationalisation by the state, which merely replaces one set of managers with another; alongside fighting day-to-day battles we advocate a struggle for vestiges of workers' control in the here and now as preparatory steps towards real workers' self-management and collective ownership.

We are the most consistent advocates of social liberation in all its forms. We fight sexual repression, sexism and homophobia and advocate sexual liberation; we champion anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles; we oppose all limits to freedom of speech and free cultural expression. These struggles are not just some adjunct to working-class struggle but are the cornerstone of democracy and human freedom. We know that it is impossible for the working class to fight for and create a communist society if it is unable to control its own organisations: we support rank and file movements against the bureaucrats who lord it over the unions and parties of the left; we are for openness and democracy in the workers' movement.

We have no gods, not even revolutionary ones. We reject the practice of using the works of this or that socialist of decades past as sacred texts from which "revealed truths" can be read off as gospel. The "traditions" to which the traditional left groups appeal are universally ahistorical and anachronistic, used for the sake of feigning historical legitimacy rather than to critically examine and draw lessons from the past. We believe that the defeats of the workers' movement in the last three decades; the decay of the left and the absolute poverty of its ideas and slogans; its abandonment of class politics; and the sectarianism of the

groups vying for supremacy with their own front campaigns and so-called unity projects; are all evidence of the need for ground-up rethinking of the left's project and the re-composition of the workers' movement.

2. Our Organisation

We are a network of communists committed to the self-emancipation of the working class, internationalism and opposition to imperialism and all forms of oppression. We reject statist and authoritarian visions of socialism and look instead to the tradition of 'socialism from below', which believes that emancipation can be achieved only through the activity, self-organisation and mobilisation of the working class and oppressed people themselves. Our goal is a communist society, which will abolish the system of wage-labour: a classless society with no state, managers or organisations superior to those of workers' self-management.

Communist revolutions cannot succeed without mass self-organisations of workers, and the leadership of organisations of revolutionary workers and the oppressed. We are a network whose aim is to contribute to the development of such a movement in this country and internationally. We agree to establish ourselves as an organising committee of individual supporters.

We shall function on the basis of consensus or if necessary majority vote: a motion is carried by a vote of more than half (50% plus one) of the people with voting rights in attendance.

3. Membership

We welcome the affiliation of any individual who accepts our platform as our basis of unity, supports our activities practically and financially, and accepts these principles of organisation. All members may speak, move motions and vote at meetings. Those who join us in these committees do so freely by an acceptance of these general principles. Others, who are not members, are free to contribute material for the paper and to participate in the discussions of the network.

4. A pluralist communist network

The Commune is a paper, a flow of pamphlets, and an organisation of activists with new ideas. Our purpose is to develop and extend these ideas, to promote their discussion and, wherever possible, to act upon them. Our aim is to create a pluralist organisation, a network of committees whose members come together to promote their ideas in an organised manner and to renew them in the practice of the class struggle. Any member or group of members has the right to form an open tendency (platform) to present their views at any time. We reject sectarian vanguardism and adhere to the principle that communists have no interests separate and apart from those of the working class as a whole.

To find out more about our events and our ideas, email us at uncaptiveminds@googlemail.com. Send postal correspondence (letters and articles; publications; donations) to The Commune, 2nd Floor, 145-157 St John Street, London EC1V 4PY

thecommmune.co.uk