

FOR A SOCIALIST REBIRTH: A SOVIET VIEW

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What country is this we are living in? Do you call this socialism, if yesterday hundreds of thousands or millions of people — mainly communists — were sent to the camps and today tanks and armoured personnel carriers appear on the streets of our towns? Is this socialism when you can't even buy ordinary shoes and milk — let alone a video or pork — in Uglich, Nizhnii Tagil, Arkhangelsk or Astrakhan? Do you call this socialism, where a veteran worker has to get by on 70 or perhaps 100 roubles a month, but young foreign currency dealers and prostitutes can make hundreds, or rather thousands of roubles a day? Do you call this socialism, if hospitals and kindergartens look like barns, but the 'servants of the people' notwithstanding all the criticism, still 'serve the people' in marble palaces. Do you call this socialism?

Any social drama is difficult to submit to sober scientific analysis if you are one of its actors. When one of the two ruling world social systems melts away like last year's snow in a few months, when Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the rest don't even want to be called Peoples' republics, let alone socialist, when a once monolithic (to outward appearances, at least) block of communist and workers' parties of the socialist countries collapses like a house of cards, when. . . When all this becomes reality, it can make you feel like burying your head in the sand of domestic problems, or repenting of former errors and joining a rag-bag band of home-grown monarchists and liberals in the Requiem for socialism.

Anybody interested? Well, we aren't at any rate. Like most Marxists, we want to get to grips with understanding the crisis afflicting socialism and the world communist movement. It cannot be simply reduced to food shortages and a loss of faith in the ruling parties (essentially the fault of the corrupt elite and the party-state apparatus) of the so-called socialist countries. The problem lies deeper. It is now increasingly obvious that the production relations, economic mechanism, the politics and ideology of **Stalinist-Brezhnevite** society left the key tasks of today — the mass introduction of the technology of the scientific and technical revolution, a

civilised and comfortable standard of living and socio-political and cultural freedoms — unanswered.

This, we repeat, is obvious. But the question is: does this mean in principle that socialism never had, and never will have a better answer than that 'civilised' part of humanity, which now seems to have such an unassailable lead on us?

Indeed we have just posed the readers and ourselves not one, but several questions at once. One: What sort of society are we living in, and can we consider 'real socialism' a practical embodiment of Marxism, and on the basis of its crisis judge one section of humanity's road to socialism and communism to have failed? Two: Have Marxism and the socialist idea completely discredited themselves as a scientific and objective programme for the creation of a new society? Three: What prospects do the countries of 'real socialism' have of escaping from the crisis, and where do we go from here?

1. What Sort of Society?

Socialism is a society built for and in the name of humanity, a society whose mission is to provide welfare and all-round development for every. . . Yes, what the USSR, Poland, North Korea and Yugoslavia have today bears little resemblance to that bright ideal. So where are we living? In a country of state feudalism with its universal hierarchy, castes, social barriers and administrative coercion? Or is this simply a bastard social and economic system without parallel in world history? And what do the socio-economic systems of the other 'socialist' countries represent — for the present or for the future? What did we fight for? For what cause did millions of party members, workers and peasants go to their deaths at the hands of noble Russian (and also British, French, Japanese and American) defenders of civilisation on the fronts of the Civil War? Why were the millions of those who were repressed by their fellow citizens convinced of the rightness of the ideas and cause of socialism? Why did the children of those shot by Stalin hurry off to join the fight against fascism in Spain (rather than the rockers or the punks)? Why were the collective farms and Soviet power restored in the areas controlled by the partisans, and the women and children literally worked to death? Why, only thirty years ago were most of us so keen to go into space, to the virgin lands and to Bratsk, rather than to become well-heeled playboys? Why do those returning from war in Afghanistan value the support of friends above everything else and why are they prepared to fight for justice?

Why is this happening in a country where the government has lied itself black in the face for decades, and a monstrous web of corruption and an all-pervading morass of bureaucracy have doomed the people of a great power to freeze in conditions comparable only to developing

countries? Why?

The answer is not simple, but there is one. Because our history resulted from playing out a terrible and monstrous contradiction, which gave birth to both the achievements and the decay of new-born socialism. At one end were those of us who fought for seventy years to build socialism with our own sweat and blood. At the other were those who by their apathy, fear and indolence saddled us with a band of outright criminals and dealers in red tape sincere only in their enthusiasm to suppress everything living. So where are we living? Is this a socialist country, or isn't it? And what sort of a socialist country has a standard of living lower than that of Taiwan?

Have you ever seen children deformed by polio? One leg longer than the other, arms sticking out in all directions, heads on one side, hardly even able to speak? Is this a human being? Stand him next to a gorilla and compare their viability. There's no question about it. Or is there? Our socialism, hardly yet born and or able to stand on its own two feet, was stricken with a terrible disease of bureaucratic transformation. Yes, there were reasons: the child was weak and the environment was hostile. Yes, today we are barely alive, and hardly know what to put right first in order to sort out which way to go, what to do, and how to do it.

There are many who would prefer to put this sick child out of its misery. After all, the experiment was a failure, its legs wont support it, its arms are useless and it's got the head of a zombie. . . some people maybe, but not those who put their own soul, heart, work and blood into the life of that child.

We have certainly built a strange society. It has everything: — a semi-feudal hierarchy, state capitalism with monopolies and a bureaucracy hiring dispossessed workers, and the embryonic 'bits and pieces' of socialist relations, which were deformed almost before they had sprung up, and survived in this terrible distorted form for decades.

What gave this monstrosity its strength? Maybe it was the strength of the totalitarian and bureaucratic system, subordinating everything to itself, distorting our lives and our ideals alike.

2. Only Communists Can Discredit Communism

And we have. We have discredited the greatest achievement of the human mind — the idea of the Communist future of Mankind, the idea of the unification and emancipation of the workers. We have discredited it, drowning it in the blood of the Stalinist purges, in the empty phrasemongering of Khrushchev's promises, and the swamp of Brezhnev's stagnation. We have discredited the ideas for which people like Bauman, killed by a Tsarist secret police agent, Sacco and

Vanzetti, sentenced to the electric chair by the democratic State of America, Allende and Jara, shot by Pinochet's worshippers of private property all gave their lives.

We have discredited many of socialism's values on what is virtually a world scale. With our own hands (correction: the hands of Stalin, Yezhov, and Beria are not the hands of the people) we wiped out the Comintern, both directly by purges, and indirectly, by the fight against social democracy and our flirtation with fascism. With our own hands (and these were our hands and nobody else's — the hands of bondsmen who dumbly tolerated the trampling of the ideals of our country and the ideals of socialism) we laid the way for our country to become the image of the 'evil empire' of totalitarianism and suppression of the individual.

During a public debate our colleague V. I. Danilov-Danil'yan justly remarked that during the twenties and thirties a well educated and cultured Englishman or Frenchman was as afraid of admitting his sympathies for the capitalist system as virtually the majority of the elite intelligentsia of the USSR or Poland are now of confessing to a belief in socialism. . . It's alright nowadays to bewail the passing of Russia the Great (Lithuania, Moldavia, Georgia), of (My God) civilisation, even the innocently murdered Nikolai Ivanovich (who called him 'bloody' — he was such a nice, well-educated man, and he was so fond of Russia) but words like 'marxism', 'socialist revolution' and 'Communism'. . . sorry, these are a bit unfashionable and not quite the thing in civilised society.

You can get as worked up as you like about this (and we must admit that we do!), but the worst of it is that these judgements are in many respects correct. Our generation has never seen any other form of socialism than that of the corrupt power of the Rashidovs and Churbanovs, and knows no other marxism than the demagoguery of Brezhnev and Suslov. For decades they lectured us on the advantages of developed socialism, swore loyalty to the ideals of Leninism. . . and lied. Lied in what they said and lied in what they did.

And what did we do? We just sat there and listened. We repeated the lie at meetings. Worse, we even believed some of it. At first we believed blindly that this lie really was the ideal of socialist marxism. Now we are ready to believe blindly. . . in what? Strange as it may seem, the same thing — that the ideals of socialism and marxism are lies, dirt and blood.

Whose fault is this? Those who humiliated us — the government, the Party, the paid ideologists and their lackeys from the social sciences?¹ But however true that may be, the guilty are among us too — those who did not hold senior posts, did not take bribes, did not speculate, did not sing the praises of developed socialism at meetings

(and how many of us 'without sin' in this respect) but in doing so kept quiet and maintained 'well-paid sycophants and lovers of sinecures' (K. Marx)¹ — those who now sit and wait a new mafia — consisting of the banking aristocracy, speculators and their willing or unwilling ideologists — to humiliate them once more.

But still, much is changing. We've thrown off our slumbers and keep asking ourselves 'why can't we live like they do over there if we clearly can't go on living the way we do over here?' Over there they've got things to eat, things to wear, somewhere to live, and all of this without any queues. Sounds good? It certainly does. And if you look at Sweden, they've even got a Social-Democratic government and live under what virtually amounts to socialism. What more could you want? We'll organise everything like that and live like. . . Yes, how? Like they do in Sweden? Or like they do in India which also has a market, and a mixed system of property, and democracy?

3. Does 'Civilised Society' have disadvantages, and should we be afraid of them?

Our erstwhile choruses of 'Shame!' at meetings and in books about 'their' way of life just a few years ago has given way to the still more unanimous 'Hooray' which we now raise on the same subject at meetings and in newspapers.

Suppose we take a sober look at the West? No, we're not trying to present opinion as objective analysis. Let us just mention the diametrically opposite views of two acquaintances who were in the USA at the end of 1989. Let us begin with perhaps the only thing on which our colleagues agreed. The level of domestic and industrial technology is more than ten years ahead of ours. But at this point there is a surprising divergence of views. One goes into endless raptures at the variety and beauty of all the things around you: the dozens of different types of wineglasses and tumblers in a bar; the eight different knives and forks that civilised man uses to eat scrambled eggs; the genuine art that one sees in any shop window, which, he feels, must have taken a talented artist over one hundred hours. The other, an art specialist, with a certain latent diffidence of a man given to quarrel with the obvious facts, has his doubts: does one have to waste the time and genius of an artist in order to present Her Majesty the Product to the customer? No, art in everyday life is all very well but. . . And (continuing his impressions) the bondage of the 'businessman' who has to put in 8-12 hours of hard work every day to. . . earn enough to pay for a flat, car and suit befitting his status and to be able to relax in the sauna or the club (where, however, one should also not miss any opportunity to talk business). The business centre of New York consists of thousands of identical stony-faced

office workers. Such is the opinion of the art specialist.

His opponent, on the contrary, is in love with the rhythm of business life; he came to make deals, and what a welcome he got. Villas, swimming pools, tennis. . . And the food!. . . Of course, there are the homeless, but they are just the layabouts — its the businessman who really counts.

But a new objection breaks in upon these encomiums. Perhaps the homeless, the unemployed, the Hare Krishna Temple and the Hippies are a mute and unassuming opposition to the satiated business life of the majority? Yes, the minority (though not everybody) in the USA or Europe can get welfare benefits and free soup; society is prepared to feed its dissidents providing they don't stand in the way of business — but doesn't this hint at the enslavement of Western man — not by a despotic state, but by 'business', by 'the organisation' by 'things'. No doubt many, on reading this, will choke with rage: there's damn all in the country to eat, nothing to wear, and you go about. . . We'll leave aside the fact that most of our enthusiasts of Western lifestyles are quite decently dressed and in no danger of starvation. Let us ask ourselves — do we want to work several times harder than we do today? Do we want to vote for the redundancy of two thirds of our fellow workers? Do we want real competition with our neighbour, our friend and our colleague? Do workers, rank and file engineers, doctors and teachers in the USSR want that? And what will they get from 'Swedish reforms?' — a civilised European lifestyle or a 'New India' with a rampaging mafia and inter-ethnic wars to boot?

We will more than likely live in this 'civilised' society in very different ways. Those who in the notorious years of stagnation stashed away. . . it's hard to say how much; if in Uzbekistan alone the mafia of Rashidov, Adylov and their ilk managed to appropriate several thousand million, then for the Union as a whole, these sums must be of an order of magnitude greater (indirect data suggests that our mafia controls maybe 30, maybe 150 thousand million roubles, and its total annual wage bill is several thousand million roubles). So these people stand to gain a fair bit from the transition to the market and the mixed economy.

Those who believe in striking while the iron is hot' and argue that it is immoral to count the money in other peoples' pockets will not do so well, but they won't do too badly either.

But how will the tens of millions of pensioners and more than 100 million factory workers, peasants and office workers fare, those whose basic income is a pension of 70-100 roubles per month or a wage of 200-250 roubles, if prices at the market, cooperatives and shops with the KKOP⁴ sign are already putting every family essential beyond their means? Isn't competition supposed to bring prices

down? Then why is it that in Poland and Yugoslavia prices, far from falling, are rising at crazy rates?

Perhaps we'll all start making money like cooperative members and smallholders? But if so, why is it that in countries where this has been going on for more than a year, the real wages of workers have not risen for several years? Why is it that the vast majority of our workers have no wish to join cooperatives, and the peasants don't want to become smallholders?

Why is all this happening? Why did even the 'Chinese miracle' run out of steam? Perhaps because what we are trying to learn from the West is the market and economic organisation which ended in the Great Depression of 1929-33, rather than the prosperity of the eighties? Perhaps because, having lost capitalism's habits of cruelty and vigour, and having introduced state monopoly capitalism, we have got all the drawbacks of capitalism, but are unable to reap any of its benefits.

DIGRESSION ONE:

The Swedish Model is unlikely to do us any good.

As a small theoretical digression let us consider the idea that the introduction of the 'Swedish' model of economic organisation is likely to bring abundance to this country in the near future. The opposite is more likely: it will condemn a large part of the present generation to the contradictions of life in an economy trying to break into the ranks of the new industrial countries by means of rampant exploitation of the workers by cultivated bureaucrats, technocrats, graftocrats⁵ other crats (rather as in South Korea in recent decades).

Argument No 1: Abstract and methodological considerations: The highly efficient economic and socio-political mechanism of modern Sweden is the result of centuries of the organic growth of capitalism. Capitalism in the 20th century has made painful progress (and in most countries is still doing so) toward the rule of the pluralistic and 'humane' model which we usually call 'Swedish'. Yes, painful! The right to live under capitalism with a 'human face' has been purchased with the lives of millions — workers, peasants and the intelligentsia. Those who were killed or tortured in Germany in 1918, in Hungary in 1919, in Austria in the thirties, those who fought world fascism throughout the thirties and forties, those who were not afraid to fight the witch hunts and racism of the boom years of the turn of the forties and fifties. The 'human face' of capitalism has been bought by the energy of strikes, the outbursts of the 'new left', and the determination of the pacifists and the 'greens'.

The result? — the new face of capitalism. From the socio-

economic point of view this face represents the development of an intricate complex of transitional production relations, including elements of a new — socialist — system. For us, this idea is important primarily because when we look at modern capitalism, we can see quite clearly the features of. . . our future socialist production relations!

Argument No 2: (decoding the above abstractions). The modern market and mixed property relations is not a naive, balanced, hundred-year-old competition where purchasers quietly decide which goods are cheaper and better, and producers bend over backwards to please the consumer. It may look like that superficially, but deeper down. . . Deeper down it is a complicated assemblage of highly organised economic relations involving the plan, social security, the market, and much else. The main 'secret' of the success of modern capitalism is even more deeply hidden — a working class which is highly organised, highly skilled — and, most important, able to stand up for its interests. And today these are not just machine operators, but also those who sit at computer terminals, serve customers and grow wheat. They have strong organisations — trade unions, consumer associations, 'greens' and so on. The workers spent decades of blood and sweat fighting to create them, going hungry during strikes and dying on the barricades. They can keep working at rates which we (and that means all of us) maintain only at the end of the quarter. They have been schooled in centuries of capitalist labour discipline, and the work ethic has entered their flesh and blood. Do we have workers like that?

And this is not all. Modern Sweden and Austria also have a highly cultured ruling elite (the 'financial oligarchy'), who have learned from both their own mistakes, but mainly from those of others, not to push conflicts too far, not to get carried away with their pursuit of power and wealth, and not to make an exhibition of themselves. This elite has succeeded in raising several generations of high-class managers; it did not stand in the way of, but on the contrary promoted the formation of a democratic, civilised system of state power, and of a social consciousness giving the political and ideological pluralism needed for everyone to be able to say and even do what they liked without in so doing going beyond the bounds of 'civilised society', at the top of which stood this elite. Could our home grown businessmen, economic administrators and officials follow such a policy, brought up as they are in an atmosphere of delight in red tape, corruption, theft, systematic petty barter and **self-deception**?

Let us now leave aside theoretical arguments and ask ourselves an odd question: do we really want to live like the Swedes or the Austrians, the Americans or the Japanese? Well of course we all

want our own house, plenty of good food, fashionable clothes, a video and two cars per family. We want holidays in the Bahamas and weekends in Monte Carlo. . . but let us repeat. . . do we want to work like the Japanese worker or American engineer? And another, perhaps rather naive question: how happy is he, this average Swede or American, so full of the good things in life?

It is hard for us at the moment to imagine how anyone could be unhappy when they can buy whatever they like — from comfortable shoes to cars that don't break down. But why does one get this sense of boredom from the best Western films and novels? Why the mass suicide and drug addiction? What makes our emigres in well-fed America so unhappy — do they just miss the Russian countryside, or is it the cruelty of their comfortable well-fed world?

Il'ya Ehrenburg remarked in his memoirs that in the twenties and the fifties we did not envy the West; instead the West envied us. What did they envy us for? Our well being? We had no such thing. Because we knew why we were living, perhaps? Because we weren't afraid of putting out a hand to our neighbour and saying — comrade? Or the fact that the word 'our' had a real meaning for us — if only partially — and meant more than the word 'mine'?

No, it didn't last long. . . The enthusiasm of the twenties gave way to the concentration camps of the thirties, the romanticism of the fifties suffocated in the stifling atmosphere of the sixties and seventies. . . Which makes all the more surprising the viability of those embryonic elements of socialism, which live on in many of our hearts, although one would have thought the cynicism and lies which have ruled us for decades would have caused general revulsion to the very idea of socialism.

And lastly. Haven't you ever felt a lump come to your throat when you read about the young Kibal'chish⁶ who refused to betray military secrets to the accursed bourgeois? Haven't you ever wanted to break out of this aimless life and be there, alongside that boy, knowing that all you have to do is to stand your ground for the day and survive the night?

No, it isn't like that now. The real enemy is now not on the other side of the barricades, but right here among us, in our indifference and passivity. But we are sorry for people who laugh at these lines, because it means only one thing; the decades of lies, falsehood and speculation on the ideas of socialism have defeated the Communist in you (never mind whether you are a party member). But perhaps you never were one? Well then, our apologies, but the rest of this is not for you. And not because it is a 'military secret' but because it will cause you only growing irritation and anger. However, anger is better than nothing, and we are prepared for polemics.

4. What Sort of Tomorrow do we want?

Well, what is to be done? Where do we go, if the price of the market and mixed property threaten to be the rule of the graftocracy and new contradictions to add to the old ones? Back to Stalinism, perhaps? 'Defend ideals, long live the firm hand, universal state control, bring everyone down to the same level, and power to the bureaucracy'?

Economists and journalists (with very rare exceptions) have been trying for almost five years to bang it in to the heads of Soviet people that there is only one alternative; Stalinism or NEP, coercion or the rouble, the bureaucrat or the market — there is no other way.

Isn't there?

Before answering this question let us stress one thing. The point is that the real scale of problems facing our country is immeasurably greater, and the problems themselves more complex than shortages of meat, milk, housing and fashionable clothing. We have to prove that our system and country, having endured the tragedy of the Cult of Personality (and of the Non-Personality) and having been stuck for decades in the swamp of stagnation can solve the main problem of modern times (and not just of modern times but of all world history) better than the cultured and highly experienced West or East. That problem is the overcoming of social alienation, the socio-economic liberation of man (not just from exploitation, but from the power of money and the bureaucracy), the transformation of all of us from 'tim'rous beasties' into masters of our own lives and country.

In order to attack these problems, we need far more radical answers and changes much more far-reaching than those taking place at present. But we must confess that precious few of the conditions needed for these changes and answers exist.

So, do we fold our arms and settle for half-measures? Or maybe we should roll our sleeves up and start fighting for those conditions (not forgetting of course the 'Minimum Programme', which we may use as a starting point as long as we are not confined by it).

DIGRESSION 2

The Scale of the Changes

If what we have said about the scale of the changes which have begun are not to look like empty phrasemongering, we must allow ourselves a certain analogy.

THE HIGH RENAISSANCE

In the renaissance of human culture, belief in the greatness and power of Man, the Personality, and the Individual supplanted submission to dogma. That is how we see that age from 500 years away. Most of the

people of the 14th, 15th and even 16th centuries saw things quite differently.

Medieval man was quite unlike like you and me. He felt himself to be a member of a social body rather than an individual or separate personality. A person was a member of a town workshop or guild, or a village community, or a family if he was a nobleman, and this sense of belonging was virtually the foundation of his life.

And such a person was unable to believe that the nobleman and the serf, the townsman and the peasant could be equal. Such an idea contradicted the whole of life and the experience of centuries, and how could you live if you did not know which family, town, or community you belonged to? To take away from medieval man the hierarchy of social estates meant the destruction of all social values, of all concepts of good, evil and nobility (a synonym for 'noble birth') and poverty (which was the lot of the 'third estate').

And then came the turning point. Gradually, affecting only individuals at first, then as the slogan of great revolutions came the great march of change. Hereditary power is no more — instead one is free to make one's life in the world of 'honest' trade (we should note that the exploitation of hired labour, since it does not contravene the law of value, is also part of bourgeois equality).

These changes brought immense progress, but they were long and painful. Rational economic man took his place upon the earth, motivated primarily by economic, monetary profit. In a few short centuries, from a historical point of view, these stereotypes penetrated our affairs, consciousness and way of life so completely that to question them seems an attempt to subvert natural and eternal human values. Not just to the man in the street, but also to high-powered economists and talented journalists.

And so mankind is faced with a new qualitative leap. This too is reaching the end of its days. And this was not only predicted by Marxism. It has been sensed by Western philosophers, sociologists, economists, even writers and artists. And so, in bringing this digression to a close we conclude: Some sort of turn or leap is needed. But where to?

Where to indeed? What sort of renewed socialism do we want? What must we, and more importantly, *can* we do. What do we want tomorrow's society to be like?

The answer could be simple — an antitotalitarian (the slogan of 1989/90 "Antitotalitarians of the World Unite" is not just a joke), civilised (here in quotes) country belonging to the highly developed human civilisation of the turn of the 21st century and. . .

And here we might add 'socialist' and underline it, notwithstanding well-nigh universal distrust of the word, in many respects

rightly identified with the institutions of Stalin and Brezhnev. Why socialist? Because the history of mass socialist workers' movements, from the naively utopian (and sometimes reactionary) communes of the Reformation, through the mass workers' movement of the turn of the 20th century to modern **leftwing** social democracy has gradually worked out a system of objectives which are inseparably bound to the concepts of socialism and communism. The slogans have been repeated in various forms for centuries: the economy should be in the hands of those who work, their work should be the work of free people, incomes should be earned, and distribution should be fair and equal.

19th Century theoretical studies and our own experience have shown that these slogans may conceal a system of barracks equality and the freedom of the concentration camp. Thus we should not reject these studies and experiences, but arm ourselves with that theory and practice of the Communist movement which has not and will not lead to the barracks, but to a society where the free development all will depend on that of each individual.

Words, Words. . .

Haven't we had enough of these high sounding words without you starting. . .

Maybe. We want to give these fine words more meaning by formulating a system of principles for the future society which both you and me (or at least a lot of us) need, but which will remain on paper if the power of the bureaucracy survives. We did not invent this system; it was born of the sufferings of 19-20th century Marxism (though let's not confuse it with our textbooks on philosophy and political economy), it is based on analysis of the few new (and we venture to say, socialist) social relations which have emerged and survived in Western Europe and Japan, and it proceeds from a critical reevaluation of the tragedy of the world socialist system.

The essence of this strategy of social renewal is the gradual but decisive abandonment of traditional industrial society based on the power of the bureaucrat and (or) the market, in favour of free workers' associations, and has as its aim the mandatory and general prioritisation of social and humanitarian objectives. In this case, we are not simply talking about making the economy the servant of human needs. The problem is larger than that. If we fail to concentrate the major and decisive share of our economic, political and ideological resources and efforts on the rebirth and creation (**i.e.** co-operative creation) of the new man, we shall not be able to feed the country, and will not be able to get scientific and technical progress started again.

Civilised Japan, which is decades ahead of us, was one of the first

to understand this, and, having reoriented a poor, demoralised and war-ravaged country towards science-intensive technology and the 'human factor', in the space of ten years outpaced the United States, which had been the dominant power for decades.

This is nothing to do with us, someone will say. We can do without the luxuries, as long as we have the essentials. Really? In the later works of Lenin the phrase about a 'system of free cooperators', comes up with increasing frequency but on virtually every page Vladimir Il'ich, with one foot already in the grave, literally cries out that it is the cultural revolution, education, civilisation, training, control of 'all the riches which mankind has created' that we needed above all else. And this was the literally (not figuratively) starving Russia of the early twenties. . . . And the Bolsheviks made many starts along that road. In the twenties and early thirties I. Ehrenberg, L. Feuchtwanger, B. Shaw, V. Mayakovskii and R. Roland rejoiced sincerely and not without reason at this spiritual rebirth, in which there was a place for everyone — Khlebnikov and Gaidar, Akhmatova and Fadeev.

We do not want to idealise this period — its development was contradictory, and it ended in tragedy. The point we are making is different. It is absolutely essential that we finally realise the economic imperative of the scientific and technical revolution: production must either be subordinated to mankind or degenerate.

The long term tasks in this area are:

Firstly, decisive social and state support for innovative systems of upbringing and education encompassing the entire educational system, including kindergartens and nurseries, various types of upbringing and instruction aimed at young people, continuing education, and civic education and communication skills for adults right up to homes for the elderly. Tasks and methods must not be decided in the private offices of the state or sponsors. All that is needed is to give people who want to deal with these matters what they ask for; money, materials and information, and the opportunity to initiate large scale experiments. In such cases the role of the administrative apparatus will be extremely simple: to act as genie to the innovators. Don't get in the way and don't ask them to prove this or that is necessary or to submit the necessary papers. It is your job to fill in the papers, to find the money and ways and means for them to get their work done. Don't fret about whether these people are wasting the 'country's money'. We have so few innovators — and we have wasted so much money! If we added up the demands of innovators in the area of upbringing, communication and education they would initially total hardly more than a few hundred million roubles, perhaps a few thousand million — which is about the price of two or three nuclear submarines.

Secondly, a key problem will be to regenerate the capacity of our citizens for cultured, human communication and dialogue, to nurture the development of people who can overcome mutual alienation, and to create the circumstances which will make that possible. What are the specific components of this problem, and what must be done? The same ones: to find, support, and if necessary publicly exalt the people who have persevered in building the house of human communication in the face of block-headed petty bureaucrats and cynical, pragmatic remarks about these 'day dreamers'. Who are these people? Take a look around you — somebody may have been trying to set up a workers sports club for years, despite repeated evictions from unwanted basements, someone else in a dusty factory rest room has been trying to get theatre and poetry lovers together. . . Yes, these people may seem eccentrics, romantics, idealists today. But there are already millions of them, notwithstanding all the booing and hissing from all sides. Every country in the pragmatic West has several thousand such clubs. Suppose we give general public and state support to this new medium of human communication and culture and make it our second highest priority? And suppose we put these 'eccentrics' in control of thousands of millions of roubles and make the officials and economic administrators the instruments of their will (initially perhaps as part of an All Union Programme of State and Public Culture)?

Thirdly, the rebirth of our society is unthinkable without a new attitude of partnership towards nature as a cultural value instead of just a 'source of valuable chemical raw materials'. And here we need a single state and social system of programmes, organised finance for recreation and, most important, the creation of a new human attitude to nature. How will this be done and who will do it? The 'greens' maybe. In the West and in Japan they have achieved a good deal, as maybe they will do here, as long as they are not obstructed, but instead given financial assistance, organisational facilities, and independent scientific centres working for the environmental movement and so on.

And a further, more 'traditional' aspect of the humanisation of society: the adoption of a social policy which encourages the development of creativity, of scientific, educational, artistic and **communicational** skills. An essential element of this is radically to raise the science (or creativity) intensiveness of industrial technology and to accelerate the growth of industries which provide predominantly creative employment. We emphasise that this is not so much a matter of reconstructing factories where the machine minder will become the robot minder, but of the national structure of economic reconstruction, of phasing out traditional industrial technologies and developing those areas where we still stand some chance of participating on equal

terms in the world market (certain aspects of fundamental and applied science etc.).

The problem is, however, that to reorient society towards priority development of science and culture⁷ we need a new environment — one of social and personal emancipation. The new man must be civically conscious and cultured, not just well educated. The new social organisation of science will take the form of non-departmental, open, competitive, and democratically organised teams of scientists.

Such types of group (associations or *unions*) can and must become the established organisational forms of any creative social activity — education and upbringing, science and art, nature conservation and the organisation of communication.

DIGRESSION THREE

A few words on the mechanics of making social priorities

All this is so fascinatingly (or revoltingly, depending on your attitude) novel, unusual and even Utopian. And there are continuing fears that these romantic experimenters will take the last crumbs from our already meagre table for their pet projects and drive busy economic administrators, businessmen and leaders mad with their empty chatter and senseless projects. Haven't they heard of the economic crisis?

No, no and again No, because we are not talking of indulging the ramblings of isolated eccentrics, but of new principles for organising the work (and creativity) of millions of people.

What organisation is this? We have in fact already sketched its outlines. At the top, sovereign Commissions of the USSR (or Republics etc.) Supreme Soviet with control of finances, material resources and administrative staff, taking decisions on projects prepared mainly by social movements and associations. Scientific expert services and an administrative apparatus will work on a competitive basis to the order of these commissions and organisations, and will help to set up the work of mass social organisations, associations and societies (environmental, creative, educational etc.). The Soviet government will give power and resources to associations of 'eccentrics'⁸ but only after scientists (non-governmental **organisations**, open to criticism and working, we repeat, as experts) have given a provisional **go-ahead**, and the Commissions of the Supreme Soviet have ratified these plans. The professional staff should be subordinate to and paid by lower associations. The administrative apparatus should preferably be organised as consultative service agencies providing administrative and other services on a paid contractual basis, rather than as permanent professional organs of social associations (in which form they will very quickly become the bosses

again, as did the Soviet executive committees).

The aim of this system is very simple; to bring people together so that they can create themselves a suitable social, cultural and natural environment. One of the most important related tasks is the protection of nature, culture and humanity from the arbitrary actions of bureaucrats, from pollution by rational technocrats concerned only with short-term gains, and from their witting or unwitting allies among the 'simple people'.

Certainly, these programmes may seem pie in the sky from the point of view of material production, but they can only be realised given suitable reorganisation of politics and the economy. The question is — how.

5. Politics today must have Primacy over Economics

A condition for realising even the most perfect strategy — is the thorough political democratisation of society, beginning with freedom of conscience and other personal human freedoms, political pluralism, freedom of speech, press and assembly and other such attributes of civil society, but going beyond that. The price of a multi-party system might turn out to be the replacement of the existing dictatorship of the so-called communist party by that of a bloc of anti-communist or non-communist parties (in Eastern European countries, people of communist convictions are already being effectively expelled from scientific institutions and government offices, just as a short while ago those who did not share such convictions were expelled). What is the guarantee that several equally closed and privilege-ridden bodies will not appear in the place of single-party rule?

Our pluralist friends explain that parties will compete for power and therefore will fear losing the trust of the people. Really? But perhaps it will be simpler for them to pretend (unconsciously of course) to compete for power, whilst in fact sharing out spheres of influence and patronage.

So — down with the multi-party system and parliamentary games, and long live the wise and guiding hand of the Leninist Politburo, alone in its knowledge of all our present, past and future desires. The problem is not to reject traditional parliamentary democracy (we need it, but with us it has, exactly as Lenin predicted, become a talking shop and a stage for the collision of the ambitions of newly arrived professional politicians) but to make it a working democracy, a genuine, organ of popular power pervading the daily life of every home and work group, giving each of us a chance to participate directly in government at all levels, from the work group and the home to the country as a whole. How does one do this? Experience shows where the answer lies. The Soviets in the first years of our

history and 'foreign' experience — the mass organisations of local self government and social movements of Western Europe, for example.

The political power of the people consists first of all of mass organs of self-government based on the workplace and the home; neighbourhood self management committees and consumer clubs at home, Worker Collective Councils at work — if they have managed to elect decent officers — or Workers' (Strike) Committees. The mass grassroots cells of neighbourhood and shop floor self-government are the indispensable foundations for deputies' efforts to control the administration, and not to be controlled by it. It is the base which can prevent the divorce of politicians from the interests of the people and their emergence as a new 'civilised' bureaucracy. It is the basis for tackling such prime issues as turning the local Soviets into real governing bodies dealing independently with regional infrastructural development (housing, health, culture, education, trade, services, and liberation from the dictatorship of government departments).

Secondly, the political power of the people is a flexible system of mass social movements involving the majority of population, dealing with political, social, economic, cultural and ecological issues. Freedom to create such movements, material and moral support from Soviets for those that work for the good of the people (and don't just waste time in talk), decisive judicial proscription of those which violate human, popular and constitutional rights — all these are by no means fantasy, but a precondition for the reawakening of the people.

Thirdly, there never was and never will be peoples' power while the system of privileges and subsidies to the leading levels of the party, state and other agencies remains intact. People are tired of lies. Open and honest declaration of what was appropriated by the bureaucracy, and the introduction of the principle of paying the administrative apparatus for work done — is absolutely essential before the people even begin to trust State and Party leaders. Moreover, the eradication of the system of secret distribution 'from above' will be an important factor in dismantling it 'from below', when everyone of us to a greater or lesser extent is bribed by government housing and off-premises retailing. ■

Popular power presupposes grass roots mass involvement in the ideological struggle. Nowadays monopoly of the mass media by bureaucracy is giving way to its monopoly by professional politicians and journalists. . . Previously it was Brezhnev, Suslov, Rashidov and Co. who knew best what the people wanted; now it is Afanas'ev, Popov, Selyunin and their colleagues. The very few 'foremen' (or more accurately workers) of perestroika — for instance the Kuzbass, **Donbass** and Vorkuta Workers' Committees had no national platform, and still don't. The people who talk about their interests are

the ones who are fighting for political power and influence in Moscow. Hence there can be no proper democracy without a guarantee that all sufficiently large, democratic and constitutional social movements and organisations will be given a platform in the national, republican and local media. The freedom of independent organs of the press is useful, but is not in itself sufficient, since it does not overcome information imperialism: the mafia of money will take the place in the media once held by the government mafia (he who pays the piper calls the tune).

6. Self government and the Emancipation of Labour — Instead of the Power of the Market and the bureaucracy

Where an administrative system rules, economic power belongs to the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy stand apart from and over the masses and is made up of privileged people. In a market economy, this power (in the simplest case) belongs to those with money. But how can one ensure that the workers retain economic power? At present we are trying to do this mainly by the breaking up of property; leasing of factories, workshops, contract brigades and private farmers on rented land. It is a simple method, allowing practical steps to be made towards putting people in control at their place of work, if not in the economy at large. Are such steps necessary?

As elements of perestroika — yes. But as a main principle of strategy they will not, in our opinion, live up to expectations. To return to small-scale collective and individual property at the end of the 20th Century is possible only in certain 'auxiliary' areas of the economy, as is the case in the West, which is ruled by highly socialised corporate property, controlled by the largest financial groups.

The strategic problem of socialism is something bigger than this — to put us all in control of the economy as whole. We tried once. It didn't work, did it? But we didn't try — that was the problem. Yes, we made a lot of proclamations. But what we did was something quite different. Under the banner of nationalisation and common property, we introduced bureaucratism and the alienation of the workers from property.

So what shall we do? We can start with taking power by workers, shopfloor engineers and factory economists, but we cannot leave it at that!

As people get involved with self management or organisation at their own enterprise, they quite quickly learn that the main problems in the fight against bureaucracy come from higher levels. On one side the persisting diktat of the Ministries and government departments, and on the other the embryonic market. The former need an obedient

and efficient administrator who cares more about indicators than he does about the consumer or the collective, and who idolises the plan. The latter needs commercial secrecy and an enterprising leader and businessman with funds readily disposable and able to react flexibly to the state of the market. In both cases real self-management is more of a hindrance than a help. If any use is made of workers' initiative in these conditions, it will be at the brigade level, or that of the workshop at the most. Beyond that it's none of their **business**.¹⁰

Suppose we try a different approach? What if we raise the principle of self-management and of putting people in control of production to a higher level — regional, industrial (nowadays inter-industrial) or national? Utopia? At first glance, yes.

But let us take a historical analogy.

As soon as we mention self-management at the national economic level, everyone thinks of some super-Gosplan, inhabited by hundreds of millions of illiterate workers and housewives deciding by mass ballot which thirty-five million types of product to produce at which hundreds of thousands of factories.

A frightening picture, isn't it? Now imagine some believer in money and commodity relations approaching some Russian peasant or landowner in about 1698 and starting to explain that the future of their economy lies in the world market, paper money (or rather credit), shares, stockmarkets and so on.

What would our 'marketeer' hear in reply? More than likely, that he is suggesting assembling millions of people who can't speak, read or write each others' languages in one market place to create a fool's economy in which you'd have to journey thousands of miles to buy butter, bread or a decent axe (the world **market**). Isn't this the height of idiocy? Isn't this economic utopia?

But at the time a new, capitalist world order was being born. True, in Russia capitalism and the market fell victim to feudal arbitrariness and barter. But in England they were victorious. And this is not all. The point is that progressive socio-economic systems are never born without struggle (and hence temporary setbacks), be they the nineteenth century market and capitalism, or twentieth century self-government and socialism.

And now a brief consideration of self-government above the enterprise level. Let us begin with the first experiment, albeit a minor one. What did the workers of the striking Kuzbass factories do when they began to feel that their efforts to gain control of their own economic life were being frustrated by the enterprise, city and ministerial bureaucracy? They decided to unite and created city strike committees (renamed Workers' Committees when the strike was over). Why? In order to assist each other, to control the activities of

the town authorities and the ministry and to prevent arbitrariness in paying wages, norm setting and capital investment.

This of course is only the first step. Or more accurately an attempt to take the first step. But if we rely on our own historical experience and look at the birth of new non-market non-bureaucratic social methods of economic regulation in Western Europe and Japan, we can draw the outlines of a new model. Its essence is *a compound of self-government, programme planning and the priority of social objectives.*

DIGRESSION FOUR

The basic units of the new management model

The first unit is a new mechanism for formulating strategic objectives, and the structure and essential proportions of the economy. These should be decided primarily by mass social organisations, and Commissions of the Supreme Soviet through commissioning related research from professional economists, and through national discussions, analysis of alternative drafts and decision making at Congresses of Peoples Deputies, and perhaps through referendums.

The second unit is a new principle for setting up organs of economic management — a change to 'voluntary centralism'. What does this mean? Roughly that producers and consumers, once they have formed voluntary associations will, on initiative from below, independently form the necessary organs of management which will then, as it were, assume the role of the market and help producer and consumer to find each other.

The third unit is a new type of relationship between producer, consumer and the centre — a change from bureaucratic decrees and market deals to a 'planning dialogue'. What would this be? An open procedure, democratically controlled by consumers, trade unions and environmentalists etc., for matching the economic interests of producers and consumers, supervised by the Soviet Government (its aim being to ensure that strategic plans are implemented).

Perhaps it is time to call a halt. What we have outlined is no more than a forecast or a hypothesis. Everything in it is new, untried and highly debatable. But the hypothesis is not without foundation. What is that foundation? To take only one example, the steadily growing role of trade unions, the 'greens', the consumer associations and other social organisations in the control of the Swedish and Austrian economies. And who do we have wrestling at home with such key economic problems as nature conservation? The ministries? Self financing enterprises? The cooperatives? Who is trying to stem the cultural and moral degradation — for example the need to preserve

the cities, human kindness and compassion. So these aren't economic problems? If not then who are the main productive forces in society — men or beasts?

Real economic self-management is an absolutely essential (though not sufficient) condition for putting each of us in control of the economy as a whole, and of ensuring the prime precondition for real equality and freedom (irrespective of the contents of one's wallet) of all members of society.

Workers' power in the economy could turn out to be a new version of totalitarianism if it does not go hand in hand with their economic emancipation and with overcoming their alienation not only from property but also from each other, from their own labour, and in the final analysis from society as a whole.

Putting it in elevated theoretical terms this task coincides with the strategy of developing associated socio-economic creativity. Freedom as an 'unconscious necessity' is not adaptation to circumstances, or the ability to 'keep your head down' and act by common sense, since were this the case one would be bound to regard the freest individual as a conformist and philistine. Freedom is the opportunity for all, without domination of one by another, to cooperate in shaping life within the framework of its own laws.

Suppose we leave theory aside and deal with obvious and urgent problems. Today a resident of the Soviet Union, even if he is not a labour-camp inmate or a down-and-out can hardly be considered free to change his place of residence (registration), job (state housing, kindergartens etc.) or social status. The breakdown of semi-feudal forced labour, which begins with the director and head of the passport desk, and ends in the corridors of the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers — which are quite unknown to the vast majority of Soviet citizens — is essential to the emancipation of Soviet man.

A further condition is the guarantee of the genuine and equal rights for all to work according to inclination. This is much harder to achieve, since it comes up against the material and technical underdevelopment of the economy and the widespread persistence of heavy, routine manual work. What is to be done? To begin with the simplest problem — guaranteed employment and opportunity to improve ones qualifications. Not 'unemployment at work' and the labour exchange for the unemployed, but well-run public and state systems of flexible employment, (financed by the state, trade unions and enterprises), when a person has advance warning about the phasing out of old skills and has the chance to acquire new ones.

An important condition for the emancipation of labour is the freedom of the workers to create unions and associations to defend their interests. Why? Because in a modern economy dominated by

large systems (enterprises and associations) it is impossible to defend one's interests as an isolated individual. But workers can be enslaved by the unions themselves (witness today's trade unions), which is why it is so essential to be free to create alternative trade unions, and to preserve their open nature. ¹¹

But the question recurs — will the workers want to take on the burden of extra work involved in economic self-management; will they want, in other words, to be the masters of the economy? At the moment they don't. But soon none of us will have any choice — it will be a matter of the collapse of the economy by continuing down the bureaucratic road of perestroika, or the aggravation of social conflict during the birth of our 'Asiatic' market, or of settling down together to create a new economy, in which, with the help of scientists and specialists, we and not the officials will decide who will do what and how.

7. How Can We Re-Learn the Desire and **Ability** to Work?

We have to create a system of incentives for initiative and creative work which can break down the wall of apathy and passivity of the majority, and which will shift society from its present stagnation. This is the problem which socialism must solve if it is not to perish. In the last few years we have been browbeaten into believing that the only things which make people work are money and fear. There aren't any other incentives. We have tried fear, and we've had enough of it. To return to those times would be a crime. So what about the rouble?

Are our people, who on one hand have grown accustomed to indolence, yet on the other cling to the naive but stubborn conviction that our aim is a society of guarantees and equality, in such a hurry to elbow aside friend and stranger alike in pursuit of the big money? Yes, some workers are joining cooperatives; some peasants are renting land. But there are not many of them, and they encounter powerful opposition from their fellow workers, who are somehow reluctant to heed the journalists who argue that it is all a matter of the envy of the incompetent and idle for their 'enterprising' fellow worker.

Then what is the problem? Maybe that we are living not at the beginning of the 19th century, but at the end of the 20th century, when one of the main incentives is not merely what one earns, but the chance of a job with initiative, purpose and interest, in which one does not feel like an animal earning a day's pay at any price, but a person in their proper place, a member of a team for whom wages and pay increases are not an end in themselves but the means of living in a decent human fashion.

More Utopia? But suppose nevertheless we rely on two basic incentives — the freeing of initiative (self-management) and social

justice (reward according to labour), and make that the basis for fighting passivity, wage-levelling and unearned income?

Yes, that slogan has been proclaimed many times, but has it ever been put into practice? How do we revive it?

First of all, we need a mechanism of social, grass-roots up, and therefore democratic and open control of matching measures of labour to measures of consumption — a slogan proclaimed by V. I. Lenin on the eve of the October revolution and revived under NEP. How does one implement such control? We have some experience. We need only recall Il'f and Petrov's portrait of the underground millionaire Koreiko, who was afraid to spend a rouble more than his wages for fear of drawing attention to his capital. There is a certain amount of experience in the West; systems of income declaration, mandatory registration of all large civil contracts (expenditures and purchases), the growing importance of cashless transactions, and in the longer term the changeover to electronic money.

Is it wrong to count the money in someone else's pocket? According to market ethics it is, since the most prized possession of the petty bourgeois is the contents of his wallet. But a mere hundred years ago it was wrong for most people to talk about the equality of the landowner and the peasant. Perhaps market morals are not eternal? But we are not suggesting the invasions of peoples' homes, simply giving someone specially empowered by public organisations the right to check your current account, just in case you 'forget' to pay your taxes. ¹²

Another step, perhaps the most important is a *democratic and open decision on the norms, forms and methods (hourly paid rate etc.) by which a man is paid for his labour.* ¹³ This would be decided by the brigade — based on what it has earned — for the individual worker, by the workshop for the brigade, and by the enterprise Worker Collective Council for the workshop. And who will determine how much the enterprise has earned? The market? But that has already been divided and re-divided long ago by monopoly producers in league with the government bureaucracy, and would hardly be any different if left to its own devices. . .

Perhaps we should adopt a rather different approach, where the prices of key products, deductions from profits, interest etc. for an enterprise are not fixed from above by bureaucratic bodies but laid down by social organisations bringing together representatives of worker groups, consumer associations, environmental organisations, trade unions, etc. under the aegis of the Soviet Government using the **assessments** of non-governmental experts as a guide. Fantasy? The Austrian experience shows that it is by no means wholly so, since in that country social control of prices for certain goods is already

a reality.

And now the last of these considerations on of what can and ought to be done to avert a deepening of the crisis. These phrases may be puzzling, since we are proposing the use of the latest organisational methods of state monopoly capitalism, including a highly organised modern market, as a major form of medication for the Soviet economy, to be administered once the socio-economic relations of socialism have been revitalised, and where necessary completely renewed.

DIGRESSION FIVE

In which the authors recall the sergeant's widow

At this point the authors ought perhaps to ask themselves whether they somewhat resemble that sergeant's widow, who gave herself a **beating?**¹⁴ To spend all that time demonstrating the unsuitability of the 'Swedish' model, only to reach the conclusion that what is required is an identical economic mechanism. What has gone wrong? Is our reasoning faulty?

No, the question is one of clearly defining goals and means of economic development. It is one thing to strive to revitalise productive relations of socialism and to remake them where necessary along the lines on which they have germinated in Sweden and Austria, and on that basis to use the most progressive forms of the market and economic organisation of modern capitalism. It is quite another attempt to restore the market and a 'pluralist' economy lock, stock and barrel, thus dooming to lingering death the remaining fragments of socialist relations, ideals and convictions which still survive in our country and people. In the first case we are counting on the development of socialist relations, albeit weak and underdeveloped, but cleansed of distortions (and above all of those of bureaucratism) while accepting forms of modern capitalism as a temporary (perhaps even long term) expedient of economic development in order to 'turn the Russia of NEP into the Russia of socialism' (V. I. Lenin). In the second, we restore the capitalist system using 'bits and pieces' of socialism as supplements, means to an end, or just as a name.

One can deal with forms of property and the economic mechanism in a similar fashion.

Do we accept pluralism in property relations? Yes. But only after a debate on the economic authority of genuine, universally open associations of both producers, consumers, and organisers of production, for only this allows the debureaucratisation of State property and breathes socialist content into leasing and cooperatives, thus preempting their degeneration into groups of private traders.

Decentralisation and independence of collectives? Yes, but not so much by their separation as by the expansion of the rights and opportunities of worker collectives and other worker associations to genuinely participate in democratic national economic planning, using on that basis and as a means (and not as an end in itself) the instruments of the modern market.

True, one could do nothing, bury one's head in the sand and leave the democrats to talk about it (endlessly lecturing the world at large) and the bureaucrats who have at least learned something to take the decisions, but in that case the end will be upon us with catastrophic speed.

So the competition of objectives and social forces is now increasingly obvious. And the more proponents of 'pluralistic socialism' and 'reform of the apparatus' consolidate their position, the more pressing becomes the question that we 'mislaid' at the beginning of the article: are there any real opportunities for our country to adopt a third path which would allow it to rely on specifically socialist relations?

DIGRESSION SIX

Is a socialist revival possible in this country?

The only possible answer to that is yes. Not because we must keep faith with the martyrs of socialism, and not because to betray the tasks of socialist revival would be to spit on the graves of our ancestors, grandfathers and fathers. Feelings, however noble, should not stand in the way of discussion. We say yes, because we believe that socialism is still alive in our economic relations, culture, and in the hearts and minds of our people. It is mutilated, but not yet dead, and can still revive the country given democratic rights and workers' freedom.

Firstly, in this country (as distinct from most of the developing countries, with which we have become accustomed to compare ourselves) there are individual technologies (primarily in the defence and aerospace industries) which, though few in numbers are close to world levels, and, more importantly, there is a significant potential of unexploited research and design.

Secondly, and particularly in the natural and technical sciences, we have a working class and intelligentsia which has forgotten how to work, but has the potential for a rapid growth in initiative, quality and rate of work. (Sociological survey data show that on average 50-60% of the working potential of workers and 30-40% of that of scientists and engineers is actually utilised.)

The third and main point is that in order to make use of these reserves, we need conditions which only socialism can provide. The

emancipation of labour and initiative means the chance to earn one's living at a job with a generally perceived outcome and purpose, secure in the knowledge that the products of one's labour will not be squandered by bureaucrats or appropriated by speculators, and that unemployment, social conflict and inequality will not be the price of greater efficiency at work. In many of us (especially if one takes workers and intelligentsia from the provinces and not the elite intelligentsia of the capitals), the remains of a former collectivism, comradeship and readiness for mutual aid (nowadays these words sound almost indecent), a dislike for the cult of money, a desire to do respected work, and a hatred of speculative income have not completely disappeared.

It might be said that if this is true, these people are hopeless cases of relapse into wage-levelling and general ideological deception, and we would agree that to a significant extent that if these socio-economic principles really have survived, it is only in a distorted and stagnant form. But what can one expect after twenty years of Brezhnev? Why do we believe that these feeble remains of socialism will 'work' today? But why did they 'work' after 20 years of Stalinism, when the 'thaw' with all its zigzags and excesses gave the country a unique economic and spiritual boost?

And now to the main point: one can only count on the survivals of socialism under one condition; that life convinces people that their work and initiative will not be wasted yet again. Many still wait for such assurance to be given 'from above'. But the pace of change is accelerating, and we are increasingly convinced that the 'powers that be' can at best only help; it is we that must act. Let us recall the great words of the proletarian anthem:

No saviour from on high delivers
No trust have we in prince or peer
Our own right hands the chains must shiver
Chains of hatred, of greed and fear.

8. *If I Don't, Who Will?*

Never before have these words been so topical. Today (or tomorrow at least) each one of us will have to decide whose side he is on, what he will fight for, and if he is going to do nothing, then what will be the human products of his apathy?

But the alignment of socio-economic forces (they have yet to become political groups) presents a complex picture.

The *bureaucracy* — a stratum of 'privileged persons standing above and apart from the masses' (V. I. Lenin) is largely preserving its positions, and is trying to monopolise its control of the economy and society. It is fairly obvious that new groups are arising among them;

the emergent reformist wing realises that the bureaucracy must periodically fight bureaucratisation in order to survive, cutting away the rottenest sections and allowing rational opposition, in order for dialogue to be possible, and to provide an object for public opinion. One should not, however, write off the 'old' wing, retired to the wings for a while but with some justification still thinking that it may yet be of service.

Does the bureaucracy enjoy mass support in this country? Undoubtedly. It comes from those who are afraid, too lazy or simply unwilling to 'pick a fight' and take up the difficult cause of self-government. It comes from those who still believe in the 'Good Tsar' in all the manifold forms of this belief: from those who favour the 'firm hand' who put their faith in the strength of the apparatus, to liberal heralds of presidential dictatorship, hoping that the hand of Gorbachev will curb the opponents of perestroika; from militant Russian chauvinists to the champions of 'saving ideals' at any price and by whatever means.

The socio-economic basis of these attitudes is a petty-bourgeois mentality born of the bureaucratic distortion of socialism — essentially the petty-bourgeois strata of the workers, who have 'sold' their status as masters of the socialist economy 'in exchange' for guarantees of a tolerable stable existence and freedom from the requirement to earn their pay. These include many office workers, former star workers now on the permanent staff, and if handouts are on offer, the lumpenproletariat and other declassé elements.

The advocates of bourgeois democratic pluralist **socialism**¹³ are becoming increasingly visible. And we are not simply dealing with a group of intellectuals from the 'Democratic Union'. The point is that for various reasons the 'Swedish Model' presents the only genuine alternative to bureaucracy for a whole spectrum of social groups. Who, specifically? First of all those '**businessmen**' for whom the market is the only place where they can show their paces. A section of them (the self-employed, small-scale cooperative members, and managers who lack confidence in themselves and their enterprises) are prepared to stop half-way, settling for the introduction of a commodity market and alliance with the liberal bureaucracy, guaranteeing them a normal existence by restraining the sharks of big business. But many of our 'businessmen' and their ideologists have already understood that a modern market must also be a market for labour, capital and securities, a market with monopolies (and anti-monopoly legislation), marketing **and**, most important, private (groups and shareholders') property.

These goals enjoy more or less active support from those who are prepared to work on their own initiative to earn (very) high incomes.

These optimistic workers, peasants and engineers are prepared to hand over part of the wealth they have created to 'businessmen' if this means an above average income. This is quite legitimate. Bureaucratism took away our control of the economy, and turned us into hired servants of the state, teaching us to trade submission for a meagre wage, so why not sell one's abilities for good money? (In academic terms this should be termed a petty-bourgeois, **trade-unionist**¹⁶ tendency among the working class, or persons of hired labour in general.)

These goals also enjoy solid ideological support from that section of the non-scientific intelligentsia (publicists, writers, economists etc.) who did not completely sell their souls and pens to the bureaucracy in the days of 'stagnation'. And one can understand this support; the only democracy these people have ever seen is democracy 'Swedish style'; socialism and its ideals have been discredited by the rule of Stalin and Brezhnev, and so there would seem to be no other choice. Moreover there are selfish motives at the back of their minds: whatever comes of 'pluralist socialism' — whether the standard of living of Sweden or India, we creative people still live better (and in the manner that becomes us) since a good economist (or journalist or writer) earns almost the same in India as in Sweden, and, most important, gets paid in hard currency.

Finally, these goals will also be supported by those nationalist movements which are trying to throw off the bureaucratic tutelage of the Russian centre, and many of those who see the 'Swedish model' as the only alternative to bureaucratic dictatorship.

Perestroika and 'glasnost' have exposed the existence of previously almost unnoticed 'informal' socio-economic forces in society. Prime among these is the graftocracy — a coalition of organised crime with corrupt officialdom and bureaucracy, and the 'supply' and 'service' elements that closely support it, such as moonlighters, ex-convicts, down and outs and the unemployed — especially the youth of the labour-surplus regions — Central Asia and the Transcaucasus etc.

What are the real forces and aims of the graftocracy? Even one of its 'Godfathers' would be hard put to answer this question. We are inclined to assume as follows: On one hand, this social force clearly stands to gain from the adoption of any economic arrangement which allows them to wash the blood and dirt from the thousands of millions of roubles they stole during the 'stagnant' years by investing them in cooperatives, private enterprise, shares and other forms of 'business'. In this sense our 'Godfathers' are bound to support the 'pluralist' economy. On the other hand, the graftocracy has always lived 'in the pores' of the administrative bureaucratic system, growing fat on a distorted market and creating a network of corruption from bottom

to top. In that sense the end of the rule of the bureaucracy is unprofitable to our 'mafiosi'. So?

So as a rule they will support (and partially initiate) the worst of all scenarios and go for the symbiosis of the asiatic market at the bottom with the dictatorship of the bureaucracy at the top. If the central authorities assist in this (as the Brezhnev government unwillingly or willingly did), they will look after it. If it starts to get in their way (as recently happened in Transcaucasia and Central Asia), they will fight it. . .

So to whom do the authors address their programme for the rebirth of socialism? The bureaucracy? The supporters of the 'Swedish model'? Or perhaps the mafiosi? No, we are deeply convinced that time will bring to the fore a stratum of the workers (and primarily the organised proletariat and the rank and file intelligentsia of the industrial centres) which, having started the fight for democracy against the bureaucracy, will not stop halfway and settle for a chance to work for and be paid (some better some worse) by clever 'Good Uncle Businessman' having made fun of stupid 'Wicked Uncle Bureaucrat'; those who will fight for the genuine emancipation of their labour, social justice, and control of the economy.

Why should they join this fight? Mainly because they are the ones worst squeezed in the vice of a contradiction one side of which is our desire to be in charge of our own lives through cooperation rather than competition. This desire has not been invented by the authors, it is the fruit of the socialisation of production and those remains of socialism which have survived by a miracle to this day. The other side of this contradiction is the complete alienation of the rank and file worker from the role of master of the economy and society.

And if today the main alienating force is the bureaucracy, then the workers, engineers and teachers will join the 'men of business' and their ideologists in the fight for the overthrow of the administrative system, as the peoples fronts of Yaroslavl', Kuibyshev and others are doing today. But tomorrow (and to some extent today) they will learn that the cultured technocrat and businessman who has replaced the bureaucrat will still try (and what is more will try harder and more subtly) to turn the worker and engineer into wage slaves, slogging away like the Japanese for Indian wages. ■ Moreover the most likely outcome is not a radical turn to the Swedish model, but a coalition of liberal democrats and liberal bureaucrats retaining a stagnant transitional economy of the type in permanent crisis in the Poland of the mid-eighties. In these conditions the struggle for socialism will come to the fore.

9. What can we do today, and how can we do it?

We are well aware that today these suggestions for directing our society towards a cardinal reconstruction and the reorganisation of politics, society and the economy on a self-managing basis, and other strategic tasks may seem pure fantasy. But it is easy to 'bring them down to earth', and formulate them as things which any one of us can do today.

Task Number 1 (the simplest)

What causes us the most trouble at the moment? Shortages, probably. These can be eliminated very simply — by the introduction of so-called 'equilibrium prices', i.e. prices at which our enormous demand will equal our beggarly supply. If we start from the premise that the purchasing power of today's rouble is about twenty 1961 kopecks then it does not take much calculation to see that prices for high quality goods and foodstuffs will have to rise by several times. Do we want to solve the problem of shortages by high prices?

There is no single answer. Those who robbed the country of thousands of millions of roubles during the years of stagnation, those who today are making several thousands and even millions by exploiting shifts in a bureaucratically distorted market would say yes. They want to buy without queueing, even if prices are high — after all they've got the money. Those who living on a pension or an average Soviet wage (200-250 roubles per month) would probably say no.

What is to be done? Suppose consumers took control of the market for consumer goods and services, pitting the power of united consumers against the monopolistic price hikes and quality falsification of producers? Who would carry out these functions? Primarily consumers' associations, supported by the trade unions, social organisations and the Soviets of Peoples' Deputies.

Is there any experience or precedent for this? At the moment very little, although the first consumers' associations have already been set up in a number of Soviet towns, and workers' control is already taking its first steps against the trading mafia. In many towns, representatives of the Peoples' Front are intervening usefully in the operations of distributive agencies. In the first decades of Soviet power we had the mass activity of voluntary and open consumer associations (involving most of the urban population), and there is the experience of similar associations in other countries.

What will our consumer associations do? They will defend their own interests. One can begin with monitoring prices and conditions of sale of goods and services. In the longer term one can tackle production regulation, dictatorship by monopoly suppliers, artificial shortages, secret departmental distribution and so on. Clearly the

consumer associations themselves should become the organisers of public debate and decisionmaking on the question of rationing, and its application in practice.

But the main problems are problems of production rather than of distribution. For that reason our second and fundamental task is to take immediate and practical steps to put the working man in control of the economy.

How do you gain control of an enterprise? The authors have already written a good deal about this, turning to the experience of those collectives where real self-management is already a fact, and drawing on the practical work of the school of self-management which we organised on a voluntary basis at Moscow University.¹⁹ The most simple step is to start taking decisions on questions of vital interest to workers and technical staff through the Worker Collective Council (or, if it is dormant, through Workers' Committees or Strike Committees). How should wages be paid, and what for? What should factory funds be spent on? How does one avoid Saturday working? People are prepared to sacrifice their own time and effort to solve these problems. But what if the director gets in the way? One can take extreme measures, such as bringing the question of his dismissal (or re-election) before a general meeting of the worker collective. There is a simpler method of making the bureaucratic director into a manager looking after the interests of workers and engineers in professional and literate fashion, which is to adopt a system already tried at enterprises in Moscow, Leningrad and Kaluga, where the bonuses and sometimes the basic salary of the director is fixed by the Worker Collective Council.

The Third Question which we can tackle today is to take practical steps to emancipate labour by creating independent trade unions or by reorganising existing traditional unions and radically purging them from below.²⁰ There is already some practical experience of this. In Lithuania, Latvia and several other regions the prototypes of new independent trade unions have already been created — the Unions of Workers. Their rules and programmes are highly democratic, and although the influence of traditional (Western-style) trade-unionism is noticeable, they give first priority to defending the workers. Who from? First of all (and in this lies one of the greatest differences between the new trade unions and the old bodies headed by the AUCCTU²¹) from today's employer-bureaucrats, from the enterprise director to the minister. In these programmes, prime attention is given to production self-management, going as far as decisionmaking on key questions of the life of the enterprise, and in the longer term to systems of flexible employment, opposing attempts to solve economic problems at the workers' expense (wage freezes while prices rise,

unemployment, and backhanders for the administration and mafias through the cooperatives etc.). Similar unions are being set up by peasants, engineers and creative workers.

In regions where there have been massive strikes, workers adopted a somewhat different approach and have grasped real power through strikes. They have changed the composition and operation of existing organisations, reelecting the Worker Collective Council, Trade Union Committees and Party Committees. The organs of self management and the workers' committees of the Kuznetsk basin have joined together to form the Kuzbass Union of Workers. So the experience is there. It is up to us to act; participation in one of the new trade unions (or if there are none in your town or region) in their creation, the fight to renew the old organisations set up to defend the workers' interests — here is a workers' struggle which is open to all.

And lastly, the main thing — politics.

Today's fourth *task* is to consolidate the political forces which support complete and radical debureaucratisation of the country (this requires a coalition of all democratic forces, and its further development via a socialist alternative although clearly there are limits to cooperation with those in favour of a bourgeois model of the USSR). At the time of writing — the first months of 1990 — the democratic forces of the socialist alternative are small and poorly organised, but they exist. They consist of the **marxist** platform of the CPSU, the new socialists, and to some extent left wing social-democracy and certain other organisations and groups.

What is to be done? We have tried to answer this question in a general way in the previous section. And now a few words on how to start the practical fight for the revival of socialism.

Unless we unite, we remain powerless individuals. The first thing to do is to find comrades, like minded people and those who genuinely want to defend the workers' interests. The simplest way to do this is not to be afraid to talk openly to your friends in the canteen and the smoke room and at trade union and party meetings. Go to the meetings of the Worker Collective Council, the Party Committee or the Trade Union — you will probably find people with ideas there. Once you have found supporters, start agitation and propaganda among your workmates to promote energetic members of the collective who are dedicated to the workers' interests to the Worker Collective Council, Trade Union Committee and Party Committee. Those who genuinely defend the interests of the worker, engineers and enterprise economists ought to be in the majority in the organs of factory self management. Get the Worker Collective Council to resolve the vital issues affecting your workers and engineers — such as reorganisation of wages, norm-setting and social justice.

If you do not succeed in taking power at your enterprise by peaceful means, use the rights given to the workers by the Law on Labour Disputes.

Firstly create strike committees, (preferably at several enterprises), publicise your demands, but don't try to win yourselves privileges or get a few more crumbs from the half-eaten cake of our semi-bankrupt economy — such demands are unjust, and such strikes are doomed to isolation and failure. Put forward demands for management democratisation, the right to get on with the job without parasites and bureaucrats. If they don't grant your demands — don't be hasty, use all the possible peaceful means, hold a demonstration strike (for an hour or two) and remember that a strike in our conditions is a blow struck at your comrades. The strike is a political weapon of last resort, and is permissible only where and when the workers do not hold economic power.

If you succeed in protecting the interests of the workers at your enterprise — fight for more complex causes.

- help to organise and run consumer clubs and associations where you live, neighbourhood organs of self-government and environmental groups. The town consumer association will tell you how to set these up.

- join working groups promoting the election of promising representatives to the Soviets of Peoples' Deputies, using all legal forms of verbal and written propaganda and explanations of their manifesto. If such groups do not exist, or the way they work does not suit you, make it your job to create others.

- by the same methods ensure the support of progressive Party and Soviet leaders (if there are any) for the fight against bureaucracy in the administrative bodies of your enterprise, region or city.

- organise meetings with deputies from regional and town Soviets, representatives of town Soviets, trade unions, regional and town party committees, explain your aims to them, offer active assistance, and press for your programme using forms of mass agitation (meetings and rallies), the right to recall deputies, and mechanism of pre-term reelection of trade union and party leaders; if you can't get a peaceful dialogue going, or it produces nothing, hold peaceful meetings and demonstrations demanding the breakup of the bureaucracy.

- create primary cells of the CPSU **marxist** platform, or socialist associations of non-party members, and find ways of consolidating socialist democratic forces. Work out and implement practical programmes of action.

- get involved in mass democratic workers' organisations, trade

unions, creative and environmental associations, city and **oblast'** Peoples' Fronts, develop and explain your political objectives, find legal means of defending your interests in the struggle for socialism, join the supporters of the struggle for democracy, and distance yourself from those who prefer the piecemeal reform of the existing system and above all remember: the revival of socialism and the prospects for building **communism** are in your hands!

NOTES

However sad it may be to have to admit it, the overwhelming majority of economists, philosophers, historians and sociologists were directly or indirectly involved in this demagogy. . . Only rarely did anyone succeed in simply keeping quiet and getting on with his research.

Fair enough, not every one kept quiet and did nothing. Dozens, hundreds of people kept up the struggle for socialism and against bureaucracy. Some of them are in poor health but still living; some are now dead. Living and fighting in conditions of abuse, sickness, prison, the mental hospital was not easy.

Here we have omitted an untranslated play on the Russian version of this saying '*Kui zhelezo poka goryacho*' rendered by the authors as '*te, kto kuet zhelezo poka Gorbachev*'. — *Trans.*

Kolkhoz cooperative. — *Trans.*

The authors coin the word *bandokratiya* (compare *byurokratiya*— bureaucracy). *Banda* in Russian means a band of criminals or gang. *Bandokratiya* denotes a powerful coalition of organised crime and local and national government and Party agencies (of which Uzbekistan was a supreme example in the days of Sharaf Rashidov, a close associate of Leonid Brezhnev). We have coined the term *graftocracy* to translate this. — *Trans.*

Kibal'chish — a fictitious childrens' Soviet folk hero — roughly the Soviet equivalent of the all American boy. — *Trans.*

We should point out in passing that the first (and very primitive) wave of such a mass social preoccupation with science and art took place at the turn of the sixties when practically every young person wanted to become a physicist or cosmonaut, read Yevtushenko and Voznesenskii and argued themselves to a standstill over physics and poetry.

These resources can be channelled by very flexible means, from finance through the State budget and compulsory contributions from economic organisations to voluntary donations by citizens and organisations.

A system whereby a retail organisation agrees to bring popular (and usually scarce) goods to an organisation's offices for exclusive sale to its employees. — *Trans.*

As is witnessed by established technocratic managerial tendencies in Yugoslavia, where they have been trying for more than thirty years to link the market economy to worker-management at the enterprise.

In describing a number of the problems of self management and liberation of labour we have drawn on the work of our colleague A. A. Auzan.

No, we are not calling for equality in poverty as the alternative to the right of all to become as rich as they like. Not to mention the fact that the market programme in Poland and Yugoslavia brought riches to thousands of millionaires, but virtual poverty to millions of workers (according to national figures, up to 20% of their populations are on the poverty line). We want to emphasise a different point; the aim by no means justifies the means. The road to riches

should not violate social justice, and wealth should be earned by one's own **labour, otherwise** it will not bring people happiness, and will cause only mutual alienation and conflict.

As a comment we should underline: today is witnessing a world wide introduction of qualitatively new incentive schemes — free time, work by inclination, through the organisation of collectivist relations at the enterprise etc. It would be no bad thing for us to learn from these, since the incentives are in principle socialist. ■

A reference to an anecdote in one of Chekhov's plays, in which a soldier's widow, having been the victim of physical **assault**, adds some self-inflicted injuries in the hope that they will improve her chances of obtaining redress against her assailant.

15. One may notice from Hungarian, East German and Polish experience that these forces, who start by fighting for 'pluralism', end up fighting communists, since they are seemingly carried far further down the road to capitalism than the 'pluralist model' presupposes.
16. The authors use the Russian, historically pejorative term '**tred-yunionistskii**'. In orthodox Soviet **marxist** writing, this has traditionally denoted trade unions pursuing strictly economic goals, and thus doing nothing (in the view of such writers) to advance the cause of Soviet orthodox **marxist** socialism. — **Trans.**
17. In English, the term 'businessman' can represent the Russian word 'biznesmen' which is often used pejoratively. The Russian term used here is 'delovye lyudi', which stresses entrepreneurial energy and practical skills, and has no such disapproving overtones. — **Trans.**
18. The course of History is not simple. The elections in eastern Europe showed that the majority of workers may support a right wing bourgeois alternative if the socialist candidates discredit themselves again by a liberal-bureaucratic fight for power, and the right wing succeed in exploiting decades of discredited socialism and (economist) trade-unionist tendencies in the working class.
19. We have in mind the recommendations on development of self-management in worker collectives published by the **Znanie** Society (Moscow 1988) the journal **Sotsialisticheskii trud** (1989, nos. 3, 5, 9) and the newspaper **Komsomol'skaya pravda**, 16th January 1990.
20. In this case the authors refer to the trade unions already in existence in the USSR, and not to unions of the more familiar Western type. — **Trans.**
21. All Union Council of Trade Unions — the ruling body of the Soviets 'official' trade unions. — **Trans.**
22. **Oblast'** — the largest administrative subdivision of a Soviet republic. — **Trans.**