

**EXCLUSIVE**

American sociologist MICHAEL BURAWOY\* spent several months working in the Lenin Steelworks in Hungary, and has visited the country regularly in the past decade. In this exclusive Labour Bulletin article, he draws on this experience to analyse class struggle in state socialism and explain the collapse of the communist regimes. The article starts off with a response to Joe Slovo and Pallo Jordan, and a discussion of Lenin.

# Painting socialism in Hungary

The last year has seen the violent crushing of the democracy movement in China, the disintegration of "communist regimes" in Eastern Europe, the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the dramatic questioning of communist beliefs within the Soviet Union itself. Communist parties throughout the world have been thrown into theoretical disarray and moral confusion, particularly those - such as the South African Communist Party - which have been closely aligned to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

But the rapid political developments in South Africa increases the challenge to the

SACP. The theory of the two stage revolution meant that the examination of a South African socialism could be postponed so long as apartheid endured. The possibility of majority rule in South Africa suddenly makes the question of socialism particularly urgent.

Joe Slovo, General Secretary of the SACP, opened the debate with an account of the mistakes of the past in which he closely follows the rhetoric of Gorbachev ('Has socialism failed?' published in *Labour Bulletin* Vol 14 No 6). More recently Pallo Jordan subjected Slovo's analysis to searching critique in his "The Crisis of Conscience in the SACP"

(republished in this edition of *Labour Bulletin*).

Jordan cannot find in Slovo a clear explanation of what went so terribly wrong in the Soviet project: "Marxism prides itself in its ability to uncover the reality that lies behind appearances. Marxists therefore cannot be content with expressions of shock, horror and condemnation. It is our task to explain what has led to the atrocities we condemn! This is the missing element in Slovo's otherwise useful pamphlet." (p 67)

Jordan argues that Slovo fails to consider the extensive writings of dissident Marxists and Communists - from Trotsky, Kollantai, Rakovsky and Bukharin to Djilas, Modzelewski and

\* Michael Burawoy is a professor of sociology at the University of California (Berkeley). He is author of, among other books, *Manufacturing Consent and Politics of Production*. His forthcoming book is called *The Radiant Past - Hungarian worker in a decade of transition*. He recently visited SA as a guest of ASSA.

Kuron, and Bahro, from the Chinese Communist Party to the Italian Communist Party. These writings all point to the class or caste character of Soviet society, to the inherent contradictions contained in Soviet socialism - contradictions Slovo sweeps under the carpet.

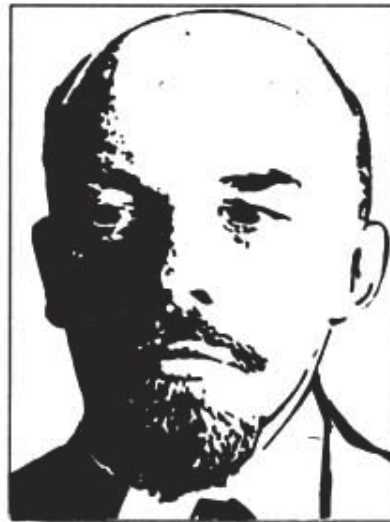
Undoubtedly Jordan's article poses a serious challenge to the SACP, but how close does he come to his stated goal - to provide a coherent explanation for the events of the last year? Why do we have to wait until 1989 for the collapse of regimes in Eastern Europe if they always had the same class character, if they always suffered from the same crises of legitimacy? How far can one rely on unreconstructed analyses of earlier generations of Marxists to provide plausible accounts for these recent events?

Jordan, I believe, doesn't go far enough in his Marxist analysis of the Soviet regimes. Nor does he understand the experience of living and working in 'socialism on earth'. To flesh out and deepen his Marxist analysis it is necessary to return to basics, to Lenin's theory of the transition to communism.

And to understand the dynamics of class struggle in state socialist society one has to understand the living experience of workers there. One has to enter the 'hidden abode of production' - the workplace in state socialist societies.

This article begins with a

discussion of Lenin's theory. I then analyse my experience of working in a steel factory in Hungary.



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin - architect of the Soviet revolution

### The Third Lenin

Lenin was not only the great architect of the Russian Revolution. He also accomplished a revolution in Marxism. It is virtually impossible to comprehend the state of Marxism before Lenin, so enormous and influential were his contributions.

For the purposes of this discussion we can say that Lenin moves through three theoretical phases. In each phase Lenin responds to political and economic developments in Russia and the wider international context.

In the first phase Lenin developed the theory of the vanguard party, and the relationship between party and working class. He wrote *What is to be Done?* in 1902 when the industrial workers in Russia were beginning to

flex their political muscle under conditions of political repression.

In the second phase Lenin developed his theory of imperialism. He wrote *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism* in 1916 in the middle of the First World War. In it he tried to answer the question of why the socialist parties abandoned working class internationalism to support their respective national bourgeoisies. He tried to explain the outbreak of world war, and show that capitalism's demise can only be understood at a world level.

In the third phase Lenin developed his theory of the transition to communism in *State and revolution*. He wrote this in August 1917 in response to the collapse of Czarism and the rising fortunes of the various socialist parties, in particular the Bolshevik Party, in Russia.

While the Lenin's theories of the vanguard party and of imperialism have been hotly debated in South Africa, the present situation calls for an analysis of the Third Lenin, the Lenin of *State and Revolution*.

Lenin's theory of the transition from capitalism to communism involves two stages: a revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism and an evolutionary transition from socialism to communism. The first transition is revolutionary because it involves destroying the capitalist state - the instrument of capitalist

rule. It necessarily means suppressing the capitalist class and establishing a new form of state - the dictatorship of the proletariat. But why is the second stage evolutionary? Why does the dictatorship of the proletariat "wither away", leaving us with communism - a society in which people receive what they need and contribute according to their abilities? What is this transitional stage of socialism?

According to Lenin socialism has three features which distinguish it from capitalism.

First, socialism is *rational*. In capitalism, which is based on private ownership of the means of production, the pursuit of profit in the market leads to inequality of wealth, wastage and continual crises. In socialism, on the other hand, planning ensures the maximum welfare of all based on collective ownership of the means of production.

Second, socialism is *just*. Capitalism rewards people first and foremost on the basis of their relationship to the means of production (capitalists receive profit because they own the means of production). Socialism, however, rewards people according to their contribution, their labour.

Third, socialism is *democratic*. Capitalism is quite compatible with forms of parliamentary democracy in which popular participation is restricted to the election of representatives. Socialism, however, requires more than

that. It requires a much more radical democracy. The dictatorship of the proletariat involves dismantling the repressive apparatus of the state and subjecting leaders to the direct control of the people who they lead.

This third component - radical democracy - is crucial. It is not an afterthought or a flight of fancy on Lenin's part. He well knew that it is one thing to suppress the capitalist class but

stage of socialism. In *State and Revolution* Lenin is not concerned to examine the conditions under which such a transition is possible. In other writings he argued that a socialist revolution in a backward country, such as Russia, could not fulfil its mission without support from socialist regimes in the West.

What then happens to a socialist revolution made in a backward country? Lenin's

---

## Socialism is rational Socialism is just Socialism is democratic

Vladimir Lenin

---

it is quite another matter to prevent the rise of a new class.

When Lenin insists on dismantling the state and arming the people, when he proposes that elected officials be subject to instant recall and receive an average worker's wage, he explicitly recognises the danger of the emergence of a new bureaucratic class. Democracy is valued not only for its own sake but also because it enables those who produce the surplus to control how it is used.

The status of this theory of the transition has to be clearly understood. It is a logical model rather than an historical account. It states that if we are to arrive at communism then we must first create a transitional

model of socialism is characterised by rationality, justice and democracy. But in the Soviet Union, a backward country, democracy was never consolidated. Instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is a *workers' socialism*, we have a dictatorship *over* the proletariat. I call this *state socialism*. In the absence of a radical democracy, rationality and justice become significantly distorted and even turn into their opposite.

### State socialism

State socialism, as it developed in the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe, has four features.

1. *First, without radical democracy, a new class emerges which appropriates and then redistributes surplus.*

This new class has been called the 'nomenclatura' or a 'bureaucratic caste' or 'teleological re-distributors'. It is placed in opposition to the class of direct producers. The two classes are antagonistic because the producers of surplus do not control how the surplus is appropriated, distributed or used by this new dominant class.

Pallo Jordan draws attention to this class structure of Soviet societies, but he does not analyse its full complexity. To advance and deepen Jordan's position it is necessary to analyse the nature of planning under state socialism.

2. *The second feature of state socialism is that a bargaining relationship develops between the enterprises and the state planning bodies.* In the original orthodox view of planning the state planners would draw up a plan which set targets for each enterprise (eg factory, mine, state farm) to fulfil. The state planning bodies would instruct the enterprises what to do. In practice the plan directed from above gave way to a *bargaining relationship* within the dominant class between the enterprise director and the state planning agency.

The director bargains with the state to get more raw materials, machinery or cash for bonuses, and also to get more orders. The state will bargain with enterprises to try to get the plan fulfilled. In the end bargaining will change the plan in ways the planners

never intended.

The enterprise develops interests of its own. Like workers on piece rates, when the targets are too difficult, the enterprise calls attention to this by restricting output. Equally, when the targets are easy then the enterprise does not push production much beyond the targets, for fear that the targets will be increased the following year. Instead, enterprises stockpile the excess product and sell it privately. Or they use the extra resources and time to produce something else.

It is also difficult for a central plan to establish targets that will lead to the production of exactly what is needed. For example, if the target for the production of nails is set by weight, then enterprises will tend to over-produce heavy nails. If the target is set by quantity, enterprises will tend to over-produce small nails which can be produced quickly. In both cases the enterprise will achieve the target, but at the cost of producing nails the country does not need and not producing nails that the country does need.

Planning based on physical targets can be effective when the product is homogeneous (like electricity) and quality is not too important, particularly in the early phases of industrial development. With the development of sophisticated machinery the quality of products becomes more important. Physical planning cannot

measure quality; at the same time planning becomes impossibly complex and is paralysed by shortages and bargaining. In other words, physical planning becomes increasingly irrational.

Planning may then change from *physical* planning to *fiscal* planning, as it did in the Hungarian economic reforms of 1968. These reforms largely did away with evaluating the performance of enterprises on the basis of whether they fulfilled plan targets. Instead the state tried to control producing through cutting prices for all raw materials and products.

In this way the state tried to encourage the enterprises to produce certain kinds of goods. For example, the state would encourage the production of certain kinds of steel by setting a higher price for them. The enterprise could sell this steel at a higher price, thus make a higher profit. There is still bargaining between state and enterprise, but this is now bargaining over pricing policies. At least there is greater sensitivity to the needs of the consumer, because the success of the enterprise depends partly on the sale of its products. An embryonic market emerges among state-owned enterprises.

Of course, if the relationship between enterprise and state is a bargaining one, it is in the interest of the enterprise directors to increase their bargaining power. They try to make their enterprises indispensable by expansion, by trying to obtain as much



*Soviet people protest on the streets of Moscow - socialist planning just hasn't produced enough goods, nor has it democratised the production process*

*Photo: Moscow News*

investment from the state as possible. With this objective in mind each enterprise enters into intense competition with other enterprises. This continual thirst for supplies (machinery, raw materials, and labour) leads to shortages, which leads to hoarding, which leads to further shortages. *The state socialist economy is a shortage economy* in contrast to the capitalist economy which produces surpluses. Each is irrational in its own way.

3. *The third feature of state socialism is that there is a triple alliance between management, union and party within the enterprise.* The bargaining relationship between enterprise and state explains why. The enterprise must present a united front to the central planners in the interests of the enterprise as a whole. Some of the benefits might trickle down to the direct producers. But this

should not obscure the other side of the triple alliance - namely, class domination over the direct producers. *Workers are denied any organisation of their own* which can defend their interests against authoritarian management. Party and trade union more or less automatically agree to management decisions, whether these concern bonuses, transfers, wages, or working conditions. If workers have power it is because they are responsible for production and management needs their co-operation.

4. *The fourth feature of state socialism is the ideology which justifies the central appropriation and re-distribution of surplus - Marxism-Leninism.* Under capitalism the appropriation of surplus is mystified by the wage form. Capitalism is compatible with a wide range of ideologies, none of which

are essential for its functioning. Under state socialism, it is clearly the state that appropriates and re-distributes surplus and therefore has to justify this exploitation. State socialism requires an ideology which legitimates state control of the surplus as being in the interests of all.

This ideology is, of course, Marxism, or Marxism-Leninism, which claims that socialism is rational and just. It pretends that the programme formulated by Lenin in *State and Revolution* is being realised. As I shall try to show, different classes experience the gap between ideology and reality in different ways. This holds the secret to the dynamics of class struggles in state socialism, as well as the secret of its demise.

### **Painting Socialism**

It is difficult to comprehend the lived experience of workers in state socialism from the outside. Workers cannot speak for themselves because they have no organisation to represent their interests. Therefore, in order to begin to understand what is like to work in state socialism, one has to enter the workplace directly.

I worked at the Lenin Steel Works in Miskolc, Hungary as a furnace-man for six months in 1985, for two months in 1986 and two months in 1987. I have been back to talk to my work-mates twice a year since then. The Lenin Steel Works employs some 12 000 wor-

kers and produces around one million tons of steel. This makes it a very inefficient enterprise by international standards. It is one of three steel mills in Hungary.

It was a freezing February morning in 1985 when I began my first shift at the huge basic oxygen converter. There was a lull in production and I was casually talking to Feri, whose job was to clean the oxygen lance, when Stegermajer, the plant superintendent, came up yelling at us to get on with sweeping the place clean.

The look of disgust on Feri's face made it clear what he thought of the idea. Who'd ever heard of keeping a steel mill clean? And anyway it was not his job. But there was no arguing with the menacing look on Stegermajer's face, so we lazily took up our brooms and began brushing away at the railings, creating clouds of dust and graphite that would descend elsewhere to be swept again by someone else's broom. Aggressiveness and shouting seemed a way of life here at the Lenin Steel Works. The bosses were always on edge. What were they so nervous about?

No sooner had we brushed the railings to reveal a dull green and yellow than painters appeared, brightening up the surroundings at least for a few minutes until the dust and graphite descended once more. "Was this normal?" I wondered. The next day the painting continued and I heard that some delegation would be



*Wall-paintings in a Leningrad street - trying to get people to believe in something they knew wasn't true*

*Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin*

visiting the factory. But no one cared who, why or when. It became clear in following days that this was to be no ordinary visit. No less a person than the Prime Minister himself would be visiting.

Even the automatic chute, broken now for many weeks, was being repaired. We would no longer have to shovel the alloys into a wheelbarrow and tip them down the chute ourselves, choked by clouds of disease-producing dust as we did so. Thank God for the Prime Minister!

On the Friday before the Tuesday visit of the Prime Minister, production had come to a standstill. Welders were out in force with their tanks of acetylene. New silver painted doors threaded by water pipes to prevent warping were being erected to fence off the converter. Hoards of young lads from neighbouring cooperatives were swarming around to give the converter its final touch. Preparations were as

elaborate as for a satellite going into space. Soldiers were shovelling the snow away from the entrances below and cleaning up the debris that they uncovered. It seemed that the entire land had been mobilised for the visit of the Prime Minister.

I found Jozsi swearing in our eating room. "This is a steel mill not a pharmacy!" He'd just been told to change into new overalls, with a new hat and gloves. I looked at him in disbelief, assuming I had not understood him properly. "You won't even be working when the Prime Minister comes," I said. He looked at me as though I'd come from the moon. "What's that got to do with anything? Everybody has to conform. This is window-dressing politics." So we all trooped off to get our new outfits, and came back mockingly giving our hard hats a final polish. Five minutes later, let alone next Tuesday, our new clothes would be filthy again. Today was our turn for a

'communist shift'. In aid of charity, such as support for a children's hospital or the National Theatre, we work an extra shift without pay. It's a socialist form of taxation. Our job was to paint in yellow and green the slag drawer, a huge machine that skims off slag from the pig iron as it passes on its way to the converter. There were not enough paint brushes to go round. I could only find a black one. What could I paint black? What better than the most treasured of the furnace-man's tools - his shovel?

*painting* socialism. And black at that!"

Workers saw the painting as just another example of socialist waste and deception. "This is the communist sector," begins a furnace-man's joke. "If there's pig iron then there's no scrap. If there's scrap then there's no pig iron. If there happens to be both then someone must have stolen something." Socialism, it seems, can only maintain an image of efficiency by calling on its workers to collaborate in a desperate and ridiculous

Socialism needs people to comply with its rituals of affirmation. Painting hides the unpleasant realities of socialism at the same time as it paints an appearance of brightness, rationality and justice. Socialism becomes an elaborate game where everyone pretends. Everyone sees through the game but everyone is compelled to play. It is part and parcel of factory life: the union elections, the production conferences, competition among socialist brigades and the communist shifts.

But if we have to paint a world of efficiency and justice then we become that much more sensitive to inefficiency and injustice. The pretence unwittingly assumes a life of its own. The constant need to paint over reality points to the inadequacy, the irrational waste and the injustice of reality. The game, the pretence, becomes a spontaneous critique of existing society and a potential vision of an alternative society. By failing to live up to the ideals it preaches, the ideals of Marxism-Leninism, state socialism generates a critical consciousness in its working class. This is a rudimentary socialist consciousness.

The capitalist game is very different. In advanced capitalism workers spontaneously consent to the directing classes by *obscuring from themselves* its system of domination and inefficiency. In capitalism the relations of production are

---

## You are not building socialism! You are painting it! And black at that!

---

I had hardly begun this important task when Stegermajer came storming over, his head bowed for combat. "What the hell are you doing?" "Painting the shovels black," I replied as innocently as I could. But he was not amused so I added, "Haven't you got any more brushes so I can help the others?" No, there weren't any others. "So I can't help build socialism?" I continued, somewhat cheekily. My mates burst into laughter at the thought of their "American professor" building socialism. Even Stegermajer had to smile when Jozsi intervened, "Misi, Misi you don't understand anything. You are not *building* socialism, you are

cover-up.

Painting socialism not only calls attention to the irrationality of socialism (its waste and inefficiency), but also to its injustice. "Money doesn't count, the Prime Minister is coming," expresses the powerful resentment towards the Red Barons who direct society, and whom we have to entertain with these charades. Furnace-men are fond of the joke about the contribution to socialism of three men. "The first receives 5 000 forints a month. He builds socialism. The second receives 15 000 forints a month. He directs the building of socialism. The third receives 50 000 forints a month. Socialism is built for him."

hidden through participation in production, whereas in socialism the relations of production become the *central concern* of workers and managers. Under socialism we are called on to deliberately cover up injustice and irrationality and to paint a vision of justice and rationality.

But why does everyone



carry on playing the game? Behind the irrational appearance this is a rational decision. Enterprises have an interest in participating in these ritual games. The growth of a capitalist enterprise depends on its profitability; but the growth of a state socialist enterprise depends on investment funds which are controlled by the state. There are three steel mills in Hungary. Their common interest in expanding the resources available to the steel industry is undermined by an intense rivalry over the allocation of what is available. Each enterprise has to demonstrate its worthiness to receive investment from the state. Since there are no clear objective criteria to assess the efficiency of firms, it is important to create the appearance of conforming to socialist values of rationality and justice.

That is precisely why management has to paint the Lenin Steel Works when the Prime Minister visits. He has to be convinced that the

Lenin Steel Works is at the forefront of building socialism. Thus, by its own logic *building* socialism turns into its *painting* - reminding all of the gap between what is and what should be, deepening the critical consciousness of workers and managers alike.

It is one thing to talk of a *class consciousness*. It is quite another matter to talk of *class mobilisation* of the sort that spread throughout Poland in 1980 and 1981. In this respect Hungary and Poland were at opposite extremes. Hungarian workers could advance their interests by individual participation in the 'second economy' after normal hours, whereas in Poland workers were more likely to be standing in queues to buy basic goods. The Hungarian 'second economy' fragmented and individualised its working class.

Furthermore, Hungarian workers did not have the resources for collective mobilisation. In Poland after 1976, intellectuals played a critical role in forging links between different sectors of the labour force, while the Church provided an arena in which collective identity could be forged. In Hungary intellectuals and the Church were far removed from working class organisation.

We have now discussed how painting socialism engendered class consciousness among workers, but what was its effect on the dominant class?

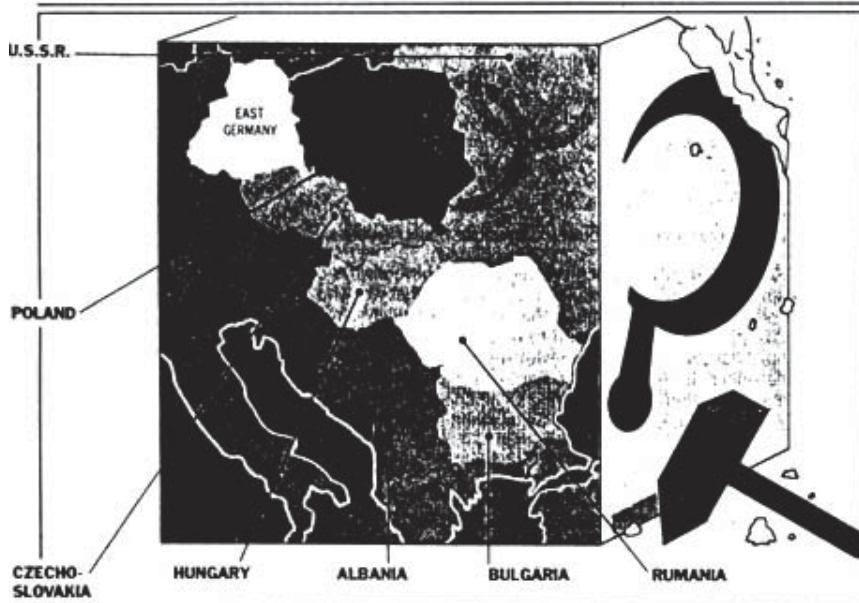
### The collapse of state socialism

Both Slovo and Jordan assume that the regimes of Eastern Europe were swept away through popular revolts from below. To be sure there were popular movements from below, particularly in East Germany, Romania and Czechoslovakia. But there have been much stronger popular movements before, which did not end with the collapse of state socialism. Why the difference?

The most common answer is the Soviet factor, namely that perestroika and glasnost meant the end of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. While obviously true, this assumes that the Soviet Union is somehow outside the Eastern Europe experience, whereas the same challenges are being experienced inside the Soviet Union itself. What is remarkable is how peaceful these changes have been, with the notable exception of Romania. Communist Parties lost the confidence and the will to rule. The collapse of state socialism was a *collapse from above*.

Here we have to look at painting socialism from the standpoint of the dominant class. The gap between ideology and reality, ritualised in painting socialism, refused to close despite repeated attempts at reform. Popular revolts from below, made that gap painfully obvious and threatening to the ruling class. The Solidarity movement in Poland, which after





all was a workers' movement against a 'workers' state', was the most powerful example. At the same time the membership of the ruling class was becoming more professional and more educated and less tolerant of an ideology so clearly contradicted by reality.

Whereas previously this gap had led to attempts to change reality, through economic reforms, now it led to the rejection of ideology. In the end even the most degenerate form of Marxism - that is, official Soviet-type 'Marxism-Leninism' - proved to be subversive of state socialism. Unable to bridge the gap between the ideals of socialism and the reality of state socialism, the ruling class finally turned against the ideology. Marxism was abandoned in favour of new ideologies which celebrated nationalism, democracy, profits and the market.

What the new ideologies all share is an uncompromising anti-communism. The

elections in Hungary in March and April this year highlight the strength of this anti-communism. The victorious party - the Hungarian Democratic Forum - campaigned on a national popular platform, while the second most popular party - the Free Democrats - campaigned for a new capitalist order. Each side sought to outbid the other in their anti-communist rhetoric. So powerful was the anti-communist consensus that no party dared defend the interests of workers as workers for fear of being labelled 'Stalinist'.

This had the effect of excluding any expression of worker interests in the elections. The social democrats jumped onto the anti-communist bandwagon and failed to demarcate themselves from the others, while the old communist party renamed itself from the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party to the Hungarian Socialist Party. Commitment to workers was viewed as an even bigger lia-

bility than socialism!

Apart from excluding the interests of the working class, anti-communism had another consequence, namely hostility to planning and indeed any state intervention in the economy. The rallying cry for the election was privatisation. Already before the elections legislation was enacted to recognise multiple forms of property. This made it possible to create limited companies and joint stock corporations, or to turn state enterprises into private companies. The last socialist government was already enthusiastically pursuing what has come to be called spontaneous privatisation, that is privatisation based on initiatives from below. State enterprises must decide themselves on their own privatisation plan, rather than waiting for state instructions.

But who would buy these state enterprises, inefficient enterprises such as the Lenin Steel Works? Firstly, foreigners received tax incentives for investing in Hungary. Foreigners have indeed been investing but it still does not amount to much. Another possibility was the old nomenclatura class, which was encouraged to buy shares in new privatised companies by making investments tax deductible, and by offering privatisation loans at low rates of interest. In the name of spontaneous privatisation the old dominant class has begun to turn its political power into economic capital. Because it was not clear who

actually owned state property, i.e. who should be paid, and because there were no effective ways of valuing assets of state enterprises, there are many scandals. Collaboration between managers, state officials and foreign capital has defined the pattern of privatisation so far.

### Workers' response

What is the response from the working class? Excluded from the political process, they stand and watch from the sidelines. For the majority the only significant change has been rampant inflation and the multiplication of managerial hierarchies that privatisation has brought about. For the time being, at least, there is still little unemployment.

Nevertheless, in places, workers' councils have sprung up to represent the interests of workers. By the end of June there were about 160 legally recognised workers' councils. Although they take different forms they do share certain features. They usually emerge in response to some blatant injustice, such as huge management bonuses. Workers protest to the trade union which fails to come to their assistance. The workers then set up a workers' council as a "real trade union" which will represent the interests of workers, both as individuals and as a collectivity. They collect subscriptions, but the money is kept for the benefit of the membership, and not to maintain some distant bureaucracy.

The new council will not automatically sign arbitrary managerial edicts, but seeks to supervise and control management. Some councils are even proposing employee ownership of their enterprises. Shares would be held on behalf of the employees by the workers' council. The shares would be paid for out of future profits. At this point workers' councils are very much rooted in production and are cautious about extending links beyond the enterprise to other enterprises.

The workers' council point to four features of Hungarian society in transition. First, the separation of state politics and production politics. With the growing autonomy of parliamentary politics and the legal apparatus and the collapse of the party, so a corresponding autonomy of enterprise politics has developed. Whereas before the regime of production was an extension of the state into the workplace, now it is increasingly an independent terrain of politics. Moreover, spontaneous privatisation has made the enterprise an arena of decisions concerning its own future. The enterprise becomes the arena of important struggles in which competing interests clash.

Second, in rebelling against the official trade unions the workers' councils are highlighting their irrelevance in the new production politics. With the declining importance of bargaining between enterprises and the state it makes even less sense for trade unions to ally them-

selves with management. Since the official trade unions seem unable to re-structure themselves it is not surprising that new forms of representation emerge to defend worker interests.

Third, in being excluded from wider political processes and having no organisational channels through which to express their interests as workers, they have to rely on the one source of power they share, namely their power in the workplace. Because the managers have to rely on the co-operation of the workers, demands for a radical democracy spring up from the shop floor.

Last but by no means least, the workers councils embody the critical socialist consciousness workers developed through participation in the rituals of painting socialism. At the centre of their project is the commitment to 'rationality' (that is the efficient organisation of production), and to 'justice' (that is the reward for labour). At this point, however, they conceive of this only in terms of the factory and not in terms of the re-organisation of the wider society.

### Conclusion - towards democratic socialism

State socialism is a degenerate form of Lenin's democratic socialism. It is a class society legitimated by the socialist ideals of justice and rationality. The gap between ideology and reality gives that society its political dynamic, explaining its collapse and the birthmarks of

the new society. Beneath the paint of Marxism-Leninism very different regimes of state socialism existed in different countries with different degrees of success. Just as we should not be deceived by the socialist ideology of state socialism, so also we should not be deceived by the anti-communist and free market ideologies of the transitional society. They shape but also obscure a number of different visions of the future, including the one based on workers councils.

The collapse of state socialism is only a blow to socialists who believed that the Soviet Union was the real and only model of socialism. Such socialists were blind to the gap between ideology and reality in the Soviet Union. They were not able to comprehend the significance of painting socialism.

They therefore did not understand the dynamics of existing state socialism, nor did they understand that there could be different models of socialism. They could not see that Marxism was at odds with the class character of state socialism and indeed that Marxism in the end proved to be the undoing of that society.

The collapse of state socialism liberates Marxism from a continuing association with despotic rule. It liberates Marxism to search for alternative conceptions of socialism, to explore and develop Lenin's original model.

What we have learnt from



*Can the SACP, together with SA unions, be the first to build a democratic model of socialism?*

*Photo: Morice/Labour Bulletin*

Eastern Europe is that the absence of the third element of socialism - radical democracy - gives rise to the distortion of the first two. The *rationality* of planning becomes the irrationality of bargaining within the dominant class (between enterprise directors and state managers) instead of the supervision of the managers and directors by the working class. The *justice* of reward according to contribution to society becomes the injustice of reward according to political position.

But we have also learnt that such a radical democracy - while going much further than parliamentary democracy - nevertheless requires the latter as its basis. Radical democracy requires a multi-party system, it requires the protection of basic individual, social and economic rights. In other words, radical democracy cannot exist without the institutions of what is often termed 'bourgeois democracy'.

But bourgeois democracy

is not a *stage* en route to radical democracy; on the contrary, bourgeois democracy tends to undermine class mobilisation for radical democracy. Rather, if radical democracy is to develop at all, it will do so alongside and at the same time as bourgeois democracy.

If Lenin was right in arguing that the best theory develops in close connection with a revolutionary working class, then South Africa should be at the forefront. With a large and powerful working class, a radical trade union movement closely connected to a mass liberation struggle, and both tied to a uniquely popular communist party, what better conditions for exploring democratic models of socialism, for developing a South African socialism of a special type? The danger is that, due to its long and close association with the Soviet Union, the South African Communist Party will flee from the challenge and abandon socialism altogether. ☆