

TOWARDS THE NEW, NEW COLD WAR

By Dayan Jayatilika

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This commentary was recorded prior to the Soviet Peace Initiative's failure and the commencement of the ground offensive.

This is an attempt to understand the processes in the Soviet Union and discern certain patterns of development on the basis of Soviet history – i.e. an attempt to understand these phenomena and processes in their historicity. Here I will draw many parallels and several analogies. We must be cautious though, not to fall into the error of historicism and not to see the future only as a replay of the past. Today's crisis in the Soviet Union must be understood in its specificity. But it must also be grounded in an understanding of Soviet history – i.e. the history of Russian revolution and the history of the interaction of that revolution with its external environment.

The pivot of this analysis will be the Gulf War and its consequences. The involvement of Russian rulers in the project of Western imperialism(s) has, in the 20th century, caused the downfall of those rulers. Even more importantly it has caused the downfall of systems. Simply put, external events seem to have an extraordinarily decisive impact on internal political processes in Russia. The 1905 revolution was triggered off by the defeat of the Czarist Russia in the Russo – Japanese War. The involvement of the Czarist Russia in the First World War on the side of the Entente, resulted in the February revolution and the downfall of the Czarist autocracy. Furthermore the inability or unwillingness of the Kerensky Government to extricate itself from that imperialist war caused not only the downfall of that regime but also spelled the doom of a certain class option – i.e. it spelled the

doom of the option of liberal bourgeois stabilization of the Russian crisis – and opened the way for its final radicalization and revolutionary leap in the October of 1917.

Will the complicity and the involvement of the Gorbachev Government in the Western War of aggression in the Gulf, have similar feedback effects? Certainly the Soviet Union is not involved militarily in the sense that the Czarist regime and its successor the Kerensky government were involved in World War I. Therefore the feedback effect will not be of that magnitude. However, the involvement of the Soviet Union will have a certain internal effect and is having one already. It will have its implications and impact upon, the balance of political forces in the Soviet Union and on the struggle for hegemony that is beginning to unfold now in that state.

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Recently Lt. Col. Victor Alksnis (dubbed the 'Black Colonel' by the Soviet liberal reformists) made a very interesting comment on the events in Baltic Republics. He said that though outwardly it's an ethnic crisis what is taking place in the Soviet Union today is a real political struggle. And he went on, to make references to 1917 and the Kerensky regime! So this pattern of the involvement of Russia in the projects of the

West leading to a domestic destabilization, will possibly recur in this case as well.

Russia's Identity

Underlying this is a battle about Russia's identity. Is it a Western power? Or is it an Eastern power? Or does it straddle the two? The Gorbachev government, particularly under the direction given by Shervadnadze to Soviet foreign policy, seemed to consider itself totally a Western power. Even within the camp of 'Westernizers' there were two tendencies – those who thought that what was most important was the relations with the U.S. (the Soviet Union as a co-partner of the US and an imitator of the US) and those who saw the Soviet Union's destiny residing in and with Europe. I think that the pendulum will shift back – if not to those who considered the Soviet Union an Eastern power, at least to the understanding that the Soviet Union is an Euro-Asian power. So in a way, it's a struggle for the soul of Russia.

The next important point concerns the relationship between the political forces in the West and domestic conflicts contradictions and political competition in the Soviet Union itself. In post revolutionary Russian history, it has been the case that there have been negative reactions to expressions of support and sympathy extended to elements in the domestic Soviet political spectrum by pro-capitalist and even

social democratic elements in the West. In simple terms, a backlash. For some reason Soviet authorities have been extremely sensitive on this score – so sensitive as to sometimes contradict and even outweigh other strategic considerations of theirs.

To mention a striking example, Lenin's attempts at forging a united front with the centrist, so called 'Second and a..

half International, as well as the Second International, floundered precisely on the reaction of Western European social democrats to the trials of other anti Bolshevik Leftists that were taking place in revolutionary Russia.

In the face of the European offensive by the counterrevolution Lenin had sanctioned a limited opening to the Second and the Second and a half Internationals. Proposals for united actions and a united working class front were on the agenda. The negotiations were conducted by experienced Bolsheviks, for the Soviet side. However, Lenin took grave exception to what he thought were concessions made by the Bolshevik representatives to the European Social Democrats as concerns the crack-down on the Mensheviks and the S.R.'s in Soviet Russia itself. I believe the Social Democrats criticized the crack-down and they wanted a halt to the executions; they wanted observers present at the trials. But Lenin was fiercely determined that such concessions should not be made – even to the point of the breakdown of those negotiations. And mind you, soft peddling that issue would have been well in line with the new strategic conception concerning relations between Russia and the capitalist World that he was beginning to articulate. Yet, the subjective factor prevailed.

It is possible that similarly American and even European criticism of the Soviet crackdown in the Baltics as well as Western support to Yeltsin, the Russian Federation and certain economic programmes in the Soviet Union, could have precisely that kind of backlash effect. We are beginning to see that already with Valentin Pavlov's (the Soviet P. M.) comments about Western economic conspiracy to undermine communist rule – the economic version of what the Chinese leadership said after Tien An Men – and also in the resignation of Gennady Filshim (who incidentally visited Sri Lanka last year as part of Parliamentary delegation).

Classes, Class Struggle and the NEP

The third point is to do with a fairly old fashion notion of class struggle – do-

mestically and on a global scale. It was Mao who said in 1962 "never forget classes and the class struggle." That's good advice though one must not return to a pre-New Thinking class reductionist notion of Politics and history.

continued existence of NATO, the pressure for the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the refusal to delay German reunification, the insistence that Germany would continue as a member of NATO – all these were parts of the politico mili-

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The dynamics of class struggle, the sharpening of the class struggle, sometimes undermines even the most sincerely attempts at moderation by Marxists. Let us take the NEP. We are aware that Lenin was willing to make enormous concessions to the West but somehow it didn't work out – except for a few iconoclastic businessmen like Hammer, this opening up remained at a conceptual level. It was never really acted upon positively by the West. Why was this?

Western policy makers and politicians wanted a total roll back of the Russian Revolution. They believed that the Soviet Union should not be allowed to stabilize itself. They believed that such economic links would do precisely that. And therefore the climate of opinion in the West was not conducive to the kind of foreign investment, trade links and integration into the world economy that Lenin had thought permissible and desirable during the period of the NEP. In that sense, the NEP failed. One must not look at this as purely an economic project but understand that the dynamics of global class struggle and the contending class projects undermine the best intentions of revolutionary moderation.

tary aspect of this strategic counter-offensive. But far less visible were the ideological and the economic aspects. It was fairly clear that the West was supporting and encouraging those sectors in the Soviet Union who want nothing less than a rapid transition to what they call a market economy but is really a euphemism for capitalism. So the peaceful restoration of capitalism and its political corollary – the change in the class character of the Soviet state – was very much part of the agenda of certain forces in the West and their domestic allies in the Soviet Union. I'm not saying that these are some sub human species or some evil elements! These sectors, both in the West and the Soviet Union probably feel that what they advocate is the best for the Soviet people and for humanity as a whole. They probably really believe in the magic of the marketplace. But objectively their programme and project was a total roll back of the socialist character of the Revolution. Objectively there was and is an alliance between these forces in the USSR and the hegemonic sectors of the West. They wanted to put the clock back to before October 1917. The tip of this peaceful counter – revolutionary iceberg were the moves to remove the statues of

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Something fairly similar took place recently. Emboldened by its success in Eastern Europe, the West, particularly the U.S., decided to continue its strategic offensive. This strategic offensive has political and military aspects but these were not the primary ones. The

Lenin, to remove Lenin's body from mausoleum, to rename even Lenin-grad. This provoked a reaction from certain other elements and forces in the Soviet Union.

How this battle will unfold I do not

know. It is quite possible that the events in the Gulf may lead to a change in the US when far more moderate (Republican or Democratic) leadership comes to the fore and decides to restructure its relationship with the Soviet Union and scale down the aims of the US policy. But right now both in the US and in Western Europe there would be increasing criticism of the direction of domestic Soviet policy – starting with the Baltic republics but not limiting itself to this. I think it will accelerate the polarization within Russia itself; it will cause further reaction on the part of certain sectors in the Soviet Union commonly dubbed 'hardline'.

While the external aspect of the NEP never really took off, even the domestic aspect of the NEP ran aground



Alksnis, left, confers with colleague Turi Blokhin

several years later. There were policy differences but underneath all that I think it was the logic of class struggle in post revolutionary Russia that once again set the parametric constraints to the operation of the NEP. The class polarization in the countryside and the rise of the Kulaks resulted in certain serious problems for the Soviet cities – the problem of the withholding of farm produce. All this led to a situation in which a certain turn was necessary in Soviet economic policy.

This 'turn' also necessitated the introduction of elements of extra economic coercion. Such elements were pretty much imperative if the log jam had to be broken through. This imperative was reinforced by the perception of encircle-

ment from without – the build up of Nazism. Certainly I do not believe that any elements in the Soviet Union would today see that kind of Fascist threat. But one cannot rule out a renewed perception of encirclement, on the part of the Soviet military and the K. G. B. Take the scene as they might perceive it – the roll back or wartime Soviet gains in Europe, the intrusion of Western influence in the Baltic Republics and in Russia itself, a Western war in the Gulf and speculation about new security arrangements in the Middle East. What is this but a renewed GENTO plus an extension of NATO (giving and extra continental role and projecting its power) in a context of the liquidation of the Warsaw Pact?

Taken together, these factors begin to resemble the conjuncture of the 30's in

which the turn away from the NEP took place under the leadership of Stalin. The sanctions given to joint army and KGB patrols and the permission given to inspect various enterprises amount to a certain militarisation of the economy. (Incidentally the best known advocate for the militarisation of the economy was Leon Trotsky. He managed to do that fairly successfully when he headed the Red Army). That kind of militarisation of the economy is beginning to take place and it might even become more necessary if the economy is to function at all and if people are to be fed. A kind of 'War Communism' may be inevitable. The actions of the Soviet state apparatus – being the condensation of certain class interests, having a certain class character – are nothing less than the

exercise of this class hegemony over the modern 'NEPmen'. And it's interesting, though not entirely surprising, that the Soviet Prime Minister gives the interview about the economic destabilization by the West to Trud which is the Trade Union paper of the CPSU. It's also not surprising that one of the most powerful hardline pressure groups is the United Working Class Front. Elements of the working class who are members of the CPSU are defending their class interests with a degree of consciousness and that is noteworthy. So the confluence of these elements – the military, the KGB – who were after all the guarantors, like in any other society, of a certain mode of production – with the working class and certain elements of CPSU will perhaps crystallize a new bloc that will lead this 'turn'.

These dialectics operated during Stalin's time as well. Stalin attempted to create a broad anti Fascist front. He made repeated appeals to the West for a united initiative against rising Fascism. However, the West dithered, delayed and hoped to channel the fascist danger towards the East. Then again Stalin tried to buy time through the Molotov – Ribbentrop Pact. Though it brought the desired results of a breathing space, this was not as prolonged as he would have wished. On both these occasions, despite the flexibility and the subjective willingness of the Soviet leadership to pursue a policy of moderation, a co-operative policy, a conciliatory policy, imperialist elements in the West had different objectives. They were far more ambitious. Today the ambitions of the West far surpass the intentions of Gorbachev. This asymmetry has led to a certain significant weakening of the position of the Gorbachev government.

In the period after 1945, the Soviet leadership acted with very considerable restraint. The Comintern had already been dissolved in 1943 to facilitate in the first place the assumption of a truly national character by the anti – Fascist resistance movements in the occupied countries, ridding them of the liability of being affiliated in some way or the other to the Soviet Union, and in the second place to facilitate the opening of a Second Front by the West. It must be borne in

mind that the West delayed in opening a Second Front. The real reason was that they wanted the Soviet Union to be bled for a little while more. The Soviet Union made concessions on its part of such as the dissolution of the Communist International.

The American dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to stimulate the U.S.S.R. It is impossible that one of the U. S. - U. K. aims in launching the Gulf War was to send a signal to the USSR about the new rules of the game it would have to observe, especially in the Third World.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, Stalin acted with considerable restraint. There were powerful communist parties in France, in Italy and in Greece and in none of those cases did Stalin encourage or support a bid for power. Stalin's behaviour was based on a realistic assessment of the overall balance of power in the post War period. After all the US had at that time monopoly of the atomic weapon. It had an economy that was very vibrant and a mainland unscathed by the War, unlike the Soviet Union which had lost 20 million people. The Anglo-American naval preponderance in the Mediterranean was also such that any assertiveness on the part of the Soviet Union would've been very counterproductive. For all these reasons the Soviet behaviour was very restrained in the post war period. But it was the US and more particularly Britain, that initiated the Cold War - Churchill's Fulton speech, the expulsion of the French and the Italian communist parties from post war coalition governments and the intervention in Greece against the Greek monarchy which had collaborated with German Fascism. Therefore the point is that despite Soviet restraint the West adopted an aggressive policy of (at that time) rolling back communist influence in the world. Soviet restraint was really not reciprocated. And whenever the West thought it had the strategic advantage it pressed home that advantage. Stalin formed the Cominform and tightened up in Eastern Europe as a response to the US - UK offensive.

In the post Stalin period there was a lot

of optimism as a result of the so-called Krushchevite thaw - Krushchev himself was willing to go pretty far in his accommodation with the West. He had outflanked and ousted the Molotov-Kaganovich Group in the Soviet Communist Party. But even Krushchev was not capable of managing the transition to a stable, reciprocal relationship between the US and the USSR. There were several crises: 1956 when the Soviets moved into Hungary to suppress the counter revolution that was unfolding there (a counter revolution that took an armed form) and the Suez crisis of '56. The Hungary episode caused a hardening of the attitudes of the West towards the Soviet Union. Then came the Cuban missile crisis, which caused a further hardening. Krushchev backed down of course. But that pretty much spelled the end of Krushchev as far as the Soviet Union was concerned. The Soviet military was determined not to be humiliated again by the US. It's after that that the Soviet Navy underwent a revolutionary expansion under the brilliant leadership of Admiral Gorshkov.

The possibility of the Soviet Union looking East towards China, cannot be ruled out.

These subjective factors may come into play - again. There are signs of a feeling on the part of the Soviet military that it has been humiliated - it has been pushed out of Eastern Europe, there are whole encampments, tent towns in which Soviet military men are housed and this had led to a breakdown of morale and discipline in the Red Army. The untrammelled use of force and technology by the West in the Gulf and the attempt to pound into submission a state - Iraq - with which the Soviet Union has a treaty after all would further enhance this sense of humiliation. And we must remember that unlike during the time of the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviet Union has reached a position of essential equivalence with the US in purely military terms. What the Soviet Union lacks is the capacity to project that power because of its domestic political and economic crisis and more importantly its crisis of policy. But it has the aggregate

power. Since the Soviet political system is not as susceptible to public opinion as the US is, or perhaps not in quite the same way, the Soviet Union may be able to regain the capacity to project power somewhat more easily than the U.S. was able to in the post Vietnam period. In the situation of instability that may arise as a result of the Gulf War, there would be a grave temptation for the Soviet Union and especially the Soviet military, to engage in that kind of power projection. Perhaps not high profile; perhaps only low intensity; but also low risk targets of opportunity - which may enable the Soviet Union to do to the West what the West did to the Soviet Union (and the Soviet military) in Eastern Europe! The Soviet military may be tempted to change and reverse the correlation of forces through such moves.

I do not want to be understood as saying that there would be an immediate, instantaneous, automatic rupture in US - Soviet relations as a result of crises and wars in the Third World, including the Gulf War. In 1972 when the US bombed Hanoi and Haiphong,

Brezhnev received Nixon in Moscow, just as Mao received Nixon in Beijing.

The highpoint of detente was 1975 - the Helsinki Accord and the Apollo - Soyuz Joint Mission. Just about a year after that (perhaps less) Gerald Ford of US was already beginning to abandon the term detente. They were unhappy with detente. Detente died in less than a year after 1975, as a result of the victory of national liberation forces in Vietnam (in '75) and the Soviet and particularly Cub internationalist assistance to the Angolan MPLA (to resist the attempt by South Africa acting as a proxy of the US to reverse the tide of national liberation and instal a puppet regime). So though there is a time lag we see the direction of the dynamic fairly clearly in retrospect - from 1917 to 1979. And it's with this weight of history that I expect a version of this to be played out as a result mainly, but not

exclusively, of the Gulf War. The role of the Gulf War will be a catalytic one.

Those of us living in Sri Lanka, having experienced the results of Delhi's behaviour in the face of the spillover effect of the ethnic problem on Tamil Nadu, should be very sensitive to the possibility that Moscow will be forced to act in some way to prevent the spill over effect of the Gulf conflict into the Islamic Major-

to the Deng Hsiao Peng or Zhao Ziang tendencies. These centrist forces, the so called old guard, contains a significant number of military men. This tendency has memories of close co-operation, with the Soviet Union in the Stalin period. Some of them were unhappy about the refusal of Mao to countenance the idea of a Sino - Soviet rapprochement in the aftermath of the ousting of Khrushchev, the assumption

ist policy cannot be ruled out. There may be strong economic grounds for this as well. If Western aid to the USSR slows down due to recession as well as to political displeasure and if foreign capital is reluctant to invest in the USSR owing to political instability, then economic cooperation between the USSR and China, as well as the remainder of socialist bloc, may be the only option open even to Gorbachev!

Soviet Reaganism

The Soviet Union is currently in a situation similar to that which the US found itself in the post Vietnam period. Afghanistan was the Vietnam of the Soviet Union and Gorbachev is in a way its Jimmy Carter. Therefore we might well see a kind of a Soviet Reaganism - a reassertion of Soviet power, of the Soviet Union's Super Power status. There have been no demonstrations of that for sometime now. The phenomenon of Reaganism was psychologically sourced in the perception of the humiliation of the US in the Third World, specially Iran. It's possible that the Soviet Carterite period is coming to a close. Let it not be forgotten that in 1979 Carter himself inaugurated the turn with the statement that Persian Gulf was an area of vital interests and that the US would intervene militarily and also with the decision to install Pershing and Cruise missiles in Europe. Gorbachev may be on the verge of such a turn.

Will Gorbachev himself be able to do it? Or will it take a new leader in the Soviet Union? This is rather uncertain. The possibility of a new leadership, a takeover by the Red Army led by a popular, charismatic officer like Bevis Gromov, or the ascendancy of some other political leaders (such as Ligachev) in the Soviet Union, cannot be ruled out. What is far more probable is the re-composition of the power bloc in which the Soviet military and the K. G. B. have a greater preponderance. It could be described as a Soviet variant of that Latin American phenomenon - the civilian - military Junta.

The "General Line"

This brings us to the ideological ques-

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ity Soviet Republics. The Western war of aggression in the Gulf has already led to an upsurge of anti - American Arab nationalism and Islamic radicalism. This has not yet peaked. Just as Mrs. Gandhi did not want to run the risk of Tamil Nadu Tamil nationalism taking an anti Centre character as a result of a perception of the insensitivity on the part of North India to the sufferings of their Tamil brethren in Sri Lanka, so too will Moscow not wish to be seen as insensitive to the feelings of the Muslim populace in the Soviet Central Asian Republics. This will not result in a military intervention on the part of the Soviet Union in the Gulf. But certainly there will be more vigorous diplomatic initiatives which may lead to a strategic schism and diplomatic divergence between the West and the Soviet Union on the question of the Gulf. Such a divergence will feed into the dynamics I analysed earlier - of growth of disharmony and polarisation in the US - Soviet relations. If President Gorbachev goes along with the US rather than his own military, in this strategic schism, it may undermine his own political position.

Looking East

As this proceeds, the possibility of the Soviet Union looking East towards China, cannot be ruled out. The forces now in ascendancy in China are those who belong neither to the pure Maoist and Cultural revolutionist tendency nor

of power by Brezhnev and Kosygin and the escalation of the War in Vietnam by the U.S. I refer to people like Marshall Chen Yun, Yeh Chien, Yeng, Li Hsien Nien.

The economic thinking of these Chinese elements is also interesting. They are for a "planned market economy" and believe in the so called "Bird Cage" theory of a market being like a canary in a cage; the cage consisting of socialist planning. In the early days of Deng, these elements made frequent use of Stalin's "Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR" to make a critique of Mao and to point out that as Stalin said, there were certain objective economic laws of socialism. So if Zhao Ziang can, somewhat unkindly, be seen as a right deviationist and if the cultural revolutionists and the so called Gang of Four can be more correctly understood as an ultra left tendency, this group can be described as a centrist, neo Stalinist tendency. It's likely that they have a significant affinity with the Soviet military men who are now being increasingly assertive in the Soviet Union. If the Soviet military perceives that it is being threatened on its Western and Southern flanks it may seek a rapprochement with the other Socialist power in the East which has faced the threat of roll back by imperialism and therefore is in the same boat - so to speak. So a Sino - Soviet rapprochement on the basis of a somewhat more hardline, quasi Stalin-

tion. The reassertion of US power required the reconstruction of a moral ethnical edifice. Part of this was done by Carter through his human rights offensive and the rest was completed by Reagan with his Ramboite rhetoric and vision. The US will find that its own ideological weapon, so finely honed by the events in Eastern Europe, is blunted by its behaviour in the Gulf. In that sense the Gulf will turn out to be the US's Afghanistan – morally speaking. The US may even go into another period of quasi isolationism in the aftermath of the Gulf War. The Soviet Union may capitalise on this and for that it will need its own psychological and ideological re-arming. Will it imitate the sequence of the US – i.e. Carterism followed by Reaganism? In other words, Gorbachevism followed by something else? And what could that something else be? What could be the counterpart of the Reaganite ideology for the Soviet Union? What forces or agencies in the USSR could provide that kind of ideological input? I can think only of the Red Army and the KGB. A fairly recent poll (timed for Revolution Day 1990) in the Moscow News surprised me. The MN is very much anti Stalinist and pro reform. But this poll pointed out that one of the most popular historical personalities in the Soviet Union is none other than Felix Dzershinsky – the founder of the Cheka, the precursor of the KGB. Public opinion polls also reveal, rather surprisingly, that the KGB is relatively more

Red Army and the KGB. In China on two occasions (first in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution when Mao was trying to rebuild a shattered Party and a state and secondly in the aftermath of Tien An Men) the P. L. A. was brought in to play and upheld as a role model. After the Cultural Revolution, 'three-in-one' committees were formed, including the PLA. This might happen in the Soviet Union as well.

The Stalin Question.

Paradoxically enough the process of Glasnost and Perestroika has paved the way for a defence and revival of Stalin! In the Brezhnev period there were occasions such as the Stalin Centenary of 1979 which saw a certain, partial, revival, but in the main there was a grey compromise and a blanket of silence. True, the anti Stalin deunciations of Kruschchev were toned down but there was for most part a radical absence of Stalin. Due to Glasnost there was a tidal wave of criticism of Stalin which also meant that Stalin was and is radically present in the Soviet discourse. The last few years have seen the collapse of the centrist compromise, in ideological terms, which the Brezhnev regime really represented. Right Wing revisionism of the Brezhnevite sort has been exploded. With the elimination of this soggy revisionism, what we have then is a fairly clear polarisation. The pro-capitalist, anti-Leninist trend has now

by Western interests, there will be, as its polarity, a certain revival and defence of Stalin. It is no accident that Revolution Day of 1990 saw in the Red Square, for the first time in decades, Soviet Communists bearing the portrait of Stalin! A Revolution Day which also saw for the first time in several years a military component, with the SS-25 Intercontinental Ballistics Missiles on display. These two symbols in conjunction – Stalin and the SS-25 – dramatises the confluence I have been discussing between the Soviet Military on the one hand and far more rigorous ideological tendency within Soviet Communism, on the other. Many commentators feel that Gorbachev's inching away from the 500 day Shatalin Plan which he originally endorsed, was the turning point of the Soviet political process. I personally feel that the turning point was precisely November 7th – the Revolution Day parade in Moscow.

I think the Soviet Communists and the Russian Communists are beginning to realise that if they are to roll back the ideological tide, the anti Socialist tide, they cannot remain silent on the question of Stalin. Stalin is the touchstone. And Mao was characteristically perspicacious when he said in the early 60's that "there are two swords one is Lenin and the other Stalin. The CPSU leadership has dropped the sword of Stalin. And he who drops the sword of Stalin will also drop the sword of Lenin." This is true. De Stalinisation in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union led inexorably to the attack on the Soviet Communist Party, on socialism as a system, on the validity of the October Revolution and the Socialist option of 1917 and on Lenin himself. With the discrediting of the Brezhnevite stagnation, the defence of all those now inevitably means the defence of Stalin.

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popular (or less unpopular) than other entities in the USSR. It is seen as a somewhat clean organization, ruthless but relatively clean. And the Red Army is probably one of the few social agencies in the Soviet Union that still believes in the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. So the task of this kind of ideological restructuring of the Soviet Union may devolve on these forces – the Red Army and the KGB. Soviet Reaganism may therefore necessitate a provision of a more important role for the

emerged full blown in the way it could never have in the Brezhnev period and even surpassing what took place during the Kruschchev period. As a result the ideological backlash has been and will be far more sharply focussed. To give one example, the Nina-Andreyeva letter – an explicit defence of Stalin – could not have received the prominence it did under the ideological compact that prevailed during the Brezhnev period. As the reformist right goes further rightwards, and as it is seen to be supported

But this is of course not to say that Gorbachev will go that route still less is to say that the pro Stalin of Stalinist tendency will win out in the battle for hegemony. There are other possibilities. I think that Gorbachev is now uniting with the military hoping to shuffle off that dependence later on after the military has over reacted itself and exposed and discredited itself. Or he may

be hoping to use the military to crack down on its political rivals like Yeltsin and then implement something akin to the programme of Yeltsin and the Right Wing reformists. Indeed the Economist, among others is urging him to adopt what they call, the Pinochet Option. And there are historical precedents for such somesaults. After all Stalin united with the Bukharinite Right Opposition to crush the Left Opposition led by Trotsky and broke with the Right Opposition subsequently and proceeded to implement a project which was similar to (and in fact an extreme form of), what the Left Opposition has suggested! Given the forces at play in the Soviet Union and given the ideology of those forces like the military, given the limited options open to any ruler in the Soviet Union and given the limited possibilities of the world capitalist economy, I feel that it would be difficult for Gorbachev to extricate himself totally from the parametric constraints that the Soviet military and the security services are likely to impose.

May I venture a generalisation. The 1960's and even the early part of '70's saw the phenomenon of Military dictatorships or civilian military Juntas in the peripheral and semi peripheral parts of the capitalist world system i.e. Greece for example. This turned out to be a certain phase of the development of capitalism. Subsequently these forms of rule were modified or shunted aside and bourgeois democracy emerged in the forefront, but all taking place within capitalist relations of production. In other words the collapse of the military dictatorships did not mean the collapse of capitalist system in those countries. I feel that we are entering a phase in which there will be this phenomenon of military rule or civilian military regimes in what remains of the socialist world. A precursor of this was the Jaruzelski regime in Poland but due to the weak roots of socialism in that country it proved transitory and a prelude to systemic collapse. I do not think that systemic collapse is the likeliest prospect in the remaining parts of the socialist world. But I do think that in the Soviet Union and even in Yugoslavia the state apparatus especially the military will play a far more decisive role in a recomposed power bloc. ■

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Article by D L O Mendis In December 1990
Issue of Economic Review

I read the special report on "Developing the Deep South" with great interest. I was particularly interested in Mr D L O Mendis' article "Irrigation Development and Underdevelopment in Southern Sri Lanka." Many of the points regarding the planning of irrigation projects in the south are ones that I personally agree with, and in our own work at IIMI we have learned a lot from reading Mr Mendis' work.

On page 9 of his article, Mr Mendis refers briefly to the field studies that he has been conducting in Lunugamvohera and Uda Walawa. He simply mentions our studies as "other approaches to providing remedies;" he correctly notes that our studies focus on the question of what improvements could be made through higher management inputs.

Unfortunately, Mr Mendis does not go on to discuss this alternative approach; the paragraph seems to dismiss it out of hand as unimportant and not useful. I believe that Mr Mendis may be too quick to dismiss improved management as one means to bring about substantial improvements in performance of these major schemes.

Our work has been documented in a number of reports to the Government and to the donor, as well as in publications. Basically, we had spent several years diagnosing the problems, and examining options for improvement. Recently our work has shifted to working with the managing agencies' staff and farmers to test and implement some management improvements that we believe would have a significant impact in terms of water use efficiency, productivity, and farmers' incomes. The improvements include, broadly, institutional strengthening of both the agencies and farmers' organizations, improved water management scheduling and delivery, and the incremental introduction of more profitable cropping patterns to make better use of the water.

These management innovations are not very costly, since they do not involve expensive capital inputs. But we are convinced by our years of work in these and other systems that both systems' performance can be improved tremendously without going into high-cost diversions and moving of dams. In fact, the idea of spending hundreds of millions of rupees to move Lunugamvohera dam seems preposterous, regardless of the relative merits of the alternative dam site.

Our view is not opposed to future augmentation and upgrading of these systems. Rather, we suggest that in the next few years the Government should focus on improving the management of the existing systems, which can be done relatively quickly and very cost-effectively. Implementing these improvements also obviously does require commitment and political will on the part of the government, building strong responsible farmers' organizations, and assisting government agencies to change in order to work effectively with these organizations — their clients — as the key to the long term success and sustainability of these systems, with or without augmentation of the water supply.

Improved management systems would then make it possible to obtain even greater benefit from future capital improvement projects in these systems. Why keep promising the poor farmers something that may benefit their children, but will not help in the short run? In fact, I would go further: such promises are a serious impediment to focusing the attention of agency staff on implementing improved management now, since waiting for these future improvements provides an easy way out.

At some future date, your readers may be interested in an article on IIMI's work in these and other systems in Sri Lanka, and our suggestions for actions that could be taken for rapid improvement of irrigated agricultural production.

I do not know whether you normally print letters to the editor, but your readers may find this letter of interest.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Matray

Head, Sri Lanka Field Operations