



# Gorbachev:

by T. Martin

"He is a man of exceptional charm with a relaxed, self-deprecating sense of humour. Emotions flicker over a face of unusual sensitivity like summer breezes over a pond. In discussion he was frank and flexible with a composure full of inner strength. He was fierce but courteous in argument, raising Northern Ireland whenever we raised human rights with him. . . . How could someone so nice and human run the Soviet system?"<sup>1</sup> — Denis Healey of the British Labour Party

"Gorbachev's charm, sense of humour, prompt responses, attempts to find convincing arguments and his less frequent recourse to demagoguery suddenly introduced the human factor into East-West confrontation. This in itself served to reduce tension. He clearly did not resemble a person who was waiting for the opportunity to drop a nuclear bomb on the West."<sup>2</sup> — Zhores Medvedev, a "Marxist" Soviet dissident

"The Soviet Union needs peace to implement its huge development program."<sup>3</sup> — Mikhail Gorbachev.

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There are many like the Soviet dissident Medvedev who denounce certain features of the USSR but reason that at least Gorbachev has the merit of being more "realistic" and "human" than the reactionary war-mongering "madman" who runs America. Reinforcing this is

the idea that, while Reagan, Thatcher, Kohl and Co. are taking the West down a path of intensifying repression and reaction, Gorbachev is making some effort to head in the other direction, fighting *against* his own conservative opposition with his program of "glasnost" (opening up). These views conform to Gorbachev's own portrayal of Soviet policy as turning away from militarism and expansion abroad so as to be able to concentrate the USSR's resources on its own internal problems, a new commitment which he says is shown by his flexibility on arms control with the West.

Many of these same forces, while holding out hope for Gorbachev, complain that he is not going far enough, that he promises more than he delivers. Again, as Medvedev put it, "Matters remain at the level of general slogans"; a letter from a group of Soviet dissidents, published in *Moscow News*, a Soviet weekly which is one of the flagships of glasnost, argued that real reforms have not gone much beyond talk and demanded, "Gorbachev, Give Us Proof!"

Mr Gorbachev has already given all the proof needed. Certainly he is demagogic and hypocritical — but the problem with Gorbachev is not that he fails to deliver on good promises. It is not that he is going too slow in his "peace offensive" or

that glasnost does not go far enough in "democratising" the USSR. The problem is that these policies are themselves reactionary; they are not part of "turning inward" but of escalating repression and reaction at home and abroad, as the Soviet imperialists prepare to resolve the crisis they face through crushing resistance at home and abroad and waging world war against their imperialist rivals. The point is not whether Gorbachev is more "human" than Reagan, but that it is the logic of the imperialist system, not the quirks of its personal representatives, that compels the imperialists to follow the path they do.

## The Crisis of the USSR

Today even the Soviet leaders themselves have been forced to admit that the USSR is in crisis; the stakes which ride on its resolution are as profound as the crisis itself. Gorbachev summed up the situation facing the social-imperialists: "We are living at a critical time. . . . There is not a moment to lose. Everything that we have planned must be done in time, for at issue are the might and prosperity of our country, the positions of socialism in the international arena and the consolidation of peace throughout the world."<sup>4</sup> In this imperialist double-speak, for "prosperity" read misery and oppression, for



A

Farewell

to Arms?

“socialism” read social-imperialism, for “peace” read war. Yet despite the double-speak, Gorbachev’s assessment accurately conveys the Soviet leadership’s sense of the gravity of the crisis they face and the urgency of its resolution. What this reflects is that, having restored capitalism in the 1950s, Soviet social-imperialism has come up against limits of the current division of the world as well as meeting resistance at home and abroad from the masses of people, as witnessed in Afghanistan and most recently by the riots in Alma Ata.

The Soviet economy no longer has the sort of reserves, domestically or internationally, to fuel a sustained period of economic expansion.<sup>5</sup> The declining growth rates of the Soviet economy, of the return on investment, of growth in productivity, etc., the bottlenecks that plague the Soviet economy, the anarchy that pervades it, the spreading crisis in Eastern Europe, the Soviet inability to integrate its Third World satellites into a coherent economic empire, all these are not the product of some bureaucratic sludge fouling up an otherwise healthy machine. They are features of a capitalist economic system at the stage of imperialism, which even as it spurts forward in some sectors degenerates in others and is unable to burst out of the constraints of its historic development and especially the limits im-

posed on it by the current division of the world.

The crisis of the USSR cannot be resolved for the imperialists short of such worldwide restructuring through war. Gorbachev’s economic reforms will not and cannot suffice; however frequently he calls them “radical reforms” or “fundamental restructuring,” they are but limited half-measures. They are confined to extending and intensifying already long-established mechanisms of Soviet capitalism: strengthening the centrality of profit (hailed by a recent *Pravda* editorial as “a mighty toiler for socialism”!) as the goal of production; increasing polarisation and competition among the masses through more piece-rate work and larger bonuses and other material incentives, especially for managers, scientists and better-off workers; expanding credit, raising prices — there are plans for the largest price-hike ever in the USSR — and cutting back on social benefits. How many imperialist politicians in the West, as in the Reagan or Thatcher “revolutions,” have promised that similar measures would lead to a new era of economic expansion, but have brought in their wake increased anarchy, international and domestic debt, polarisation, exploitation and heightening antagonism between the two blocs?

#### Oiling Up the War Machine

A key goal of Gorbachev’s

economic reforms is oiling up the Soviet war machine. One Western expert, commenting on the current five-year plan, observed that, “the generals can afford to be generous in supporting Gorbachev’s economic modernisation program. Many of the areas targeted for investment, especially parts of the machine-building industry, will provide the basis for the next round of military modernisation. Computers and robotics are also high-priority items. In fact, many priorities read like a military wish-list.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the emphasis on science and technology that pervades Gorbachev’s program are seen by the revisionists as key for war preparations. Marshal Ogarkov, a leading Soviet military spokesman who is close to Gorbachev politically, argued that, “Nothing is more dependent on the state of the economy than the army. Weapons, supplies, tactics and even strategy depend on the level of production and the means of communication.” Again, from Ogarkov: “In order to increase the military preparedness of the country, today as never before it is necessary to coordinate mobilisation and deployment of the armed forces and the entire economy. . . .” He concluded by calling for preparations to convert the Soviet economy “to a war footing.”<sup>7</sup>

This is the hidden agenda of Gorbachev’s economic modernisation

program. His reforms are not reducible to militarisation — there are real economic problems which he is trying to deal with in their own right, a topic beyond the scope of this article — but the point is that Gorbachev & Co. are not revving up the Soviet economy for a long period of peaceful development. Their plans to “accelerate social and economic development” are inextricably bound up with accelerating military development and preparations for world war and counter-revolutionary suppression.

### Glasnost: A Step in the Right Direction?

Key to this reactionary effort is Gorbachev's much-heralded “glasnost,” which he has called the “precondition” of all his other reforms; the *sine qua non* without which all the rest cannot advance. The Soviet media has presented this as a genuine democratising of Soviet life. Many who have often denounced the Soviet ruling class' repression have welcomed glasnost. Medvedev, for instance, states that, “I do not wish to imply that Gorbachev's reforms are worth nothing. He promised changes in the field of culture and there have indeed been quite rapid changes; I would not say a full liberalisation but a real improvement.”<sup>8</sup> He goes on to demand essentially that these changes go deeper and broader. In other words, it's a start, finally some information is coming out; for instance, during Chernobyl, this argument goes, at least people knew something about what was going on instead of being irradiated without knowing why or how.

In fact, the whole point of glasnost is to mobilise reaction in the USSR for crimes beside which Chernobyl would be but a footnote in history. The fundamental question to demand of glasnost is: opening up to whom? Opening up for what politics?

A key target of glasnost is the mobilisation of the strata of Soviet society which have particularly benefited from living in an imperialist society, who have drunk from its plunder and grown accustomed to its privileges. Just as these sectors are being spurred into

action by the promise of new bribes and material incentives, so too they are being roused politically by glasnost. Consider, for instance, a letter whose publication in *Moscow News* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta* caused a stir in the Western press. It was written by a group of ten Soviet dissidents living in exile in the West, varying in composition from pro-Western social-democrats to the Solzhenitsyn-type, Great Russian chauvinists who openly long for a return to the values of pre-revolutionary Tsarist Russia, of the Orthodox Russian church, etc.

The dissidents argued that there were still numerous abuses in the USSR and still no guarantee that people like them could air their views; they concluded that the most significant proof of real change would be publication of their letter, with its open challenge to the Soviet system for its lack of intellectual liberty. The editor of *Moscow News* not only published it and said, “OK, now what?” but went on to argue in a public response that though the dissidents might have had some just grievances before Gorbachev, now there was a basis for all, whether openly reactionary or liberal, to return home to work together for the USSR. He concluded with a naked appeal to Russian chauvinism: “I must admit that up till now I don't know of anyone in the history of Russian emigration for whom living abroad was preferable to living in his own land and who didn't take advantage of the first opportunity to come home.”

Coming together, coming home *to Russia*, to work *for Russia*. This is the kind of politics glasnost promotes. The Soviet imperialists face a particular problem with this imperialist-suckled strata of their population, the intelligentsia, scientists, etc. Because the West has had a historical economic advance over Russia as well as a greater empire to plunder, many in this strata, though basically loyal to social-imperialism, could do even better materially in the West and look to it to some extent. Far from challenging their reactionary values, Gorbachev & Co. simply want to harness them for Soviet, and above

all Great Russian, interests. If they love imperialism, can't they love it better “at home” than abroad?!

### The “Black Hundreds” Revived<sup>9</sup>

The purpose behind glasnost is also evident in the much-publicised way in which glasnost has dealt with the group *Pamiat* (Memory). This is a recently formed Black Hundreds-style group distinguished by a militantly reactionary, racist and anti-semitic, pro-Great Russian ideology dedicated to keeping Russia “pure” and “untainted” by any and all “foreign” influences. The media has featured a number of recent articles which while admonishing those who hold such ideas, also pointedly note how very widespread they are among the population — as if to say that it is not really all that out of the ordinary, or even a matter of much concern, to be a thorough-going Russian chauvinist!

Further, Moscow party chief Boris Yeltsine, a champion of glasnost and protégé of Gorbachev, recently held a highly publicised meeting with *Pamiat* at Moscow City Hall during which he proclaimed that they were a legitimate grouping because they were sincerely motivated by the interests of the fatherland! This is the typical tactics of imperialist politicians, who give an understanding “tut-tut” to the more extreme reactionaries so as to keep a respectable distance while propping them up with publicity at the same time.

Similarly, another group called Movement for Socialist Renewal, evidently composed of high-ranking party officials, issued a 17-page manifesto arguing that Gorbachev isn't going far enough fast enough and openly worrying that if more progress isn't made the USSR will lose out to the U.S. in their world rivalry. The terms of the debate are never *whether* to oppose Soviet imperialism, but only *how* to promote its reactionary interests.

The point of glasnost is to get the Soviet imperialists' social base to take a more aggressive interest in their reactionary policies so as to disguise these as the “voice of the Soviet people.” Isn't this one reason Lenin pointed out that

“bourgeois democracy” was the “best shell for the rule of the bourgeoisie”? One major debate glasnost has opened up in the media has been over the death penalty. This debate has spanned the full gamut of *bourgeois* opinion, from reactionary to liberal. Whether or not the social-imperialists do away with the death penalty, the editors have made a point of summing up that most people writing in favoured *continuation or even increased use* of the death penalty.<sup>10</sup> This is the bourgeois democratic method: events are turned upside down, reactionary measures are said to be what “the people democratically demand,” when it is the bourgeoisie themselves who have created the conditions and used their monopoly of the means of communication, education, etc., to set the terms of the debate and generate (or outright fabricate) this “demand” in the first place!

#### Building “Trust” with the Technicians of War & Reaction

Besides unleashing patriotism and reaction, glasnost serves other important interests of the Soviet social-imperialists in more generally mobilising these better-off strata for reactionary ends. As Novosibirsk economist Tatiana Zaslavskaya observed, the underdevelopment of sociology and the limitations on the press and research not only hurt economic management but also the building of “trust between the leaders and the population.” Today, when, as Gorbachev put it, “there is not a moment to lose” and “everything must be done *in time*,” the Soviet bourgeoisie need to give these strata the feeling that they have a say in Soviet society, to build “trust” so that those who occupy key posts in their economy and especially in their war machine can be counted on to go all out. In this, Gorbachev counts particularly on scientists and technical personnel. In presenting the current Five Year Plan, he called “rapid scientific and technological progress” the “basis on which the whole plan is built.” The stakes are such that Gorbachev has even let out Sakharov, who has openly called on the West to strengthen

itself against the USSR. But after all, Sakharov led in building the H-bomb for the USSR before he turned to praise Western imperialism — why can’t he and others like him be lured back again to build new and better weapons for their “own” imperialist masters?

Going together with glasnost are Gorbachev’s “decentralisation” measures, centring on his calls for elections of cadre, decentralising economic control, etc., which, it is claimed, will “empower” the masses. In fact, the decentralising measures are being developed in the context of overall tighter centralisation of power in the hands of the top party leaders. Not only is this true in economic matters, where numerous articles have noted that strengthening the role of profit means that “the rouble operates more strictly than any controller,” but in political matters too. At the 27th Party Congress, the second-ranking party leader, Ligachev, stated: “Now everybody knows that the policy of placing a certain trust in the cadres has been frequently replaced by trust with no inspection, and to put it frankly, without any control. . . . From now on all the cadres should report to their leaders on their activity.” Ligachev went on to note, “Our highest concern is with the military cadres and the cadres that fulfill the sensitive task of defence of the peace and security of the Soviet people. We need cadres that completely feel the pulse of the times” and “grasp the essence of the tasks.” Gorbachev & Co. are putting a fire under the elite, toughening them up, getting them to be more aggressive, forcing them to test and improve their ability to mobilise people, yet under ever tighter overall direction. Are these not exactly the sort of measures required to prepare for imperialist war? As Marshal Ogarkov put it, “it is not possible” to increase the military preparedness of the country “without a stable centralised system of leadership of the country and the armed forces. . . . an even greater concentration of management.”<sup>11</sup>

The Soviet imperialists are not issuing general calls to mobilise all strata equally behind their program.

Indeed, they invariably leave out the lowest sections of the masses, who are too alienated and unreliable for them. As Fedor Burlatsky, a commentator for *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and intimate of Gorbachev, put it, “We must not have illusions about the workers and peasants. There is an active part of them who want to work better, and get more money, more goods, and more appliances, and maybe their own homes, and dachas, but there are also many people who don’t want to work harder. I believe that our hopes for the reforms and the process of democratisation are first of all based on the political will of our leadership. . . .”<sup>12</sup> Glasnost is skewed to the elite, for those who have a stake in Soviet imperialism and so might rise to the sacrifices demanded.

#### Glasnost & the “Lower Depths”

As for the lower sections of the masses, “who don’t want to work harder,” they are to be politically paralysed or beaten into submission by the mobilisation of reactionary sentiment, backed up by intensified repression from the state. Discipline campaigns, launched under Andropov, are the order of the day. The fight against crime is championed from the Kremlin, as it is from America’s White House, by world-class criminals, so as to legitimate increased repression. A particular target are the oppressed nationalities. The government promotes its own more liberal version of Pamiat’s “Black Hundreds” sentiment, for instance, fretting openly about the declining birth rate among Slavs and promoting motherhood among *Russian* women. Recently Gorbachev tightened up Russian control in the Kazakh Republic by naming a Russian to take over the main party post there. Rebellion broke out, leading to fierce street-fighting against the forces of order. The Soviet press blamed this on corrupt party bureaucrats. Whatever role these bureaucrats played in allowing things to happen, the revolt drew in masses and was certainly fueled by sentiment that Russians taking over direct authority boded ill for the oppressed people there. Far from backing down, Gorbachev took a

hard line, with the death penalty ordered for at least one "rioter."

Glasnost is also a weapon in the battle for public opinion that Gorbachev is aggressively pursuing worldwide. He boasts repeatedly that not only is the USSR the best hope for peace, but that now it is even democratising too, beating the West at its own game. For years the Western bourgeoisie has directed virulent criticism at Soviet society in areas where it could assert its superiority, both its abundance of material goods and the kinds of petty privileges which such abundance facilitates especially among the better-off strata. Furthermore, the USSR's socialist mask has been tarnished by its bloody crimes in Afghanistan, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and many other places. Glasnost is also an effort to polish up the USSR's image, and to contest with the West on its own turf. When U.S. Information Director Wicks challenged the Soviets on cultural freedom, *Moscow News* replied by pointing out that, among other things, the USSR publishes 20 times more books by American authors than the U.S. does of Soviet authors.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, *Literaturnaya Gazeta* bragged that Poland has more churches per capita than even Italy or Spain, and that even large numbers of party cadre go to church! If more churches and American best-sellers are what glasnost promises, then the Soviet masses have undoubtedly already had far too much of it.

#### Glasnost: Limited?

Is glasnost "limited"? Obviously. It is not about unleashing protest against the war in Afghanistan, or against the militarisation of Soviet society. Even nuclear power is off limits: Gorbachev personally denounced certain anti-nuclear protests in the West which sought to damage nuclear installations as "nuclear terrorism"<sup>14</sup> — a particularly astonishing charge from someone commanding one of the world's two largest nuclear arsenals. Meanwhile, the Soviets are not only reopening Chernobyl's non-damaged reactors but going ahead with plans to construct additional reactors there, turning it into the

largest nuclear power centre on the planet!

Or look at what happened to the discussion of the privileges of party cadres which for a brief moment was allowed to flourish in the Soviet press. When it went beyond exposing a few cases of gross corruption, often of entrenched rivals of Gorbachev, to posing questions about the privileged position of the Soviet bureaucrat bourgeoisie itself, the debate was personally brought to a quick halt by Gorbachev, who declared that it was one thing to criticise "unearned privileges" such as come from corruption but quite another thing — and flat-out intolerable — to attack "earned privileges," which for him means the wealth and power that the Soviet elite "merit" for their hard work! Any capitalist knows how to sing this refrain by heart.

But the real problem with glasnost is not that it is "limited" or doesn't go "far enough." Its limits and its content are part of a single piece, tailored and cut to measure by and for the Soviet bourgeoisie. To ask that they let glasnost "go further" acts as if the Soviet rulers committed some oversight in "only" allowing the promotion of imperialist views and not views which expose Soviet imperialism on important matters, when promoting reactionary values has been the main point of glasnost all along. Nor is it the case that a "door has been opened" which could be pushed open wider still to allow in more progressive activity. On the contrary, glasnost is designed in part to smother and crush more radical resistance under the weight of the better-off strata unleashed behind reactionary values. In doing this, however, the Soviet bourgeoisie will meet an element it doesn't factor in its careful calculations, for their reactionary mobilisation is bound to provoke resistance from the oppressed themselves. Not because they too will be able to "use glasnost," but because they will be forced to go against what it really means and against the bourgeois dictatorship that wields it.

Masking this reactionary dictatorship is a key point of glasnost.

Gorbachev tries to graft the typical Western lies about democracy onto the USSR's socialist mask by pontificating about "classless socialist democracy." There is no such thing. Lenin pointed out that every state is a form of class rule, "... an organisation for the systematic use of *force* by one class against another, by one section of the population against another.

"... it is constantly forgotten that the abolition of the state means also the abolition of democracy, that the withering away of the state means the withering away of democracy."<sup>15</sup>

Gorbachev's brandishing of "classless democracy" denies this truth in order to deceive the Soviet masses, to mobilise them behind bourgeois interests, to hide the mailed fist of the Soviet bourgeois dictatorship in the cloak of the general social interest — is it any wonder that Gorbachev's most ardent supporter in Eastern Europe is none other than that grand champion of democracy, General Jaruzelski, architect of martial law in Poland!?

#### Not Turning Inward, But Stepping Out

Part of Gorbachev's "new thinking" is that the USSR must turn inward to solve its own domestic problems, that, as Gorbachev is quoted as saying earlier, "The Soviet Union needs peace to implement its huge development program." In fact, the social-imperialists are not turning inward but outward, as they diversify their options, consolidate what they have and strengthen their political and military position throughout the world.

The crisis which has so concerned Gorbachev & Co. does not simply involve the internal functioning of the Soviet economy, but their international position overall. Likewise, its resolution will be international in scope. One important manifestation of the Soviet bloc crisis is the difficulty that the USSR has had in the Third World. At the end of the 1970s their influence there had expanded considerably, with the addition of nearly a dozen new Soviet neocolonies, now ranging from Cuba through Angola and Ethiopia

to Vietnam and Kampuchea. But by the time of Gorbachev's rise to power, serious problems had become evident. Many of the neocolonies even most closely bound to the USSR were in severe economic crisis: Cuba had imposed an IMF-style austerity program, while Vietnam was trying to support its huge army occupying Kampuchea on the basis of an economy with one of the world's lowest standards of living. The Soviets had been forced to cede joint exploitation of Angola and Mozambique to the West. In a number of countries, Western-financed insurgencies seriously threatened, or at least hamstrung, the Soviet-supported governments. In short, even as the USSR was increasing its military and economic aid to many of these countries, its dominion grew increasingly unstable. This reflected not only the limits of the Soviet's ability to weave together an empire in the current division of the world, but also intensifying rivalry with the U.S. bloc.

So when Gorbachev, summing up the overall situation facing the social-imperialists, warned that, ". . . at issue are the might and prosperity of our country, (and) the positions of socialism in the international arena," he was not being unduly pessimistic. But what Gorbachev has most certainly *not* done in these circumstances is retreat or turn inward. On the contrary, he has led the social-imperialists in mounting challenges to the U.S. even in areas long considered sacrosanct parts of the American empire.

Notable among these is the Pacific. This has long been considered by the U.S. imperialists as virtually "an American lake." So in the summer of 1986 when Gorbachev announced in a speech pointedly given at the USSR's largest Pacific port, Vladivostok, that "the Soviet Union is also an Asian and Pacific country," the message was not lost on Washington. It was an unprecedented challenge to American imperialist might. And Gorbachev quickly followed up with a flurry of activity, including the first-ever visit by a Soviet Foreign Minister to

Australia, increased military aid to North Korea and Vietnam, the inauguration of Soviet diplomatic and commercial ties with some of the Polynesian island states, intensified military and diplomatic pressure on Japan, and, most importantly, efforts to normalise relations with China.

In the Gulf too Gorbachev has aggressively pursued governments long considered pro-West, as, for instance, his efforts to establish commercial ties even with Saudi Arabia, or to run Kuwaiti oil tankers under the Soviet flag. Soviet warships now steam the Gulf, and the USSR has proclaimed that they now see themselves as a "guarantor of Gulf security"! Similarly, while profiting handsomely from fueling both sides of the Iran-Iraq war with arms sales, the USSR even dared to try to put together its own peace conference, in Moscow, presenting itself as the main arbiter of the destiny of this region which the U.S. has declared "vital to its national security."

While tacitly encouraging the virulent anti-semitism of groups like Pamiat at home, in the Middle East Gorbachev began to patch up relations with Israel and engaged in negotiations to make sure that Jews leaving the USSR will go straight there instead of to the U.S. Israel gets more soldiers, Gorbachev gets influence in Israel and a place at any forthcoming Mideast peace conference — such is Gorbachev's barter. Meanwhile, he has overseen Syria's bloody invasion of Lebanon, partitioning power there with the Western imperialists, and sat back while Palestinians were starved and killed by gunmen armed by the Soviets themselves.

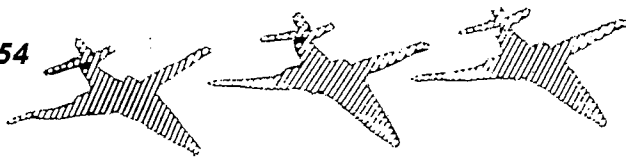
Even in Latin America, the "backyard" of U.S. imperialism, Gorbachev is intensifying Soviet manoeuvring, including among the giants of the region. He has announced a trip there in autumn 1987; the talk in Moscow is that he might even bypass Cuba and Nicaragua and go straight to Brazil, Mexico and perhaps Argentina.

Pursuing naked reactionaries, even feudal kings, doesn't at all mean cutting back on the Soviets' use of the "Marxist-Leninist"

regimes which are Soviet neocolonies, but, on the contrary, is part and parcel of the same policy of mobilising all reactionary forces possible to the USSR. Military aid to Soviet dependencies has been stepped up, and as soon as Gorbachev came to power new offensives were launched in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Nicaragua and Afghanistan. It is the latter that is perhaps the best example of what Gorbachev means when he says the USSR needs peace.

#### **Afghanistan: "You too will be among the victims. . ."**

Here too there was a new offensive taken as soon as Gorbachev came to office, including bombing raids on refugee villages in Pakistan, the mining of border roads, and even increasing use of Soviet commando units in the field. Soviet spending for the war has increased to at least \$3 billion per year, perhaps more. Gorbachev has introduced his own "personal touch" as well. Propaganda leaflets are dropped from the sky, informing the Afghani villagers of their right to be exterminated: "The enemies of peace. . ., in using your homes and your villages as combat bases, are opposing the cease-fire. Stop them [from doing this] and tell them that if this continues the armed forces will give them a bloody lesson. And if that happens, you too will be among the victims. . . ." Just call it glasnost in Afghanistan. The neocolonial regime has also initiated a 5 to 1 wage differential in favour of military over civilian work for Afghanis. What a splendid example of Gorbachev's "socialist material incentives": the creation of a puppet mercenary army. This, combined with mass forced conscription, seems to be the only way that the Soviet imperialists can get their "fraternal" Afghan brothers to fight on behalf of these imperialist invaders. In addition, the newest Afghani puppet, the former head of the secret police, has sought to consolidate the neocolonial regime by luring the pro-imperialist feudal Islamic forces away from the West, even calling on the king to come back. [See the article in this issue by Afghani communists]



Some pro-Gorbachev forces point to measures to lessen direct Soviet involvement as “steps in the right direction.” Certainly Gorbachev wouldn’t mind getting out of Afghanistan. The social-imperialists have already used the war to test their military, and today any advantages this offered are turning into their opposite, as demoralisation grows to the point that Soviet soldiers widely sell their arms for vodka and drugs on the Afghani black market. Furthermore, what’s really going on in Afghanistan is being spread in the USSR itself through word of mouth of the many hundreds of thousands of veterans who have by now served there. Gorbachev putting clips of the war on TV is not a show of strength and “enlarging of “openness,” but an effort to more aggressively present the social-imperialists’ own views to head off the “underground” summation already going on. In short, the Soviet army is bleeding, and the Soviet image suffers at home and abroad.

Yes, Gorbachev would like to leave, but what’s most important is that he leave *without losing*. His “steps in the right direction” are efforts to consolidate and strengthen a reactionary neocolonial regime, to “Afghanise” the war and ultimately rule without paying such a high price. And even if they left, they could always come back. As Gorbachev put it in calling for negotiations, “If the intervention against the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan continues, the Soviet Union will come to the defence of its neighbour. This position stems from our internationalist solidarity with the Afghani people [sic] and from the interests of the Soviet Union’s security.”<sup>16</sup> Whether Gorbachev can consolidate a stable reactionary regime not dependent on Soviet occupation troops depends not only on Western imperialist efforts to keep them pinned down, but more fundamentally on the resistance of the masses and the revolutionaries and their battle to do away with all imperialism.

### Gorbachev: Controlling Arms, or Controlling the Masses?

A key plank of Gorbachev’s “peace offensive” is his acceptance of the “zero zero” option. It is argued that any arms control agreement will only come about because Gorbachev backed off his original insistence that any reductions of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe be coupled with U.S. limitations on Star Wars and even, at Western insistence, agreed to the elimination of short-range nukes, in which the USSR had an edge, as well.

First of all, even if the U.S. and USSR arrive at such an agreement, hardly a sure thing, the overall situation should be kept in a clear perspective: together these two imperialist superpowers now have a total of well over 50,000 nuclear warheads. They are oh-so-cautiously moving towards getting rid of around 1,200 warheads — *less than 3% of the combined U.S. and Soviet nuclear arsenal*.<sup>17</sup> This will leave them with still over 50,000 nuclear warheads — enough so that each power could obliterate every major and even middling city on the planet! There will even be over 10,000 nuclear warheads placed directly in and around Europe, including battlefield nukes, on aircraft and submarines as well as the French and British forces. Is it really possible to talk about “steps towards disarmament”!?

Giving up a handful of nukes like this is a small price to pay for these imperialist superpowers to appear as champions of peace, *while both continue to modernise and expand their military arsenals and their influence everywhere on the planet and position themselves for war*. Aren’t the Soviets challenging the U.S. in many hitherto sacrosanct parts of the American empire? Militarily, the Soviets have begun construction on a 65,000 ton aircraft carrier, one of the largest in the world; a new 10,000 km range nuclear missile, the SS-25, is nearing completion; a huge new radar installation is built in the Far East; nuclear-equipped Typhoon-class submarines are being deployed in

the Pacific. Nor has Gorbachev thus far abandoned a single major military project begun by his predecessors. Meanwhile, the USSR continues to sell arms at a rate rivalled only by the U.S. It is also worth noting who Gorbachev has just appointed as new chief of Soviet air defence. The man who let Mathias Rust fly his Cessna onto Red Square unhindered is to be replaced by . . . the former chief of air defence in the Far East, that is, the man who oversaw the shooting down of KAL 007! Aren’t Brecht’s words appropriate: when the leaders talk of peace, the common man knows they mean war?

In any war, and especially one of such criminal proportions as a nuclear war, the imperialists always try to make it appear that *they* have done everything possible to avoid it so that the responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities lies with “the enemy.” As Lenin concisely put it, in the era of imperialism nothing can be done without the masses. Gorbachev is going about enlisting troops on the Soviet imperialist side of the barricades as aggressively as he is going about every other aspect of escalating reaction and war preparations. He pries at cracks in the West European social order, preying openly on the conflict in West Germany engendered by the fact that it is the most vulnerable to the battlefield nukes that would be left by any agreement; he sends envoys, especially former “dissidents,” like Bulat Okudjava, to woo social-democrats and the peace movement. Meanwhile, to counter parallel measures taken by his own rivals and strengthen his own hand, he tightens up relations in his own dominion, as in the Warsaw Pact countries where Gorbachev has increased the frequency of Warsaw Pact summits and dramatically increased commercial ties as well. This is the kind of typical imperialist geo-political jockeying that Gorbachev’s “peace offensive” represents.

And what of his proclamations that “nuclear war is suicidal”? Gorbachev has even gone further than any social-imperialist before him, declaring that Clausewitz’ analysis that “war is the continuation of

politics by other means" is outdated.<sup>18</sup> Since nuclear war is suicidal, Gorbachev argues, what politics can that be the continuation of — there are no winners, only losers. What this argument tries to obscure is that all over the globe the USSR, like the U.S., is carrying out politics of plunder, suppression of the masses, and intensifying rivalry with their rivals — in short, *imperialist* politics, and that however dangerous to the survival of humanity a nuclear war might be, it is this imperialist politics and no other that guides and will continue to guide the policy of the USSR in every sphere, including militarily. The potential destruction of nuclear war does not change this truth but should only reaffirm that it is only imperialism that is capable of such horrendous crime, and emphasize all the more the necessity to step up the revolutionary struggle to overthrow it in all its forms.

While one can hardly expect Gorbachev to openly declare Soviet goals and aims in preparing for such a great crime, those who doubt their capability of carrying it out would do well to consider what Marshal Ogarkov, their great military theorist, has to say about "victory" in nuclear war: "Soviet military strategy proceeds from the fact that if nuclear war is forced on the Soviet Union, then the Soviet people and its Armed Forces need to be ready for the most severe and prolonged trials. The Soviet Union and the fraternal socialist states in that case will, by comparison with the imperialist states, possess definite advantages. . . . *This creates for them objective possibilities for attaining victory.* However, for the realisation of these possibilities timely and all-round preparation of the country and the Armed Forces is necessary."<sup>19</sup> Gorbachev himself, speaking of the Soviet victory in WW2, warned the U.S. that, "we shall not be taken by surprise. . . . If need be, we will give a fitting answer this time too."<sup>20</sup> Illusions should be cast aside. These imperialists, like their Western counterparts, will do whatever is necessary to carry on their way of life, their empire, and their rule, even if it means nuclear war.

### Conclusion

From glasnost to arms control, Gorbachev has vigorously mobilised all forces that he could on behalf of Soviet imperialist interests. Feudal mullahs and tribal elders in Afghanistan are brought onto the same bandwagon as scientists working on the exotic apparatus of the Soviet military machine; members of the European peace movement are asked to hitch a ride along with the general who oversaw shooting down the KAL airliner; Saudi sheiks are to tag up with Ethiopian "Marxist-Leninists" — it is a motley crew indeed.

Now leading this reactionary array is a new chief, who has taken the West aback for the simple reason that he is a master of the imperialist art of cooing about peace while slamming into place the guns of war. His imperialist rivals circle warily. As the *Washington Post*, reflecting more liberal imperialist sentiment in the U.S., commented, "On the surface, the world looks like a safer place with Gorbachev. But we may be losing one element of stability from the old order — the expectation that if we pushed at the margins of the relationship, a conservative and risk-averse Soviet Union would give ground. That sort of accommodation may be less likely with Gorbachev. . . . And that may be dangerous. . . . In a new Mideast crisis, the Soviets might react as quickly and aggressively as the Americans."

Gorbachev has not brought about a lessening of tension, but, along with his imperialist rivals, heightened confrontation, occurring ever more intensely in even the most remote parts of the globe. His "strengthening" of "classless socialist democracy" is the unleashing of reactionary chauvinist sentiment among the bourgeoisified strata of Soviet society, and the concealing of the Soviet ruling class' own vicious dictatorship. It is a thoroughly reactionary program, hardly distinguished from any other imperialist platform just because it hides under the cloak of socialism.

The new Gorbachev Programme of the CPSU boasts that without the Soviet Union, "no issue in world politics can be solved."<sup>21</sup> Like his

U.S. imperialist counterparts, Gorbachev imagines that it his class alone that determines history, that will decide destiny from the Iran-Iraq war to the Middle East to the fate of the planet itself. He is as mistaken as he is pompous. □

### Footnotes

1. *Gorbachev*, by Zhores Medvedev (W.W. Norton: New York, 1986), p. 159.
2. *Gorbachev*, Medvedev, p. 229.
3. Cited in *Gorbachev*, by Thomas Butson (New York: 1986).
4. Report to Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, June 1986 (Novosti Press: Moscow)
5. For an analysis of the relation of Soviet economic reform to military preparations, see "Star Wars and the Soviet Economy: Desperate Planning, Wishful Thinking, and the Onrush of World War," by Raymond Lotta, *Revolutionary Worker* (Newspaper of the RCP, USA, a participant in the RIM), 16 February 1987.
6. *Current History*, October 1986.
7. Marshal Ogarkov, *Always Ready to Defend the Fatherland*, cited in E.P. Thompson, *Heavy Dancers* (London, 1986), p. 142; and *Current History* (October 1986).
8. Interview with Zhores Medvedev in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* (London) June 1987.
9. The Black Hundreds were an ultra-reactionary group in Tsarist Russia infamous for racist pogroms.
10. *Moscow News*, 21 June 1987.
11. Ogarkov, in *Always Ready to Defend the Fatherland*, cited in *Heavy Dancers*, Thompson, p. 142.
12. Interview in *Marxism Today*, journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain, February 1987.
13. *Moscow News*, 29 March 1987.
14. Mikhail Gorbachev, *For a Nuclear-Free World* (Novosti Press: Moscow, 1987), p. 104.
15. Lenin, *State and Revolution*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 25, pp 460-461.
16. Gorbachev, *For a Nuclear Free World*, p. 147.
17. Figures based on *The Economist*, 18 April 1987; *The War Atlas*, by Michael Kidron and Dan Smith (New York: 1983); and *END: Journal of European Nuclear Disarmament*, May-June 1987, p. 13.
18. The Soviet social-imperialists discuss Clausewitz in "Europe and Clausewitz: The Absurdity of a Classic Formula. . . and the Absurdity of Reviving It," *Moscow News*, 26 April 1987.
19. This is under the entry on military strategy in the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* over Marshal Ogarkov's name in 1979, cited in *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race*, by David Holloway (Yale Univ Press: London, 1983), p. 54 (emphasis added).
20. Gorbachev, *For a Nuclear Free World*, p. 79.
21. *The Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (New Edition)*, (Novosti: Moscow, 1986), p. 14.