

A MOMENT OF QUALITATIVE CHANGE

Debating the Moscow coup

The following documents were exchanged within the IBT between 20 August and 10 September 1991 and comprise the vast majority of our written internal discussion on the coup that took place in Moscow on 19-21 August that year. Naturally, discussion on the end of the deformed and degenerated workers' states had begun before that point and continued after, but we focus here on the debate that occurred while reaching a position on the coup and its implications.

Material in the documents relating to other issues has been removed and names have been standardized. Obvious spelling and grammar errors in the text have been corrected, but these remain unedited internal documents written in the haste of debate, some by comrades whose native language is not English (the language used for international communication in the organization). We have made our best efforts to reproduce the documents in the order they were written, but this was not always possible to determine as they were sent from a range of time zones between email systems that, in 1991, were often only checked once a day.

DOCUMENT 1

Logan (Wellington), 20 August 1991

We had an executive meeting last night and were unanimously defensive of the coup. A Bolshevik Club meeting at lunch time showed no opposition.

We have a membership meeting in a little over two hours. Two or three members of the student group will also attend. We anticipate no internal problems.

We would feel more secure if we heard from everywhere else that everything is OK.

Externally we cannot expect to be flavour of the month.

DOCUMENT 2

Riley (Toronto), 20 August 1991

I received your note regarding the coup in the USSR. We are scheduled to have an IS meeting tomorrow so I thought that a memo could await that. However here we are inclined to be more cautious than you seem to be there. Based on the information available it is clear that the leaders of the coup have repeatedly stated that they wish to continue the “reforms” initiated by Gorbachev (this is reported in today’s *Financial Times*). In the article in the last issue we said that we would support a hardline crackdown only on condition that it was aimed at stopping the restorationist drift:

“It is possible that leading sections of the bureaucracy may attempt at some future point to arrest the process of capitalist restoration. If that happened, it would be our duty to side militarily with the “conservatives” against the Yeltsinites. The Stalinist caste is incapable of *solving* the problems which gave rise to the “reforms” in the first place, but slamming on the brakes could at least buy some time.”

I am inclined to think that as yet we cannot conclude that this was a blow against capitalist restoration, which we would defend, rather than simply an attempt to maintain power by the traditional apparatus. It would be interesting to know what Pamyat has to say about it. We also noted in the article in the last issue that:

“concerning the intentions of the ‘hardliners,’ no definitive answer seems possible at this point. In all likelihood they have not answered it for themselves. They lashed out to counter a mounting threat to their power, but have not given any clear indication of their long-term objectives, or even that they have

any. They are profoundly demoralized, and most of them have lost confidence in the historical viability of socialism of any sort.”

For the time being I propose that we limit ourselves to a conditional position that *if* there is more here than a struggle within the bureaucracy for who sits in the saddle as the USSR slides into capitalism (i.e., a struggle to arrest capitalist restoration) then we would defend the coup. But as yet we do not have the information necessary to make a judgement. Perestroika administered by the hardliners with the suspension of civil rights and the political rights of the working class does not deserve support. On the other hand if there is a deepening polarization between Yeltsin and the hards that breaks out into civil war it may well mean that despite the rhetoric about continuing the “reforms” the Stalinists will be forced to try to revive the central plan. Whatever the case, the Soviet working class has an opening to play an important role in the outcome. This is something that I think we should emphasize, while of course pointing out the problem of the absence of a Trotskyist pole.

There is little support for Gorbachev or perestroika in the population at this point, and as the *FT* reported a lot of Russian workers are angry about the chaos and may incline to supporting any force which seems capable of doing something about the mess. The Siberian miners are on strike but many Russian workers apparently ignored Yeltsin’s call for a general strike the first day. It seems a hard thing to call at this point. Certainly the fact that they have talked about the “reforms” continuing does not automatically mean that they can be equated with Yeltsin and the capitalist restorationists he represents. Cullen mentioned that their initial statement mentioned the motherland several times, but did not mention socialism once. It also decried the centripetal forces threatening the planned economy as well as the unity of the USSR.

We should aim to have a written statement out within a week. Cullen is prepared to do a draft by the weekend. The IEC should discuss it and we should have a final version of at least a preliminary statement in about a week. Cullen has also proposed that he come off the 1917 assignment on the US working class and do a major piece on the USSR

(he has done our last couple and so is our “expert”) which I think makes sense. He has not been making much progress on his article on the US working class piece anyway.

Cullen and Nason are in agreement that for the meantime we should proceed on the general (very conservative) basis as outlined above.

DOCUMENT 3

Logan (Wellington), 21 August 1991

1. As the struggle was posed according to the evidence available to me until a few minutes ago it seemed that the outcome would be either the victory of forces around Yeltsin or the victory of forces around the core of the Soviet military establishment. A victory for Yeltsin would have definitively established a bourgeois state. That would not have been good.

The new possibility opening up is some sort of compromise. That in fact would represent the collapse of the military and would entail its reorganisation and its acceptance of a bourgeois government.

In any case other than the victory of the coup the outcome is the end of the deformed workers’ state.

2. If we were to take the position that we are unable to defend the core of the Soviet military in conflict with an openly bourgeois government then we would be saying that there was nothing left to defend in the Soviet state at all. In that case we would be saying that the Soviet Union has already ceased to be any kind of deformed workers’ state at all.

3. Riley says: “I am inclined to think that as yet we cannot conclude that this was a blow against capitalist restoration, which we would defend, rather than simply an attempt to maintain power by the traditional apparatus.” That poses the question wrongly. The Stalinists have never been fundamentally opposed to capitalist restoration. They have always been motivated by the need to maintain the power of the traditional apparatus. The point is that the power of the traditional apparatus can be maintained only by maintaining the system of central planning.

I have read this statement on the phone to Hannah, Mason and Hayes, and they are in agreement with it.

DOCUMENT 4

Riley (Toronto), 22 August 1991

It is clear that we urgently need to sort out some kind of position on the Soviet Union in the wake of the coup. Judging from the communications from the PRG and GS, as well as conversations with the BABT, there is a considerable spectrum within the IBT at the moment. We are confronting an objective situation which is extremely complex and difficult, and which our tradition does not provide ready-made answers for. So I think that it is no surprise that there are differences of interpretation within the group. While our analyses may vary our programmatic intent does not.

Logan has posed his conclusions quite succinctly, which makes it easier to reply to him. So, to take his points in order:

1.

[a]"A victory for Yeltsin would have definitively established a bourgeois state."

This is very probably correct, had the army split and the issue been settled through a civil war which commenced this week. But Pamyat could have supported either side, and a defeat for Yeltsin would certainly not have foreclosed the possibility of another road to the establishment of a bourgeois state in the fairly near future.

[b]"The new possibility opening up is some sort of compromise. That in fact would represent the collapse of the military and would entail its reorganisation and its acceptance of a bourgeois government. In any case other than the victory of the coup the outcome is the end of the deformed workers' state."

I think that this is too one-sided. A compromise which leaves substantially intact the military and police apparatus (with a few suicides, jailings and demotions a la Cory Aquino) will leave us with a situation not qualitatively different than the status quo ante. In any case the rightists have been enormously strengthened and the already considerable momentum toward capitalist restoration has been increased, and indeed the end may be very near. But if the USSR was a degenerated worker state prior to the coup a compromise in itself would not mark the definitive end. The intention of the government

does not determine the nature of the state in a situation where the government does not exercise effective control over the means of repression.

It is entirely possible that we will come to see that the failure of the coup was the historical moment where the die was cast. But I do not think we can establish that yet. Gorbachev is still talking about an important leading role for the CPSU, Yeltsin is talking about breaking it up. Gorbachev may well, for his own reasons, be willing to make a compromise with the upper layers of the officer corps, Yeltsin is talking about a purge of hundreds of generals. If such a purge is carried out, and there is no resistance, or the resistance is crushed and itself purged, then I think we can talk in terms of a transformation of the core of the state apparatus and the establishment of an effective agency for enforcing the embryonic bourgeois social relations that the Yeltsinites are committed to.

But prior to that all we are dealing with is probabilities, not social facts. I heard today on CBC that Yeltsin is talking about establishing a Russian national guard—this implicitly recognizes that he does not regard the Soviet army as a reliable instrument for achieving his ends.

2.

“If we were to take the position that we are unable to defend the core of the Soviet military in conflict with an openly bourgeois government then we would be saying that there was nothing left to defend in the Soviet state at all. In that case we would be saying that the Soviet Union has already ceased to be any kind of deformed workers’ state at all.”

The problem that arises here is one of establishing what the intent of the core of the military cadre was. For example, if they were mainly concerned with the loss of the republics from the “motherland” and resigned to or in favor of perestroika, then we could have a situation in which neither side was supportable. It is clear that at the highest levels of the CPSU the bureaucracy has lost confidence in itself and the historic mission which it long claimed for itself. So Gorbachev becomes ever more “radical” in embracing the inevitability and even necessity of capitalism. Naturally this does not mean that he or the

bureaucracy he represents is prepared to relinquish the social privileges and political power that come with high office. At the same time its existence is an obstacle to carrying out the “reforms” which it espouses. This creates a contradiction. But it does not automatically transform the character of the society. And I cannot see how, in theory, we can rule out the possibility of a falling out between bureaucrats over the pace of the “reform” program etc. which could lead to jailings etc. This is essentially what went on in Beijing a couple of years ago. If it comes to a shooting war between those who say capitalism sooner and those who say they want it later it seems to me that we would have to evaluate a whole range of concrete factors in deciding whether the “later” was militarily supportable. Very likely it would be, but not automatically—how much “later” would be an obvious consideration.

3.

“The Stalinists have never been fundamentally opposed to capitalist restoration. They have always been motivated by the need to maintain the power of the traditional apparatus. The point is that the power of the traditional apparatus can be maintained only by maintaining the system of central planning.”

I am generally in agreement with this, however what are we to make of Gorbachev? He wanted to maintain central planning but modify it by introducing market mechanisms. But he has found that he is incapable of doing so. He has no credible answers for the problems the bureaucracy has created. So he has balanced between those who want to introduce capitalism, regardless of the loss of power by the bureaucracy, and those who put a higher priority on maintaining the existing power structure but who themselves recognize that capitalism must be instituted. We could hardly support one sector of the bureaucracy against another over who is to preside over the reintroduction of the market. This was the point of the formulation regarding support to the “hardliners” in the last issue of *1917*.

I am of the opinion that we need to put out some kind of statement as soon as possible, but that we cannot do so prior to establishing our position. I think that the key issue in the discussion for the moment is Logan’s first thesis.

DOCUMENT 5

Logan (Wellington), 22 August 1991

The demoralisation of the armed forces, and reorganisation that they face at the hands of Gorbachev/Yeltsin means that Soviet Union can be said to exist no longer as a deformed workers' state. A bourgeois state—still rather weak—is now in the process of consolidation.

DOCUMENT 6

Monsees (Berlin), 23 August 1991

The coup is over, as you know—things will be different now in the former “fatherland of the international proletariat”.

I was glad to see that Riley and Logan went on line as fast as possible to give the first estimations. Kalisch and I decided to wait until today to come forward with a position in the IBT—the events have been faster.

Kalisch and I have different positions on what was going on and they look similar to the different positions of Logan and Riley.

Tonight I will answer the different positions, but first I want to explain the differences between me and Kalisch, because it looks to me that they are subordinated to the differences I have with the other comrades of the IEC.

So, first I will explain the differences between me and Kalisch on the estimation of the actual events in the USSR. (Of course I do it in my words and it might be that Kalisch will correct my explanation of his position.)

The starting point is different to Riley and Logan, and is important to know—Kalisch's and my position is:

With the establishing of a pro-capitalist government the deformed workers' state is gone.

For both of us this means, that the dominance of class-forces is not yet decided. The proletarian character of the state is gone in so far as

1. the economic decisions are made by a regime which is for the establishment of capitalism, that means for a bourgeois system of the production (not only for a “bourgeois law” of distribution which is even “normal” under a revolutionary system).

Even if there is no national bourgeoisie yet, this regime functions

along the laws of value, that means to organize economy for profit-making in difference to privilege-saving on the base of socialist-bases

2. the state-apparatus is ruled in this perspective and so
3. the pro-cap government is an embryonic bourgeois state apparatus.
4. This means that the working class is much more in the defensive than before.

The bourgeois character of the state is not yet secured in so far as

1. the pro-cap government cannot be sure/has not yet proved the effectivity of “its” state. The state-apparatus, that means mainly the armed body of men, are still not a tested formation.
2. In so far the duty of the regime is to (re-)organize a bourgeois state apparatus (mainly by integrating/educating in capitalist rules and minor by cleaning the existing bureaucracy from untrustful elements).
3. This means a STILL better situation for the proletariat to fight for its interests than in a bourgeois state (this situation is worsening under the rule of a pro-cap government constantly).

In this “transitional situation” both ways are possible without a civil-war/revolution/counter-revolution comparable to a revolution in a bourgeois state.

There is no “Chinese Wall” between a stalinist bureaucracy of a deformed workers’ state and a bureaucracy of a capitalist state.

A specific term is needed, because:

1. The bourgeois state can be established without a shooting fight, but might probably because of the contradictions which the recapitalization period produces, be installed by a bourgeois coup d’etat—a bonapartist coup on bourgeois foundations.
2. The rule of the stalinist bureaucracy on proletarian foundations can be re-established by a coup d’etat also, but is unlikely because of the historical context of imperialist crisis, in which a socialist production on a national scale is only possible to defend with the enthusiasm of a victorious working class.
3. The working class will have to do the same job as in a deformed

workers' state: To split/liquidate the armed body of the regime, but unlike the situation in a deformed workers' state to fight the pro-capitalist institutions/pro-cap dominated parts of the armed forces and their (possibly) already installed connection to imperialist powers.

Kalisch's position is, as you know, that with the last CC-plenum (under Gorbachev) of the CPSU a pro-cap-government exists in the USSR.

My position is, that the CC-meeting was an expression of the strengthening of the pro-cap forces but not an irreversible victory on government level. The hardliners accepted G.'s proposal for a new party-program as a "discussion base" in preparation for the projected party-convention in Nov./Dec. but did neither vote for nor against it. That they kept mainly calm at this meeting is for sure on one hand an expression of the weakness of this faction, but as we now know might also have been an expression of a preparation period for the coup (they did not want to "awake sleeping dogs" as we say in Germany).

In so far the dominance of the pro-cap forces on governmental-level was not decided.

Kalisch and Klein (K+K) have the position, that the program of the hardliner-emergency committee did not look qualitatively different to this of the Perestroika-government under Gorbachev. Riley and Cullen are right, they did not mention with one word a connection to socialism or central-planning etc. decisively. In so far K+K say that it looked like that there is no decisive QUALITATIVE difference between the "hard-liners" and the Gorbachev government. They say that the difference between them and the Gorbachev-regime seemed to be a difference between one faction of the bureaucracy that tried to save their privileges by organizing the recapitalization under military control and another (Gorbachev) who openly decided to try a more liberal way (treaty of the republics)—both pro-capitalist.

My position is that this was not clear yet: there was no defence of socialism and the hard-liners said that they want to go on with the "reform-way" and to support the possibilities of private-entertainment and to understand themselves in the "tradition of hundreds of years

of the nation of the Soviet people” (!?) but they also spoke about the necessity of changing the distribution of products, were in favour of price-stop and wage rising and to my understanding tried to look as far “proletarian” as is possible confronted with a working class which is obviously dominated by Perestroika/Glasnost forces.

Kalisch as well as me took our position from all the statements these men gave (we have nearly all in written version). But this was not enough, neither for him nor me, to prove our estimations. We decided to wait for more decisive acts.

The events run faster and it might be that it will not be possible in future to prove on what program this coup was tried. I am with Riley’s careful statement: “Certainly the fact that they have talked about the ‘reforms’ continuing does not automatically mean that they can be equated with Yeltsin and the capitalist restorationists he represents.”

The bureaucracy does not have ITS OWN social foundation, it depends in the last instance on the forces of the two social forces, proletariat and bourgeoisie, what decision it takes in the one or another conflict. This conflict did not give the hardliners a chance to come out with one or another program. They were obviously mainly looking for support along Russian nationalism/chauvinism on one hand (Riley is right, would be interesting what Pamyat says about). On the other hand, I think, they hoped to base themselves on these forces who were unwilling to accept

1. the results of perestroika:

- the military (and the military-industrial, that means the Russian industrial basic industry) -bureaucracy,
- the soldiers and officers and
- the working-class.

2. the effects of decentralization on the national level:

- the national bureaucracies which did not like to lose support by the “Union-wide” Kremlin-policy (as the Azerbaijan support of the coup showed).
- the Russian populations in the different republics.

To me it looks like, as it would have been possible, that if the working-class would have expressed its will to fight Gorbachev and

Yeltsin, these hardliners would have tried to play the “proletarian-card”. The shown weakness of this faction (unable to do a real coup: to get TV/radio/telephone under control, to let the pro-cap forces explain their positions, to let Yeltsin and Shevardnaze speak etc.) expressed the weakness of this wing of the bureaucracy, which sees its privileged future only saved by a securing (at least in the near future) of their historical role in society—that means by a dominant faction of a bureaucracy of a deformed workers’ state. (This weakness was proved by their attempt to get support of the CPSU-CC, which they did not get, and which I think was an important step for their capitulation.)

As I said above this is not, was not proved—but I think this possibility was not impossible. In so far I support Riley’s remarks on this issue.

Now on the general question: I think, all comrades are right by trying to explain their positions carefully. Obviously we are all in the situation that our tiny international tendency has only very small capacities to have access to information about what really is going on.

On one hand I am in our situation in favour of being conservative in new situations like these today. On the other it seems clear to me that there will be NO force which will be able to make this understandable to the working class, what is really going on except this (actually shrinking) IBT, which will grow with this task to offer answers.

In our discussion it seems to me that we are emphasising different theoretical basics to handle the actual situation.

The question of “currency-changing”, “capitalist production” and so on was never the discussed question, yet, to explain whether workers’ or bourgeois state. All, including the ICL, argue in this way.

The different starting points are all on the question of the “armed body of men”.

Logan said that “In any case other than the victory of the coup the outcome is the end of the deformed workers’ state.”

I think this is wrong. Why?

First according to Logan’s argumentation:

As far as I understand the argumentation of the NZ-comrades, they say that “the armed body of men” of a state are the CORE of the state. Well that is true, as it is not.

The “army for itself” is nothing else than people who are weaponed—and this is really important because they are the only one who have weapons when there is no working class militia (as the base of the proletarian dictatorship—which can exist even if the proletariat has not won yet, in a situation which we call dual-power).

But in a bourgeois state as well as in a deformed workers’ state, the social position of a soldier and (in the USSR mostly) even of an officer of a standing army does not depend on the property forms.

The character of these armed bodies of men is dependent on the character of the leadership of these formations and the way they see themselves in society depends on the class-struggle. They have only an independent character inside the society in so far as the society is one of class-differences.

There can be a situation in which the leadership of this armed body is not clear, as we all know. This is known from the “classical” situation of a bourgeois coup d’etat in a bourgeois state—its victory depends on the forces which the one faction of the bourgeoisie is dominating against the other faction.

In a deformed workers’ state it is not different:

When the part of the bureaucracy of a (deformed) workers’ state becomes dominant which is looking (however because of what reasons) for other roots of its existence than the proletarian property forms, they give the orders for the existing armed bodies of men. If these people, who have weapons, the armed body of men, is doing what they are ordered to do or not, depends on two things:

1. the situation of the class-struggle, that means on the possibility to win or not,
2. on their social connection to the regime they defend/they fight against.

Do you really think that there is an independent (secret) program inside the army of a deformed workers’ state to defend proletarian property forms? There is not!

Either these forces in the army or wherever they exist (see above, the theses I gave about the “base” of the hardliner-emergency-committee) come out with a program, a political position to fight for

this or that, or they will be damned to be smashed between the real class-confrontation of labour and capital.

When there would have been a real civil-war between the forces of the emergency-committee and the Yeltsin-troops, the victory of the first ones might have meant that a stalinist bureaucracy of a workers' state became dominant—"might", because I am not sure if they really depended on working-class forces, which would only be possible to say in the real situation after their victory—see above). The victory of the Yeltsin-troops would have meant that this part of the armed body of men became dominant which are dependent on the capitalist way.

Now, in fact, there did not happen the one or the other.

There was no real fight and it is something like a compromise: the hardliners were not able to defend their attempt and they gave up, which does not say that there is no potential anymore for a new split inside the armed body of men. That such a situation might come up is more likely in the circumstances of a proletarian defence fight—I think it is not anymore probable that parts of the bureaucracy will try to do it for their own. For sure is that the pro-capitalists come out strengthened now and I think it is very likely that they now will start through and split/transform the CPSU in a social-democratic one in order to save their position, that means to isolate the sceptical parts of the bureaucracy, which do (reasonably) not believe in a saving of their privileges under capitalism and in order to clean the existing armed body of men, in order to get the armed body of men they need to be thrustfull for investments of the international capital and (as far as already existing) for these people who have already been able to accumulate capital inside the "former" deformed workers' state.

To me it is clear, (although tonight not yet proved) that the outcome will be a pro-capitalist government. The USSR now (which might be an abstraction already) is in the same situation as all the other East European countries.

To me this means:

The deformed workers' state USSR is gone.

Why?

First, I support Logan's and Kalisch's disagreement with the term

“no state in the marxist sense”, because this term is in our tradition used for special situations, that means used for situations in which the old state apparatus, the armed bodies of men, were smashed (East Europe after ‘45; Cuba; Nicaragua).

But nevertheless I deny the existence of either a workers’ state or a bourgeois state.

The question of who has the power is still not answered.

Dominant are the pro-cap forces—no question. But as I stated in my first paper on this question, they have to get a state-apparatus which is decisively a defender of their way of production (on this question I think it is interesting, what Lenin quoted from Engels in “State and Revolution” [I am sorry only to be able to present a translation of mine: the following is neither Lenin nor Engels, it is just me who wants to make it easier for you to find the paragraph in Lenin’s text]: “Because the state grew out of the necessity to keep class-contradictions under control, but because it was build contemporary in between the conflict of the classes, so normally it is the state of the most powerful, economically ruling class, who is by the state also becoming the political ruling class which in this way gets new methods for suppressing and exploitation of the suppressed class.” (*State and Revolution*, Chapter 1, point 3 [The state—a tool for the exploitation of the suppressed class]—second quotation).

In this definition the state is a weapon of the economical ruling class, to become the political ruling class. In the period of imperialism the bourgeoisie showed to be “the most powerful, economically ruling class” of the world, because of the weakness of the proletariat, that means the crisis of its leadership. Nowadays it is getting access to become the political ruling class in the former deformed workers’ states again. The most powerful, economical ruling class is first, which nowadays is trying to become by the state the political ruling class. The pro-cap governments are the expression of this dominance and their historical duty is to ensure the political power of the economical ruling class, the bourgeoisie: with a pro-cap government, the bourgeoisie is securing its economical power—which is on the economical level expressed by dismantling of the plan, demolition of the state

owned industry and the disappearing of the state monopoly of foreign trades.

Politically it is expressed by establishing bourgeois democratic regimes.

PS: I am against an IBT-statement on the events in the USSR in a week. The fact that the hardliners gave up, brings up a new situation and we have not to be and should not be too fast in estimations of what came out of this conflict. A broad not outpointing paper will be of no political importance in Europe—an answer to LRCI and ICL should be possible with such a paper.

I support Riley's proposal that the next 1917 has to have an article on the Russian question—for me this means on the question of the former deformed workers' states and I think Logan is right it is not important to analyze each East European state but we have to have the criteria.

Second, 1917 has to have as well an article on the Yugoslavian question (Klein will probably tomorrow send our information to you and we might be lucky to use an official resource to get clearer infos).

Both questions are connected with a general understanding of the fall of the deformed workers' states. Yet I do not see a common understanding or clear positions. 1917 should be postponed if necessary—there is no urgency to get it published.

DOCUMENT 7

Riker (Bay Area), 23 August 1991

Smith is down with the flu so I am making this interim report on discussions here.

As you all know we discussed the coup here and with various minor shadings of opinion decided that there was not much to support in the public statements of the coup leaders. Our attitude was that it might gain some time for the working class and whether or not we could support it on that basis was to be determined by who they shot when and if the shooting began.

The coup however has failed—miserably. And now events in the USSR are moving with increasing speed. Today the following events were reported in the late editions of the *S.F. Examiner*:

1. The Russian Parliament suspended publication of six of the CP dailies including *Pravda Sovetskaya Rossiya*, *Glasnost* and *Moscow Pravda*, and seized their printing plants;
2. The new head of the KGB (the third in a week) announced upon his appointment that party activity (i.e. cells) will no longer be allowed in the KGB;
3. The Russian Parliament also announced a ban on party work “anywhere in the Russian republic, including the army, (and) police units of the Interior Ministry and the party HQ in Moscow has been closed and sealed until further notice;
4. Latvia and Lithuania have banned the CP altogether and the police have occupied the party HQ and arrested the chairman of the CC;
5. The President of Uzbekistan resigned from the Politburo and the Central Committee in protest of the CP’s “failure to oppose the coup”;
6. The President of Kirghizia took control of the headquarters of the party and the local Lenin Museum;
7. Statues of Felix Dzerzhinsky and Lenin were pulled down in Moscow (in front of KGB HQ) and in the capitals of Estonia and Lithuania;
8. “Government officials” in Georgia have called for the prohibition (illegalization) of the party and the “nationalization of all its property”;
9. President Mircha Snegur of the Moldavian Republic “ordered the removal of all party organizations from government agencies”.

As the registered (and only, as far as I know) “Marcyite” on these questions, I must say that Logan’s position (that it’s all over) has a certain attraction for me. However, unlike in Hungary 1956 and Poland 1980, the Soviet working class is not in the streets and is not (as far as we can tell) in favor of the program of either Yeltsin or Gorbachev. (Or Lech Walesa or Imre Nagy.)

From what we can tell from here this entire struggle is going on over the heads of the workers there. There are (except for some miners

in Siberia) very few strikes in favor of Yeltsin—neither were there any in favor of the coup leaders. In fact one of the glaringly obvious things about the reams of decrees issued by the coup during its short life, was that they made no appeals directly to the working class. Everything they wrote was couched in patriotic (Pamyet?) terms or in the language of law, order and sexual repression. Some of their decrees could just have well been written by Ed Meese the red neck Attorney General under Ronald Reagan.

In view of the absence of the working class speaking definitively one way or the other AND in the absence, AS OF YET, of a clear military of the conservative Stalinists (the coup collapsed like soggy bread) I don't think we can yet say that a workers' state no longer exists. [To the Germans: it's not your translation, that last sentence is convoluted and tangled even in English—FR]

Yeltsin and the capitalist restorationist forces, like a runaway horse, have the bit in their teeth and are galloping at full speed toward the precipice. I think, barring the entry of any new forces onto the field, that they will succeed in dragging the Soviet state over the cliff with them. If in three months or six months it is clear that that is what has happened, I will be the first to congratulate Logan for having been the first to see it.

But for now, even this old “Marcyite” is not willing to say “it's over”.

By the way: The REAL Marcyites came out in favor of the coup in their press and when it collapsed they printed a special edition of their paper with the headline “Gorbachev and Yeltsin back in power with help of imperialist powers” or some such rot.

Also, according to a long-time cadre of the SL whom I cornered in my plant today, the SL's position on the coup is that they did not support it—but think there is still a workers' state in the USSR albeit much weakened.

DOCUMENT 8

Smith (Bay Area), 23 August 1991

At the time I was about to send off this letter the Stalinist coup collapsed. Nevertheless, we still need to clarify our position on this historic event.

The factors that led to the coup attempt are clear for Trotskyists. *Anyone* who vaguely considered themselves Soviet defensist couldn't help but want to see Gorbachev out.

The so-called hardliners were ready to move on Gorbachev after he came back from his belly crawling act at the G-7 conference empty handed. Don't go around Communists with no money! It has been reported that the Communist Party of the USSR is near bankrupt.

Yeltsin had recently passed legislation in the Russian parliament banning Communist Party fractions in the factories. This betrayed his blatantly anti-working-class appetite. The Russian workers will soon feel the sting of the lash from their new "hero". As I point out below the "New" Bonapartes are no better.

There are a few things that Keystone Cops of the "Emergency Committee" were right about. There is a felt need on a mass scale for social order and against chaos. The loss of credibility in Gorbachev's ability to rule accounts for the initial passivity of the Russian plebeian masses right after the coup. According to a *Times Mirror* opinion taken before yesterday's coup Gorbachev had an approval rating of 27% (*Oakland Tribune*, August 20, 1991..

I think the "Emergency Committee" also tapped into the very real chauvinist reaction among the Russians towards the ugliest manifestations of nationalism at its nastiest in the border republics, run amok. The New Union Treaty was probably the last straw.

There was also widespread criticism of the lopsided pro-imperialist Chevron deal that Gorbachev was pushing. Some of this criticism came from the "Reformers" camp.

The Jaruzelski Factor

Are we for or against this coup? As comrade Riker said, "It depends on who they shoot."

We must differentiate. We are for *any* measures a would-be Junta may advocate that *objectively* will preserve collectivized property relations. We are opposed to *any* measures that restricts the ability of the working class to educate, organize, and defend itself in its historic struggle to retake political power on the basis of socialized property forms.

The wing of the bureaucracy that was behind the coup seems to be recoiling from the latest path that Gorbachev has embarked upon largely on the basis of chauvinist-nationalist politics [Soviet Patriotism a la Stalin]. In fact there was *no* appeal to the working class directly. Only classless chatter about “The Motherland” and “The Soviet People” (what ever that means). However there seems to be, and we should be extremely tentative in our judgement of this, a possibility that this coup could have lead to a temporary slowing down of capitalist restoration.

A Brief Analysis of the Soviet Junta’s political statements

A careful look at the various decrees, statements and press conferences of the “Emergency Committee” reveals that there was damn little they said or wrote that we could have supported.

We oppose these aspects of their decrees -

The classless decrees of the “Emergency Committee” while they could be used against capitalist restorationist forces they may well be used against legitimate working class actions and therefore were Authoritarian and Anti-democratic. For instance:

“The decree suspended political parties, social organizations and movements ‘that prevent normalisation’. It banned rallies, marches, demonstrations, and strikes, and reimposed press censorship.”

This slimy and clumsy foot work exposed the anti-working class of the main spokesman for the “Emergency Committee”. When asked point blank by a reporter during a press conference:

“Q: Mr. Yanayev, you used to be a trade union leader, and a very successful one at that. My question is: Are you prepared to adopt some constitutional legitimate steps against Yeltsin’s decree, which is directed not only against the party cells but against the trade union organization?”

Yanayev answered, “I think that all the decrees and all the decisions that will be taken will be considered from the viewpoint of the state of emergency that we are introducing in this country.”

He then went on to blame Gorbachev for provoking violence, i.e. he refused to directly answer the question. Why? Because he knows his regime will mercilessly attempt to crush any attempt by the Soviet proletariat to independently organize itself.

Section of the “Emergency Committees” statements were extremely reactionary and pointed in a dangerous direction from the standpoint of the proletariat: Anti-internationalist chauvinist patriotism, Stalinist puritanism, the arbitrary disarming of the Soviet population (we are not opposed to the disarming of the various fascists and ultra-nationalist outfits, we are opposed to the disarming of the workers).

Nevertheless aspects of the Generals’ stated program were worthy of the support of Marxists, particularly those that hinted at the reimposition of the planned economy. For example the *Financial Times* of August 20, 1991 said:

“The decree called for ‘restoration of order and discipline’ in the economy and reflected the views of old-style industrial and collective farm managers represented in the emergency committee. It urged the ‘strict fulfilment of measures to preserve and restore *vertical and horizontal ties between enterprises...and unflinching achievement of planned targets regarding production and supplies of raw materials and components*’” (My emphasis)

Also, “The committee promised ‘*a decisive struggle against the shadow economy*’ and to enforce laws against ‘corruption, theft, profiteering, bungled management and other economic wrongdoing’.”

And, “The promised harsh measures against the emergent but often semi-legal market economy were accompanied by promises to *control food distribution with priority for children and pensioners, and the freezing or reduction of prices for certain consumer goods and foodstuffs within a week.*”

If this was true, I think we would support such measures.

What About the Working-class Comrade General?

The present situation in the USSR is not analogous to the Jaruzelski coup against Polish Solidarity in December of 1981 because the Soviet working class is not presently independently organized, as a class, behind a capitalist restorationist leadership. The Soviet workers, organized as an independent class force, are not in the streets, not yet. Everything hinges on where the Soviet workers, on which side, they will come down on the question of the continued existence of collectivized property.

The relative passivity of the working class indicated by the few

strikes to date may reflect a deep fear of the unwinding of the economy. The new rich “Mafioso” who have been seizing control of much of the distributive economy have antagonized and enraged many workers. The announced measures to restore the links in the economy, restore subsidies to basic food stuffs and crush the “mafia” may have proven initially popular among Soviet workers.

According to the *Financial Times* (August 20, 1991):

“In the Kuzbass mining region, at heart of a crippling two-month political strike, radical miners looked set to walk out again... In the Urals, the political base of Mr. Yeltsin, factories may also strike. But in Moscow, the initial response of industrial workers was sluggish.”

“As for the army, it is largely unpredictable in its response.” (Ibid)
“While the officer class (sic) is divided, most of the top brass, many senior Communist party members, feel humiliated by a cut in their authority—as well as threats to the defense industry.”

The Nationalist movements are obviously against this coup.

At the same time the “State of Emergency Committee” statements and decrees have been extremely vague and duplicitous on their exact attitude towards the still existing collective property forms. This is essential for us to know in order to formulate a precise political position on whether or not this coup could have been supported by revolutionary Marxists. Unfortunately the whole thing was cut short.

For now I think it is safe to say that:

1. We do not defend the existing pseudo-democratic parliaments that are being suppressed because we support and call for workers’ councils or soviets based on the mass organizations of the proletariat.
2. We do not oppose the coup in principle. Our attitude towards this action by the “Emergency Committee” was dependent upon their attitude and actions in defense of socialized property.
3. We forthrightly oppose all measures of the “Emergency Committee” that restrict the ability of the Soviet working class to organize.

4. I think it is a bit premature to say, as comrade Logan does in his August 21, 1991 statement that: “In any case other than the victory of the coup the outcome is the end of the deformed workers’ state.” Although I do think that there is a gigantic boulder of truth in his projection.

DOCUMENT 9

From Minutes of the IS (Cullen, Nason, Riley), 23 August 1991

Hegel observes that “no sooner have we written down the truth than it is stale and out of date.” The wisdom of this observation is especially apparent in revolutionary and counterrevolutionary times. Be it noted, for the record, that the IS’s understanding of Russian events, when we held our initial meeting on 21 August, is summarized in Riley’s letter of 22 August. The dramatic events of 23 August, however, made it necessary for us to reconvene that evening. The following represents our most recent appraisal.

We are agreed that the coalition government and the campaign now being waged against the CPSU represents the beginning of the end of the Soviet workers’ state. The social counter-revolution is underway. We further consider any significant resistance on the part of the fragmented and demoralized Stalinist bureaucracy to be unlikely. Certainly a much wider purge of the party and state apparatus, and especially the officer corps of the army, will be required to complete the process. But there can be no doubt that the process has begun.

Whether we wish to date the downfall of the workers’ state from the beginning or the end of this process need not, in our opinion, greatly concern us at this point, nor do we have to take a public position on this matter. Some comrades have argued that the death agony commenced before the coup and its failure. But, as long as we are all agreed that the end is upon us, the resolution of this question can also be left for later. For now, we propose to state in public that the coup and its failure unleashed a reactionary avalanche that signifies the demise of the state power created in 1917.

It is imperative that any IEC member who disagrees with the above formulation contact Toronto by phone or Compserve within 72 hours

of the receipt of these minutes. We must take a public position as soon as possible.

We think it will be sufficient to state our position orally, pending further elaboration in a front-page article of the forthcoming 1917. Once again, any disagreement with this proposal should be communicated *poste haste*.

All IEC members (and indeed all comrades) are invited to put their thoughts on recent events in writing; this is no doubt the most important internal discussion our tendency has ever had. We intend to publish all contributions in a future Internal Discussion Bulletin.

DOCUMENT 10

Kalisch (Berlin), 25 August 1991

My strong feeling is that we have now to react and come out with a public line at first in our arguments later on codified in a written statement. Whatever we decide on, it is better to have a position than try to evade the issue on the Russian question point blank. Even if we have a line which does not satisfy all of our comrades. We are here under heavy pressure to publicly react (contacts, sympathizers, Essen group) and we cannot continue any work without that line.

1. existence of the workers' state USSR

I think that the situation now underlines that the USSR is not a workers' state anymore and in that respect I agree with Logan. What we have now is a break up of the USSR as a unified state; that implies that Gorbachev's role tends to zero. Everything that he is doing is under the whip of Yeltsin, a representative of a procapitalist government. (I disagree with Logan's argument on how that has happened and frankly speaking, I see an inconsistency in his argument when he declares now the USSR is off but he obviously still considers Poland for example a deformed workers' state. I still hold the position that in mid July the Gorbachevites went definitely over to the other side of the barricade (G7-summit, CC-plenum, proof: Bush's visit). I do not want to complicate the issue right now. I think that the IBT has to declare openly: USSR off, down with the great Russian chauvinist Yeltzin (explaining, among other things that we are against this anticommunist

witchhunt organized by these forces in their will to stabilize the new bourgeois Russian republic).

2. On the putsch

My position is that we were not in support of this emergency committee and its action. If you want to form a military bloc it must be at least clear on what common minimal program such a bloc is formed. The situation in the SU is now at a point that there is no possibility of an illusion about a “third way” or whatsoever. We don’t share the Pabloite methodology that because of the dynamic of forces and the fight the true program of the junta must have come out. The condition of the bloc is that Yanayev & Co. must have fought Yeltsin on one point: no restoration of capitalism. They on the other hand set themselves in the continuity of Gorbachew and for free enterprises, on the international level they said they would fulfil every treaty (START) Gorbachew has signed. That was the thrust of their program and the programmatic basis they wanted to restore law and order: no “time” won for the working class, no program of a STALINIST faction but simply a program of law and order, ANOTHER variant of great Russian capitalist tendencies, only by protecting a (majority) wing of the bureaucracy to establish capitalism under its control. One can argue that it was not at all clear what they want etc. Even under that condition: for a military support on behalf of the workers it MUST have been clear for what they stood for if the workers should have supported them. There exists no “military support in stages”: either you support them or not. If some of your bloc partners says he fights fascism then you try to form a bloc, if he says he is not so sure then you convince him to form a bloc, if he evades in his program and his deeds the issue why forming a bloc? But once more again, I think that is only a hypothetical question to convince some of our comrades who try to evade the issue (this we do support, this not etc.) is simply a result of their indecision and has nothing to do with a position. We have to take sides and cannot duck the issue. I will vote for a position to take side with the workers against Yeltsin and Yanayev & co.

Anyhow we have to come now to a public position, and if we cannot mutually agree we have to decide with a majority line. This does not mean that we stop the discussion on this complicated matter, but if we

have no position we simply declare to the public that we are no factor. So especially because of the overwhelming party interests, I support a quick decision in the next three or four days.

DOCUMENT II

Monsees (Berlin), 25 August 1991

ON THE QUESTION TODAY: The former deformed workers' states

1. The degenerated workers' state USSR is gone!

I do not share the explanations of Logan and Riley about why or why not there is a workers' state anymore ("decisive question—CORE of the armed body of men"), as you know.

The armed body of men in a former deformed workers' state has to be cleaned/reorganized or a new one has to be built, to ensure capitalist power—this process is started in all the East European states (inclusive the USSR), but not fulfilled yet. It can first be seen as fulfilled when the capacity is reached to fight for/defend capitalism by these formations. At what point this situation is reached might be analyzed only some time after it was fulfilled, but might become immediately obvious by a coup/civil war or (in the case of separation) by a war along nationalist lines or (Trotskyist classical) by an intervention/stationing of imperialist troops.

Riley says "... Yeltsin is talking about a purge of hundreds of generals. If such a purge is carried out, and there is no resistance, or the resistance is crushed and itself purged, then I think we can talk in terms of a transformation of the core of the state apparatus and the establishment of an effective agency for enforcing the embryonic bourgeois social relations that the Yeltsinites are committed to."

Is this the case yet? Although the Yeltsinites have taken the chance now to come through with it they are not through, yet. (An Austrian industrial said tonight in Moscow broadcast that they are happy about the victory of the Russian people, but that this victory is not sure yet: "The ghost is now in the bottle again, but it is still alive.")

Logan says: The defeat of the Yanayev-coup is enough. (Kalisch's amendment is correct about the contradictions of Logan's argumentation.)

You both have to explain your criteria you use to evaluate the events in the USSR in regard of what is going on in the other former deformed workers' states of Eastern Europe:

Logan, what are you awaiting in CSFR, Poland and Hungary for example?

The USSR is gone, ok—is it already a bourgeois state? Along your “DWSPD-paper” it might be not yet—correct?

If it is, is Russia an imperialistic one?

If not, what is the special character?

Riley, where does this purge you spoke about in regard of the USSR not take place in East Europe?

My position is that this process is going on everywhere in East Europe—with different speed (today the highest speed—putschistic/coup-like in the USSR). There are only differences because of national differences in the defeat of the stalinist bureaucracy, but no qualitative one.

2. It was not clear which direction the coup will take.

a) The acts of the Emergency Committee to try to overthrow the pro-cap forces in Russia and the Baltics had to be supported by the working class.

b) Why this, although their program was unclear and they did not speak clearly against capitalist restoration?

Kalisch says: “They on the other hand set themselves in the continuity of Gorbachev and for free enterprises, on the international level they said they would fulfil every treaty (START) Gorbachev has signed. That was the thrust of their program and the programmatic basis they wanted to restore law and order: no “time” won for the working class, no program of a STALINIST faction but simply a program of law and order, ANOTHER variant of great russian capitalist tendencies, only by protecting a (majority) wing of the bureaucracy to establish capitalism under its control. One can argue that it was not at all clear what they want etc. Even under that condition: for a military support on behalf of the workers it MUST have been clear for what they stood for if the workers should have supported them.”

This is the half of the truth Kalisch explains. Program is more than

just one or two papers. They acted against the pro-cap forces in Russia and the Baltics (in Russia they wanted to jail Yeltsin, but did not come through in the CC of the CPSU).

They did not say that they see themselves as supporters of Gorbachev's speech at the last CC-meeting. They did not say that market economy is their one and only interest.

This faction was the expression of these parts of the bureaucracy who were responsible for Gorbachev's "half-hearted" reforms, who kept him always back (or at least tried). They lost more and more against the Yeltsinites and pro-cap governments in the non-Russian republics. They never came forward with their own/different way to capitalism, instead of this were always blocking the restorationists. This does not mean that they are communists, they did so because of their privileges—but on the foundations of workers' property. If Kalisch thinks that one can only explain the working class that some of the acts of the coup supportable when one is able to say "Here look, they call themselves anti-capitalists!", then he has to say, how he is able to explain the workers, "Here look, these guys are pro-capitalists!". The hint on their statement to be in favour of the reforms under Gorbachev, is not enough. These faction was really never in favour of the pro-cap pressure of the imperialist lackeys around Yeltsin, but to a certain extent they were able to live with the compromises: Until Yeltsin's ban of the CPSU in the factories, until Gorbachev's CC-speech and until the new treaty of the peoples of the USSR!

There is no left faction. The difference between Yeltsin and Yanayev is, in a historical different situation, the one between Bucharin and Stalin without a Reiss one. And a (centrist) Stalin faction without a left pressure is not centrist anymore—just right-wing reformist. More earlier than later a victory of the Yanayev-group would have posed the pro-cap program again inside the government: there is no perspective anymore for a bureaucracy of a deformed workers' state—"socialism in one country"-economy is (in contradiction to the Stalin-up-to-Breshnev-era) not workable anymore.

Two points more versus Kalisch's "proof" of their capitalist character: They were for free enterprise.

The only thing I read was in their first statement: We will support the possibilities of free-entertainment. To me it sounds just a nice offer, but says nothing about the general direction (in contradiction to Gorbachev not speaking about Yeltsin who is hailing the great capacities of market-economy!).

When they say to fulfil the START-treaty is really no criteria. With this criteria Stalin was much more dangerous with his pact with Hitler and that these bureaucrats have no other chance than opening/capitulating to Imperialism is obvious.

I do not think that there was any clear direction of this faction, but it would have become definite when would had to answer a working-class action in fighting the imperialist compradores.

c) An important point of our propaganda would have been to explain that their program was soft towards bonaparte Gorbachev who was president between and of two factions—the pro-capitalists and the hardliners. So there was nothing to hope for the working class with the coup-faction—only a possibility to use their acts against the pro-caps to overthrow the bureaucrats at all, by simultaneously fighting/defending against imperialist impact.

- With this understanding I support the points 1—3 of Smith's statement of August 21.

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Because of the speed of aggressive acts of the Yeltsin crew, I think, I have to retreat my proposal for a postponing of a public IBT-statement. Kalisch is right to propose a definitive decision on the line during the next days. Although new questions, despite the variety of different arguments and positions, we have to come out. To stay in old formulas today does not help—we have to jump in and might have to correct us later. A majority-line is today urgently needed—the discussions will go on, this is for sure!

DOCUMENT 12

Harlan (Hamburg), 25 August 1991

It is impressionistic and misleading to simply say the USSR has been transformed from a degenerated workers' state to a bourgeois

(capitalist) state in one week. A description of the state solely or mainly in terms of regime and armed repressive forces (commitment, etc.) can distort the perception that capitalist restoration has barely begun. And also obscures one's understanding that capitalist counterrevolution is more easily reversible in this situation than in a state with developed capitalist property forms, capitalists, and repressive forces implementing the capitalists class property interests. The pro-capitalist government can and is moving to virtually outlawing the CP. The top bureaucrats will almost certainly capitulate without a whimper. I wouldn't be surprised if the CP shakes down after more splintering into some kind of left social democratic formation with some anti-capitalist, pro-"socialist" program.

I think we will see a relatively extended period marked by a collapsing economy and increasingly restive working class. During this period the process is reversible, but probably not through intervention of the bureaucrats operating but through the activity of the working class. It's not precluded that desperate workers may conclude that "capitalism" isn't working—Yeltsin, Landsbergis, etc, can't make the economy work and begin plant occupations and some kind of syndicalist dual power could develop over time. I personally think Yeltsin et al. will have to move fairly rapidly toward the bonapartist option in order to carry out the only possible rapid capitalist transformation of the economy through outright sales of land and productive forces to imperialism. they will have to base themselves on new comprador capitalist formations.

Incidentally, the Lithuanian parliament's outlawing of the CP points to nationalist oppression of the non-Lithuanian workers which is the CP's base. Estonia dismissed the Russian managers of the two largest factories and the port. Banning of the CP in Estonia goes a long way to politically disenfranchising of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Byelorussian workers; a majority of Estonian workers. Pogroms, repression, and exclusion may serve as a cover for the inability of the pro-capitalist nationalist regimes to make the economy work.

The most useful way to describe the USSR is as a beheaded, rapidly degenerating workers' state(s), resting on collectivized property

forms with a pro-capitalist government(s). A developed state with no significant capitalist class, very little capital, no real financial market, and a quite large working class not ideologically committed to collectivized property forms and only in the most shallow sense attracted to capitalism. This description is supplementary to the I.S. proposed public statement regarding “... demise of state power created in 1917.”

DOCUMENT 13

Logan (Wellington), 26 August 1991

We have just had an executive meeting.

Certainly I am willing to accept, and the other leading comrades here are too, the following minimal public position: that the failure of the coup has unleashed a reactionary avalanche that signifies the demise of the state power created in 1917.

However, our position remains, of course, that defence of the coup was a necessary aspect of defence of the (deformed) workers' state. Consequently we are certainly not willing to accept the implication that those who sided with the coup necessarily share the blame for its demise. To that extent the formulation “*the coup and its failure* unleashed a reactionary avalanche” is highly objectionable to us.

There has long been a movement in the direction of capitalism in the Soviet Union.

Political responsibility for that movement has been in the hands of various governmental agencies, including in different ways the Yeltsin and Gorbachev governments. For some time the Yeltsin government (and possibly the Gorbachev government, too) has consciously aspired to be the government of a bourgeois state and was widely perceived as the potential organising nucleus for one.

(Kalisch might well be right that Gorbachev and the people around him in recent times became decisively more pro-bourgeois, but that hardly marks the transition of the Soviet Union from a deformed workers' state to a bourgeois state, and I do not understand Kalisch's argument on this point. Such a change in Gorbachev's position marks a quantitative increase in the drive of his government to play some

role analogous to that of an organ of bourgeois dual power within the deformed workers' state.)

The movement towards capitalism caused all sorts of social, economic and bureaucratic disruption which seriously threatened the interests and privileges of top levels of the armed forces. The top levels of the armed forces do not give the slightest damn about the threat of capitalist restoration as such, and nor ultimately would they be able to prevent that restoration. They were not overly conscious of what they were doing in terms of world-historic socio-economic programme. They just wanted to retain their power and privilege. But their power and privilege was tied, in ways they themselves did not fully understand, to a network of bureaucratic relations, a particular kind of social formation, called a deformed workers' state. Any resistance to the diminution of their power and privilege was in the actual situation a resistance to the process of capitalist restoration.

(In fact this is usually the way with Stalinist bureaucrats. They are not supportable in any political sense. They are not interested in workers' property forms as such. They are interested in their bureaucratic privileges. But we often find ourselves in a military bloc with them because the defence of their power and privileges often obliges them to defend the workers property forms on which those powers and privileges are based.)

There was in fact probably some level of consciousness among the coup leaders that they were opposed to capitalist restoration, but in any case, in order to defend their power and privileges, they attacked the governmental agencies which have political responsibility for the processes of capitalist restoration.

In their heads they might have been fighting to slow down the pace of pro-capitalist reform rather than reverse it, but that makes little difference to our standpoint. The conditions did not allow the possibility of an armed fight about pace to be contained within the bounds of the deformed workers' state.

(In China at the time of the events of Tiananmen Square a couple of years ago it was possible for a fight over the pace of reform to take a military aspect while all major parties still remained fundamentally

within the framework of a deformed workers' state. This was possible because the processes of capitalist restoration were in some respects less advanced in China—in particular there was no potential nucleus of a bourgeois state.)

The recent abortive coup in Russia was directed against the bourgeois governments of Yeltsin and Gorbachev. These governments had political responsibility for the movement towards the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. The top levels of the armed forces didn't like these governments. Neither did we. They had their guns pointed at these governments, and locked up some elements of them, tried to lock up other elements of them, and might have shot some elements of them. The proletariat should have liked to do the same. We should have been in a bloc with the top levels of the armed forces against these governments.

When we consider making a military bloc, it depends on who our potential bloc partners are pointing their guns at. In this case they were pointing their guns at the pro-capitalist governments. And that is what we should have joined them in.

Now it is quite true that the coup leaders WOULD EVENTUALLY have shot at the proletariat. That is always the way with a military bloc-partner, but those circumstances were not immediately on the agenda. The proletariat was not active as a force in the situation. Our programme should have been to mobilise them in defence of the coup, and if they had been mobilised in defence of the coup that would have opened up a very different period than the one we have before us, and one in which the likelihood of the proletariat looking down the wrong end of a gun was far less likely than it now is.

It is entirely irrelevant that the coup leaders said bad things in their statements or that they said nothing supportable. In a military bloc we don't support the politics of our partner. It's not like critical support. It is entirely irrelevant that Pamyat might have liked them.

Of course it is true that had the coup succeeded the underlying forces conditioning the movement towards capitalism would have continued, and would have been given political expression once more. In a sense it would only have been buying time. (Of course that's all Stalinism ever

did for us—buy time. The tragedy is we were not able to use it.)

Now, of course, the coup leaders have been defeated. The question is whether such a thing can happen again, or whether there is any element in the soviet state which at any future time could in some way act decisively against capitalist restoration.

If there is some element of armed force in Russia which could act at some future time decisively against capitalist restoration, then there would still be a deformed workers' state in existence. If there is now no longer any element capable of acting decisively against capitalist restoration then there is no deformed workers' state left.

In fact it was clear throughout the period of the coup that those in the armed forces who were either objectively or subjectively against capitalist restoration had their best chance at that point. And they gave it their best shot (!). If there was any group which sought to move, that was the time to act. That was their historic moment.

They showed themselves to be divided, morally weak and quite simply without sufficient capacity to defend either their own interests and privileges or the deformed workers' state on which those interests and privileges were based. They collapsed, as someone said, like soggy bread.

And if they were without sufficient capacity during their coup last week, it is clear that their defeat left them with but the smallest fragment of the capacity they had before their defeat. That's what happens with such defeats. The victory of the bourgeois governments, including the crystallisation of certain armed forces around them, has made the forces against capitalist restoration incomparably weaker at the end of the week than they were at the beginning.

It is not merely probable that the armed force is now unable to decisively defend workers property forms, it is a proven historical fact, proven by the result of the coup. Of course some elements in defence of the deformed workers' state may yet play a role, but if these exist they are considerably less than the elements in defence of the bourgeois order which remained to plague the new workers' state after the October Revolution.

And of course there is a sense in which the victory of the bourgeoisie

in this last week has not been translated into social fact, in the same way that it took some years to translate the victory of the proletariat in October 1917 into social fact.

The defeat of the coup, however, has decided and indicated two things:

1. That the deformed workers' state is qualitatively incapacitated.
2. That a weak nascent bourgeois state has developed around the capitalist restorationist forces.

It is certainly true that the old (deformed workers' state) force is not a reliable support to the new (capitalist) order. It would be quite extraordinary if it were. The theoretical core of Riley's argument in his 22 August letter is that "The intention of the government does not determine the nature of the state in a situation where the government does not exercise effective control over the means of repression." But the victor never has good operational control over a defeated army. If you have an enemy, it is enough to neutralise it. And the armed force of the deformed workers' state has been neutralised.

Harlan's prognosis seems about right as a description of what is most likely to happen. And of course he is right to say that the Soviet Union has not been transformed into a bourgeois state. That is precisely the point. The phrase "the Soviet Union" can be used in two different ways. In one sense it is a state—a deformed workers' state which is now qualitatively dead (although available as a source of organ transplants). In that sense the Soviet Union simply does not exist any more, although remnants of it certainly do. In another and less precise sense the Soviet Union is a geographical area in which there may be a variety of different states or state-like bodies. In that sense one could say last week that the Soviet Union was under the control of a deformed workers' state, and this week that it is no longer under the control of a deformed workers' state, but that a bourgeois state is in the process of consolidating its control.

There is, of course a sense in which it might properly be said in the months soon after the October Revolution that the new regime was still a beheaded bourgeois state resting still on bourgeois property forms with a pro-working-class government. Both Lenin and Trotsky

described it in terms not dissimilar to those at various times for various special purposes. In this sense, but only in this sense, Harlan's parallel theoretical characterisation may also be said to be correct. Fundamentally, however, that characterisation is misleading in the context of the current discussion.

So what about the other deformed workers' states in Europe? I don't know. There is nothing theoretically inconsistent whatever about the proposition that Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia remain deformed workers' states, even if the policies of their governments or the frameworks of their economies have moved quantitatively further along the road to capitalism than Russia has. This whole process of the decomposition of the deformed workers' states is messy and uneven.

They might well still be (weakened) deformed workers' states. But if so they are unlikely to last for long, and I would expect that in some cases the transitional period may be rather uneventful. The defeat of the armed force of the deformed workers' state of the Soviet Union will have a deeply demoralising and disorganising effect on the armed forces of these states. I would expect that the various bourgeois governments will be able to quietly purge the officer corps over the next few months.

DOCUMENT 14

Riley (Toronto) for the IS, 26 August 1991

In his letter of 26 August Logan makes the following point regarding the proposed formulation of our public position elaborated in IS minutes No. 16:

“we are certainly not willing to accept the implication that those who sided with the coup necessarily share the blame for its demise. To that extent the formulation “the coup and its failure unleashed a reactionary avalanche” is highly objectionable to us.”

We have discussed this in the IS and agree that the formulation that “the collapse of the coup unleashed a reactionary avalanche” is sufficient for our purposes and should be used by all sections.

To date we have heard no other objections to the proposed

formulation. Our proposal is to produce an article for the next issue which takes a more detailed position on the events underway in the USSR. Obviously one outstanding question is that of our position on the coup. Another is the question of dating the end of the degenerated worker state in the USSR (as this is the one worker state which was not deformed from birth.)

DOCUMENT 15

Mason (Wellington), 27 August 1991

My understanding has always been that the IBT is willing to take an unpopular position in order to defend workers' property forms. Perhaps way down here at the bottom of the world it is easier to defend orthodoxy.

It is quite simple:

1. There were two opposing sides during the coup: the old-time Stalinists versus the forces openly (you could not get much more openly!) in favour of capitalist restoration.
2. One side wins, and wins extremely convincingly.
3. IMMEDIATELY, the forces in favour of capitalist restoration advance at a rate which is devastating.

Under the circumstances (ie. the events of the last few years), we could hardly have had a clearer situation. Gorbachev, who had been rapidly moving the USSR closer to capitalism but who has been unwilling to go "the whole way", gets toppled by the conservative bureaucrats supported by the CORE OF THE MILITARY. Gorbachev gets dumped into obscurity, and the line up is therefore Yeltsin (plus every single other element which was clearly identified with "capitalism now") versus the old-time, conservative bureaucracy.

All the arguments about what the bureaucrats were saying and whether they were essentially committed to defending proletarian property forms are beside the point. I have had all those arguments with the LRCI. With regard to Poland in 1981, the LRCI insists that it wasn't just Solidarity which was pro-capitalist: the Stalinist bureaucrats were ALSO begging for money from the IMF and had acted to HELP the Catholic Church. "That is not the point", I would say. "The Stalinist

bureaucracy is a contradictory phenomenon, they are fundamentally counterrevolutionary but they sit on top of collectivised property forms and thus, in their miserable attempts to defend their privileged position, they are at times forced also to defend collectivised property forms.” I do not remember the IBT ever basing its position on what the Stalinists use as their justification.

It was hardly surprising that the Stalinists in the USSR failed to mention socialism in their rhetoric. “Socialism” isn’t very popular in the USSR right now. These people only see the situation as one where they must defend their interests, and they concluded, rightly or wrongly, that their best bet was to pose as the restorers of “order”. To conclude that we did not defend the core of the armed force when it is in opposition to patently capitalist forces, in the one time in recent years when the Soviet Stalinists DID attempt an act of defence, is to conclude that there was not a workers’ state.

The minute it was clear the coup failed Logan—and indeed the entire NZ executive—had no doubt that the workers’ state no longer existed. Now, most of the IBT leadership agree with us that the gains of 1917 have been overturned, but are unwilling to state that this catastrophic defeat was, in an immediate and important sense, caused by the WRONG SIDE WINNING.

AT THE VERY LEAST, THE SUCCESS OF THE COUP WOULD HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY SLOWED THE PROCESS OF DESTRUCTION OF THE WORKERS’ STATE.

To argue that the armed force made a power bid against decisively pro-capitalist forces only to bring about capitalism (at the same pace?) under a military rule can only lead to the conclusion that a workers’ state in the USSR had been defeated prior to the coup.

Kalisch—and possibly Monsees—does indeed take this position (which is, at least, a consistent position). However, us Leninists have always said that a state—in the Marxist sense is—“armed force in defence of collectivised property forms”. Haven’t we been saying that our understanding of Marxism led us to believe that a government which had plenty of appetites towards capitalism must create a situation of conflict in the USSR?

THE COUP WAS A CONFIRMATION OF OUR MARXIST VIEW OF THE STATE. THE OLD ARMED FORCE IN THE MOST POWERFUL workers' state COULD NOT SIMPLY TRANSFORM ITSELF INTO A BOURGEOIS STATE. IT HAD TO REACT.

And its defeat has led to its dissolution.

DOCUMENT 16

Hayes (Wellington), 27 August 1991

As comrades have said this is clearly the most important question the IBT has had to deal with so far; I guess it's the second most important event of the twentieth century.

I remember that Keith from the LRCI said to us earlier this year that he was convinced that the ICL would take no side in any hardline crackdown in the USSR if and when it came. He said the IBT would be left alone upholding traditional Spartacism. It appears from what Riker reports that the SL are indeed taking no side in last week's coup. They have shown over the last decade that they can no longer uphold the Trotskyist programme. The question is: can we?

The comrades who argue that we had no side in the coup have written of the complex factors that make up this situation, and which, they argue, mean that we cannot bloc with the Stalinists. So what is the situation, what are these factors that they point to?

As the forces of capitalist restoration have gained momentum, a petty-bourgeois Stalinist bureaucracy has been splintering and fragmenting into different factions: one faction has opted clearly for capitalist restoration; another has been willing to compromise somewhat on capitalist reform in order to give the stagnant economy a kick, but has been unwilling to let go of the system of bureaucratic power which is tied to the central plan; another has wavered between these two poles.

There was a coup: the hardliners struck against the vacillating Gorbachevite government and the conflict seemed to shake down to a fight between two sides, the hardliners and the open restorationists. Judging by their statements—for what they're worth—the hardliners seemed to be primarily motivated by the desire to retain their bureaucratic

power and to have only a limited and partial commitment to opposing capitalist restoration, they expressed an appetite to capitulate to imperialism, they indulged in national-chauvinist rhetoric, they had no inclination to mobilise the working class politically against the restorationist forces, they wished to restore “law and order” and repression.

So ... where are the surprises, comrades? This is substantially the way in which our tradition has always projected the conduct of Stalinism in a situation in which we would be obliged to bloc with it militarily against the threat of capitalist restoration. It’s pretty much a textbook case, and the textbook is *The Revolution Betrayed*.

Comrades, it’s true that the situation is at one level complex and difficult. If we want to piece through it all, the events of the last week are a goldmine of empirical complexity—as political crises in all their details usually are. But at the same time there are some clear class lines running through this saga and the whole thing is not really that very complicated.

I believe a correct line on this question consists of the following propositions:

1. Prior to the coup there was in the USSR a procapitalist government and a deformed workers’ state;
2. Last week the conservative core of the Soviet deformed workers’ state struck against this procapitalist government. We and the working class had a side, the side of the hardliners;
3. When our side collapsed the victory of the side of capitalist restoration was clear and qualitative. When the coup collapsed there was no longer a deformed workers’ state; there was now a weak, emergent bourgeois state.

Much of the discussion of course turns around the question of the state: when can a state be said to be no more? when can a state be said to be established. It strikes me that the Marxist theory of the state as well as being correct is also pretty simple: the question is whether or not there is a cohesive group of people with guns committed to defending a particular property system. Usually there is a state; sometimes, in times of crisis, there are two semi-states with one preponderant—dual

power; sometimes there is no state at all for a while. But the method of working out whether or not a state exists is simple: is there a class-based group of people with the coercive power and the cohesion to call the shots?

Monsees and Kalisch's positions

I do not understand Monsees and Kalisch's position that because there had been a procapitalist government before the coup in the USSR therefore there was not a deformed workers' state. I have read through their arguments but this position appears to be simply a departure from the Marxist conception of the state; that conception does not equate a "state" with a "government", which is a subsidiary part of a state.

Certainly the procapitalist government *wanted* to get rid of the deformed workers' state and was going to try, sooner or later. But it still had to do it. Gorbachev's continuing vacillation, the jostling between bureaucratic factions, in fact *testified* to the continuing existence of a deformed workers' state in the USSR—otherwise there would not have been two poles for Gorbachev to vacillate between. The coexistence of a procapitalist government and a deformed workers' state has been the central social fact which has shaped the last period in the USSR. Procapitalist forces have faced the problem of the continuing existence of an armed force, still essentially intact, which had been historically committed to the defence of collectivised property.

The events around the coup were the resolution of that struggle between a procapitalist government and a deformed workers' state and conclusively demonstrated that the deformed workers' state still existed. The coup saw the struggle peak and take on a military form, and the lines were drawn.

Kalisch's argument that in this struggle there were only different procapitalist forces and that therefore we took no side is wrong but sort of internally consistent. Monsees on the other hand correctly argues against Kalisch's focus on the statements of the Committee, re the START treaty etc, as apparently determining the procapitalist character of the coup, and Monsees seems to leave open the possibility of defending the coup. But in this he is clearly not consistent. How

could defence of the coup be a possibility if before the coup the core of the deformed workers' state had ceased to exist? What then were we backing in the coup? We could in fact only take a side because an armed force committed in some way to the old regime still existed, an armed force capable of striking back at capitalist restoration.

On the other hand, those comrades who argue that we took no side in the coup but argue that there *was* still a deformed workers' state in the USSR prior to the coup are also inconsistent. For they argue that the conservative core of the deformed workers' state was a procapitalist force so comparable to the procapitalist governments of Gorbachev and Yeltsin that we cannot side with this core of the deformed workers' state. This proposition that the different sections of the core of the deformed workers' state would go over en masse to a completely different social system is a fundamental violation of the Marxist theory of the state. And this proposition was shown clearly to be empirically false by the fact that the *defeat* of the core *qualitatively accelerated* the process of establishment of a capitalist state.

Of course we have always described Stalinism as petty-bourgeois, as having no fundamental social roots of its own; we predicted that with the threat of capitalist restoration it would split and fall apart and be drawn to the two primary class poles. But the idea that no section of this petty-bourgeois caste, not even the most conservative core of the state, is capable of defending the central plan is simply to junk the Marxist understanding of the way the world works.

Riley's 22 August letter

In his letter of 22 August Riley leans toward the proposition that the conservative wing of the bureaucracy, concentrated in the military, was effectively a force for procapitalist reform and thus we should not take a side between it and the Gorbachevites and Yeltsinites. If the struggle can be said to be one about capitalism "sooner" vs "later", then the promise of "later" did not seem to be great enough to warrant us taking a side. Riley also argued that when the coup failed there was still a deformed workers' state, and that the widespread purging of the military would most likely be the process which would mark the destruction of the deformed workers' state.

It struck me that therefore Riley didn't see any qualitative change from the situation before the coup was mounted to the situation after the coup collapsed: after the coup collapsed we still had a continuing struggle between different procapitalist forces with the continuing existence of a weak deformed workers' state.

But this misses what happened in the struggle around the coup. When the coup was mounted a short, decisive (though not very bloody) civil war took place between two military camps. After this civil war the USSR, as one comrade has said, is now a very different place.

Riley's empirical characterisation of the conservative wing of the bureaucracy probably goes too far in saying that they "put a higher priority on maintaining the existing power structure but ... recognize[d] that capitalism must be instituted." But even *if* their subjective commitment to the introduction of capitalism *was* this decisive, that is still not the point. No matter what else the conservatives may have subjectively "wanted", their clear desire to maintain the basis of their present positions of privilege by keeping the power within the bureaucratic apparatus meant *necessarily* an opposition to the abolition of the central plan. Of course this defence looked likely to be only half-hearted, limited and temporary, but when has Stalinist defence of collectivised property been anything else?

The central question here is *not* that of all the different elements of the subjective intent of the hardliners. *All* comrades in this debate have so far agreed that the coup was a bid towards retaining the power of the bureaucratic apparatus; the coup was aimed at those procapitalist forces who were aiming to remove that power and establish a different social system in which power is acquired and held in a different way.

Far from us being *unable* to bloc with Stalinists if they seek "only" to maintain bureaucratic power, this is exactly what the Trotskyist conception of a military bloc with Stalinists in defence of the workers' states has always been based upon. Such a bloc *always* presupposes this; it *always* presupposes that the Stalinists don't want socialism, that they are counterrevolutionary and that they only want to maintain their privileges.

Some comrades are clearly counterposing the events of the last

week to the “conventional” case of a bloc with Stalinists, for example, Poland in 1981. But if anything we may decide that this case is in many ways quantitatively more clear than Poland in the drawing of the class lines.

It’s notable that after the Jaruzelski crackdown the centrists argued against us that “Look, the Polish Stalinists are bringing in promarket reforms just like Walesa wanted to do. This shows that your idea of a bloc with the Stalinists in defence of collectivised property was nonsense.” Of course they were pretty much right about the Stalinists; it just wasn’t the point.

Stalinist rule is unstable. As a parasitic caste its social position is qualitatively more unstable than that of the international bourgeoisie, whose position is also ultimately unstable. The bureaucracy can’t plan; there’s no workers’ democracy which *could* plan; there’s no market which could *kind of* plan. Over time, faced with economic stagnation and chaos the bureaucracy toys with using the capitalist market; but its bind is that it must also resist capitalism if it wants to maintain the present basis of its privileges.

In August 1991 it’s true that all wings of the Soviet bureaucracy had some degree of commitment to market reforms. But Yeltsin and his base in the bureaucracy and outside it was a group committed to seeking social power *not* through holding bureaucratic office but through the possession of private property in a capitalist economy. In order to retain bureaucratic power, the conservative wing of the bureaucracy—whatever the extent of its different subjective impulses—had to oppose the march of capitalist restoration. Bureaucratic power in a deformed workers’ state and the power of a bourgeois class are two very different, ultimately mutually exclusive kinds of social power. The coup set up those two kinds of power, those two different kinds of social systems, in a struggle against each other. That’s why we had to take a side.

The statements of the hardliners on the “motherland” and on START treaties are just not relevant. As long as we accept—as we all appear to do—that this was a struggle for the maintenance of bureaucratic Stalinist power against capitalist power, a struggle between the

still intact core of a deformed workers' state and forces openly and clearly for capitalist restoration, then we had a side.

If we say we have no side in a struggle between bureaucratic Stalinist power and capitalist power then we are revising Trotskyism, comrades. The only way we could take no side in last week's events would be if we decided that *before* the coup there was already no deformed workers' state. So far only Kalisch and Monsees have argued that, and I think they're clearly wrong.

Riley said he generally agreed with the proposition that the struggle to maintain bureaucratic power cannot be separated from the defence of the plan, but he raises the question of Gorbachev's vacillation on this question. But the fact that the coup was historically significant for the working class is demonstrated by the fact that Gorbachev and his vacillation were quickly eclipsed by events.

The coup cleared the decks; it drew clear battlelines between the very forces Gorbachev had balanced between, the two poles in the bureaucracy, which were those who wanted capitalism pure and simple and those who were prepared to compromise with some process of reform but who were committed to defending the traditional system of bureaucratic rule. The coup polarised things and there was no place in the middle. Gorbachev quickly became irrelevant to the "anti-Gorbachev coup", and not just because he was under guard. After only a few hours, everyone knew it was now a struggle between the forces around Yeltsin and the hardliners.

As well as the lines being clearly drawn in this struggle the victory of the other side was also clear and qualitative. I disagree with Monsees who says that there was no real fight and that the result was a kind of compromise. If it was a compromise then the Committee compromised a hell of a lot and Yeltsin didn't have to give much away. In fact, after a long period of creeping capitalist reform, the coup was the last shot for anyone who was up to defending the old system.

Logan is right when he says that it was not a question of determining a point at which it was probable that the deformed workers' state would soon be destroyed. The collapse of the coup was itself the *proof* that the incapacity and qualitative non-existence of the old state was already

upon us; it had ceased to be. The coup was its last attempt at acting like a state and it failed in it.

Again the question of the existence or non-existence of a state is pretty simple: is there a cohesive, class-based armed force capable of calling the shots? The coup simply collapsed: the hardliners were clearly incapable of acting as a cohesive armed force; soldiers didn't obey orders; the generals split, etc. It soon proved clear that the *only* cohesive armed force defending a particular form of property in the USSR during and at the end of that short civil war was the armed force grouped around *Yeltsin*. That force now clearly calls the shots and Yeltsin rules. There is no place for Gorbachev and his vacillation anymore because the framework for his vacillation no longer exists: one class pole has clearly won. Yeltsin has little use for him and has publicly humiliated him.

To look for an extended process of purging of the military as Riley does in his 22 August letter simply misses what happened when the coup collapsed. The real substance of the process that Riley looks for had in fact already occurred when the coup fell apart. Of course they were all still there in their uniforms with their formal ties with one another. But the military was broken, it had had its chance, it blew it. The key leaders were under arrest or shortly to be and Yeltsin had clearly got those generals that split already solid around him. When that happened it was clear there was no military force capable of standing up to Yeltsin. The purging will go on for a while but when the coup collapsed Yeltsin henceforth already had the power to do it. He banned the CP like *that!*

IS statement on the end of the workers' state

I raise Riley's 22 August remarks on the purging of the military being necessary for the end of the deformed workers' state because I believe they are consistent with a line that we had no side in the struggle around the coup. Riley said the coup was a struggle between procapitalist forces and after the coup collapsed a procapitalist government still faced the problem it faced before the coup: the continued existence of a deformed workers' state. I think it violates *The State and Revolution* but apart from that it has a consistency about it.

But the IS's last statement that the deformed workers' state has now been destroyed *makes absolutely no sense at all* so long as the IS argues we had no side in the coup. The IS argues that two or three days after the coup folded the destruction of the deformed workers' state was now behind us; but if so, then the struggle around the coup must have been one which *qualitatively accelerated* the process of counterrevolution. But if this struggle qualitatively accelerated the process of counterrevolution then it can only have been because the side defeated was opposing capitalist restoration in some historically significant way and therefore it must have been a side to which we would have given military support.

The rapid smashing of many of the elements of the old deformed workers' state was only possible because of the outcome of the coup. The collapse of the coup, which demonstrated that the Yeltsinites had military and social cohesion and that the hardliners had no military and social cohesion, meant that clearly there was no longer an armed force capable of defending the old order. The decisive fact—which the IS correctly recognises—that several days after the collapse of the coup there is no longer a workers' state in the USSR offers the strongest possible evidence for the position that the PRG comrades are arguing. The non-existence of the deformed workers' state a week after the coup demonstrates that the coup was a struggle of historical significance and a struggle in which we had a side.

DOCUMENT 17

Monsees/Kalisch (Berlin), 27 August 1991

Seeing the procedure of the discussion between the IS and IEC-comrades we see a tendency to try to duck the issue of what is happening in the USSR, on the putsch and the characterization of the USSR right now. Whatever the majority-line will be, it is impossible to talk about a “reactionary avalanche” having no position on the putsch. In our public propaganda we have to take a side, otherwise we are paralyzed. Our common understanding is—and that is a motion—that there has to be a vote on the two following items:

1. character of the USSR right now

2. had the coup to be defended or not?

Monsees position to 1. is:

No workers' state anymore.

Not a bourgeois state, yet.

Amendment:

No workers' state anymore since the defeat of the coup and the establishing of a pro-capitalist government under Gorbachev—the lackey of Yeltsin.

Whether the victory over the coup was the decisive test of the loyalty of the armed body of men to be committed to bourgeois property forms is not clear to me—it might be. For sure is that the restorationists are now in a much better position than before. But if there is a bourgeois state apparatus already in function is not sure—as the *Herald Tribune* wrote, Yeltsin has to prove that he is now able to smash workers strikes.

So we have no workers' state anymore, but a pro-capitalist government which is on the way to install a bourgeois state apparatus—it is an embryonic bourgeois state—it still has to get born and it still can get aborted.

Kalisch's position to 1. is:

Yeltsin's counter coup is only the further deepening of the counterrevolutionary move building and fortifying a Russian bourgeois state. The USSR as a deformed workers' state does not exist anymore.

Amendment:

This process began with the forming of a pro-capitalist Gorbachev government in Mid-July, the end of the workers' state (change from quantity to quality).

Monsees position to 2. is:

We had to block with the hardliners against the pro-cap forces. It was the attempt of the last of the stalinist bureaucracy to defend its privileges against the pro-capitalist wing of the bureaucracy.

(For workers' action to smash the pro-capitalist forces—No illusion in the Yanayev-gang in their ability to defend the deformed workers' state—For a workers' government based on organs of the working class.)

Amendment:

These bureaucrats had to offer no real alternative to the development in the USSR, but wanted to fix the status quo—a reactionary utopia in a country under attack from capitalist restorationist forces.

Of course no political support for them—no support for the “Emergency decrees”—only support for these acts which were taken against the pro-cap forces around Yeltsin.

Kalisch’s position to 2. is:

No support for the “Emergency committee: For class independent workers’ action against Yanayev and Yeltsin forces (Down with German and New Zealand Pabloism).

DOCUMENT 18

Cullen (New York), 27 August 1991

Comrades are, of course, free to say whatever they like in documents and to make whatever motions they choose. There are, however, intelligent documents and motions and stupid ones. We are a young and fragile tendency, and it seems to me that we should therefore spare no effort to maintain a comradely and discursive tone in our internal discussions. I have no idea what Kalisch/Monsees have in mind when they refer to “German Pabloism,” but I think the New Zealand comrades have presented sharp but reasoned arguments for their position on the attempted USSR coup. In my view, the hurling of such incendiary epithets as “New Zealand Pabloism” violates the comradely tone that all leading comrades must strive to preserve and is therefore crass, arrogant and politically stupid. I take deep personal and political offense at this motion.

DOCUMENT 19

Hannah (Wellington), 29 August 1991

I don’t write. This exception is demanded by my real sense of dismay at the international response to the Russian coup. This event is the most crucial the IBT has faced and I want to add my voice to the debate.

Prior to the coup I saw that there were three alternatives for the USSR—restoration of capitalism, political revolution, or a coup defending the status quo—the degenerated workers' state.

Obviously we wanted a political revolution but with no revolutionary leadership that seemed a dream. With the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from East Germany there had been spasmodic mutterings of the military taking control to prevent capitalist restoration. In light of those mutterings I suppose I have been prepared for the possibility of a coup. Some commentators have said that it should have been foreseen that the signing of the Union Treaty would be the deadline for a coup.

Gorbachev was in the middle between the hardliners and Yeltsin. He wavered between the two poles, indecisive, responding to pressure. With the onset of the coup there was no middle ground for him, he was irrelevant. The fight was between Yeltsin's forces and the hardliners. Yeltsin understood this. With the defeat of the coup Yeltsin is calling the shots. He has won, not Gorbachev. Gorbachev is his puppet for the dismantling of the remnants of the degenerated workers' state and then he will be banished to oblivion. Today it is Yeltsin who is strutting about proclaiming what his forces will and will not accept and threatening other states if they should dispute borders etc.

The coup leadership was conservative, anti-working class, pro-reforms and making concessionary statements to the West but they were against the disintegration of the USSR and for the defence of a planned economy and proletarian property forms. Stalinists have never defended the working class from a revolutionary perspective—they have always sold out except where their interests are at stake. And their interests were at stake and they sought to defend their interests.

It was clear who they were 'shooting at'—Yeltsin and his cohorts! Yeltsin understood this very clearly and immediately went on the offensive to defend his interests. His calling a general strike against the coup was his attempt to utilise a demoralised and broken proletariat to defend him against the hardliners. The workers did not respond as a class, only some sectors came out in support of his programme, because they had no faith in Yeltsin's programme to deliver them from the chaos. The hardliners didn't call on the workers because

they did not want an activated proletariat who might, after defeating Yeltsin, proceed to make demands on them. Also, after decades of gross betrayals at the hands of the hardliners and their predecessors, the proletariat had little faith in what they understood to be 'socialism'.

Prior to the coup we defended the USSR as a degenerated workers' state with a pro-capitalist government. After the coup it was obvious that the degenerated workers' state no longer existed. The IS has now said as much. So what happened?

If both sides in the coup were militarily unsupportable, if they were roughly the same and the outcome was of no consequence to the proletariat how come the supposedly inter-bureaucratic, squabble between different pro-capitalist factions lead to the shattering of the degenerated workers' state? It doesn't follow. It can only mean that Kalisch's position that the USSR was a capitalist state prior to the coup was the position of the IBT! Yet no such position was adopted by the IBT. If the USSR was no longer a degenerated workers' state prior to the coup when did the transformation occur? How come we as a tendency missed the historic event?

The failure of the coup, comrades, was the qualitative point. The defeat of the hardliners showed that there was no armed force capable of defeating Yeltsin. Yeltsin now had the power to purge the armed forces.

The coup's defeat shattered the core of the degenerated workers' state demonstrating the Trotskyist position that the degenerated workers' state could not go over en masse to a new social system.

Subsequent to the coup Yeltsin and Gorbachev, realising that they cannot just change the uniform of the armed forces etc, have been dismantling the Communist Party and purging the KGB and Army laying the basis for a pro-capitalist leadership of the armed forces. Not only is there a pro-capitalist government but now there is a nascent bourgeois state.

All this says that we did have a side in the coup. Militarily we would have blocked with the hardliners knowing that they were politically inadequate to halt the process of the restoration of capitalism in the long run (or short run). This has been their destiny since Stalin's rise to

power. It is the basis of *Revolution Betrayed*, it is the basis of our politics. The problem Trotskyists have always had is that our prediction of the role of Stalinism to lead to capitalist restoration has taken so long to be demonstrated. Now our programme is vindicated and yet we are wobbling.

“Two opposite tendencies are growing up out of the depth of the Soviet regime. To the extent that, in contrast to a decaying capitalism, it develops the productive forces, it is preparing the economic basis of socialism. To the extent that, for the benefit of an upper stratum, it carries to more and more extreme expression bourgeois norms of distribution, it is preparing a capitalist restoration. This contrast between forms of property and norms of distribution cannot grow indefinitely.” (Trotsky, *L. Revolution Betrayed*, Merit Publishers, 1965, p244.

“Will the bureaucrat devour the workers’ state, or will the working class clean up the bureaucrat? Thus stands the question upon whose decision hangs the fate of the Soviet Union.” (ibid, p 285.

“... it has happened more than once that a bureaucratic dictatorship, seeking salvation in ‘liberal’ reforms, has only weakened itself.” (ibid, p 287)

Yes we defended the coup militarily and politically denounced the politics of the coup leadership saying that it is only a matter of time before they too capitulated to restorationist pressure and we would have called on the proletariat in Russia and Germany to seize the day on our programme.

In the fight between the hardliners and Yeltsin the lines were drawn and we had a side.

DOCUMENT 20

Logan (Wellington), 29 August 1991

Monsees and Kalisch call on us to take a position on the present character of the Soviet Union and on whether or not the coup had to be defended.

It would be most unfortunate if we were not able to come to

decisions on these two questions, and comrades all around the world are expending considerable energy in that endeavour. We are certainly doing our best, and I see every evidence that German and North American comrades are too. But we can only do what we can do.

And we must get things in proportion. The events we are trying to understand are of epochal proportions. In this context the opportunities we are worried about losing are relatively trifling.

These events will have an immense impact. They will transform the lives of hundreds of millions of people, usher in a round of military, racial and social turmoil, lead to a bloody imperialist scramble for influence, and ... well, we could go on. They will also transform the shape of the left in which we work, and the opportunities which are relevant to us.

I believe it was possible to be correct on these events with great speed. I am profoundly disappointed we were not, as an organisation, capable of that speed. But I would far rather that we took a little time and got it right, than that we hurried and got it wrong.

The IS is correct to look for an immediate minimal position which we might be able to agree on.

And on the first of Kalisch and Monsees's questions ("the character of the USSR right now") I don't think we'll have much difficulty. There is no USSR right now. It is dead. Even Harlan, who doesn't want to say it is dead, admits it is beheaded, and, as I understand it, death usually follows decapitation with some speed.

We disagree on (1.) the manner and timing of its death, (2.) the line to take on the coup, and (3.) the nature of the governmental, state and armed structures in the territory previously governed by the USSR.

1. The manner and timing of the death of the USSR

There are three views: (a) that the USSR died as a deformed workers' state in some gradual process more or less definitively completed some time ago, (b) that it died or will die through some process which cannot be said to be definitive until some point a period of time after the coup, and (c) that although there were processes leading towards its death before the coup, and although its death was not absolute at the time the coup was defeated, that was the qualitative point at which it died.

I understand Kalisch to argue that Yeltsin's countercoup was only the further deepening of counterrevolutionary developments which had been going on in the Soviet Union for some time. With that I agree. But I'm not sure that Kalisch sees this as the point of quantity turning into quality. The qualitative point is not when those in power make certain decisions. It is when there is a change in the people who have power.

There had for some time been a bourgeois government and a weakening deformed workers' state. Is it Kalisch's view that this deformed workers' state had actually weakened to nothing well before the coup? If the workers' state had already been reduced to nothing at that time, then what were the obstacles back at that time to the measures of the kind being taken now?

And if there has not been a deformed workers' state for some time, then does Kalisch argue that the coup and the counter-coup were both events which took place wholly within the bourgeois order, or perhaps that they both took place wholly within some sort of transitional order?

It would seem curious to propose that some time ago a series of rather unspectacular events, governmental decisions, policy statements and so on signalled a major change in the state order, while these large events of late August meant little and were entirely within a single order. These August events have involved military movements, mass demonstrations, changes of command, tanks in the streets, collapses of traditional chains of command, a complex set of changes of governmental personnel, suicides of generals and so on. And their immediate aftermath has been a series of decisions which, you must admit, have looked very much like the decisions one might have expected on the day after a counter-revolution.

You seem to be arguing, Kalisch, that there was a counter-revolution in mid-July which looked very, very much like a quantitative continuance of pro-bourgeois governmental policies within the framework of a single state. And you seem to fail to notice a counter-revolution which really looked like a counter-revolution, and did the things a counter-revolution is supposed to do.

On the other hand some of the American comrades seem to make a symmetrical error. They seem to hold that the workers' state came to an end (or will come to an end) as a consequence of the Yeltsin counter-coup, but that the end should be dated not at the time of the counter-coup but at a future time when the new state authorities have made various decisions about the military or even, possibly, about the economy. But the qualitative point is when one grouping becomes no longer in a position to make the decisions, and another grouping takes its place. The qualitative point is not that at which a given group makes a prescribed set of decisions.

The pre-August Gorbachev government was unable to escape, despite every intention, from the network of the deformed workers' state, tied by its thousands of threads to workers property forms. To escape from that network required it to be torn apart. It was torn apart, and in that process the Yeltsin camp took the right to make a new network. Their taking that right is of fundamental importance. And they have taken that right on the basis of their declared and obviously energetic intention to tie that new network by thousands of threads to the bourgeois order.

And they have the capacity to carry out their intention, although there will be difficulties and challenges to their authority. There has long been a considerable drive in the Soviet Union towards a capitalist order, and that drive has been frustrated by the dominance of the deformed workers' state, and the absence of a bourgeois state. Those frustrations are removed.

2. The line to take on the coup

I agree with Monsees, I think, regarding the programmatic points on the coup.

And it is very difficult to understand why Kalisch can't come to this position, too. I understand Kalisch to believe that the counter-coup was a move to build and fortify a Russian bourgeois state. Surely that was clear from the first. Any likely move against the coup would be to build and fortify the Russian bourgeois state. We are opposed to building and fortifying the Russian bourgeois state. So we defend the coup.

It is not a matter of political support. We are often in a position to militarily bloc with people for whom we give no political support whatever, no matter how critical. We will militarily bloc with a popular front against fascists or the army. We bloc with Kerensky against Kornilov—from Kalisch’s point of view the analogy is almost precise. We bloc with Jaruzelski against Solidarnosc. In none of these cases do we have any political confidence in those we bloc with. In every case we seek to overthrow them. We bloc with them not because of any quality they have—except that they are shooting people who are more immediately dangerous to us and to the working class than they are themselves.

I take Kalisch to be making a serious political point regarding Pabloism. He regards a posture of military defence of the coup as in some way equivalent to the classical Pabloite tactic of critical support to a political formation under the illusion that the dominance of that force will allow the development of favourable objective processes. I accept Kalisch’s epithet of “Pabloism” as well-intended. But it is politically inappropriate.

Indeed if there is an element of Pabloite methodology in any side of this discussion it is in a necessary implication of something Kalisch said. Kalisch holds that a prerequisite for a military bloc is some level of political support. We have stood for a military bloc with the Stalinists against imperialism as our normal position for many years. Presumably, in Kalisch’s case this has been because he believed we could give the Stalinists some level of political support. That would be Pabloism.

The Emergency Committee were not a nice group. Some phrases that come to mind are: disgusting cowards, anti-proletarian scum, thieving bureaucrats. So what’s new. We’re not blocking with them for their morals or their programme—except insofar as their programme is to point their guns at the core of bourgeois restorationism in the Soviet Union, and that’s where our guns should be pointed too.

It seems indisputable that Yeltsin’s counter-coup “unleashed a reactionary avalanche”. The question of whether we take a defensive posture toward the coup really reduces to the question of whether we should have done anything to postpone the reactionary avalanche.

Comrades!!! We're not dealing with an avalanche set off by a bolt of lightning. We're dealing with an avalanche set off by a gang of hoons throwing stones. Those who refuse to stop the hoons share responsibility for the avalanche.

3. The nature of the structures in the former USSR

We are agreed I think that essentially the deformed workers' state is dead.

It seems unlikely, but it might be that there are some fragments of the old deformed workers' state which will still put up a fight, but they will at best be fragments. As a whole the Soviet Union is finished as a deformed workers' state. To use the words of State and Revolution the old state is smashed, broken up.

So nobody should argue the old state has become a bourgeois state as a whole.

One might have the view that while the workers' state has been destroyed there is no bourgeois state yet in place.

There is, however, at least one social organ—the Yeltsin camp—which developed in and alongside the old state, but essentially against it. This social organ has not only survived the demise of the old state, but has qualitatively increased its strength with the demise of the old state. In fact it is acting now very much like a bourgeois state.

Monsees says it is not yet clear to him whether “the armed body of men” are “committed to bourgeois property forms”. The problem is that there is no longer a single “armed body of men”. It is essentially smashed, broken up. So if you look at the armed body of men as a single whole, of course it will remain unclear what they are committed to. You've got to look at the different bits. One fragment of it is clearly committed to bourgeois property forms. And that fragment has become the armed force which enforces the rule of the bourgeois order as it emerges. The other fragments don't count. They are demoralised, disorganised, broken, committed to nothing.

Nobody would be silly enough to suggest that we had a fully developed bourgeois state in the Yeltsin camp. But then a newly emergent state is never fully developed. The defeat of the coup occurred in part because the forces supporting the Yeltsin bourgeois

government have some power, and that they are an essential element which constitutes the Yeltsin camp as an emergent state. That is why the Yeltsin camp clearly has the authority to make a variety of state-like decisions. And it is clear that these decisions go consistently and qualitatively in the direction of undermining the system of workers property and central planning in the territory of the USSR, and in protecting and extending bourgeois property relations.

A bourgeois state in the context of a decomposed deformed workers' state is a social organisation which:

- i. makes governmental decisions which as a pattern decisively undermine workers property forms and central planning, and decisively protect and extend bourgeois property relations, and
- ii. which has at its disposal armed force capable of enforcing those decisions and willing to enforce them

The Yeltsin camp is such a social organisation. (There may well be others in the various republics.)

In a year's time, almost irrespective of the various chaotic intervening events which are probable, we will be in no doubt at all that the Yeltsin camp is (or perhaps by then, was) a bourgeois state, and that the defeat of the coup was its moment of initial consolidation.

This is not a foetus. I don't think that it's even a premature birth. As things go it is unfortunately a disgustingly healthy baby. But of course it is only a baby, and it is weak.

INFANTICIDE!

DOCUMENT 21

Harlan (Hamburg) & Smith (Bay Area), 29 August 1991

The Coup that Never Was

The ability of Stalinist bureaucrats to defend the degenerated workers' state depends on its collective understanding of the reality and the relationship of forces; the will to act resolutely; and the capacity to crush capitalist counterrevolutionary forces. The initial pronouncements of the gang that couldn't even shoot, let alone shoot straight, showed that they were out of touch with reality. They early on showed no firm determination to halt the counterrevolution; and their

isolated, divided clique lacked the political and military means to win.

The counterrevolution has most definitely begun. It has NOT yet been consummated. The anti-communist purges of the state apparatus, economy, and repressive forces have not been completed.

We disagree with the assertion that Logan makes in his letter of August 26:

“However, our position remains, of course, that defence of the coup was a necessary aspect of defence of the (deformed) workers’ state.”

We will try to address several of the arguments raised by the New Zealand comrades in defense of this thesis.

First of all we disagree with the assertion that:

“It is entirely irrelevant that the coup leaders said bad things in their statements or that they said nothing supportable.”

This is an overstatement because political declarations of intent ARE important. The “Emergency Committee’s” edicts are in this case a reflection of this fraction of the bureaucracy’s extremely limited understanding of what needs to be done to crush the counterrevolution and its pitifully deficient resolution to carry out those measures. The clique that attempted the coup codified its LACK of resolve in their half-hearted and contradictory statements right from the beginning.

Core of the state?

The New Zealand comrades argue that “the core” of the deformed workers’ state was involved in the coup. No so! It was a small isolated fragment of the bureaucracy that clumsily tried to impose their will on Soviet society (Largely by wasting good paper on their impotent diktats).

Comrade Mason in his letter of August 27 stated:

“Under the circumstances (ie. the events of the last few years), we could hardly have had a clearer situation. Gorbachev, who had been rapidly moving the USSR closer to capitalism but who has been unwilling to go “the whole way”, gets toppled by the conservative bureaucrats supported by the CORE OF THE MILITARY.”

By capitalizing “core of the military” Mason appears to be trying to

reinforce the argument that the main forces of the bureaucracy were counterposed to the counterrevolutionary forces. As we have pointed out above this was not the case.

USSR 1991 was not Poland 1981

The comrades of New Zealand have argued that there is a clear analogy between the Jaruzelski suppression of Polish Solidarnosc and the aborted coup in the USSR. In the first few hours of the events in 1981 it was self-evident that the counter-revolutionaries were being **DECISIVELY** suppressed.

There is another major difference between these two situations that the comrades are ignoring. Implicit in their argument is that the coup in the USSR was **DEFEATED** because the capitalist counterrevolutionary forces in the USSR were comparatively much stronger than in Poland 1981. The fact is that the recent attempted coup in the USSR was not defeated by overwhelming and militarily superior forces behind Yeltsin. The coup disintegrated and collapsed from within. Why? The total absence of a cohesive political program in defense of collectivized property forms both reflected and contributed to the “Emergency Committee’s” conspicuous lack of will to suppress the counter-revolution despite the minimal opposition that developed, especially during the first two days of the coup. They dithered around, failed to sequester the counterrevolutionary leadership, or even occupy the Russian Parliament. This clear irresolution emboldened the pro-capitalist forces, probably contributed to the passivity or defection of the majority of the military, and the abstention of the Communist Party apparatus.

Ready, aim ... well?

Comrade Logan in his letter of August 26 says:

“When we consider making a military bloc, it depends on who our potential bloc partners are pointing their guns at. In this case they were pointing their guns at the pro-capitalist governments. And that is what we should have joined them in.”

Then again in his letter of August 29 letter he says:

“We bloc with them not because of any quality they have—except that they are **SHOOTING PEOPLE** [our emphasis] who are more

immediately dangerous to us and to the working class than they are themselves.”

In reality most of the guns remained in holstered. That was the problem. They only momentarily pointed their guns but never used them. Do we want to be in a military bloc with such “allies”? These guys wouldn’t bust a grape in a race riot.

Armed forces and the deformed workers’ states

Comrade Logan in his August 26 letter argues:

“If there is some element of armed force in Russia which could act at some future time decisively against capitalist restoration, then there would still be deformed workers’ state in existence. If there is now no longer any element capable of acting decisively against capitalist restoration then there is no deformed workers’ state left.”

The first line argues that a workers’ state exists if, and only if, there is some element of the arms forces which could POTENTIALLY act against capitalist restoration. It is impossible at this point in time to determine whether such objective and subjective forces exist in the USSR. We simply don’t know. It is not precluded that such forces may have existed during the period of the attempted coup but remained passive for the reasons we argued above.

Cleared the deck?

Comrade Monsees asserted that the coup “cleared the deck” and “drew clear battle lines” between the forces of capitalist restoration and those against. This is a gross overstatement.

The fact is that the coup mobilized only a fraction of those forces in the bureaucracy that had been against clear cut capitalist restoration.

The coup didn’t “clear the deck”. The coup did not clearly delineate the underlying issues. Where the “Emergency Committee” was going was as clear as mud. For instance many of those workers that did oppose the coup may have lined up behind Yeltsin largely on the basis of their support for democratic rights (Glasnost), not their support for capitalism.

Should we support the coup?

In retrospect we should say: that IF the coup had lead to a sharp

confrontation with the counterrevolutionary forces and in such a manner that we could see that collective property forms were being defended against its most immediate enemies we would THEN have militarily supported the coup.

Not a single member of this organization “fears” taking a political position that is “unpopular”.

If the coup had resolutely crushed the counterrevolutionary forces we would have certainly supported the measures that led to the smashing of the capitalist restorationists. We think it is wise that we do not rush to judgement and adopted a wait and see position for the two days during which the issue was unresolved.

Some of our comrades may not realize how difficult it is to crawl from under the refuse of an incorrect position, hastily arrived at. We are small with no forces in the field within the USSR. Our grasp of the reality there is necessarily dependent on a highly unreliable bourgeois media, that interestingly enough began to re-write history as soon as they realized the coup fizzled out. We can't be too careful in accurately assessing reality if we want to maintain our Bolshevik integrity; extend the basis of our political authority; and deepen our self-confidence.

Soviet Workers will Rise Again. Stalinism Never!

DOCUMENT 22

Monsees (Berlin), 29 August 1991

Logan's last letter, I think, points out the different positions correctly.

The important point:

1. The USSR

- a) is no deformed workers' state anymore
- b) is still a deformed workers' state

(Although with different argumentations) a) is the majority position in the IBT, I think—if not I would like to see an alternative formulation for a motion, and then having a vote on it immediately.

2. The coup

- a) had to be defended
- b) had not to be defended
- c) neither nor

I vote for a), Kalisch's position is as you also know for b).

We want to know what the majority is inside the IEC.

On the question HOW the counterrevolution is taking place in the deformed workers' states, I think, we will have to have more discussions. In his last letter Logan stated something about a "quantitative continuance of pro-bourgeois governmental policies" in the context of the Gorbachev government. If I got it right, this means that Logan's position is that a pro-cap government in the USSR was already existing for a long time before the coup? If I got it right, then we have a different position on a basic question, which I thought was cleared already with the fusion statements.

The whole discussion about the "armed body of men" must also go on, I think, especially when the "CORE-comrades" will start explaining what is going on in Poland and CSFR in the context of the state question.

Nevertheless we have to have clear positions (how do NZ/BABT-comrades discuss and intervene in the left today without presenting a position on this question? I would like to know).

No waiting anymore, a decision has to be made. Hopefully the IS-meeting tonight will take the necessary initiative.

DOCUMENT 23

IS (Cullen, Nason, Riley), 29 August 1991

From Minutes of the extraordinary session of the International Secretariat, called to discuss the USSR Coup, its aftermath and how to direct internal discussion on these matters, convened 29 August 1991

The IS has received several motions from the GS on the USSR coup. Any member of the IEC is entitled to call a vote on these motions. However, in the interests of clarity and dispatch, we propose to put before the IEC the three following motions, which, when voted upon, will in our opinion establish a clear majority and minority opinion on the major disputed questions.

Motion #1, by Cullen, Nason & Riley: With the collapse of the coup, the process of capitalist restoration that has been unfolding in the USSR for the past several years has reached the point of no return.

The USSR can therefore no longer be considered a workers' state.

Motion #2, by Nason and Riley: Given the variety of possible outcomes we could not take a simple position of defending the coup before the alignment of social forces was clear. And faced with the prospect of such a polarization the coup collapsed. Yeltsin won by default. We had a duty to support measures any section of the apparatus took against the capitalist restorationists, including militarily blocking in defense of the status quo and the suppression of Yeltsin et al, but this did not extend to defending the coup leaders in what was essentially an inter-bureaucratic power seizure (the arrest of Gorbachev and assumption of power). And this was in fact what the coup was about. The refusal, or inability, of the coupists to confront the capitalist restorationists either militarily or politically rendered the question of our support to their coup moot.

Motion #3, by Cullen (counterposed to #2): Whatever the consciousness or program of the hardliners may or may not have been, and however inept and pathetic their efforts, the coup nevertheless represented an attempt on the part of a majority of the leaders of the Stalinist apparatus to defend the status quo against the most aggressive restorationist forces. That status quo included collectivized property. Thus the coup involved a defense of collectivized property and the core state apparatus that maintained it, regardless of whether the Stalinists saw it that way or not. Trotskyists and the Soviet working class should therefore have tendered military support to the coup leaders.

To balance the considerations of time urgency and the opportunity for all IEC members to thoroughly consider the questions at issue we propose that these motions be voted up or down by Sunday, Sept 7. IEC members should vote Motion #1 up or down and for either Motion #2 or Motion #3. Needless to say, any member of the IEC is free to submit whatever further motions or amendments s/he may wish as well as to make any procedural suggestions. Particularly we believe that comrade Smith may wish to propose a motion regarding the class character of the USSR which could be counterposed to Motion #1 above. We would hope, however, that IEC comrades consider that these motions as well as this procedure will be sufficient to decide the

main disputed questions. Overlapping or repetitive motions could tend to detract from the clarity of the discussion.

These motions and all documents pertinent to this discussion should be made available to the entire membership of the IBT.

DOCUMENT 24

Harlan (Hamburg), 29 August 1991

The Present Nature of the Soviet State

I object to the use of the term “bourgeois governments of the deformed/degenerated workers’ states” as it is formally incorrect and misleading. A bourgeois government is one which represents a capitalist class. This government (or governments), on the territory of the USSR, are pro-capitalist in ideology but lack the cohesion, stability and power, of capitalist governments based on capitalism.

Pro-capitalist petty-bourgeois state power captures this reality. The pro-capitalist regimes have NOT taken root in bourgeois property relations. The dismantling of the centralized planned economy, the severing of vertical and horizontal links in the industry, and the “PARTIAL” operation of market forces of competition and profitability in the economy do NOT represent a capitalist economy.

Logan’s argument that the methodology implicit in characterizing the USSR as a workers’ state after the October revolution can be applied without qualification to the situation where pro-capitalist forces have state power but are based on collectivized property forms misses the differences in the nature of the two dominant classes when in power.

When a clearly anti-capitalist workers insurrection smashes the bourgeois state and takes power as in 1917 the thousand threads of state control of a minority class are broken, even if they still retain formal ownership of the means of production. The capitalists in this situation are unable to mobilize their finances, their profits, and those social layers dependent upon them to effectively counter working class state power.

Capitalist classes characteristically show determination to retain their property rights and retain their profits at any cost. But with their property rights and states smashed workers power prevails. This

workers' power extends for the shop floor, to the banks, to the organs of trade.

When the state power of a workers' state is replaced by pro-capitalist forces these forces are initially handicapped by not having at their disposal large social forces deriving their power and privileges directly from the profit of capitalist property relations. They represent petty-bourgeois, would-be capitalists, or bonapartist power groups dependent on the acquiescence or suppression of the proletarian masses. These pro-capitalist forces lack the means to consolidate STABLE state power, without direct imperialist intervention. It is this instability which I think precludes "bourgeois state power" in the USSR at this time. To describe the USSR as a "bourgeois state" only compounds the error.

Not a baby deserving infanticide but a very early embryo deserving of abortion.

With the collapse of the unitary USSR state power and the formation of clearly pro-capitalist anti-communist governing bodies carrying out massive purges of the CP in the army, MVD (formerly NKVD), government, and industry we can see the development of government regime(s) embodying EMBRYO bourgeois state power formations.

Supplementary Description

We should describe the development of the current regimes embodying embryo bourgeois state power in terms of their inherent weakness and the immense difficulty of the pro-capitalist forces in constructing a stable bourgeois state without capitalists and capital while administering collectivized property forms. The capitalist counter revolution remains potentially reversible by the working class during what is likely to be an extended period of time. The body of the workers' state and the collectivized property forms remains but is subject to centrifugal, degenerative forces.

DOCUMENT 25

Logan (Wellington) to Monsees, 30 August 1991

I think you pose correctly the minimal questions for urgent decision, and I think that you are correct in assessing that there is a

clear majority for the view that the USSR does not exist as a deformed workers' state any more.

It is not yet clear that there is a majority around any position on the other issue, the issue of the line to take towards the coup. If the majority is correct we need a quick decision. If the majority is incorrect we need to slow things down in the hope of changing people's minds.

I am often in the position of arguing that we should not be too perfectionist. But this issue is far too important.

You are quite correct that it is bad not to have a position, and that we must work towards one as quickly as possible. It is certainly extremely difficult to do public work without a position, and far more difficult for you than for us. Nobody other than ourselves is interested in these questions in Wellington.

But, firstly, the internal discussion is far more important than any discussions we might have with anyone outside the organisation.

And, secondly, if we publically take a wrong position on this question it will be very difficult to live down.

If there is a serious danger of making a wrong decision then we will have to tie ourselves up in internal argument until there is clarity on the question.

There is a sense in which the polemic around key historical events, polemic in the international revolutionary tendency, is the highest expression of the class struggle. Other considerations must be subordinated to the need for clarity.

Just one point for now on the substantive issues:

I'm not sure what you mean about some important difference on a basic question related to my description of the pre-coup Gorbachev government as pro-bourgeois.

A government is not a state. It is a subordinate part of a state, and its class character is not necessarily as clear-cut as the class character of the state to which it is attached.

The old classical Stalin government of the USSR was pro-bourgeois in a certain sense, and there is a continuum of quantitatively different levels of pro-bourgeois possibilities for the governments of deformed workers' states. It looks very much as if, in the period of their final

decline the ever-weaker deformed workers' states usually have very pro-bourgeois governments.

Because these pro-bourgeois governments are subordinate parts of states based on workers' property forms they are frustrated in their attempts to put their pro-bourgeois programmes into operation. Tensions develop between the government and other parts of the state apparatus. This tension between a pro-bourgeois government and what we might call the core of the state, may be seen as a counter-revolutionary analogue of dual power.

It seems that the Gorbachev government was always a somewhat pro-bourgeois government in a workers' state, and that over time its pro-bourgeois character fluctuated, with a tendency to become more pronounced. It also seems that in its final weeks there was a further substantial quantitative movement. That final movement was no doubt the "last straw" for the "hard liners", the move they couldn't put up with. Hence their coup.

DOCUMENT 26

Riley (Toronto), 31 August 1991

This is indeed a very serious discussion that we are engaged in and it is necessary for us to sort it out as best we can before we take a public position. It is better to be slow off the mark than to have to issue retractions, particularly when it is not a situation where we can have a direct immediate impact, in which case of course we would not have the luxury of a thorough discussion.

In discussions such as this it is usually the case that comrades who feel strongly will engage in some "stick bending" and sometimes make some characterizations of their opposition which are somewhat "angular." Cde. Kalisch has a rather angular style in general and his point about "Pabloism" is a case of this. I also doubt that comrades who are not prepared to support the coup are motivated by fear of unpopularity. I would not want to accuse the Robertsonites of this either. Subjectively I hoped that the coupists would succeed, and I would find no particular difficulty defending a majority position of military support to the coup. But I also think that while it is clear and

internally consistent it is not right and it would therefore be a mistake for us to adopt it.

One other preliminary comment. This is a relatively minor one of terminology, but I think that we should be careful to retain the historic distinction in our movement between the *degenerated* workers' state of the USSR and the deformed workers' states which were created after World War Two. The distinction is of course that the USSR was once a healthy worker state which underwent a bureaucratic degeneration and the others were deformed from birth.

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I did not put much store in the position of the PRG comrades that we should support the coup when I first read their initial statement. But they argue it quite persuasively, (including those who "don't write") and moreover events have unfolded very much along the lines they projected in the first day of the coup. While they have not changed my mind on the essentials of the position they have certainly made me think carefully about it and reconsider certain aspects of it.

It is clear now that the counterrevolution is in full flood and is sweeping all before it. The Stalinist apparatus has disintegrated, the officer corps is completely demoralized and those who are not overtly pro-capitalist are apparently entirely willing to acquiesce and the Yeltsinites hold the reins. To consolidate power they must of course finish the job of "cleaning house" but it is clear to me that we are now past the qualitative point of the destruction of the degenerated workers' state. This is a fact which we must recognize.

The question which I want to address is whether we should have come out in support of the coup. I think that the whole position of the comrades who argue for this hinges on a notion of the historical inevitability of the outcome of the coup once launched. They have the idea that there was no possibility of reconstituting some kind of coalition government after the event in which the essential correlation of forces was not qualitatively altered. With this framework it makes sense to take sides between the bureaucratic machine on the one hand and the Yeltsinite yuppies and CIA assets on the other. But is this framework correct? Were these the only possible outcomes? I

think not. The entire Stalinist apparatus turned out to be far more thoroughly demoralized and corroded than anyone knew. Most of it sat still and waited to see how things turned out. Yeltsin's vigorous and ultimately successful resistance provided a focal point for the "democrats."

We cannot expect to automatically deduce political behavior on the basis of a set of axioms. They are very helpful and will usually supply the right answer, but we also have to leave room for quarks (and of course hoons). I think that the comrades who think that we should have taken the position of military support to the coupists right from the start assume that because the bureaucracy controls the state apparatus that it must act, in however duplicitous and irrational a fashion to defend it at some level. If not in the DDR and Poland, which after all were essentially creations of Moscow in the first place, at least in the USSR where the bureaucracy has its roots.

It seems to me that Logan sums up the argument pretty clearly with the following from his 29 August letter:

"Any likely move against the coup would be to build and fortify the Russian bourgeois state. We are opposed to building and fortifying the Russian bourgeois state. So we defend the coup."

But this does not necessarily follow. Had the armed forces hung together, and perhaps launched a counter-coup to remove the plotters and reinstate the "legitimate" party leader and commander in chief then the coup would have been defeated but Gorbachev could have retained his balancing position by his continuing control of the armed forces on the one hand, and by forming a government of national reconciliation including some Yeltsinites on the other. No doubt there would have been some exemplary trials and a shallow purge of the plotters at the top and an exoneration of those who were only carrying out their orders. This would have increased the pace of capitalist restoration, but not have qualitatively changed the character of Soviet society. This did not of course occur, but it could have. And if that was a historical possibility, that is, if there was any possible outcome to the failure of the coup besides the total victory of the Yeltsinites, which we are witnessing, then we could not *automatically* support the coup.

Instead we would have to evaluate the coupists on the basis of what they stood for, what they were doing, what they were intending to do as well as what they were objectively capable of doing or attempting. They did not declare any intention to defend collectivized property nor to revive the central planning mechanisms. They declared that they wanted to continue the “reforms” towards capitalism. This was not simply window dressing, but an expression of the fact that the hardest of the “hards” were so demoralized that they saw no historic perspective but the introduction of capitalism in the USSR. Their victory could only have reproduced, possibly in an extremely sharpened form, the problems which had created the Yeltsinites in the first place. This does not rule out the possibility of a military bloc with them, but it is necessary to bear in mind in considering the possible outcomes of their bid for power.

We should recall that in the first days of the coup British PM Major stated that the British government would expect that the reforms would go ahead anyway, and that they would not break off connections. The Canadian foreign minister said essentially the same thing (a big scandal now). And George Bush noted that Yanayev had promised to go forward to capitalism:

“I don’t know whether to take heart or not from Yanayev’s statements that this does not mean turning back the reforms, but there was such a statement from him. So the situation is still quite murky inside the Soviet Union.” (*NYTimes* 20 August)

Bush also remarked:

“Let’s hope that Yanayev...was speaking from conviction...that this will not mean...setting back the reform and commitment to go forward.” (ellipses in original)

The comrades of the PRG from the first saw this coup as the last chance to stop Yeltsin. Events have confirmed this estimate, but even so this does not mean that no other outcome was possible. In Chile there was a coup in June before the real one in September, and there have been a number of unsuccessful attempts in the Philippines since Aquino took over. Yanayev’s coup too could also have turned out to be a warning shot.

A good part of the reason that it proved to be the last gasp of a decaying caste was that the “hardliners” had nothing to offer anyone, and by demonstrating their impotence they immensely strengthened the hand of the Yeltsinites. They did not believe in their own cause and could not even keep their own members together. They saw themselves and were seen generally as a spent force and apparently got little more than grudging acquiescence from any of the units they commanded. Indeed they could not even keep several of their own members from resigning in the two days before they completely collapsed.

The coup launched by the “hardliners” in the USSR on 19 August, was in effect a case of a cabinet deposing a prime minister through extra-parliamentary measures. The coup’s leaders proclaimed that they intended to carry through on Gorbachev’s capitalist-restorationist program and attempted to present their power grab in a fashion in which it would most easily be taken as a *fait accompli*. At the time the coup occurred there was no clear indication what intentions they had toward the purely capitalist Yeltsinite elements, or toward those elements of the Stalinist bureaucracy which favored accelerating the transition to capitalism.

Several outcomes, besides the catastrophic collapse of the degenerated workers’ state, were possible:

a) the armed forces, or a large component of them could have rejected the coup as unconstitutional and remained loyal to Gorbachev their commander in chief, thereby aborting the coup. This outcome would probably have strengthened the Yeltsinites considerably but not have qualitatively altered the status quo ante;

b) when the coup began to crumble, and several of the coup leaders flew to talk to Gorbachev at his dacha (where he refused to meet them) it is possible that they could have patched up their differences sufficiently to allow Gorbachev to once more take over, as a counterweight to Yeltsin. But thinking that they had little to offer, Gorbachev spurned them, apparently thinking that he would be able to retain a sufficient power base in the CPSU (after the failure of the hardliners) which would allow him to remain a factor;

c) the coupists, if they achieved their aim and succeeded in grab-

bing power without major incident, and aborting the union treaty, could then themselves have proceeded to “hand over power to a pro-capitalist government, or even participate in the formation of such a government themselves” as we speculated in the last issue of *1917*. This was projected as “the Pinochet approach to liberal economics” in the words of an *Economist* article which we quoted. It is conceivable that had the bulk of the officer corps and security apparatus held together the coupists could have sought an accommodation even with Yeltsin as part of a government of national reconciliation and market reform on the grounds that no other course was possible.

In any of the above cases support to the coupists would neither have advanced the interests of the workers, nor have defended the property forms of the degenerated worker state. It is also possible that:

d) the coup leaders could have moved to suppress Yeltsin, the black marketeers and/or other pro-capitalist elements, thereby indicating that they were intending to freeze or at least slow down the progress of capitalist restoration.

In that case we should indeed have blocked militarily with them.

Perhaps it was probable (but hindsight is always 20/20) that the only real opposition to the coup would come from Yeltsin and that he would triumph virtually unopposed because the coup leaders were either too impotent or indecisive to attack him. Of course it was a disaster that he won. In “Stalinism in Extremis” we note that Yeltsin was purely and simply “a deadly danger to the Soviet working class.” But we also noted that the hardliners “calumniate the liberal democrats in the Yeltsin camp not because they are anti-communists, but because many of them are Jews” and noted the sinister implications of their alliance with Pamyat.

Of course our previous positions are not binding on us, but it may interest comrades to recall that in the last issue of the paper we opine that “At present there is little reason to think that their [hardliners] differences with the Yeltsinites have anything to do with preserving collectivized property.” This formulation is rather angular, but I think it contains a substantial element of truth. There is, as comrades have pointed out, a connection between preservation of their power and

status and the property forms, but history has shown that it is not automatic, as Jaruzelski et al have demonstrated and the ignominious collapse of the Soviet bureaucracy virtually without firing a shot has confirmed. This is attributable to the fact that, as we noted in the last issue, the hardliners “are profoundly demoralized, and most of them have lost confidence in the historical validity of socialism of any sort.”

The confusion created by the coup created an opportunity for the working class to intervene, had it had the leadership and organization to do so, to defend the worker state against the slide into market anarchy and misery. WV reports that the Moscow Soviet (whatever that was) took this line but coupled it with a call for support to the coup. A more correct approach would have been to outline a set of demands in the interests of the workers, which focused on defending the gains of the collectivized property, smashing the Yeltsinite pro-capitalist elements, and for the establishment of direct workers democracy to wrest control from the corrupt and incompetent party apparatus and revive the planned economy. In this context it would be appropriate to indicate that we would militarily bloc with the coup leaders (or even Gorbachev or any other faction of the bureaucracy) on the basis of the preservation of collective property against any attempts by pro-capitalist elements around Yeltsin (or elements still within the bureaucracy) to seize power. Of course (and here we all agree) at the same time it would be necessary to point out that these same people had been part and parcel of Gorbachev’s course toward capitalism, that they were incapable of serious resistance to the Yeltsinites and that they too were the enemies of the working class (as evidenced by their affinity for Pamyat etc.) But a military bloc depends on knowing who your partner is pointing his/her guns at, and at the outset of the coup that was not knowable.

A military conflict between the Yeltsinites and the Yanayevites would almost certainly have polarized the apparatus roughly between those who wanted to go over to capitalism immediately and those who wished for the meantime to preserve the status quo (including the centralized control of the economy). To rally support for their side the Yanayevites would have had to have put forward some motivation

for those whose participation they sought to enlist. While their main concern was not to alienate the imperialists and those sections of the bureaucracy that supported perestroika, their initial promises to rescind the price hikes were a step in this direction. In such a conflict we would have supported the latter on the grounds that this would, despite their subjective intentions have objectively represented a move “to arrest the process of capitalist restoration” at least in the short term. But *given the variety of possible outcomes we could not take a simple position of defending the coup before the alignment of social forces was clear. And faced with the prospect of such a polarization the coup collapsed.* Yeltsin won by default. We had a duty to support measures any section of the apparatus took against the capitalist restorationists, including militarily blocking in defense of the status quo and the suppression of Yeltsin et al, but this did not extend to defending the coup leaders in what was essentially an inter-bureaucratic power seizure (the arrest of Gorbachev and assumption of power). And this was in fact what the coup was about.

The key mistake that the comrades who want us to take a position of support to the coup make is to presume that the coup was directed against Yeltsin. The fact is that the coup leaders did not or could not fight the Yeltsinites, nor did they even announce their intention of doing so. Perhaps they intended to do so. Yeltsin claims that the KGB Alpha team refused orders to take him out, but given the source we should not assume this to be true. (Other reports have leaders of the KGB special operations department saying merely that they remained neutral in the coup.) Their refusal, or inability, to confront the capitalist restorationists either militarily or politically rendered the question of our support to their coup moot.

DOCUMENT 27

Cullen (New York), 1 September 1991

I agree with Riley on one essential point: that the process of the destruction of the Soviet workers’ state, and its replacement by a new, pro-capitalist state apparatus is now “in full flood,” and is not likely to be reversed at this juncture. Our disagreement is over whether or not

we should have declared military support for the coup. To clarify our differences on this question, I think it may be useful to retrace the main lines of the argument as it has unfolded within our tendency so far.

The PRG comrades (and I am thinking particularly of Hayes' document) have argued that since the defeat of the coup led to the counterrevolutionary onslaught we are now witnessing, a hardliner victory would have prevented such an outcome, at least for the time being, and that the most elementary logic of the situation therefore demanded that we support the coup. Riley, if I understand his argument correctly, objects on two grounds: 1. that the coup leaders were probably no less committed to marketization than the "hardliners," and, that to the extent that they aimed their guns at all, they aimed them at Gorbachev and not at Yeltsin, that their victory would not necessarily have signalled a defeat for Yeltsin and the openly restorationist forces gathered around him, and that therefore, 2. there was no necessary or essential connection between the defeat of the coup, on the one hand, and Yeltsin's subsequent triumph and the attendant orgy of reaction, on the other; that the coup could have been defeated by Gorbachev-loyal elements within the army and KGB, who could then either have restored Gorbachev to his former position or cobbled together some sort of compromise with the Yeltsin forces. Given these possibilities, argues Riley, there was no strong reason to support the coup when it was launched on 19 August.

I find Riley's arguments unconvincing because I don't believe the universe of possibility to have been as wide, or the political identity of the coup leaders to have been as indeterminate as he seems to think. The coup did not come as a lightning bolt from the sky. It had a political background. It was the *culmination* of a struggle that had been going on within the CPSU and the country at large for the past several years, and had assumed a particularly acute form in the past nine months or so. The Yeltsin camp represented a wing of the bureaucracy (and allied non-party intellectuals and technocrats) that had openly gone over to capitalist restoration. On the other side were leading elements (I believe a majority of the leading strata) of the party, state and military

apparatus that saw marketization, growing national disunion and the surrender to imperialism as a threat to their power and privilege, and hence (what was the same thing in their minds) a danger to the very existence of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's main political role was that of a mediator between these two factions.

From October to December of 1990, the hardline faction began to move more aggressively than ever before. They forced Gorbachev to scrap Shatalin's 500-day plan for the privatization of the economy. They sent the "black beret" units to crack down on the Baltic secessionists. They engineered a purge within the highest echelons of the party and government apparatus, compelling Gorbachev to remove "reformers" from key positions and replace them with loyal servants of the apparat. These moves caused many (including ourselves) to speculate that the hardliners had finally brought Gorbachev in tow, and drove most of his "reformist" supporters within the party—most notably, Shevardnadze—into the Yeltsin camp.

However, in the face of monster Yeltsinite demonstrations in Moscow and the fear that the imperialists might be even less receptive to his pleas for economic aid at the upcoming G-7 conference, Gorbachev backpedaled and once again attempted to mend fences with the Yeltsin forces. He refused to carry the Baltic intervention to its logical conclusion and depose the secessionist governments there. He signed an agreement with Yeltsin to carry through the 500-day privatization plan and to implement a new union treaty that would transfer most governmental powers from the center to the republics. This reconciliation attempt only emboldened the Yeltsin forces; they repaid Gorbachev's good will with a decree banning the CPSU from the police force and the factories in the Russian Republic. It was also this final reconciliation attempt which convinced the hardliners that they could no longer rely upon Gorbachev to fight Yeltsin: their position could only be salvaged by deposing the President.

If this analysis of events preceding 19 August is correct, I think it is possible to draw certain definite conclusions about the coup itself:

1. That it was the result of a growing *polarization* within the bureaucracy and the country as whole. The coup signified that the

middle ground occupied by Gorbachev had completely evaporated and that, once the plotters had shown their hand, any return to the status quo ante was precluded. This analysis has been amply confirmed in the coup's aftermath, but was evident *beforehand* from the logic of events leading up to it.

2. That, Riley to the contrary notwithstanding, the coup was indeed directed against the Yeltsin camp. The fact that the plotters did not take direct aim at Yeltsin should not mislead us. Ensnared in their Kremlin bunkers, the plotters were hopelessly out of touch with the political realities of the country. They mistakenly believed that the "leading position" of the party was unassailable, and that, by consolidating their grip over the party and state apparatus, they could then proceed to take on Yeltsin, Landsbergis, other fractious national minorities etc. It never seemed to enter their heads that Yeltsin would not permit them the luxury of arresting him at their leisure. This was a drastic miscalculation, but does not alter the fact that the plotters felt compelled to act against Gorbachev precisely because they believed—correctly—that he was giving away the store to Yeltsin!

In short, to entertain the possibility that the events of 19-21 August could have led to a restoration of the pre-coup status quo or to yet another deal with Yeltsin seems to me to miss the political significance of the coup. The plotters acted as they did because they believed that the time for compromise and manoeuvre had passed. A victory for the plotters would have led logically and inevitably to bolder initiatives by the bureaucracy against the restorationists. The disintegration of the workers' state, now going on before our eyes, is the equally logical and inevitable result of the coup's collapse.

I think everyone in our tendency agrees that Yeltsin stands at the head of the most openly restorationist forces in the (former) Soviet Union. When it comes, however, to making a political characterization of the coup leaders, complete confusion seems to reign in certain quarters, and the entire Trotskyist analysis of Stalinism appears to have gone by the boards. The hardline faction is depicted as a political wild card at best, and, at worst, as a group of aspiring Pinochets. *Workers Vanguard* even goes so far as to assert that the coup leaders wanted "perestroika

minus glasnost.” Comrades would do well to ponder the implications of this line of reasoning very carefully. If the hardliners differed with Yeltsin and Gorbachev only over whether or not to maintain democratic liberties, would not a democratic perestroika regime be preferable to an undemocratic one? Would not the former at least give the workers the freedom to organize openly against privatization? And would we not therefore be obliged at least to support Gorbachev, if not Yeltsin, against the Kryuchkovs and Yanayevs? The Cliffites (as well as many of our other reformist and centrist opponents, I’m sure) have already drawn this conclusion explicitly. The Spartacists are, of course, still too shamefaced to dot the “i”s and cross the “t”s, but to such a pass does this kind of thinking inevitably point!

To buttress their “plague-on-both-your-houses” position, the Spartacists have drawn attention to those passages in the coup declaration that guarantee continued freedom to private enterprise and respect existing treaties with the imperialists. But was it not to be expected that the plotters would want the coup to come off as smoothly as possible, and seek to minimize the alarm created by their actions in imperialist capitals? Have the Spartacists forgotten that, in 1928, at the very time when Stalin was going to Siberia in order to launch the collectivization drive, *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, *Inprecorr* and the entire international Stalinist press were still singing the praises of Bukharin and the NEP? Trotskyists must be guided not by the pronouncements, or even the subjective intentions, of the Stalinists, but by the inner logic of events.

Riley seems to accept the Spartacist line at face value when he states that “[the coup leaders] did not declare any intention to defend collectivized property nor to revive the central planning mechanisms.” Yet WV is very selective even when it comes to the Emergency Committee’s official pronouncements. Entirely omitted from their most recent article is any reference to the following passages from the principal coup declaration, published on the front page of the 19 August *New York Times*:

The war of laws and encouragement to centrifugal forces spelled destruction of the integral national economic mechanism that has been shaping for decades. The result includes sharp drops in the living

standards of the vast majority of the Soviet people, and the blossoming of profiteering and a shadow economy.

**

An offensive is under way on the rights of working people. The rights to work, education, health, housing and leisure are in jeopardy.

Passages like the above, when added to those cited in WV, show that the consciousness of the hardline Stalinists was at least contradictory, and included some elements of a desire to defend the workers' state. The consciousness of the hardliners is, however, a secondary consideration. There can be no doubt that even the most conservative groupings in the bureaucracy had lost faith in a socialist future of any kind, harbored many of the same pro-capitalist notions as their adversaries, and were not above stooping to Great Russian chauvinism, xenophobia and even anti-Semitism to protect their monopoly of political power. But the subjectivity of the Stalinists has never been our starting point. As far as I know, we have always (or at least since 1933, based our analysis on the objective social position of the bureaucracy; we have always said that their political monopoly, their privileges and their prestige, derived from the role as administrators of the collectivized economy.

Riley states that the attempted putsch of 19 August "was essentially an inter-bureaucratic power seizure (the arrest of Gorbachev and the assumption of power). And this was in fact what the coup was about." But simply to call it an "inter-bureaucratic power seizure" is not to explain what "the coup was about." The arrest of the President and Party Chairman was a fairly desperate act. One must also give some account of *why the rival bureaucratic factions were fighting one another*. On this score, Riley pleads agnosticism: the motives and interests of the so-called hardliners remain entirely opaque to him. I submit that their interests were not so difficult to fathom. The coup leaders represented that wing of the bureaucracy that would not, and in most cases could not, find a place in the "New Russian Order." They were the beleaguered scions of the old apparatus. They saw the growing stampede toward "private enterprise" and national dissolution as a threat to their power, and acted to stem the tide. In so doing, they moved to defend the social and economic status quo and preserve what remained of the cen-

tral apparatus, *which of necessity included its economic prerogatives*. This was the only power base they had. When we speak of unconditional defense of the Soviet Union, I assume we mean we would give military support to any move by the bureaucracy, or any wing thereof, against capitalist restoration *regardless of their subjective motives and intentions*. But now, when the bureaucracy is actually coming apart much as Trotsky predicted it would, when one faction has defected to the side of counterrevolution, we seem to be demanding of the diehard faction, as a *condition* for our support, that they act as conscious and consistent defenders of socialized property. Trotsky, it will be recalled, attached no such conditions. Perhaps he was the original Pabloist?

When I speculated in the last issue of 1917 that the Stalinists may be too demoralized to defend collectivized property, I was thinking of Eastern Europe, where the bureaucracy surrendered without firing a shot. And the Soviet Stalinists *almost* did the same. Their final attempt to defend themselves was, I admit, irresolute, half-hearted, pathetic. But, unlike all the other things Riley claims we could not know at the time, their relative strength or weakness was the one quantity we actually could not measure for certain in advance. Had they acted with greater determination, they might have held on to power a little longer and put a crimp in the sails of the Yeltsinites. As Trotskyists, it seems to me we had little alternative but to hope that they would. Such an outcome would have at least bought time for the Soviet working class.

If there had existed in the former USSR a proletarian army led by a Trotskyist vanguard, mightier than either of the contending factions, we would needless to say, have pushed both aside and established genuine Soviet democracy. But if wishes were horses beggars would ride. The Soviet working class has not to date constituted itself as an independent political force. To do so, they must have a correct orientation to the forces actually in the field. Our job as Trotskyists is to provide that orientation. It was, in my opinion, incumbent upon us to say to the Soviet workers: "The hardliners are completely bankrupt as an historical force. Their victory will not lead us out of the economic morass they have gotten us into, and they will very likely succumb to the Yeltsinites in the not-so-distant future. But, *at this moment* they stand as the only barrier

to full-fledged capitalist restoration. Let us bloc with them for now, in order that we may later push them aside and settle accounts with the Yeltsinites ourselves.” In the event, Yeltsin supported Gorbachev, only to push him aside and settle accounts with the apparatchiks. I hope that our tendency will prove as astute in defending our class interests as the President of the Russian Republic was in defending his.

Added note from **East (New York)**: I completely subscribe to the positions above. To Riley’s document I can only remark that we do not know that the sun will rise tomorrow either.

DOCUMENT 28

Watts (Wellington), 2 September 1991

I would like to add my voice to the debate on whether the IBT should have defended the coup. I first heard about it on Tuesday 20 at 8am. About 12 hours later we were discussing this event at the PRG general meeting where I stated that we shouldn’t be too hasty about taking a side, that the coup represented a falling out of bureaucrats and that we should wait and see what the economic program of the hardliners was going to be. However, 2 weeks after the event it is very clear what side we definitely didn’t want to win and therefore what side we did want to win.

The situation was a military one and like any military conflict we could either take one side or the other, or to take no sides at all. In a military fight the political program or pronouncements of each side may be secondary—what is important are the objective classes the two sides represent. In some conflicts there is a falling out of imperialists or a falling out of petty-bourgeois neo-colonists. In these cases the victory of either side changes nothing qualitatively in terms of property forms so there is no advantage for the working class either way. A non-defencist position (like in Kuwait vs Iraq) means we simply don’t care who wins.

Well we are certainly not happy with the events in the ex-Soviet Union today. If we had been in Moscow at the time, and we were militarily capable, I now hope we would have blocked with the hardliners in a decent attempt to blow Yeltsin and his cronies sky-high. And then we would have helped the Soviet proletariat boot out the Stalinists.

The decrees issued by the “Emergency Committee” were contradictory—some suggested the reimposition of the planned economy, others were blatant grovelling to imperialists. In actual fact we can totally ignore these utterances when deciding what form of property the core of the armed forces is committed to defending. We wouldn’t be wondering such things if the core of the armed forces in a capitalist country kicked out a government with pro-worker leanings. This is because we know the armed wing of the state is not just a gun club whose chiefs wake up in the morning, toss a coin and say “Heads—Capitalism, Tails—Socialism”. We know the central core of the state exists to maintain class antagonisms—it’s very existence depends on the continuation of one form of property relations.

The coup was an attempt by the central core of the Soviet armed forces to maintain the very sick collectivised economy.

The number of people “responsible” for the coup is irrelevant—those people headed the armed forces, the KGB, the Black Beret etc. ie they represented the core of the state. There were a few generals that sided with Yeltsin—the Marxist definition of the state doesn’t mean that every single soldier or even every single officer must fight to the end for the property form they are objectively bound to.

The deformed workers’ state gave a rather pathetic, last ditch attempt to defend the planned economy. It failed and was smashed through a process of purges, suicides, imprisonment etc. It was smashed in much the same sense as the East German deformed workers’ state was smashed.

There is now no “special body of armed men, prisons, etc” that is capable of and committed to defending workers property forms.

If we take a non-defensist position we are revising the Marxist notion of the state.

DOCUMENT 29

Mason (Wellington), 2 September 1991

It appears that Smith and Harlan may be arguing for a new criterion for determining to whom we give military support, namely, the degree of fortitude of our potential bloc partners. If that is going to be a basis

for our decision on whether we had a side in the coup in the USSR then we must accept that we have made serious errors in choosing bloc partners in the past.

The reason we speak of “military” support is that we have no political faith in our bloc partners and we are not surprised if they lack the necessary will to carry the struggle through to its conclusion. We do not, and never have, given military support with the added proviso that we will only defend the Kerenskies, Jaruzelskies, Yanayevs etc if they put up a “decent struggle”. We give them only military support and have no political confidence in them that they have a programme capable of defending and advancing the interests of the working class in any substantial way. We can hardly be surprised if their capitulation takes the form of failure to put enough resources into the struggle.

The Soviet Army in Afghanistan was never a force committed to the decisive defeat of the mullahs, let alone the socialisation of the means of production. Neither were the Polish Stalinists fundamentally resolute in their determination to defend collectivised property forms against Solidarity. Despite the military crackdown in 1981, the Stalinists continued to make concessions to international capital and undermine proletarian property forms. Did we expect anything else?

The conception that Stalinism is fundamentally counter-revolutionary is part of the foundations of Trotskyism. Just as central to our programme is the notion that we will defend collectivised property **DESPITE THE VACILLATIONS AND THE LACK OF FORTITUDE OF THE BUREAUCRACY.**

It is absurd to suggest that we should be wary of defending the coup on the grounds that the coup leaders were not prepared to wage a thorough and decisive fight. The whole point of military support is to declare that we want one side to win. If we wanted them to fight then clearly we wanted them to win—same thing.

Smith and Harlan wrote that no one was doing any shooting and that most of the guns remained holstered. Perhaps their argument is to say that, while they would have backed the coup leaders if they had shot at Yeltsin, there was in fact **NO** military struggle in which the question of our taking a side could have been raised.

This would however be simply playing with words. The coup did in fact set up a military confrontation between the hardliners and the open restorationists, a confrontation on which we had to take a position of either backing one force or taking no side. To argue that this was not a “real” military conflict simply ducks the issue. Clearly the coup leaders wanted to get Yeltsin but the forces on the side of the coup fell apart militarily and proved incapable.

There have been two general scenarios suggested to argue for not taking a side in the struggle around the coup.

1. The first of these appears to be that the forces of the core of the workers’ state were not qualitatively involved in the conflict around the coup, or if they were, they were not defending workers property forms.

I simply cannot comprehend the logic of this position. BEFORE the coup there was a workers’ state; AFTER the coup, no workers’ state now exists. (At the very least, everyone admits that after the coup the forces of capitalist restoration have been very substantially increased.) The side that was clearly victorious was thoroughly and openly pro-capitalist, and as soon as it had succeeded in defeating the coup, it began to transform and destroy the key elements of the old workers’ state—the KGB, the army, the Communist Party, the “hardliners”, etc etc.

The argument that the coup did not involve the core of the deformed workers’ state simply doesn’t hold water. Instead of suggesting that all sections of the bureaucracy were simply procapitalist, this argument suggests that sitting on the sidelines of the struggle around the coup were some hardline, conservative bureaucratic forces which would have had a greater fortitude than that of the coup leaders but which nevertheless remained pretty much dormant.

But the coup, while weak and pathetic, was in fact the last—and virtually the only—attempt at a fightback by the old workers’ state against the years of encroaching capitalist restoration. If anyone was going to try and knock back Yeltsin and Gorbachev and defend the old regime then they had to lend their weight then. And once that attempt failed the gates were opened for the establishment of a bourgeois state

and the rapid dismantling of the obstacles which for a long time Yeltsin et al had bounced against.

So Smith and Harlan seem to argue that the coup leaders had the desire and the INTENT to get rid of Yeltsin and the open procapitalists however they refuse them military support because they lacked the CAPACITY.

Another argument suggested by comrades is that, in any case, a victory of the coup leaders would have also led to the dismantling of the workers' state. Of course, in a sense this must ultimately be true: we could hardly count on the Stalinists to consistently defend proletarian property forms. But the issue here is whether this overthrowing of the workers' state was going to occur immediately or at some later date. It is painfully clear that the defeat of the coup opened the floodgates and the victory of the coup leaders could ONLY HAVE SLOWED DOWN THE PROCESS OF DECAY. How can we not be in favour of more time for the most important proletarian state in the world?

2. The second possible argument for taking no side in the coup must be that, at the time of the coup, there was no longer a workers' state in the USSR.

In his latest letter, Monsees asks if the position of the New Zealand comrades is that we consider Gorbachev's pre-coup government to have been pro-capitalist.

For us, this is not a central question. It certainly appears that around the time of the G7 summit Gorbachev swung more openly than before in Yeltsin's direction and that this movement towards being more openly pro-restorationist probably helped trigger the coup. But the question of whether a government in a particular deformed workers' state can be said to be "procapitalist", to be for the restoration of capitalism, does not change the key political questions for us as we do not believe that it changes the nature of the state. Rather the establishment of a procapitalist government raises the tempo of events, tends to polarise the class struggle and eliminate some of the middle ground, and it brings the necessary resolution of the crisis forward in time.

Of course if we are to call Stalinists—from Stalin on—"fundamentally counter-revolutionary" then we could hardly balk at

also calling them, in an important sense, “pro-capitalist”. Further, the emergence of governments fully committed to capitalist property forms in the deformed workers’ states is of course an expression of the fundamentally procapitalist and counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism, its inability to defend workers’ property.

Nevertheless, the Stalinists sit on top of collectivised property forms. If a section of the bureaucracy becomes fully committed to overthrowing the workers’ state, then, it is true, there is a contradiction which must be resolved. It is important, however, to distinguish between 1. a contradiction in need of resolution and 2. the resolution itself. Yeltsin (and less significantly Gorbachev) and the Stalinist “conservatives” were the expression of the polarisation of this contradiction while the coup—and its defeat—was the resolution.

In other words, the Stalinists are a petty-bourgeois layer sitting on top of collectivised property forms. In times of crisis we would expect a split between those elements demanding immediate capitalist restoration and those which—while remaining fundamentally “pro-bourgeois”—desire to defend their old system of privileges, which are based on collectivised property forms.

Gorbachev was attempting to maintain a position in both camps. The coup confirmed the basic Marxist understanding of the state, which predicted that Gorbachev’s role was historically unviable—either he had to crush the forces for capitalist restoration in the USSR, or he had to dismantle/destroy the old state machinery.

It did seem that Gorbachev was increasingly moving into the camp of the out-and-out restorationists: but the very fact that there was a coup by the conservatives which had to oust him demonstrates that the Stalinists as a whole had not suddenly changed their historical character and become “counter-revolutionary through and through to the core” and that there was still an armed force with deep roots in the old system of bureaucratic power that had to be dealt with.

The nature of the state cannot be determined simply by looking at what the leaders of the GOVERNMENT are saying. In 1917 we say that the working class established a proletarian state because it was committed to establishing and defending collectivised property but also because

it had destroyed the old state which defended capitalist property. But the procapitalist forces in Gorbachev's Soviet government had yet to destroy the old (workers') state and thus, despite their procapitalist programme, did not yet have the capacity to implement it.

We live in complex times. My personal view is that the IBT should be very cautious in categorically stating which of the Eastern European states are no longer workers' states, which of them have incipient bourgeois states and which of them have no states. The fact that these workers' states were never "healthy" and were mostly created by external bureaucratic forces—and depended for their existence on the threat of Soviet intervention—led to them being weaker than the USSR and thus it is conceivable that they could come apart comparatively easily.

But the USSR was always a little different: for various reasons (the moral authority attached to 1917, the strength of the armed forces, etc) we never thought that THIS state was going to disappear without a visible struggle.

And struggle it did. The forces of counterrevolution won, and responsibility rests firmly on the shoulders of the Stalinists themselves. If we are to avoid any of that responsibility on our shoulders then we must declare our military support for the coup.

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The excerpts from Workers Vanguard present us with a challenge. The Spartacists have long attempted to portray themselves as the "hards" when it came to defence of the Soviet Union. The IBT is supposed to be made up of a bunch of Cold War drop-outs who didn't have the stomach for the Russian question anymore. But after a decade of demoralisation and defeat the ICL has simply given up. The hype that Robertson built up over the "political revolution" in the DDR has come back with a vengeance. So, they have caved in and declared that they don't have the stamina to stand on the correct side in the last-ditch attempt by the Stalinists to defend collectivised property forms.

THIS IS THE DECISIVE BETRAYAL THAT SHATTERS THE SPARTACISTS' MYTH ABOUT THEIR BEING "THE TROTSKYISTS WHO DEFEND THE SOVIET UNION".

Robertson and co. will be extremely conscious of our reaction. They have long tried to portray the IBT as anti-Soviet and we are in a perfect position to take advantage of their betrayal. Let's use it.

DOCUMENT 30

Harlan (Hamburg), 2 September 1991

Motion on State Question in the USSR

With the collapse of the ATTEMPTED coup the process of capitalist restoration that has been unfolding in the USSR for several years has reached a qualitative turning point. The state power established in October 1917 has been broken. The degenerated workers' state has been beheaded, and a workers' state in the COMPLETE sense of the term no longer exists.

In the territory of the former USSR a variety of weak, petty-bourgeois, procapitalist regimes presiding over largely collectivized property forms are in a rapid process of collapse there is as yet no substantial capitalist class. These unstable state power forms can be described as embodying EMBRYONIC bourgeois state power. During the probable extended period of time before capitalism can be constructed the capitalist counter-revolution can be reversed by a reawakened working class without the qualitative obstacle of a developed capitalist class based on capitalist property forms.

DOCUMENT 31

Riker (Bay Area), 2 September 1991

This response to the discussion on the USSR has been somewhat delayed by medical problems here. However, I hope I am still in time to have some influence with those Cdes who have retained an open mind on the question.

I wish to address three points in this contribution:

1. What is the class nature of the state in the USSR?
2. Should we have supported the coup?
3. The truncated, narrow and *hasty* nature of the discussion so far.

On point No. 1:

I read Harlan's short document: "The present Nature of the Soviet

State” dated August 29th (but transmitted 09-02-91) and agree with it in its entirety. There is no bourgeois state in the USSR and, neither is there a bourgeois *government*. What exists there are petty-bourgeois *restorationist regime(s)*. These regimes, given their present trajectory, in the absence of any further efforts at a power-grab by the 15 million(!) remaining members of the CP and, in the absence of any independent political action by the working class will restore capitalism to the USSR (or whatever is left of it).

Cullen, Riley and Nason’s motion says: “. . . With the collapse of the coup, the process of capitalist restoration that has been unfolding in the USSR for the past several years has reached the point of no return. The USSR can therefore no longer be considered a workers’ state.” Comrades, this is known as telescoping. Taking empirical data in its early stages of development and projecting it ahead to some (logical/ illogical) conclusion. It is also called guessing and is more appropriate for the \$2 window at the race track than for a serious political discussion.

There is no evidence that “the process of capitalist restoration has reached the point of no return”. There is every reason to believe that 15 million party members, strategically infiltrated at every level of the armed forces up and particularly through the general staff will make another attempt at defending its position in the old order of things. Yes, the KGB has been decapitated with 48 of its department heads fired. But think comrades, would Beria/Stalin have been satisfied with this paltry few? Not on your Kalishnikov.

A good ole Stalinist purge of the military/repressive forces would include every KGB man down to the district level—literally thousands. Furthermore, what did they do with the military forces formerly attached to the KGB? Shoot them? Disband them? Send them to re-education camps? No, they re-attached them to the regular army! This is just not a serious (nor a lasting) purge. Riley has already made the point that there were two coups in Chile by the supporters of Pinochet—one in May which was defeated and one in September that was all too successful. It remains to be seen whether the “democratic-minded officers” will prevail here. It ain’t over till it’s over Comrades.

And it ain't "over" in the USSR until the military is purged.

Why are they a "petty bourg restorationist regime"? Because they neither represent the workers (somnolent) nor the bourgeoisie (non-existent in the USSR and somewhat of an abstraction internationally at this point). They took power, these failed intellectuals of Stalinism on the basis of their felt need for "freedom". Freedom to what? Freedom to travel internationally, publish and sell their art internationally and, most of all, to artificially import the standard of living of their peers from Paris/London/Berlin to Moscow/Leningrad/Kiev. These are extremely unstable regimes that can be toppled in a minute by the forces in Soviet society who have the real power: the working class, the Stalinist bureaucracy and the party infiltrated military!

Harlan says in his document:

"When the state power of a workers' state is replaced by pro-capitalist forces these forces are initially handicapped by not having at their disposal large social forces deriving their power and privileges directly from the profit of capitalist property relations. They represent petty-bourgeois, would-be capitalists, or bonapartist power groups dependent on the acquiescence or suppression of the proletarian masses. These pro-capitalist forces lack the means to consolidate STABLE state power, without direct imperialist intervention. It is this instability which I think precludes "bourgeois state power" in the USSR at this time. To describe the USSR as a "bourgeois state" only compounds the error.

"Not a baby deserving infanticide but a very early embryo deserving of abortion."

Here Here! Let's Hear it for a voice of sanity!

On Point No. 2:

To Coup or not to Coup. I take exception to Smith et al's reference to the Moscow Coup leaders as "The Gang Who Couldn't Shoot Straight". I remember the Mafia punks from around President Street in Brooklyn who were immortalized in Jimmy Breslin's book by that title and take my word for it Crazy Joe Gallo has grounds for a slander suit. *They* were some really bad guys.

Now look, I can take a joke along with the best of them, but will someone in Wellington (or Berlin or NY) please tell me how you are going to give military support to a Stalinist formation without knowing what their program is? You comrades are *assuming* that because these ineffectual clowns and bunglers attempted to overthrow Gorbachev that they were necessarily, somehow by definition “objectively” anti-restoration. There were only three things that were clear in all the reams of proclamations issued by the Gang of Eight (all else was left intentionally vague): They were for increased sexual repression; they made some extremely vague statements about “re-connecting” industry vertically and horizontally *and*, they were against the Treaty of the Union.

So what do you comrades propose? Let’s say that we had a medium-sized propaganda group in Moscow and they cabled us for advice on how to proceed. You would say (I assume):

“Get whatever military forces you have at your disposal and back the coup—but remember, no political support.”

The comrades in Moscow cable back:

“But comrades of the IEC, how can we go to the workers who look to us for leadership and tell them to follow us and protect the coup and its leaders from the Yelzenites when we don’t know of any real difference between them? Shouldn’t we wait and see what they are going to DO before we take a side?”

Then, I imagine, you comrades would get on Compuserve and send the following advice:

“Look you nitwits, we never give political support to the Stalinists in this sort of a situation, just military support—*so it doesn’t bloody matter what their program is! So just shut-up and sit-down, you’re out of order!*”

No, I’m sorry comrades, but about the only thing that these guys were really clear on was their Great Russian Chauvinism and their irreconcilable opposition under any circumstances to the separating of the republics. Even the Spartacists couldn’t bring themselves to support them on that basis.

The only way you can talk yourself into support the coup is to

assume that these demoralized, Stalinist, government bureaucrats played some role “objectively” i.e. outside of their consciousness (sort of like those unconscious Trotskyists that Joe Hansen used to see in Cuba when he’d had too much vodka). No, comrades, it is you that does not understand military/political support to Stalinists regimes.

We say to the working class (yes, and to the persecuted little middle-class schmuck artist): “the Stalinists say they defend ‘Socialism’ in the USSR against the forces of counter-revolution. They are not *capable* of stopping the counter-revolution but we will fight side-by-side with them as long as their guns are pointed in the right direction.”

The Stalinists must at least *say* they are against capitalist restoration (remember, there are also Stalinists in the field who are for the restoration of capitalism) in order for us to tell them apart. In other words we do not give political support to the Stalinists when we give them military support *BUT IT IS NECESSARY FOR US TO KNOW WHAT THEIR PROGRAM IS!!!!*

No support to the coup!

Now, on Point No. 3. The truncated, narrow and *hasty* nature of the discussion so far.

The process of unravelling the results of the events of October 1917 is a far longer term and a far more complex event than comrades have indicated thus far. And while things seem to be moving extremely rapidly, given the tasks before Yeltsin and company—they have hardly moved at all. When we have completed the discussion in the IEC and voted the motions up or down, I am for a continuing but much more thorough-going and calmer discussion.

The vast majority of counter-revolutions (as opposed to defeated revolutions) that we are familiar with are the ones that occurred in the wake of the bourgeois revolutions of Europe of the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries. It is from these, I think, that we can draw some lessons on the long-term effects of the events in the USSR.

In the wake of the Napoleonic wars much futile effort was put to the restoration of things as “god meant them to be”. Even with the death of Cromwell and the restoration, Roman Catholicism never returned and the nascent capitalist class of the cities remained firmly

entrenched. The wave of history, once having rolled forward, never rolled all the way back.

The point is that we view (or, at least we say we do) Socialism as a historically necessary and far superior system than capitalism. And barring a return to barbarism or, at the very least fascism, all the gains of the last 74 years are not going to disappear in the USSR if counter-revolution is successful.

For example, while central planning will disappear, the economy in the USSR (or whatever succeeds it) will remain heavily statified. Even in the absence of a world-wide liquidity crunch, there is neither the capital nor the desire by foreign capitalists to buy the industry of the USSR. The rag-tag gang of ex-blackmarketeers and petty criminals that is the new “entrepreneurial class” doesn’t have the money and no Western banker in his right mind would lend it to him.

Poland is the perfect bad example. After four years in power the amount of industry the Poles have managed to “privatize” is next to nil. (But even the example of the social-democratic countries that have tried large-scale privatization is not promising in this regard: the U.K., France, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, Burma etc. etc.).

Furthermore, the world capitalist class is in deep trouble. The enormous investment in capital industry that took place in the third world countries in the wake of the OPEC rip-offs of the 1970’s has caused world industrial capacity to far exceed world markets (GM now runs its U.S. plants at 35 per cent capacity). For the petty-bourgeois liberals who write the editorial/financial pages of the U.S. press this is “now the time to invest in the USSR”.

But the capitalists of Western Europe and N. America only see the USSR and East Europe as a market for their commodities and not a place to invest surplus capital. What would be the purpose after all? To dump even more manufactured goods on a world market that is already glutted? Not likely.

So, what will exist is a largely statified economy, with no central plan with the various parts competing willy-nilly against each other and against the whole. The (foreign) capitalists will concentrate primarily on extractive industry while the domestic “capitalists” will concentrate

on what they know: the distributive sector. All-in-all an extremely unstable situation and one that is easily reversible for an extended period of time.

If and when a capitalist state is re-established in the USSR it will be extremely weak from the outset for a number of reasons:

- First, militarily. The world bourgeoisie as a class has absolutely no interest in a strong military in a capitalist USSR. Even in the event of a third world war 10 years from now arising from the trade wars now in progress, the USSR will more than likely be the venue of the war rather than the partner of one side or the other. Not a prospect that encourages a stable regime.
- Second, the cost of running a capitalist state on the bones of the USSR will be extremely high. The social cost of dismantling the vast (and barely adequate) medical care, education, urban transportation systems etc. would be extremely high. More instability.
- Third, any deal the newly formed capitalist state can make with the world capitalist class on trade will be on the most uneven (and costly) basis. The North Americans, for example, will be glad to sell agricultural commodities in exchange for rubles pegged at some gold standard price (1,000 rubles for one dollar?) or for gold itself. This sort of deal is only made at the expense of the working class—a working class that, in as much as it has passively supported Yeltsin, has been because he (and the intellectuals) have promised to *deliver* the standard of living the Stalinists always promised.

So, even if it turns out that the comrades are right who say that the workers' state in the USSR "has reached the point of no return" (and this is entirely possible, just not clear at the moment) the opportunity to reverse the situation will exist for years, if not decades to come.

Now on haste and why it's not always good to be "fast" but it's always good to be "right".

I can't say for certain because I do not know all the comrades involved in this discussion well enough to say. However, it seems as if the comrades' desire to rush to judgment on this question is being

influenced by the pressure of the mass media. I have worked in the bourgeois media for more than 30 years and the one thing I have learned above others is that in the final analysis the *NY Times*, CNN and the *London Financial News* are a business. Leaving aside the illusions of the petty bourgeois who people the editorial staff of these institutions, they *ultimately, and in the final analysis represent the views and the political agenda of the capitalists*. They regularly, and knowingly feed CIA, MI5 and KGB disinformation to the public “in the interest of freedom and democracy”. In this case it is in the interest of the world bourgeois order to convince us (and the Soviet Stalinists) that “The Party’s Over”. Maybe, maybe not. I say the jury is still out.

I support Harlan’s “Motion on State Question in the USSR” and urge all IEC members to vote for this motion and a resounding “NO” on all three of the IS/IEC motions.

DOCUMENT 32

Jane (Wellington), 3 September 1991

With the exception of Kalisch there seems to be general agreement that prior to the coup the USSR was a deformed workers’ state, and with the exception of Harlan and perhaps Bay Area comrades, that today there is a bourgeois state, albeit very weak. I find it astonishing that comrades do not see the failure of the coup as the decisive point where the nature of the state changed. Both sides were relatively weak, but the failure of the “hardliners” signified the collapse of the old workers’ state.

Riley wanted to hold off on any decision as to the smashing of the workers’ state, waiting for a purge of the army. Yes, the purges that are taking place are important, as was the banning of the CP. But these measures were not decisive points which saw the destruction of the workers’ state; they showed that the failure of the coup, which made them possible, was that decisive point. Yeltsin’s victory, following the split in the army, was what laid the basis for the further process of dismantling which has occurred since the coup folded.

For us not to take a side in the coup is to betray the working class. It is unacceptable that we do not take a side in a conflict that led to

the smashing of the deformed workers' state on the basis that it was merely a falling out between bureaucrats or between pro-capitalists.

Part of this debate revolves around the question of whether the PRG comrades were correct to say, at the time the coup was launched, that the defeat of the coup would mean the creation of a bourgeois state in the USSR, or whether they just made a lucky guess. The point is that the coup immediately polarised the different forces in the Soviet Union. The fact that Gorbachev is now irrelevant is not a chance occurrence: his position as the leader of the foot-in-both-camps faction was and is unviable—if he becomes a prominent political figure again, it will be as a solid procapitalist, no more sitting on the fence. Once the coup began there were two sides, one for capitalist restoration, the other for the protection of Stalinist bureaucratic privileges. As in Poland in 1981 the hardline Stalinists' defence of their privileges was necessarily a limited defence of collectivised property.

Comrades have pointed to the statements of the coup leaders in order to prove they were not fighting for the working class or in defence of collectivised property, but rather that they were only fighting for their own interests. So what's new, comrades! As we have always said, their defence of their own bureaucratic privileges is only possible with the defence of collectivised property. Fundamentally they are counterrevolutionary, they have never been able to do more than buy some time. Nothing was essentially different in Poland in 1981—what Jaruzelski SAID was not very important in determining whether or not we took a side. We said to the Workers Power types: "There were two sides, comrades, and you were on the side of capitalist restoration; we were on the side of collectivised property." There were two sides in Poland and there were two sides in the Soviet Union. One of these sides was ours.

Smith and Riker however seem to remain agnostic on the question of defence of the coup, arguing that our support for the coup is determined by who the coup leaders were shooting at. Of course it depends on who they shoot at, comrades; this is always the question when there is a military struggle and we are trying to decide whether the working class has a side in it. And of course our taking a clear side

in the coup does not mean that we necessarily support every action of the people we are blocking militarily with. In Poland in 1981, we didn't defend Stalinist atrocities; we defended the crackdown IN SPITE OF any Stalinist atrocities. This question is secondary to our defence of the coup and to collectivised property.

In the case of the coup there wasn't much doubt whom the "hardliners" were aiming their guns at—Gorbachev, Yeltsin and the forces for capitalist restoration. And within a very few hours the situation was polarised between the "hardliners" and Yeltsin. On that basis we had to support the coup, unless you are arguing perhaps that if the coup leaders were shooting at Soviet workers our position would change. This factor did not determine our position in 1981; it DID for Workers Power. If their guns were aimed at the working class, which they probably would have if there had been a drawn out civil war, our position should still have been in defence of the coup.

Smith argues that: "The present situation in the USSR is not analogous to the Jaruzelski coup against Polish Solidarity in December of 1981 because the Soviet working class is not presently independently organised, as a class, behind a capitalist restorationist leadership." Smith is correct in arguing that they are not organised as a class, either for or against the coup, but how does this affect our position? Are you arguing that if the working class WERE to support Yeltsin our position would be different?

The situation would be more analogous to 1981, and the defence of the coup would be a lot less popular on the left. But we do not determine our political line on where working-class consciousness is at, as Workers Power did in Poland and on the national question in the USSR. The question is not which side the working class is on, but which side would a working class that is politically conscious of itself be on. It would be for the defence of collectivised property and against Yeltsin and co. It would have been tragic had we had a section in the USSR that did not take a position in defence of the bureaucracy against restoration at the time of the coup.

Harlan appears to argue that the Soviet Union is still a deformed workers' state, though severely weakened. But the army that supported

the “hardliners” was defeated and is now being purged. The armed force which split and supported Yeltsin won, and is now defending the restoration of capitalism. It must be basic to our understanding that since the defeat of the coup a bourgeois state has existed in the Soviet Union, though fragile and weak. Of course there are still fragments of the old workers’ state in place and there may be resistance to Yeltsin from those fragments or from the working class, but that does not mean that the nature of the state is proletarian. What are you waiting to see to PROVE the end of the deformed workers’ state?

I disagree with Kalisch that there was not a deformed workers’ state in the Soviet Union prior to the coup. Kalisch here is consistent with his position on non-defence of the coup, but is very wrong. There had been until the coup no qualitative changes in the Soviet Union that could possibly mean that there was a bourgeois state. The G7 summit and the CC plenum reflected that the pro-capitalist government was strengthening and that the workers’ state was very frail, but there was no decisive change. We had not seen the workers’ state incapacitated—that process began with the collapse of the coup. And the wholesale cleanout from Yeltsin which we’ve seen in the last ten days COULD NOT HAPPEN until the workers’ state was incapacitated.

The coup confirms that there WAS a state in the Marxist sense, an armed body that defended collectivised property. The smashing of the coup by Yeltsin and the armed forces who supported capitalist restoration was the point at which the nature of the state in the USSR changed, to a state that defends a bourgeois regime.

But comrades have replied that the coup leaders were not defending collectivised property, but only the positions of the Stalinist bureaucracy. But short of a political revolution which overthrows the bureaucracy, which was clearly not immediately on the agenda, the core of the state in the USSR was of course going to be defending the privileges of the bureaucracy and not advancing a consistent programme for defence of centralised planning. But this is all that the bureaucracy has ever been capable of doing. The point is not the motivation of the bureaucracy when sections of it aim their guns at procapitalists; the point is that these counter-revolutionaries DO

sometimes aim their guns at procapitalists, and this has always been the basis on which we have given military support to the Stalinists.

Comrades, there was no question in this situation of us giving political support to the coup leaders. We were not trying to decide whether or not to call for an electoral vote for them. There was a military confrontation between two fundamentally counter-revolutionary forces and we had to decide whether or not to bloc militarily with the “hardliners”. We had to decide this on the basis of whether it would be a good thing for the international working class if the “hardliners” were defeated, or a bad thing, or whether it made no difference. Some comrades are arguing that we had no side, that the working class had no stake in the conflict around the coup, that it made no difference. At the same time everyone seems to be in agreement with the IS’s rather vague but correct statement that “the collapse of the coup unleashed a reactionary avalanche”. But if the result of the defeat of the “hardliners” was a reactionary avalanche—and if not the destruction of the workers’ state then something very close to it—then it is absurd to argue that the working class was indifferent to the conflict around the coup. Comrades, these two positions are incompatible.

DOCUMENT 33

Logan (Wellington), 3 September 1991

Some Points Supplementary to Cullen’s Reply to Riley

Of course Riley is quite right: nothing in history is absolutely inevitable.

The proposition that absolutely any outcome whatever, other than the consolidation of the coup, would represent the end of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers’ state is not theoretically supportable; nor is it necessary to the argument for taking a defensive posture toward the coup. (That proposition was merely a judgement of the overwhelming probability, projecting from the evident depth and maturity of the contradictions between the movement toward capitalism on the one hand and the bureaucratic interests of the personnel in the old state apparatus on the other hand.)

It was theoretically possible for the coup leaders to change their

minds, and to cease going after the pro-capitalists. We would AT THAT POINT have had to break any bloc we had with them. That is OK. We may well sometimes decide that the circumstances which gave rise to a military bloc no longer apply, and that the bloc must be broken. It doesn't mean we were wrong. We blocked with them because they were going after the pro-capitalists. If they stopped going after the pro-capitalists we stopped blocking with them. We never trusted them, anyway.

But, to move from theoretical possibilities to the actual world in which the events took place, you had a society which was falling apart, a society which was riven by contradiction, particularly taking the form of a contradiction between the movement toward capitalism and the interests of the old bureaucracy. In this society you had a coup which was led by the whole official leadership of all the armed forces. Any supporter of the old state structures who failed to side with this coup from the very first had either decided already that there was no real possibility of maintaining those structures, or was too cowardly to take a side in this or any conceivable struggle, or was so politically disoriented as to be insignificant as a force. In a certain sense any member of the apparatus who did not support the coup was functionally no longer part of the workers' state.

Conversely every supporter of capitalist restorationism knew that it was essential to oppose the coup.

The coup and the forces against it very quickly came to express the different poles of social interest which were already very well developed in the society. That was rather inevitable. There was a social logic to the development of events which proved inescapable. This was not Chile or the Philippines. It was the Soviet Union in the final stages of decomposition.

In the event what was proved was that the deformed workers' state had already gone a very long way towards complete decomposition. It was proved in this struggle that the state was incapable of very much of a fight. Of course the historical proof of that already-developed fact was an important event in itself, with its own historical consequences. It stripped away everyone's illusions. On the one hand it demoralised

and disabled the personnel of the old state, and on the other hand it gave confidence to the pro-capitalists, who now knew for sure that the coercive power of the old order was a sham.

It seemed possible for a brief time during the coup—judging on the basis of incomplete information from afar—that the forces had not fully polarised and that a compromise might yet ensue, perhaps involving bringing Gorbachev back but leaving the coup leaders in office. Even if this had occurred, however, the institutions of the old state would have been shown up as incapable of playing a decisive role. The deformed workers' state would have been shown before its society to be impotent. And there would have been nothing to hold back the forces of counter-revolution which are mobilised in Russia today.

So yes, in the real historical situation “there was no possibility of reconstituting some kind of coalition government after the event in which the essential correlation of forces was not qualitatively altered.” You see the old correlation of forces was based on the deception that the workers' state was stronger than it in fact was. Had the coup leaders been forced to a compromise would have exposed a social fact which had to be hidden if the old correlation of forces was to remain. Any such compromise would have shown that the “hardliners” were not in a position to impose their will. The coup was necessarily a testing of forces. It necessarily stripped away illusions. And, thereby, it necessarily changed the basis on which it was possible to put together a government for Russia.

Riley presents a variety of alternative scenarios. All of them seem unlikely. These scenarios are of two types. The first type involves the coupists coming to a compromise. As I have argued, in the real social circumstances there was no room for compromise, so any attempt at one would have been interpreted as defeat for the coup, and would thereby have become a defeat for the coup.

The other type of scenario Riley presents at bottom postulates the PRIOR demise of the Soviet Union as any kind of workers' state at all.

“the armed forces, or a large component of them could have rejected the coup as unconstitutional and remained loyal to

Gorbachev their commander in chief, thereby aborting the coup. This outcome would probably have strengthened the Yeltsinites considerably but not have qualitatively altered the status quo ante”

A counter-coup against the properly constituted leaders of the armed forces was always unlikely. Had it occurred in this fashion—that is, for the purpose of preventing the top officers from taking decisive action against the pro-capitalist Gorbachev government—then in this context it would have shown that there was essentially no force willing to fight against restorationism. It would have been seen in that way, too, and the restorationists would have gone on the rampage anyway.

“the coupists, if they achieved their aim and succeeded in grabbing power without major incident, and aborting the union treaty, could then themselves have proceeded to ‘hand over power to a pro-capitalist government, or even participate in the formation of such a government themselves’..

It is certainly true that if the coupists had achieved their aim then the regime they established would have led to a continuance of the slide toward capitalist restoration. However, if instead of a continuing slide they had moved directly to the setting up of a capitalist regime, then that would suggest that they were themselves the armed force of a bourgeois state.

Now it was conceivably possible that the armed force of the Soviet Union would slide over to become the core of a bourgeois state, but it was never our position that this had happened ... thankfully. It is basic to the position of defending the coup that until the defeat of the coup the Soviet Union was a workers’ state, albeit degenerated.

DOCUMENT 34

Dorn (Wellington), 5 September 1991

The decisive event which led to the destruction of the world’s first workers’ state is not an issue on which the working class should take no side.

The recent events in the USSR were not unexpected. The

contradictions of Stalinism have finally resolved themselves in one of the two possible directions. We knew this was going to happen. The contradiction was resolved in the context of a fight between those who wanted to maintain the existing state and those who wanted to change it. We knew this was going to happen too.

I wrote the above before I was aware of the full range of positions in the IBT. I still see it as rather self-evident although others obviously do not. There are many things we are not agreed on. We are not agreed on the current class character of the state in the area of land known as the USSR; those who agree that this has changed cannot agree on when; and we cannot agree on whether to take sides in the event which many believe to be the qualitative turning point.

My position on these is that the workers' state in the USSR has been decisively destroyed and that several bourgeois states are being created; that this qualitative change came about with the defeat of the coup; and that it naturally follows that we had a side in the coup, to defend it against the forces of capitalist restoration. Essentially this entails support of motions #1 and #3 in the recent IS minutes. I believe this is a logically consistent correct position.

To say, however, as Riley does, that the defeat of the coup was the qualitative event which changed the nature of the USSR state, but to then refuse to take a side in this event, seems to me illogical and contradictory.

In defeating the coup "plotters", Yeltsin and co *at the same time* defeated the workers' state. (Events since have shown this very clearly—the purge of the military and the KGB, Yeltsin's personal increase in power compared with Gorbachev, Western imperialism's dismay at the coup and delight at the repercussions of its defeat.) This seems to suggest that the coup must have had *something* to do with defence of the workers' state.

As Marxists we offer *military* support for one basic reason: that we think the working class will be significantly better off if one side defeats the other. That's all. It's got nothing to do with programme. It's about defending and extending conditions which better enable us to fight for our programme.

The architects of the coup were Stalinists: they weren't very good at it; they didn't have much working class backing; their only motivation was a last minute grasp at the disappearing fragments of their bureaucratic privileges. They were confused, demoralised, even desperate, but in some way they perceived their material interests as resting on the current nature of the Soviet state, and as being threatened by the drive towards capitalist restoration. And in attempting, however incompetently, to defend these material interests, they were also (despite themselves) attempting to defend collectivised property. We should have helped them.

If we had sufficient forces in the Soviet Union we should have mobilised the Soviet proletariat in military support of the coup. But we would be mobilising them in *open* defence of collectivised property (and for workers' democracy and thousands of other things the Stalinists have betrayed), thereby forcing the Stalinists to reveal what they were *really* trying to defend. I doubt if such a movement would have had much faith in them as leadership.

Stalinism, as Riley points out, is a contradiction. A bureaucratic layer resting on workers' property forms but without a significant working class base could not last forever. Basic Marxism says that contradictions will eventually resolve themselves—this is how social change occurs. We've just seen social change, the process of contradiction being resolved (unfortunately in the wrong direction) and we've been expecting it.

As the *government* of the USSR became more and more pro-capitalist over the past few years, the contradictions between it and the workers' *state* became more accentuated. We believed that at some stage there would be some kind of conflict between these two forces, leading to the victory of one over the other, either a change or a consolidation in the nature of the state. Such a decisive change could only come about through a fundamental conflict between two factions representing the polarised elements of the contradiction. In such an unstable social situation where the nature of state force is threatened, it would have been very unlikely if the conflict had not turned to polarisation.

However, over the past few years, there has been much speculation in the Trotskyist movement that there would not be a conflict after all, that the film of reformism really could be wound backwards. The forces in support of the workers' state seemed so weak, seemed to capitulate so easily to each of the "reforms" put into place by Gorbachev, that on the surface it seemed unlikely that they could put up a fight.

This, of course, caused a few problems because it essentially contradicted the Marxist view of the state—an armed body defending particular property forms which cannot move over as a whole to defend different property forms but must be decisively smashed. I was rather hoping that there would be a decisive, qualitative event—it would save us the trouble of rewriting Marxism.

Taking these points into account, it does not seem particularly surprising that such an event happened, that forces tied to the existing state tried to defend it against those who attempted to "reform" it; nor is it surprising that this was a very weak attempt and that it failed.

This is now history. And Marxists place great value in history. We look to it for a greater understanding of how social and political forces operate. We learn from the conflicts in history to help us win future conflicts. In a sense, however, I'm not sure that there is all that much to learn from these events, because we already had the theoretical basis on which to analyse them. We largely predicted what was going to happen, or at the very least that it was very likely to happen.

What I do believe we can learn from all this is that the Marxist theory of the state is a correct one. We have, once again, been proved right. I believe that to not take sides in the coup, or to say (Harlan, Smith, Riker) that the "qualitative turning point" has passed but that the workers' state is still in existence, or to say (Kalisch) that the nature of the Soviet state changed through the existence of a "pro-capitalist government" all entail significant revisions of this theory.

There has been much talk about the "complexity" of these events. This is true. Politics is always complex, but that hasn't stopped us seeing fundamentals before and it shouldn't stop us now. These revisions are not necessary. We should beware of making things more "complex" than they really are.

DOCUMENT 35

Smith (Bay Area), 6 September 1991

Logan's historical objectivism its strengths and flaws

I think there is something attractive to Comrade Logan's argument in defense of the Soviet coup d'état. And that is that he may be right. But we insist that so far the empirical evidence does not substantiate his theory. Even less so when the theory is regurgitated by his students. In his search of logical consistency Comrade Logan found a schema. This scenario is partially right but his position is composed more of "historical objectivist" thinking than an analysis of events as they actually unfolded.

Comrades that support his point of view have accused those that oppose advocating a military bloc with the coupists of having the same political position as Workers Power upholds in defense of Polish Solidarity. We pointed out that the objective situation was not the same. That the Soviet working class has not yet spoken. To no avail.

We could use a similar "method" of argumentation and assert that Comrade Logan's position, that indeed does tend towards historical determinism, parallel's Workers Power's position on Cuba. That is, that as soon as the Soviet bureaucracy intervened on the side of the Cubans that there was an "irreversible dynamic" that could *only* lead to Cuba becoming a deformed workers' state. Thereby denying that consciousness plays a role in such historic events. But baiting one's comrades for having positions that they do not hold will not play a useful or clarifying role in this discussion. Besides its dirty pool.

Just think: Do Stalinist bureaucrats necessarily follow the "logic" and "dynamic" as laid out by Comrade Logan? The Stalinists of the former DDR are obvious proof that as Billie Holiday would say—"it ain't necessarily so".

Yes Comrade Logan, the coup COULD have led to a sharp polarization of Soviet society and a civil war, but it simply never got off the ground.

In his answer to Riley's argument of August 31 that there were a variety of possible outcomes for the coup, Comrade Logan says:

"But, to move from theoretical possibilities to the actual world

in which the events took place, you had a society which was falling apart, a society which was riven by contradiction, particularly taking the form of a contradiction between the movement toward capitalism and the interests of the old bureaucracy. In this society you had a coup which was led by the whole official leadership of all the armed forces [not true! G.S.]. *Any supporter of the old state structures who failed to side with this coup from the very first had either decided already that there was no real possibility of maintaining those structures, or was too cowardly to take a side in this or any conceivable struggle, or was so politically disoriented as to be insignificant as a force. In a certain sense any member of the apparatus who did not support the coup was functionally no longer part of the workers' state.* “ (Comrade Logan’s letter of 3 September 1991, my emphasis, G.S.)

Wrong! It may have been that Stalinists, and anybody else, that didn’t support the coup failed to do so because they had *no confidence* in the ability of the coupist to pull it off. Not a minor consideration for a Stalinist careerist. For most of these stalinist apparatchniks soviet defensism is “a profession not a conviction”.

Comrade Logan goes on to say:

“Conversely every supporter of capitalist restorationism knew that it was essential to oppose the coup.” (Ibid)

This converse *is* both logical and true. But it tends to distort the reality because many in the USSR who opposed the coup did so out of a mis-placed desire to defend their newly acquired democratic liberties. The coup was so murky and the Stalinist lied in such a base manner that in the minds of many “anti-coupists” the polarization over the coup was “democracy” vs. “dictatorship.”

“The coup and the forces against it very quickly came to express the different poles of social interest which were already very well developed in the society. *That was rather inevitable.* There was a *social logic* to the development of events which *proved inescapable.* This was not Chile or the Philippines. It was the Soviet Union in the final stages of decomposition.” (Ibid, my emphasis, G.S.)

“Inevitable”? “Social logic”? “Proved inescapable”? What is this? Truth is concrete. But no concrete analysis is provided. As our ex-

Comrade Seymour said in a discussion on the formation of deformed workers' states in the Spartacist League (SL) in the early seventies:

“In the absence of a concrete analysis of alternative possibilities, Comrade Logan’s use of the term “inevitably” is objectivist—it asserts that what ever happened had to happen.” (Seymour, 24 June 1973, SL internal document)

Comrade Logan then asserts that “It [the coup, G.S.] stripped away everyone’s illusions.” Here it is clear that the wish precedes the thought. The unfortunate reality is that Soviet workers still have enormous illusions. Some in Yeltsin and a utopian vision of capitalism a la the Scandinavian countries, some in Gorbachev and “market Stalinism”, And some still harbor illusions in the “hardliners”. Unfortunately it will be necessary for the Soviet workers to go through a long, rocky, and bloody road before they shed their illusions and regain the essential revolutionary consciousness to once again become the masters of Soviet society. All of this presupposes the formation of a Trotskyist party. Without this development Comrade Logan’s prognosis will be proven correct. But it is too soon to tell.

Logan denies that the coup represented an intra-bureaucratic struggle. He disagrees that it was possible for the coupists to form a coalition with the Yeltsinites. We have concrete evidence to the contrary. Here it is. Soviet Air Force Colonel Viktor Alksnis who appeared on U.S. national TV Wednesday night (Ted Koppel’s show) and was described by the commentator as a coup supporter and did not deny it, was also interviewed in the 3 July issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. In this article he laid out his program to resolve the crisis in the USSR. We quote it here in full:

- Remove Gorbachev from the presidency.
- Abolish the presidency altogether.
- Create a “Committee of National Salvation.”
- Outlaw all political parties—including the Communist Party.
- Grant the republics a limited degree of autonomy—but only within the framework of a strengthened Soviet Union. Permit no secession.
- Crush all secessionist movements—with force if necessary.

- Crack down on all political movements and suppress all political debate, discussion and dissent.
- Install a private market economy—at bayonet-point, if necessary.
- Then, and only then, make a transition to multiparty democracy and freedom of expression.
- Rebuild the Soviet military to restore the reunified Soviet Union to superpower status in the world.

(*S.F. Chronicle*, July 3, 1991).

It seems to me that this program almost coincides with the program of the coupists. This Colonel Alksnis is a member of the Supreme Soviet and he claims that this program has broad support. Isn't it conceivable that the Yeltsinites could support such a program? Isn't it possible that the forces that advocate such a "solution" to the crisis in the USSR would be hesitant to wipe out their potential bloc partners? Isn't it likely that what really describes those who advocate Perestroika under the gun is that Yeltsin too readily takes orders from the US state department?

I think this coup started off as an intra-bureaucratic struggle and certainly **COULD HAVE DEVELOPED INTO A CIVIL WAR**, but it collapsed. The coup failed, not in the face of superior force, but due to a lack of resolve on the part of the coupists.

The Pupils of the Pedagogue

Logan's school has cultivated a number of able and serious adherents. Unfortunately because Logan's schema is being mis-applied, in the particular situation, many of the facts and conclusions his co-thinkers are distorted to fit the "theory".

In Dorn's letter of 5 September she says:

"The decisive event which led to the destruction of the world's first workers' state is not an issue on which the working class should take no side."

This is presumptuous. If we all agreed that the coup represented the "decisive event which led to the destruction of the world's first workers' state" it would not be necessary to have this discussion at all.

She goes on to say:

"There has been much talk about the 'complexity' of these

events. This is true. Politics is always complex, but that hasn't stopped us seeing fundamentals before and it shouldn't stop us now. These revisions are not necessary. *We should beware of making things more 'complex' than they really are.*"(my emphasis)

Given the absence of empirical data in support of the arguments from the New Zealand comrades during the course coupled with an imaginary "civil war", Dorn's statement is the rough equivalent of saying: I've got my mind made up don't confuse me with facts!

One of the paramount propositions of dialectical materialism, the Marxist method of analysis, advances is that a given social phenomenon can't be completely comprehended unless and until the facts surrounding its entire course of development has been divulged and assimilated (in all their complexity if I dare say).

Hayes called the coup a civil war. He said:

"But this misses what happened in the struggle around the coup. When the coup was mounted a short, decisive (though not very bloody) civil war took place between two military camps. After this civil war the USSR, as one comrade has said, is now a very different place."

This is a gross exaggeration. While it's true that if the coupist had been far more resolute the situation could have developed into a civil war characterizing the coup as a decisive civil war is a perfect example of distorting reality to fit a "theory".

As Trotsky pointed out:

"A real civil war could develop not between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the resurgent proletariat but between the proletariat and the active forces of the counterrevolution."

(The Class Nature of the Soviet State, LTW 33-34 p.118)

This "real civil war" has not yet occurred in my opinion.

Mason says that "Smith and Harlan may be arguing for a new criterion for determining to whom we give military support, namely, the fortitude of our potential bloc partners." Harlan and I were not arguing for any "new" criterion. We were trying to point out that the coupist lacked even the most rudimentary commitment to carry the coup out. The coupists wanted a bloodless coup, according to the *Los Angeles Times*:

“An official from the tool-making industry said that the troops were not being tough enough in controlling the protests. Driving into the Kremlin, he came across a demonstration just beneath its walls.

“I saw what was happening in Manezh Square,’ he said. ‘We have to move ahead more decisively. There were about 700 people there.’”

“According to Vorontsov’s notes, Pavlov replied, ‘I am against tanks. Let people stroll around and talk a little bit.’” (*LAT* September 3, 1991.

Forming a military bloc is not a purely abstract or moral consideration. We have to attempt to estimate the actual commitment of the Stalinist , or ostensible Soviet defensist, to preserve proletarian property forms. When we describe and try to define the commitment of the Stalinist to defend socialized property relations we must consider three major components:

1. *Understanding*

Do these Stalinists comprehend the threat to socialized property relations and its connection to their privileged existence? This includes the necessity of the central plan to sustain the Soviet economy.

The decrees and statements of the “Emergency Committee” were a mixed bag, very contradictory. They *were not irrelevant* as many of the New Zealand comrades assert. While these declarations were of only secondary importance to us they did reveal the political basis for the paralysis of resolve the coupist lapsed into.

2. *Will*

Do the Stalinists have the conviction to act decisively against capitalist restorationist forces?

The latest information I have reveals that the coupists did indeed want to arrest Yeltsin:

“Unknown to him (Yeltsin, G.S.), a KGB squad was hot on his trail across the capital. It had first gone to his home in northern Moscow. Not finding him there, it had sped to his dacha, missing him by 40 minutes. It missed him again at the Kremlin when the guards who refused him entry had not received an

order to detain him. Now its last opportunity was gone: He had arrived shortly before 10 a.m. at the White House and already a crowd of supporters was growing.”(LAT Ibid)

After this on three separate occasions (a paratroop battalion, a squadron of 10 tanks from the elite Tamanskaya division, and the KGB’s Alpha Unit, an elite anti-terrorist unit) the military forces assigned to take Yeltsin refused to do so.

Which brings me another very important component.

3. *Ability*

Do the Stalinist have the facility to carry out the crushing of the counter-revolutionary force? This means they must have sufficient power, authority, and influence within the repressive apparatus and within the state and economic administrative bodies.

The facts show that the coupists lacked the commitment, understanding, will, and ability, which are all interconnected to carry out this coup. Mason, exactly who could you have formed a military bloc with? Our potential bloc partners were not real. They were an empty shell, a ghost, nothing. Calling for a military bloc with such a force in the abstract transforms a serious Leninist tactic into a cruel joke.

The USSR is still a degenerated workers’ state

If Comrade Logan would preface his argument with the qualifier that “all things being equal” or “if no new forces enter the field” the most likely outcome will be that the degenerated workers’ state will no longer exist. I would agree with him. Instead the “League of unsolicited prophets” declare unequivocally the same damn thing that every bourgeois rag from the *New Times* to the *Economist* has been howling: “Communism is dead”, i.e. The USSR as a workers’ state is no more.

If we were at the race track the smart money would vote Logan’s way but I say it ain’t over till it’s over.

To claim that the USSR no longer exists as a degenerated workers’ state mistakenly characterizes the unfolding counter-revolutionary process as finished. The probable outcome of the events now in process in the USSR will most likely be the end of the USSR as a degenerated worker’s state but in no way are we at the end of this historic process.

The USSR 's degenerated workers' state still represents a tool, a severely damaged tool but a tool nonetheless, for the defense and maintenance of the social conquests of the soviet proletariat. Though horribly mismanaged these gains are still fairly well consolidated. The imperialists realize that they may crack their teeth trying to bite a chunk out of the soviet economy. Despite the bombastic headlines in their press they instinctively know that the counterrevolution has not yet run its course. That is why the more sceptical among the imperialists have proclaimed that they are not prepared to "invest" in the Soviet economy until the "reforms" have been completed.

If the weak unstable nascent pro-capitalist state developing around Yeltsin's government were to try to directly attack the working class the entire process could be reversed almost over night.

According to *WV* # 533, 30 August, 1991:

"The forces backing Yeltsin would like to be a capitalist class, but they are not yet one. Even in Poland, where THE STATE IS CAPITALIST FROM TOP TO BOTTOM [my emphasis], a capitalist class has not yet congealed because they lack...capital."

Will somebody, anybody, please tell me how you can have a capitalist state with no capitalist class?! Undoubtedly this must be from the new school of Robertsonian "dialectics".

This is precisely the type of foolishness I am trying to convince the IEC of the IBT to steer away from. We must never proclaim that the historic gains of the world proletariat have been lost without irrefutable evidence. And this we do not have because it doesn't exist.

This is the meaning of Harlan's motion which I support, for convenience let's call it motion #4.

In conclusion I am urging members of the IEC to vote for motion #2, by Nason and Riley and motion #4. by Harlan.

For the Rebirth of the Fourth International.

DOCUMENT 36

Riley (Toronto) for the IS, 6 September 1991

For IEC on Procedures etc. for Vote

I have some final comments on the discussion but I will not be able

to send that out until tomorrow. This memo is directed at establishing the procedures for the voting on the motions, and updating the state of the motions.

1. The IS proposes that the vote on the motions should take place by phone from IS members to each IEC member between 4 and 5 pm (New York time) on Sunday (our days). This would be between 10 and 11 pm in Berlin; 1 and 2 pm in the Bay Area and 8 and 9 am (Monday) in New Zealand. We believe that polling members by phone should make it possible to accurately determine the will of the IEC and allows us the possibility of straightening out any confusion or technical hitches that might occur with electronic mail. We will of course promptly send out a memo with the results.

2. The motions which are to be voted on are to determine our general line on the disputed questions, but the IS proposes in advance that they should not be seen as binding in terms of precise formulation etc. In producing a written statement on the situation in the USSR we must be guided by the line approved by a majority of the IEC but it should be generally understood that the precise formulations will likely require some further discussion and/or refinement.

3. As a result of the discussion there has also been some changes on the part of those on the IS who put forward the original motions.

a. Nason, Riley and Cullen are withdrawing our motion No. 1 in favor of Harlan's motion (No. 4. which was sent out several days ago. We believe that it is not counterposed and represents a superior description of reality.

b. As a result of the information in the *LA Times*, quoted in Smith's most recent submission, that the coupists did in fact make several attempts to arrest Yeltsin early in the coup (information that was not available earlier) I consider the motion which Nason and I put forward regarding the proper attitude to the coup to be wrong. In its place I propose instead the following motion:

“The minimum condition for supporting the coup is that it was directed against the forces of capitalist restoration in the USSR. The fact that the coup leaders several times attempted to arrest Boris Yeltsin, the leader of the capitalist restorationists, in the

preliminary stages of the coup means that despite the cowardly, incompetent and irresolute fashion in which they proceeded (a reflection of their profound political demoralization) it is necessary for us to have a defensist attitude toward the coup.”

c. If any IEC member wishes to support either of the two original motions then they can of course be left on the floor.

4. While there is obviously considerable urgency about determining our position on this question the IS recommends that if any IEC comrade feels that the changes in the motions proposed above necessitates an extension of the discussion period (perhaps of 48 hours) then we should be prepared to do so.

DOCUMENT 37

Hayes (Wellington), 7 September 1991

On the Coup: Replies to Riley and Riker

1. Riley's 31 August letter

I am in full agreement with the responses from Cullen and Logan on Riley's latest document.

Probably my main impression of Riley's document is that much of it is unfamiliar to me. I do not recognise its framework, its pre-conceptions and its methods in relation to the questions of military blocs and the nature of Stalinism.

For instance I am confused by Riley's statement that he subjectively hoped that the coup would succeed but nevertheless believed that the IBT should take no side. If the Emergency Committee was just another bunch of capitalist restorationists then there was clearly something seriously awry in Riley's subjective impulse. A revolutionary programme is only a coherent statement of the hopes of revolutionaries, hopes which they believe to be historically and morally well founded. Our position on the coup had to be that the international working class should have hoped that the coup would succeed.

Riley's document has a tendency to vacillate between arguments which do not hang together very well. One argument is that the coup was unsupportable because it was simply a falling out between matching procapitalist forces, or was for other reasons just a squabble

between bureaucrats. The argument here—that a military bloc was precluded because it didn't matter who won—is I believe a serious error but it is also relatively straightforward.

The second argument, which dominates Riley's document, is however that the coup was unsupportable because its real social content and its likely subsequent impact were at the time unknowable. This line of argumentation seems to be a slight retreat from the first and appears to go like this: OK, let's say the coup was a reaction to the progressive undermining of the old system of bureaucratic planning and a brake against the process of capitalist restoration being facilitated by Gorbachev's government—*but* we could not be sure that the coup leaders would continue to apply this brake and further it was possible that the result of the coup leaders ceasing to apply the brake would not be the destruction of the deformed workers' state but the return of the precoup status quo.

Riley has argued that this whole debate hinges on this question of "outcomes". This is however thoroughly irrelevant. There is simply no logic to the argument that 1. because it was still possible that there could have been a compromise or defeat of the coup without the destruction of the workers' state, therefore 2. we could not back the coup militarily. Even if we accept the first proposition—which we should not—there is simply no logical connection between this proposition and the second.

Riley suggests that the military might have immediately rejected the seizure of power and reinstated Gorbachev: but in that event we would simply have regretted the immediate defeat of our bloc partners, scummy though they were, in their attempt to apply a brake to capitalist restoration. We supported that attempt and while the attempt was being made it was a good thing.

Riley also suggests that Yanayev et al might have engineered a compromise with Gorbachev or they might later have set up a restorationist regime themselves. But these scenarios simply involve the changing of the conditions under which we entered the military bloc in the first place.

Military blocs are usually temporary and unstable things. They are strictly conjunctural affairs, made possible by the fact that one

counter-revolutionary force has engaged another in military conflict and that it would be a good thing for the working class if a particular side won. When our bloc partners cease to do whatever it was they were doing which made us lend them military support then we cease to give them military support.

As long as the coup leaders remained militarily hostile to Gorbachev and applied a brake to capitalist restoration then we were on their side. If they ceased to do this then we would withdraw our support. There is however an implication in Riley's argument that we could not back the coup because we would share responsibility for any change in the conduct of the coup leaders thereafter.

But in any case the other outcomes which Riley suggests were not possible—not in the way Riley means. For he argues not merely that they were theoretically possible, but rather that in the USSR in 1991 they were *historically plausible*.

Riley warns of the dangers of being tied too closely to axioms when deducing correct positions to take on political events. But if our axioms are not useful in guiding us to correct political positions in important crises of this kind then they must be called into question. And this is essentially what Riley has done in his projections of the plausible lines of development of this struggle around the coup. He calls into question the axiom that it is impossible for all significant sections of the core of a state to go over to decisively support the overthrow of the social regime that their state defends. More specifically he calls into question the axiom that Stalinism is not homogenously and absolutely procapitalist and that we may sometimes bloc with it against procapitalist forces despite its fundamentally counter-revolutionary character and despite the unsupportable nature of its pronouncements. The first of these axioms is the theoretical core of Marxism-Leninism and the second is the key contribution of Trotskyism.

Our axioms are the lessons of history and we do not give them up lightly. I think in this case they stood up very well, and while prediction can generally be a dodgy business, the predictions of a number of those IBT comrades arguing for defence of the coup turned out pretty much OK. But then this was really a pretty orthodox situ-

ation; it didn't present new theoretical challenges like the creation of deformed workers' states post-World War Two which demanded applying the methodology of Trotskyism to explain new phenomena. The only odd thing about the events of August 1991, the only thing which doesn't fit too neatly with the expectations of pre-World War Two Trotskyism, was that they didn't happen half a century ago. But there were no real challenges; our task was simply to respond to a situation our movement had turned over in its mind since the 1930s and which unfolded fairly much as we had predicted. In the face of capitalist restoration Soviet society polarised, the bureaucracy split, and one section of the bureaucracy made a deformed and half-hearted defence of its bureaucratic privileges.

In his arguments Riley is not merely allowing for the odd historical quirk. He has brought some new axioms and some new expectations to these events, ones which I do not recognise. He seems to me to downplay the social and political polarisation in the USSR which the coup and its opposing camps reflected and to which the coup immediately gave a massive spur: for instance the Nason/Riley motion speaks only of the "prospect" of polarisation.

All of Riley's suggested possible outcomes assume the absence of the intensely polarising effect of the EC's seizure of power. The possibility of a compromise with Gorbachev assumed the relative lack of polarisation of a situation in which compromises could still be made; the possibilities of the simple nonrecognition of the coup by the armed forces and of the EC setting up a procapitalist government both assumed the relative lack of polarisation of a situation where the deformed workers' state had in fact *already* been destroyed and where no section of bureaucracy would defend the status quo.

The Nason/Riley motion asserts that when the coup was mounted the "alignment of forces" was not clear, and in his letter Riley similarly writes that "a military bloc depends on knowing who your partner is pointing his/her guns at, and at the outset of the coup that was not knowable." Now this is simply not true. Let's forget all the arguments over what the coup leaders wanted to do or didn't want to do with *Yeltsin* and whether they did actually try to get him or not: at the outset

of the coup the guns were aimed at *Gorbachev*. Now we clearly had to see *that* as a good thing, as buying the working class some time. The alignment of forces was clearly that of the core of the workers' state against procapitalist forces which dominated the government of that state. Whatever we projected about outcomes after that is by the by—dumping Gorbachev was a good thing and we had a side.

On the question of where it was all to go from there Riley saw the situation as something of a blank slate—anything was possible: “At the time the coup occurred there was no clear indication what intentions they had toward the purely capitalist Yeltsinite elements, or toward those elements of the Stalinist bureaucracy which favored accelerating the transition to capitalism.” To the extent that we knew anything at all about what the coup leaders wanted to do they seemed to want to restore capitalism.

Now if we were simply waiting to see what they would say in order to determine the stance this force would be likely to take against the Yeltsinites then, OK, there wasn't much indication; but our understanding of Stalinism should have made us aware that it would be impossible for the EC to consolidate the coup without taking out Yeltsin and his camp. Similarly we should have been aware that Yeltsin would have to destroy the coup if he were to succeed in restoring a bourgeois order. But Riley argues that it was thoroughly unclear whether or not the Emergency Committee—who were smart enough to see that *Gorbachev* was a serious threat to their way of life—were likely to have any hostile designs on Yeltsin. But that obscures the situation as it was: there were now real historical limits to the kind of alignments and coalitions which could be lashed together in this new climate. The possibility of compromise belonged to a time different from the one we had just entered; the coup leaders had to win and win decisively or they were finished.

Riley's approach does not fit comfortably with the degree of polarisation that did in fact occur and the degree to which there was a military confrontation with the Yeltsin camp. He appears to agree with the Bay Area comrades' argument that if the coup leaders had gone after Yeltsin then we would have sided with them, but that in fact no

such confrontation ever took place. But the idea that there was no real conflict or confrontation with Yeltsin is unacceptable; tanks lined up, barricades were erected, and these are generally the stuff of military confrontations. We don't demand a certain body count before we allow that a military confrontation exists; you don't generally see the Battle of the Bulge on the first day. The point is that the struggle around the coup quickly formed up two sides, two armed forces, against each other, and it was a situation which could only be resolved by the playing out of the scene according to the relative military capacities of the two camps.

But in any case I don't understand why Riley accepts that we would side with the coup militarily against Yeltsin, but not against Gorbachev. One of the arguments against siding with the EC against Gorbachev was that the EC appeared to plan to continue with the reintroduction of the market. So it didn't matter that Gorbachev was a probourgeois force: the point was that the coup leaders were pretty much the same. So why then do we take a side when the coup leaders aim the guns at Yeltsin? This rests I'm sure on a recognition that to not back the Stalinist military against a force so openly and clearly for capitalist restoration as Yeltsin's camp would be self-evidently preposterous. But it does not flow from Riley's arguments, and can only be explained on the basis of an important programmatic distinction between Gorbachev and Yeltsin—perhaps that Yeltsin was outside the CPSU, or that he was more open in his procapitalism. I can however see only a *quantitative* distinction between Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

The pieces of Riley's argument simply do not fit: he argues that for the working class the coup was a struggle about nothing, a struggle between procapitalist bureaucrats, or at least a struggle so foggy and impenetrable that it would be unwise to take a side in it. But the idea that this was a struggle about nothing is not supported by the hugely disastrous, epoch-making events which immediately followed the resolution of this struggle.

Riley's only response can be to argue that the connection between the defeat of the coup and the destruction of the deformed workers'

state is not in any way *causal* but purely chronological and accidental: they just happened to come one after the other. And yet Riley surely *does* concede a causal connection with his acceptance of the formulation that “the collapse of the coup unleashed a reactionary avalanche”. Unless we’ve become fond of reactionary avalanches we must conclude that we had a stake in ensuring that the coup did not collapse.

At the PRG general meeting on Tuesday the comrades of the NZ section all recorded their votes for the first and the third of the IS motions. The first motion argues that: “With the collapse of the coup, the process of capitalist restoration that has been unfolding in the USSR for the past several years has reached the point of no return.” The second motion argues that the working class had no stake in preventing the collapse of the coup. Those comrades who support both motions 1 and 2 should realise that the necessary implication of their argument is that the working class had no stake in preventing the success of capitalist restoration. I will of course argue this position publicly if it is the decision of the IBT; but first I’m going to need some coaching in how to do it.

2. Riker’s 2 September letter

It seems bizarre to have to assert that it is not objectivism to look beyond the speeches of Stalinists in order to determine whether we can extend military support to them, however Riker’s contribution makes this necessary.

Riker has made an attempt to clarify the distinctions between military and political support; he has however demonstrated that he does not understand this distinction. He argues quite correctly that if we are to take sides in a military conflict, we must have some means of evaluating the parties to the conflict and their relationship to each other and therefore the consequences of the victory of either side for the working class.

Riker’s objection to those who argue for defence to the coup is, as I understand it, that those comrades provide *no means* of evaluating the parties to the conflict and instead have only a Pablo-esque faith in Stalinism as an historically progressive force. The EC might have been

in a conflict with procapitalist forces—but just what was the EC? How did we determine whether or not it is in the interests of the working class for the coup leaders to win?

Riker's answer to this question is that we look at their "programme"; while we do not extend any political support to this programme we must nevertheless base our military support on this programme, he argues. But any military support our tradition has ever given to Stalinist forces has always been *in spite* of their programme, and not because of it. The programme of Stalinism is essentially counter-revolutionary and includes a lot of things like derailment of workers' revolutions internationally, capitulation to imperialism, suppression of workers' democracy domestically, all of which undermine the defence of collectivised property.

But Riker means, more specifically, the subjective intentions of the EC in the immediate situation, as revealed by their public utterances. Leaving aside the extreme dubiousness of trying to establish the subjective intentions of these thieves and liars by their *statements*, we have in any case *never* based our military defence of Stalinists on how often they mention the central plan in their speeches. When Stalinists have really laid on the class-struggle rhetoric we have not concluded that they had changed their fundamental inability to lead a struggle for socialism, and when they've been spare with this rhetoric we have not concluded that we have been unable to bloc with them. Again our military blocs with them are usually *in spite* of their generally appalling statements.

So a look at their "programme" and their public utterances obviously don't help us very much: they have never been decisive in our tradition for determining whether to lend military support. Well, goes Riker's argument, what does that leave us with? How can we make a decision?

What we are left with is the Trotskyist understanding of Stalinism as a specific social phenomenon. That understanding is that Stalinism is a petty-bourgeois and fundamentally counter-revolutionary force which sits on top of collectivised property forms and derives its privileges from the maintenance of those property forms. In the face

of capitalist restoration we believe that sections of the bureaucracy will defend those property forms, even if with a weak will and a limited and contradictory understanding of their defence, in order to attempt to maintain the existing structure of bureaucratic power.

If we do *not* look to this understanding of Stalinism's objective relation to workers' property forms then we are stuck in Riker's position. Riker simply looks at the coup leaders as if he'd never heard of such a thing as a Stalinist bureaucracy, and he says he knows of no real difference between them and the Yeltsinites. In the EC he sees a bunch of apparently procapitalist people who seem to be in a conflict with other apparently procapitalist people (like World War One maybe?) and he decides the working class has no side. How does he know? Because the EC *told* him they wanted to continue with market reforms.

To look beyond the statements of the EC in order to evaluate our chances of a military bloc is, Riker suggests, a kind of objectivism. Comrades, a central axis of our struggle for a revolutionary programme is the struggle against the objectivist notion of the inevitable victory of socialism. But that should not mislead us into arguing that a position which bases itself upon a consideration of objective conditions constitutes "objectivism".

The Trotskyist understanding of Stalinism does not include the Pabloite conception that the working class should extend critical political support to Stalinism on the grounds that Stalinism has the capacity to smash world capitalism. It does not include the Hansenite conception that Castroism unconsciously developed into a new genuinely revolutionary current. It simply recognises that—whatever the particular bureaucrats say—a defence of the bureaucratic apparatus involves simultaneously and necessarily a defence of the system of central planning which is the basis of the structure of bureaucratic privilege. Trotskyists certainly do not expect to get out of the Stalinists "a cohesive political program in defense of collectivized property forms" as Harlan and Smith seem to imply.

OK, Riker replies, but "The Stalinists must at least *say* they are against capitalist restoration (remember, there are also Stalinists in the field who are *for* the restoration of capitalism) in order for us

to tell them apart.” In the USSR one section of the bureaucracy had not only said that it favoured the market and a transformation of Soviet society but had undertaken real measures which progressively undercut the old bureaucratic structure. The coup last month did not occur in a vacuum but reflected a developing polarisation within the bureaucracy: the coup was clearly a reaction to the undermining of the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus, an attempt by certain key figures in that apparatus to halt or slow that process, and that is why a military bloc was called for. I know of no evidence that the coup was not an attempt to shore up the old network of bureaucratic power, privilege and repression and no comrades in this debate have provided any. But *this* is what the debate hinges on.

Riker in fact encapsulates the whole debate perfectly. He says: “The only way you can talk yourself into supporting the coup is to assume that these demoralized, Stalinist, government bureaucrats played some role “objectively” i.e. outside of their consciousness ...” He is right. Trotskyism has always seen military blocs with Stalinists in defence of collectivised property as being on the basis of the *objective* position of the bureaucracy. It has never based them on the consciousness of the bureaucracy for that consciousness has little or nothing to do with the defence of collectivised property. The only consciousness we expect from them is a fear that their jobs are going down the tubes, and this was fairly clearly the consciousness of the EC.

The necessary implication of Riker’s position is that we based our position on Poland 1981 on the public statements of Jarulzelski. I have never argued for the defence of the December crackdown along these lines and I have never heard of another member of the IBT doing so. I have quickly leafed through our *Acid Test for Trotskyists* pamphlet and I couldn’t find any argument of that type there. *Acid Test* does however note the economic crisis caused by the Polish Stalinists’ “mortgaging the economy to the western banks” and the Stalinists’ policy of conciliating “petty-capitalist farmers” (p 17), but it didn’t reprint any Jarulzelski speeches to try and convince Workers Power types to back the crackdown. No wonder. It did say however that

“Trotskyists cannot assume an attitude of neutrality in a showdown between a capitalist restorationist movement and a Stalinist state apparatus”; and I don’t think this argument was conditional on the restorationist movement not being based in the governmental bodies of the state apparatus.

To be honest I don’t *know* what Jarulzelski “said” at the end or 1981, and what’s more I don’t care. It made no difference to the position we took. I’m not sure but I imagine he would have mixed the usual reactionary crap with some nods in the direction of “socialism” and would probably have had a strong thread of the “need for law and order” running through it; if so that would be about par for the course.

And if that’s what Jarulzelski said then that doesn’t sound too much different from what the EC said, not that that should be relevant to our position. I agree with Cullen that a half-smart Stalinist in the EC would not want to be too heavy with the socialist rhetoric; it doesn’t sell well at home or abroad. But Cullen also provides some additional empirical information, statements from the EC which do invoke the need to preserve the central planning mechanisms and therefore provide a more balanced picture of the consciousness (or at least the public-relations consciousness) of the coup leaders and one probably more in keeping with what our projections might have been.

The significance of this more balanced picture of the EC “programme” is not of course that it lends any substantial weight to the case of those comrades arguing for defence of the coup, for they take that position in spite of the statements of the coup leaders. Its significance is rather that it substantially undermines the position of those comrades who have argued for taking no side in the coup, for they have *all* taken as their starting point what the EC *said*. Taken logically, their argument reduces itself to the bizarre proposition that we backed the December 1981 crackdown and not the August 1991 coup because Jarulzeski said better things than Yanayev. Ultimately therefore—Riker’s protestations notwithstanding—the arguments of those who take no side in the coup are that we could not defend the coup *militarily* because we could not give *political* support to the “programme” of the coup leaders.

DOCUMENT 38

Logan (Wellington), 7 September 1991

All the rhetoric, and all the talk of schemas and objectivism cannot conceal the key facts.

The Gorbachev and Yeltsin governments were carrying out policies which increasingly went in the direction of capitalism.

The top brass in the military and state machinery did not like the effects of these policies. Perhaps most immediately they did not like the imminent loosening of the Union (and the end of All-Union planning).

They sought to displace the governments.

A new government of the top brass would have slowed the movement toward capitalism.

They were, however, defeated.

Their defeat was followed by a considerable shift in power towards pro-capitalist elements, a marked acceleration of the movement towards a bourgeois order, and a considerable re-organisation of senior levels of the armed forces.

There is in this discussion one proposition which is mere dogma, mere theory, and without the support of empirical evidence. That is the proposition that subsequent to the defeat of the coup the predominant armed force remaining in Russia is fundamentally on the side of workers property forms. That is wishful thinking.

Of course it is true that the regime in Russia remains extremely fragile and the working class has extraordinary opportunities. Many of the gains of the October Revolution—nationalised industry, etc—in fact remain. Huge elements from the old armed forces can be won to the side of the revolutionary working class.

But for the working class to take power in Russia today it must be imbued with the understanding that the predominant coercive power is its irreconcilable historical enemy.

Comrades who gloss over this fact out of attachment to the traditional Trotskyist programme of defence of the Soviet Union are in danger of deep disorientation in forthcoming struggles in Russia.

There will be struggles between the working class and the state

power in Russia over the next months. We want to be on the right side in those struggles.

DOCUMENT 39

Kalisch (Berlin), 7 September 1991

1. Motion on the coup

Our axis of our intervention during the coup should have been:
Down with the reactionary bourgeois forces in the Soviet
bureaucracy!

Down with Yeltsin!

No military support to the Yanayev plotters!

For independent class action of the Soviet working class!

(Counterposed to new IS-motion of Sept. 6.)

2. On the character of the USSR/United Sovereign Republics (USR)

The Yanayev coup and the counteraction of the Yeltsinites is the last proof that the USSR (a bureaucratic degenerated workers' state does not exist anymore). The USR represents now a conglomeration of bourgeois states. Based on the imperialists, the native capitalist classes and the pro-capitalist wing of the bureaucracy the task of the newly established bourgeois governments is to ensure the restructuring of the economy and the state apparatus according to capitalist requirements.

(counterposed to Harlan's motion)

DOCUMENT 40

Monsees (Berlin), 7 September 1991

On motions

Before going into the stuff I have to say something general about inter-IBT discussions:

We have three sections in the IBT in the English speaking world and there is the language problem for the fourth one. The IBT is lucky to have so many comrades in the GS at least able to understand English, but this is not to be overstressed. Especially during this discussion again and again idioms are used, which NOBODY (inclusive Christoph, Kalisch and Maria) understands here and which cannot be

found in a dictionary. Of course we can ask, but this is an obstacle, of course comrades might think this or that half sentence/word is not important anyway, but we would like to decide that for ourselves. So it would be nice when comrades could have in mind this situation and try to explain obvious slang-formulations etc in brackets. Not that the German section is lucky to be able to take part in discussion, but the other sections are much more lucky to become understood in Germany.

I support Kalisch's motion on the character of the USSR.

I do this although I am still not convinced that it is useful to describe the State apparatus under a pro-capitalist government as bourgeois from the beginning. To my understanding this has to be organized under such a regime but is merely a process/period which might be finished by a civil-war, imperialist intervention/stationment—but which also might be resolved during “peaceful” times because of the misguided working class.

Nevertheless I support this motion, because its direction is fundamentally contrary to Harlan's motion. The last one is to my understanding based on the theses that there is an organic development from a deformed workers' state to a bourgeois one. This is not the case.

My position is as described in my letters, that with the establishment of a pro-capitalist government the workers' state is gone.

In his paper “The present nature of the Soviet State” Harlan starts with an important point that a “bourgeois government of the deformed/degenerated workers' state” is a term which is “formally incorrect and misleading”. The term “pro-capitalist government” is much better and already proved as useful to describe the contradiction of a government of a former workers' state which has the aim to destroy this state apparatus and to replace/reorganize it; the term “bourgeois government” is understood as connected to the existence of a bourgeois STATE.

But: Harlan's definition “a bourgeois government is one which represents a capitalist class” is not the point. The difference between a “bourgeois-” and a “pro-capitalist-regime” is only in so far useful and should be made, because a bourgeois regime is ruling a bourgeois

STATE-apparatus and a pro-capitalist regime has not yet got the STATE-apparatus which it needs to secure its historical task: the restoration of capitalism on the area of a former workers' state.

The “pro-capitalist governments” represent also the capitalist class, although there are only some capitalists, yet, inside these “countries”. The capitalist class is the dominant power on world scale, and a regime which has probably no other future than to become a compradore-regime of imperialism is nevertheless committed to bourgeois property forms, that means to the capitalist class. Or, comrade Harlan, what do you think is the qualitative difference between the Polish-government and the Algerian one, if not the difference of STATE-power (Walesa is probably NOT YET defended by armed forces of an imperialist power against the working class!, but he is a bourgeois politician based on capitalist means of production—even if there is still a lot of state-owned industry!).

Comrade Riker is totally wrong in explaining the pro-capitalist regimes as a governmental expression of petty-bourgeois peaceniks, travelers, artists and bohemians. For example in Hungary and Poland there are all of these lonely, small, individual national capitalists in direct connection with the government and a lot are themselves “democratic representatives” (and of course in direct connection with the various imperialist monopolies). They know what they want to get!

Back to Harlan:

Your statement that “pro-capitalist petty-bourgeois state power captures this reality” (The Present Nature...p. 1. is in the logic of Riker’s “bohemians-government”. This statement is not only “formally incorrect and misleading” but theoretically wrong. The term “petty bourgeois state” brings up a discussion which was, to my understanding, brought to the correct conclusions nearly two decades ago in our tradition.

Your historical optimism that there will be a “probable extended period of time before capitalism can be reconstructed” (Motion) seems to come from the logic, that a national capitalist class is needed to secure a bourgeois state-power. You have to deny this (and you did —only implicitly—by saying “these pro-capitalist forces lack the

means to consolidate STABLE state power, without direct imperialist intervention”/The Present Nature... p. 1.. If you do not deny this, please explain to me why Austria became a bourgeois state after the bourgeois state was smashed by the Soviet Army, and Cecheslovakia and Bulgaria did not. It did NOT depend on the development of a national capitalist class, but the outcome did depend, in fore-hand [vordergründig], on the rulers (the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy) of the armed body of men which was committed to proletarian property forms and decisive, in the last instance [letztendlich], it was dependant on the proportion of forces between imperialism and degenerated workers’ state.

I do not want to deal now with the hints of Harlan and Riker on the “mass-party” CPSU to explain, which forces they think are important to fight back, and seem to be important for them to explain why the “possibility to return” still exists. Only this: the former Stalinist state parties, now in opposition, came in the last year always and everywhere out as typical bourgeois workers’ parties, which do NOT strengthen class consciousness but led the proletariat into the hands of bourgeois nationalism and capitulation to/illusions in capitalism.

I have to come back with my question, whether we speak about the same thing when we talk about a “pro-capitalist government”: Logan wrote in his letter of August 29 a criticism against Kalisch position (that a pro-capitalist government was installed by Gorbachev on the last CC-plenum before the coup and that this means that the degenerated workers’ state is gone):

“You seem to be arguing, Kalisch, that there was a counter-revolution in mid-July which looked very, very much like a quantitative continuance of pro-bourgeois governmental policies within the framework of a single state. And you seem to fail to notice a counter-revolution which really looked like a counter-revolution, and did the things a counter-revolution is supposed to do.”

I asked in my letter from August 29:

“When I got it right, this means that Logan’s position is that a pro-cap government in the USSR was already existing for a long time before the coup?”

Mason answered in his letter from Sept. 2, for me unsatisfyingly:

“In his latest letter, Monsees asks if the position of the New Zealand comrades is that we consider Gorbachev’s pre-coup government to have been pro-capitalist. For us, this is not a central question. It certainly appears that around the time of the G7 summit Gorbachev swung more openly than before in Yeltsin’s direction and that this movement towards being more openly pro- restorationist probably helped trigger the coup. But the question of whether a government in a particular deformed workers’ state can be said to be “procapitalist”, to be for the restoration of capitalism, does not change the key political questions for us as we do not believe that it changes the nature of the state. Rather the establishment of a procapitalist government raises the tempo of events, tends to polarise the class struggle and eliminate some of the middle ground, and it brings the necessary resolution of the crisis forward in time. Of course if we are to call Stalinists—from Stalin on—“fundamentally counter-revolutionary” then we could hardly balk at also calling them, in an important sense, “pro-capitalist”. Further, the emergence of governments fully committed to capitalist property forms in the deformed workers’ states is of course an expression of the fundamentally procapitalist and counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism, its inability to defend workers’ property.”

Might be “not a central question”, for you, Mason, in coming to a position on the coup, but: nevertheless, it IS a central question, whether we see a qualitative difference between a pro-capitalist regime and a regime of the Stalinist bureaucracy (to be clear, for example, like the one before Gorbachev).

To my understanding, the contradiction between the social foundation (= workers’ or bourgeois means of production) is under a regime of the Stalinist bureaucracy reflected inside the government, while under the conditions of an existing pro-capitalist government outside this regime.

The problem is, I think, the obvious usual term in the PRG: “fundamentally counter-revolutionary”. The fundament of the Stalinist

bureaucracy was the existence of proletarian means of production on a national scale while a capitalist dominance internationally exists, right? The privileges of that bureaucracy came out of the national means of production, that means proletarian means. With this understanding the Stalinist bureaucracy has had NOT the fundament for counter-revolution on the national scale. Because the bureaucracy is even under the best conditions not able to defend its foundation (let's say for not longer than 70 years), parts of it are looking from very early on to find its roots in a restored capitalism. The problem for these parts is to become dominant. The Stalinist bureaucracy has the contradiction in itself. While it is a "transmission belt of imperialism inside the workers' state" it has its fundamentals of privileges in the proletarian property forms on the national scale.

Insofar as the Stalinist bureaucracy was not "half-committed" to bourgeois property forms in the Soviet Union, but FULLY committed to proletarian property forms of the state they ruled.

Nevertheless, the bureaucracy is unable to save its privileges on that foundation.

Trotsky had always to argue against these comrades, who said the bureaucracy itself, as a whole, had become a (state-) capitalist class. He pointed out its contradictions and that its foundations are itself contradictory. The main point was always that it is based, although contradictory, on proletarian property forms.

Here is the difference to a pro-capitalist government, to my understanding. A pro-cap-government is not anymore based on the proletarian means of production but on the prospect to secure its social position on the dominance of the law of value.

Just a talk about words? No! Under a pro-cap regime the Hitler-Stalin pact would have been irreversible with the same regime -under the Stalin-regime it was! Trotsky defended the Soviet Union despite this treaty, and he inclusive was for the defendance of Stalin against Hitler, because it was clear that Stalin (the Stalinist bureaucracy at whole) represented, contradictory, the proletarian property forms.

Please, imagine an intervention of armed formations of the BRD into the DDR under de 'Maiziere (or, much more to think for some

comrades, under the Grand Coalition of Modrow). What would have happened? An outcry of a big part of the DDR-population, but acceptance of these regimes in order to keep the situation under control.

A pro-capitalist regime has to be defined, as a government which is “through and through counterrevolutionary” (another word could be “fundamentally counterrevolutionary”)

With this understanding, it cannot be true that I understood you, Logan and Mason, that the Stalin-regime was only quantitatively different to that of Landsbergis.

I am sure you will answer not the same on the governmental level, but on the state level, don't you?

The PRG-comrades would also support that the “old version” Stalinist regime differs from a pro-capitalist one, because it had an INABILITY TO DEFEND proletarian property forms, the deformed workers' state, in the last instance, while the pro-capitalist government has THE DUTY TO DESTROY the proletarian property forms, in order to establish a bourgeois state. Do you?

DID WE DEFEND THE DEGENERATED/DEFORMED WORKERS' STATES BECAUSE OF THEIR ARMIES?

I cannot imagine a “yes” in the IBT. This would be a too short statement, wouldn't it?

The armies of the deformed workers' state did too often not act for the interests of the working class but directly against and in so far also against the defending of the deformed workers' state.

These armed bodies of men under the rule of a pro-capitalist government will only put in action to secure the restoration of capitalism. Whether the new rulers are able to use them as they want is in the first period very unclear and the process of disturbing the old structures by “cleaning” shows that the new ruling class is aware about this weakness.

I support the thrust of Logan's statement in his letter from Sept 7,

“There will be struggles between the working class and the state power in Russia over the next months. We want to be on the right side in those struggles.”

These armed bodies of men who are brought into fight by a pro-capitalist government will be the enemy of the workers' class!

DOCUMENT 41

Riley (Toronto), 7 September 1991

The key question regarding our attitude toward the coup is was it in fact an attack on the capitalist restorationists? At this point I believe that there is evidence that it was and that the coup was therefore defensible. According to the *LA Times* of 3 September, that the coup leaders moved to arrest Yeltsin right at the start. They apparently tried three times to apprehend him and then abandoned the project or decided that it was not worth shooting anyone over. Some defense! Still, in their grossly incompetent, half-hearted and gutless fashion they did apparently attempt to take some kind of measures against the leading exponent of capitalist restoration, at least initially before they lost their nerve. The KGB tanks that cut off Red Square and were in position to go after the “White House” were not driven off by superior force, they were *ordered to retreat* by the coupists as they were giving up without having a shot fired at them. That is how worthless these Stalinists proved.

There remain important differences in the arguments advanced for taking the position of blocking with the coup. The coup we all agree, was so irresolute that it collapsed from within as soon as it became clear that Yeltsin, the embodiment of capitalist restorationism in the USSR, was not prepared to roll over and die.

In his reply to my 31 August document Cullen reminds us that:

“As far as I know, we have always (or at least since 1933. based our analysis on the objective social position of the bureaucracy; we have always said that their political monopoly, their privileges and their prestige, derived from the role as administrators of the collectivized economy.”

Trotsky’s analysis was of course correct, but we should also recall that he considered the bureaucracy a self-liquidating phenomenon: the longer it ruled the more it undermined the existence of the worker state. In this period quantity is turning into quality: the bureaucracy is disintegrating and, as we have seen even the “hards” appeared incapable of taking the most elementary steps in self-defense. We cannot simply posit that because our theory indicates that they must

act in such and such a way we can assume that in this moment of flux that they will in fact behave in a predictable fashion in accordance with their objective social position and the entirety of their past history. We cannot therefore automatically determine our attitude in advance in accordance with the theoretical model which has served us so well in the past.

Instead, our attitude toward the coup had to be determined on the basis of what they actually *did* (or at least attempted to do). That is why, in the last issue, our position was put quite conditionally:

“It is possible that leading sections of the bureaucracy may attempt at some future point to arrest the process of capitalist restoration. If that happened, it would be our duty to side militarily with the ‘conservatives’ against the Yeltsinites.”

If, on the other hand, under the pressure of events elements in the bureaucracy fell out among themselves we did not necessarily have any obligation to take sides, even if such a split could open up an opportunity for the Yeltsinites. Of course we would oppose the Yeltsinites regardless of our attitude towards the bureaucratic factions and would bloc with either or both against the restorationists.

Comrade Hayes, in his most recent contribution seems to argue that Gorbachev, prior to the coup, was qualitatively the same as Yeltsin. This is a mistaken assessment, for Gorbachev was a pro-capitalist within the bureaucracy whose position depended on his control of the CPSU and Soviet apparatus while Yeltsin was a pure and simple capitalist restorationist acting hand in glove with the imperialists. The same difference between say, Jaruzelski and Walesa in 1988. At a certain point there may not seem to be much difference but it is an important distinction, as it determines the social forces which act upon them and which they represent.

In the previous issue of *1917* we had some very disparaging comments on the “hardliners” which I think were substantially true. Some of the comrades appear to be moving to a position that we should have stated flatly in our last article that if the hardliners carried out a coup then we would automatically militarily block with them. This is the logic of asserting that their objective social position would

compel them to act in defense of socialized property and therefore whatever they did they would in fact be fighting Yeltsin and capitalist restoration. Mason implies that their willingness to fight (as opposed to cutting some kind of deal or simply giving up) was as predictable as the sun coming up tomorrow. Cullen has less confidence:

“When I speculated in the last issue of 1917 that the Stalinists may be too demoralized to defend collectivized property, I was thinking of Eastern Europe, where the bureaucracy surrendered without firing a shot. And the Soviet Stalinists *almost* did the same.”

Very true. The demoralization of the apparatus was profound. Their ability to act to defend their privileges was tested. They acted but then almost immediately completely lost their nerve. Sizeable sections of the bureaucracy apparently immediately rallied behind Yeltsin, including the commander of the airforce. So a serious coup which triumphed would have required a deep purge of the bureaucracy and the officer corps.

Is it really so hard to imagine that people who collapsed without a fight would not also have been capable of cooking up some kind of irrational and suicidal “compromise” that would have solved nothing and represented merely a very temporary continuation of the status quo? Their behavior bordered on the suicidal. They were morally and politically bankrupt. They had no confidence in themselves and no ideas about how to turn the economy around. Their promises to continue the “reforms” were not only to neutralize the imperialists—they were a declaration of bankruptcy and their lack of confidence in the viability of a social system which they had all but destroyed.

Of course we would need to warn the workers against the dangers posed by capitalism and Yeltsin. Cullen proposes that we should have told the Soviet workers:

“The hardliners are completely bankrupt as an historical force. Their victory will not lead us out of the economic morass they have gotten us into, and they will very likely succumb to the Yeltsinites in the not-so-distant future. But, *at this moment* they stand as the only barrier to full-fledged capitalist restoration.

Let us bloc with them for now, in order that we may later push them aside and settle accounts with the Yeltsinites ourselves.”

I would only modify that slightly:

“The hardliners are completely bankrupt as an historical force. Their victory will not lead us out of the economic morass they have gotten us into and they will very likely succumb to the Yeltsinites in the not-so-distant future. But, *at this moment* to the extent that they stand as a barrier to full-fledged capitalist restoration we must be prepared to bloc with them, in order that we may later push them aside and settle accounts with the Yeltsinites ourselves.”

This leaves open the question of how much opposition the “hards” will put up to Yeltsin. The idea would be to thereby making clear that if and when they proved to be “too demoralized to defend collectivized property” (as Cullen considered possible) the bloc would cease.

DOCUMENT 42

Boyd (Bay Area), 7 September 1991

I know this is an eleventh hour contribution at a point when most comrades seem to have made up their minds on the two critical questions before us: 1. Whether or not to have critically supported the coup via a military bloc with the coupists and 2. How to describe the nature of the state now extant in the former USSR. Nevertheless, I feel compelled to make the record before the IEC vote.

I have read what to my knowledge are all the contributions to the debate including the latest documents sent by various comrades today, 9/7/91.

Although I had early on tentatively decided that there was no basis for a military bloc with the coupists, I was waiting to see what arguments and hard data comrades would come up with for the position that the PRGers first articulated.

What seems to be missing in the documents which call for a military bloc with the coupists is a lack of recognition of the historical conjuncture in which world Stalinism has found itself.

That conjuncture specifically is the wholesale capitulation by Sta-

linized CP's to the notion of "free market economies" as the answer to their problems. It is this conjuncture that motivates the hesitation to offer a military bloc to forces who no longer appear to have, as comrade Smith has stated, either the understanding of their historical role, the will or ability to defend socialized property norms.

The USSR 1991, comrades, is not Poland 1981. In the latter events there was clearly a bureaucratic caste willing to defend deformed socialist property norms against capitalist restoration. In ten years, however, the historical political trend has been for Stalinists the world over to capitulate to the forces of capitalist restoration, as indeed the Polish bureaucracy eventually did. In 1991 it is correct to factor in this historical political trajectory as one of several factors by which to determine our attitude toward the coupists. It is when considering this trajectory that the question of commitment of the coupists to defending the collectivized property is of greater historical weight than it was in Poland 1981. For this reason I reject the argument made by comrade Hayes that those of us who raise the factor of commitment must logically "reduce[s] itself to the bizarre proposition that we backed the December 1981 crackdown and not the August 1991 coup because Jaruzelski said better things than Yanayev." It is statements such as this, comrades, that appear not to recognize the qualitatively different historical period which has led some to characterize this as historical objectivism.

Another argument put forward quite cogently by comrade Cullen to bolster the notion that the coupists were qualitatively different from Yeltsin, Gorbachev et al. is that it would have been impossible to return to the status quo ante coup. Given the stated and contradictory program of the coupists and the historical trajectory of the Stalinist camp worldwide, I find his assertion to be unconvincing. We do have an historical precedent to go by, comrades, as to what the so-called "hardliners" might have been willing to do after a successful coup. That precedent comrades is Poland! By comrade Cullen's logic the Polish CP should never have capitulated to the pro-capitalist Solidarnosc. There is simply no historical or contemporary data to say as he does that "A victory for the plotters would have led logically and inevitably

to bolder [sic] initiatives by the bureaucracy against restorationists.” In 1981 we did not predict the kind of wholesale capitulation (without a fight by any significant section of the Polish CP) but that is what happened. In 1991 we have that historical knowledge and precedent to show us what the Russian coupists would have been capable of doing. And it would have had little to do with stopping the disintegration of the workers’ state but it would have had everything to do with trying to work out a position and income for themselves in the new “free-market economy” to which they were pledged.

This, of course, raises the question addressed by Hayes about the objective role of the bureaucracy aside from any conscious commitments to socialized property forms. By acting to protect their positions are they ipso facto, albeit in some deformed, idiotic and brutal manner, defending collectivized property norms per se? Only if the latter is true can we say that we would offer a military bloc to the Stalinists in spite of their programme. Just what the Soviet “hardliners” represented politically was addressed in our last issue of 1917:

“In light of recent events in Eastern Europe, it is conceivable that they could hand over power to a procapitalist government, or even participate in the formation of such a government themselves.... At present there is little reason to think that their differences with the Yeltsinites have anything to do with preserving collectivized property.” (p.38)

Those who propose we take a military bloc position have offered little to contradict this perspective. The fact that they attempted to go after Yeltsin and sequestered Gorby is not a de facto (objective) expression of defense of any particular kind of property forms.

Comrades, Stalinism has reached an historical watershed and its dual (and contradictory) nature has been resolved in favor of the class enemy. The relationship of class forces worldwide along with a molecular political change of resolve within the petty-bourgeois bureaucracy has unfortunately negatively confirmed our perspective that only Trotskyism can defend the gains of October. It is sad but true that as we wrote in the same 1917 article above: “Now the socialist pretensions have been thrown aside, and only the dross remains.” (p.39)

Comrade Hannah asked the provocative but legitimate question (I do not have the document in front of me to quote, so I will paraphrase) that went something like this: if the bureaucracy had changed its role and function i.e. no longer represented the historical role we Trotskyists have assigned to it, how did we miss the boat? In other words, if the coup only represented an inter-bureaucratic wrangle amongst pro-capitalists why didn't we catch this historically important transformation when it happened? Comrade Smith essentially answers this in his document:

“One of the paramount propositions of dialectical materialism, the Marxist method of analysis, advances is that a given social phenomenon can't be completely comprehended unless and until the facts surrounding its entire course of development has [sic] been divulged and assimilated.”

There is no shame or embarrassment in retroactively reappraising a position once held. Trotsky did it with the question of the Russian Thermidor, Lenin did it with the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry and we may have to do it with our position on Nicaragua if we ever have the time to decide just when or if it went capitalist.

Finally, I can live with a military bloc position but I insist that we rigidly adhere to these exact words. We must not use the phrase “military support.” This is not merely a semantic difference. The term support in English connotes a cheerleading position vis a vis the coupist forces. We use the term “bloc” because we are proposing a coordination of combat forces. Also, a bloc implies that we would keep our forces separate and under our own command. We would make every attempt to coordinate military maneuvers with the coupist forces but we would not relinquish our own command and organization. Nor would we be idly urging “support” of the coupist forces. I think we all agree that a military bloc with such a political enemy would be a difficult and dangerous manoeuvre wherein we would always be having to keep an eye on the coupist forces to make sure they weren't aiming their guns at us.

I do not have time to address the question of the state and what

property forms are now extant in the USSR. But I will say that I essentially agree with Harlan's and Smith's statements on the subject.

DOCUMENT 43

Turner (Bay Area), 7 September 1991

On the class nature of the USSR

The concept of the degenerated workers' state has been one of the hallmarks of Trotskyism since its inception. As Trotskyists, we of the IBT have consistently advocated military defence of the USSR and at the same time, indeed as an integral part of this defense, workers' political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucratic caste. This double-edged programmatic sword sets us head and shoulders above the stalinophiles and the stalinophobes, the apologists and the third-campists. As against all those for whom dialectic is an abstract conjuring word, we offer a *program* that is dialectical because it addresses the dialectical complexity of the real world. The concept of the degenerated workers' state is a key part of this.

Why have we defended the degenerated workers' state? Not because we politically supported those in power, but because it was a degenerated *workers'* state: even though a parasitic caste had usurped political power from the workers, the collectivized property forms still existed, and those collectivized property forms represented a historic gain for the working class, a gain of unprecedented proportions.

The collectivized property forms of the Soviet Union have never not been in danger. Obviously they are in great danger now, but that does not mean that they do not still exist.

We have always maintained that the Stalinists, including the so-called hardliners, were in the long run incapable of defending the gains of the revolution, and that this task must ultimately fall to the working class. Given the low level of consciousness in the class and the absence of any organization fighting for a revolutionary program, the prospects do indeed appear grim. Nonetheless, there are also substantial objective obstacles to the restoration of capitalism.

These objective obstacles to capitalist restoration are clearly shown by the development of events in Eastern Europe. Even in Poland,

where a procapitalist government has been in power the longest and despite the unambiguously procapitalist intentions and efforts of the government, 80 percent of industry is still collectivized. There is still no significant indigenous capital and no significant indigenous capitalist class. World imperialism, uncertain of the long-term stability of the region and, more importantly, faced with a severe economic crisis of its own, is not buying in.

Just as capitalism has survived longer than Marxists anticipated and Stalinism survived longer than Trotsky anticipated, these peculiar situations in which a procapitalist government sits atop collectivized property forms may survive longer than we might have anticipated.

Meanwhile the restoration of capitalism in the former DDR, where circumstances were the most favorable for the pro-capitalist forces because of the preexistence of a powerful capitalist state in the BRD, is stretching West German capitalism to the limit and has resulted in a potentially highly explosive social situation in all of Germany, with no resolution in sight.

On the basis of available information, I believe that our current public line that in Eastern Europe it is only in the DDR that the deformed workers' state has been conclusively destroyed and that the other East European countries are best characterized (as the DDR was at an earlier stage) as deformed workers' states with pro-capitalist governments is still correct.

Moreover, I believe that the most prudent course at this time would be to extend this characterization to the USSR as well. The USSR today is a (highly) degenerated workers' state that now has a clearly procapitalist government. If it is incorrect to apply this formula to the USSR, then it has not been correct to apply it to Eastern Europe.

To those who would say that there can no longer be a degenerated workers' state because it has been shown that there is no longer a special body of armed persons committed to defending the collectivized property forms, I would respond that the same has been true for some time in most of Eastern Europe. Does this mean that we have been wrong about Eastern Europe? I do not believe so.

What, then, of the Marxist theory of the state?

There is more to the Marxist theory of the state than the oft-repeated phrases from *State and Revolution*. *State and Revolution* was written with a very specific polemical intent: to show that the proletariat must smash the bourgeois state because the state is an instrument for the forcible domination of one class over another. As relevant as this is to the present situation, Lenin's "military" view of the state was not intended to supersede the economic view of the state in the historical materialism of Marx and Engels, but rather to expand on one aspect of it. I submit that in assessing the *class character* of a state (which is taken as given in *State and Revolution*), it is the relations of production that must be regarded as decisive. I do not believe that this is in any way inconsistent with Lenin. Moreover, if this premise is denied, our current public line on Eastern Europe is thereby rendered unintelligible.

State and Revolution presupposes the "normal" historical situation, in which there is a straightforward correlation between the relations of production and the behavior of the armed bodies. The current situation in the USSR and Eastern Europe, in which there is no such straightforward correlation, must be regarded as anomalous. Such an anomaly must inevitably be resolved in one way or the other. We do not know, however, how long it will take or even for certain in which direction it will go. The collapses of Stalinism have been astonishingly rapid, but the assimilation of Eastern Europe into the imperialist orbit is proving surprisingly slow.

The present anomalies are possible because, although the character of the state is determined by the relations of production, the state apparatuses possess a relative autonomy. It is for the same reason that Trotskyists have been able to speak of *workers' states*—albeit degenerated or deformed—in which the workers do not have control of the state.

In publicly addressing these matters, we should be as factually accurate and programmatically clear as possible, while avoiding any precipitous departure from the classic positions of Trotskyism. I strongly believe that as long as the relations of production have not been fundamentally transformed, to declare that there is no longer

a degenerated workers' state would be such a precipitous departure.

On the aborted coup

The question of military support or nonsupport to the pitiful abortive coup attempt has been rendered moot by events. Since it was a question of military and not political support, the PRG comrades were right to pose it in terms of what would have objectively benefitted the working class. However, they were wrong in framing the question abstractly as one of whether, if the coup forces had vanquished the Yeltsinites, the working class would have benefitted. I agree with them that it would have been a good thing if the Yeltsinites had been trounced. However, this was not the question. Military support is not a question of what if, but one of tactics and strategy based on the actual situation. The likelihood of the possible outcomes may be irrelevant in questions of political principle, but it must be considered in military matters. This is not to say that it may not be overridden by larger strategic considerations, but it must be considered, as must the degree of difference between the opposing sides and the degree of resolve of potential allies. In a real military situation, questions of risk versus benefit would of necessity be involved. These matters are highly complex, deadly serious, and subject to change from moment to moment. We would not, I hope, throw away our comrades' lives in support of a fly-by-night adventurist action or the pitiful last gasp of an untrustworthy enemy of our enemy.

DOCUMENT 44

Cullen (New York), 7 September 1991

IEC Motions

Riley and I agree that the most important function of the upcoming IEC vote is to establish a clear programmatic orientation for our tendency on the coup and the present nature of the state in the territory of the former USSR. The motions should, in our opinion, present 1. the clearest counterposition of views where there is strong disagreement, and 2. the broadest unity among those who support the same essential programmatic conclusions, regardless of differences in emphasis and methodology. To this end, we propose the following.

1. That Riley and Nason's first motion on the coup be withdrawn, and that the portion of Kalisch most recent motion that deals with the coup be put to a vote. This will reflect the fact that Riley and Nason no longer support their original motion, and that Kalisch's motion best reflects the views of those comrades who advocate a neutral position on the coup.

2. That the following motion by Riley and Cullen be substituted for Riley's second motion:

The attempted coup of 19 August, to the best of our knowledge, was directed against the principal forces of capitalist restoration in the USSR. We would therefore have blocked militarily with the coup leaders.

This motion deliberately avoids the methodological questions that still divide those who advocate a military bloc with the coup leaders (whether our military bloc flows from the objective position of the hardliners, or depends upon their intention to arrest Yeltsin). It simply states the programmatic bottom line.

DOCUMENT 45

Logan, Hannah & Mason (Wellington), 8 September 1991

Voting Procedures

The counterposition between Harlan's motion and Kalisch's on the class character of the state institutions in the former USSR is most unsatisfactory.

From our point of view the two poles of understanding in the tendency can be outlined roughly as follows:

In the former USSR the degenerated workers' state is qualitatively destroyed, although elements of it remain and might yet play important roles. However the summits of power are now occupied by a number of immature, fragile bourgeois state powers.

This captures our position and we therefore move it for adoption by the IEC. It is more or less consistent with Kalisch's motion, but we would hesitate to support Kalisch's motion because that motion is based on the assumption that the transition happened some time before the recent events. That is an issue which is better avoided in

the motions at this time. Logan has spoken to comrade Kalisch and we understand that he is prepared to withdraw his motion in favour of this one.

We understand the real alternative position in the tendency to be:

In the former USSR the degenerated workers' state has been badly damaged, and might yet prove to have been qualitatively destroyed, but that is not yet certain. There is now a number of regimes which are not yet bourgeois states, but in the normal course of development can be expected to become bourgeois states.

We take it that the leading comrades at present in the Bay Area support this proposition. That seems to be the energetic thrust of their documents. The Harlan motion is consistent with this proposition, and if that motion were passed it would seem to authorise the supporters of proposition two to claim that as the position of the tendency. Indeed the choice of the words given emphasis in Harlan's motion through being capitalised would seem to indicate that it is directed AGAINST proposition one.

However, the Harlan motion is ALSO CAPABLE OF BEING READ AS CONSISTENT WITH PROPOSITION ONE. And it is now apparently being supported by comrades who, from other things they have said, would seem to agree with proposition one.

It would seem to us in this context unfortunate if Harlan's motion were put. It does not clearly divide comrades according to the real differences among us.

If we are correct in saying that the leading comrades in the Bay Area believe in the thrust of proposition two, then it would be desirable that a motion such as that were moved.

DOCUMENT 46

Mason (Wellington), 8 September 1991

Military Support and Stalinism

The internal discussion around the failed coup in the USSR has, perhaps inevitably, led to repetition from all sides. Nevertheless, it remains important to debunk the reasoning and methodology emanating from comrades in the Bay Area.

Firstly, there exists a misunderstanding of the necessary conditions for Trotskyists to provide military support.

Next time that I defend the IBT position on the 1981 Stalinist crackdown in Poland I must remember to use the rationale used by these comrades with regard to the recent events in what used to be the USSR. When the Mandelites, or whoever, tell me that the Stalinists were “just as bad” as the Walesa and co., I will say, “Ah, but Jaruzelski SAID he was moving against Solidarity because he was defending Socialism “.

Or in Afghanistan. I will defend our position of military victory to the Soviet Army in Afghanistan by finding quotes from Brezhnev about the necessity of defending and expanding the international socialist revolution, or at the very least, “really hammering the mujahedeen”.

Or, for that matter, our bloc with Kerensky against Kornilov. I will have to look up statements from Kerensky expressing how important it was to defend the provisional government, so that I can justify our position of a military bloc with the same.

I do not believe that such a methodology is consistent with our tradition. Crucial to the concept of a military bloc, is the notion that while we take a side in a particular conflict, our bloc partners are scum and worthy of no political support: we do not give a damn what they use as justification for their actions. To the contrary, we condemn the statements of our “partners” as lies and deception and we implore the working class to have no trust in their will to resolutely conclude the struggle.

Riker, in his September 2 letter writes,

“We say to the working class (yes, and to the persecuted little middle-class schmuck artist): “the Stalinists say they defend ‘Socialism’ in the USSR against the forces of counter-revolution. They are not *capable* of stopping the counter-revolution but we will fight side-by-side with them as long as their guns are pointed in the right direction.”

“The Stalinists must at least say they are against capitalist restoration (remember, there are also Stalinists in the field who are for the restoration of capitalism) in order for us to tell

them apart. In other words we do not give political support to the Stalinists when we give them military support *BUT IT IS NECESSARY FOR US TO KNOW WHAT THEIR PROGRAM IS!!!!*

“No support to the coup!”

Riker’s conception stems from a misunderstanding of elementary Bolshevik tactics: a confusion between military and political support.

We sometimes give critical (political) support to bourgeois workers’ parties in order to break our class from its misleadership. We declare our view that the bourgeois workers’ party will betray, but, in order to shatter illusions within the proletariat, we may use the tactic of calling for a vote for them. It is principled, and coincides with our strategic plan of international socialist revolution, because there is something supportable about their PROGRAMME—namely that they stand for an independent party of the working class. In the quote above, Riker’s argument reads more like what we say when giving this sort of support: namely, critical POLITICAL support.

Military support is a bit different.

When a bourgeois worker’s party is in a popular front, we consider them completely devoid of any merit worthy of our political support—no matter how critical. However, in a conflict with, say, a fascist movement, we could enter into a military bloc with the same organisation: not because there is something supportable about their programme, but simply because in the particular conflict it is in the interests of the proletariat for them to win. It would be ludicrous to demand, as a condition of our military support, declarations consistent with our programme. Indeed to make such a demand could only foster dangerous illusions in our bloc partners among the working class.

So once again, we repeat, the whole point of giving ONLY military support is that we place no faith in our military partners—to fight with fortitude and commitment or to make declarations in support of our programme.

Or to quote Trotsky on one of the classic military blocs that we defend,

“While participating in the front lines of the struggle against Kornilov, the Bolsheviks did not take the slightest responsibility

for the policy of Kerensky. On the contrary, they denounced him as responsible for the reactionary attack and as INCAPABLE OF OVERCOMING IT (my emphasis -Mason)”

(Page 296, Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, Pathfinder Press.)

Confusion also exists within our tendency over the nature of Stalinism.

Smith, in his September 5 letter writes,

“Comrades that support his point of view [ie. Logan’s view in support of the coup—M] have accused those that oppose advocating a military bloc with the coupists of having the same political position as Workers Power upholds in defense of Polish Solidarity. We pointed out that the objective situation was not the same. That the Soviet working class has not yet spoken. To no avail.”

If I understand his position (and, I confess, I am not sure I do), I would agree with Smith that it would be incorrect to argue that he has completely taken on board the methodology and programme of the LRCI. The most dangerous element to their centrism is that in decisive periods in history, the LRCI will choose a side on the basis of subjective consciousness of the “masses”: if necessary, AGAINST forces which are in the OBJECTIVE interests of the proletariat.

Comrade Smith certainly takes a different tack. Unless Smith believes that the working class was about to rise in defence of the coup (in which case it is strange to compare it to Polish Solidarity) he appears to justify his unwillingness to support the coup on the grounds that the soviet working class were NOT mobilised against the coup. To support the coup on the condition of active proletariat OPPOSITION, is an absurdly outlandish position to take, but I would agree it has little in common with the LRCI.

Yet, there IS an element of “Workers Powerism” in the logic of some comrades, and that is in their understanding of Stalinism.

Riker mistakenly emphasises the declarations of the coup leaders on the grounds that, without such a perspective there is no way of determining the difference between them and the opposition forces, led by Yeltsin—and, less importantly in the actual conflict, Gorbachev.

(Comrades would do well to seriously consider Cullen’s warning of the logic of this position: if the hardliners cannot be distinguished from the restorationists on any other basis than support or otherwise for a crackdown we must then, surely, argue for support of “democracy” versus “military suppression”).

While the comrades in the Bay Area incorrectly insist on the continued existence of a USSR workers’ state, this analysis at least acknowledges that a workers’ state existed PRIOR to the coup. Therefore they must view the conflict at the time of the coup as one between capitalist restorationists and elements of the Stalinist apparatus (albeit a conflict which, in their eyes, was only the embryo of a REAL military conflict).

Presumably, Riker accepts that Yeltsin, at least, was the leader of a thoroughly capitalist restorationist tendency within the USSR. Therefore, it logically follows that Riker is suggesting the coup leaders were—or at the very least, could have been—no less pro-capitalist than the Yeltsinites. Here we have a familiar misunderstanding of the nature of Stalinism.

The LRCI, in order to defend their tailism, argue that Stalinism is essentially the same phenomenon as outright capitalist restorationism. If we add the proviso that we will ONLY bloc with Stalinists against capitalist restorationists if they fight with determination and say they are defending “Socialism”, we do not arrive at a qualitatively different position.

We have repeatedly pointed out the inadequacy of this position. To quote from Comrade Cullen’s 1 September letter:

“But now, when the bureaucracy is actually coming apart much as Trotsky predicted it would, when one faction has defected to the side of counterrevolution, we seem to be demanding of the diehard faction, as a *condition* for our support, that they act as conscious and consistent defenders of socialized property. Trotsky, it will be recalled, attached no such conditions.”

The correctness of the position in support of the coup is being empirically verified every day by reports of what is happening in Moscow and the republics. Even those comrades who do not accept

the position of the defeat of the coup as (yet?) leading to the “point of no return” for the workers’ state are willing to acknowledge that the event was a qualitative turning point—a decisive defeat for the international proletariat.

Sometimes Leninism is verified in defeats. The defeat of the coup, which immediately led to the defeat of the Stalinist apparatus (or, if you like, the extreme weakening of the hardliners in the USSR) has confirmed our analysis of Stalinism and the state.

DOCUMENT 47

Spike (Wellington), 8 September 1991

It seems clear to me that our position on the coup and its aftermath should encapsulate these two basic positions:

a. That we give ‘military support’ to the coup, on the grounds that it was in a fundamental way, irrespective of the pronouncements of the leaders of the coup, an attempt to defend the collectivised property base of the Soviet Union against the prospect of immediate restoration.

b. That the defeat of the coup by Boris Yeltsin at the head of a nascent Russian bourgeois state on August 21 marked the end of the degenerated Soviet workers’ state. The accumulation of contradictions accompanying several years of quantitative movement towards capitalist restoration within the framework of the degenerated workers’ state, reached a crisis point in the events of 19-21 August, and resulted in a qualitative transformation of the nature of the state in the Soviet Union. The process of dismantling the old stalinist state apparatus and replacing it with a bourgeois one is incomplete but proceeding rapidly at present.

Comrades it is important for bolsheviks not only to have decisive positions on events of epochal importance, that goes without saying, but also to understand both the pertinent empirical data and the methodology we use to interpret that data in reaching our final positions. A discussion such as the one in which we are now engaged can be of great benefit to our tendency in achieving greater political

clarity and firmness in the long run and in our immediate orientation to events in the Soviet Union and the remaining deformed workers' states. This being said the coup has revealed a rather disturbing disorientation on the 'Russian Question' by several of our leading comrades internationally, and in order to make this discussion creative rather than destructive to the organisation, this disorientation must be faced, combatted and corrected.

To that end here are some thoughts on the coup, its aftermath and our internal differences on the matter.

A Confederacy of Dunces

The coup leaders have been portrayed to a certain extent as a collection of klutzes, men who 'couldn't organise a piss up [beer party—BL] in a brewery' let alone the seizure of power in the largest country on earth. I suspect there is a grain of truth in this characterisation; the methods of bureaucratic leadership do not engender initiative and decisiveness in the hacks and apparatchiks of stalinism. Their misjudgements and mistakes, most glaringly leaving Yeltsin ensconced in the 'white house' (Russian Parliament buildings) with his communications intact, undoubtedly hastened their own demise. However, these men were already in positions of great power in the Soviet Union, which surely indicates a certain competence and also ruthlessness in going about their bureaucratic business. The power that they *wielded* was based upon their dominance in the bureaucracy, and that bureaucracy, as Trotsky pointed out in *Revolution Betrayed*, drew its power and privileges from the administration of a workers' state based on a planned economy and collectivised property.

The coup represented an attempted defense of this economic base but for all the wrong reasons. This is nothing new to history. The Trotskyist understanding of the stalinist's defence of collectivised property forms has always been that their motivation is primarily to defend their own interests: [The]'bureaucracy is first and foremost concerned with its power, its prestige [and] its revenues' [Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, p.176]. In defending their position as bureaucratic parasites the stalinists have also historically, 'consciously' or 'unconsciously' defended the entity upon which they are parasitic,

upon which they depend for their livelihood: collectivised property. They couch this in different terms at different times, one day claiming the mantle of bolshevism, the next of pacifism, and the following that of patriotism. They do this for opportunistic motivations, and really we should not lose too much sleep over what they are saying, rather we must concentrate on what they are doing and on the inner logic of those actions. Trotsky was clearly aware of this fact when in 1939 he wrote: ‘...the official defense [of the Soviet Union]... is now being carried on under the slogan: ‘For the Fatherland! For Stalin!’... [INDOM p20].

The coup was an attempt by a core section of the bureaucracy to maintain their power base, their positions and their privileges against a fundamental challenge to them. That challenge was the threat of capitalist restoration and the dismantling of the workers’ state. Militarily they decided to move first, to take pre-emptive action; however, in the concrete historical situation this proved impossible and actually hastened their downfall from power and the destruction of the workers’ state.

The events of August 19-21 represented an ‘inter-bureaucratic power struggle’ as Riley suggests, only insofar as the key protagonists were members of the bureaucracy. It was not a question of an internecine squabble about who was to get the lion’s share of the plunder usurped from a workers’ state, nor about who was to preside over the re-introduction of capitalism, and thus plunder as a comprador bourgeoisie, but fundamentally about which of these options were to be taken.

The opposing factions of the bureaucracy, in this instance, represented fundamentally opposed class forces and forms of state: the ‘Yaneyevites’ were the core of the degenerated workers’ state attempting to prolong the degenerated dictatorship of the proletariat; the ‘Yeltsinites’ were more peripheral to the degenerated workers’ state and saw their future as the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois of a capitalist Russia (or Latvia etc) and they had long been struggling for the dictatorship of the (international) bourgeoisie.

Clearly we had a side in this struggle and equally clearly our side was convincingly defeated. What the events of 19-21 August revealed was

not centrally the incompetence of some trembling stalinists, that was a symptom of a deeper malaise. Historically what the coup revealed was the utter bankruptcy and disorientation of stalinism in its death throes. The process of degeneration first outlined by Trotsky in the thirties and forties had reached culmination: the parasite had destroyed the host.

Some comrades have denied that the coup in any way represented an attempted defense of collectivised property and on this basis argue that we should not have offered 'military defense' of it. This position is based on empiricist confusion, not marxist analysis. Riley in particular seems attached to the idea that the nature of the coup was very difficult to judge, and that its nature was to an extent open. He backs this up with a list of possible outcomes of the coup as he saw them, and also moves a motion, with Nason, that characterises the coup as a bureaucratic infight in which workers had no side—a bureaucratic infight, the outcome of which was the destruction of the degenerated workers' state (as they admit in motion one)! Therefore, if Riley and Nason's motion is passed, we had no side in the conflict which led directly to the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers' state: seems like a pretty big BLIP on the Russian Question to me!

To correct this 'blip', before we go public on it like the Sparts, we need to examine briefly both the tactic of military defense, and then why the coup attempt was a concrete historical example of when Trotskyists should apply this tactic.

'Military Support'

Riley has a point when he says that history is not predetermined or inevitable, but it is not a point that carries much weight in his argument. It actually argues against his abstentionism. The entire point of advancing military support is to *affect* the course of history. There are a variety of possible outcomes inherent in every major historical event, the role of bolsheviks is to attempt to put our weight and the weight of the working class behind the outcome that is most in our interest (though of course in some instances we have no side). That is why we militarily supported Kerensky against Kornilov in 1917.

The idea that the use of 'military support' is to influence the course of history also argues against the abstentionism of Harlan and Smith,

in 1917 would they have waited to see if Kerensky could have defeated Kornilov on his own? The point is obviously that without the support of the Bolsheviks Kerensky would have been defeated!

The coup attempt is in some respects analogous. We wanted the coupists to win in the immediate military conflict. They were in conflict with the most openly and aggressively capitalist restorationist forces, and in a distorted and self-interested way they had the *intent*, through their actions, to defend the planned and collectivised economy. What they lacked was the means. If we were a group with significant influence over the Soviet working class and army, our role would be to help provide them with those means—not abstain, laugh at them as the ‘keystone cops of putschism’, and continue chuckling as CAPITALISM WAS RESTORED IN THE SOVIET UNION! Comrades, we would be laughing all the way to our graves! Of course, after supporting them against one enemy, we would want to settle the account with them ourselves—like we did with Kerensky.

The role of the call for ‘military support’ is of course different for a small propaganda group, such as the IBT, than it is for a mass party, such as the Bolsheviks in 1917. However the basic principles behind our choice are the same: does the working class have a side in this conflict? will the outcome of this conflict significantly affect the position of the working class one way or the other?

It is difficult to argue, from a Trotskyist perspective, that the defeat of the coup by the ‘Yeltsinites’ has been anything but disastrous for the working class. All comrades agree that it has meant either the death of the degenerated workers’ state or a mortal blow to it. The concrete manifestations of the victory of capitalist restoration have included an all out assault against the Communist Party (a central mechanism in the recruitment and functioning of the old state apparatus), purges against ‘hardliners’ in the government, army and KGB, moves to dismantle or ‘restructure’ those same institutions, a ‘devolution’ of power from the central ‘Soviet’ authority, to a series of would-be bourgeois republics, and on a symbolic yet telling level the officially condoned and encouraged philistine vandalism of statues of Lenin and Dzerzhinsky. Whilst several of these tendencies were present before the coup, they

have entered a qualitative new phase: from being attacks against the state, they are now the dismantling of the former states' apparatus and symbols. Comrades would all this have happened if the coupists had won? It seems very unlikely indeed—they would have been presiding over their own executions. Yeltsin knows at whom to point his guns, and the coup leaders knew at whom to point theirs—the problem is that their guns jammed or fired blanks; Yeltsin has live ammunition.

By arguing from the negative example and using historical hindsight it is clear that we had to militarily defend the coup. But hindsight is of no use to the dead. The point is that pretty much from the outset it was clear that we had to advance military support to the coup. The IBT does not have to use historical hindsight and an abstentionist 'wait and see' attitude when dealing with major events, we have the tradition and teachings of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky et al, to use, and the tools of marxist analysis at our disposal. It seems rather unfortunate to throw them out the window just when they are most urgently needed.

The coup is an 'acid test' for Trotskyists: and we are in danger of failing. The role of calling for 'military support' for a small propaganda group such as ours, is essentially to develop and maintain a tradition of correct programmatic leadership. That is based on a correct and methodological understanding of the fundamentals of world history and politics, and an ability to apply that methodology to situations *as they arise*. Our role is to reforge the Fourth International on the solid foundations of marxism: confused abstentionism is not one of those foundations! We do not want to build on a swamp!

The State and Counter-Revolution

Marxists, I am sure we will all agree, seek to find the fundamentals of a given situation and analyse its 'inner logic', rather than get mired in a bombardment of empirical detail and technical possibilities. We analyse empirical evidence on the basis of a tradition of theory that has developed in the process of the class struggle. If the theoretical tools at our disposal prove inadequate for the task at hand we revise them, or develop new ones. That revision is not necessary in the current instance. All that is needed is clarity on the question of the state.

'Friedrich Engels once wrote that the State...consists of detachments

of armed men in defence of property: everything else serves only to embellish or camouflage this fact.' [Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, 'Preface to 1936 French edition', New Park, 1975, p.15.]. This comrades is the essence of the state. The core of a workers' state, deformed or healthy, is *detachments of armed men in defence of collectivised property*. That is what the Red Army was under Trotsky, under Stalin and under Dmitri Yazov. That is what the Cheka/G.P.U./K.G.B. was under Dzerzhinsky, Beria and Kryuchkov.

The leadership of the coup attempt corresponded to a large extent to the highest leadership of the 'detachments of armed men' that historically we have seen as the core of the degenerated workers' state: Dmitri Yazov; Defence Minister, Vladimir Kryuchkov, KGB chairman; Boris Pugo, former head of KGB in Latvia, head of Interior Ministry, in charge of 'black berets' and Oleg Baklanov, 1st deputy chairman of 'Soviet Defense Council' [!] also the 'Communist Party official responsible for supervising the military -industrial complex'[*Guardian Weekly*, *Washington Post* section, 1 Sept, 1991] Alongside these military men were several apparatchiks, such as the trembling Gennady Yanayev, Vice President, Vasili Starbutsov, head of the 'Farmers' Union', and Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, a critic of perestroika.

Given the line-up of the coupists, and the line up of their immediate opposition (after the removal of Gorbachev) being a collection of arch-reformers (counter-revolutionaries) centred around Yeltsin, the logical conclusion was that the coup was an act of defense on the part of core elements of the state, and therefore we would offer military support to it. The coupists issued a contradictory programme that has been used by opponents of 'coup defensism' to say that a curse should be placed on both houses; but, comrades, actions speak louder than words: especially when we are assessing customers as slippery as the stalinist bureaucrats! In this case their inability to act decisively also spoke volumes, but the intent was clearly there as *Time* detailed in the September 2 issue:

On Aug 19, two elite armored divisions, the and the Kantemirovskaya, and one airborne division, the Tulsкая, are moved into Moscow. Of those, the Tulsкая division and a tank

detachment of the Tamanskaya division side with Yeltsin.

When the putschists realize that troops are defecting, they decide to send in the elite KGB airborne Vitebskaya division.

The units of that division, however, halt some 12 miles (19km) from the Russian Parliament and never enter the city.

The coupists never got the chance to show us what they would do in power, they were paralysed and quickly crushed. They were crushed by a force that can now be characterised as a nascent bourgeois state: armed detachments of men acting in the interests of bourgeois property forms.

The outcome of the conflict has been the destruction (or as some comrades would have it, mere decapitation) of the degenerated workers' state. One side of the conflict corresponded to the Trotskyist conception of the core determinant of the nature of a state, the other side was openly hostile to that state and its economic base. There is now a pro-bourgeois armed force in power in the Russian Republic, heartland of the former Soviet Union, which is destroying the structures and symbols of the old state. There has been a qualitative change in the nature of the Soviet Union: it no longer exists as a workers' state of any sort. Apart from the coup there has been no military conflict in this transition. Comrades, if the coup did not represent the struggle between the old state and the new, what did? Where was the workers' state in the coup fight? How does an interbureaucratic rumble result in the downfall of the state, without any apparent resistance? Is comrade Henning correct when he says (if I understand his position) that the degenerated workers' state died peacefully in its sleep sometime earlier this year? It seems that this is the logical conclusion of accepting the propositions that a. the Soviet Union is no longer a workers' state (correct) and b. that we had no side in the coup (incorrect).

It is up to non-coup defensist comrades to try and answer the first set of questions, but I will answer the last one. Is Kalisch correct when he says that the degenerated workers' state died peacefully in its sleep sometime earlier this year? No. Kalisch's position is wrong.

He seems to suggest that a subjective change in the orientation

of the Gorbachev government in mid-July marked the end of the Degenerated Workers' State. This seems in contradiction to usual Marxist thinking on the State question which sees not the government but the armed forces as the key determinant of the nature of the state. A change in government policy does not equal a change in the nature of the state. For example if a social democrat party came to governmental power in a capitalist country, and advocated and tried to enact a policy of collectivisation, we would not say that this had meant the formation of a workers' state. The question of the state would then be raised in all its force, as the core of the capitalist state, the army, police etc would be expected to try to assert itself. Whether or not it could do so successfully is an entirely different kettle of fish.

Kalisch is confusing significant quantitative movement towards the end of the degenerated workers' state with its qualitative ending point. The qualitative transformation occurred when the core of the state proved unable to defeat the forces of restoration, in a concrete series of historical events, and was itself defeated and replaced in power by the core of a bourgeois state (or perhaps several states). i.e. the coup attempt and its immediate aftermath. Trotsky predicted 'No devil ever yet voluntarily cut off his own claws. The Soviet bureaucracy will not give up its positions without a fight.' [*Revolution Betrayed*, p.287]. That the devil proved weak, confused and incompetent, its claws blunt, does not negate the basic point.

The ghost of Kornilov

If Kalisch's problem is failing to differentiate quantitative from qualitative change, the comrades who fail to fully admit the demise of the degenerated workers' state, cannot recognise qualitative change when it occurs.

The state is more than merely 'detachments of armed men' in defence of property forms. The state is a complex superstructure of institutions, an apparatus, for the defence, maintenance and reproduction of the property forms and interests of a specific class. But recognising the complexity of the state apparatus does not change the fact that, at bottom, the state is centrally determined by the presence of armed coercive force and by its orientation and ability

to defend a particular type of property. As a working distinction we can call this the core of the state, as opposed to the rest of the state apparatus, which Trotsky and Engels characterised as camouflage or embellishment! Accepting for the purpose of argument a situation in which one class has control over all the various state apparati, except for the armed core which is still in opposition to their particular property orientation, what you would have was a temporary situation, a fundamental contradiction, that would have to be resolved one way or the other. Either the class in control of the core would sweep away, militarily, the opposing class's apparati or the opposing class would create a military force to destroy the old state armed force and carry through to conclusion the aims of their state.

During the early hours of the coup, when Yeltsin had not gathered significant military force around him, but was obviously trying to, I jokingly characterised him as 'a Kornilov without an army'. I would not rest too much weight on the analogy, but Yeltsin was a Kornilov in intent, and he rapidly found the means to be one in practice. Whilst Kornilov tried to destroy the worker's state whilst it was still an embryo, Yeltsin succeeded in destroying it in its dotage.

The armed force that coalesced around Yeltsin and defeated the coup, now constitutes the core of a nascent Russian bourgeois state; weak, shaky on its feet, but clearly in control. This represents the qualitative ending point of the old state as a state. Significant remnants, structurally rather than geographically speaking, of the old state remain relatively intact, and theoretically could reassert themselves through further conflict and the defeat of the Yeltsinites to reconstitute a state power. This seems very unlikely given the mood in the ex-Soviet Union right now, the international balance of class forces, and the utter demoralisation and lack of perspective or appeal of the stalinists, but it remains a theoretical possibility: 'qualitative' is not necessarily synonymous with 'irreversible'.

The key point however is that state power now rests, throughout the ex-Soviet Union, in the hands of agents of the bourgeoisie. They are using this power to destroy the demoralised remnants of the old state, to assure that they cannot rise from the ashes, and to put in

their place an apparatus suitable for the introduction of capitalism, its maintenance, defence and reproduction.

Conclusion

Comrades, we have had the tragic historical 'privilege' of watching the demise of the worlds' first workers' state. If we are to move forward to the creation of new ones, we must be clear in our methodology and judgement. We must be clear and we must face the truth squarely. We cannot afford to fail this 'acid test'.

DOCUMENT 48

Cullen (New York), 8 September 1991

Comment on arguments by Boyd and Turner

I think that cdes Turner and Boyd have made certain arguments in their recent documents that are not exactly brand new, but are formulated more concisely than in other contributions, and therefore lend themselves to a concise reply.

Boyd argues that, by handing over power to Solidarnosc, Jaruzelski proved that Stalinism no longer necessarily defends collectivized property, and that we could therefore have expected no better from the Soviet coup leaders. Boyd seems to imply that, since the Polish Stalinists allowed themselves to be pushed unresistingly into oblivion, we can now conclude in retrospect that we were mistaken to have backed Jaruzelski's 1981 coup.

But I think there is one essential fact that Boyd overlooks: Jaruzelski did not declare martial law in December, 1981 and hand over power to Solidarnosc in January, 1982. Between his coup and the formation of the Mazoweiki government there was an interval of over eight years. This was precious time bought for the Polish working class. I contend that, even if we had been able to predict in 1981 what Jaruzelski would do eight years later, we still would have been correct in tendering military support to the coup. So also with the Soviet Stalinists. I by no means rule out the possibility that, even if they had won last month, they may have capitulated to the Yeltsinites at some future point. But, at the time the coup was launched, they were nevertheless striking at Gorbachev and Yeltsin. The *immediate* result of a victorious coup would have been

a weakening of the most aggressive restorationist forces. If the formation of a restorationist government could have been forestalled for a year, or even six months, this could have provided an interval in which Soviet workers might have taken a harder look at what is going on in Eastern Europe, and have become far more reluctant to cast their lot with Yeltsin.

Turner argues if the Eastern European countries are still workers' states, this must still be true *a fortiori* of the former Soviet Union. I would only point out that we never said, to my recollection, that Poland, Hungary etc. were still workers' states. True, we also never said that they were not workers' states. But this was due to a lack of positive information, as well as to a certain confusion on our part. The Soviet coup may very well be the single event that clarifies the situation in the entire region.

Turner also argues that the workers' state is more than simply an armed body committed to defending collectivized property. The mode of property ownership in the former USSR cannot be abolished overnight. No doubt. Comrades know I have always thought that the whole question of the state is far too complicated to be settled by the repetition of a few formulas culled from *State and Revolution*. It is also obvious to me, as it was to Trotsky, that any restorationist regime in the Soviet Union would have to coexist for a lengthy period with significant elements of the disintegrating collectivized economy. We should indeed avoid the simplistic or mechanical counterposition of a bourgeois to a workers' state; it is not simply a matter of "either or." There will clearly be a transitional period.

But neither should we underestimate the importance of the armed forces of the state. Even if the future struggle of Soviet workers against restoration will necessarily involve the defense of large elements of the social/economic status quo, there is still the question of which side the army, police and secret police will take in this struggle. Workers fighting to preserve existing social gains will be at a distinct disadvantage if these "armed bodies" are on the other side, i.e. are acting in concerted fashion to eradicate existing social gains. Before the coup collapsed, I think it safe to say that these "armed bodies" would have been divided

over any attempt to impose private property or market norms. The coup's collapse has, however, *left the way open for the construction of a coercive force dedicated to the reimposition of private property.*

The possibility that elements of the army or KGB may yet try to resist Yeltsin/Gorbachev cannot be categorically ruled out. But, if these elements were weak and irresolute on 19 August, are they likely to be stronger in the future when a) they have already failed one crucial test, and b) all their leaders have been purged and replaced by loyal Yeltsin men? The momentum for capitalist restoration has been building in the Soviet Union for several years now, and it will be some time before a full-fledged capitalist state is consolidated. But, in any transitional process, there is a point at which the balance of forces shifts decisively. I don't claim to possess any final wisdom on this matter. But it seems to me, from all available evidence, that the events of August 19-21 constituted precisely such a watershed.

DOCUMENT 49

Mike (Wellington), 9 September 1991

The events of 19-21 August in the USSR might well be labelled "3 days that shook the IBT". The final death agonies of the degenerated workers' state, played out before the world stage, posed questions I felt our Tendency was well equipped to answer. Instead the Tendency has been disorientated and is in danger of junking, at the crucial moment, soviet defensism. When leading comrades in the Tendency argue that we should have *taken no side* in what clearly became the decisive battle between forces committed to immediate capitalist restoration and the remnants of the degenerated workers' state, I am worried. I think those comrades are wrong.

On the evening of Monday, 19 August I walked into my home and heard the news of Gorbachev's ousting by the coup. My first, subjective reaction was "thank god." Afterall, Gorby had just announced his desire to dissolve the CPSU, finally turning his back on any last vestige of communism. No doubt this was intended to be taken as good coin by the imperialist cronies of G7. It also reflected the growing weight of the openly capitalist restorationist Yeltsin. It looked like Gorby had

decided to throw in his lot with Yeltsin. So my reaction was “Good riddance”. My second reaction was to look at who was behind the coup. It turned out the coup leaders represented the “hardliners” of the CPSU together with the higher echelons of the Interior ministry, the KGB and Army. To me that represented the core of that part of the state apparatus still linked to workers property forms. It seemed to me that what was happening was that the core of the degenerated workers’ state was attempting to reassert itself, in defense of its own privileges of course; nevertheless it would interrupt the process of capitalist restoration. I concluded that we would have to be in support of the coup, in spite of the atrocities that might be committed and in spite of the fact that *politically*, we had nothing in common with the coup leaders. (By the way comrade Smith, this conclusion was reached without any reference to Logan’s view on the question. Logan’s comments the following day simply confirmed and developed my own conclusions.)

Show me who your enemies are...

There is a nice little rule of thumb in politics. Show me who your friends are and I’ll show you whose side *I’m* on. In this case the reverse is true. Show me who your enemies are and I’ll show you whose side I’m on! The imperialist outrage at the coup should be instructive for comrades. From Bush to Major to Bob Hawke the sentiment was the same: The coup is against the reforms. The Coup is for the command economy. Down with the Coup! One peculiar and minimal exception to this—but which still proves a point—were New Zealand agricultural exporters like the Dairy Board who speculated on the effects of the return to a more centrally planned economy—and were mildly in favour of it. It meant they might actually get paid! As the coup foundered and got bogged down against the mass mobilisation for counterrevolution, imperialist outrage turned into glee. With Gorbachev removed from the scene, the forces of vacillation and indecisiveness were now absent. Yeltsin, barricaded in the Russian parliament, now moved to centre stage. Yeltsin became the imperialist man of the hour. (No prizes for guessing who gets to be *Time* “man of the year”.) And with Yeltsin’s victory over the coup the imperialists literally gloated, referring to

“the Russian Revolution”. Comrades, does this not suggest that at least the imperialists recognised there was something of a battle going on here? And doesn’t this suggest that we too would have had a side?

Degenerate workers’ state degenerates

In August 1991 the degenerate workers’ state of the Soviet Union was fragmented and in the process of decomposition. (Sorry, “decomposition” is a word used by Logan. Am I guilty of regurgitating?) There existed a number of outrightly pro-bourgeois governments in the various republics, including the most important one of Yeltsin in Russia. Naturally these governments were attempting to gather around them armed forces committed to the abolition of workers’ property forms. What else was the crackdown in the Baltic states other than a battle between nascent bourgeois states, i.e. the Lithuanian and Latvian police forces loyal to their pro-bourgeois governments and the armed forces of the degenerated workers’ state? The thing is that when that part of the degenerated workers’ state, the highest echelons of that state moved against Gorbachev, and then attempted to move against Yeltsin, they found that they didn’t have much of a state apparatus left to move with them. With Yeltsin free to stand in opposition to the Coup, significant layers of the armed forces either refused to take him on or actually sided with him. So you had in those 3 days a situation where tanks lined up with guns pointing at Yeltsin and tanks lined up with guns pointing at the Coup. With hundreds of thousands of workers mobilising for bourgeois restoration and the “death of communism”.

Alignment of social forces

This was not an intra-bureaucratic feud. This was a conflict that was shortlived and farcical (witness the contagion of bad health) as it might be, involved a fundamental reshaping of world politics. The collapse of the coup represents the definitive end of the degenerated workers’ state in what was the USSR (or what I prefer to call the Unravelling Federation of De-Sovietised Republics—UFDR). It seems that we can all agree on this. What seems to be unacceptable to some comrades, particularly Riley, Smith, Riker and Harlan is that to have come out in defence of the coup fails to recognise that, one, the programme of the Coupists was largely the same as that of Gorbachev or Yeltsin, and in

any case there was *nothing* supportable about their programme; and two, that a civil war did not eventuate which means that there were no clear sides to decide between.

Firstly, of course the programme of the Coupists was ultimately pro-bourgeois—as is the programme of Stalinism. When the General cracked down on Solidarnosc in 1981 our defence of the General was not conditional on the grounds that the Polish stalinists had *any* ability or intent to build socialism. They too were laying the basis for the restoration of capitalism. It's just that Solidarnosc "...wanted to go over to capitalism immediately...[while the stalinists] wished for the meantime to preserve the status quo (including the centralised control of the economy)." (To "regurgitate" Riley by quoting from the penultimate paragraph of his 31 August document.)

Secondly, whenever has a military bloc involved finding something supportable in the programme of the bloc partner? That was the case in the second world war when the Fascists invaded the Soviet Union. There was nothing, absolutely nothing supportable in the programme of Stalin. He had concluded a murderous pact with Hitler in 1939 (an event which disorientated some leading Trotskyists of the time) and had had Trotsky assassinated in 1940. Stalin's programme was nothing short of a recipe for disaster. Yet the Trotskyist position was to defend the Soviet Union, to bloc with Stalin—against Stalin and in spite of him. Actually it was Hitler who said of his 1939 pact, "I'd make a pact with Satan himself in order to drive out the devil". Not a bad description of a military bloc—just so long as you know who the devil really is! In a different context surely the same methodology applies. We defended Iraq militarily *against* imperialism. Not because there was anything at all supportable about the programme of Saddam Hussein, but because an imperialist victory could only be *worse* for the masses in that region—as indeed has proved to be the case.

Thirdly, a civil war did not eventuate in the USSR because the coup failed. Our side lost! Riley is wrong to suggest that Yeltsin won by default. Yeltsin won because he was able to mobilise significant numbers of the Russian working class around the programme of capitalist restoration. The coup leaders, incapable of offering any alternative programme and

relying on armed force collapsed in the face of this mass opposition. There was a clear alignment of social forces alright. The forces of immediate capitalist restoration, focussed particularly around Yeltsin and supported by imperialism on the one hand, and those who, in their own narrow bureaucratic interests, were for the status quo.

In that light the Tendency must take the position expressed in motions #1 and #3.

DOCUMENT 50

Monsees (Berlin) to Riley, 9 September 1991

On Motions

Your changed attitude toward the coup and your argumentations for this are one reason for this letter. The second is that I have changed my position towards the coup, too—but vice versa.

As far as I understood you changed your position because they wanted to sack Yeltsin. Didn't you know that they sacked (really!) Sobchak (the Leningrad major), who was later (during the coup) put back into power by the same Omon-troops which sacked him. Didn't you know that they marched into the Baltics—who do you think were they looking for?

For me it never was the question that they want to go against all these restorationist forces (they did say so in their first statement: “against all these new institutions, like majors...”) But why did they want to do this?

Two possibilities:

1. To save their privileges on the base of proletarian property forms against the pro-caps.
2. To save their privileges on the base of restoring capitalism, but under their control—against these liberal bourgeois democrats under Yeltsin, who sells their possibilities to imperialism.

Their statements left both reasons open. I think you explained this not bad with your first paper. And to me it looks like, that you are still not sure whether there was only possibility 1.. You wrote in your letter (7 Sept.):

“I would only modify that slightly:

“The hardliners are completely bankrupt as an historical force. Their victory will not lead us out of the economic morass they

have gotten us into and they will very likely succumb to the Yeltsinites in the not-so-distant future. But, at this moment to the extent that they stand as a barrier to full-fledged capitalist restoration we must be prepared to bloc with them, in order that we may later push them aside and settle accounts with the Yeltsinites ourselves.”

“... we must be prepared to bloc with them,...”. That’s fine to me. But this is different than doing it.

The question is not as you pointed out just to look on what base the bureaucracy was defending their position in the past, but also to look on which now (or at least in favour of what base now). If anybody denies this he is in the trouble to explain where the pro-capitalist/restorationist wing of the bureaucracy comes from and how he is defining them (Cullen’s “objective social position” does say nothing about turning bureaucrats, who ARE in the positions of a deformed workers’ state, but decided to save this position in capitalism IN FUTURE, starting with TODAY.)

Because of this, I think, your statement:

“Instead, our attitude toward the coup had to be determined on the basis of what they actually *did* (or at least attempted to do)” gives not the whole criteria. It has also to be determined on the basis WHY/FOR WHAT they did what they did (or at least attempted to do)!

To sack Yeltsin does not say that they wanted to stop the restorationists (see Smiths quote from Colonel Alksnis, which makes clear that at least he wanted no stopping of capitalist restoration). Imagine his position would have been the dominant program of the coupists—would you have been for a military block with the coupists?

Another strong argument that this might have been the “core” of their program might be found in the July 22-statement of Sojus, from which I until today know only excerpts (but which are much more in the direction of possibility 2 than 1..

Until today it is not clear to me what direction the coupists did really want to go. I think, as I said in a paper before, that they were mainly representing the “old-Gorbachev”-way against Yeltsin (that they did not call themselves in favour of Gorbachev’s last CC-statement

—“socialdemocratisation”—but to the same time for ongoing reforms, is a hint, I think). Might be that there was a kind of block of two CPSU-factions behind this coup: one in favour of restoration, one against—but both in favour of holding the CPSU in power (the not coming through of the coupists in the CC-meeting during the coup, is a hint for this, I think).

However, even if it would have been a coup to defend the property forms—it had to be shown.

This was my mistake: I thought, “no it was not clear which direction (look they wanted Yeltsin, took Sobchak, and their statement does not make impossible such an attitude of them)—so, I argued, there might have come up a clearing during a fight, which would with the impetus of a working class action had drawn the class-line clear. It was not clear so we should have defended the coupists against Yeltsin. But this is not our criteria for a military block/”united-front”. We want to explain the class what are the objective interests of the class and this means we want to be able to explain why these guys are at least the lesser evil than Yeltsin. But we cannot do this when we are unable to say, that they are. Nobody is able to do—not you, because sacking of Yeltsin does say nothing about the class-line—not the NZ-comrades, because they do not bother this question, because of their myth of a workers’ state, which is a workers’ state because of its core, and the core of the core (which is not true, Smith is right!) acted, so the workers’ state acted. No, the core of the core of the core might come up as eight people—from which the NZ-comrades think, this was the workers’ state—who wanted to save their privileges under capitalism, but under other political conditions than Yeltsin.

But even Kalisch is not able to do it—there are only hints, but the coup cracked before clearing it for us.

But once again: this is and was never our criteria for military support. We only support acts which are useful for the working class—the establishing of a pro-cap bonaparte Yanayev is not, even when he has to sack Yeltsin for this.

The trick, with “one might recall the military support”, is one because the right way would have been “one might call for the military

support”, when they make clear at least with a clear hint that they are going against the Yeltsinites to save their privileges inside a workers’ state. This did not happen.

I support because of that, Kalisch’s motion, although a tactical attitude might be added: The workers’ will defend this faction, when it makes clear to fight the capitalist restoration. Or in other words “to the extent that they stand as a barrier to full-fledged capitalist restoration we must be prepared to bloc with them”!

A “united-front” offer might have been smart to polarize these factions as well as all these armed formations (the majority!) which kept calm and did not move in the one or other direction.

But this is minor. The starting point should have been: NOT A CARTE BLANCHE FOR THEM!

**

In hindsight: *Spiegel* reports that the troops looking for Yeltsin, did see him on the other side of the street... but did not turn!

**

I hope you will think about your decision once more, as all comrades should—the methodology for united fronts/military blocks might be different in IBT after a vote in favour of a military block with these coupists.

PS: I will abstain on the motion about the character of the USSR, because it is linked to the coup—which might be correct, but might also not, if it becomes clear that (as Kalisch thinks) a pro-cap government was formed already before.

Take this abstention as a full support for the statement: NO WORKERS’ STATE ANYMORE IN USR! THE ARMED FORCES OF THE USR, WHICH WILL BE BROUGHT INTO THE FIGHT BY THE PRO-CAPITALIST GOVERNMENTS ARE COMMITTED TO BOURGEOIS PROPERTY FORMS!

DOCUMENT 51

Logan (Wellington), 9 September 1991

Note Regarding Voting

I’ve talked to Cullen and Kalisch in the last few hours.

Hannah, Mason and I wish to withdraw our motion on the state question in the former USSR sent of 8 September 1991 in favour of the amended version of Harlan's 2 September motion.

Kalisch had not seen the revised Harlan motion when I spoke to him, but is eager for the matter to be put to decision.

At present there are three motions before the IEC: the Kalisch motion on the coup, the counterposed Riley/Cullen motion, and the Harlan motion on the state question in the USSR.

Comrades are apparently eager to reach a decision. Any question which any comrade believes is left outstanding by these motions may be taken up at a later time.

Cullen asked me on behalf of the IS to prepare and dispatch a "voting paper". (Presumably because the job fell in the antipodean day shift. The IBT keeps its office staffed 24 hours a day, circling around the world.)

DOCUMENT 52

Cullen (New York) for the IS [edited for clarity], 10 September 1991

Motion and Results of IEC Vote on Coup and Present Nature of Former USSR

QUESTION ONE: On the line to take on the coup

Vote for one of the two counterposed propositions, or abstain or cast a no-vote.

Motion 1: MOVED KALISCH:

Our axis of our intervention during the coup should have been:
Down with the reactionary bourgeois forces in the Soviet bureaucracy!

Down with Yeltsin!

No military support to the Yanayev plotters!

For independent class action of the Soviet working class!

Votes for:

Full IEC: Kalisch, Monsees (2 full votes)

Alternate IEC: Nason

Motion 2: MOVED RILEY & CULLEN:

The attempted coup of 19 August, to the best of our knowledge, was directed against the principal forces of capitalist restoration

in the USSR. We would therefore have blocked militarily with the coup leaders.

Votes for:

Full IEC: Cullen, Hannah, Logan, Riley (4 full votes)

Alternate IEC: Mason

Motion 2 PASSED

Voting for neither motion:

Smith (full) and Harlan (consultative) *see note below.

QUESTION TWO: On the class character of the state institutions in the former USSR

Vote for the motion, or against it, or abstain or cast a no-vote

Motion 3: MOVED HARLAN:

With the collapse of the attempted coup, the process of capitalist restoration that has been unfolding in the USSR for several years has reached a qualitative turning point. The state power established in October 1917 has been broken. The degenerated workers' state has been beheaded, and while most of the means of production remain collectivized and the officer corps below the top level is so far largely untouched a degenerated workers' state no longer exists.

The territory of the former USSR is now ruled by a variety of weak, petty-bourgeois, procapitalist regimes; there is as yet no substantial capitalist class. These unstable regimes can be described as embryonic bourgeois states. Although bourgeois states have not been consolidated the major obstacles to their consolidation have been removed. During the period before capitalism can be constructed, the capitalist counter-revolution can be reversed by a reawakened working class without the obstacle of a developed capitalist class based on private property. The embryonic bourgeois states must, however, be destroyed if the counterrevolution is to be defeated.

Full IEC for: Cullen, Hannah, Logan, Riley, Smith (5)

Full IEC against: Kalisch, Monsees (2)

Alternate IEC for: Mason, Nason

Consultative for: Harlan

Motion 3 PASSED

*Smith (full) and Harlan (consultative) vote for neither Motion #1 nor Motion #2 on question #1, but wish to go on record as supporting Riley's original motion (since withdrawn by Riley, and not included in the final ballot), which reads as follows:

Given the variety of possible outcomes, we could not take a simple position of defending the coup before the alignment of social forces was clear. And faced with the prospect of such a polarization, the coup collapsed. Yeltsin won by default. We had a duty to support measures any section of the apparatus took against the capitalist restorationists, including militarily blocking in defense of the status quo, and suppression of Yeltsin et. al., but this did not extend to defending the coup leaders in what was essentially an interbureaucratic power seizure (the arrest of Gorbachev and the assumption of power.) And this was in fact what the coup was about. The refusal or inability of the coupists to confront the capitalist restorationists either militarily or politically rendered the question of our support to the coup moot.

DOCUMENT 53

Kalisch (Berlin), 10 September 1991

Here are the reasons why Monsees and I voted against Harlan's and other's motions.

Against Harlan's motion:

1. The correct estimation of the downfall of the USSR as a bureaucratic degenerated workers' state is fixed on the coup of August 19/21, which has not yet been proven.
2. The motion of Harlan implies the existence of a petty-bourgeois transitional state (in a presumably "period before capitalism can be constructed"), which contradicts the Marxist estimation of a bourgeois state.