Our critique of Soviet society became wide-ranging. But it was mainly a criticism of the nature of the political system. We were aware of some of its grave economic problems but still felt that the basis of the economy was sound, and that once political barriers were removed, solutions to economic problems would somehow naturally follow.

It was not until 1989—when the power of the people in Eastern Europe and the progress (even if erratic) of glasnost in the Soviet Union revealed the depth and extent of the economic crisis of these countries and the degree of corruption and environmental degradation it had been responsible for—that it was fully brought home that there were yet more fundamental problems than we had ever realised in the socialist project.

In no way would I wish to mitigate the dreadful legacy of Stalinism or its responsibility, mainly through the agencies of communist parties, for grave losses of credibility and even legitimacy on the Left side of politics. But it would be no service to the Left cause, however defined, to ignore fundamental problems which are not resolved by the demise of the Stalinist model.

This new climate of uncertainty has put the Left as a whole on the defensive in the economic field—a field which was once regarded by both sides of politics as a Left stronghold—and has thus also placed the Left on the defensive more broadly. The Left has become reactive rather than pro-active, as a number of recent articles in ALR have pointed out. The failures of all the economies claiming to be socialist have made it virtually politically impossible to advocate that either 'state' or 'workers' should take over the means of production as full-blown solutions to the patent evils of capitalist control and power.

In addition, political parties—which the Left, in the main, has elevated even further than the conservative side of politics, as a locus of political wisdom—are suffering from a possibly irreversible, and probably deserved, cynicism. There is a consequent reluctance to give 'the party' anywhere near the kind of dedication which people of my generation—and even later ones—were prepared to give.

Put in a nutshell, the vision of a viable social system which can be advanced as an alternative to modern capitalism is in disarray, and the means by which radical change may be brought about cannot any longer be based on old models.

This may be the cause of even greater chagrin in that the depth and extent of the problems and dangers which today confront humanity are growing rather than diminishing. And it is also faced with new crises—indeed has created them—such as the environmental one.

Political movements across the whole spectrum have been affected by the changes. But it is the Left which faces the greatest challenge. All sections of the Left have to work in a new situation in which the old signposts have fallen over as though through dry rot, or been engulfed or displaced by political earthquakes, so that if they do point at all, it may be in the wrong direction.

Many people are used to expecting that 'their' publications will reinforce the things they already know or believe. ALR does not, in the main, play such a role, nor should it try to do so. It should, rather, do what it has been doing, and try to do it better still. That is, to be an avenue and forum in which ideas and problems can be discussed and developed, rather than pursuing a predetermined 'line'. For the days when the Left could promise the millennium when all problems would be solved, and joy could at last begin, are gone forever.

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