June/July 1966 those involved in the
Twenty-five years ago we were being
Today it is far more difficult to define
years later imposed a 20 year long
have been enormous.
years since ALR first appeared
last. And the changes in the 25
like yesterday. Even 25 years ago
earthquakes.
been transformed by a combination
the political, ideological and theoreti­
Invasion of Czechoslovakia two
was regarded as 'beyond the pale' as had
were abrasively against the marxism we
abrasively against the marxism we
based on old models.
This may be the cause of even greater
in that the depth and extent of the
problem and dangers which
to confront humanity are growing
and does not, in the main,
the political, ideological and theoretical
terrain in which it operates has been
transformed by a combination of slow changes and political earthquakes.
Twenty-five years ago we were being
driven by the new moods and
movements of the 60s which rubbed
abrasively against the marxism we
espoused, and by the split between
the Soviet Union and China. We were
then breaking decisively, if somewhat belatedly, with Stalinism. We
wanted to overcome the sectarian
distrust of other forces on the Left
which had so often plagued us, and
to recognise how inappropriate was
our assumption that we possessed a
knowledge inherently superior to
anyone else's. In ALR no subject was
regarded as 'beyond the pale' as had
been the case before.

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
great economic problems but still felt
that the basis of the economy was
sound, and that once political bar­
riers 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 envi­
ronmental degradation it had been
responsible for. Only 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
great 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 strong­
hold—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 possi­
ibly irreversible, and probably
deserved, cynicism. There is a conse­
quent 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 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 dis­
cussed and developed, rather than
pursuing a predetermined 'line'. For
the days when the Left could promise
the millenium when all problems
would be solved, and joy could at last
begin, are gone forever.

ERIC AARONS was in 1966, and is in
1991, a member of ALR's editorial
collective.

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