

Why Russia Isn't Socialist

*International Communist Party
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I. Russian Capitalism

Conspicuous social divisions, wage differentials, privileges according to type of work, and a division of labour which dooms "manual workers" to the factory inferno and which reserves for intellectuals the monopoly of comfort, can these really be said to be compatible with Socialism as the CP men shamelessly assert? A villa for Kosygin, and hovels for the workers; missiles to the moon and queues in front of the butcher's shop; a nuclear arsenal and meat and cereal shortages: are these edifying pictures of the society of the future? However, it is not sufficient merely to answer; No! For the bourgeoisie has already learnt how to skilfully exploit the disillusionment of certain workers confronted with stark Russian reality. It is as good as says to them that since Communism doesn't offer anything better, why not be satisfied with good old democratic capitalism? For the defenders of the "new roads to Socialism" the language is scarcely modified. Each people will have their very own Socialism which will take account of their traditions and their "degree of civilisation"!

If we, as revolutionary Marxists, wish to demonstrate that Russian Communism is false, it isn't with the slightest intention of disgusting workers with the truth. Rather, it is to show that the defects of present-day Russian society are common to all existing political regimes, because all of them – Russia included – are capitalist.

To pronounce on Russia with these observations supposes that one knows the fundamental characteristics of Socialism, but even knowing this is conditional on first knowing the nature of capitalism, and it is precisely this which is mostly ignored by the clever persons who hold forth on the subject on radio and television or in learned "scientific" works. For it is not a matter of discerning a few accessory and incidental aspects of this mode of production, but of defining its fundamental characteristics so as to be able to recognise it in all circumstances. These characteristics can be summed up as follows:

In Capitalist society commodities are produced, i.e. human activity is dedicated in the main, to the manufacture of objects destined to be exchanged for money, i.e. sold. Meanwhile, the great mass of producers are deprived of the means of production (as opposed to the artisan or the small peasant who possess their own work instruments).

These producers, possessing only their own labour power, are therefore forced to sell this commodity, adapted to the conditions of modern productions, associated labour, concentration of industry, high-tech production. All economic exchange, all buying and selling and especially of that particular commodity which is the workers' labour power, takes place through the medium of money. Capital is born and develops according to the

combined utilisation of all these factors.

The social class that is deprived of all the means of production and forced to sell its labour is the proletariat. This labour power is a commodity that has the “miraculous” quality of producing more wealth than it requires for its maintenance and reproduction. In other words, in a working day of 8 hours, the worker produces, let’s say in 4 hours, the value of his daily wage, but continues to work 4 extra hours for capital.

The price of labour power represents the worker’s wage. The difference between this wage and the mass of values produced remains the property of the class which retains control of the means of production: the capitalist class. It is called surplus-value or profit and this in its turn is exchanged against new labour power and new products of labour (machines, raw materials, etc.) becoming capital. This process repeated ad infinitum is the accumulation of capital.

All these elements are strictly linked within the capitalist mode of production and are therefore inseparable from it. It is therefore an insulting falsehood to deem that a society is worthy of the name Socialist when there exists within it both money – exchangeable against labour power – and wages, through which workers obtain the necessary products for the maintenance of themselves and their families, whilst the accumulation of values remains the property of businesses or the state. Well, exactly such a state of affairs exists today in Russia.

In the USSR it is possible, with roubles lent by the statebank, for a group of individuals to buy labour power and keep for themselves the difference existing between the value produced and the amount of wages paid; such is the case with the ephemeral joint-stock companies responsible for the construction of housing and public buildings and edifices, and with the kolkhoses that remunerate tractor drivers and seasonal workers as wage-earners by paying them in cash. Indeed these same kolkhoses have been forced by the authorities, for several years, into setting up preserve factories and other processing industries, using partly profits from their enterprises, and partly the salary system for factory personnel. Finally it is the same with the state businesses themselves, which both pay their workers in money, encouraging and developing wage differentials related to labour power, and which invest, i.e. the profit which is realised is transformed into capital.

In Russia the worker pays in money for all the foodstuffs and products that he needs, suffering silently from market fluctuations and even from the speculation indulged in by the individual producers, namely the kolkhosniks, who as well as having their share of the total kolkhos income, possess livestock and personal land which they are free to sell at whatever price they can get.

Finally in the USSR money yields interest. This occurs through Government stocks, which bring in profits to the stockholders (as in the classical capitalist countries) and also in the form of interest which the state derives by lending to its own enterprises.

How is all this different from the bourgeois societies of the capitalist west? In the USSR everything operates under the banner of value which in modern societies is merely a source of profit, capital accumulation and of exploitation of labour power. In Russia, everything is exchangeable with this cursed money. Everything is for sale, from the services of prostitutes to those of intellectuals, whose task consists of singing the praise of national “Socialism” and generally licking the boots of the powerful.

Later on, we will explain how it is that such a company of profiteers, toadies and parasites could arise amidst the ruins of the glorious October Revolution at the expense of the blood and toil of the Russian proletariat.

It is sufficient though to underline this essential fact: Socialism is incompatible with the categories of capitalist economy, such as money, wages, accumulation, and the

division of labour.

II. The October Revolution and the Russian Economy

The first measures that must be taken by the proletariat on taking power in a developed country, are those which aim to eliminate the capitalist characteristics of the economy. In bourgeois society, the essential commodity, and the very origin and basis of capital, is labour power as a commodity. The price of labour power, on the labour market, is expressed by a salary which is the money equivalent of the products necessary for the workers maintenance. However, even when labour power is paid at a correct value that enables the wage labourer to provide for his own and his family's needs, the capitalist enterprise always gains a surplus from the sale of products. This surplus value or profit, this inexhaustible source of capital and prime mover of accumulation, is the economic foundation of the social power of the capitalist class.

With this established, it is evident that to be able to destroy capitalist exploitation, it is necessary to destroy the fundamental relationship that forms its basis, that is, the commodity character of labour power. This is possible only on one condition: the abolition of the form of remuneration known as wage labour. The means to achieve this end predicted by Marxism is the system of "labour vouchers". We will look at in more detail later on.

We have already said in regard to such a system, despite the sarcastic remarks of "modern" philistines, that it is not the least bit utopian. Yet on reading Marx's description, it becomes immediately apparent that it can only be realised in countries that have reached a sufficient degree of economic and technical development. In October 1917 however, such was not the case for proletarian Russia; on the one hand because the country was economically backward, and on the other because of the destruction caused by the civil war against the Whites and the struggle against foreign intervention.

Not only could the revolutionary Bolshevik power not address itself immediately to the fundamental task of the Socialist Revolution, i.e. abolishing capitalist relations of production, but on the contrary, first of all it had to develop them so as to be able to abolish them later on. The Russian proletariat had come to power under the impetus of a bourgeois revolution which the Russian bourgeoisie had been incapable of carrying through. The price the proletariat paid was to carry on its shoulders the heavy burden which historically devolves on the bourgeoisie: the primitive accumulation of capital.

Instead of abolishing the division of labour, based on the wage earning system, it was necessary for the proletariat to make best use of it in the form that it already existed in Russia. Far from wiping out the market, inseparable from remuneration in money for labour power, it brought it back to life. Rather than undertake the impossible tasks of socialising millions of farms, it was obliged to encourage small peasant production so as to be able to feed the towns. In a word, it had to persevere with holding the political power that would eventually destroy the capitalist economy, whilst at the same time, it was led by force of circumstances to accelerate the latter's development!

Certain "extremists" would, retrospectively, consider this gamble as doomed to failure from the start. A bid for proletarian power in semi-feudal Russia could only – they say – lead eventually to national capitalism! But this ignores two key elements. On the one hand, the First World War caused the revolution to mature in every conceivable manner in Russia, and furnished a unique opportunity for the proletariat to reverse the relations of social forces on a world scale by taking advantage of the congenital incapacity of the national bourgeoisie to accomplish its own revolution. On the other hand, after the October insurrection and the social crisis provoked by the war in Germany, the hypothesis becomes possible through a revolution in that country. In this case, the coming to power

of the German proletariat, by alleviating the economic tasks of the Bolsheviks, would have permitted the Bolsheviks to pass over the problem of accumulation of capital without risking, under one form or another, the restoration of capital's political and social force.

For Lenin and for all the Bolsheviks – including Stalin before he theorised “Socialism in One Country” – the goal of the October Revolution was by no means the immediate transformation of the Russian economy in a Socialist sense. On the contrary, thousands of texts and speeches testify that the perspective of all Communists of the period consisted of making the power of the Soviets into a sort of progressive bastion of the world revolutionary struggle. Only if the revolution had reached the most developed European countries, where the fundamental first measures of Socialism were immediately realisable, would it have been possible to envisage their gradual realisation in Russia. Lenin emphasised this constantly with his formula: No victorious revolution in Germany – No Socialism in Russia! In order to hasten this victory, and to concentrate there all the forces of the international proletariat, and so as to free the soviet power from the ball and chain of having to restore Russian industrial production, it was ready to rent out to foreign capital the most important enterprises! This certainly gives a rather different impression to the image of a patriotic Lenin they are peddling nowadays! Lenin's preoccupations were miles removed from the one who claimed after him, to have “made” Socialism in his country alone.

History, however, did not comply with the expectations of this generation of political giants. The Berlin Commune of 1919 was crushed, and the workers' insurrections in central Europe were defeated. It was precisely these consecutive defeats of the International Revolution which forced the Bolsheviks to adopt a set of economic policies, which Stalinism would later consecrate with the label “Socialism” but which, in fact, had nothing whatsoever to do with it. In fact, measures like workers management of factories abandoned by their owners, the re-establishment of a certain level of internal trade, industrial planning and the substitution of the compulsory wheat requisitions with the tax in kind, all these were merely economic expedients, palliatives against misery and under-production. They were temporary measures in view of a recovery of the world proletarian struggle and no revolutionary of the day, worthy of the name, considered renouncing such measures.

The weakening and defeat of the international struggle was necessary in order that the greatest fraud in modern history be perpetrated. For which became expedient that all those who remained faithful to the positions of Lenin, in Russia and elsewhere, be massacred or deported: thus was consecrated as “Socialist”, the most backward and barbaric system for the exploitation of labour power ever known.

Socialism abolishes the hierarchy of remuneration; the Bolsheviks were to stimulate the productivity of labour with high wages. Socialism reduces the length of the working day; the soviet power lengthened it. Socialism eliminates both money and the market; the Russian Communists gave free rein to internal trade. The Proletarian State had to accumulate capital in order to reconstruct the destroyed means of production and create new ones. In other words, the Russian proletariat had political power, but economically, it was wearing itself out keeping alive a backward country that was centuries behind.

The Bolsheviks were, however, quite aware of these necessities and contradiction. They were certain that there was one link only between the Russian proletariat and Socialism: The Communist International, directed entirely towards the proletarian struggle of Europe, Asia too.

III: Isolation and Defeat for the Russian Proletariat

Only a proletarian victory in the developed capitalist countries could help to shorten the misery and suffering of Soviet Russia, and avert the social dangers involved in reconstructing the economy. Lenin never said, or wrote, that it was possible to “make socialism” in backward Russia. He relied on the triumph of the workers’ revolution first in Germany and central Europe, then in Italy, France and England. Only with this revolution, and this revolution alone, did he hold out the possibility for a Russia of the future to be able to make its initial steps towards Socialism.

When Stalin and his cronies came to power and decreed, as though through royal edict, that Socialism was possible in Russia alone, they de facto destroyed the perspective of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. They broke the only link connecting the Russian proletariat to a possible future Socialism: separately the Russian party’s link with the European Communist Revolution.

The relations of production in Russia at that time, had (where it had been possible to go beyond the archaic stage of small production and natural economy) bourgeois foundations alone. On these foundations could develop only social strata that were eager to politically consolidate their economic advantages, and who were hostile to Socialism. These were especially the shopkeepers and small private capitalists who had had restored to them appreciable freedom of action by the NEP and the enormous peasant masses who had become fiercely conservative since being given land after the workers’ revolution.

If the revolution had succeeded in Germany, the soviet power would have been able to abide by the concessions already made to private capitalism and the Russian peasantry, and overcome all the social consequences, but to renounce the European Revolution, like Stalin, was to give free rein to capitalist relations in Russia, and to give the classes who would be the immediate beneficiaries supremacy over the proletariat. This section of the proletariat, in an extreme minority, decimated by the war against the whites, and bound by a crushing task of production had one weapon only against the speculators and the greed of the peasants: the hammer of the Soviet State. This state, however, could only remain proletarian in so far as it united with the International Proletariat against reactionary strata inside Russia. To decide that Russia was going to create “its” Socialism all by itself, was to abandon the Russian proletariat to the immense pressure of non-proletarian classes and to free Russian capitalism from all controls and restraints. What’s more, it was to transform the Russian State into an ordinary state. An ordinary state endeavouring to make Russia into a great bourgeois nation as quickly as possible.

This was the real meaning of Stalin’s “turning point” and of his formula “Socialism in one country”. In baptising unadulterated capitalism as “Socialist”, by bargaining with the reactionary mass of the Russian peasantry, by persecuting and slaughtering all revolutionaries who remained faithful to the perspectives of Lenin and to the interests of the Russian and international proletariat, Stalin was the maker of a veritable counter-revolution. However, although he accomplished this through the cruel terror of an absolute despot, he was not the initiator but the instrument.

Following the crushing of armed insurrections and the catastrophic tactical errors of the International, after the peasant raisings and the famines in Russia – defeat both on the internal and international levels – it became evident, around 1924, that the Communist Revolution in Europe was to be postponed indefinitely. From this moment, a terrible period hand to hand combat began for the Russian Proletariat with the other classes. These other classes, momentarily moved to enthusiasm for the anti-tsarist revolution, aspired henceforth to enjoy their conquest in the bourgeois way, i.e. they gave up the revolutionary perspective so as to establish “good relations” with the capitalist countries.

Stalin was only the mouthpiece and the accomplisher of these aspirations.

But when we say “Russian proletariat”, we don’t mean the working masses themselves, who, afflicted by unemployment and famine, had the lifeblood squeezed out of them after their considerable effort and sacrifice, and who were incapable of political spontaneity. We refer to the Bolshevik Party, in which was condensed and concentrated the final revolutionary will of a political generation to which history no longer responded. It cannot be emphasised enough that the economic situation at the end of the civil was a terrible one, with the whole population wishing, at no matter what cost, for a return to security, bread and work. In all periods of revolutionary reflux, what triumphs is not revolutionary consciousness but the most trivial demagoguery. It was all too easy under these circumstances for a few unscrupulous politicians to advocate before the hungry masses the necessity of a compromise with the capitalist west, and to stigmatise as the initiative of adventurers the grim determination of the Bolshevik minority to follow “Lenin’s line”, which consisted of subordinating Russian politics entirely to the overall strategy of the International Communist Revolution. Stalin, however – to whom the most refined progressive Western intellectuals yielded down like prostitutes of the lowest order – never took the initiative, leaving to others the superhuman, and in the long run, impossible, task of reconciling the indispensable capitalist economic foundations with the retention of proletarian power.

Such an attitude made him available for the liquidation of the perspectives and *raison d’être* of Bolshevism.

This liquidation called for a blood-bath, certainly, but what bewilders the historian inclined towards the Russian Revolution, is that it developed within the Bolshevik Party, as if it were a matter of leadership struggles or a family feud, rather than a clash between two diametrically opposed historical perspectives. This “mystery”, we will proceed to explain in the next chapter.

IV: The Stalinist Counter-Revolution

This imposture disguises one of the most misunderstood events of contemporary history. Not only does a genuine view of the October revolution remain buried under half a century of political and doctrinal falsifications, but it has come to represent to those who have actually managed to unravel things, such an incredible affront to the rhythm of history, such a superhuman ambition considering the conditions in Russia at the time, that it hardly seems credible to them anymore. As we will never cease repeating, the key to a Socialist solution lay outside of Russia.

In the Russia of the twenties, the double character of the revolution couldn’t be kept up indefinitely, for the economic development that required the bourgeois revolution completed could only undermine and eventually overwhelm the purely political victory of the Socialist revolution.

In fact, within the interior of Russia, all that proceeded from national economic necessity, everything which expressed Russian social interests, constituted a moral danger for Communism, and every conceivable internal social strategy for Russia concealed, depending on the state of the International Revolution, the same fatal risk for the Russian proletariat.

Thanks to the destruction of feudal landed property, the bourgeois peasantry acquired a considerable economic and social influence. They bought up the land of the poor peasants and then rented it out. They illegally employed wage labour and went as far as monopolising wheat and starving out the cities. In the administration, where tens of thousand of militant Communists have metamorphosed into functionaries, there

develops a bureaucratic machinery whose motto is “administration for administration’s sake” and “the state for the state’s sake”. In a country where famine rages, to have work or accommodation becomes a privilege. Finally, after 1923, defending a genuine Communist opinion becomes an act of heroism.

But why particularly after 1923? Certainly, what we refer to as the Stalinist counter-revolution was the culmination of a process that spanned a period of several years, and it is difficult to exactly ascertain the “key” moment. Yet 1923 isn’t an arbitrary point of reference for it marked the definitive defeat of the German Revolution. With this, the last chance for an immediate extension of Communism in Europe fades away. The shattering significance of this fact was so well understood, that in the Russian party the news provoked suicides. It is also the year in which the catastrophic situation of Russian production is revealed by the “scissors” crisis: thus are respectively represented, in the diagram shown by Trotsky at the 12th party congress, the curves of agricultural and industrial prices, and their growing divergence poses a grave problem of economic orientation and social strategy. Must heavy industry be helped immediately, or should instead the policy of tax relief in favour of the peasantry be continued at heavy industry’s expense? The issue is left unsettled, but the situation continues to worsen with 1,250,000 unemployed.

Additionally, in 1923, Lenin suffered a third attack of arterio-sclerosis which was to cause his death in January 1924; but not before he had been able to denounce, in what can be considered to be his political testimony, “the powerful forces which are deviating the Soviet state from its course”. He had also broken with Stalin who embodied, he said, “an apparatus that is thoroughly alien to us, and represents a hotchpotch of bourgeois and tsarist reversions”. 1923 is also the year in which the first plot against Trotsky was hatched during Lenin’s illness, due partly, it is worth mentioning, to the blindness of the “old Bolsheviks” manipulated by Stalin. Against the organiser of the Red Army are now propagated the first political falsifications which will go on to become the slanderous pack of foul and ludicrous accusations which the riffraff of the other Stalinist parties, despite all their denials – including those of their ex-venerated Khrushchev – still continue to use today as their historical reference points. Lenin’s best comrades in arms would only understand two years later, that the real enemy of the revolution was the “foreign body” in the Bolshevik party, which history destined, in the course of the next ten years, to be its own executioner.

Looking at the vain efforts and countless vicissitudes of the opposition regrouping around Trotsky against Stalin’s almighty clique, we can see today how feeble and precarious were the strictly Russian foundation of Lenin’s great perspective, considering that the West (which any revolution in Russia, according to Marx, ought to “stir up”) was not in a position to respond forcefully to the call.

At the crucial moments, there were only a few hundred genuine Communists, courageously opposing about a million new, generally inexperienced elements introduced en masse into the Bolshevik Party by Stalin to back his policy of liquidating the International Revolution. Such a disproportion of forces is inexplicable unless a fundamental issue of the October Revolution is taken into account; that beyond the purely bourgeois tasks of the revolution, the “Russian nation” – that is, all the classes except an extremely small proletarian minority – represent nothing but an obstacle to the struggle for Socialism. This is the cardinal fact that is either ignored or underestimated by all democratic critics of Stalinism who correctly contrast the scientific honesty of Lenin with the coarse political brutality of the unscrupulous Stalin, but who don’t go beyond what is merely the phenomenology of a colossal movement of historical and social force, i.e. Russian capitalism. A political party which was conceived to usher in Socialism, was considered, with good cause, as its most immediate obstacle, and to make its way, Russian capitalism is forced

to brake its political backbone by emptying it of its social content.

We will not go on to explain here, even briefly, how this came about. Whilst referring the reader to our study "Bilan d'une Revolution", we will limit ourselves to outlining its main features on the political level.

During the internal struggles which preceded the definitive victory of Stalinism in 1929-30, none of the economic measures over which the party factions clash claim to be free from the framework of capitalist production relations; none of them have the right to declare themselves Socialist. In the picturesque formulation of the "scissors" crisis, the problem keeps worsening with all the resultant economic and social consequences, with all its corresponding effects on the state of industrial productions and the social balance of forces. Trotsky's left maintains the principle of a preliminary industrialisation as a pre-condition for the development of agriculture, sanctioning at the same time support for the poor peasant. Bukharin's right (though names are given here as points of reference only) counted on the enrichment of the middle peasant and on the increase of his working capital, thinking towards its eventual confiscation. Stalin's centre doesn't have a position, being content to pilfer from the right and the left anything that allows it to keep at the helm of the state, and it is for this reason therefore that its polemics do not show a clear demarcation between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. Thus the Stalinist centre, able to use any old measure, whether inspired by the "right" or the "left", has in the last analysis one function: saving and reinforcing the Russian state. By forcing the double revolution into an anti-feudal, and therefore capitalist, pigeonhole, it is completely anti-communist.

Both faithful to Lenin, the right and the left know that everything depends, in the end, on the International Revolution, that it is a matter of holding out until it triumphs, and if there are violent conflicts between them, it is on the respective efficacy of the various measures that are proposed for that purpose. The centre is preoccupied with other things however; it has already broken with the International Revolution and has therefore only one political point of view: to eliminate those who still pursue the International Revolution. The way in which Stalin finally triumphs illustrates this clearly. First of all he supports the right from which he adopts the programme of support for the middle peasant, meanwhile showering Trotsky with abuse and accusing him of sabotaging the infallible "Leninist" alliance of peasantry and proletariat. Next, in the face of the failure of this policy, and panic stricken by the threat of the kulaks, he dismisses the right and engages in mud slinging at Bukharin who he accuses – wrongly – of expressing the interests of the rural bourgeoisie. The manoeuvre succeeds so well that Bukharin, when he would have attempted a rapprochement with Trotsky, fails to convince him that the right is Marxist whilst the centre isn't; in fact, certain of Trotsky's supporters will even consider Stalin borrowing some of their positions, for his own interests, as a step of the centre towards the left.

Needless to say, this "physical" struggle taking place at the head of the party and state is merely the expression of the subterranean offensive that we have mentioned above, but it shows how drastic a reversal on the political level was necessary for them to be able to triumph. Meanwhile, on the economic level it wasn't so indispensable to proceed in the same way, since neither the solution of the left or right was Socialist. The Stalin 'solution' wasn't more so, although it seemed to draw its inspiration – through forced collectivisation – from a caricature of Trotsky's position. The explanation of this paradox resides in the fact that no Russian solution could bring about, even in the long term, the realisation of Communism if the International Revolution was defeated.

The superhuman effort of those who tore each other to pieces over the means of preventing this hard historical reality, hid from view the common enemy; which Bukharin

identified perhaps only at the moment when he felt the cold revolver of the executioner on his neck.

The fact that the enemy of a social revolution could be a mere gang of killers proves that if isolated from the anticipated support of the International Proletariat, the socialist character of October 1917 reduces itself to being the will of a party, i.e. a group of people, which, moreover, becomes thinned out under the weight of hostile events; to kill revolutionaries is well nigh incumbent on any counterrevolution.

V: Socialism and State Capitalism

Because of the extreme complexity of this turbulent historical period, it seemed necessary to endeavour to prove by, first a general survey, that necessary and specific relations existed between Russian economic and political problems, internal policy and the international role assigned by Communists to their revolution. Thus in dealing with a question in which no aspect can be examined in isolation, we have reversed the usual didactic method which proceeds from the particular to the general. We had as a consequence to dwell at length on the significance of the struggle which, from 1923, took place between the factions at the head of the Bolshevik party. Here were opposed not economic solutions, one of which would have been Socialist and the other not, but the different ways of conserving power in expectation of the International Revolution. It is important that we develop this paramount point in detail in order to trace the evolution of the Russian economy to its present state.

We must repeat that from the first years of the revolution, Bolshevik economic policy is undermined by a contradiction that will eventually sound its death-knell, and which Communists in Russia and throughout the world – up to the turning point marked by Stalin – hope to be able to surmount only through the international victory of Socialism. But whilst awaiting this victory, which becomes increasingly problematic, the Russian population must survive and the forces of production be used as best as possible as they stand, i.e. at the level of a petty-bourgeois mercantile economy. What then is the Bolshevik formula in this matter? It is to orientate the productive effort towards state capitalism.

Why Capitalism? Lenin explains it in his text of April 1921, “The Tax in Kind” from which we draw all quotations in this article (Selected Works, Moscow 1971, Vol. 3).

“Socialism is inconceivable without large-scale capitalist engineering based on the latest discoveries of modern science.”

In fact, on the strictly economic level, there is no other “path to Socialism”, other than through the accumulation of capital incumbent on bourgeois society rather than on the power of the Proletariat state in Russia, as the bourgeoisie weren’t to fulfil it, it was the proletariat who took charge of this sine qua non condition of Socialism. Indeed, it is necessary to transform millions of peasants vegetating in the “peasant backwoods” “where scores of versts or trackless country separate the village from the railway” into wage earners so as to be able to abolish wage earning at a later date. To begin with, it is necessary to introduce mercantile exchange in those areas that “are in a realm of patriarchalism and semi and outright barbarism” thus enabling its eventual abolition. Equally, “Large-scale industry” and “modern technology” must be promoted so as to attack “indolent patriarchalism” which constitutes social life in the vast Russian countryside.

For Lenin, and all Marxists worthy of the name, the accomplishment of this gigantic task never represented a realisation of Socialism, but of out and out capitalism. Despite the scandalous confusion caused by the learned savants who transform the conscious criminal falsifications of Stalinism into erudite nonsense, Socialism is not “constructed” like the concrete and steel structures which are indispensable to modern production:

Socialism is the freeing of forces that already exists and involves the destruction of the obstacles which obsolete productions sets against them.

The tragedy of the October Revolution is that the Russian proletariat, unlike the Western proletariat if it had come to power, would have two sets of shackles to break rather than just one, with the shackle of bourgeois production remaining indispensable on the Russian scale whilst at the same time obsolete on the International scale.

“Capitalism” writes Lenin “is a bane compared to Socialism. Capitalism is a boon compared with medievalism, small production and the evils of bureaucracy which spring from the dispersal of small producers. Inasmuch as we are as yet to pass directly from small production to Socialism, some capitalism is inevitable as the elemental product of small production and exchange; so that we must utilise capitalism – particularly by directing it into the channels of state-capitalism – as the intermediary link between small production and socialism, as a means, a path, and a method of increasing the productive forces.”

Stalin’s worst crime against the proletariat, more monstrous even than massacring revolutionaries, and worse than submitting the Russian workers to unspeakable slavery whilst leaving the workers of the west to the mercy of their “democratic” bourgeoisie, is having made the means invoked by Lenin into an end, an “historical path” into a final stage, assimilating Socialism totally into capitalism. This involved cooking the books to such an extent that, for the imbeciles and toadies who extol Lenin whilst caricaturing his teaching, the task of Socialism becomes, little by little, the accumulation of capital!

Why then, in the perspective that Lenin formulated for Russia, is it a question of state capitalism? It is because Socialism, whilst not achievable without prior capitalist development, isn’t achievable without “proletarian domination of the state either”. The state that emerges from the October Revolution is proletarian; that is, it derives from a revolution led by the proletariat, directed by a party born out of the proletariat and armed with the doctrine of this same proletariat. This is on the political level. But how Socialist is the state on the economic level? Lenin was quite clear when he considered this point:

“No one, I think, in studying the question of the economic system of Russia has denied its transitional character. Nor, I think, has any Communist denied that the term ‘Soviet Socialist Republic’ implies the determination of the Soviet power to achieve the transition to Socialism and not that the existing economic system is recognised as a Socialist order.”

Lenin, who frequently employs the term “transition” in the text, is interested in defining which stages Russia must pass through, from the economic and social stage they were at the time, to Socialism.

“At present, petty-bourgeois capitalism prevails in Russia, and it is one and the same road that leads from it to both large-scale state capitalism and to Socialism, through one and the same intermediary station called ‘national accounting and control of production and distribution’.”

And Lenin insists:

“Russia cannot advance from the economic situation now existing here without traversing the ground which is common to state capitalism and to Socialism (national accounting and control).”

Lenin’s idea, even if later shamelessly obscured, is clear: The route Russia must take to arrive at Socialism, is imperatively determined by the economic and social conditions of the country after the revolution. Only the political nature of the state (because the state is proletarian) can guarantee that we will not be stopped along the way, that we won’t halt at

an “intermediary stage”, namely “small mercantile production”, “private capitalism” or “state capitalism”. On the contrary we will continue, full steam ahead towards that still distant terminal illuminated with the blazing letters of Socialism! And for which the control of the state makes for the fastest fulfilment. But it must be emphasised, this will only take place given the indispensable condition that the international victory of the proletariat, breaking capital’s might in all its main nerve centres around the world, gives to the “locomotive” of the Russian Revolution the green light all the way down the line!

Today, the main reason why such a lucid perspective is buried in inextricable confusion is undoubtedly the shameless falsehoods spread by Stalinism, but it is also due to the course of historical development in which the proletariat registers defeat after defeat and countless repudiations of its party: the general reflux of the proletarian movement, which is evident in all respects, wreaks most damage on the proletariat’s consciousness of its own history. Glaring evidence for this contention can be found in the fact that the October Revolution has been distorted not only by Stalinism but also by most anti-Stalinists.

This is especially true for the “extremist” view according to which the failure of the revolution is blamed on the “Leninist” conception of state capitalism. We will show that this argument collapses before an indisputable truth; that this economic stage, which for Lenin was a simple “step forward” – has never been attained by Stalinism. The alleged realisation of state capitalism cannot therefore be identified with the triumph of Stalin’s counter-revolution. The latter, in grabbing the levers of the “locomotive of history” converted it into a short winded old rust bucket which, after a half-hearted sally towards state capitalism, contented itself with shuttling up and down between the “intermediate stations” separating it from small production amongst which are the “engine sheds” preferred by the valiant engineers of “Socialism in one country”.

Numerous anti-Stalinists (having at their disposal as criteria, only “democracy”, “political morality” or “the best type of organisation”) condemn Lenin’s teachings, because according to them, he equated Socialism with state capitalism. This is a general aberration common to most critics of the Russian revolution, whether from the left or the right. However, we saw earlier that as far as Lenin was concerned, the formula of state capitalism was required merely to makeup for an extremely inadequate capitalist development; it is an objective strictly dependant on “Russian conditions”, and is entirely inadequate as a condition of proletarian revolution in the developed countries where the first Socialist measures will be taken straightaway, and in particular, the abolition of wage labour. What is international in the October Revolution, is its essential political feature: the universal necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Everything to do with Russian economic problems is, by and large, nothing to do with socialism.

The “extremists” who transform into principle and a question of doctrine, what was only a transitory objective in the proletarian management of a backward economy – even if in good faith – are committing the same error which allowed Stalinism to triumph in the international workers movement.

VI: Socialism and Small Production

To begin with, we must indicate what is meant by the political phenomenon that we have designated as “Stalinist counter-revolution”; a task in this particular field, involving contradictions and difficulties which we won’t attempt to mask. For example, when we affirm on the one hand, that without the help of the international revolution, the Russian economy could only aspire to reach a capitalist development whilst on the other we say this capitalism is the work of Stalin, the difficult question arises; in what respects did the economic policies of Lenin differ from those of Stalin, and what right have we to speak of a counter-

revolution when it carried on the work of the political forces that it had defeated?

As a matter of fact, we have already replied to this objection; the Russian economy freed from Tsarism tended towards capitalism through sheer necessity, but it wasn't on this terrain that the Bolsheviks intended to confront capital but on the international level, especially in the countries where the relations of production could be immediately destroyed by a victorious revolution. It remains however for us to specify what the Stalinist counter-revolution stood for as an orientation imprinted on the entire historical development of modern Russia; it is not just a matter of the final death-knell of any Socialist perspective in the long and short term, but more than that, of a mode of capitalist expansion that is far from being the most radical or energetic.

Let it first be well understood that all counter-revolution is political, that is it is expressed through the class in power changing, and not through the development of the productive forces being arrested: that would mean civilisation going backwards and modern history furnishes no examples of that happening. Indeed, whilst the restoration of 1815 restored the aristocracy to power in the European countries that had fended off the French Revolution, the extension of capitalism was not prevented subsequent to this revolution. In other words, it transformed the nobles into bankers or landed proprietors, but without leading the bourgeois into serfdom!

Similarly Stalinism, in sabotaging the International Revolution, didn't try and go back on the result obtained by the downfall of Tsarism, i.e. generalisation of mercantile production, generalisation of capitalist economy. It is also true that this counter-revolution didn't restore power to the overthrown classes, and this is the last, but not the least of the objections to which we must reply. For the moment we will restrict ourselves to making this observation: the crisis of colonialism in the last twenty years has confirmed that it is capitalism which emerges from any revolution breaking out in backward or semi-feudal countries when the World proletariat isn't in combat (even if the bourgeois class isn't physically present) whilst the state, in its capacity as economic agent, installs or maintains the capitalist relations of production.

The notion of the determining role of the state acting as a "hinge" between two successive modes of production is indispensable in order to fully understand the function that Lenin assigned to it in the October Revolution, as indeed it is in throwing light on the function it fulfilled under Stalin. The state, as conceived by Marxism, is an instrument of violence at the service of the ruling class, guaranteeing in a social order corresponding to a particular mode of production. This definition is just as valid for the proletarian state, but note well, with the difference that the latter form of state expresses the domination of the exploited classes over the exploiting class and not the other way round. Also it is doomed to wither away with the disappearance of the production relations which it intends to abolish. In this last respect, the Proletarian State, like all others, has only two means of intervention: to authorise or to forbid.

We have seen how the Russian Revolution because of its double nature: anti-feudal and anti-capitalist, could "jump" the economic stage corresponding to its first aspect, but not escape the accomplishment of its political content: it destroyed and rendered impossible all class domination founded on the accumulation of capital, but it wasn't able to survive without tolerating, indeed encouraging, this accumulation. Its proletarian character therefore depended on a potentiality more than an actuality: its Socialism was more a state of intention than a material possibility.

In these conditions, and starting from when the defeat of the European Communist Revolution was undeniable, on what basis can one assess the "threshold" when the state ceases to have anything to do with the revolutionary function of the proletariat? This threshold, on the political level, is easy to define; it has been overstepped when Stalinism

openly renounces the requirement for future Russian Socialism: the International Revolution. On the economic and social level though, the only solid criteria is that which derives from the function of the state given above: the Soviet State ceased to be proletarian when it was deprived of all means of forbidding the transitory economic forms which it had been forced earlier to authorise.

If legally speaking, this impotence only manifests itself officially with the 1936 constitution – which by establishing democratic equality between peasants and workers, puts the seal on the crushing of the proletariat under the weight of the immense Russian peasantry – on the economic and social level, it appears mainly in the major upheaval brought about in agricultural structures. Stalinist propaganda, backed up by the entire international intelligentsia, makes out that the “collectivisation” and “dekulakisation” of the thirties have realised the second of the two Russian revolutions; the Communist one contained in the October Revolution. This boastful announcement – which could be made only by totally distorting all Marxist criteria – collapses in the face of the following observation; the organisation of agricultural production, a burden for modern Russia, has not only not reached the socialist level, but it drags along at a stage well below that of all developed capitalist countries. Let it suffice to point to the endemic shortage of basic necessities in Russia, rendering it necessary, even today, for wheat to be imported into a country which used to be one of the foremost producers of this cereal in the world.

In opposition to the widespread “extremist” view, according to which the defeat of Socialism in Russia was due to a monstrous state capitalism, it is necessary to describe the form of production to which the proletarian power in that country finally capitulated. It is sufficient to refer to Lenin to learn about this “Enemy No 1 of Socialism” referred to constantly in his speeches and writings, and to notice how this enemy held fast before all the reforms and changes occurring in the USSR. In the text previously cited, the author of “The Tax in Kind” enumerates the five types of Russian economy:

1. Natural economy: i.e. patriarchal production, almost totally consumed by its producers.
2. Small commodity production: “this includes the majority of those peasants who sell their grain”.
3. Private capitalism: whose rebirth goes back to the N.E.P.
4. State capitalism: i.e. grain monopoly and national accounting of production, which the proletarian power strives to accomplish in the face of a multitude of difficulties.
5. Socialism: On this last point, Lenin is crystal clear; it is, he says nothing but a “legal opportunity” of the proletarian state. An opportunity that could only become an immediate reality if the Russian revolution, as Lenin sharply reminded Bukharin on another occasion, had inherited the historic results from a “completed Imperialism” from “a system in which everything was in submission to finance capital” and in which “it remained only to decapitate it to leave everything else in the hands of the proletariat”.

This evidently wasn't the case in Russia, and it is for this reason that, in Lenin's outline, the struggle unfolds not between state capitalism – still at the stage of a tendency and efforts to create it – and Socialism – which is mere “legal opportunity” founded on the nature of the party in power, but in the economy, where small production dominates.

“It is not state capitalism that is at war with Socialism” Lenin emphasises, “but the petty-bourgeoisie plus private capitalism fighting together against state-capitalism and Socialism”.

The outcome of this struggle one can measure today in the condition of Russian agriculture, which far from having eliminated small production, has eternalised it under the falsely “collective” appearance of the kolkhos. We will look later at the economic content and the social influence of this type of co-operative which differs hardly at all from those in the capitalist countries of the west. We would merely like to point out that the party of the Russian proletariat did not perish through the advent of “new forms”, “unforeseen” by Marxism, nor because of the colossal termite mound of bureaucrats, previously nurtured in the bosom of the working class. It was vanquished entirely by the historic conditions of Russian society which, it was aware from the beginning, it could not overcome without the help of the European Communist Revolution.

The most serious of the Stalinist falsifications is to have declared that in such conditions, Socialism had been “constructed”. This lie had been denounced by Lenin earlier on at the time of the NEP:

“The Building of Communist society just by Communists is a childish idea and we have never expressed it; Communists are only a drop in the people’s ocean”.

“It is a matter of creating it with the hand of others” he added. In other words, of allowing the non-proletarian classes to modernise their productive techniques, with the use of modern machinery, thus realising the conditions for Socialism but not realising Socialism itself. These conditions can be known by no other name than capitalism.

The development of capitalism equals the elimination of small production, but the Russian Communists would try to bring this about in the Communist, not the bourgeois manner, by saving the existence and the working capacity of the small producer, whilst uprooting him from his derisory “property”; a slavery worse even than serfdom. It was in the “agrarian communes” that the Bolsheviks would strive to group the peasants together on the basis of a collective exploitation and redistribution, without individual property, without wage labour..., they failed, as later would Bukharin’s plan based on the hope of an increase in the working capital of the middle peasant.

The solution which succeeded was Stalin’s forced collectivisation. The most appalling, most barbaric, most reactionary way conceivable. Appalling, because it engendered quasi-apocalyptic violence, barbaric, because accompanied by an immense destruction of resources, notably the destruction of cattle from which Russia is still suffering 40 years later. The most reactionary because it stabilised – differing from western capitalism which eliminated it – the small producer in an inefficient, ideologically backward system. The kolkhosniks, in whom is combined traditional rural egoism and the greed of the country worker is a good symbol of the triumph of the peasantry over the proletariat, masked by the braggadocio of “Socialism in one country”.

VII: The False “Communism” of the Kolkhos

The compromise with small production shouldn’t be attributed, as Stalin’s international band of servile adulators would have one believe, to the carefully weighed-up inspiration of a brilliant leader, but rather to the despotic requirements of particular political and economic conditions. These conditions can only be adequately analysed by returning to the previously mentioned discussion within the Bolshevik party on the agrarian question. We’ll see that Trotsky’s left gave priority to industrial development as the indispensable prior condition for putting agriculture on its feet, whilst Bukharin’s right prioritised capital accumulation by the rural middle classes.

It should be recalled of that debate the categorical difference which became apparent between the preoccupations of the left and the right of the party on the one hand, and those of the Stalinist centre on the other. The latter interested itself little in the respective

reasonableness of the theses that it had to deal with; for it, being an expression of the Russian national state, what mattered was the ruthless elimination of the last phalanx of the party. Stalinism was acting already on its specific terrain: the abandonment of the struggle for the World Revolution, the stabilisation and consolidation of existing structures, and the transformation of the centre for the revolutionary direction of the World Proletariat into a mere national state apparatus. Of Stalin's intentions and ambitions, neither Bukharin nor Trotsky were yet fully aware. The importance of the decisions on which they were divided was of more importance to them than the sordid maneuverings of the "secretary general" for nothing was really viable if the International Revolution didn't gain second wind. With this hope, their respective positions took on for their passionate defenders the nature of an "All or nothing" gamble, which engaged them in intransigence as opposed to conciliation. In Trotsky's eyes, who saw salvation only in a thorough industrialisation, Bukharin – traitorously used and defended by Stalin – appeared to be defending the rich peasant. For Bukharin, prioritising industrialisation was full of undesirable bureaucratic consequences, and it seemed better that the accumulation of capital be confined to a rural bourgeoisie with which we would eventually "settle accounts". The harshness of this conflict between the right and the left, equally committed to maintain the economic bases the least unfavourable to the dictatorship of the proletariat, hid from view the menace which weighed on the political base from the centre. Both would underestimate the counter-revolutionary danger that this represented.

In actual fact, it was entirely with political aims in view that Stalin supported the "Bukharin solution", linking it from them on to the liquidationist formula of "Socialism in one country". On the other hand, the slogan "Peasants Enrich Yourself" hadn't had the effect on the economic level counted on by the right. The middle peasant, instead of increasing his working capital as hoped for by Bukharin, instead increased his personal consumption. The production of grain collapsed to the point of giving rise once again to the spectre of famine in the towns.

In January 1928, the production of corn was 25% below that of the preceding year, showing a deficit of 2 million tons. The Stalinist direction of the party and state – uncontested since the 15th congress and excluding the left – reacted by sending armed contingents into the towns. Repression and confiscation of stocks alternated with peasant rebellions and massacres of workers dispatched by the party to the countryside. By April, the corn reserves are somehow or other restored, whilst the central leadership backs out, condemning the "excesses" it itself had ordered. Can it really be said – as one is given to believe by every foreign language catechism bearing the Stalinist imprimatur – that it was all a matter of a line of conduct sagely elaborated? In reality, the central committee acted through panic and the grossest possible empiricism. It didn't set out, wrote Trotsky, with any particular political line, and adopted policies that were valid for only a few months at a time, not to mention years! In July, the central committee forbids all seizure of corn, whilst increasing the price. At the same time it leads a violent campaign against the kulaks who the right were accused of defending. Still in July – just a few months now separating us from the forced collectivisation that will follow – Stalin lays the blame on "those who think that individual exploitation has had its day", who, he exclaims "have nothing in common with our party"! Although the first five year plan, adopted at the end of 1929, foresaw only 20% collectivisation of the land, and that only by 1933, the idea of the kolkhos was taken up by the central committee, and propagated under the boastful slogan: "The introduction of Communism into agriculture".

Attacked from April 1929, Bukharin capitulated in November under an avalanche of insults, slanders and threats of the purest Stalinist stamp. Then, in accordance with a concept of irresponsibility, which has since spread down to the very last cell of the national communist parties, it is the Right which becomes the scapegoat for the failure of

the Bukharin formula. The clique which has ever been unable to take any decision which doesn't involve repression, will emerge bedecked in haloes from the discovery of a "solution" which has nothing whatsoever to do with Socialism: a collection of co-operatives which, operating within the market system, will end up escaping from all state "control and accounting", and which will display the economic insufficiencies of small production in conjunction with the backward and reactionary mentality of the peasant.

During the second half of 1929 and throughout the following year, what the central committee will refer to as "dekulakisation" and "collectivisation" unfolds amidst incredible high-handedness, violence and confusion. It is apparent once again that political schemes prevail over economic initiative because of the threat of famine and unrest; it becomes a matter of turning the perennial hatred of the poor peasant against the middle peasant, and thus bypassing a difficult obstacle that endangers the very existence of the state.

In fact hardly any preparations are made for this "collectivisation" with only 7,000 tractors provided for everybody, whilst according to Stalin 250,000 are required! Then again, in order to incite the small producers to join the kolkhos, a grant of cattle is made to them. The result is that the ones already in their possession are then sold or eaten! The immediate consequences of the measures prove catastrophic, provoking in certain regions an armed rebellion of the peasants against the functionaries who collectivise everything right down to glasses and shoes!

By the time the Spring sowing comes around, the dread of civil war moves the government to condemn the "excesses" of collectivisation and to allow the peasant to leave the kolkhos; this provokes a mass exodus reducing the number of kolkhosians by half. Trotsky was to observe "the film of collectivisation going in reverse". In order that a new influx of peasants into the kolkhoses is possible, and to enable Stalin to conclude that "collectivisation is a success", it will be necessary that he make considerable concessions, which will cancel out socially anything that is technically "collective" in the kolkhos. But before looking at the content, it is important we explain the causes of collectivisation itself.

According to the opinion shared by Stalinists and their left adversaries alike, it was a response rendered necessary by the blackmail exercised on the Soviet power by the rich rural bourgeoisie (the kulaks) whose importance hadn't stopped increasing since the revolution. The scarce documents at our disposal tend to show, on the contrary, the extension of production by the small and middle peasants, whose very existence considerably slowed up the indispensable condition for the progressive elimination of small production in the countryside – the devolvement of wage labour. Under these circumstances, collectivisation isn't a "veering to the left" of Stalinism, a stray "socialist" impulse of the state bureaucracy, but is the only means available in the backward conditions of the Russian countryside, to impel – in an emergency and in response to a severe crisis – the general course of the economy towards capitalism.

In fact there are several reasons for thinking that Stalin embarked on this adventure because of the success of the grain requisitions that commenced in 1929, the favourable reports on the development of the co-operatives, and the conviction that the peasantry as a whole would be unable to put up an effective resistance. For whatever reason, the determinism of facts, if not the statistical proof, is persuasive: the "kolkhos-form" turns out to be the only one possible given the economic, social and political conditions that are the result of the irretrievable reflux of the International Revolution.

Any political solution in the end survives only in so far as it eliminates those solutions which lack the indispensable conditions. What is evident for revolutionary solutions is as true for counter-revolutionary ones. After the proletariat's superhuman effort in Russia,

capitalism was now unable to return to the “under-developed” vassal form which it had assumed under the tsars, neither could it be defeated by Socialism because the International Revolution had been defeated. The construction as an “intermediate solution” of a national capitalism – in other words an autonomous centre for the accumulation of capital in Russia – was possible under these conditions only by stabilising the immensely conservative social force represented by the Russian peasantry in the kolkhoses.

This particular road, which one could call “Russian capitalism mark 2” expresses the complicated dialectic of the social upheavals in the imperialist phase: The capitalist mode of production for the Russian economy of the time is revolutionary, but is made possible only by the victory of the world counter revolution. The proletarian elimination of the Russian bourgeoisie that had failed in its historic task achieved nothing less than the triumph of bourgeois relations of production! It is understandable that these contradictory events, forming an object of profound perplexity for an entire historic generation of revolutionaries, considerably complicates the nonetheless indispensable act of clarification. It is possible, however, to sum things up by going back to an old touchstone of Lenin’s formulated well before the victory of 1917, and which poses the fundamental alternatives for modern Russia; the proletariat for the revolution or the revolution for the proletariat? Stalinism is, in the final analysis, the realisation of the first part of the formula to the detriment of the second; thanks to the blood of the Russian proletariat, modern Russia founded its national state. What does it matter if the class to whom this task has historically been given is physically destroyed, if the relations of production which are installed, after several decades of upheaval are the relations proper to this class and guarantee its reappearance in the more or less distant future.

The social type of the kolkhosian form incarnates the long historic tradition which has been necessary for it to come about. As collective farm worker, the kolkhosian – who receives a fraction of the product proportional to his provision of work – is related to the wage-earners of industry. He will never be a wage-earner proper though, until a further evolution of unknown duration has taken place because of his plot of land. He isn’t propertyless, but an owner of means of production, even if reduced to two or three hectares of land, a few head of cattle and his own house. Under this last aspect, he appears similar to his counterpart in the west, the smallholder. But, as distinct from the latter, who is ruined by the usurer, the bank and the market fluctuations, he cannot be expropriated; the little that belongs to him is guaranteed by law. The kolkhosian is therefore the incarnation of the compromise between the ex-proletarian state and the small producers passed on in perpetuity.

The indispensable condition for Socialism is the concentration of capital. Whilst the confiscation by the proletariat of ultra-centralised forms like trusts, cartels and monopolies is possible because property and management have long since become dissociated in these institutions, when considering the myriad of kolkhosian micro-proprietors it becomes unthinkable other than at the expense of long periods of failure and defeat. Not only is this Socialist perspective totally excluded without a new revolution, but even the simple concentration of capital comes up against difficulties, to the extent in fact that today’s Russia endeavours to achieve it by going back to the start of a process already completed by the developed countries. This is the significance of the principles of competition, of profitability on which the Russian leaders probably depend to eliminate the non-competitive kolkhoses and, in the long run, to transform their members into bone fide wage-earners. We will next examine the stages already completed within this long, drawn out process.

The rural collectivism of Russia isn’t Socialist, but Co-operative. Trapped within the laws of the market and the value of labour power, it shows all the contradictions of

capitalist production without partaking of its revolutionary element which is the elimination of the small producer. But it has allowed the national state, firmly propped up on the “stable” peasantry, to realise at the expense of incalculable proletarian suffering, its primitive accumulation and achieve its only modern capitalist element: state industrialism.

VIII: All the Defects of Capitalist Agriculture with None of the Advantages

Socialism is, above all, the abolition of relations of exchange founded on value, and the destruction of their fundamental components: capital, wages and money. These categories the kolkhos guarantees through the transformation of the small rural producers, whose social position it crystallises, partly thanks to remuneration in money (or in negotiable products) for their work on a co-operative farm and partly through allowing for the individual exploitation of plots of privately owned land and cattle, the produce of which can be sold on the open market. Far from being a kind of “Socialism”, the Kolkhos is akin to the “self-management” systems which exist in certain of the newly independent under-developed countries; there, by usurping terminology in just the same way as their Russian forbears, such systems serve to conceal their role as historical stopgap between the archaic natural production preceding capitalism and the latter’s full development.

After having examined the political motivations for Russian “forced collectivisation”, and drawn attention to the support given to the Stalinist counter-revolution by the immense soviet peasantry, we must now show that it is by this path – a meandering one but with definite salient features – that an out and out national capitalism was founded on the ruins of the October Revolution.

The personality of the kolkhosian reflects well enough the economic and social impasse of a revolution that, within its national frontiers couldn’t bypass the stage of a bourgeois historical transformation. The kolkhos, a transitional solution necessitated by the abandonment of the international revolutionary strategy, continues to represent the main obstacle to a rapid development of capitalism in Russia. It is an obstacle that certainly doesn’t denote the intransigent survival of an “archaic road” to Socialism as Trotskyists have maintained, despite all evidence to the contrary. In fact rather it demonstrates the heavy tribute paid by the proletariat to history when the counter-revolution, after having clearly broken with the perspective of Socialism, doesn’t even offer the creation of its most radical social and economic premises by way of compensation.

By revealing the backwardness and economic difficulties of present-day Russia, from which the politicians and economists of the west believe it is possible to deduce a “failure of Communism”, we wish instead to establish the real causes. This is not just in order to counter the Stalinist lies and the illusions of those who maintain the survival in Russia of “conquests for Socialism”, but rather to disprove critics who reproach Lenin with having imprudently taken the path of state capitalism. The kolkhos is neither a “Socialist accomplishment”, or an expression of state capitalism. Its beneficiaries are peasants who supply to the collective fund a parcel of land and a certain number of cattle (if they were without them, the state provided them). The kolkhosian participates in the collective valorisation of all the plots, henceforth reunited, and of the herds thus constituted. As a result of this, he receives a part of the product proportional to the number of days set aside for work, meanwhile having at his disposal a plot of land and cattle, the products of which he can use as he pleases.

Through his circumstances as much as by his social psychology, the kolkhosian is as foreign to Socialism as the Kentish market gardener or the winegrower of a Co-operative in the South of France. The way his labour is remunerated in the collective farm is related to that of the wage labourer, but also to that of the small shareholder in the capitalist countries, for whilst he receives a part of the profit of the enterprise, the fact of his

minuscule ownership confers on him a position identical to that of the peasant small-holder in the west. The “personality” in the rural society of the USSR who most approximates to proletarians in the capitalist west and susceptible to behaving as such, is the sovkhosian. But the sovkhos, or state enterprise represents only a tiny part of Russian agrarian production.

The kolkhos, from whichever angle it is considered, is the most reactionary element both socially and economically in soviet society, not only because of the psychological conservatism of its members, but because of the burden it exerts on the only modern class: the proletariat. Indeed, one can easily see why it was that at the time of the last world war the Russian rural small producer – saved from famine and expropriation by the kolkhos – didn’t begrudge his blood to defend, along with the Stalinist state, the guarantees of survival and stability that the latter granted him. However, it is necessary to consider the entire Russian economic and social structure to understand that this survival and this stability, in the final analysis, is due to the overexploitation of the proletariat. The mediocrity of conditions in the Russian countryside should not deceive us: the kolkhosian system, beyond the fundamental distortions that it accentuates in the capitalist nature of Russian relations of production, constitutes the main obstacle to a general rise in the standard of living.

Imposed by Stalinism’s political strategy, which ceased to link the destiny of the Russian state to that of the International Proletariat, the kolkhosian form has become quasi-ineradicable, to the extent that it can only be destroyed – as yearned for by present day soviet leaders – through competition from a more productive form. This though is highly unlikely, unless through a general subversion, in the short term. In this connection, some figures will go towards filing out these ideas: in Russia, the average yield of cereals despite increasing between 1913 to 1956 by 25% as compared to around 30% in the United States and Canada, is still manifestly insufficient given demographic growth. The peasant population is still very high, a reliable indicator of the feeble agricultural productivity, in 1956 it was 42% of the population as against 12% in the U.S.A. and 28% in France, and there is the frightful situation regarding livestock which, excepting a spectacular growth in pigbreeding (+63%) – diminished by about 20% from the level in 1913 for beef and dairy cattle.

This deficiency of the kolkhosian system resides not only in the inadequacy of its production, but also increasingly in its overall management. The Russian state selling tractors instead of hiring them to the kolkhoses lost the sole means of pressure at its disposal for laying down the production of indispensable foodstuff; which prior to the famous Khrushchev reform, it had fixed in price and quantity. The original promoter of this reform was afterwards observed dashing around the Russian countryside and exhorting without success the kolkhosians to produce corn, instead of barley and oats which allow the considerably more lucrative rearing of pigs. Thus under Russian pseudosocialism, the appetite for lucre of the kolkhosian enterprises prevails over the pressing need to feed the allegedly in power “people”!

This doesn’t mean on the other hand that the lot of the kolkhosians themselves is a wonderful one. Quite the reverse in fact, for after deductions are made from the aggregate product of the kolkhos (amongst which figure the same rubrics that govern all enterprises in the west, notably a rate of investment at a comparable level) there remains little to “divide” amongst its members. This fact, in constraining the kolkhosian to make up his inadequate “wage” by the sale of products from his personal plot, aggravates yet again the anarchy that is rampant in the provisioning of the population.

In reality, the feeble productivity of cereals (which is still the basis of the Russian diet) combines with the de facto independence of the kolkhos and results in its tendency to

produce not what is indispensable but what gives the best return, thereby decreasing the availability of foodstuffs on the official market and causing the price to climb in the “parallel” market. Thus the kolkhosian gains as much from selling the produce of his plot at market, as much as from his labour in the kolkhos. To get an idea of the price which the urban wage earner must pay for his existence, we need only know that in 1938, three-quarters of the agricultural products put on the market came from individual plots, with less than a quarter provided by kolkhoses, and still today half of the total income of the kolkhosian is derived from the exploitation of his individual plot.

We lack space here to relate how it was that the “Khrushchev reform” of the kolkhoses imposed itself on the soviet leadership (covered in our party work entitled “Dialogue with Stalin”) but it shows that the Russian economy – and particularly its Achilles’ heel, agriculture – obeys the inexorable laws of capitalism. The sole irrefutable criterion of Socialism is the triumph of use value over market value: not until this has become a reality can one affirm that production serves the needs of people and not capital. The pseudo-socialist agriculture of the USSR strikingly illustrates the opposite, that it is market laws and not the most fundamental needs of workers which determine qualitatively and quantitatively kolkhosian production.

Even the development of the Russian economy as a whole – which both permits at the same time necessitates access for Russia to the world economy – serves further to throw light on its contradictions. International competition requires that the costs of production are kept down, thus agricultural prices are lowered so as to enable salaried labour to be fed without having to pay out too much. This then results in one of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, that since natural limitations exist in the agricultural sector on the turnover of capital, the latter is directed by preference towards industry. The growth of agricultural productivity, which, despite the above, western capitalism attains (thanks to the industrialisation of cultivation and the time-honoured expropriation of the small producer) is far more difficult for Russian capitalism, because of the heavily entrenched kolkhosian sector, which the soviet power endeavours to make successful merely by “selecting” profitable kolkhoses over unprofitable ones.

One can imagine the degree of exploitation imposed by this same soviet power on its industrial wage-earners in order to lower its costs of production, thereby compounding the endemic misery of the agricultural sector (due to the reasons we have just given with, the most barbarous exploitation of the workers, of whom we will speak in our next and final part.

Russian capitalism, like all youthful capitalisms, throws light in the clearest way on the contradictions of capitalism in general: for this reason, its international lackeys won’t be able to cover up the exploitative nature of so-called “Socialism in one country” and maintain indefinitely this superstition which disarms the proletariat, in every country in the world, before the bourgeoisie.

IX: The Reality of Russian Capitalism

Evidence for the exploitation of labour power doesn’t reside only in the fact that the class which works receives only a portion of the social product, whilst they who do nothing award themselves a fat slice from for their own personal consumption. Such an ‘injustice’ doesn’t contain in itself the perspective of the possible and necessary disappearance of capitalism. What condemns the latter on the historical level is that it finds itself having to transform an ever increasing part of the social product into capital: a blind social force which survives only by exasperating more and more its own contradictions, the revolt by the class which is its main victim.

Denouncing the existence of this blind social force in allegedly “Socialist” Russia, isn’t therefore, as the Stalinists unconditionally assert, to “attack and defame Communism”, but to unmask its most infamous forgery. It is to orientate the instinctive hostility of workers as regards manifestations of capitalism, against its inner core and against its murderous categories: wages, money and competition. It is to demonstrate that the proletarian movement has been beaten because it capitulated, in Russia as elsewhere, before these features of capitalism.

Others have described much better than ourselves the ferocious exploitation of labour power in Russia. We will therefore limit ourselves to illustrating the causes with one of the most characteristic laws of capitalism: that of the increasing growth – as born out in all bourgeois countries – of the sector that produces capital goods (sector A), to the detriment of sector B which produces consumer goods.

Those who jeered at Hitler’s formula “Guns before butter” and who now imitate him with their “strike force”, were able to translate the dictum into Russian as follows: machines before shoes, heavy industry before light, and accumulation before consumption. Some figures will suffice to illustrate this. From 1913 to 1964, total Russian industrial production had been multiplied by a factor of 62. That of sector A by 141, and that of sector B by 20. Taking demographic growth between these dates into account, the capital goods sector increased by a factor of 113 times, whilst the consumer goods sector increased only 12 fold.

More important still are the social effects of this conflict between production and consumption in the USSR. The Russian economy can make up for the “backwardness” of light industry and cure its deficiencies, but it can no longer free itself from the contradiction that is inseparable from capitalism; accumulation of riches at one extreme and poverty at the other.

Already the engineer, the technician and the specialist have their villas on the Black Sea. But to the unskilled labourer, the Tartar, the Kyrgyz and the Kalmouk uprooted from their rural or natural existence, there remains only the same misery that is the lot of the Algerian and the Portuguese in France, or the southern immigrant in Italy. That this monstrous aspect of the “Russian model” of Socialism no longer shocks today’s workers is the most damning indictment of all that history will make against Stalinism, which reduces the terms “Socialism” and “capitalism” to being merely different labels for the same thing.

Seeing that labourers and workers accept piecework as being eternal, along with all the other aspects of competition between those who give their labour-power, it is easy for intellectuals and opportunists – who are convinced that the principal merit of the October Revolution is that Russia was brought out of economic backwardness – to equate socialism with accumulation of capital. The fact that the entire Third-World in revolt against imperialism in its turn makes this formula its own, demonstrates the full extent of the defeat of the proletarian movement, which destroyed not only the life force of the working class, but more serious still, affected its political consciousness. To follow this terrible “path to Socialism” is to condemn all proletarians of the world, each in their turn, to pass through the Calvary of horrors which is the mark of capitalism everywhere.

It suffices to see what it was like in Russia under Stalin. The five-year plans – which it is all too easy for the western intellectual who has never touched a tool in his life to admire – were literally a worker’s hell, a carnage of human energy. Even the most basic protection of the workers’ interests were suppressed, making the lot of the Russian wage earners – by the institution of “work passes” – the same as the French wage earners under the iron rod of the second empire. They humiliated the workers with the infamous methods of Stakhanovism; recruited labour under the blows of repression; wasted it usually in useless “projects”; called the fruits of bureaucratic negligence sabotage; and

brought to trial in monstrous mediaeval trials those who were to be baptised "Trotskyists". These "Stalinist excesses" were not due to the "specific conditions" of Russian "Socialism" as those who owe their sinecures to bureaucrats or politicians would have us believe, but to general universal conditions appropriate to the genesis of all capitalism. The primitive accumulation of English capital executed thousands of free peasants; that of Russian neo-capitalism transforms Russian citizens into political criminals, so as best to turn them into convicts: during the second world war, the chiefs of the NKVD (the political police) finding itself short of labour in the concentration camps, made this edifying self-criticism: we haven't been vigilant enough in our political surveillance!

All these atrocities have been committed by burning incense to a false god, with the praises of Socialism sung, and sacrifices made to production! The post-war industrial growth kept up the pretence. According to Stalin, decadent capitalism was no longer capable of developing the productive forces. For the Western "Communists" ensconced in bourgeois governments of patriotic reconstruction, these words were gold dust, with strikes became "weapons of the Trusts" the proof of Socialism in the USSR was to be discovered in the ascending curve of the indices of Russian production, whilst in the capitalist West, they stagnated once again.

The illusion was to last exactly as long as it took for the Western economy to take off in a new direction. It is a constant in the history of capitalism that the rate of growth of production diminishes as capitalism gets older. This rate, markedly higher for the young Russian capitalism which started from virtually nothing, was bound eventually to assume its correct place behind those capitalisms; which although undoubtedly older, had been considerably rejuvenated by wartime destruction. If the annual rate of growth was really a criteria of Socialism, it would be necessary to admit that Federal Germany and Japan, whose volume of production gallops forward at a hallucinatory pace, are more Socialist than Russia! In reality, the average increase in production in Russia has progressed as follows: 22.6% from 1947-1951, 13.1% from 1951-1955, 9.1% from 1959 to 1965. This squeezing effect, which is verified in the history of all capitalisms, shows that the Russian economy missed out on none of its essential characteristics.

The Stalinist bluff as regards the irresistible march of Russian production was bound to be called after having served as a pretext for the liquidation of "the cold war" and the reconciliation of the Russians to the Americans. Not only the "miracles" of Soviet production, in spite of the fanfares of Khrushchev, have failed to convince the latter of "the superiority of the Socialist system over the capitalist system" (not surprisingly!), but the promoter of "competition between different systems" had also to recognise the necessity that the Russians join the western school of technology.

The last veils concealing the reality of Russian capitalism are removed by the economist Lieberman with his keynotes: productivity of labour and profitability of enterprises. The phase of primitive accumulation of capital in the USSR is achieved: Russian production strives to find a way into the world market and is therefore contorting itself to meet all its demands. The market is a place where commodities come face to face. To say commodities is to say profit. Russian production is also production for profit. But this term must be taken in its Marxist sense – as surplus value destined to be converted into capital – and not in its vulgar formulation as "the bosses profit".

Assuming this crass disguise, it was easy for the Stalinists to deny the existence of profit since private property in the means of production doesn't exist in the USSR. As for their left adversaries who maintain that Russian labour power is exploited, they confine themselves for the most part within juridical and purely formal criteria, by invoking the existence of a "bureaucracy" which arbitrarily monopolises the national profit.

This explanation simply isn't one. "Bureaucracy", by-and-large, has always appeared at definite moments in the genesis or evolution of all the important modes of production. Well then, it is the nature of these modes of production which determines the roles and privileges of the bureaucracy and not the other way around. After all, the structures of modern capitalism, in their "traditional" as much as in their Russian expressions, tend to link up. The capitalism of Europe and America "bureaucratizes" itself to the extent that, property and administration having been dissociated there for a long time, the function of the state becomes determinative and engenders a whole Mafia of "managers" and speculators who are the real masters of the economy; meanwhile, Russia, which is going through its "countdown" to "liberalisation", relaxes state control of production and preaches the virtues of competition, commerce and free enterprise. This process in Russia isn't linear though but is full of contradictions, for political and social reasons which we will certainly have cause to examine in the future.

Applied to the economic history of the USSR, the criteria put forward at the start of this article allow the genesis of Russian capitalism to be traced out. Wage labour and accumulation of capital are manifestly incompatible with Socialism. Imposed on the October Revolution by the economic backwardness of the country it meant Socialism was something for the future; but still, for socialism to really happen, capitalist measures could only be employed to satisfy the demands of social life in the USSR and must be strictly subordinate to the strategy of the international extension of the revolution.

With this strategy abandoned, "peaceful coexistence" translated itself into a struggle for the world market. Russia was to publicly proclaim the primacy in its economy of the universal categories of capitalism; competition and profit. Indeed, this has come about without the existence of a bourgeois ruling class for whom the bureaucracy, which in other respects is declining, deputises. But this class didn't wish to live its underground existence for ever, hidden, almost clandestine, as it is still today. The political bagmen who conclude agreements in the foreign capitals act on its behalf just as much as the military which has subdued by terror any notion of emancipation by the "brother-parties" of central and Balkan Europe. Similarly, instruments of the future Russian bourgeoisie in the same measure are the diplomats who "help" the Arab countries and North Vietnam, and the tanks that police Czechoslovakia. Military oppressor rather than "valid" competitor, touter of forced labour rather than extorter of surplus value in the refined way of its western rivals, Russian capitalism, during half a century of Stalinism, has passed along a route marked by blood, violence, infamy and corruption – the royal road of all capitalism.

The lesson to be drawn can be summed up in a few sentences. The possibility of Socialism in the USSR was conditional on the victory of the Communist Revolution in Europe. The Stalinist deception, by assimilating present production relations to non-capitalist relations, erased any distinction, even the most basic, between capitalism and Socialism, ruining the only true weapon of the proletariat; its class programme.

The essence of this programme is the dictatorship of the proletariat on the political level, and the abolition of mercantile exchange founded on the exploitation of labour power on the economic level. Of these two conditions of Socialism, the October Revolution achieved only the first, powerless to maintain it for more than a few years whilst it was incapable – and its leaders knew it – of coming through to the second.

The dictatorship of the proletariat has died in the wake of the degeneration of the Bolshevik Party. The latter, by becoming an instrument of the Soviet State instead of being its master, rendered the international victory of the proletariat impossible, as it did the withering away of the state which forms such a fundamental postulate of Marxism. On the social level, meanwhile, the "democratic constitution of 1936" gave priority to the immense conservative mass of the Russian peasantry, on the economic level, the USSR

definitively submitted itself to the law of value; to the mechanism of the accumulation of capital, the which, being irresistible forces, must, without the help of the International Revolution, result in the same defects and the same monstrosities reappearing in Russia as elsewhere.

From the moment when the inexorable logic of the facts become evident to even of the most incredulous, the denunciation of the infamies and contradictions of false Russian Socialism becomes the primary condition for the recovery of the International proletariat and its revolutionary objectives and for the rehabilitation, before the exploited of the entire world, of the fundamental principles of Communism.

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