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# ON PROTOSOCIALIST NATIONS

Ruyle: On Protosocialist Nations

Eugene E. Ruyle

Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life (Karl Marx).<sup>1</sup>

Few questions are of greater importance for our species than those relating to the nature of the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and other societies emerging from the historic revolutions of the twentieth century. Are these models for a brighter, happier, and more humane future? Or are they threats to all that is good and decent about humanity? The answers to such questions necessarily affect our views on all political questions, from Star Wars and the arms race to U.S. intervention in Central America.

Given the powerful ideologies of anti-communism and anti-sovietism that dominate the consciousness of Americans, it is difficult to approach this issue in a dispassionate, scientific manner. The importance of the question, however, makes it essential that we do so. We must penetrate the ideological veils that surround contemporary world politics and examine the underlying contradictions of our period of transformation.

The bourgeoisie and its ideological representatives, of course, are united in their opposition to the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and other societies emerging from the historic revolutions of the twentieth century, and make little effort to examine them in a scientific manner.

Within the working class movement there are a variety of competing views. Social democracy, allied with the bourgeoisie on this issue, has always viewed the Soviet Union as a new form of totalitarian society. The Communist International, on the other hand, has followed the Soviet Union's own view, that it is a socialist society on the road to communism. The Trotskyist movement has seen the Soviet Union as a "degenerated workers' state," ruled by a new bureaucratic caste. Maoists see a restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union during the post-Stalin period. Most recently, Paul Sweezy set forth the view that the Soviet Union is a "post-revolutionary society," a new form of class rule which is neither capitalist nor socialist.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, proponents of each of these views can marshal impressive arguments in their support. Still, it is obvious that none of these arguments has been sufficiently compelling to command universal support, even among those who accept the basic tenets of Marxism. Perhaps a fresh approach is in order.

Too frequently, the question of the nature of "existing socialism" in the Soviet Union and elsewhere is approached in a mechanical and metaphysical manner: the Soviet Union either is socialist, or it is not; its bureaucracy either is a ruling class, or it is not. The antidote to such thinking, of course, is dialectics. The Soviet Union both is, and is not, socialist; its bureaucracy both is, and is not, a ruling class. Existing socialist societies, in other words, must be viewed dialectically, not just in terms of what they are, but what they have been and what they are becoming, and in terms of their interconnections with the global sweep of modern social change.

I suggest that the Soviet Union is best viewed as a Protosocialist Nation, a type of society that includes China, Cuba, and other socialist bloc nations. The term has been chosen with care. "Proto-" is a Greek-derived prefix that means first, or earliest

form of, and refers to the fact that these nations are not yet, and as yet incomplete forms of socialism which do not yet, and can not yet, manifest all the attributes of the socialism of the future. Protosocialist Nations are still state societies which share many of the characteristics of other modern state societies. But they are also different from other modern states in important ways. While most modern states are dictatorships of the capitalist class, the protosocialist nations are dictatorships of the proletariat.

Protosocialist Nations emerge as portions of the world capitalist system break away and embark on autonomous paths of socio-economic development. These paths invariably include economic re-structuring and the elimination of the worst excesses of poverty, starvation, disease, and illiteracy. Although not socialist in the classic Marxist sense, they are on the road to socialism and are parts of the world transition to socialism.

Capitalism is a world system, composed of Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, and Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations in Europe, North America, and Japan.<sup>3</sup> As portions of the world imperialist system break free and attempt to develop socialist relations of production, they face a dual challenge. They must overcome the heritage of imperialism and develop economically to meet the needs of their people, but they must do so while protecting themselves from imperialist aggression and counterrevolution. This dual challenge requires a strengthening of proletarian dictatorship, not its withering away. Protosocialist nations are thus the form the dictatorship of the proletariat takes during the epoch of world socialist revolution.

Recognition of this independent protosocialist road out of world capitalism suggests that socialist revolutions in the overdeveloping nations will face different challenges and hence follow different paths. Protosocialist Nations are historically limited social formations. They exhibit distinctive laws of motion which are not those of capitalism. Further (and this is a point of considerable political significance for those struggling for socialism in the imperialist nations) the laws of motion of protosocialism are not those that will characterize the socialist world of the future.

In developing this view, it is necessary to first examine the classic Marxian view of socialism. We will then be in a better position to see how the Soviet Union both is, and is not, socialist.

### **The Classic Marxian View of Socialism**

Marx's critics (and, alas, even his supporters) frequently impute to him an idyllic myth of socialism: one day soon, the workers will go to the barricades and up the revolution. After that, all our problems will disappear, and we can "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner," just as we like.<sup>4</sup> Marx, however, never held such a view, but instead criticized those who would "substitute the catchword of revolution for revolutionary development":

While we say to the workers: You have 15, 20 or 50 years of civil wars and international conflicts to go through, not just in order to change prevailing conditions but also to change yourselves and to qualify for political control, you say, on the contrary: 'We must immediately come to power, or we can go to sleep.'<sup>5</sup>

For Marx, then, the revolution was not an event but a process occurring over a long

historical period during which the proletariat would gain the political maturity to rule as a class. During this time, the organization of the proletariat would take the form of a class dictatorship:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the *revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.<sup>6</sup>

Although Marx consciously avoided drawing blueprints for the socialist future, he did have a fairly clear notion of the essential elements of that future.<sup>7</sup> Socialism would be a classless, and hence stateless, society built by a dictatorship of the proletariat after the overthrow of capitalism. The working class would appropriate the highly developed productive plant built by the bourgeoisie and operate it according to social need, rather than private profit. The dictatorship of the proletariat would be characterized by complete democracy, with free debate and democratic election of officials who would be paid no more than a worker's wage, as in the Paris Commune. When it was no longer needed, this dictatorship would wither away, to be replaced by a socialist "administration of things" which would not only provide material abundance for all, but would also facilitate the free development of all members of the socialist world.

Now, just as capitalism is necessarily a world-system, so too is communism necessarily a world-system. The replacement of capitalism by communism is therefore a world-historical process, and "the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other" is necessarily marked by bitter conflict and intense suffering. It would be nice if this weren't true, but it is. Marx didn't make the world, he merely analyzed it as it is and as it is becoming.

Clarity about the revolutionary process is of the utmost importance. The dictatorship of the proletariat necessarily must take measures which will offend the sensibilities of some of the liberal supporters of the revolution who would like to substitute the catchword of revolution for revolutionary development. The idea that socialism will emerge automatically and without struggle after the revolution, however, is foreign to Marxism.

The idea that socialism could be built in one nation alone, much less a "backward" nation that had not been transformed by capitalism, was also foreign to Marxism and the working class movement prior to Stalin's time. Faced, however, with the failure of working class revolution in the capitalist nations of the West, Stalin argued that socialism could be built in the Soviet Union alone even while the Soviet Union was under attack from imperialism. This new view served to legitimize the policies of collectivization and rapid industrialization pursued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Subsequent history has confirmed the correctness of these policies, but the fact remains that Stalin's ideas constituted major revisions of Marx's own views on socialism.<sup>8</sup> Prior to this time, socialism was viewed as a consequence of industrialization, not as a way to industrialize.

Now, it may be argued that Stalin's ideas are important additions to Marxian theory. Since Marx did not have any existing socialist society to analyze, and since socialist societies in Marx's original sense do not exist anywhere in the world, it is appropriate

to modify his concept so that it will apply to societies that do exist.

On the surface, this is a seductive argument, and if our purpose as Marxists were simply to interpret the world, we might agree. But Marxists must interpret the world in such a way as to clarify the real issues confronting our species. This is essential if we are to be participants in this process of changing the world.

The major issue confronting our species is precisely the struggle between capitalism and socialism, both understood in the classic Marxian sense. Socialism, in the classic Marxian sense, does exist. It exists as a potentiality in the capitalist system and world imperialism. It exists as a vision which motivates the struggles of the international working class, at least its most enlightened, class conscious members. Marxian socialism, to paraphrase Marx, is a material force because it has gripped the masses in both the "advanced" nations and in the Third World.

To adopt the Stalinist view of socialism is to abandon this older view of socialism as a vision and a potential. Although the Stalinist view may have immediate appeal to the Third World, it does not excite much enthusiasm within the working classes of the United States, Western Europe, or Japan. What is needed is a new view which will preserve the original Marxian vision while incorporating the positive achievements of the Russian, Chinese, Cuban, and other socialist revolutions of the twentieth century.

### **Modern Social Change: Unilineal or Multilineal?**

The major defect of both the classic Marxist and the Stalinist concepts of socialism is their unilineal character, a failing shared with most bourgeois social thought. All societies are seen as developing through essentially the same stages: from feudalism, through capitalism, and on to socialism. They may do so at different rates, and the possibility of skipping stages has been discussed, as has the possibility of backward motion from a more advanced to a less advanced stage. The basic framework, however, remains unilineal.

Such unilinealism is a severe impediment to understanding the actual processes of change in the modern world. Important advances in our understanding of modern social change have been made by writers such as Amin, Baran, Frank, and Wallerstein, and a new view has emerged which sees different nations as placed on different evolutionary trajectories within the modern world system.<sup>9</sup>

This newer multilineal world system view may be summed up as follows. Contemporary underdeveloped nations do not represent a stage of development through which Europe passed several centuries ago. These are not "premodern" or "feudal" societies without histories of their own. Instead, they have had their own histories, histories of being plundered and colonized by the Euro-American nations. These histories have been linked with the history of the imperialist nations, for it was precisely this colonial plundering, part of what Marx called the "primitive accumulation of capital," that facilitated the development of capitalism in Europe and the United States.

On the one hand, this process facilitated the decisive changes in economy and social structure that characterize the Euro-American nations. On the other hand, it led to what Frank called "the development of underdevelopment." Through colonialism, the social structures of the non-Western world were transformed to facilitate the extraction of economic surplus by the imperialist powers. Underdevelopment, in this

newer view, is simply the other side of development, produced by the same modern socio-economic forces. Capitalism, then, is an international, rather than a national, system. As Lenin, following Marx, remarked in 1920:

Capitalism has grown into a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the peoples of the world by a handful of the "advanced" nations.<sup>10</sup>

Within this world imperialist system, then, there are not one but two types of modern society: Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations and Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations.

The Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations of Europe, North America, and Japan have, on the basis of their centuries of imperialist looting of the Third World, developed the forms of bourgeois affluence and irrationality criticized by Marxists and non-Marxists alike.

The Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia show the reverse side of world capitalism, the poverty and irrationality created by centuries of imperialist oppression. These are not products of backwardness as bourgeois development and modernization theorists would have us believe (and as some Marxists seem to agree), but products of modern capitalism.<sup>11</sup>

Underdevelopment and overdevelopment are thus the twin forms of capitalism in the modern world. These are not stages in a unilineal sequence, but interdependent trajectories of change within the modern world capitalist system. Marx himself noted, on at least two occasions, that capitalism takes a different form in the colonies than in Europe:

The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked.<sup>12</sup>

(In) fact the veiled slavery of the wage-workers in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world.<sup>13</sup>

Now, as Frank has stressed, different policy recommendations flow from these different views.<sup>14</sup> In the unilineal view, the "backward" nations should follow the tutelage of the "advanced" nations and borrow money to finance industrialization and military establishments to control irrational revolutionaries who are seduced by Communist Totalitarianism. In the multilineal view, by contrast, the Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations must break free from imperialist control and embark upon roads of independent national development. Revolutionary movements of national liberation are, accordingly, not only rational, but essential in the newer, world capitalist system approach.

Just as the concept of the development of underdevelopment forces a change in our views of correct policy for what were formerly seen as the "backward" nations of the Third World, so the concept of overdevelopment forces a change in our views about what were formerly seen as the "advanced" nations. No longer can these be seen as models toward which all other nations must tend, but rather as distortions of modernity. Just as the poverty, illiteracy, and starvation of the underdeveloping capitalist world are in large part consequences of imperialist exploitation, so too the industrial pollution, the consumerism, the alienation, and the hyper-individualism

of the overdeveloped nations. The concept of the overdevelopment thus facilitates the incorporation of new radical views into Marxism. Marxism can only be strengthened by incorporating the criticism of overdeveloping nations made by the Greens, feminists, and liberation theologians.

Since 1917, as portions of the formerly colonial or semicolonial world have broken free from imperialist control, they have embarked on a third developmental trajectory. Under the leadership of Communist Parties associated with the Third International, the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and other nations have embarked on independent courses of development which are no longer capitalist but not yet socialist. I suggest the term Protosocialist nation to apply to these nations which have made a decisive break with world imperialism and in which the capitalist class has been overthrown.<sup>15</sup>

There are few more important questions for marxists or for humanity in general than the understanding of these Protosocialist Nations, both their internal laws of motion and their place in the global transition to socialism. It is to these questions that we now turn.

### **Protosocialist Nations in Dialectical Perspective**

"The bourgeoisie," according to the *Communist Manifesto*, "has played a most revolutionary role in history."<sup>16</sup> According to Marx, by overthrowing feudalism and incorporating the entire world in a single industrial system capable of providing abundance for all, the bourgeoisie has created the material conditions which alone can support socialism. By tearing the direct producers from the land and creating the modern proletariat, the bourgeoisie has created the force which alone can build socialism. The bourgeoisie, in short, creates the conditions which will lead to its own negation in a world socialist society.

It was reasonable enough to assume that those nations which led the world into the capitalist present would also lead the world into the socialist future. It would be nice if this were so. We can only imagine what our world would look like if the tremendous productive potential of Europe, North America, and Japan had been devoted to building a socialist world of peace and abundance, rather than being wasted in senseless wars of imperialist aggression and anti-communist harassment. But, as Huberman and Sweezy observe:

Engels once remarked, "history is about the most cruel of all goddesses." She has decreed that the world transition to socialism, instead of being relatively quick and smooth, as it might have been if the most productive and civilized nations had led the way, is to be a long-drawn-out period of intense suffering and bitter conflict.<sup>17</sup>

During this period of "intense suffering and bitter conflict," it has been the formerly backward, semi-colonial nation, what Lenin called the "weakest links" in the world imperialist system, that have experienced the first socialist revolutions. It is these nations that are leading the world into the socialist future. This contradictory development has led to a contradictory social order, protosocialism.

The first Protosocialist Nation was the Soviet Union. Trotsky, in analyzing the contradictory course of the Russian revolution, referred to the Soviet Union as a "degen-

erated workers' state."<sup>18</sup> When the Russian working class made its revolution in 1917, the material conditions for socialism were not present. As a result of the backwardness of the Russian economy and society, the relative weakness of the Russian working class, and the threat of imperialist intervention, the Russian dictatorship of the proletariat could not directly create socialism. Instead, it produced the dictatorial rule of a bureaucratic elite under Stalin. Despite its authoritarian excesses, however, the Stalinist dictatorship rested essentially on socialist property relations. Another, political, revolution would now be necessary, Trotsky argued, to overthrow the new bureaucratic caste and return the workers' state to the control of working class.

Trotsky's analysis has not been widely accepted, but it points the way to a Marxian understanding not only of the Soviet Union, but also of other post-revolutionary societies. All of these revolutions, whatever their peculiarities, have occurred in essentially similar sorts of material conditions which include a heritage of backwardness and the threat of imperialist intervention. These similar material conditions produce similar social structures in the post-revolutionary period.

These material conditions will continue to exist until the world imperialist system itself has been overthrown. As long as imperialism exists, there will be a threat of imperialist intervention. Thus, even though the Soviet Union has industrialized, it cannot escape the material conditions of protosocialism.

Therefore, just as there are two kinds of society within the world imperialist system, so there are two roads out of that system and into the world socialist society of the future. The Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations sooner or later must follow the lines predicted by classical Marxian theory: working class revolution, a dictatorship of the proletariat, and a fairly rapid transition to socialism. In the Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations, which lack the material conditions presupposed by Marxian theory, socialist revolution leads, not to socialism, but to Protosocialist Nations which have the historic function of developing the productive forces of the revolutionary societies while protecting themselves from outside intervention.

These two roads are interdependent. The appearance of Protosocialist Nations heightens the contradictions within world capitalism and therefore affects the development of the revolutionary forces in the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations. Further, protosocialism is historically limited. Working class revolutions in the overdeveloping nations would end the threat of imperialist intervention and thereby radically alter the material conditions of the Protosocialist Nations as well as the Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations.

### **The Laws of Motion of Protosocialism**

Protosocialist Nations, then, emerge as parts of the world imperialist system break away and begin to build a new socialist order. Protosocialist nations are not yet socialist, however. They have inherited a legacy of backwardness and remain threatened by imperialism. On this basis, the Protosocialist Nations develop new contradictions of their own, contradictions which can only be resolved after the final overthrow of capitalism.

The fact that the earliest socialist revolutions did not occur in the "advanced" capitalist nations, nor in independent societies, but rather in the underdeveloping parts of a world capitalist system leads, first of all, to a heritage of backwardness. This means that: 1. the forces of production are unevenly developed as parts of a



world imperialist system; 2. the working class is relatively weak and therefore not necessarily the dominant force in society; and 3. the bourgeois institutions of democratic elections and political freedoms are weakly developed. The material base for socialism is therefore not present.

These same facts lead to the threat of imperialist intervention. Imperialism cannot accept the existence of independent socialist nations. The international bourgeoisie must, accordingly, seek to overthrow independent revolutionary governments. The most immediate threat of capitalist counterrevolution was, of course, immediately after the Russian revolution, but the threat has remained real throughout the course of all progressive revolutions in the modern period.

A further characteristic of Protosocialist Nations is that they all develop out of social revolutions led by Communist Parties associated with the Third International. These revolutions resulted in decisive breaks with world imperialism, so that the Protosocialist Nation gains control over the economic surplus formerly appropriated by the imperialist nations. Further, the power of the old parasitic ruling classes, both the semi-feudal landowning classes and the compradore classes tied to imperialism, is broken, and the surplus formerly appropriated by these classes becomes available for economic growth. Consequently, the Protosocialist Nation, led by its Communist Party, gains control of the growth potential of the old underdeveloping society which was formerly harnessed to the economic growth of the imperialist nations.

It is within this set of material conditions (backwardness, the threat of imperialist intervention, and a strong state led by a determined Communist Party) that the laws of protosocialism operate.

The most basic of these laws is economic development and modernization. These are necessary both to provide a modern defense establishment, as required by the threat of imperialism, and to raise the standard of living of the masses, as required by the socialist values of the revolutionary elite as well as the political demands of the masses.

In the West, the initial stages of capital formation and economic development, what Marx called the "primitive accumulation of capital," were financed by the plunder of the Third World and the forcible expropriation of the European peasantry.

For the emerging Protosocialist Nations, capital formation through colonial plunder was not a possibility. Consequently, internal sources of growth had to be tapped. In the Soviet Union, this was accomplished through what has been termed the "primitive socialist accumulation" during the "Second Russian Revolution" of the late 1920s and 1930s. Urban industrial growth was financed by the forcible expropriation of the kulaks, the forcible collectivization of agriculture into State Farms, and the continued extraction of surplus from the countryside.

All of this required a powerful coercive state apparatus. The existence of a coercive state, in turn, leads to the emergence of a new elite. As Marx noted in *The German Ideology*, a high degree of development of the productive forces is essential for socialist equality, because without economic abundance, "want is merely made general, and with *destitution* the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced."<sup>19</sup> This is precisely what has occurred. Those who control the surplus necessary for economic development are able to divert some of this surplus for their own elite consumption. The elite life style in turn becomes a model for emulation leading to graft and corruption and a source of tension and alienation.

Nothing guarantees, furthermore, that Protosocialist Nations will always make the best decisions or pursue the most enlightened policies. It is difficult to evaluate these policies in a dispassionate manner, given the systematic distortions promulgated by the bourgeois press.<sup>20</sup> What Marx saw as “all the old filthy business” is an inevitable concomitant of the material conditions of protosocialist nations. We may condemn this in moral terms if we like, but it must be understood as flowing, not from the moral defects of individuals, but rather from the structural characteristics of protosocialism.

Such are the laws of motion in the extraction and use of the economic surplus in protosocialism. Whatever their faults, Protosocialist Nations are meeting the human needs of their members better than Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations or the capitalist system as a whole. Most Marxists “know” this, and may even be able to provide some statistics from a favorite Protosocialist Nation documenting it, but there has been surprisingly little effort to document this belief in any systematic way. A notable exception has been provided by Shirley Cereseto.<sup>21</sup>

In her study of global inequality and basic human needs, Cereseto uses World bank statistics (which may be assumed not to be biased in favor of socialism) on income and the quality of life in both capitalist and socialist nations to test the two most important aspects of the Marxian paradigm: the law of capitalist accumulation, and the prediction of improvement following a socialist revolution. Her findings may be briefly summarized.

Cereseto finds that the increasing inequality that has characterized the entire career of civilization, has intensified since WWII, with increasing degradation, misery, and denial of the basic human needs of a large and growing portion of humanity. While the population of the world was increasing by 60% from 1950 to 1975, the total production of wealth was increasing faster, from \$1 trillion in the late 1940s to over \$6 trillion in 1975 and more than \$9 trillion in 1978! But although wealth was increasing faster than population, poverty was also increasing, so that in one decade of rapid economic growth (1963–1973), the number of seriously poor people in the world increased by 119 million, from 1.09 to 1.21 billion people, or 45% of the entire capitalist world. Thus the poverty and misery of Third World peoples, Cereseto finds, are not caused by overpopulation or “backwardness” (as the bourgeoisie would have us believe) but rather are consequences of the fundamental law of motion of capitalism:

Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e. on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.<sup>22</sup>

Cereseto divides capitalist nations into three categories, based on GNP per capita: rich, middle income, and poor. She finds, not surprisingly, that the physical quality of life is better in rich nations than in poor nations.

What is significant is that socialism does much better than capitalism in improving the physical quality of life and meeting the basic human needs of the members of society. All socialist nations fall within the middle income category based on GNP per capita, even though many were desperately poor before their revolutions. Cereseto uses a variety of statistics on such things as inequality, infant mortality, life expectancy, literacy, and health care and finds that: 1. the socialist nations, all middle income, do better than the capitalist nations taken as a whole in meeting the basic human

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needs of their human beings. Meeting these human needs than do capitalist nations with the same resource base (i.e. middle income capitalist nations), and 3. socialist nations do about as well as rich capitalist nations in meeting basic human needs. Cereseto also finds that, while inequality is increasing both within and between capitalist nations, inequality is declining both within and between socialist nations.

Cereseto's findings, then, confirm the central tenet of Marxism: socialist revolutions are in fact good for human beings. With their social ownership of the means of production, the Protosocialist Nations have been able to eliminate the mass poverty, starvation, and ignorance generated by the capitalist system and have begun to create more egalitarian societies.

Protosocialism, however, is not a free and democratic social order. (Neither, for that matter, are the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations.) Freedom and democracy, in the bourgeois senses of these terms, are often curtailed under threat of subversion and invasion. The Protosocialist Nations are sometimes forced to use repressive means to protect themselves. Although this may offend the sensitivities of liberal critics used to the "freedom" of the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations, it is unreasonable to expect that things could be much different.

However, political repression in the Protosocialist Nations is certainly no greater than it is in capitalism. In the capitalist world, there has been increasing institutional violence, political assassinations, and state-sponsored torture paralleling the growth in economic inequality since WWII.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, most observers, both Marxist and non-Marxist, would agree that political repression has declined in the socialist world since Stalin's time. Although there has been no systematic study of the relative severity of repression on a world scale comparable to Cereseto's study of inequality and human needs, it is likely that such a study would produce equally striking results.

Such, at least, is the implication of the careful studies of Albert Szymanski.<sup>24</sup> Using the data of Western Sovietologists (who may be assumed not to be prejudiced in favor of the Soviet Union), Szymanski finds that there is much more political freedom, democracy, and effective participation in the Soviet Union than most bourgeois scholars acknowledge, and that the Soviet working class probably exerts more effective freedom and control than do the working classes of the United States or other overdeveloping nations. It is not, thus, a question of "freedom" versus "totalitarianism," but rather of the structural locus of such freedom, and of what class interests are being served.

Szymanski concludes that the Soviet bureaucracy serves the interests of the Soviet working class as well as our own bureaucracies serve the bourgeoisie (and much better than Western bureaucracies serve the working class). The Soviet Union, in other words, is an authentic dictatorship of the proletariat.

Szymanski's views were developed before the recent reform initiated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. His material, however, takes on added significance in the light of glasnost and perestroika, for it helps us understand that these policies are not abrupt turns arbitrarily decided by the Soviet leadership but are rather continuations of a long term tendency toward liberalization in Soviet society.<sup>25</sup>

Szymanski's conclusions on the relative power of the Soviet working class, clearly, are at odds with the opinions of many other observers, such as Charles Bettelheim.<sup>26</sup> But regardless of which view one accepts on this issue, it is difficult to accept Bettelheim's view that the Soviet Union is capitalist. Soviet workers, with guaran-

teed jobs, free health care, a better position, structurally, than workers even in the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations. And there is quite simply nothing in the protosocialist world to be compared with the mass poverty and starvation of the Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations. The underlying structure of the Protosocialist Nations is fundamentally different than that of capitalism.

Such, in broad outline, is the theory of protosocialism. Capitalism, while expanding the productive potential of humanity, is getting progressively worse in terms of meeting the human needs of our species. The Protosocialist Nations, whatever their faults, are making progress in meeting these needs and in eliminating poverty, ignorance, and equality.

### **Political Implications of the Theory of Protosocialism**

The theory of protosocialism has important political implications for Marxists, for it can help us better deal with the "existing socialisms" whose defects are so frequently used against us. We are painfully aware of these defects, and would like to distance ourselves from them. But we are also aware of the positive achievements accomplished by the historic revolutions of the twentieth century, and need to draw strength from them in our own struggles. Perhaps this contradiction within our own struggle may be resolved by understanding the contradictory nature of protosocialism.

The Protosocialist Nations must be viewed dialectically, in terms not only of what they are, but what they have been and what they are becoming, and in terms of their interconnections with the global sweep of modern social change. When the Protosocialist Nations are compared with what they have been, their defects do not loom so large. When it is realized that the Protosocialist Nations are attempting to deal with their defects, and are doing so much more effectively than either the Overdeveloping or Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations, these defects are seen as transitory phenomena, rather than as permanent blights and indictments of the very idea of socialist revolution.

Most importantly, the Protosocialist Nations must be understood in their interconnection with the global transition to socialism. The protosocialist road which is imposed upon the revolutionary movements of the Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations is not the road that will be followed by the working class in the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations. A working class revolution in the United States, for example, will probably not face a threat of imperialist invasion. Our revolutionary working class will be able to appropriate a highly developed productive plant and well developed institutions of democracy and political freedom. This is not to say, of course, that there will be no problems, merely that these problems will be different than those faced by the revolutionary leaderships of the Protosocialist Nations. And since Marx has been correct in so much more of what he said about the nature of modern social change, there is every reason to suppose that he will be shown to be right by the working classes of the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations.

There is thus nothing in the experience of the Protosocialist Nations that would justify rejection of our Marxian vision that a dictatorship of the proletariat in the United States could be democratic and open, and could use the tremendous productive potential unleashed by capitalism to effect the transition to socialism both rapidly and smoothly. Indeed, the achievements of the Protosocialist nations, viewed in proper perspective, confirm our convictions in this regard.

The theory of protosocialism, then, sees not one but three types of modern society: Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations, Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations, and Protosocialist Nations. Accordingly, modern class struggle, which in its most abstract form is the struggle between capitalism and socialism, takes three concrete forms.

In the Protosocialist Nations, class struggle is directed primarily toward protecting these nations from imperialist attack and counterrevolution, and toward developing the productive potential in order to better meet the needs of the masses and continue to provide protection from imperialism.

In analyzing these struggles, it is essential to distinguish between the particular policies pursued by the leaderships of these societies and the underlying structure of the societies themselves. An analogy may be useful. We can debate the merits of the particular style of football played by the L.A. Raiders as much as we like, but this does not alter the fact that they are playing U.S. style football and not soccer, the football of the rest of the world. From an anthropological perspective, it is the structural differences between U.S. football and soccer that are significant; without understanding these differences one cannot meaningfully debate the pros and cons of particular styles of either football or soccer.

In world politics, bourgeois tacticians may discuss the merits and demerits of dealing with Nicaragua—invasion, blockades, economic pressure, or even cooperation—as alternate ways of preserving the global system of capitalist property relations. Similarly, there are alternative strategies for fostering the economic growth required by the Protosocialist Nations. These are better understood as differing routes to the same goal than as “right” or “wrong” policies, as is too frequently done.

As Marxists, we of course need to evaluate in a critical manner the particular economic, political, and social policies pursued by the leadership of the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, and other revolutionary societies. Such criticism, however, must be analytically distinguished from the taxonomic problem of understanding the structural nature of these societies. For this, we need to understand the inner structural nature and laws of motion of the emerging socialist world.

Thus, to take a worst case scenario, even if we disagree with Soviet policy in sending troops to Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afganistan, this does not discredit the achievements of the Protosocialist Nations, nor the idea of socialism. There is nothing in the nature of protosocialism or of revolution that guarantees that governments will always follow the correct policy.

Although it is not essential to the theory of protosocialism, I should stress at this point that I cannot join the critics of Soviet policy in these instances. The critics, particularly if they are Marxists, have an obligation to say just how they think the Soviet Union should respond to popular movements in East Europe that want to pull out of the Warsaw Pact and expose the entire socialist world to imperialist attack, or to a CIA-financed counterrevolution in Afganistan.<sup>27</sup>

In the Underdeveloping Nations, class struggle takes the form of movements of national liberation against imperialist domination and exploitation. Such movements aim toward gaining control of the surplus which is being extracted by the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations and by domestic bourgeois elites so that it can be directed toward independent national development and meeting the needs of the masses in the Underdeveloping Nations. To the extent that such struggles succeed, they will come under violent attack by world imperialism. In responding to such attack

liberation forces in the Third World have taken capitulation to imperialism or alliance with the only force capable of withstanding such attack, the Soviet Union. The idea that any nation, or any liberation movement, can be neutral in the international class struggle between socialism and capitalism is simply an illusion. And illusions serve the interests of imperialism, not socialism.

In the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations, class struggles are more complex. The struggle for peace and social justice, in solidarity with the class struggles in both the underdeveloping world and the protosocialist world, is of course central. Opposition to all forms of imperialism is perhaps the most basic way of expressing solidarity with the international working class. The struggles for democracy and social justice within the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations are also crucial. As Marxists working within such struggles, we must above all act to develop a socialist consciousness within the working class. The theory of protosocialism makes an important contribution to furthering such consciousness.

The theory of protosocialism stresses that there are different roads to socialism, and that the road to socialism followed by the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations will be quite different from that followed by the Protosocialist Nations. This can help combat the virulent anti-communism infecting the working class. At the same time, the positive achievements of socialist revolution even under the adverse conditions of the underdeveloping nations gives some indication of the potential achievements of a socialist revolution in the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations, where conditions are much more favorable to socialist construction. The theory of protosocialism thus both preserves and strengthens the classic Marxian theory of socialism.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Human societies do not exist in isolation. They exist in interpenetrating relationships with other societies within the total flow of human history. They contain both the remnants of past social orders and the seeds of future orders.

Human societies, therefore, cannot be understood in isolation. They must be viewed in dialectical perspective within the total flow of human history, and as both products of past conditions and potentials for the future. The theory of protosocialism, in attempting to apply these principles to the understanding of one type of modern society, can shed light on the understanding of modern social change in general.

Where does protosocialism lead? What is its probable future evolutionary trajectory? The answer, I think, is that the Protosocialist Nations are definitely on the road to socialism but cannot arrive there until all other societies join them.

Protosocialism is a response to a particular set of material conditions, and may be expected to last as long as these material conditions exist. It is no doubt within the power of the peoples of the Protosocialist Nations to build modern industrial systems which will serve them better than any other social order in history. This will, of course, take generations, and during this time world capitalism will also be changing.

We do not know, and cannot know, what the future trajectory of world capitalism will be. But the scientific evidence does suggest that, as predicted by Marx, the working classes of the Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations will take control over their own destiny and embark on the road to socialism. Such a development would certainly transform the material conditions faced by the Protosocialist Nations and would radically alter their evolutionary trajectory as well. Only the future will tell.

Our task as Marxists, however, is not simply to await that future, but to provide the clarity of social thought that will assist the working class in building a socialist future. The theory of protosocialism is offered to help provide that clarity.

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- 1 In Robert B. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Second Edition, New York: Norton, 1978), p. 5.
- 2 Paul M. Sweezy, *Post-Revolutionary Society* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980). For criticism, discussion, and citations to additional sources, see the special issue of *Line of March* devoted to a symposium on Sweezy's theory of Post-Revolutionary Society (No. 10, Jan/Feb, 1982). Good discussions of the major theories of Soviet society may be found in the Socialist Labor Party's *The Nature of Soviet Society* (Palo Alto: New York Labor News, 1978) and in John E. Elliott, "Contending Perspectives of the Nature of Soviet Economic Society," *International Journal of Social Economics* 11 (1984), no. 5, pp. 40–61. Also see my comments later in the article on the Soviet Union as an example of state capitalism (see note 26).
- 3 This tripartied division of the world into Overdeveloping Capitalist Nations, Underdeveloping Capitalist Nations, and Protosocialist Nations is an attempt to deal with the most significant realities of the contemporary world. The terms, however, should be understood to refer to Weberian "ideal types" rather than mutually exclusive categories, for clearly there are nations which do not fit neatly into my classification. Thus Portugal, for example, is "underdeveloped" in relation to Great Britain, but "overdeveloped" in relation to its former colonies, Mozambique and Angola. The OPEC nations may be "underdeveloped," but are quite different than El Salvador, Zaire, or Bangladesh. Similarly, not all of the protosocialist nations were underdeveloped prior to their revolutions. East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary would no doubt be better classified as overdeveloped than underdeveloped. Although such complexities clearly merit closer analysis than is possible in this brief article, they do not negate the reality of overdevelopment, underdevelopment, and protosocialism as processes in the modern world.
- 4 Quote is from Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, excerpted in John E. Elliott, *Marx and Engels on Economics, Politics, and Society* (Santa Monica: Goodyear Publishing Company, 1981), p. 468.
- 5 *The Socialist Revolution (Marx and Engels)*, compiled by T. Teplov and V. Davydov (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), p. 105, see also pp. 87.265.
- 6 *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 538)
- 7 For compilations of Marx's views, see *On Communist Society: A Collection* (Marx, Engels, Lenin), compiled by T. Borodulina (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), and the collections edited by Teplov and Davydov, Elliott, and Tucker cited above.
- 8 On this point, see Issac Deutscher's discussion in *Stalin: A Political Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 1967), pp. 281–293. Deutscher points out that Stalin's theory of socialism in one country was developed in opposition to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and that Trotsky's theory, borrowed from Marx, was closer to the thinking of Lenin and other Bolsheviks prior to the late 1920s (see also Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed, Trotsky: 1979–1921*, New York: Vintage, pp. 149–163, and Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*. New York: Pioneer).

It may be noted that Marx never distinguished between socialism and communism. In his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx did distinguish between

the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society . . . (and) a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has



vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banner: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs (in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 530).

Marx did not give these phases different names, but saw them as phases of a single social order which would emerge *after* the phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat (see above, note 5).

Lenin, in *State and Revolution*, elaborated on Marx's distinction, and indicated that Marx's first phase is "generally called Socialism" (New York: International Publishers, 1974, p. 76–78). But Lenin never suggested that socialism could be built in the Soviet Union alone, this idea was Stalin's contribution.

- 9 See *The Political Economy of Growth*, by Paul A. Baran (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1957); Andrew Gunder Frank, "The Development of Underdevelopment" *Monthly Review*, September, 1966 (reprinted in Frank's *Latin America: Underdevelopment of Revolution*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969); Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a World Scale*. Vols. 1 and 2. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).
- 10 As quoted by Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy in "The Communist Manifesto After 100 Years," in *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), p. 108.
- 11 As an example of bourgeois theories which ignore Marx's analysis of the primitive accumulation of capital, see Grace Goodell, "The Importance of Political Participation for Sustained Capitalist Development." *Archives Europeenes de Sociologie* 26:93–127 (1985). Using the Philippines as her example, Goodell simply ignores the history of Spanish colonialism and American neo-colonialism. For a fuller critique of such theories, see Andrew Gunder Frank, "Sociology of Development and Underdevelopment of Sociology." *Catalyst*. Summer, 1967 (reprinted in Frank's *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution*).
- 12 "The Future Results of British Rule in India," in *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*, edited by Shlomo Avineri (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 137.
- 13 *Capital*, by Karl Marx (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), pp. 759–60.
- 14 Andrew Gunder Frank, "Sociology of Development and Underdevelopment of Sociology." *Catalyst*. Summer, 1967 (reprinted in Frank's *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution*).
- 15 It should be noted here that neither England, France, nor even Sweden are socialist in the Marxian sense of the term, in spite of the fact that socialist parties have held power at one time or another. Socialism involves the overthrow of the capitalist class and the control of the economy by the working class. In Sweden, for example, fully 90 per cent of the economy is privately owned, and big business never lost control of the state (see Joachim Israel, "Swedish Socialism and Big Business." *Acta Sociologica* 21 (4): 341–53, 1978). In the taxonomy proposed here, Sweden is an Overdeveloping Capitalist Nation which, because of its favorable location within world capitalism, have been able to build what some Marxists might call "capitalism with a human face." But Sweden's "middle way" is not a real option for most of the world's peoples.
- 16 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), p. 5.

- 17 "The Communist Manifesto After 100 Years," p. 112.
- 18 Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?* 1937. (Reprinted, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972.)
- 19 In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 161. Perhaps the best empirical description of this process is in the work of William Hinton, see *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) and *Shenfan: The Continuing Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983).
- 20 As Cohen has suggested, the U.S. media systematically distorts coverage of the Soviet Union in three ways. First, the media highlights the negative aspects of Soviet economy and society while ignoring the positive aspects. Second, the media uses value laden terms to describe the Soviet Union. Thus, the "United States has a government, security organizations and allies. The Soviet Union, however, has a regime, secret police, and satellites." Third, the media creates a popular impression that the Soviet Union is guilty of every charge made against it. See Stephen F. Cohen, "Sovieticus." *The Nation*, May 12, 1984, p. 568. For efforts to place these phenomena in clearer perspective, see Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Marxism: The Science of Society* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1985), pp. 111–112; Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Stalin, Man of Contradiction* (Toronto: NC Press Limited, 1987); and Albert Szymanski, *Human Rights in the Soviet Union* (London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1984).
- 21 Shirley Cereseto, "Capitalism, Socialism, and Inequality." *Insurgent Sociologist* 11 (1982), no. 2, pp. 5–38; see also Shirley Cereseto and Howard Waitzkin, "Capitalism, Socialism, and the Physical Quality of Life." *International Journal of Health Services* 16 (1986), pp. 643–658; and John E. Elliott and Phillip Lesser, "Comparisons of Economic Systems," Part VI of *Comparative Economic Systems*, by John E. Elliott (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1985), pp. 456–483.
- 22 Karl Marx, *Capital* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), p. 645.
- 23 Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Boston: South End Press, 1979), p. 8, citing Amnesty International, *Report on Torture* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), pp. 184–185.
- 24 Albert Szymanski, *Is the Red Flag Flying? The Political Economy of the Soviet Union Today* (London: Zed Press, 1979), and *Human Rights in the Soviet Union* (London: Zed Press, 1980).
- 25 Perhaps the best analysis of the recent Soviet reforms is to be found in the newspaper *Frontline*. See especially the series by Irwin Silber beginning February 15, 1988.
- 26 Charles Bettelheim, "The Specificity of Soviet Capitalism." *Monthly Review*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 43–61 (September 1985).
- 27 For sympathetic discussions of Soviet policy in these areas, see Irwin Silber, *Afghanistan: The Battle Line Is Drawn* (Oakland, CA: Line of March Publications, 1980), and the Line of March Editorial Board, "Turning Point in Poland." *Line of March*, No. 10, pp. 7–41 (Jan/Feb 1982). Also see David Gibbs, "Does the Soviet Union Have a 'Grand Strategy'? Reinterpreting the Invasion of Afghanistan." *Journal of Peace Research* 24 (4): 366–79 (December 1987).