

RUSSIA 1917-1967

A Socialist Analysis

Preface

In 1948 we published a pamphlet 'Russia Since 1917: Socialist Views of Bolshevik Policy', consisting of a reprint of articles from our journal THE SOCIALIST STANDARD during the years 1915-48.

The following note appeared in the Preface:

“In the articles themselves, no attempt has been made to interfere with the original text. The articles stand just as they are written. We have nothing to fear from letting our original words stand. There are, it is true, passages in some of the earlier articles which, were we writing them today in the light of information now available, we would phrase differently; but these are points of detail. In essentials, the articles stand as overwhelmingly testimony to the soundness of the Marxist position – the position of **the Socialist Party of Great Britain.**”

When the pamphlet was sold out and the question arose of issuing a new edition, it was decided not to repeat the old form – reprinted articles – but to have it as a new pamphlet covering the same ground along with developments since 1948; with the same purpose as before, to show the soundness of the attitude adopted by the Socialist Party of Great Britain from the outset. The reader may ask why we think it important to understand the theories and actions of those who came to power in Russia in 1917 and those who have governed for half a century. Now that Russia is a great world power does it matter what deceptions and self-deceptions marked the course of development? It matters vitally to the workers of all countries because the same wrong theories are still impeding the achievement of Socialism. The urgent need of our time is the replacement of capitalism by a world-wide socialist system of society. This requires clear understanding of the socialist objective and of the means by which alone it can be reached. In particular it requires appreciation of the reasons why Socialism was impossible in Russia in 1917 – as was pointed out by the Socialist Party of Great Britain at the time – and of the deception practised by the so-called Communist governments in Russia, China and elsewhere of describing as ‘socialist’ the State Capitalism that in fact is their prevailing system. They have not introduced Socialism, nor are they trying to introduce Socialism.

The reader is reminded that we consistently use the term Socialism for the kind of classless social system described in our Object and Declaration of Principles. Some writers have used Communism in the same sense, as is shown in Chapters 2, 3 and 6. Much confusion is caused by the misuse of one or other of these terms to apply to nationalisation or the social system in Russia, for both of which the proper description is State capitalism. It is the purpose of this pamphlet to clear away confusion and help forward the victory of the socialist movement.

Executive Committee
SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN
March, 1967

Introduction

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN has always held that the system of society known as Socialism becomes possible only at a certain stage in the forward march of mankind. It depends firstly on the growth of the powers of production, transport and communication to the level at which the provision of the necessities and amenities of a full life could, with proper organisation and social planning, be assured for the whole population. Capitalism solved this technical problem long enough ago through the development of great industrial plants and machinery and the breaking down of the physical barriers which formerly kept people in different parts of the world isolated from each other.

It depends secondly on the growth of working class organisation on a world-wide basis united by understanding of socialist ideas, and by agreement on the democratic political action necessary to replace capitalism by Socialism.

The two conditions interact with each other. The second could not proceed the first and, as experience has shown, the growth of socialist understanding and organisation actually lags far behind the advance of productive capacity.

Since one country can learn from another and the industrially more advanced could help the less advanced, it is not necessary for the latter to go through all the historical phases of capitalism. On the other hand, it is not possible for one country alone to leap forward into Socialism in a predominantly capitalist and hostile world. By this token it was not possible for Russia in 1917 to achieve Socialism. Russia lacked both the necessary productive capacity and the necessary acceptance of socialist idea by the population; nor was the small socialist movement in other countries in a position to help by overthrowing capitalism. In that situation nothing could save Russia from having to develop along capitalist lines.

The position held by the Socialist Party of Great Britain on this question of the advance towards Socialism is essentially Marxian.

CHAPTER ONE

Background to 1917

THE PARTY which gained power in October 1917 was the Russian Communist Party – known as the Bolsheviks, from a word meaning majority, because their wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party had received the support of a majority of the delegates at a conference held in London in 1903.

The party had been formed in 1898 and had inherited traditions from various movements against the Tsarist autocracy active earlier in the nineteenth century. Russia was a predominantly agricultural country, freed from serfdom only in 1861 and with the mass of peasants brutally oppressed and desperately poor. Capitalism was growing but was still limited in extent and the immature capitalist class were so weak politically that it was commonly accepted that the full development of capitalism could only be achieved through a peasant and working class uprising to overthrow Tsarism. Some groups, however, believed it possible to introduce

Socialism without going through capitalism and most of them, including many claiming to be Marxist, rejected the possibility of the workers and peasants being capable of grasping the meaning of Socialism. Lacking the franchise and parliamentary institutions, and without the legal right to form political and trade union organisations, some groups turned in despair to political assassination.

In 1917, along with the Bolsheviks, the principal political parties were the other wing of the RSDLP, the Mensheviks (from a word meaning minority) who believed that Russia must pass through the normal stages of capitalist development and a democratically elected parliament, and the Socialist Revolutionaries, a largely peasant party which stood primarily for the abolition of private property in land and which made use of political assassination as a weapon of struggle.

The organisational principles of the Bolsheviks were elaborated by their leader Lenin in a work 'What is to be done?' published in 1902. In it he argued that in all countries socialist ideas have to be brought to the working class from outside, by the "revolutionary socialist intelligentsia". According to Lenin, "the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness...". (Lenin, 'Selected works', Vol. 2. Lawrence and Wishart, London 1936, page 53.) In keeping with this conception the political organisation to lead the would consist "chiefly of persons engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession" (page 139.) And because 'democratic control' was held to be incompatible with the need for secrecy the party would have to be controlled from the centre (page 155).

The Bolsheviks' immediate aim was not to introduce socialism, but "to overthrow the tsarist autocracy and to supplant it by a republic on the basis of a democratic constitution". For this purpose they sought support in any and every discontented group, hoping that by so doing the minority of professional revolutionaries would lead the working class and draw the peasants along with them. At the same time they declared that the ultimate aim of social revolution would require a "dictatorship of the proletariat".

In 1905, following the defeat of the Russian forces in the Russo-Japanese war, demonstrations and disorders occurred all over the country but without any unified aim. Liberals were demanding a democratically elected legislature, factory workers higher pay and shorter hours, peasants the land, soldiers and sailors better treatment and the 'professional revolutionaries' a social revolution. At the peak there were strikes, uprisings, land seizures and mutinies in the navy but when the Tsarist authorities promised an elected Duma with legislative powers the movements lost their drive. The government then resorted to counter measures and within two years Social Democratic deputies in the Duma were arrested and the autocracy was in full control again.

Lenin later described the events of 1905 as the "dress rehearsal" of 1917.

CHAPTER TWO

The Events of 1917

BECAUSE of backward industrial development Russia could not stand up to the

might of more highly industrialised Germany. The hardships imposed on the civilian population and the troops through inadequate transport, defective equipment, scarcity of food and high prices, together with the inefficiency and corruption of the ruling class provoked revolt. There were frequent strikes for higher wages and for the ending of the war, and the mutinies at the front. Soldiers who were ordered out against the workers sided with them. Crowds attacked the houses of the Tsarist ministers. In this situation the government, in March 1917, ordered the dissolution of the Duma. This body, although elected on a limited franchise from which most of the workers and peasants were excluded, rejected the order for dissolution and decided to carry on. The Tsar then abdicated.

In the confused period which followed the abdication there was first a provisional government formed by Liberals and other capitalist and landowning representatives in the Duma and eventually a government under Kerensky, leader of the Socialist Revolutionary party, whose authority rested partly on the Committee of the Duma but increasingly on the Committees of Workers and Soldiers (Soviets) which had sprung up all over Russia and which were rapidly pushing the less representative Duma into the background.

While Kerensky's government retained the backing of the Soviets the Bolsheviks were unable to make headway against it, but as the Kerensky government grew more unpopular, because of its efforts to continue the war, one after another of the Soviets elected Bolshevik majorities; and when an All-Russian Soviet Congress met in November 1917 (actually in October according to the old Russian calendar) a clear majority, 390 out of 676, were Bolshevik delegates, and it passed resolutions in favour of peace, the dispossession of the landowners and the setting up of a temporary 'workers and peasants' government, pending the election of a democratic 'constituent assembly' which was to decide the future constitution. Backed by successful risings in Moscow and other towns the Bolsheviks consolidated their position as the government, made peace with Germany and faced a long period of civil war provoked by reactionary groups which were supported by the British, American and other governments.

One of the Bolshevik government's first actions, a prelude to the dictatorship that followed, was to dissolve the constituent assembly as soon as it met, in January 1918, because a majority of the delegates there represented parties in opposition to the Bolshevik Party. They gave as their excuse that the voters changed their views after the elections

The Bolsheviks had campaigned under the slogan "Peace, Bread and Land." Immediately on gaining power they persuaded the second All-Russia Soviet Congress to adopt a decree on peace drafted by the Bolshevik leader, Lenin. It invited the peoples and governments of the nations at war to begin negotiations at once for peace 'without annexations and indemnities' and to conclude an immediate armistice. It appealed particularly to the workers of Britain, France and Germany to help the Bolsheviks stop the war and secure 'the liberation of the toiling and exploited masses from all forms of slavery and exploitation'.

The appeal met with some response from sections of the working class in various countries but was ignored by the governments with which Russia had been allied.

Thereupon the Russian government entered into separate negotiations with Germany and its allies. The German authorities imposed harsh armistice terms, including the continued occupation of large territories that had been part of Tsarist Russia. Many members of the Bolshevik party wanted to reject the terms and advocated the waging of a 'revolutionary war'. Lenin, knowing that Russia was in no position to wage such a war, declared: "It is a question of signing the terms now or signing the death sentence of the Soviet Government three weeks later" and eventually won over the Central Committee of the Party to his point of view.

At the seizure of power the Bolsheviks had been opposed by the Mensheviks and the majority of the Socialist Revolutionaries. A minority of the Socialist Revolutionaries, however, gave the Bolsheviks their support and were at first represented in the first government. They resigned over disagreement about accepting the harsh German terms to end the war and over the government's policy of subordinating the trade unions.

By the middle of 1918 the Bolshevik government had arrested the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary leaders, expelled their delegates from the Soviets and driven the parties underground, making the Communist Party the only legal political party in Russia.

Thus started the half century of Communist Party government of Russia which was to put to the test the claim of the Communists that they had found the road which would lead to the speedy establishment of Socialism in Russia and in the rest of the world, and that other countries should follow their example.

As a Marxist organisation the Socialist Party of Great Britain rejected the Communists' claim and showed at the time that it was based on wrong theory and was incapable of succeeding.

CHAPTER THREE

Socialism: Means and Ends

Since the later years of the nineteenth century a notable change of emphasis has taken place in the issues dividing those calling themselves Socialists. Earlier discussion about the *means* by which Socialism could be achieved has been increasingly turned into disagreement about the end itself.

In this country the Socialist Party of Great Britain has stood alone in its insistence that ends and means cannot be separated; that the wrong means must inevitably lead to wrong ends.

At the earlier time various groups calling themselves socialist were more or less agreed about the socialist society they aimed at but were unable to agree about the methods needed to reach it. There were those who held to parliamentary action and those who opposed it; those who advocated physical force or the general strike for the conquest of power; those who thought in terms of minority movements and those who relied on democratic methods; those who believed that Socialism could be built up gradually within the capitalist framework, either by the Fabian policy of permeating

the existing capitalist political parties, or by the policy, which was to become that of the Labour Party, of working for a Labour Government and using governmental control to introduce reforms and improvements which would, they said, transform capitalism into Socialism.

How much agreement there was about the nature of the transformation they hoped to bring about by their different policies, can be seen for example in the *Manifesto of English Socialists* issued jointly in 1893 by the Fabian Society, the Social Democratic Federation and the Hammersmith Socialist Society. The signatories including William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, H. M. Hyndman and Sidney Webb, were able to agree on the following declaration which appeared in the Manifesto:

“On this point all Socialists agree. Our aim, one and all, is to obtain for the whole community complete ownership and control of the means of transport, the means of manufacture, the mines and the land. Thus we look to put an end for ever to the wage-system, to sweep away all distinctions of class, and eventually to establish national and international communism on a sound basis.”

Keir Hardie, later to be prominent in the formation of the British Labour Party, did not sign the manifesto but elsewhere declared as his objective “free Communism in which... the rule of life will be – ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’.” (‘Serfdom to Socialism’, 1907, page 89.)

At that time they were all thinking of the future, of the socialist society they would inaugurate when they came to power. Two of the schools of thought claim that they have been proved right, on the one hand in the rise of Labour Governments to power, and on the other in the long period of Communist Party rule in Russia.

From the standpoint of socialists (and indeed from the standpoint of those who issued that Manifesto in 1893), both claims are completely unjustified.

It is not disputed that in the countries ruled by Labour or Communist parties, as in other countries, many social reforms have been introduced, such as old age pensions, health services, unemployment and sickness insurance, and that many industries have been taken over by the government; but these are features, in greater or lesser degree, of capitalism everywhere – they are not Socialism but arrangements within which the capitalist system operates.

The essential features of capitalism continue to exist in Labour Party Britain and Communist Party Russia as in avowedly capitalist America; the class monopoly of the means of production, the wages system and the dependence of the workers on the sale of their mental and physical energies to an employer for wage or salary (that the employer may be a private company or a state organisation makes no material difference); great inequalities of wealth and income; the coercive and persuasive powers of the State used to keep the workers in their subject position; the production of commodities for sale and profit; housing scarcities and problems of wages and prices; and the perpetuation of armament production, national rivalries and war. This is not the “socialist brotherhood of man,” or the rule of life based on “from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs”.

Among the ironies of the present situation is that the 'cold war' between the Western powers and Russia is paralleled by the new cold war between Russia and China; and that while a Minister in the Labour Government, Mr. George Brown, was assuring business men that "without any question at all, private enterprise should be allowed to earn its profits" (*The Director*, April 1965), the Russian authorities were openly encouraging the development of the profit motive in Russian industry.

To the socialist these developments were inevitable. They are not to be explained as the failure of Labour and Communist Party rulers to choose the right path; in the circumstances in which they hold power they had and have no choice but to continue capitalism.

NO SOCIALISM WITHOUT SOCIALISTS

What are the circumstances which determine the actions of these rulers? Apart from the necessary development of the means of production to a stage at which Socialism is economically possible, the necessary pre-requisite of Socialism is the existence of a majority which understands and wants Socialism and is determined to achieve it.

This condition does not exist in the Labour or Communist Party-controlled countries. Socialism cannot be ushered in gradually by a Labour government or imposed by a Communist Party dictatorship.

This was an issue that was well known to the Socialist Party of Great Britain at its formation and in its controversies with the other two schools of thought. Because the Socialist Party of Great Britain insisted that there cannot be Socialism without socialists it was dubbed 'impossibilist': it was charged with running away from the possibility of achieving Socialism by Labour Party reformism or by minority dictatorship. But those who chose gradualism and those who chose dictatorship have failed to advance to Socialism.

Both groups claimed to have found the speedy road to Socialism and both rejected the Socialist Party of Great Britain's principle that the vital task was to win over the working class to an understanding of Socialism. While the 'gradualists' were promising that with Labour government Socialism would come in "like a thief in the night", Lenin was making the exaggerated declaration that "If Socialism can only be realised when the intellectual development of all the people permits it, then we shall not see Socialism for at least five hundred years". (From a speech in 1918, reported by John Reed in 'Ten Days that Shook the World,' Penguin Books, 1966, p.263.)

Labour governments in Britain have had years of office in which to prove their case and the Russian Communist Party has had fifty years of continuous rule, but capitalism everywhere is still strongly entrenched. What those parties have done (falsely claimed to be in the name of Socialism) has made harder than ever the task which the Socialist Party of Great Britain knew to be necessary, the task of gaining working class understanding of and support for Socialism.

CHAPTER FOUR

What we said about the Russian Revolution

In order to place in proper historical perspective what is written in this pamphlet about the seizure of power by the Russian Communist Party in 1917, and about subsequent developments in Russia, we reproduce brief extracts from articles published in our official journal, THE SOCIALIST STANDARD, in the period 1918-24.

August 1918 'the Revolution in Russia –Where it Fails'.

‘Is this huge mass of people, numbering about 160,000,000 and spread over eight and a half millions of square miles, ready for Socialism? Are the hunters of the North, the struggling peasant proprietors of the South, the agricultural wage slaves of the Central Provinces, and the industrial wage slaves of the towns convinced of the necessity, and equipped with the knowledge requisite, for the establishment of the social ownership of the means of life? Unless a mental revolution such as the world has never seen before has taken place, or an economic change has occurred immensely more rapidly than history has recorded, the answer is “No!”

What justification is there, then, for terming the upheaval in Russia a Socialist Revolution? None whatever beyond the fact that the leaders in the November movement claim to be Marxian Socialists.’

July 1920 'A Socialist View of Bolshevist Policy'.

‘We have often stated that because of a large anti-Socialist peasantry and vast untrained population, Russia was a long way from Socialism. Lenin has now to admit this by saying: “Reality says that State Capitalism would be a step forward for us; if we are able to bring about State Capitalism in a short time it would be a victory for us. How could they be so blind as to see that our enemy is the small capitalist, the small owner? How could they see the chief enemy in State Capitalism? In the transition period from Capitalism to Socialism our chief enemy is the small bourgeoisie, with its economic customs, habits and position.” (‘The Chief Tasks of our Times’ by Lenin, page 11).

Here we have plain admissions of the unripeness of the great mass of Russian people for Socialism and the small scale of Russian production.

If we are to copy Bolshevik policy in other countries we should have to demand State Capitalism, which is not a step to socialism in the advanced capitalist countries. The fact remains, as Lenin is driven to confess, that we do not have to learn from Russia, but Russia has to learn from lands where large scale production is dominant.’

March 1924 'The Passing of Lenin.'

‘Despite his claims at the beginning, he was the first to see the trend of conditions and adapt himself to these conditions. So far was he from “changing the course of history”... that it was the course of history which changed him, drove him from one point to another till today Russia stands half-way on the road to capitalism. The Communists, in their ignorance, may howl at this, but Russia cannot escape her destiny. As Marx says:

“One nation can and should learn from others. And even when society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement – and it is the

ultimate aim of this work to lay bare the economic law of modern society – it can neither by bold leaps nor remove by legal enactments the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birthpangs.” (Preface to ‘Capital’, Vol. I, by Karl Marx.)

CHAPTER FIVE

Bolshevik Leaders’ Miscalculations

MENTION has already been made of the theory of the Russian Communist Party that the achievement of Socialism did not need to wait on the growth of the workers’ understanding.

On an extreme interpretation such a theory would have been compatible with a belief on the part of the Russian Communist Party that its seizure of power in November 1917 could be followed by the early inauguration of Socialism in Russia alone, and in Western Europe and America many of their uninformed admirers, as well as frightened defenders of capitalism, believed this to be true.

If the leaders of the Russian Communist Party had any such idea they were soon undeceived. But another belief they held was hardly less fantastic. They were soon to find that the peasants had no intention of co-operating in the government’s plans which were opposed to their desire to secure unfettered ownership of land by dividing up the big estates. Faced with peasant hostility, the government had to institute forcible requisition of food in order to feed the town population.

In sympathy with the peasants’ resistance to the requisition, sailors at Kronstadt naval base passed a resolution in February 1921 seeking relaxations. When these were refused they mutinied. Lenin’s government – which the Kronstadt sailors had actively helped in the struggle for power in 1917 – brought in troops and smashed the mutiny with artillery fire.

Among industrial workers, apathy and resistance to government policies were also to add to the difficulties of reconstruction. Lacking support for Socialism inside Russia the Russian government still believed that it could count on the decisive support of the workers in Britain, France and Germany. It viewed its own situation as that of holding power for a short interim period until the workers of the West took revolutionary action and came to Russia’s aid. Lenin in his pamphlet ‘The Chief Task of our Times’ dismissed the idea that Russia could itself stand up to the power of “international imperialism”. He stressed that Russia’s struggle, if it was to succeed, had to be conducted “in conjunction with the revolutionary proletariat of Germany, France and England. Till then, sad and contrary to revolutionary traditions as it may be, our only possible policy is to wait, to tuck and to retreat”.

RUSSIA DEPENDENT ON HELP FROM OUTSIDE

Lenin’s fellow Communist Party leader Trotsky, in an address delivered on 14 April 1918, spoke of their aim to establish “a common brotherly economic system ... so that all should work for the common good, that the whole people should live as one honest, loving family”, but he added that it could only be done with help from outside.

“All this can and shall realise completely only when the European working class support us.

“Comrades, we should be wretched, blind men of little faith, if we ever for one single day, were to lose our conviction that the working class of other countries will come to our aid, and following our example will rise, and bring our task to a successful conclusion.”

(‘A Paradise in this World’, page 18.)

When the Russians issued their call for a general armistice they addressed it to the ‘class-conscious workers’ of the western countries; but most of those workers were not class-conscious and the reasons Trotsky gave for his ‘faith’ that they would revolt rise in revolt rested on all sorts of things except the one that mattered, their understanding of Socialism. What he countered on was the war-weariness of the soldiers and civilians and discontent about high prices and unemployment. It was an appeal to the politically-immature workers of the West to come to the aid of the politically-immature workers and peasants of Russia – to establish Socialism, a world-wide system which only a few in any country wanted.

The work of spreading an understanding of socialism widely among the workers of Europe had not been done. The great majority were at best indifferent to socialist principles, at worst hostile, as was to be shown nine months later at the General Election in Great Britain in which Tory-Liberal-National Labour ‘Victory’ coalition was returned by an overwhelming majority against the official Labour Party and other opposition candidates who, though not socialist, were expected to take a more or less sympathetic attitude to the new Russian government.

The new government under Lloyd George then embarked on armed intervention in Russia and supported the reactionaries who were to wage civil war to overthrow Lenin’s government. Appeals made to British workers to refuse to make or ship arms to Russia for use against the government forces received little response.

The workers in France, Germany and elsewhere were equally unready for Socialism and the Russian government had to fall back largely on its own resources.

CHAPTER SIX

The Meaning of Socialism and Communism

There is nearly everywhere confusion about the meaning to be attached to the words Socialism and Communism, and we have no means of preventing all sorts of different and conflicting ideas and aims from being given these labels, from the ‘socialism’ propounded by Hitler and Mussolini to the deceleration by a Liberal politician late in the nineteenth century: “We are all socialists now.” This is not a recent development: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in their *Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848, devoted a chapter to an analysis of the many self-styled socialist and communist groups from whose ideas the authors of the Manifesto wished to distinguish their own aims and theories.

Because “Socialism was in 1847 a middle class movement. Communism a working

class movement”, Marx and Engels decided to call their Manifesto Communist. Later in the century they again used the name Socialism.

The Socialist Party of Great Britain takes its stand on the same set of ideas whether called Socialism and Communism, and, like Marx and Engels, repudiates the numerous pseudo-Socialist theories which since 1848 or since have masqueraded as socialist or communist.

Many of the ‘socialist’ nostrums of 1848 are flourishing still, as anyone can readily recognise from the description Marx and Engels gave of two of the groups.

“To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole and corner reformers of every imaginable kind.

“A second, and more practical, but less systematic, form of this socialism sought to depreciate every revolutionary movement in the eyes of the working class by showing that no mere political reform, but only a change in the material conditions of existence, in economical relations, could be of any advantage to them. By changes in the material conditions of existence, this form of socialism, however, by no means understands abolition of the bourgeois relations of production, an abolition that can be affected only by a revolution, but administrative reforms, based on the continued existence of these relations; reforms, therefore, that in no respect affect the relations between capital and labor, but, at the best, lessen the cost, and simplify the administrative work of bourgeois government.”

The propaganda of the Socialist Party of Great Britain through the years has been continually hampered by the need to explain that these and other policies for solving problems within the framework of capitalism have nothing in common with the socialist aim of replacing the class system, capitalism, by a classless social system in which production for sale, the exploitation of the working class by the receivers of rent, interest and profit, and the wages system will no longer exist.

NATIONALISATION IS NOT SOCIALISM

Politicians of various parties have a interest in perpetuating the confusion. Those who want to whip an opposition to some change or reform advocated by another political group will denounce it as ‘socialist’ or ‘communist’, hoping thereby to get support from reactionary sections of the population who fear change of any kind. And politicians (Hitler and Mussolini, for example) who want to pose as friends of the workers, may find that there is vote-catching value in naming their programme ‘socialist’. This exactly fits the British Labour Party and the Russian Communist Party, both of which have sometimes applied the name Socialism to nationalisation or state capitalism, while on the other occasions giving a correct description. (Lord Atlee, Prime Minister in the Labour Government 1945-51, once embarrassed his party, which was still claiming the Post Office to be ‘socialist’, by describing it as “the outstanding example of collective capitalism”, and one of his ministerial colleagues, the late Lord Morrison, told an audience that “more socialism was done by the Conservative Party, which opposed it, than by the Labour Party, which was in favour of it” – he meant, among other institutions, the Post Office.)

In Russia , after the Communists seized power in 1917, the use of the word Socialism to mean first one thing and then something entirely different had a curious and complicated history, starting with the use of the terms Socialism and Communism to mean the same thing and ending with the use of Socialism as a label for state capitalism.

Reference has already been made to the statement of Lenin early in 1918, that Russia needed State capitalism. In his 'State and Revolution,' written in August 1917 just before his party came to power, he had explained how State capitalist institutions would be operated. Like the British Labour Party he took the Post Office as an example, and like them he referred to it both as "an example of the Socialist system" and as "a State capitalist monopoly".

LENIN AND EQUALITY

Lenin believed it possible to operate State capitalism on the basis of equal pay for everyone. He wrote:

"We have but to overthrow the capitalists, to crush with the iron hand of the armed workers the resistance of these exploiters, to break the bureaucratic machine of the modern state – and we have before us a highly technically-fashioned machine freed of its parasites, which can quite well be set going by the united workers themselves, hiring their own inspectors, their own clerks, and paying them all, as indeed, every 'State' official, with the usual worker's wage. Here is a concrete task immediately practicable and realisable as regards all trusts, which would rid the workers of exploitation... To organise our whole national economy like the postal system, but in such a way that the technical experts, inspectors, clerks and indeed all persons employed, should receive no higher wage than the working man, and the whole under the management of the armed proletariat – this is our immediate aim."

But less than a year later he was to admit that it had not been possible to carry out this procedure. In an address given in April 1918, published in translation as 'The Soviets at Work,' he said:

"We were forced now to make use of the old bourgeois method and agreed a very high remuneration for the services of the bourgeois specialists. All those who are acquainted with the facts understand this, but not all give sufficient thought to the significance of such a measure on the part of the proletarian state. It is clear that such a measure is a compromise, that it is a departure from the principles of the Paris Commune and of any proletarian rule, which demand the reduction of the average workers – principles which demand that 'career-hunting' be fought by deeds, not by words.

"Furthermore, it is clear that such a measure is not merely a halt in a certain part and to a certain degree in the offensive against Capitalism (for Capitalism is not a quantity of money but a definite social relationship) but also a step backward by our Socialist Soviet State, which has from the very beginning proclaimed and carried on a policy of reducing high salaries to the standard wages of the average worker."

He went on to acknowledge that the backward step had a corrupting influence “both on the Soviets...and on the mass of the workers”, but he held out the prospect that perhaps within a year, or even less it might be possible to get rid of it.

Of course it never has been got rid of in Russia. Far from being regarded as an evil, inequality has been established as a principle. Here again the parallel with the British Labour Party is remarkable. As late as 1935 Attlee, leader of the Labour Party, in his book ‘The Will and the Way to Socialism’ declared that “Socialists believe in the abolition of classes and in an equalitarian society”, and that under “socialist planning” there would be “no little cottages and no large private houses. All would be reasonably well housed....” As in Russia, no more was heard of equalitarianism when Attlee’s party came to power.

In other ways, too, State capitalism has not developed in Russia as Lenin supposed it would. The country is still dependent for a large part of its agricultural produce on the private holdings of the peasants outside the State and collective farms, and there has been a growing development of ‘private enterprise’ (frequently illegally but none the less effectively). The advertising and marketing methods of the older capitalist countries have been copied and latterly greater use of the ‘profit incentive’ in the State concerns. The term Socialism has now been officially adopted to describe this state of affairs, while the term ‘communism’ is now used differently to apply to something in the distant future.

Thus the British Communist *Daily Worker* (5 November 1949), in an issue celebrating the 32nd anniversary of the 1917 revolution, carried the headline ‘Thirty-two years of Socialism’. And in 1952 a commission under Stalin and Khrushchev which drew up new roles for the Russian Communist Party was reported as follows in the *Daily Worker* (14 October 1952):

“The Communist Party of the Soviet Union achieved the overthrow of the power of the capitalists and landlords, the organisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the abolition of capitalism, the elimination of the exploitation of man by man, and in short, the building of a socialist society. The principle task of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union now consists in building a Communist society by a gradual transition from Socialism to Communism....”

How far this use of the term Socialism differs from earlier use by the Russian Communist party can be seen from ‘A Short Course of Economic Science’ by A. Bogdanoff. Here Socialism and socialist society are described as “the highest stage of society we can conceive”, in which such institutions as taxation and profits will be non-existent and in which “there will not be the market buying and selling, but consciously and systematically organised distribution.”

This work, first published in 1897 and extensively revised for the edition in August 1919 was used as a textbook in the schools and study circles of the Russian Communist Party. It was published in an English edition in 1923 by the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Unlike the Communist Party and the British Labour Party, with their shifting

definition to suit political expediency, the Socialist Party of Great Britain has consistently used the term Socialism in its original Marxist meaning and has never misapplied it to State capitalism.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Capitalism in Russia

What system of society exists in Russia? Trotsky, in exile, argued that although Russia was not socialist, as Stalin claimed, it could not be described as capitalist either. He held that in 1917 the working class in Russia had seized power and had begun the transition from capitalism to Socialism. However, owing to backwardness and isolation, what he called a 'bureaucratic caste' managed to usurp power. According to Trotsky, Russia was thus between capitalism and Socialism; it could either go forward to Socialism, but only with the rest of the world, or return to capitalism. He kept this view till his murder in 1940. Some of his followers still argue this. Others say Russia can now only be described as State capitalism. The Socialist Party of Great Britain too argues that this is the best description. We do not, however, think that Russia set off for Socialism and ended up as State capitalism, but, as shown elsewhere in this pamphlet, that Russia did not, and could not, have established Socialism in 1917. Capitalism has always existed in post-revolutionary Russia and the working class there has never had political power.

The social system in Russia can be described as capitalist since the essential features of capitalism predominate: class monopoly of the means of production, commodity production, wage-labour and capital accumulation. The first of these – the class monopoly of the means of production – is perhaps the hardest to grasp as far as Russia is concerned.

Wealth is in effect the property of an individual or group if that individual or that group has a right in act against the other members of society to use it or to control its use. A class is made up of people who are in the same position with regard to the ownership and use of the means of wealth-production and distribution. One class has a monopoly over these means if the rest of society are allowed access to them only on terms imposed by the group in control. The monopoly does not have to be legally recognised though in fact, as in Britain, this is generally so. Here the privileged minority, the capitalist class, have titles backed by law to the wealth they own. In Russia the ownership of the privileged minority is generally not given formal legal backing, but, as in Britain, they maintain their monopoly through control over the machinery of government. They occupy the top posts in the party, government, industry and the armed forces. Their ownership of the means of production is not individual but collective: they own as a class. Historically this is not a new development as is shown by the position of the Catholic church in feudal times. The privileged class in Russia draw their 'property income' in the form of bloated salaries, bonuses, large monetary 'prizes' awarded by the government, and other perks attaching to the top posts.

“The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as ‘an immense accumulation of commodities’...” So begins ‘Capital’ by Karl Marx. A commodity is something produced by human labour with a view to

sale. Wealth in Russia, too, takes the form of an immense accumulation of commodities. The Russian revolution did not abolish commodity production; on the contrary it has been the aim of the government to extend it as widely and as rapidly as possible.

The existence of commodity production, though it shows that Socialism does not exist, does not necessarily mean that capitalism does. Capitalism is the most developed form of commodity production in which everything, including human labour-power, is bought and sold. For labour-power to take on a commodity character presupposes that the producers have been separated from the means of production and that these means are concentrated in the hands of a minority. This has happened in Russia, especially with the expropriation of the peasantry. We have already shown that the means of production there are effectively owned by a privileged class. The dispossessed, propertyless majority make up the working class who live by selling their labour-power to the state (or co-operative or collective farm) which acts, like the public corporation and company in Britain, as the agent of the privileged minority.

Under capitalism goods and services are not only produced for sale with a view to profit, the source of this profit being the unpaid labour of the working class, in Russia and elsewhere. The working class spend a part of their working time reproducing the value of their wages and the rest producing a surplus. Most of the latter is re-invested. Thus for Russia the means of production are used to exploit wage-labour for a surplus. In other words they function as capital.

Russia is capitalist and not a new class society nor somewhere between capitalism and Socialism.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Economic Policy and Development

BEFORE 1917 Russia was an agricultural country whose feudal society was breaking up under the impact of capitalism which was spreading mainly in the west and in the oilfields of the south. At the time of the revolution perhaps 80 per cent of the population still lived off the land in a primitive subsistence economy.

The Bolsheviks, having seized political power during a war and later having to defend themselves against foreign invaders, were forced to take emergency measures including the nationalisation of most of the capitalist concerns. These state capitalist enterprises became the economic basis of the Bolshevik dictatorship. In 1921, with the threat of foreign invasion gone, a new policy was adopted known as the New Economic Policy or NEP. This policy was described by Lenin as the “development of capitalism under the control and regulation of the proletarian state.” (Theses on the Tactics of the Russian Communist Party, adopted at the 17th Session, 5 July 1921.) Many of the smaller factories which were not ripe for central State management were handed back to private enterprise; foreign capitalists were invited to invest in Russia; State bonds were issued which wealthy Russians could buy; State control in agriculture was also relaxed. The government claimed that NEP was economically a success and by 1926 the pre-war level of industrial production had been reached. One of the aims of NEP had been to develop capitalist large-scale production at the

expense of the isolated peasant family production. In the towns a class of wealthy traders and contractors known as 'nepmen' appeared and in the country a class of wealthy peasants or 'kulaks.' At the same time it was not clear what would be the future course of the development in Russia; many observers suggested that the new wealthy classes would grow in strength and eventually overthrow the Bolshevik dictatorship.

The results of NEP, however, led to a discontent and arguments inside the Bolshevik Party; demands were made for strict measures against the private capitalists and rich peasants and for a policy of rapid industrial development. After much wavering the dominant section of the party led by Stalin adopted this policy in 1928 with the beginning of the first Five Year Plan and the 'dekulakisation' campaign. As the capital required for rapid industrial development could not be obtained from foreign loans it had to be obtained internally: from plundering the peasantry, poor as well as rich, and from intensifying the exploitation of the working class. In this way the economic basis of the Bolshevik dictatorship, the State capitalist sector, was strengthened at the expense of the private capitalist and peasant sectors. So also was the political rule of the Bolsheviks.

The policy of taxing and plundering the peasantry to get funds for capital expansion was not new. It had been pursued by Tsarist governments. It has the one great defect: if carried beyond a certain point it defeats its own purpose by preventing agricultural accumulation and the growth of food supplies and raw materials. This was what happened in Russia as a result of the policy of the forced collectivisation of peasant farms. And worse, in fact, for not only did agricultural accumulation stop, it decreased as peasants destroyed their crops and livestock. Between 1929 and 1932 the number of cattle fell by a third, sheep and goats by a half, and horses by a quarter. Not until 1939 was the loss made good. (Maurice Dobb, 'Soviet Economic Development since 1917', Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1960, page 246.) One result of this policy was the advent of an artificial famine in 1932-3. The disastrous results of this policy which was immediately evident forced the Bolsheviks to retreat a little, but the essentials their policy remained the same and the collective farms were compelled to sell their produce to the State at artificially low prices.

GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF THE TRADE UNIONS

With the implementation of the first Five Year Plan the position of the working class also grew worse. During the period of NEP the trade unions, though under Bolshevik control, had done something to protect the interests of their members. In 1929, however, the Stalin government removed the old leadership and purged many of the lesser officials as a prelude to bringing the unions under complete State control. In the 1930s the unions became organs of the State whose function was not to try to improve wages and working conditions but rather to reduce cost., keep wages down and increase production. As a result wages began to fall and working conditions to deteriorate. Some workers did try to resist but their position was weakened by the high unemployment of the time. In 1926 the Commissar of Labour estimated the number of unemployed as probably reaching two million, which included one million members of the trade unions. Two years later the Central Council of the Trade Unions reported two million of their members unemployed. (Maurice Dobb, 'Soviet Economic Development since 1917', p.190.) Workers who protested were denounced

as ‘grabbers’ and ‘agents of the class enemy’ and blacklisted. In the years that followed the working class became completely subjected to the domination of the Bolshevik dictatorship. Their wages were fixed by the management alone; they were required to carry various passes and work-books; they had to suffer the vicious sweating system associated with the name of Stakhanov; the Labour code made strikes, absenteeism, lateness and even lax work criminal offences subject to harsh punishments.

In addition, expropriated peasants and political and criminal prisoners were used as forced labour to construct dams and roads and to mine gold and other minerals. The heavy industries of Russia were built up at terrific human cost.

During the 1950s the discipline and penalties imposed on workers were relaxed and at the same time the majority of occupants of the labour camps were released and the conditions of the remainder improved. Passive and sometimes active organised resistance played its part and also no doubt realisation by the authorities that with the growing complexity of production, such methods become less effective as means of promoting efficiency.

Capitalist development in Russia under the Bolsheviks took the form of expanding the State capitalist enterprises; private enterprise played practically no part after the end of NEP, at least legally. A measure of the extent of the development can be seen by comparing the census figures of 1939 and 1959:

	1939	1959
Industrial and Office Workers	52.5	68.3
Collective Farmers	44.9	31.4
Individual Peasants and Handicraftsmen	2.6	0.3

The industrial and office workers are all wage and salary earners while the collective farmers do not get their income in the form of wages as the price of their labour power. By comparison with Britain where the great majority of occupied persons are wage or salary earners, the figure for those in Russia not yet subject to the wages system is still high at more than 30 per cent though it should be remembered that in 1917 it was about 80 per cent. The working class in Russia in fact is still being recruited from the peasantry.

The system of industrial control over the State capitalist enterprises was extremely centralised during the lifetime of Stalin. Ministries in Moscow set targets of how much each industry and factory should produce. The State directed what should be produced; the factory managers merely had to carry out these orders. The State also fixed the prices at which goods were to be sold to the consumer. As in all systems of rationing (which the State-directed system resembled) a black market appeared. Industrial agents or 'pushers' made a living by getting scarce supplies for a price. Indeed they became an essential part of the system. As time went on the defects and inefficiencies of the system became more and more evident. Yet when one economist, Voznessensky, suggested decentralisation in 1950 he was accused by Stalin of "seeking to restore capitalism" and shot. But by the end of Stalin's life it was being realised that such crude methods had become a hindrance to further economic development. After his death changes were made both in agriculture and in industry.

AFTER STALIN

In agriculture the new government was faced with the legacy of the forced collectivisation programme. The policy they adopted involved making concessions to the peasantry to get them to produce more. Compulsory deliveries to the State were reduced and purchase prices raised. In 1958 the machine and tractor stations, through which the State had exercised control, were denationalised and sold to the collective farms. Since the fall of Khrushchev the government has pursued an even more conciliatory policy: at the end of 1964, all restrictions on peasants selling the produce of their own family plots were removed. These family plots play an important part in agricultural production. At one time the policy was to try and incorporate them into the collective farms but this proved impossible. Unlike those who work on State farms the collective farmer is not a wage worker; he receives his income partly in cash and partly in kind and supplements this from working his own plot. The aim of the government policy still is to introduce the wages system into the collective farms but many of these farms are too poor to pay a regular living wage to their members. Indeed many collective farmers are unemployed for a part of the year and if it were not for their family plots they would starve.

Industry was decentralised in a reform of 1957 which set up regional economic councils. This was a concession to pressure for managerial independence which demanded that the managers be given more freedom in fulfilling the targets set by the State. In recent years this pressure has been mounting; prominent Russian economists have been suggesting a relaxation of State control and a move towards the a system

which places more reliance on the market to fix output, prices and profits. Already controls have been relaxed in the retail trade where the old system led to periodic gluts and shortages. As supplies of shoddy goods began to mount up in the shops, the government allowed advertising, price-cutting, credit and hire-purchase to be used. Experiments in direct buying by the shops from the factories and farms has proved a commercial success and this method is being extended. In the field of service industries private enterprise, though nominally illegal, has been allowed to flourish again. It is only when businesses get too big (such as building contractors and large-scale market gardeners) or are patently illegal that the State now acts against private enterprise. There is talk of extending the market system to the State and collective farms. Whether it will be extended also to industry and foreign trade, as in Yugoslavia, remains to be seen. Relaxation of State control causes new problems of its own such as growth of urban as well as rural unemployment and an accelerated drift to the towns making the housing problem more acute. These problems are already acute in Russia.

Since the end of the last war and since the death of Stalin, the lot of the working class has been improving. The labour shortage which the slaughter of the war produced prevented the vicious Labour Code from being rigidly enforced. It had to be revised in 1951 and was finally abandoned in 1956. Despite this and despite increases in wages and consumption the working class still have no free and independent economic organisations with which to further their interests as the workers in some other capitalist countries have. The trade unions remain a part of the State machine concerned with such matters as insurance, safety and housing as well as with production. Many workers are gaining experience in organisation and administration in these social activities of the trade unions. The experience will prove invaluable when the workers in Russia become strong enough to form their own independent economic and *political* organisations. Capitalism in Russia, as elsewhere, supplies and trains its own grave-diggers.

RUSSIA INVADING WORLD MARKETS

In the field of foreign trade the building up of Russian industry has brought about a striking change in the attitude of the government towards the export market. The early attitude towards foreign trade was dealt with in 'Soviet Export', a book published in Moscow in 1936, in which the author, M. Zhirmunski, claimed that Russian trade policy is quite different from that of 'the capitalist countries'. Quoting from Lenin's 'Development of Capitalism in Russia' he explained that the 'capitalist' countries move into the export market because "capitalist enterprise inevitably grows beyond the confines of the community, the local market, the region, and subsequently even of the state." Russia, the author said, had no such problem: it exported according to plan and only in order to obtain from abroad the modern machinery needed to speed up industrial development.

Because Russia was industrially far behind America, Germany and Britain, the Russian government decided in 1918 to make all foreign trade a state monopoly in order to control the nature and direction of all exports and at the same time prevent a flood of cheap imports from abroad which would have ruined the industries being built up.

In the mind of the author of 'Soviet Export', this arrangement was not just a matter of convenience but a direct consequence of the difference between a 'capitalist' country and Russia where 'the first Socialist revolution in the world' had taken place.

Many years later Stalin, in his 'Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR' (Moscow, 1952), had another look at Russian foreign trade. He described the rapid growth of industries in Russia and in the countries of Eastern Europe in the Russian economic orbit and concluded:

"It may be confidently said that, with this pace of industrial development, it will soon come to pass that these countries will not only be in no need of imports from capitalist countries, but will themselves feel the necessity of finding an outside market for their surplus products" (page 36).

The state trade monopoly still exists but, as Stalin foresaw, it is now more and more concerned with finding markets abroad for Russian heavy and light engineering products, steel, aircraft, watches, cameras and diamonds, as well as for traditional exports of furs and timber.

By the 1960s the volume of Russian foreign trade was approaching three times what it had been in 1913, but whereas then two-thirds of the exports were of fuel, raw materials and consumer goods, with negligible exports of machinery, the position in the sixties was that the first group had dropped to less than half, and the exports of machinery and equipment were more than 20 per cent (Statesman's Year Book, 1965-66).

One ironical and quite unplanned feature of recent years has been that Russia, formerly an exporter, has had to import great quantities of wheat and other foodstuffs (including much from Canada and USA), paid for by the export of gold.

With its eye on world markets the Russian government has increasingly joined in international banking, monetary, shipping and other conferences, and introduced currency changes designed to make the rouble acceptable as a world trading medium. The Russian merchant marine has been greatly expanded "to meet the needs of our growing foreign trade" and, as the Minister of Marine said, freight rates are fixed "with an eye to profit". (*The Times*, 10 September 1966.)

Thus has the development of Russia as a great capitalist state made nonsense of the early claims that their foreign trade policy was quite unlike that of the 'capitalist' countries.

CHAPTER NINE

Russian Foreign Policy

THE REVOLUTION brought about an abrupt reversal of Russian foreign policy. The day after the seizure of power the Congress of Soviets adopted a Decree on Peace drafted by Lenin. This called for an immediate peace without annexations and indemnities and stated that the new Russian government was ready to begin peace talks immediately. In the months that followed the Bolsheviks exposed the capitalist

nature of the war and called on all workers to repudiate the aggressive policies of their governments. They published the secret treaties on the post-war division of Europe and Asia which the Tsarist government had made with the Allies. They renounced Tsarist Russia's aim of controlling the Dardanelles, and voluntarily gave up the Russian 'spheres of influence' in China and Iran which had been extorted by force from governments too weak to resist. They proclaimed the right of 'self-determination' and allowed Finns, Poles, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians to secede and become independent states. These actions won sympathy for the Bolsheviks among the workers throughout the world.

Lenin's government, however, soon showed a different attitude towards breakaway movements in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Georgia, which had been recognised as independent in 1919, was reoccupied by Russian troops in 1921 and the two other areas were incorporated in it. When the British Labour Party protested and proposed a referendum to find out the wishes of the population, Lenin ridiculed the idea and proposed that the British Government start by evacuating India and Ireland and having referenda in those countries. (David Shub, 'Lenin', Pelican Books 1966, page 402.)

Trotsky, who had been appointed Commissar for Foreign Affairs, declared that in this field there were two tasks. To end the "shameful and criminal slaughter which is destroying Europe" and to aid the coming revolution which would overthrow capitalism in Europe.

It is to the credit of the Bolsheviks that they did put a stop to the slaughter on the eastern Front. An armistice and then peace were quickly concluded with the Central Powers. That peace for Russia was not maintained was not their fault, for after defeating Germany the victorious Allies turned on Soviet Russia. In the period 1918-20 a state of undeclared war existed between Russia and the Allies. British, French, Japanese and other troops occupied parts of Russia and aided the reactionaries who were seeking to restore the Tsarist regime.

The Bolsheviks were however deluding themselves in thinking that a socialist revolution in Europe was imminent. Yet in the early days of the revolution their policies were based on this hope: Zinoviev, the first president of the Communist International which was set up in 1919, wrote on 1 May 1919 that "in a year the whole of Europe will be communist".

ABANDONMENT OF THE THEORY OF WORLD REVOLUTION

As their dreams of a European revolution faded the Bolsheviks were forced to pursue a more realistic policy. Their aim became to get international recognition as the legitimate government of Russia. In March 1921 an Anglo-Soviet trade agreement was signed and in 1922 the Bolshevik government was invited to an international conference in Genoa. Later in the year the treaty of Rapallo with Germany was signed. The Bolsheviks justified these moves as a means of gaining time by playing off capitalist states against each other. But with the failure of the insurrection led by the Comintern in Bulgaria and Germany in 1923, the Bolshevik government, now coming increasingly under the control of the Stalin group, began to abandon all hope of a world revolution and to concentrate on building up industrial strength at home.

During the years that followed the Bolshevik government gradually gained international recognition but was still not fully accepted as a respectable member of the international capitalist community. It denounced the League of Nations as a “league of bandits”. Lip service was still paid to the aim of world revolution and in 1927 the Comintern did try an insurrection in China which once again failed. This was to be the last of such experiments in insurrection.

With the rise of Germany under the Hitler government, the Bolsheviks changed their policy to one of actively seeking friendship of the rest of the capitalist world. In 1934 Russia applied for membership of the “league of bandits” and signed a Defence Pact with France. The aim of this policy was to use the League to organise the capitalist states opposed to Germany to deter any aggression which might endanger Russian interests. The Comintern, now entirely purged of opposition elements, became a simple tool of Russian foreign policy. The various Communist Parties dropped their pseudo-revolutionary talk and campaigned for a ‘popular front against fascism’. The slogan ‘world revolution’ was openly replaced by ‘defence of the Soviet Union’.

POWER POLITICS

The first shock for those who thought of Russia as an anti-imperialist, peace-loving state came in 1939 with the Russian attack on Finland. Three months before this, in August 1939, Ribbentrop flew to Moscow to sign a Russo-German non-aggression Pact. This change represented a recognition that their previous policy of using the League of Nations as a deterrent had failed. The new policy was a return to power politics; an attempt to gain security by playing off the other European powers against each other. The Pact was followed by secret agreements for the division of Eastern Europe into Russian and German ‘spheres of influence’. Russia was to have the Baltic Republics and part of Poland. These agreements were put into effect almost immediately. Russia also took the opportunity to annex a part of Rumania. In the end this policy too was a failure and in June 1941 Russia was brought into the world-wide slaughter which had begun in Europe nearly two years previously.

The Bolsheviks had denounced the First World War as a “predatory war” for the redivision of the world amongst the imperialist powers. The Second World War was no different, but now Bolshevik Russia was one of the predatory powers. On coming to power the Bolsheviks had denounced secret diplomacy and called for a peace without annexations or indemnities. During the Second World War Russia was a party to the secret agreements for the post-war division of the world made at the Yalta conference in 1945. At this and other conferences Russia made a number of claims: for a base in Turkey to control the Dardanelles; for a UN trusteeship in Libya; for “the former rights of Russia violated by the treacherous attack of Japan in 1904” (a war which the Bolsheviks opposed at the time). On top of this, ten thousand million dollars reparations was demanded from Germany. All these claims were not accepted by the other powers, but as the Red Army overran Eastern Europe, more parts of the former Tsarist Empire were annexed including the Baltic republics, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. In Asia parts of China and Japan were annexed. The Red Army also marched into Northern Iran and while there forced the government to accept an agreement giving Russia fifty years’ control of the oil industry in the region which before 1914 had been a Tsarist Russia ‘sphere of interest’. (Under American and

British pressure the Russian troops later withdrew and the Iranian government repudiated the agreement.) The contrast between the words and actions of the early Bolsheviks and those of the Stalin government could not have been greater. Russia was once again a fully-fledged imperialist power, strong enough to impose its will on weaker states.

After the war Russia extended its political control over all Eastern Europe: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Albania, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania and parts of Germany and Austria. These areas were not actually annexed though they might well have been. Their industries were looted to rebuild Russian industry without regard to the effect on the workers; and their trade was entirely in Russian hands. Just after the war Russian power in Europe was greater than it had been under the Tsars.

The Western powers, which had just beaten off an attempt by Germany and Japan to dislodge them as dominant world powers did not look kindly at Russian expansion in Europe. After the Russian coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 it became obvious to the American government that Russia represented a new threat to their dominant position and they determined to act. They put on the Berlin airlift to break the Russian blockade in 1948, and in 1949 organised NATO.

The years that followed were those of the cold war. The older and fatter bandits used their strength to try to keep a newer bandit in his place.

Although the Comintern had been dissolved in 1943 to please the Allies, the Communist parties outside Russia were once again brought in to serve the aims of Russian foreign policy. By their patriotic flag-waving during the war and their claim to be anti-fascist these parties had built up some support and sympathy. This was now to be turned to good use through a bogus 'peace campaign'. The pre-war slogans of a 'people's front' were replaced by slogans for 'peace'. The Russian rulers calculated that, with a strong pacifist sentiment at home, the Western powers would not be prepared to react so decisively against Russian attempts to expand at their expense.

Many of the twists of Russian foreign policy since the end of the war – as of foreign policies of the Western powers – were prompted by the development of nuclear weapons, the re-emergence of Germany in the European economic community and the growing military power of China.

During the rise of the Hitler regime the Russian government had held the view, proclaimed by Foreign Minister Molotov at the time of the Stalin-Hitler pact of friendship in 1939, "we have always held that a strong Germany is an indispensable condition for durable peace in Europe". After the war this was turned into its opposite, that of preventing them from having nuclear weapons.

These were the years during which Russia was trying to overtake the American lead in nuclear armaments and the Attlee Labour government in Britain was building its own atomic bomb and starting work on the H-bomb. The Russian government's view, faithfully echoed in the Communist *Daily Worker*, was that the first Russian atom bomb was "tremendous news" calculated to encourage "peace-loving people everywhere" (24 September 1949), but the British bomb was "an unmitigated curse", "a coward's weapon, designed for the unrestrained massacre of the civilian

population.” (18 February 1952.)

From 1958 to 1961 America, Russia and Britain suspended nuclear tests and thus halted for a time the hideous poisoning of the world’s atmosphere with atomic fallout. The Russian government then resumed massive tests in the air, including the explosion of the megaton bomb, on the cynical plea that they had a ‘right’ to make the tests the Americans had made earlier.

During this period Russia and China had been seeing more eye to eye in foreign affairs and Russia had helped China with its own nuclear development. Then relations worsened – Russia provided military help to India in its conflict with China and Chinese propaganda began to include claims on Russian territories; frontier incidents were reported. There were too, mutual accusations of having ‘betrayed the revolution’ and of being capitalist and fascist. Already in 1963 the British Communist Party was criticising the Chinese government’s policy of equipping itself with nuclear missiles. (*Daily Worker*, 17 August 1963.) as Russia’s relations with China turned to cold war so Russian-American relations became less overtly hostile.

In 1963 a Test Ban treaty was negotiated and in 1966-7 talks were going on between the American and Russian governments about the possibility of mutual agreement not to embark on an enormously expensive plan to defend their cities with anti-missile defence systems.

Only the future can tell whether this is the beginning of a new international line-up of the powers.

The history of Russian foreign policy since 1917 is the history of the abandonment of revolutionary slogans for ‘realistic’ policies designed to further the interests of Russia as a great capitalist state.

CHAPTER TEN

The Lesson for Socialists

The long years of Communist Party government in Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe have witnessed the descent from the early idealistic proclamations of human brotherhood and socialism to the present reality of a powerful capitalist group armed with the latest instruments of destruction and facing with suspicion the rest of the capitalist world – including now China: the descent from the first declaration of the Communist International in 1919 – “end the domination of capital, make war impossible, wipe out state boundaries, transform the whole world into one co-operative commonwealth, and bring about real human brotherhood and freedom” – down to the police and censor-ridden capitalist dictatorships, the Hydrogen bomb and the ‘Berlin Wall’.

Some of those who at first blindly worshipped the Russian Communist Party leaders and later turned against them, have learned nothing from the course of events. Ignoring the lessons of history and the Marxian interpretation of it they have hypnotised themselves with the empty explanation that the failure was one of leadership – Stalin was the wrong man! They overlook that Russia was set on the

same course before the Stalin era and that a world wide socialist working class, which alone could achieve Socialism, would have no need of leadership. Above all they ignore the fact that in the conditions that existed in Russia and the absence of a strong world socialist movement no other development was possible, Russia had to go through the stage of capitalism.

From the Marxist standpoint the capitalist development of Russia was foreseen in 1874 when Engels (at Marx's request) rebutted the utopian views of the Russian insurrectionary Tkachoff. Engels, in his 'Social Problems in Russia', wrote:

“Only when the social forces of production have reached a very high degree of development does it become possible to increase production to such an extent that the abolition of classes represents a real and durable progress without causing stagnation, or even a regression in the mode of social production. This has only been reached by the productive forces when in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, the existence of the bourgeoisie is from this point of view also as necessary a condition for the Socialist revolution as the proletariat. A person who maintains that this revolution could be carried out more easily in his country because it neither has a proletariat nor bourgeoisie proves by his statement that he has understood nothing of Socialism.”

(Reproduced in 'Marx and Soviet Reality' by Daniel Norman, 1955, page 39.)

That Russia had to follow the capitalist road and employ capitalist methods was inevitable: only utopians could have supposed otherwise. When faced with the reality that they could not by-pass capitalism the Communist Party covered its failure by labelling State capitalism 'Socialism'.

This was their great crime against the socialist movement. They enabled the opponents of Socialism to point to all the sufferings and acts of suppression and violence in Russia as proof of the evils and inadequacies of Socialism thus confusing the workers of other countries and multiplying the difficulties faced by the socialist movement in winning over the workers to Socialism.

Of course the capitalist enemies of Socialism were glad to seize on this stick with which to beat the socialist movement, but one of the striking features of the situation has been that, with few exceptions, the capitalist politicians and business men really believed that Russia was socialist.

One of the few occasions on which a spokesman of capitalism recognised the existence of State capitalism in Russia was in 1959, at the end of a visit to the United States by a Russian trade mission led by the Deputy Prime Minister A. I. Mikoyan. The late John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State in the Eisenhower administration sent a telegram to Mikoyan:

“The President is aware that you operate under a system of State capitalism, and he hopes that it has been useful to you to have seen the progress of our people under our system of individual capitalism. We are sure that you have found this experience interesting.”

(*Daily Telegraph*, London, 21 January 1959.)

However, such is the quality of the education provided by capitalism even to its own ruling class groups that most of them did not recognise their own capitalist system when it was presented to them in Russia in somewhat different trappings!

The misrepresentation surrounding the Russian revolution and subsequent events has been catastrophic for the working class of the world. It has obscured the true nature of Socialism and caused incalculable waste of effort leading to frustration and cynicism.

The lesson is plain for all to see. Events have completely vindicated the stand of the Socialist Party of Great Britain against the travesty of Marxism propagated by the Communist parties of the world.