

# World Revolution vs. Socialism in One Country

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## The Stalinist State and the Survival of Capitalism

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The theoretical concepts of world revolution and 'Socialism in One Country' are pivotal to understanding the Stalinist State and the survival of capitalism. To thoroughly understand how they are connected, we must understand each of them. First, we will seek to understand the difference between the ideas of world revolution and 'Socialism in One Country.' Then we shall look at the Stalinist state, including its command economy and its militarization. We will end with an analysis of why capitalism has survived and the prospects of world revolution today.

The concept of revolution is central to Marxist theory. Marx viewed a revolt by the proletariat as the way to bring about a communist state. There exists in capitalism a contradictory relationship between private capital and the proletariat. They exist as two opposites, as two sides of a whole. Private capital wishes to expand itself. The proletariat wishes to free itself. But they are both conditions of existence for each other. For proletariat to abolish private capital would be akin to abolishing themselves. For the proletariat to destroy themselves as a class is for them to be free.<sup>1</sup> In *The German Ideology*, in which Marx and Engels sought to make clear many of his philosophical views, Marx declared, "In order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the State."<sup>2</sup>

Marx viewed revolution as not only necessary to throw off the yoke of oppression but as inevitable. Given the progression of history, once the right economic conditions were met, revolution by the working classes was inevitable. But revolution could not happen in any one country or by any one group of people. Instead the proletariat of the world needed to be a united front. The revolution needed to be a world revolution; without a united front among the world proletariat, and a simultaneous revolution, the capitalist nations would suppress any isolated revolution that sprang up. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx writes that the borders between nations are disappearing, more and more the world was becoming a global society, and as a result communism required that the proletariat of every country throw their allegiance behind the cause instead of their nation: "National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing ... The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilized countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat."<sup>3</sup>

For Marx, revolution also needed to be a constant action, at least while there were still capitalist elements, the birthmarks of capitalism, existing in society. In *Address to the Communist League*, Marx set forth an argument for permanent revolution. During the initial revolution to overthrow the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie, or those who owned private property but were also workers, would join forces with the proletariat. The petty-bourgeoisie seek to ingratiate themselves to the proletariat by fighting to improve their social conditions, but they do not want to remove the class system. The petty-bourgeoisie wish to end the revolution as soon as possible; they do not want to meet full proletariat demand because this would mean the abolishing of classes and with it the abolishing of their privilege. They desire to keep the proletariat under them but to make their situation more tolerable in order to quell their revolutionary spirit. "While the democratic petty-bourgeoisie wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible ... it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent ... For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of existing society but the foundation of a new one."<sup>4</sup>

Marx cautions the proletariat to be wary of the petty-bourgeoisie and to reject their offers of consolidation. The permanent revolution is one of constant vigilance and sustained action. World and permanent revolution stand in stark contrast to the theory of 'Socialism in one Country.' In order to properly understand the concept, we first must understand some of the history behind it.

The Communist Party in Europe went through five major iterations. Known as 'Internationals,' or the international organization that was comprised of the various communist parties of each country, they embodied the current modes of thought in the communist parties. The Second International of the Communist Party was deeply divided over the First World War. With the idea of international revolution still strong, some of the leaders urged the members of the International to remain neutral in the face of what they viewed as capitalist imperialism. In August 1914, in an abrupt about face from previous votes to remain uninvolved, the proletariat decided to support each of their own countries and the Second International was left in shambles. A Third International, one that still embodied the idea of a world proletariat united against the capitalist forces, was called. It was during this International that Joseph Stalin broke away from the idea of worldwide proletariat revolt that had dominated Marxist thought and introduced the concept of 'socialism in one country.'

'Socialism in one country' was the Stalinist idea that communism could be achieved, not with worldwide rebellion, but with the revolution and the construction of a socialist state within one nation. Leon Trotsky, a loyal revolutionary Marxist, was vehemently against this idea and argued in *The Third International after Lenin*:

Marxism has always taught the workers that even their struggle for higher wages and shorter hours cannot be successful unless waged as an international struggle ... The theory of the possibility of realizing socialism in one country destroys the inner connection between the patriotism of the victorious proletariat and the defeatism of the proletariat of the bourgeois countries ... It is not yet too late to return to the path of Marx and Lenin. It is this return that opens up the only conceivable road to progress.<sup>5</sup>

By 'the inner connection between...the victorious proletariat...and the proletariat of the bourgeois countries,' Trotsky speaks to the relationship that the members of a successful revolt have to the members of one that is unsuccessful. The 'victorious proletariat' supports their comrades in capitalist countries in the hope that another revolution will arise.

He identified five long-term repercussions that 'socialism in one country' would have.<sup>6</sup> The first is revision of the concepts of world revolution and capital imperialism. The second is the interests of the world proletariat would be secondary to the interests of the Soviet Union. The third is that it would be the role of the communist party and the world proletariat to protect the Soviet Union's socialist state against hostile capitalist forces. The fourth is the elevation of the Soviet Union to premier socialist state and the quieting of any debate or criticism of the state. Finally, as the idea of 'socialism in one country,' goes against the very idea of Marxist world revolution, the dissolution of the Third International. In his work *The Principles of Communism*, Frederick Engels echoed the idea of world revolution in his repudiation of socialism in one country. He posed the question if it were possible to have the revolution in one country alone and answered: "No. By creating the world market, big industry has already brought all the peoples of the Earth, and especially civilized peoples, into such close relation with one another that none is independent of what happens to the others."<sup>7</sup>

Despite Trotsky and Engels' warning, 'socialism in one country' was the foundation for the formation of the Soviet Union. It soon became the responsibility of the communist parties in various countries and the International to protect the new socialist state, at the expense of supporting communist revolutions in other countries. It particularly sought to protect the USSR from international intervention by capitalist forces. The Soviet Union was considered to be the totality of world revolution until the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban revolutions during the 1940s and 50s. This finally subverted the idea that the Soviet Union was the principal socialist state that had to be defended at all costs.

In order to properly understand the Stalinist State, the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin, and its eventual fall, we must first gain an understanding of the Stalinist economy that became the backbone of the new socialist state. The Stalinist economy was a planned centralist economy and was arguably one of the most defining characteristics of the Soviet Union. This economy had clear Marxist-Leninist

origins, stemming from Marx's ideas that capitalism would fall to the working class and a new socialist state would arise. This new socialist state would then go through two stages – first, socialism and eventually evolving into communism. During the transition into the first stage, a strong state would be required to guide the revolution through the remnants of various capitalist elements and to build up the socialist state's economy. After a socialist economy was built and a state of abundance was reached the state would transition into communism.

The Communist Party in the Soviet Union became the main feature of the state. Headed by Joseph Stalin, the party decided all state matters, including, but not limited to, the economy. The role of the party in the new planned socialist state was to oversee, plan, and direct all economic activities. The main economic task for the party was resource allocation, or determining what and how many supplies to send to the various industries. This was accomplished by setting economic priorities. These economic priorities, which set forth industry goals and made clear economic policy, were determined by the party and disseminated to industry officials.<sup>8</sup>

The Stalinist economic bureaucracy was comprised of the council of ministries, the state planning committee, various sub-committees, and the enterprises themselves. The council of ministries, together with the party, oversaw and governed all economic actions; as a general oversight body they did not perform the actual administrative work and instead preferred to leave this to a number of state committees. The state planning committee was responsible for operational planning, including short-term and long-term goals. These operational plans were intended for the industrial ministries, which then draw up plans for their own enterprises.

One huge task of a centrally planned socialist economy, especially one the size of the former USSR, is that of balancing supplies and demand. The method developed by the Soviets during the 1930's was called material-balance planning. As the name implies, this was a planned system that sought to maintain a balance of goods within the economy and did so by strictly regulating the input and output levels of the most important commodities. Commodities such as steel, machine tools, motor vehicles, and coal were of high economic priority and as such their input and output levels were controlled. For each of these commodities the state planning commission needed to maintain a material balance. The commission first had to determine the amount of supply that the industries would produce for the year. The commission then relied on data from past years in order to determine demand. In a capitalist economy, free market forces correct an imbalance in supply and demand. If there is excess supply, prices drop. If there is excess demand, prices will rise. In a planned socialist economy, the party controlling the price of the goods maintains a balance. Since there is rarely an excess of supply of critical commodities, the commission mostly had to balance out excess demand by reducing planned allocations because raising production targets could disrupt other balances. The commission decided where to reduce resource allocations by using the economic priorities mentioned previously. Industries that provided goods to the state, for the future communist society, and the military were favored over industries that produced consumer goods.

A rapidly expanding military was heavily supported by their command economy and the economic priorities that were set forth. As mentioned, they called for the production of military goods to be of the highest importance. Russia was still in a semi-feudal, agricultural phase when the Russian revolution took place in 1917. The rapid militarization was needed in order to reach the capabilities of the rest of the world, particularly the capital West. It was also an attempt to protect the burgeoning socialist state from international intervention by capitalist forces. While some would say that this militarization was unnecessary, others could argue that, as a state emerges from a revolution surrounded by hostile nations, militarization is not only necessary but is the only option. The centralized command economy coupled with this militarization of the state led to an authoritarian leadership under Stalin.

After the first atomic bombing during wartime in 1945, the militarization of the East became an all out technological war with the West. In order to ensure its own survival, the Soviet Union ramped up its own nuclear program. It is important to note here the rapid time scale in which the Soviet Union went from being a mainly agricultural society to competing with the West in technological matters. The West, as a reaction to the Soviet Union's nuclear capabilities and hoping to outstrip the USSR, advanced its own nuclear program. They soon both reached the state of mutually assured destruction.

Building its nuclear and space programs took a toll on the Soviet Union's economy. One weakness of a planned economy is that you cannot plan for everything. The Soviet Union may have seen the need

for militarization but they may not have seen how far they would have to go or the extent to which it would limit or destroy the non-military economy. With so much of its GDP going to the military, its non-military economy, such as consumer goods, housing, and food, was left in shambles. This allowed the capitalist West to surpass the Soviet Union in the production of non-military goods, leaving the communist East behind. Despite the Soviet Union's attempt at a communist society, and their brief success, the revolution did not follow them. World revolution never commenced and capitalism survived. Capitalism has survived by the very thing that will make the system collapse: expansion.

Globalization is the last stage in capitalism. After such, without other places to expand into and support the system, the system will fold. By no means are we to say that globalization has not been beneficial to some countries. The East Asian countries have done particularly well but this is due to a large amount of governmental oversight over the level of international infiltration into their respective country. But for the vast majority of countries that experience neo-colonization, it often leads to or means exploitation. Neo-colonization helps ameliorate the effect of a crisis of overproduction. In order to remain competitive, the capitalists must look elsewhere for cheap labor. To do this, capitalist countries expand their economies beyond their borders and into other underdeveloped countries. This was first done by outsourcing the production of basic consumer goods, like clothing, to factories in underdeveloped nations while keeping the production of advanced technology within the borders of the colonizing country. As the colonized countries became more proficient in the production of technology, even the production of technological goods was outsourced. Globalization, however, is doomed to fail. With a rapidly dwindling number of countries that developed nations are able to expand into, capitalism has nowhere to go.

What then should we expect to happen when capitalism reaches its end? What is the actuality of world revolution? Marx envisioned the entirety of the world proletariat, or at least of the more developed countries, uniting to overthrow the capitalist forces. Given the current state of international dependency and cooperation it is not hard to have the same vision. Class-consciousness is lacking among many of the proletariat. Too many strive for the upper class, a class they will most likely never see. But they have been conditioned to reach for it. Capitalism has become synonymous with democracy, with freedom. In fact, that is often far from the truth.

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," in *Ibid.*, 198
- <sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, "The Communist Manifesto" in *Ibid.*, 260
- <sup>4</sup> Karl Marx, "Address to the Communist League," in *Ibid.*, 306
- <sup>5</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 72-3
- <sup>6</sup> Ernest Mandel, *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism* (London: NLMB, 1970).
- <sup>7</sup> Frederick Engels, "The Principles of Communism," *Marxist Internet Archive*, at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>
- <sup>8</sup> Paul R. Gregory, "The Stalinist Command Economy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 507 (1990), 18-35