

“Capitalist restoration can only be carried out on the basis of a ruthless suppression of the working class.”

Letter to a historian in Moscow

David North
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Dear Professor Stepansky:

You indicate in your letter disagreement with my assessment of the present Soviet government, and state that “the main steps along the path of perestroika have been adopted by the people and working class.” If that is the case, that can only mean that the Soviet working class has decided to liquidate whatever remains of the social conquests of the October Revolution and restore capitalist exploitation — because that is without any question the goal of the policies which are being pursued by the Gorbachev regime.

Since the 1930s the Trotskyist movement has warned that unless the Soviet bureaucracy was overthrown by a political revolution of the working class and the Kremlin's police-state dictatorship was replaced by *genuine* soviets — that is, real *proletarian* organs of power — the bureaucratic degeneration of the USSR would lead inexorably to the restoration of capitalism. Trotsky's prediction is being vindicated.

I have before me the law on property that is to take effect on July 1, 1990. Its provisions include:

The right of ownership is recognized and protected by law in the USSR.

An owner possesses, utilizes and disposes of property belonging to him as he sees fit.

An owner has the right to do anything with his property that does not violate the law. He may use his property to carry out any sort of economic or other activity that is not prohibited by law. ...

Property may consist of land, mineral resources, water, plant and animal life, buildings, structures, equipment, objects of material and spiritual culture, money, securities and other assets.

The results of economic utilization of property

(output and income) belong to the owner of this property unless otherwise stipulated by law....

An owner may demand the elimination of any violation of his rights, even if such violations do not involve deprivation of possession.

Protection of the right of ownership is provided by a court, the state arbitration service or an arbitration tribunal.

The rights provided for in this article are also enjoyed by a person who, although not the owner, is in possession of property with the right of complete economic control, day-to-day management, or a lifetime possession with right of inheritance, or on some other grounds stipulated by law or contract.

Once this law is in effect, bourgeois property will enjoy legal protection as complete as exists in any capitalist country. In fact, the above-quoted provisions would provide a legal foundation for suppressing factory occupations, strikes and other forms of militant activity by the working class.

Taken as a whole, the law on property creates the legal framework for what amounts to a *social counterrevolution*. As a historian, I am sure that you understand the profound implications of these legal formulations. In relation to the bourgeois development of France, what would have been the implications of a law passed in 1815, after the return of the Bourbons, which restored aristocratic ownership of the land and the re-establishment of feudal privileges? Indeed, despite the Thermidorean political reaction which followed the fall of the Jacobins in 1794 and the formal restoration of the monarchy after the defeat of Napoleon, the old forms of property were never reestablished.

What is now taking place in the USSR is without

historical precedent. Stalinism represented a political reaction against the proletarian revolution of 1917. The bureaucracy usurped political power from the working class and utilized its monopoly of state power to defend its privileged and parasitic existence. However, it has until the advent of Gorbachev not attempted to actually dismantle the entire social structure of state property and reestablish capitalism. But that process is now underway, and its realization would signify a drastic lowering in the social position of the proletariat in a new bourgeois society. For this reason, capitalist restoration can only be carried out on the basis of a ruthless suppression of the working class.

In my opinion, it is out of the question that the restoration of capitalism would result in a bourgeois democratic system. First of all, the new Soviet bourgeoisie — recruited from the ranks of the bureaucracy, sections of the intelligentsia and, last but not least, the criminal element — would be essentially of a comprador character, operating as agents and functionaries of US, European and Japanese capital. Confronting a massive working class in a highly industrialized country, the social foundation of these petty agents of world imperialism would be far too weak to establish, let alone maintain, a democratic regime. A far more likely outcome of capitalist restoration would be some sort of military-police dictatorship, of a Bonapartist or openly fascist character.

It seems that many Soviet intellectuals, despite their personal inclination toward socialism, have been so disoriented by the Stalinist perversion of Marxism that they see no alternative to the program of capitalist restoration. They are rejecting the entire heritage of 1917 because they have succumbed to the historical lie — advanced by both the imperialists and the Soviet bureaucracy for decades — that Stalinism and Leninism are essentially the same. They are closing their eyes to the historical, political, social and cultural implications of this blind stampede toward capitalism.

My dear Professor Stepansky, I cannot agree with your assertion that the program of perestroika has been adopted by the working class. Where and when have the workers been asked if they desire to restore the capitalist system which they overthrew in 1917? Where and when have the workers been asked if they desire the creation of mass unemployment and the destruction of the nationalized industry which, despite the mismanagement and plundering of the bureaucrats, represents a historical advance?

For the last five years the debate over the future of the Soviet economy has been dominated by the Aganbegyans, Shmelyevs, Popovs, Petrakovs and other worshipers of the capitalist market — in other words, by those who criticize Stalinism *from the right*! Their proposals simply echo the views of the most backward and rightwing ideologists of capitalism in the United States. Last week, the German liberal weekly journal, *Die Zeit*, carried an interview with Petrakov, the chief economic adviser of Gorbachev. He expressed himself in the most brutally reactionary terms. He openly proclaimed that the living standards of an individual should be based on the amount of money he has, not on his social needs. People should be given meat, he said, not because they are hungry but because they have money! They should go on vacation to the south not because they are sick but because they have money! They should have a large apartment not because they have many children but because they have money!

Please reread Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* in which he so brilliantly characterized the money-nexus of capitalist society that is expressed in such a vulgar form by Mr. Petrakov. The capitalist is ugly, but he can buy beauty because he has money! He is stupid but he can buy intelligent people to think for him, because he has money! — and so on. That Mr. Petrakov's views have far more in common with those of Malthus than Marx is clear enough. But let us bear in mind that what is at issue is not merely abstract philosophical questions. The implementation of Petrakov's program would result in the impoverishment of tens of millions. Indeed, what is taking place in Poland today is only a small-scale anticipation of the horrifying social misery that capitalist restoration would bring to the Soviet people.

I will conclude my argument, for the time being, at this point.

With best regards,

David North

National Secretary of the Workers League



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