

A question on socialism and communism

15 September 1998

To the SEP,

The condition in Malaysia is the same as it is in most of the world. Profit minded leaders and people leave little room for the poor and needy. The Government suits the rich businessmen and politicians, not the people. As it is everywhere, things are done for the upper classes, never for the greater good of the greater number. Although some welfare groups are found, there is no such thing as the dole here. The poor depend on the slight assistance of the government and the charity of the rich. The rich in turn look down on others and make money at the lower classes expense.

A strong socialist minded government, like that of Mitterrand (France) in 1981 is needed to close the gap between rich and poor and also to increase the standards of living for all, not just those who pay higher taxes. As Marx said, 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'.

Concerning the socialist way, is it like communism? I have often pondered the similarities and find that much is missing. For example, both aim to create equality. Yet, no communist country has ever succeeded in doing that. Would it be the same if there was a socialist government, where the government plays a major role in peoples' lives? And, is a Trotskyist party, is it not communist? For wasn't Trotsky a firm believer in communism before he was assassinated? If it is not too much of a bother, could you please explain the goals of the socialists compared to the goals of the communists so that I may explain it to my many interested friends in hope of getting them to join and create a future socialist world.

Yours sincerely,

BM

Dear BM,

Your question regarding socialism and communism is an important one. From the outset, it is necessary to rescue these terms from the distortions and falsifications that have surrounded them for most of

this century.

Socialism is, by its very nature, international. Its establishment will require the overthrow of the capitalist state in at least the major imperialist centres by the working class and the establishment of genuine workers' states. A socialist society will be one that, as Marx explained, stands higher in its economic development than anything so far achieved under capitalism. Production and distribution will be carried out according to a rational plan, not the anarchic drive for profit.

Communism will be achieved only when all the material conditions for inequality have been overcome through the development of science and technique, and when the state itself begins to 'wither away'. As Trotsky explains in his brilliant work *The Revolution Betrayed*: 'Capitalism prepared the conditions and forces for a social revolution: technique, science and the proletariat. The communist structure cannot, however, immediately replace the bourgeois society. The material and cultural inheritance from the past is wholly inadequate for that...Marx names the first stage of the new society 'the lowest stage of communism' in distinction from the highest, where together with the last phantoms of want, material inequality will disappear. In this sense socialism and communism are frequently contrasted as the lower and higher stages of the new society.'

From this brief outline, it should be clear that no socialist, much less communist, society has yet existed. While the working class carried through a socialist revolution in Russia in 1917, Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks never conceived that socialism could be established in that backward country, without the extension of the revolution to the more advanced countries. The emergence of the Stalinist bureaucracy was, in the final analysis, an expression, inside the Soviet Union, of the failure of the revolution to spread; in other words, it was the product of the growing isolation of the first workers' state in a hostile

imperialist world economy.

In 1924 Stalin advanced the reactionary anti-Marxist theory of the 'building of socialism in a single country'. On the basis of this nationalist conception, he carried through the betrayal of the October 1917 revolution and the murder, not only of its leaders, but of hundreds of thousands of socialist workers and intellectuals. His blood purges of 1936-38 were aimed above all at Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition--those who continued to fight for socialist internationalism. Trotsky was eventually assassinated by one of Stalin's agents in Mexico, in 1940.

Stalin carried out this political genocide of Marxists--of genuine socialists and communists-- in the name of socialism and communism.

In this monumental political fraud, he was assisted by the bourgeoisie and the capitalist media, as well as by the social-democrats (Labor parties), trade unions and of course the Stalinist Communist parties around the world. Their role was to compromise the struggle for a socialist perspective in the eyes of advanced workers throughout the world, and in this way, consolidate bourgeois rule.

The fact that you identify, in your letter, socialism with social democracy (reformism) in the form of the Mitterrand regime in France, and communism with the former Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China, demonstrates just how successful they were.

The Mitterrand government, like social democratic regimes in Australia, Britain, Spain, etc was a capitalist regime, committed to leaving the ownership of wealth and profit squarely in private hands. Under Mitterrand, the French working class continued to be exploited by French and global capital. And, like his counterparts, Mitterrand left the working class in France a legacy of mass unemployment, and declining living standards. Under the Australian Labor governments between 1983 and 1996, to cite another example, the gap between rich and poor more than doubled.

The world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, of which the Socialist Equality Party is the Australian section, strives to revive a genuine socialist culture in the international working class. This requires, above all, an assimilation of the lessons of the experiences through which the working class has passed throughout the 20th

century--the most crucial of which was the rise, decline and fall of the Soviet Union.

I hope this helps in answering your questions. I urge you to visit regularly the ICFI's international web site, the *World Socialist Web Site*, where you will find a great deal of political and theoretical material on the history and principles of Trotskyism.

We would welcome any further questions or comments you may have.

With regards,

Linda Tenenbaum

See Also:

Leon Trotsky and the Fate of Socialism in the 20th Century

[A lecture by David North]



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