

MARXISM THE FUTURE!

“If you want a belly laugh. try going to Eastern Europe, look someone in the eye and try telling them about the virtues of state-owned monopoly”. This comment from Bob Hawke at the recent Federal A.L.P. conference was effective In scoring a point against the A.L.P. Left-wing on the issue of privatisation. The ruling class is cock-a- hoop. Thanks to the very real failure of stallnism (which they call socialism) the capitalists now have the right to penetrate Eastern Europe with their Investment. As well as this they now consider that they can call their right to plunder the authority of “rational economics”.

“Capitalism works and socialism doesn’t” is the lesson they hope to draw for the world in order to rationalise their worldwide exploitation. Millions face no future under this system apart from austerity. The ruling class want to ensure that they see no real alternative. They are backed by millions of ex-”so-called” communists who are happy to disown their past. In Britain the Sunday Times declares “COMMUNISM R.I.P.” and this bosses’ rag is backed up by Gareth Stedman Jones in the publication Marxism Today. This academic renegade informs us that the only aspects of Marxism worth preserving are those insights which “have long ago been absorbed into the mainstream of social democrat and liberal thought.”

In Australia we have witnessed the debate in Australian Left Review in the February this year, between Paddy Mc Guinness, writer for the Australian, and Brian Aarons, former leader of the now dormant Communist Party and now of New Left Party.

For Paddy McGuinness capitalism is economic rationality: “To me it is clear enough that if one is genuinely committed to environmental issues, for example, it is but dangerous and stupid to rule out from the beginning analytical approaches or policy measures which might help tackle problems just because these are not in accord with the kitch”. For Paddy McGuinness socialism is just rhetoric “kitch” and real economics means capitalism.

The problem is that to a degree he has a point— for too many leftists rhetoric does not have a scientific basis and socialism is posed as merely a moral ideal. For example the Communist Party used to give out idealist models of socialism while their practical measures amounted to trying to make capitalism operate better. It was Marx who demonstrated the bankruptcy of capitalism and the economic basis for communism. Today, thanks to the bankruptcy of Marx’s proclaimed adherents it is the capitalists who raise the banner of economic rationality and precisely when their system faces the biggest crisis since the great depression.

So what does Brian Aarons counter this with? “Similarly, there is no reason why a socialist economy should not have a market or even private enterprise”.

“Where to now for history? Who knows?! The lesson of history is that it is foolish to expect anything except the unexpected. In this situation there are various possibilities. For what its worth, my own feeling, and bias, is that any real progressive possibility latent in the late 20th Century lies in the creative merging of the socialist, social democratic and liberal tradition together with the new ideas of the green feminist and multicultural movements, to provide the ideological basis for a new social system beyond all which have been tried” This ideological dogs breakfast hands the debate to Paddy Mc Guinness, game, set and match!

No! Brian Arons! you can-not maintain a socialist society with capitalist economic relationships!
Let's look at what Lenin had to say on the question

“I shall sell and make my bit; the more I make the less I shall starve and the more others will.’ This is the accursed legacy of private property which left the people to starve even when there was enough food in the country when a measly minority grew rich both on wealth and on poverty That is the economic law that says that when there is a food shortage, frantic profiteering is engendered by every step toward what is called free trade, all attempts to encourage it are utterly pernicious and are a step back from the work which the Food Commission is doing amidst incredible difficulties in the fight against millions of protiteers whom we inherited from capitalism with its old private property maxim. ‘Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost’. If we cannot root out this evil than we shall never build socialism.”

Speech at a joint session of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee, the Moscow Soviet and All-Russia Trade Union Congress January 17, 1919 Collected Works Volume 28 page 396

The New Economic Policy introduced by the Bolshevics appears to be in contradiction to this. However when they introduced it. as a temporary measure, they were well aware of the potential for counterrevolution. They urged the strengthening of the organised working class organisation to fight the counter-revolutionary threat. In their article In Socialist Worker September '89 entitled Human Values and the Future of Socialism leading members of the Democratic Socialist Party, Jim Percy and Doug Lorimer justify perestroika by placing it under the same banner as the N.E.P. Well! there are some similarities. However it is the differences that are crucial. Firstly, there is no indication that perestroika is merely a temporary measure. There is no strengthening of proletarian power to combat what reactionary tendencies that may emerge. On the contrary — for Gorbachev it is a principle to strengthen precisely the nonproletarian sectors. For Gorbachev, the market is the principle. He has rejected planning outright!

Fighting bureaucracy for Lenin was not a question of promoting human values as opposed to bad models. Both Lenin and Trotsky saw the struggle against bureaucracy in term of fighting alien class forces — those with a material position at the expense of the working class. Gorbachev hates many aspects of the bureaucracy. But he fights this by promoting precisely those sectors antagonistic to the proletariat. Under Gorbachev inflation and unemployment have become features of society in the Soviet Union. So has small scale profiteering. Nationalist tendencies, bureaucratically suppressed under Stalin have been exasperated.

If you accept the post- capitalist stalinist states as socialist then it is clear that socialism does not solve the problems of the environment or the liberation of women or the question of nationalities or even qualitatively improves the conditions of the working class. Well there are many countries superexploited by Imperlism where workers would be happy if their conditions were improved to the level of those in Eastern Europe. But Eastern Europe is hardly a shining example of what the new society should be like. We have a responsibility to the working class to explain the degeneration of these states. If we cannot explain this degeneration in terms of material forces then, as Paddy McGuinness points out, we descend into kitsch.

To consider these societies to be socialist and to draw conclusions about socialism equating it with bureaucratic degeneration. is to do the cause of socialism a gross disservice. The planning that

doesn't work within the Soviet Union is not the planning of proletarian power. It is an attempt to plan through a bureaucratic command system. This lacks both the discipline of the market and the discipline of workers' control. The result is gross inefficiency. Through planning we will ensure the material comfort of all and protect the environment.

Karl Marx understood that capitalism would destroy the environment but he saw the destruction as a product of a particular economic system. From the stalinist degeneration it appears to many that the problem is not economics but technology itself. This is the conclusion drawn by the Green movement in its various forms. As a result Green strategies involve token guerilla actions, the personal politics of trying to buy ideologically sound products and even promoted ideologically sound capitalists. The Greens welcome support from the Australian Democrats. Despite proclaiming a fundamentally radical vision of society In terms of Its real Immediate programme they cover for capitalism. They are often anti- working class when they blame working class consumption and not the bosses' profits.

Whilst some of the issues they raise are supportable there can be no concessions made to Green ideology (as made by the DSP). Gorbachev argues that all classes have an interest in defending the planet. The DSP rationalise this by pointing out the Comintern argued that it is permissible to make a limited bloc with the national bourgeoisie when it fights imperialism. The circumstances are totally different. For a start even a limited block involves ruthless exposure of the inconsistencies of the national bourgeoisie. In no way is it to be conceded that all classes have an interest in fighting Imperialism. But secondly; the defence of the environment requires the destruction of the bourgeoisie. To invent a criterion of universal values, Involving all including the bourgeoisie seriously degrades, in fact sells out the struggle to expose the capitalist system

The future Is red. As In Marx's day it Is the proletariat that holds the key to the liberation of all humanity. Today there is chaos and pessimism thanks to stalinism Marxism has been totally degraded in the eyes of millions of workers. The re-establishment of Marxism as a living tradition requires a ruthless exposure of stalinism — a materialist explanation for stalinism. If the participants of this conference can make one small step toward the regeneration of Marxism as a living force then we are part of the movement that will liberate humanity. The alternative is degeneration and despair!

Communist Tendency

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