

REVOLUTION

Summer 1984
Issue number 52

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Revolution (ISSN 0193-3612) is the propaganda organ of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP,USA). It is published quarterly.

Correspondence: We welcome correspondence to *Revolution* magazine. All letters and manuscripts should be clean copy, typed and triple-spaced and become the property of *Revolution* magazine. They should be sent to: RCP Publications, P.O. Box 1317, New York, NY 10185

Subscriptions:

In the U.S.: \$14.00/year
Other countries: \$16.50/year – surface mail
\$24.00/year – air mail
\$20.00/year – institutional rate

Payable by check or money order.

Send all subscription orders to: RCP Publications,
P.O. Box 3486, Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL 60654.

Editor's Note

Two years ago the Revolutionary Communist Party issued a call for a debate on the nature and international role of the Soviet Union. The call focused on the urgency of the Soviet question for the revolutionary movement today; as its opening passage explained:

"The long raging debate over the nature and international role of the Soviet Union is intensifying again all over the world and needs to be made sharper and clearer still. The heightening is a product of important world developments over the relatively recent period, including both the reversal in China after Mao's death and the sharpening of the conflict between the Soviet Union and U.S. imperialism.

"Splits have emerged over this question within revolutionary movements, and long-standing alignments have broken with new ones forming. New research and theoretical work has been published and has been welcomed, provoking still newer controversy and debate. Some who claimed to be Maoist have 'reevaluated' their stand on the Soviet Union — while the Chinese revisionists themselves, despite all their proclaimed anti-Sovietism, are unable to find anything in Mao's revolutionary scientific analysis of the process of capitalist restoration that they can uphold.

"Wherever revolutionary-minded people gather, and wherever new forces break into mass struggle — the question pushes itself into the front; 'Soviet Union: friend or foe; capitalist or socialist?' What is its underlying nature, its fundamental class relations, what laws of motion motivate its actions across the globe — and fundamentally, how does this superpower confront the revolutionary struggles of the world? As an ally? Or as one more imperialist power to be fought, overthrown and destroyed?"

The timeliness of the call was borne out in practice. Eight hundred people attended the main debate between Raymond Lotta and Albert Szymanski, and hundreds more turned out for a series of six smaller panel discussions in the days before. The international turnout and participation was strong, including original theoretical contributions from Colombia and Uganda printed in the *Revolutionary Worker* newspaper in the

period leading up to the debate. But what most distinguished the entire event, what set it off in an increasingly arid theoretical atmosphere on the Left, was the hard-edged clarity of the theoretical confrontation between the two positions: those who uphold the revolutionary communist analysis of the Soviet Union as an imperialist power, and those (including the position's leading exponents) who insist on the socialist character of Soviet society.

This can be seen in the two books generated by the debate. The first — *The Soviet Union: Socialist or Social-Imperialist? Essays Toward the Debate On the Nature of Soviet Society* — came out before the debate and featured essays by David Laibman, Al Szymanski, and Santosh K. Mehrota and Patrick Clawson. The first two authors published separate critiques of the Maoist thesis of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union, while the latter two collaborated on an exposure of the imperialist character of Soviet relations with India. The book also reprinted the important 1978 article by the RCP, USA entitled "The 'Tarnished Socialism' Thesis, or the Political Economy of Soviet Social-Imperialism." A new introduction, foreshadowing themes later developed and elaborated on by Raymond Lotta at the debate, accompanied the essay.

The second book — *The Soviet Union: Socialist or Social-Imperialist? The Question is Joined* — is a transcript of the New York City debate itself, between Szymanski and Lotta. Lotta's presentation, of course, built off the pioneering work done by Mao and those grouped around him in China during the '60s, as well as important theoretical work since then, most notably the RCP's own *Red Papers 7: How Capitalism Has Been Restored in the Soviet Union*, published in 1974, and Bob Avakian's path-breaking *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*, published in 1981. While firmly grounded in that tradition, Lotta's presentation clearly broke new ground in analyzing capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union.

Lotta chose not to focus on specific cases of counter-revolutionary betrayal or reactionary social policies and/or institutions in various spheres of Soviet society; instead, he attempted to lay bare how the laws of capital operate in the Soviet Union and how that operation forms part of the global dynamic of imperialist accumulation. In doing so, he addressed four main points: the commanding role of profit in the Soviet economy and the corresponding commodification of labor power; the character of economic planning in the Soviet Union and the assertion of the laws of capital through the medium of the plan itself; the manifestation of the "many-ness" of capital in the Soviet economy in the forms of competition and fragmentation peculiar to the Soviet Union; and finally, the roots of the compulsion driving the Soviet Union and its bloc into ever sharper confrontation with the U.S.-led imperialist bloc.

The above theses can be said to form the point of departure for the articles in this issue of *Revolution*; the articles contained here should be read as complementary to the earlier books. None of the articles attempts an overall critique of the capitalist nature of Soviet society; that, we feel, has been outlined in the Lotta work. What they do show is how the demands of capital and compulsions of imperialism have

twisted and dominated various and important spheres of Soviet society. The first article of this issue, "Notes Toward An Analysis of the Soviet Bourgeoisie," by Lenny Wolff and Aaron Davis, can be said in a sense to answer the constantly offered challenges of Laibman, Szymanski, et al., to prove the existence of a Soviet bourgeoisie. The article is important not only for its research and analysis on the class formation in Soviet society and the reproduction of the Soviet hierarchy, but also for its methodological critique of Szymanski's and Laibman's views on the state and the functioning of the bourgeoisie, as well as their overall approach to social analysis.

Mike Ely's "Against the 'Lesser Evil' Thesis: Soviet Preparations for World War 3," details Soviet military preparations and strategic doctrine, and puts that data in a Leninist analytical context. Ely specifically criticizes the Kautskyite strain of apologetics for the Soviet military buildup that has emerged in recent years, as well as the illusions of many more honest opponents of the U.S. military buildup. No issue is more central today than the imperialists' preparations for a new — and horrible — war of redivision.

Finally, Soviet education is often put forward as a strong point of Soviet society. Yet Leona Krasny's article "Soviet Education: Reading, Writing, and Revisionism," exposes the real content of Soviet education and begins to analyze its social role in reproducing a bourgeois social division of labor.

In all, the articles brought together in this issue can be said to round out, in a certain sense, the process begun two years ago with the initial call for the debate. All of them were in fact developed out of preparatory research for the debate. The flurry of theoretical work necessitated by the debate (itself called forth by larger historical necessity) has now been synthesized.

In no way does this mean that the question of the Soviet Union has somehow been settled. Marx's aphorism on the relation between the weapons of criticism and the criticism by weapons is to the point here — the Soviets, after all, have an army, they represent a material force, and their influence cannot be vanquished by ideological struggle alone, however sharp. On the other hand, without such struggle no bourgeoisie — including the one currently holding power in Moscow — will ever be vanquished!

Beyond that, however, the debate's importance goes to the heart of the very goal of the revolution, the vision of the society the proletariat has been fighting to construct since the Paris Commune. As Raymond Lotta said in his concluding remarks at the debate, "How we analyze the historical experience of the Soviet Union and how we analyze the developing situation in the world has everything to do with the kind of struggle we wage. Communism can only be achieved through the fiercest, the most determined, and the most conscious struggle to make a leap into the future of mankind."

Such was the importance of the May 1983 debate, and such continues to be the importance of the ongoing struggle over this question. In today's world, when the likelihood of world war and the necessity for world revolution ever more urgently pose themselves, that is no small thing.