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BOOK REVIEW

This issue of COMbat is devoted to the review of a new book of outstanding interest, namely:

PERESTROIKA: THE COMPLETE COLLAPSE OF REVISIONISM

by HARPAL BRAR
London; 1992.

INTRODUCTION

Harpal Brar makes his political position crystal clear right from the book's initial dedication, which is

' . . . to J. V. Stalin: Fearless and Faithful Friend
of the International Proletariat and Resolute Defender of Socialism
and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat'.

In a series of well-documented articles originally published in Lalkar, the journal of the Indian Workers' Association in Britain, the author traces in detail the process of deviation from Marxism-Leninism, and resultant degeneration of socialism, which began with Khrushchev and ultimately led, under Gorbachev, to the liquidation of the Soviet Union as a state.

The author makes it clear that it is a testimony to the strength of socialism, under the leadership of giants like Lenin and Stalin, that it was destroyed not by open anti-socialist aggression from without, but by treachery from within, initially by revisionist departures from Marxism-Leninism masquerading as 'creative developments of Marxism-Leninism'. He notes that it took more than forty years from the first attacks upon Stalin -- attacks which he sees correctly as attacks upon Marxism-Leninism and upon socialism! -- to bring about the destruction of the state created by the October Revolution.

No review can do justice to the great importance of this eloquently written and inspiring book, not merely to Marxist-Leninists, but to everyone who wishes to penetrate beneath the surface of the current 'socialism is dead!' propaganda to real history.

It would be a futile exercise to try to summarise the mass of material which fills the book. Among the most important questions covered are 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost', Stalin and the role of the peasantry, Stalin and the 'decapitation' of the Party and the Red Army, and Stalin and the 'Cult of Personality'.

However, a critic is expected to criticise -- which is far from easy and borders upon churlishness in the case of such an undoubtedly brilliant work as this! So . . .

'CONSERVATIVE' = MARXIST-LENINIST?

The author alleges that Marxist-Leninists, whom he equates with

" . . . the so-called conservatives", (p. 288)

constituted

" . . . a majority at the 28th Congress" (p. 288).

of the CPSU in July 1990 and that these were

" . . . staunchly Marxist-Leninist forces led by people such as Ligachev" (p. 285).

Since the author has spent nearly 300 pages detailing how Marxist-Leninists had been removed from positions of influence over the previous forty years, since the draft platform to abolish the Communist Party's sole leadership role was adopted by the CC Plenum on 7 February 1990

" . . . with only one vote against",
('Keesing's Record of World Events'. Volume 36; p. 37,235)

(the opposing vote being that of Boris Yeltsin), and since Ligachev declared at the congress on 3 July 1990

" . . . that he could see no alternative to 'perestroika'"
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 36; p. 37,615).

it seems clear that 'conservatives' such as Ligachev were in no way Marxist-Leninists fighting against 'perestroika' and for the restoration of a genuine socialist society. They were, in fact, revisionists -- but revisionists who were opposed to denationalisation, to the replacement of the existing state capitalism by free enterprise capitalism (which it is much more difficult to pass off as 'socialism!'), who were opposed to

" . . . allowing the Soviet Union to be broken up". p. 292).

MAOISM = MARXISM-LENINISM?

But the most serious flaw in the book, in our opinion, is its failure to expose -- indeed, its open support for -- Chinese revisionism.

Mao Tse-tung is described by the author as

" . . . China's greatest proletarian revolutionary"; (p. 304),

and as a result of the revolution completed in 1949, China is said to have had

a

" . . . socialist system" (p. 304, 306, 309)

based on

" . . . the dictatorship of the proletariat" (p. 306-07).

The CPC's Assessment of Stalin in 1956

In his exposure of the motives for the Soviet revisionists' attack upon Stalin, Harpal Brar 'contrasts' Khrushchev's 1956 assesment of Stalin with that made in the same year by the Communist Party of China. But this contrast emerges only from the author's selective quotation (p. 203) from the CPC document 'On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat'. This same statement goes on to say:

"Stalin erroneously exaggerated his own role and counterposed his individual authority to the collective leadership, and as a result certain of his actions were opposed to certain fundamental Marxist-Leninist concepts which he himself had propagated. . . .

When any leader of the Party or the state places himself over and above the Party and the masses instead of in their midst, when he alienates himself from the masses, he ceases to have an all-round, penetrating insight into the affairs of the state. As long as this was the case, even so outstanding a personality as Stalin could not avoid making unrealistic and erroneous decisions on certain important matters. Stalin failed to draw lessons from isolated, local and temporary mistakes on certain issues, and so failed to prevent them from becoming serious mistakes of a nationwide or prolonged nature. During the latter part of his life Stalin took more and more pleasure in this cult of the individual, and violated the Party's system of democratic centralism and the principle of combining collective leadership with individual responsibility. As a result he made some serious mistakes such as the following: he broadened the scope of the suppression of counter-revolution; he lacked the necessary vigilance on the eve of the anti-fascist war; he failed to pay proper attention to the further development of agriculture and the material welfare of the peasantry; he gave certain wrong advice on the international communist movement, and, in particular, made a wrong decision on the question of Yugoslavia". ('On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', in: J. Gittings: 'Survey of the Sino-Soviet Dispute: A Commentary and Extracts from the Recent Polemics: 1963-1967'; London; 1968; p. 291-92).

It will be seen that the CPC's assesment of Stalin in fact differs little from that made in Khrushchev's secret speech and that the long list of Stalin's 'mistakes' includes 'in partcular' the condemnation by the Cominform of Yugoslav revisionism!

The Stages of the Revolutionary Process in Russia and China

Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tse-tung agree that in countries such as Tsarist Russia and pre-1949 China, the revolutionary process had to pass through two successive stages: the stage of democratic revolution, and the stage of socialist revolution. Harpal Brar quotes on page 121 the slogans put forward by Lenin for these two stages of the revolutionary process in Russia:

"The first slogan was: together with the whole of the peasantry against the autocracy; the second slogan: together with the poor peasantry against the bourgeoisie".

Stalin endorses Lenin's view that the accomplishment of the second stage of this revolutionary process, the stage of socialist revolution, requires 'a fierce class struggle' against the bourgeoisie:

"Can the capitalists be ousted and the roots of capitalism destroyed without a fierce class struggle? No, they cannot. . . .

There have been no cases in history where the dying bourgeoisie has not exerted all its remaining strength to preserve its existence".

(J. V. Stalin: 'The Right Deviation in the CPSU', in: 'Works', Volume 12; Moscow; 1955; p. 34,40).

'Peaceful Transition to Socialism'

However, Mao Tse-tung's conception of the second stage of the revolutionary process -- the stage of socialist revolution -- differs from that of Lenin and Stalin. While the latter present this stage as being directed against the national bourgeoisie, Mao Tse-tung presents the contradiction between the working class and the capitalist class in China as a contradiction 'among the people' which can be resolved peacefully because in China the national capitalists are 'willing to accept socialist transformation':

"In this country the contradiction between the working class and the national bourgeoisie comes under the category of contradictions among the people. . . . In the period of the socialist revolution, exploitation of the working class for profit constitutes one side of the character of the national bourgeoisie, while . . . its willingness to accept socialist transformation constitutes the other. . . . The contradiction between the national bourgeoisie and the working class is one between exploiter and exploited. . . . But in the concrete conditions of China, this antagonistic contradiction between the two classes, if properly handled, can . . . be resolved by peaceful methods".

(Mao Tse-tung: 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People', in: 'Selected Works', Volume 5; Peking; 1977; p. 386).

Mao goes on to explain that by the 'correct handling' of this contradiction -- handling which can bring about a 'peaceful resolution' of the antagonistic contradiction between the working class and the national capitalist class -- he means a policy of the

" . . . ideological remoulding"

(Mao Tse-tung: *ibid.*; p. 403).

of the national bourgeoisie.

But this conception of the bourgeoisie being 'ideologically remoulded' into 'willingness to accept socialism' and so refraining from class struggle against it is clearly analogous to the revisionist thesis of Bukharin of the Russian capitalist elements 'growing into socialism' -- a conception on which Stalin justly comments:

"Capitalists in town and country . . . growing into socialism -- such is the absurdity Bukharin has arrived at. . . .

Either Marx's theory of the class struggle, or the theory of the capitalists growing into socialism. . . .

Either an irreconcilable antagonism of class interests, or the theory of the harmony of class interests. . . .

The abolition of classes by means of the extinction of the class struggle and by the capitalists growing into socialism -- such is Bukharin's formula".

(J. V. Stalin: *op. cit.*; p. 32, 33, 36).

'Building Socialism without the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Stalin asks:

"If the capitalists of town and country . . . are growing into socialism, is the dictatorship of the proletariat needed at all?"
(J. V. Stalin: op. cit.; p. 32-33).

Mao Tse-tung -- logically on the basis of his revisionist premise -- answers this question in the negative. He alleges that the 'new-democratic state' -- in which the working class is said to share power with the national bourgeoisie (theso-called 'middle bourgeoisie') and even with a section of the landlord class (the so-called 'enlightened gentry') and which he defines as a state of 'all our people' -- can build socialism in China:

"The middle bourgeoisie constitutes the national bourgeoisie as distinct from the comprador class"

(Mao Tse-tung: 'Current Problems of Tactics in the Anti-Japanese United Front', in: 'Selected Works', Volume 2; Peking; 1965; p. 423).

-- the comprador class being that section of the Chinese bourgeoisie closely linked with and dependent upon foreign imperialism.

"Places in the organs of political power should be allocated as follows: one-third to . . . the proletariat and the poor peasantry; one-third to . . . the petty bourgeoisie, and the remaining one-third to . . . the middle bourgeoisie and the enlightened gentry".
(Mao Tse-tung: ibid.; p. 427).

"Our state is a people's democratic dictatorship. . . . The aim of this dictatorship is to protect all our people so that they can . . . make China a socialist country".

(Mao Tse-tung: 'On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People', in: 'Selected Works', Volume 5; Peking; 1977; p. 387).

Far from suppressing the Chinese bourgeoisie, the 'people's democratic dictatorship' will permit its political parties to exist over a long period of time:

"Why should the bourgeois and petty bourgeois democratic parties be allowed to exist . . . over a long period of time? . . . Because . . . it . . . is the policy of the Communist Party to exist side by side with the democratic parties for a long time to come".
(Mao Tse-tung: ibid.; p. 413).

and will permit the Chinese capitalist class freely to put forward the ideology of its class:

"It is inevitable that the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie will give expression to their own ideologies. It is inevitable that they will stubbornly assert themselves on political and ideological questions by every possible means. You cannot expect them to do otherwise. We should not use the method of suppression and prevent them from expressing themselves, but should allow them to do so".
(Mao Tse-tung: ibid.; p. 411).

Indeed, Mao demands that the Communist Party, in this 'people's

democratic dictatorship', should adopt a policy of 'free competition', of 'liberalism', in all fields -- including that of political ideology:

"In the light of China's specific conditions . . . letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is the policy for promoting progress in the arts and sciences. . . .

What should be our policy towards non-Marxist ideas? . . . Will it do to ban such ideas and deny them any opportunity for expression? Certainly not. . . . If correct ideas are pampered in hothouses and never exposed to the elements and immunised against disease, they will not win out against erroneous ones. Therefore, it is only by employing the method of discussion, criticism and reasoning that we can really settle issues. . . .

Literally the two slogans -- let a hundred flowers blossom and let a hundred schools of thought contend -- have no class character: the proletariat can turn them to account, and so can the bourgeoisie".

(Mao Tse-tung: *ibid.*; p. 408, 410-11, 412).

And although Mao speaks of the importance of

" . . . the leadership of the Communist Party',
(Mao Tse-tung: *ibid.*; p. 412).

he makes it clear that, during the building of socialism, this leadership should be shared with the parties of the national capitalist class on the basis of 'long-term mutual supervision':

"Mutual supervision among the various parties is . . . a long-established fact. . . . It means that the Communist Party can exercise supervision over the democratic parties, and vice versa".

(Mao Tse-tung: *ibid.*; p. 413-14).

The Chinese revisionists' conception of 'socialism' is one in which only the enterprises of the comprador capitalists are nationalised, while those of the national capitalists are gradually and peacefully transformed into 'socialist enterprises' in alliance with these capitalists, through state capitalism, using the machinery of the 'new-democratic state':

"In our country . . . we can proceed with our step by step socialist transformation by means of the existing machinery of state. . . . We have in our country a relationship of alliance between the working class and the national bourgeoisie. . . .

The socialist transformation of capitalist industry and commerce by the state will be gradually realised over a relatively long period of time, through various forms of state capitalism. . . .

The aim can be achieved by peaceful struggle".
(Liu Chao-chi: Report on the Draft Constitution of the People's Republic of China; Peking; 1962; p. 26, 27).

"Under the conditions existing in our country, the use of peaceful means, i.e., the method of persuasion and education, can change . . . capitalist ownership into socialist ownership".

(Mao Tse-tung: Speech at Supreme State Conference, January 1956, in: Kuan Ta-Tung: 'The Socialist Transformation of Capitalist Industry and Commerce in China'; Peking; 1960; p. 40-41).

The method of transforming the enterprises of the Chinese national capitalists into 'socialist enterprises' was through the formation of joint state-private enterprises:

"The advanced form of state capitalism in China is called a joint state-private enterprise. This is the principal way through which the transition of capitalist industry and commerce into socialist enterprises is being effected.

A joint state-private enterprise is one in which the state invests and to which it assigns personnel to share in management with the capitalists. . . .

A fixed rate of interest was paid by the state for the total investment of the capitalists in the joint state-private enterprises. . . .

. The interest was fixed at a rate of 5% per annum".

(Kuan Ta-Tung: *ibid.*; p. 75. 84, 86-87).

The Chinese national capitalists not only had no objection to this form of 'socialist transformation', in which the state invested in their enterprises and guaranteed their profits, they welcomed it with cymbals and drums!:

"Why were there increasing numbers of capitalists who petitioned of their own free will to have their enterprises changed over to joint state-private operation? . . . The statistics of 64 factories in various parts of China which had gone over to joint operation earlier than others revealed that their profits were increasing. Taking their profits in 1950 as 100, it was . . . 306 in 1953. . . .

The capitalists paraded with the beating of cymbals and drums, while sending in their petitions for the change-over of their enterprises".

(Kuan Ta-tung: *op. cit.*; p. 78-79, 84).

The completion in 1956 of this programme of the formation of joint state-private enterprises was later portrayed by the Chinese revisionists as 'the completion of the socialist revolution':

"The socialist revolution in the ownership of the means of production was fundamentally completed in 1956";

(Chou En-lai: Report on the Work of the Government, in: 'Main Documents of the First Session of the Third National Congress of the People's Republic of China'; Peking; 1965; p. 26).

"Socialist relations of production have been established";

(Mao Tse-tung: *op. cit.*; p. 394).

while the 'new-democratic state' (previously defined as 'a class alliance which included the national capitalist class') was now portrayed as 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', as 'socialist state power':

"The dictatorship of the proletariat in our country rests on firm foundations and our socialist state power is unshakeable"

(Chou En-lai: *op. cit.*; p. 28).

But behind this false facade of 'socialism', as Mao himself admits, the Chinese national capitalist class continued to exploit the working class:

"In joint state-private industrial and commercial enterprises, capitalists still get a fixed rate of interest on their capital, that is

to say, exploitation still exists".
(Mao Tse-tung: op. cit.; p. 394).

Maoism -- Summary

It must be clear to any objective Marxist-Leninist, even from the above brief analysis, that Maoism is a brand of revisionism designed to enable the national capitalist classes of certain colonial-type countries to win national independence from imperialist domination, but to hold back the revolutionary process at the stage of the democratic revolution and so maintain national capitalism under false red flags. The Maoist programme has been applied not only in China, but in such countries as North Korea and Vietnam.

Harpal Brar goes some way to admitting the spurious nature of Chinese 'socialism' when he admits that the Chinese government has offered imperialism

" . . . special economic zones and joint ventures. This, accompanied by the loosening of the centralised economic planning, the dissolution of the communes, wider pay differentials between the masses and managers and intellectuals, have disrupted the socialist economy and led to inflation, unemployment and dislocation of vast numbers of workers and peasants".
(p. 310-11).

In these circumstances his call to the CPC

" . . . to put an end to those practices -- economic and ideological,"
(p. 311),

however well-meaning, is likely to be as effective as a call to the Tory Party to put an end to capitalist exploitation in Britain!

But if the above analysis is correct, if the social system in China was one of state capitalism and not socialism, if the CPC was a revisionist party and not a Marxist-Leninist Party, then the 1989 movement for democracy in China was not, as the author claims, 'counter-revolutionary' but objectively progressive -- since the formation of a genuine Marxist-Leninist Party in China can proceed more easily under bourgeois democracy than under the semi-fascist state of the Chinese revisionists! Perhaps those Marxist-Leninists who condemned the brutal suppression of the democracy movement were not so gullible as the author suggests on page 303! Perhaps the gullibility lies with those who present the Chinese revisionists as 'Marxist-Leninists', who present Chinese capitalism as 'socialism', who present those who fought for democracy as

' . . . thugs and criminals" (p. 305).

It is indeed a matter for great regret that Harpal Brar, who analyses so brilliantly in his book the hypocrisy of Soviet revisionism, should have allowed himself to be deceived by the slightly different hypocrisy of Chinese revisionism. Whatever the reason for this 'blind spot', one can only hope in preparing a new edition of his book, he will take another look at these questions, will shed his illusions in relation to Maoism, and bring his brilliant powers of analysis properly to bear upon other brands of revisionism, which are equally harmful to the cause of world socialism. Perhaps, indeed, this new edition might be more correctly titled: 'Perestroika: The Complete Collapse of Soviet Revisionism'!

CONCLUSION

That we have spent so much space in this review in dealing with Chinese revisionism, when the subject of Harpal Brar's book is Soviet revisionism, is in fact a tribute to the basic correctness and excellence of the book.

This is by far the best and most penetrating analysis of the degeneration of the Soviet Union which has appeared in English -- and, to the best of our knowledge, in any other language. Despite the reservations to which so much space has been devoted in this review, Perestroika: The Complete Collapse of Revisionism cannot be too highly recommended. Everyone interested in politics, contemporary history and international affairs should if possible buy a copy, or at least get his local library to order one.

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