

What Is Socialism?

(A slightly enlarged version of a talk given to a group of students in 1991 by Ray Nunes, late Chairman WPNZ)

There is great confusion in the world today over this question. Our aim is to try to clear some of this up.

How is this possible? The question has many sides, as with all complex questions (and even simple ones). However, in my view there are two major sides: theoretical and historical, and we will get closest to a correct answer if we look, first at the theoretical and then at the historical side – which includes the experience of actual socialist societies.

Historically the word – and the concept of – socialism came first. So let us look first at the theoretical side of the question.

The Utopians

The word was first coined early in the 19th century in regard to the doctrines advocated by the French utopian socialists Charles Fourier and Henri Saint-Simon, and became common in England from about the time of Robert Owen – another great Utopian socialist, in the 1830s.

These doctrines, while producing many brilliant ideas and scathing criticisms of capitalist society as it existed suffered from a major shortcoming, in that they did not comprehend the underlying economic relations of capitalism. These were rooted in the economic and social conditions of the times, in the as yet undeveloped nature of the capitalist economy and with this, the lack of development of the working class as an independent political force.

This was a time when feudalism had been overthrown in Britain and France and capitalism was in the throes of the industrial revolution. The great utopians were sympathetic to the terrible conditions of the working class, but because the class struggle was in an undeveloped state they could only see the improvements they wanted coming from convincing **all** classes they were right. So they spun ideas for improving society out of their heads, different plans which filled a whole literature of the times - but that were utopias, because their creators did not have an understanding of the concrete economic development of capitalism, and so saw the working class only in the role of sufferers, not as the class destined to overthrow capitalism.

Thus, Robert Owen, the great British utopian, having shown that it was possible for the downtrodden workers to live like human beings (he provided good wages, good housing – good elementary education to his workers and their families in the village associated with the cotton mills he owned at New Lanark) believed that the socialism he envisaged was so obviously superior to capitalism that the ruling capitalist class could not fail to be converted to socialism once its advantages were clearly presented to them. He even wrote to Queen Victoria thinking he

could convince her. What he found was that whereas formerly the capitalists had hailed him as 'the great philanthropist', he was now cast into the outer darkness as a menace to society.

Marx and Engels

By the 1840s great class struggles between the workers and the industrial bourgeoisie were erupting all over Europe. In Britain the Chartist movement was the first mass independent political movement of the working class in history. In Lyons, in France, an armed workers' uprising of the weavers took place in 1831 in which the red flag for the first time was used as the workers' standard.

Into this Europe, torn by growing class struggles between the propertyless urban workers, the proletariat, and the employing classes, the capitalists – particularly the manufacturers – Karl Marx and Frederick Engels grew to maturity in Germany.

While beginning as bourgeois-democratic revolutionaries aiming at overthrowing the feudal regime that still existed in Germany, they quickly placed themselves at the standpoint of the extreme left of society, which comprised at that time workers' communist groups with revolutionary feelings but without a coherent ideology or programme.

This Marx and Engels set out to provide, and did so, beginning with the Communist Manifesto, 'a little book worth whole volumes', as Lenin remarked.

Why didn't Marx and Engels call it the 'Socialist Manifesto'? Because at the time 'socialism' was a utopian middle-class movement which appealed not to the working classes but to the educated classes. It consisted of adherents mainly of the 'Fourierists' and 'Owenites' which had already declined into sects with various quack remedies.

Alongside these there was, in Engels' words, 'a crude, rough-hewn, purely instinctive sort of communism' as he put it in 1888, which was powerful enough among the working class. Thus, socialism was a middle-class movement, communism a working-class movement. The one was 'respectable', the other not. Engels writes:

'And as our notion, from the very beginning, was that "the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself", there could be no doubt as to which of the two names we must take. Moreover we have ever since, been far from repudiating it.'

In reality, there were a number of other so-called 'socialist' trends at the time. These Marx and Engels analysed in a chapter of the Manifesto entitled 'Socialist and Communist Literature.' Today, most are mere curiosities: Feudal socialism, clerical socialism, petty-bourgeois socialism, German or 'True' socialism. Only one form retains some modern features: 'Conservative', or 'bourgeois socialism', which has a kind of echo in the so-called 'socialism' of the social-democratic and Labour parties. These seek to peacefully redress social grievances without causing the bourgeoisie any distress.

Of course as people in New Zealand know, property tycoon Bob Jones is a violent reactionary. But in attacking socialism in the 'Auckland Star's' columns some years back he denounced different Labour politicians for being unable to give him a definition of socialism. It had its amusing side, to see how they sidestepped, twisted and evaded. Among them was Cath Tizard, our 'socialist' Governor-General.

It is true that the Labour Party once had in its constitution a 'pledge' that members took, to work for 'the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange' until it was deleted soon after World War II. The reality was that while Labour politicians **talked** about socialism, in practice they carried on running capitalism.

They did introduce certain reforms which ameliorated the effects of some of the worst features of capitalism in the spheres of health, housing and family support. Collectively, these became known as the 'Welfare State' – but they were not socialism. **The essential feature of capitalism, that very thing which makes the system one of exploitation and robbery of the mass of wage workers by the ruling class of capitalists, namely the private ownership of the means of production and exchange, this remained untouched.**

That did not stop the exploiting classes from denouncing Labour governments as 'socialists' or 'communists' at every opportunity. They made the most of their control of the media and almost all sources of information to imprint this 'big lie' on people's minds. This was nothing new in the world. The second paragraph in the 'Communist Manifesto' reads:

'Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power? Where the Opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of Communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries.'

The Labour Party's real role

Long ago Frederick Engels characterised the British Labour Party as 'the bourgeois Labour Party'. He judged it by its deeds, not just its words. In New Zealand the Labour Party was created in the image of British Labour; it, too, was and is a 'bourgeois Labour Party' - one that runs capitalism on behalf of the exploiters.

There are many workers who have belonged to the Labour Party, and some who still belong, though far fewer. But this by no means makes it a political party of the workers, as Lenin pointed out to workers back in 1920 in the following words:

'Of course, most of the Labour Party's members are working-men. However, whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics. Regarded from this, the only correct, point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie which exists to systematically dupe the workers with the aid of the British Noskes and Scheidemanns.' [German Social Democrat leaders who betrayed socialism in World War I].¹

The New Zealand Labour Party never attempted to socialise the means of production and exchange. In all the time Labour governments were in office, enterprises under public (or state) ownership never amounted to more than 4 per cent of the total number. All their 'socialism' amounted to was state capitalism, in which the state was controlled and run by the capitalist class. It still is.

Marx and Engels actually transformed socialism from a Utopia into a science. For the first time in history, they armed the working class with a fully-developed scientific theory.

Socialism as a science

The essentials of this theory were comprised of three sources and component parts: The philosophy of dialectical materialism, which arose out of classical German philosophy; Marxist Political Economy, which had its source in the works of classic English political economy; and the theory and tactics of the class struggle, which comes under the head of 'French socialism'. We have space for only a brief look at each of these.

As Marx was the prime mover in his and Engels partnership, we shall just refer to him, for brevity's sake, remembering that they were close colleagues in everything that mattered.

Marx was a materialist. That is, he considered that in the development of nature and society, matter is primary, thought, consciousness, secondary, derivative. That is, we proceed in our thinking and knowledge from things to thought and not from thought to things. From Hegel, the idealist philosopher (who proceeded from thought to things) Marx extracted his great philosophical achievement, **the dialectical method**. This is a theory of development in which things and processes are not regarded as static and existing in isolation, but in a continual state of movement, as indeed is the case in the real world, and interconnected, developing as a result of contradictory and opposing tendencies within them.

Consistently extending this outlook to the sphere of social phenomena, Marx discovered and substantiated the scientific view of history known as historical materialism. His studies showed him that every major historical epoch has its own particular mode of production, with its own specific economic laws, and that the understanding of the whole of the political, religious and intellectual life of each epoch has to be sought not in the ideas, but in the economics of the time, the mode of production that is, in fact, the material basis on which the whole structure of society rests - including its main governing ideas.

Those studies, profound and extensive, showed Marx that, apart from primitive communal society, all history was a history of class struggles. Once one understood this, guided by historical materialism, it became possible for the first time to see a connecting, determining thread running through history, enabling one to understand history as not just a chapter of meaningless accidents – although chance events played a definite role – but as a law-governed process (in the sense of natural law).

With the aid of historical materialism and using the dialectical method of investigation, Marx was able to analyse in great and accurate detail the whole system of capitalist production in all its complexity.

In particular, he discovered the law of surplus value, an economic tool with which he solved economic problems which previously had baffled all bourgeois economists including the greatest, the English school known as the classical economists, whose major figures were Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

Published in 1848, the Communist Manifesto and other works were early fruit of Marx and Engels' joint labours. It began the process of unifying the European working class which for the first time had a genuinely scientific theory to guide it.

This process was continued with Marx's epochal work 'Capital', which became the virtual 'bible of the working-class'. He also founded 'The International Working Men's Association' (The First International) which greatly advanced the international unity of the working class.

'Capital' not only scientifically explained capitalism - on the basis of enormous, painstaking research - as a socio-economic formation still in a state of development. It also gave the workers a clear understanding of the methods by which the capitalists as a class - manufacturers, landowners and commercial capitalists - got from the labour of the workers their large incomes in the form of profit, rent and interest. All were forms of surplus value, having their origin in capitalist production which was based on the special value-creating commodity bought by the capitalists - labour power.

Thus Marx exposed the whole machinery of capitalist exploitation of the working-class. In doing this, he equipped the workers with a scientific understanding of society and of their class role as the chief executants of the transformation of capitalism into socialism. That is, he gave the workers an understanding of their historic mission in society. Engels points out that with the discovery of surplus value and historical materialism, socialism left behind utopias and became a science.

Because Marxism showed itself in practice to be a scientifically accurate reflection of social development and of the antagonism of the major classes of capitalists and workers, it also enabled the workers' parties to develop correct tactics in the class struggle and soon became the dominant theory of the working class on the Continent.

Always basing themselves on the firm ground of historical experience, Marx and Engels kept developing their scientific socialist theory as long as they lived. In their hands it never became a dogma. Engels wrote to one correspondent that Marxist theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action. (See his letter to Sorge, Nov. 29, 1886).

Imperialism

In his great work 'Capital' Marx clearly demonstrated the tendency within 'free competition' capitalism for capital to become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, resulting in monopoly,

and indeed a new stage of capitalism was ushered in at the turn of the century: monopoly capitalism, termed by Marxists, 'imperialism'. This replaced the 'free competition' of Marx's day. It was still capitalism, but it had acquired new features. These were analysed by Lenin, who also organised and led the Bolshevik Party, under whose leadership the workers accomplished the epoch-making November 7 socialist revolution in Russia in 1917.

While this brings us to the second major side of the question, 'What Is Socialism', there are certain important theoretical questions to be cleared up before leaving the first side.

From the time of the 'Manifesto' on, Marx developed his ideas on the state. The experience of the class struggles in France 1848-51 led him to the view that the main task of the proletariat under capitalism was to smash the state machine. The experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, when the Parisian workers held power for six weeks, led him to declare that the proletariat could not lay hold of the existing state machine and wield it for its own purposes. That is, the bourgeois state had to be smashed (which was done by the Commune) and replaced by the working-class state - the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In one of his last works, the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' Marx expressed some further basic ideas in relation to the overthrow of capitalism. He had already shown in 'Capital' that the great socialisation of labour that took place under capitalism provided the economic basis for the inevitable coming of socialism.

Socialism and Communism

In the 'Critique' he distinguished between the lower and higher phases of communism. He did not call them socialism and communism, but here it was stated that society could not leap straight from capitalism to communism. Even when capitalism was overthrown, the masses of working people came into the new society with all the birthmarks of the old upon them. The property rights ('bourgeois right' is the term Marx used) and inequalities of the old society continue for a long period of time even after the means of production are made social property.

In the first period the principle would apply: **'From each according to his ability, to each according to his work'**. That is to say, until an economy of abundance is achieved making possible the distribution of goods according to need, people would receive from the social pool of goods produced an amount of remuneration commensurate with the quantity and quality of work performed. To achieve an economy of abundance all members of society would have to work. In the building of socialism in the Soviet Union, for instance (and it was built) the rule applied: 'he who does not work, neither shall he eat.'

This socialist principle was necessary while a new economy was built, an economy of abundance, and while people gradually became more and more accustomed to working for the benefit of all instead of just for the most one could get. Because it would take a long time to eliminate the bourgeois habits and customs carried over from capitalism, and because the bourgeoisie would never reconcile itself to the loss of its privileged, exploiting position, a long period of transition from capitalism to communism would be necessary, and must inevitably be the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Communism is the abolition of classes

Only when the level of the productive forces had been greatly raised and an economy of abundance attained, and also the cooperation between people had become a matter of everyday life, of simple social practice because their outlook had been transformed, only then, when the distinctions between town and country and between mental and manual labour had been abolished, could the abolition of economic classes be treated as fact, and the principle of communism be applied, that is: **‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.’**

Lenin on imperialism

It became a common practice for this lower stage to be referred to as socialism and the higher stage as communism. That is how Lenin treats them in his book: ‘The State and Revolution’.

Marx and Engels did not live to theorise about imperialism. They died before monopoly capitalism became dominant.

Lenin, Marx’s great successor and the architect of the Russian socialist revolution of November, 1917, saw and analysed the new stage of capitalism that had grown out of the ‘free competition’ of 19th century capitalism and by the turn of the century had grown into monopoly capitalism, with special features that led to its being labelled ‘imperialism’, even by writers who were not Marxists but liberals such as J.A. Hobson.

Lenin’s systematic analysis, set forth in his path-breaking work: ‘Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism’, briefly defines the main features of imperialism as follows:

- 1) The concentration of production and capital [has] developed to such a stage that it creates monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life.
- 2) The merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of ‘finance capital’, of a financial oligarchy.
- 3) The export of capital, has become extremely important, as distinguished from the export of commodities.
- 4) The formation of international capitalist monopolies which share the world among themselves.
- 5) The territorial division of the whole world is completed.

In this work, written in 1916, Lenin broke new ground in the theory of Marxism. He exposed the economic essence of imperialism - i.e., monopoly capitalism - on the basis of analysing not just a few unrepresentative or isolated examples, but, as he wrote in a preface, analysing ‘the **whole** of the data concerning the *basis* of economic life in **all** the belligerent countries and the **whole** world.’

Prevented by the Tsarist censorship (Tsarism was military-feudal imperialism) from expounding the **political** aspects of imperialism except in the most roundabout form, Lenin nevertheless exposed the fact that imperialism was **parasitic** in character, i.e., that because of the enormous amount of accumulated surplus capital in its hands it was able to reap vast **super** profits from its investments in the colonies where labour and raw materials were extremely cheap and the ruling colonial power could exploit the people to the maximum possible, without let or hindrance.

The domination of monopoly inevitably retards the development of the productive forces of society in the interests of maintaining monopoly profits through monopolistic prices and controls, constantly manifested in the high cost of living. It also gives rise to the creation of a class of parasitic financiers and bondholders, 'coupon clippers', drawing huge dividends from colonial or neo-colonial investments rather than investments aimed at modernising and developing the productive forces of the home economy, a tendency which works in the same direction of retarding the development of the productive forces.

Thus, on the basis of irrefutable summarised data, Lenin shows that imperialism is a decaying, parasitic system, a moribund system which, because different national monopoly capitalist groupings develop unevenly, leads inevitably to struggles between them over which group shall be dominant, and hence to various kinds of wars – including the suppression of struggles for independence and national liberation – and in particular to imperialist wars between the great capitalist powers for the redivision of an already divided world. World War I was the outcome of the clash of rival imperialist powers (in alliance with others) for precisely such a redivision, arising out of uneven economic development and consequent changes in the relative strength of the powers. Behind all the patriotic catchwords of 'freedom', 'democracy', the 'defence of small nations' etc., the reality was that the war was a clash between two rival imperialist alliances, two groups of bandits armed to the teeth who forced tens of millions into battle (over ten million were killed, about fifty million mutilated) solely in the interests of one or other of the opposing groups of monopoly capitalists. **It was an imperialist war on both sides, wholly opposed to the interests of the great mass of workers and toiling people who were used simply as cannon fodder.**²

Lenin's new theory of revolution

Only when one has grasped Lenin's analysis of imperialism can one really understand the origins and meaning of both World War I and World War II.

Lenin's theoretical work (which went hand-in-hand with revolutionary practice) was Marxism in the era of imperialism. It was the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, which became the ruling state power in socialist Russia.

Leninism was a further development of Marxism, and the theory justly became known as Marxism-Leninism.

In his analysis of capitalist production Marx showed that owing to the social character of production and the private appropriation of what is produced, capitalism develops unevenly, one

capitalist driving out another, particularly in times of economic crisis which were endemic to capitalism.

In analysing imperialism, Lenin showed that monopoly capitalism intensified this uneven development. He showed from production statistics how British domination in industrial production had been overtaken and surpassed towards the end of the 19th century by Germany and the USA, bringing about changes in the economic and political strength of the powers. Moreover, there was uneven development in the level of the working-class movement in the different countries of Europe.

In the pre-imperialist period of capitalism Marxists held that it was impossible for socialism to be victorious in a single country, and that it could only be so in a simultaneous revolution in all the civilised countries. However, Lenin saw that under imperialism this was no longer possible. His studies of imperialism led him to formulate the 'law of uneven economic and political development of capitalism', and to draw from it a vital conclusion, that socialist revolution would not be simultaneous throughout Europe. On the contrary, he declared that it was now possible for revolution to occur in a group of countries or even one country taken on its own.

This was a new theory of revolution, put forward in 1915, asserting that it would be possible to build socialism in one country.³ This guided the socialist revolution to success in November, 1917.

Trotskyists have consistently lied on the question of 'socialism in one country', claiming this theory was invented by Stalin. It was not. Lenin from the beginning of the socialist revolution carried on building socialism in the Soviet Union and planned for its continuation, plans carried out by Stalin after Lenin's death in 1924.

Thus, Lenin, utilising the granite basis of Marxist theory, creatively applied it in the new epoch. While retaining the revolutionary content of Marx's theories, his philosophy, his political economy and his theory of socialism, Lenin adapted it in certain particulars to develop a new theory of revolution, not confined to Russia but applicable to all countries.

Not only did the socialist revolution in Russia prove the **general** correctness of Marx's theory; the victory of the Chinese revolution under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung gave additional proof that Marxism-Leninism was a scientifically correct theory, valid also - provided it was applied non-dogmatically - in less developed countries of the world.

Observing the rise of national-democratic revolutionary movements in the colonies and semi-colonies during World War I, Lenin noted that revolutions in the East would have many original features differing from those in advanced Europe, as indeed proved to be the case in China.

Socialism in practice: Paris 1871 to Russia, 1917

Now we come to the second side of the question; the existence and experience of socialist countries. There was a great historical achievement by the French working-class in 1871, the Paris Commune. This was the first example in history of the seizure of political power by the

working class and was accompanied by amazing achievements: the establishment of social ownership of the national workshops; the abolition of crime (though under siege, ringed by the German army, there was mass democratic control); the abolition of many inequalities. The Commune lasted six weeks: Engels wrote in answer to anarchist 'anti-authoritarians': 'Gentlemen, if you wish to see the dictatorship of the proletariat, look at the Paris Commune.'

What led to the Commune's defeat was their too great magnanimity. They should have seized the remnants of the forces loyal to the old government and disarmed them – but instead the Commune's leaders allowed them to leave Paris with their arms. Later these were used to crush the Commune. They should also have seized the Bank of France but did not. Its power was used against them. They should have seized the old government but did not. It was allowed to leave, and soon re-organised – with German complicity – a sufficient force to seize Paris and overthrow the Commune.

Marx, in his book 'The Civil War in France', drew important conclusions from this experience. They were thoroughly absorbed by Lenin and were an important factor in the success of the socialist revolution of November, 1917. Lenin's aim was to set up a state of the type of the Paris Commune, and he devotes much space in his book 'The State and Revolution' to the experience of the Commune.

A party of a new type

Lenin early saw that the old European socialist and social-democratic parties did not follow Marx and propagate the idea of the **necessity** of socialist revolution. Instead, their leaderships concerned themselves only with partial and temporary reforms; with peaceful, parliamentary politics, relying wholly on elections and parliamentary manoeuvring. Their trade union and political leaders actively collaborated with their capitalist governments on important questions. That sort of party was useless to the working class in the new epoch of imperialism, of great class struggles and imperialist wars, an epoch which required a party of a new type, an advanced detachment of the working-class armed with Marxist theory, highly-organised and disciplined, able to guide the working class and the masses in all conditions in order to achieve the goal of socialist society.

Lenin built such a party. In 1905 it played the leading role in the unsuccessful democratic revolution of that year which served as a dress rehearsal for 1917. It led the overthrow of Tsarism in March, 1917 (new-style), and in November accomplished the socialist revolution in a nearly bloodless insurrection. Although the workers shed their blood in overthrowing Tsarist autocracy in the March revolution, the capitalists stole the power, setting up a Provisional Government under their control. However, in November the working class suppressed this government and established Soviet power, a new form of state under **their** control. However, the Tsarist and capitalist forces though down, were not out. Backed by the Entente imperialists they began a counter-revolutionary civil war in which, along with the reactionary armies of Tsarism and capitalism, the armies of fourteen imperialist countries and their stooges, headed by the Allied powers of Britain, France, Japan and the USA tried – but failed – to crush the infant Soviet Republic.

Even while defeating the counter-revolution, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were reorganising the Soviet economy on Marxian socialist lines, and an entirely new type of workers' state, a proletarian democratic state run by the Soviets – democratic organisations of the workers and peasants – was established.

Despite having to overcome incredible difficulties the Soviet Union forged ahead. The economy, devastated by six years of war and civil war, was restored. Lenin planned the further construction of socialism in the USSR but died in 1924. It was left to Stalin to lead the carrying out of Lenin's plans for the industrialisation of the Soviet Union and - a necessary accompaniment - the collectivisation of agriculture. This he did with great success.

The Soviet Union very quickly went from being the most backward country in Europe to an advanced industrial-agricultural state with the second largest economy in the world, and this at a time when the capitalist world was in an acute economic crisis, i.e., the depression of 1929-35.

The workers internationally found the Soviet Union a beacon of hope for the future.

World War 2 and the Cold War

Naturally, the imperialists hated Stalin and the USSR. They set out to destroy it, thinking to use Hitler and Nazi Germany to this end. That was the purpose of Chamberlain's appeasement policy which handed Czechoslovakia and Austria to Hitler on a plate. They failed. Finally, when Germany launched its surprise attack in 1941, Russia counter-attacked and played by far the major role in defeating Hitler Germany.

Even before the war ended, the US imperialists launched the 'cold war' against the Soviet Union. An immense anti-Soviet, anti-Communist, anti-Stalin campaign was carried out to secure US imperialist world domination.

When Stalin died in 1953 socialism appeared to be firmly established in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and in China - which under Mao's leadership had carried out its own mighty, world-historic revolution. Even the bourgeois press of the world had to admit at the time that Stalin and socialism had transformed Russia and brought it into the modern era.

Stalin made mistakes and had his faults, some of them serious. Some of his mistakes were unavoidable because the Soviet Union was travelling a new road in history where no previous signposts existed. Some mistakes were avoidable. Two such mistakes were the assertion that socialism had achieved final victory in the USSR, and that there were no longer any antagonistic classes in the USSR. Both these errors played a role in leading to the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

There was no 'final victory' of socialism nor can there be until most or all of the world becomes socialist and reaches the advanced stage of communism.

Stalin lacked Mao's grasp of Marxist philosophy and as a result became arbitrary and stopped relying on the masses. Mao showed that in building socialism (and before that) the workers'

party must learn to distinguish between contradictions among the people – which are non-antagonistic, and those between the people and the enemy, which are antagonistic. Because of this shortcoming, Stalin extended the scope of the suppression of counter-revolution to include people who were not counter-revolutionaries but had made errors. But that is a far cry from the so-called ‘crimes’ that are attributed to him both by imperialism and by the enemies and betrayers of socialism in power in Russia today.

Khrushchev and Khrushchevism exposed and refuted by Mao

How did Gorbachev and Yeltsin get to power? Mainly through the growth of a new bourgeoisie in the Soviet Union. Stalin had adopted a policy of over-large material incentives to the most productive workers and the most efficient managers and administrators etc. in order to build up the country’s productive forces quickly so as to meet the people’s needs, and to build a heavy industry to defend socialism against the anticipated imperialist attack.

This policy worked. But it had a negative side which was not foreseen. A new, privileged capitalist grouping emerged, consisting of corrupted Party officials, of a labour aristocracy, of highly-paid technicians and professional people, and of state bureaucrats.

Before Stalin’s death they could not organise to bid for power. He kept them on the hop. After his death, Khrushchev managed to usurp power. He was their man in the Kremlin. He quickly removed many working-class cadres from leading committees and replaced them with new bourgeois elements who supported him.

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev delivered a secret report to the Congress, where there was now a majority of Khrushchev supporters. This report negated Stalin totally, denied that he had a single positive achievement to his credit.

In Stalin’s lifetime, Khrushchev had been the most complete sycophant. Now, backed by the new bourgeoisie which had secured leadership in the Party and state, he set about restoring capitalism. He revised the basic policies of Marxism-Leninism out of existence, proclaimed the possibility of a peaceful, parliamentary path to socialism, declared that war could be abolished even while imperialism remained, replaced the dictatorship of the proletariat with the so-called ‘state of the whole people’ and declared that the Party was no longer a party of the working class but a ‘party of the whole people’. Instead of promoting the ideals of Marx and Lenin he put the rouble in command and destroyed the enthusiasm of the masses for socialism, which had been the force for unity of the people in constructing the new social order.

It is not possible to cover the whole question here. For further detail we have to refer you to the Workers’ Party of New Zealand pamphlet ‘What Went Wrong in Russia and China’. For a full account, the reader is urged to obtain the pamphlet basically drafted by Mao Tse-tung: ‘On Khrushchev’s Phoney Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World’.

It soon became clear to Mao Tse-tung that the Khrushchev clique were set on restoring capitalism, that they were revisionists who were trying to push the socialist bloc – one third of the world's people – on to the capitalist road.

Under Mao's leadership the Chinese party began a major ideological struggle against the new revisionism.⁴ This only happened **after** Khrushchev and Co. had publicly attacked China and Albania.

In a series of well-documented, closely-reasoned theoretical pamphlets written under Mao's direction and using Mao's basic formulations, the Communist Party of China carried on a great polemic which exposed Khrushchev and Co. as thoroughgoing revisionists practising 'phoney communism, real capitalism'.

While most Soviet bloc countries followed the capitalist road of Khrushchev's revisionism, Albania allied itself with China. However, Hoxha and the Party of Labour of Albania (PLA) were never able to attain the ideological depth of Mao and the Communist Party of China. Hoxha and Co. played some role in Europe, but the world struggle was indisputably led by Mao. We will return to this question later. The Communist Party of New Zealand strongly supported China and hailed Mao as the Lenin of our era. This stand was adopted by the Communist Party of New Zealand National Conference in 1963 and held to until late 1979.

The problem in China

In the course of this struggle Mao evolved what became known as the 'Theory of Continued Revolution under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat'. This was based on the view that class struggle continued under socialism until the higher stage of Communism was reached, and that while it was not possible to prevent new bourgeois elements from emerging under socialism, it was certainly possible to prevent them from seizing power by avoiding high material incentives, by strengthening mass democracy and mass supervision of state and Party cadres, and by gradually eliminating the distinction between mental and manual labour, and that between town and country.

In the course of the struggle against Soviet revisionism it became evident that new bourgeois elements also existed in China - and were in leading positions in the party and the state. Taking into account both Soviet and Chinese experience, Mao concluded that merely removing a few diehard revisionists from leadership could not be a guarantee against a revisionist takeover in China. He considered it necessary to raise millions of successors. Such a thing could not be done by the usual socialist education campaigns, nor, in his view, solely by inner-Party struggle. He took the view that a cultural revolution was necessary.

It is clear from the content of the reports and articles of 1965-66 on the subject that what Mao had in mind was a revolution in which the working-class played the leading role and the aim of which was to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat through mass supervision of all aspects of political, social and intellectual activity in Chinese society.

However, while the Cultural Revolution succeeded in keeping China socialist during Mao's lifetime, it did not succeed in its aim of preventing a revisionist takeover. A month after Mao's death right-wingers in the Central Committee seized power in a coup d'etat and began the restoration of capitalism. This proceeded much faster in China than the Soviet Union for various reasons. Today neither the Soviet Union nor China is socialist. As soon as revisionism got power in the USSR and in China, the rightists (the new bourgeoisie) established a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in place of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This had happened in Eastern Europe and under pressure from Khrushchev's revisionist clique, most other former socialist bloc countries soon followed suit. Today, they no longer even put up the socialist signboard with which they deceived the people after the revisionist takeover.

Albania, as is now perfectly clear, is also in the same category. It followed a somewhat different route.

After Mao's death the rightists in China cut off aid to Albania. Hoxha and the PLA which earlier had hailed Mao as a great Marxist-Leninist began reviling him. Their purpose in this was to seize the leadership of the world Marxist-Leninist movement and to establish Hoxha as the true successor of Stalin. Because Albania still appeared to have retained socialism a lot of Marxist-Leninist parties followed the Hoxha line, including the CPNZ, some of whose leaders organised an internal putsch against those who did not accept it. The author was one of these latter. He resigned from the Communist Party and took time out to make his own estimation of the whole situation. Meantime Albania followed the dogmatic line of Hoxha which in due course turned into its opposite, revisionism, as the author of this pamphlet predicted would happen.

That is why we of the WPNZ have a group today distinct from all others. It does not blindly follow any overseas party but judges each situation on its merits and makes up its mind independently.

Because it is not possible without doing violence to actual historical development to absolve Mao from the loss of socialism in China we do not call ourselves, as some overseas groups do, Marxist-Leninist-Maoist. We recognise that Mao made certain errors in relation to the Cultural Revolution, in particular initially placing the student youth in the leading role, but that he also made great contributions to Marxism-Leninism. For this reason we call ourselves pro-Mao, Marxist-Leninist.

What lessons the restoration of capitalism in former socialist countries holds for the future are now generally clear. 1) We still hold, in line with Marx, that socialism is necessary and inevitable. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class. Monopoly capitalism does not change this. Internal contradictions or conflicts exist within the imperialist system of today which inevitably lead to the socialist revolution.

2) Socialism is a far superior system to capitalism. Until revisionism took over in the socialist countries and restored capitalism, socialism had already proved its superiority from the point of view of the great majority of the people.

3) The prevention of a revisionist takeover depends on keeping the new bourgeoisie from becoming strong enough to seize power and restore capitalism. The best guide to this is Mao's 'Theory of Continued Revolution under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.'

4) The loss of socialism worldwide was primarily due to internal weaknesses in the one-time Marxist-Leninist parties leading the socialist countries. (The influence of imperialism was a secondary cause). But because the class struggle still continues in all capitalist countries it is inevitable that a new world Marxist-Leninist movement will arise which will finally achieve power on a world scale and succeed in accomplishing the transition from capitalism to communism.

5) This will occupy a very long period of time. Mao estimated between one and several centuries before the question, will the capitalist road or the socialist road achieve victory, could be decided. But whatever, the nature of imperialism will objectively force on this development. The deeper the ideological grasp of pro-Mao, Marxism-Leninism by the working class and the oppressed peoples, the more complete and rapid the process will be.

NOTES

1 Lenin, Collected Works Vol 31, pp257-8.

2 Every Anzac Day or November 11 (Armistice Day) the press publishes interviews with ordinary soldiers who had no idea what they were fighting for or officers who justify the war with the usual patriotic phrases.

3 See the article: 'On the Slogan for a United States of Europe', Vol. 21, Lenin, Collected Works. Lenin forcefully restates the same idea of achieving the victory of socialism in one country in 'The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution' (In Vol 23 of his Collected Works).

4 Revisionism: An opportunist tendency within the communist movement aimed at replacing revolutionary Marxist-Leninist ideology by bourgeois ideology. In particular it emasculates Marxism-Leninism by attacking and eliminating revolution under cover of Marxist-Leninist phraseology.