

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

# The Workers' Advocate

## Supplement



50¢

Vol. 5 #1

VOICE OF THE MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY, USA

January 15, 1989

## The degeneration of Soviet socialism and the turn of the mid-1930's

"It falls to the Communist Party to deepen and extend socialist consciousness", the first speech on the subject of socialism at the Third Congress of the Marxist-Leninist Party, is in the last issue of the **Supplement** (Dec. 20, 1988). Below we carry another speech on socialism, edited for publication. This speech, and the speech on the Marxist-Leninist principles of socialism also in this issue, put forward various views on Soviet history for discussion, not for decision. Only after a great deal of additional research, study, and discussion will the MLP come to its detailed conclusions on these matters.

### Speech at the Third Congress Fall 1988

In this speech I would like to discuss some issues concerning the degeneration of socialism in the Soviet Union. First I want to repeat the cautionary point from my last speech that comrades should not get the idea that we've made a lot of progress in this field of study, or that further work will be smooth sailing.

Over the last year or so, we have been saying in our press that there was a turn in the mid-30s in the Soviet Union not just in foreign policy but in domestic policy as well. We have pointed to our analysis of the turn in international orientation, but we haven't spelled out the turn in domestic affairs. That's what I want to discuss now.

I will cover a good deal of historical territory in this speech. This will give a rough idea of the basic things the Party has to look at in the study of Soviet history. There are roughly three main things:

1) We can see there was a turn in the mid-30s. I will describe some features of this turn. But the task of fully studying each of these features, as well as others, and the task of precisely analyzing what the turn means--that is

something we have yet to do in our study.

2) Naturally then, there is the issue of studying what came before that turn. This involves both studying the accomplishments of the socialist revolution and sorting out how the groundwork was laid for the unfortunate turn of the mid-30s.

3) Then there is the issue of what comes after the turn. How does the process take place of degeneration into the state capitalism we are familiar with today?

To proceed.

We are aware that a series of changes take place in the mid-30s. Not just one or two isolated things, but quite a few. When a whole series of such changes occur in roughly the same time, and when we already know of a fundamental turn in foreign and world policy, the phenomenon definitely gives the impression of a basic turn in domestic affairs as well.

However, in domestic policy it's not quite like the 7th Congress of the Communist International where a whole new line is spelled out at a world congress (albeit in the name of simply a new tactical policy). The turn in domestic matters takes

**Continued on page 19**

### Also from the Third Congress:

**Speech on the principles of socialism. . . 2-9**

### INSIDE

<b>Spain: Social-democratic government betrays anti-nuclear promises . . . . .</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Bangladesh: The week of struggle . . . . .</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Philippines: 1917 Bolshevik revolution and the path ahead . . . . .</b>	<b>12</b>

<b>Texas prisons: The Alberto Aranda case-- 40-year sentence for prison activism. . .</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>From Alberto Aranda . . . . .</b>	<b>18</b>

By its own injection, we will become the cure to its cancer and it will have to eventually and inevitably die to give birth to the transformed rebel elements!

PRISONERS UNITED FOR  
REVOLUTIONARY EDUCATION

Venceremos!

Alberto Aranda  
#300823  
Ellis I Unit  
Huntsville, TX 77343<>

---

**DEGENERATION OF SOVIET SOCIALISM  
AND THE TURN IN LINE OF THE MID-1930'S**

---

Continued from the front page

place in a different way. It takes the form of a series of new decrees, laws, campaigns, and economic, political and theoretical pronouncements. Due to all these changes, the Soviet government and its relations with the toilers appears to undergo a major change.

I will get to discussing the turn in a moment. But first, a natural question comes up. If we say a turn took place, what was it from and what is the turn towards? I'd like to first touch on "from what?"

**The October Socialist Revolution**

The October 1917 Revolution was a socialist revolution which established the dictatorship of the proletariat. In carrying this out, the Russian workers also completed the unfinished tasks of the democratic revolution.

The task the Russian workers faced after October wasn't one of being able to immediately establish socialism but of beginning a transition towards socialism. As Lenin put it in one place, the program of the Soviet government

"consisted of gradual, but firm and un-deviating measures, towards socialism."

And in May 1918, he said,

"No one, I think, in studying the question of the economics of Russia, has denied their transitional character. Nor, I think, has any Communist denied that the term Socialist Soviet Republic implies the determination of the Soviet government to achieve the transition to socialism, and not that the new economic order is a socialist order."  
("Left-wing" Childishness and

**Petty-bourgeois Mentality, Section III--**  
see **Collected Works**, Vol. 27, p. 335)

And in Russia they faced the task of carrying out a transition to socialism in the conditions of a relatively undeveloped country, a country in which small production remained overwhelming, and a country which was soon to be gripped by a cruel and destructive civil war from the overthrown bourgeoisie backed by world imperialism.

It is quite breathtaking when you consider what the Bolsheviks sought to establish. A political power based on the masses, not on bureaucrats. A power based on the armed toilers. An economy in which the capitalists would be expropriated, and steps taken to develop both an apparatus for central planning and also means to draw the workers into running the economy. The freeing of the peasants from the landlords. Liberation and then development for the oppressed nations. Support for the world proletariat and the revolutionary movements of the oppressed peoples.

At the same time, they faced harsh realities. They had to make zigzags and even make concessions away from socialist principle. But where they did so, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had the principled attitude of recognizing retreats as retreats. For example, comrades are familiar [from

---

The October Socialist Revolution . . . . .	19
The Period of the 1st Five Year Plan . . . . .	20
The Final Victory of Socialism? . . . . .	20
The Turn of the Mid-30s . . . . .	22
Inequality and Privileges . . . . .	22
The New Constitution of 1936 . . . . .	23
Other Changes . . . . .	23
On the Theory of the State . . . . .	23
After the Mid-30's . . . . .	24

---

the Party-wide study program] with Lenin's discussion of the bribing of the specialists with higher pay, a step which diverges from the Paris Commune's principle of paying average workers' wages to officials. (For example, see the second part of the section "The new phase of the struggle against the bourgeoisie" in the **Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government in Collected Works**, Vol. 27, pp. 247-251.)

A few years after the revolution, they had to make the biggest zigzag of all, the New Economic Policy (NEP). But power remained in the hands of the proletariat. The partial revival of capitalist elements during the NEP period, the fact that the Russian revolution was not followed by victorious socialist revolutions elsewhere (i.e. not any that lasted), the continuing pressure of world imperialism--all this meant intense pressures on the Soviet Union.

### The Period of the 1st Five Year Plan

With the complicated situation created by the NEP, a series of further steps had to be taken. The Soviet workers had to go on an offensive of industrialization and push forward the collectivization of the countryside. We believe that these steps were necessary at that time. At the same time, more study is required on how these things were carried out. While advances were certainly made and the groundwork laid for potentially even bigger advances, it is also apparent that there were major weaknesses and problems. (Problems such as resorting more and more to administrative measures; neglecting work "from below" when taking measures "from above"; the lessening of organizational work; and so on.)

Still, in the period of the 1st Five Year Plan one can still see an attempt to remain revolutionary, an effort to be guided by a proletarian class line, and a good deal of mass activity among the toilers. The point here is not to endorse everything done as correct but to suggest that the revolution continued to be alive.

Let us look at some examples.

\*\*There was much mass mobilization in the work of industrial construction. There was mass participation in socialist competition. Socialist ideas like the importance of mutual aid and workers' solidarity were promoted. Working class solidarity was pursued across nationality lines.

\*\*Although the Soviets appear to have weakened, there were still efforts to mobilize workers' participation in the operation of government. For example, this took place in the Workers' and

Peasants' Inspection.

\*\*To push forward the struggle against the kulaks and collectivize agriculture, urban workers sent out a number of contingents into the countryside.

\*\*There wasn't yet the degree of embracing of money and material incentives that we see a few years later. While material incentives did grow, there still remained a sizeable phenomenon of those who worked not for personal interest but for the social interest. This could be found especially among communist and Komsomol (Young Communist League) workers.

\*\*There was a major offensive in the cultural revolution. This wasn't just a matter of training new engineers, technicians, etc.--a task which was definitely necessary and now being done on a bigger scale. There were also other mass campaigns in the cultural field. Such as a big campaign for the liquidation of illiteracy. In favor of extending general and preschool education. To spread modern ideas of hygiene. There was an active fight against religion, against alcoholism, and against nationalism.

\*\*In the fight for the emancipation of women, concrete measures were being discussed and extended.

The point here is not to describe the situation in detail, but to indicate some of the evidence of a class spirit; of efforts to strengthen socialist relations; of efforts to draw the masses into affairs of government and economy; etc.

### The Final Victory of Socialism?

However, after the first big steps have been taken, the "victory of socialism" is declared. And it appears to be in this guise that various fundamental changes are made and justified.

A mood of euphoria was created. In Jan. 1933, Stalin says that the collectivization during the 1st five year plan would "eliminate the possibility of the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union." (**Results of the First Five-Year Plan**, Section II "The Fundamental Task of the Five-Year Plan and the Way to its Fulfillment", see **Problems of Leninism**, p. 589.) The 7th Congress of the CI in 1935 proclaimed "the final and irrevocable triumph of socialism" in the Soviet Union. A year later, discussing the new Constitution for the USSR, Stalin declared that the Marxist conception of socialism, as the lower phase of communism, had "in the

main" already been achieved. (**On the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R.**, Section III, in **Problems of Leninism**, p. 806). This doesn't seem right.

The truth is, the Soviet Union had only reached a further rung in the process of transition to socialism, but it was still in that transition. It is a far cry from reality to declare that socialism had already achieved final victory. And Stalin went on to talk of the transition to communism itself!

True, there had been big advances. One can say that a certain foundation had been laid. Large-scale production had expanded tremendously, creating the possibility of even greater economic advances. The danger of capitalist restoration from private capitalist elements, such as the kulaks, had been blocked, and collectivization created even bigger possibilities of increase of agricultural productivity.

But there were still huge problems before the Soviet Union. For one thing, various problems had accumulated over this period. But even more, the vast social changes unleashed by the five-year plan brought their own social, political, and economic consequences--all of which had to be dealt with.

Let me point to a few examples of these.

\*\*The big leap in industrialization meant that the working class was reinforced many times over by new recruits from the countryside. During the 1st five-year plan, at least 9 million peasants left the villages to join the urban, industrial workforce. Between 1926 and 1939, some 19 million migrated to the city. This was quite a mixture of people. Many of them lacked proletarian or revolutionary traditions.

Industrial technique had obviously expanded and improved. Large scale production was set up. But productivity lagged behind. The Soviet Union faced the immense task of training and organizing peasants and rural youth into modern industrial production. It faced the task of doing this without throwing aside communist principles.

Another related question was the task of training this mass to be class conscious. The task of imbuing it with socialist consciousness and organization. And of drawing it into the proletarian state and the management of the economy.

\*\*At the same time, many among the vanguard of the workers had to go into administrative, managerial and technical work. For example, at the end of 1933, of the 861,000 posts of "leading cadres and specialists", over 140,000 were filled

by persons who had been workers at the bench in 1928. More than half a million communist workers moved from manual to white-collar occupations between 1930-33. The total number of workers moving into white collar jobs during the 1st five year plan was probably at least one and a half million.

Thus the Soviet Union faced the task of training communists and workers in administrative work without giving in to bureaucratization. And at the same time, it faced the task of ensuring the growing presence and activity of communists at the base, among the rank-and-file workers. And the task of training new workers as communist party activists.

\*\*While the countryside was largely collectivized, there were huge issues there too. There was the question of actually utilizing collective agriculture to increase productivity. There was the issue of raising the socialized character of production in the collective farms. The peasantry had become collectivized, but it's not as if they had become workers yet. In fact, the way the collective farms operated, there were still a number of factors reinforcing peasant mentality among the collective peasants, such as how they were paid, how they were attached to their private plots, etc.

\*\*Meanwhile, in the party, trade unions and government, various problems had accumulated. The Soviets had been weakened considerably. There were questions of dealing with bureaucratization in the party and unions. There was a growing tendency of short-cutting organizational and ideological work, such as attempting to deal with social and economic problems with administrative means and threats in repressive decrees.

Those are just some key examples. All these problems needed to be dealt with. They needed solutions in a Marxist-Leninist spirit. But theoretical work had suffered greatly.

At this point it is also important to remember that with the victory of the Nazis in Germany and the growth of fascism in Europe, the reactionary pressure on the Soviet Union expanded considerably. This is an important context in which the turn of the mid-30s takes place.

But instead of dealing with the whole situation in a Marxist-Leninist way, the actual state of affairs was glossed over and a major turn for the

worse taken in the name of the triumph of socialism.

### The Turn of the Mid-30s

Fundamentally, the turn appears to be one of giving up the revolutionary drive in favor of "institutionalization" in a more and more bourgeois direction. At the heart of this was, on the one hand, the consolidation of a bureaucracy detached from the masses, and on the other, the removal of the working masses from participation and control over the economy and state and the reduction of the masses into passive producers.

The bureaucracy was of course not simply created by this turn in the mid-30s but the groundwork was paved for it earlier. But it appears that at this time that the bureaucracy congeals in a certain form, as a bureaucracy based essentially on a workers' aristocracy and standing above the masses of toilers.

I would like to now go through some features of the turn.

### Inequality and Privileges

A big campaign is organized against "leveling and equalization". This had been launched in 1931 and it is one of the issues that Stalin rails about in his speech to the 17th Congress of the CPSU in 1934. (See Stalin's **Report**, Part III "The Party", Section 1 "Questions of ideological and political leadership" in **Problems of Leninism**, pp. 740-3) Now there may have been some examples of groups of workers and peasants who tried premature equalization, but that's not what the campaign is about.

The speech [see elsewhere in this issue of the **Supplement**] on the Party-wide study of socialist principles discussed the theoretical side of this question more. Here I just wanted to note that this campaign officially abandons the idea that the Bolsheviks had held until then (e.g. in the 1919 Communist Party program) of aiming for a gradual equalization of wages. Now, when the need is considered to provide bonuses and extra pay to cadre, it is no longer seen as a forced retreat but as the genuine embodiment of socialist distribution.

The early Bolshevik policy had foreseen a gradual equalization of wages. At the same time, they had recognized the need to make concessions, such as to the specialists. Throughout the 20s both these trends can be seen. Sometimes certain higher pay and privileges were even retracted.

In the first five year plan period, some additional concessions were made in favor of material incentives both for managers and engineers and for skilled workers. Some of these things were prob-

ably necessary. But it doesn't appear there was recognition of the potential dangers when those measures were taken.

But with the onset of the big campaign against "leveling," the groundwork is created for an even bigger change. Sometime in the early 30s the "party maximum" is given up (it had been modified earlier); this was a cap on party members' salaries which existed even at times when non-party people in comparable positions were being paid more.

After the mid-30s there are additional steps to extend the privileges of the bureaucracy. A system of specialty shops for them is begun. They are provided with a much better housing. And so forth. And the salaries themselves are raised super-high above the ordinary workers.

Most salary figures were not published after the mid-30s. But some estimates have been made which give a picture of things. I will give one set of figures so that comrades can see what I'm talking about.

In 1937-38 the average monthly wage was about 250 rubles. Mind you, this is an average monthly wage, which means that many workers got less than this. A minimum wage was set for piece workers to be 110 rubles a month and 115 for time-workers. It appears that skilled workers generally made between 200-300 a month. During this period, apparently an upper section of workers also existed who made more than 1000 rubles a month. That gives an idea of the high differential among the workers themselves.

At this time, plant engineers were making 1500 rubles a month and directors 2,000. This was salary and didn't include bonuses. There is apparently a published decree in January 1938 which said that deputies (i.e. legislators) would get 1,000 rubles a month plus 150 rubles expenses for every day's session. The presidents of the 11 federated republics were to get 12,500 rubles a month. And the president and vice-president of the Union would get 25,000 a month. Compare that to the 110 ruble minimum wage or the 250 ruble average wage!

This gives us some picture of the privileges and pay for the upper bureaucracy, army leaders, and intellectuals, etc. Note that the issue is no longer just of the specialists inherited from the old regime but of new officials, who are drawn mainly from former workers and peasants. The core of the upper officialdom after 1938-9 is made up of the 150,000 workers and communists who had entered higher education during the 1st five year plan. This is the Khrushchev-Brezhnev generation.

As one can see, there is a huge expansion of material incentives in society. The money culture becomes a prime motivator for work. This infects both the party and the toilers.

## The New Constitution of 1936

In December 1936 a new constitution is approved. This appears to mark a legislative abandonment of Soviet power. I want to raise two issues about it.

It reorganizes the Soviets on a territorial basis, abandoning the idea of Soviets based in the work places. But this was one of the key points stressed by Lenin about how the Soviets could be closely connected to the needs of the masses and draw them into government.

Another thing is that the new constitution does away with working class hegemony in the name of equal rights for the "two friendly classes" and the socialist intelligentsia. In the earlier setup, the working class had been given disproportionate weight in the Soviet system. Even if that needed to be modified by this time--and perhaps it did--there was no consideration given to adopting any other special measures to ensure working class hegemony. Despite the fact that the working class proper was quite a different class than the collectivist peasantry or the intelligentsia.

### Other Changes

\*\*There are major changes in the army. In 1935 the system of ranks is restored, which had been abolished after the revolution. The restoration of ranks wasn't an issue of having commanders--the Red Army had always had that. A socialist army of course needs commanders but what it doesn't need is to make the officer strata a separate, privileged section. The restoration of ranks was aimed at that.

\*\*There are changes in the way things are run inside the work places. The authority of factory management appears to be enlarged more than ever while the workers' role is reduced.

\*\*A conservative line is pushed in family and personal affairs. There are new laws dealing with women and family questions. Abortion is outlawed and hindrances placed on the right to divorce. Homosexuality is made a criminal offense.

\*\*There are changes in the educational system. They include changes in methods of education. And in 1940 fees are even introduced for secondary school and higher education.

\*\*The approach to the study of history is revised, involving a revival of nationalism. Tsarist and other national heroes of early times now find praise.

\*\*There is a growth of repression and penal measures. There was already a bad tendency in the 1st Five Year Plan period of developing more and more harsh laws to deal with social problems. But the mid-30s on brings in a stepped-up use of

repression and still more harsh laws.

\*\*While already a bad tendency had developed of exaggerating the figure of Stalin, initiated by official observation of his 50th birthday in 1929, the mid-30s marks a big expansion of Stalin's personality cult. Which gets worse and worse with each passing year. And apparently at the regional and local level, cults are built around regional and local personalities as well.

### On the Theory of the State

One of the big theoretical changes that takes place is on the theory of the state.

Many comrades probably know that in 1939 Stalin "corrects" Engels and declares that yes, under communism in the Soviet Union too there will continue to be a state. (**Report to the 18th Congress of the CPSU(B)**, Part III, Section 4, "Some Questions of Theory") On the grounds of defense against foreign military attack, spies, wreckers, etc. This theorizing has obviously gone into a realm of total fantasy. For one thing, it is difficult to conceive that a classless, communist society could be built in the Soviet Union within the domestic and world conditions of that time. For another, the theory of a classless state is a travesty of Marxism, which has always seen the state as a feature of class society.

But this was merely the culmination of a tendency which had already started earlier. When they declared the final and irrevocable victory of socialism, Stalin and the Soviet leaders also revised the Marxist-Leninist theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. For one thing, we have already noted that in the new constitution they eliminated any question of ensuring proletarian hegemony in the state.

In this period they also raised the call of strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat. (See endnote 1) But this was essentially seen only as reinforcing the coercive side of the dictatorship of the proletariat and building up the economic administration apparatus. A polemic was launched against the idea of the withering away of the state, which is declared to be an issue for a later period (when that period supposedly came, there was no more discussion of it.) I want to raise some questions about this.

There is a contradiction between saying that socialism was already victorious and that the dictatorship of the proletariat needed to be further strengthened. If indeed socialism was victorious and there were only minor remnants of exploiters left to deal with, then it would be reason for taking big steps in reducing the coercive and repressive aspects of the socialist state. If indeed there are no longer hostile classes, no class an-

tagonisms--as they were describing things at that time--there would no longer even be reason to have a proletarian dictatorship. But if as they were saying, the dictatorship of the proletariat needed strengthening in this period, then one would have to more realistically and concede that the final victory of socialism was not here yet.

Instead of bombastic declarations which contradicted one another, a Marxist-Leninist approach would have actually dealt with the concrete situation as it existed. It would have looked at what the class situation actually was, seen what were the issues for the coercive side of the state, what were the steps necessary to draw the masses into the administration of economy and government, what measures to reduce the state apparatus, etc. But no such concrete discussion took place.

What then do all these changes that took place in the mid-30s mean? It means reducing the working class into the position of simply being producers. The work of revolutionary mobilization and participation in affairs of society is abandoned. Meanwhile the bureaucracy becomes detached and establishes a rule above the masses. It affirms privileges for itself and is bourgeoisified.

Those then are some features of the change. In our study, we will be faced with fully analyzing the change and the factors that led to it.

#### After the mid-30s

Then there is the question of how things proceed from the mid-30s on. It appears that the mid-30s is the crucial turn in the Soviet revolution. Until this time, there is still an attempt to be revolutionary, even if with weaknesses and problems. But from now on, what takes place is the institutionalization of the revolution in a bourgeois direction. After the turn, the Soviet Union is no longer pursuing a forward march towards socialism, but is in a trajectory of degeneration. In this case, since private capitalism had been largely defeated, the degeneration is towards the state monopoly capitalism we are familiar with in recent decades.

Of course a society does not completely change character overnight. The big decline begins in the mid-30s, but it would be wrong to say that all the gains from the revolution are instantly stripped away. The workers still retain various gains. And it should also be kept in mind that neither the overthrown Tsarist regime nor the old Russian bourgeoisie is restored to power.

Thus we are also faced with the task of studying the process of degeneration after the turn of the mid-30s. It involves analyzing why the working class could not stand up to the change. And it involves studying the successive stages of

degeneration. There is the period of World War II. There is the period of post-war reconstruction. There are the changes introduced by Khrushchev, Brezhnev, etc. Thus we have to study how the decay from bureaucratic degeneration to outright state capitalism took place. We have to study the process concretely to see how quantity changes into quality. There are in fact a series of things that take place from the mid-30s on, including further strengthening of the bureaucracy, the growth of militarism, escalation of nationalism, and so forth.

The views on capitalist restoration expressed by the Chinese and Albanians are not sufficient. They tried to describe the change by talking about a Khrushchev coup d'etat, and by attempting to describe capitalist restoration as, in large part, a matter of the introduction of various private capitalist and market features. But in looking at the evolution of things it is difficult to find any qualitative change in the mid-50s such as the Chinese and Albanians described. In fact, there are various threads of continuity in many of the features of the economy and political system between the mid-30s and today. Of course with various changes that have taken place in the last several decades. Khrushchev in the 50s and Kosygin in the 60s tried to extend the realm of such things as the enterprises and the collective farms but their efforts only went so far. And Brezhnev even appears to have reversed various of those efforts. It has fallen on Gorbachev to really push forward the realm of private capitalism in the Soviet Union. This whole issue is closely linked to the question of developing further our analysis of state capitalism.

Before I finish I did want to note that while I have concentrated on domestic policy, there is also the important issue of foreign policy and the relationship of the Soviet Union to the world revolutionary movement. That side of things is not a detached matter but is closely intertwined in the whole process. In this speech I dealt with the domestic side of things only.

(1) In Soviet literature from this time, a certain terminological issue arises. In Section II of his report **On the Draft Constitution** to a 1936 Soviet Congress of Soviets, Stalin says that the term "proletariat" refers to an oppressed and exploited class, and so the Soviet working class is no longer a proletariat. (See **Problems of Leninism**, pp. 800-1.) He then, in Section IV, makes a point of talking of the dictatorship of the working class, instead of using the term dictatorship of the proletariat. (*Ibid.*, pp. 817-9) But later the term dictatorship of the proletariat is still used.--**Supplement.** <>