

On Proletarian Democracy

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By the Central Reorganisation Committee, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

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Please see also, [Democracy: More Than Ever We can and Must Do Better Than That](#) by Bob Avakian.

1. Introduction

1.1. The recent wave of democratic upsurges in former socialist countries such as China, the Soviet Union and those in East Europe have raised many questions and challenges in front of the communists all over the world. The repercussions of these developments are not confined to the communist movement, rather they have shaken up the whole political realm at the global level. Communists, non-communists, and anti-communists, none can stand aloof. Questions are raised from various corners and answers are given from different angles. The communists have to grasp the depth of these problems and find out appropriate answers. It is with such an approach that this study is conducted.

1.2. The Marxist-Leninists in general all over the world have welcomed the recent wave of revolts and democratic upsurges against the social-fascist regimes of the former socialist countries. The Marxist-Leninists had already evaluated that the social system in these former socialist countries had degenerated into capitalism. Hence these upsurges are understood by them as an expression of the severe crisis faced by this particular form of capitalism. While hailing the people's struggles, Marxist-Leninist forces have cautioned them that bourgeois democracy or an unconcealed capitalism is not the solution. They have been called upon to continue the struggle for genuine communism. Mao's attempts leading to the lessons of the Cultural Revolution have been hailed as an alternative model to rely on and develop.

1.3. From the angle of the traditional Marxist-Leninist interpretation of capitalist restoration in the former socialist countries, this interpretation is sufficient. The capitalist roaders in the ruling communist parties of these countries transformed the budding socialist economy into a capitalist one by promoting, instead of restricting, bourgeois right and relying on material incentives for promoting production. The resultant bureaucratic capitalism has led to the present crisis in all these countries. This explanation is basically correct in relation to the economic aspect of capitalist restoration. But it is not sufficient to answer the principal political issue raised by the masses in these countries. Their major demand is the dismantling of the existing political system which ensures the monopoly of the communist party. The Marxist-Leninists have

correctly pointed out that these parties are not communist and that the political system there represents the dictatorship of a new bourgeoisie, social fascism. But so far as the masses of these countries are concerned, there is no difference between the essential structures of this social fascist political system and those which existed earlier when they were socialist. Even in China, where the Cultural Revolution gave rise to a new political situation, the state structure under Deng is not essentially different from the one which existed previously. The distinction is mainly in content, in who leads the State, Marxist-Leninists or revisionists. But the people are not able to see any qualitative difference in the structures of the political system, even though they can recognize the changes in their living conditions. That is why a mere call to re-establish socialism and a genuine dictatorship of the proletariat will not be sufficient.

1.4. Revisionists under the leadership of Gorbachev attribute the responsibility for the whole crisis of their bureaucratic capitalism to the deviations committed by Stalin. Using the cover of Stalin's mistakes they justify the basic changes openly implemented by Gorbachev. Gorbachev is actually trying to resolve the internal crisis faced by bureaucratic capitalism by fully and openly introducing Western capitalist methods both at the economic and political level. This is intensifying the contradiction, within the ruling party and the political system of the Soviet Union, between the old bureaucratic bourgeoisie well entrenched in the system and the new bourgeoisie under the leadership of Gorbachev who want to dismantle the decadent bureaucratic system. Up till now Gorbachev has been able to cleverly manoeuvre and keep his lead in the process, though the mounting national struggles in different nationalities are bound to destroy the centralized imperialist system headed by him.

1.5. The internal restructuring initiated by Gorbachev's perestroika is extended to the international arena, leading to the collusion between the two imperialist blocs led by the U.S. and the Soviet Union. This is accompanied by a process of realignment of economic and political forces at the global level. Along with his realization about the weakness of the bureaucratic system within the country, Gorbachev was also realizing the weakness of the social-imperialist neocolonial system, mainly maintained through manipulations at the state to state level, as compared to the dominant neocolonial structures system headed by the US. Hence the initiative by Gorbachev for collusion, envisaging a process of gradual absorption of Soviet social imperialism within this neocolonial structure. For the time being contention for control over the resources of the world will continue at a lower level.

1.6. The struggle between the bureaucrat bourgeoisie and the new bourgeoisie in the former socialist countries has not been completed, even though the new bourgeoisie has won decisive victories in the East European countries. Though Gorbachev, representing the new bourgeoisie of the Soviet Union, is in the lead, the powerful bureaucrat bourgeoisie within the party and the army have not yet accepted their defeat. The possibility of a coup by them cannot be ruled out. But that cannot stem the present tide of full-fledged and open capitalist restoration which has already reached the final stage in these countries. In China, the bureaucrat bourgeoisie have been successful in holding

on to power after brutally suppressing the people's revolt against the social-fascist system and defeating the new bourgeoisie within the party and the army, at least temporarily. But the social fascists in China will not be able to continue for long as the people's revolt is mounting. This may even take new dimensions, because of the powerful influence of the Cultural Revolution led by Mao, which was already manifested in the previous people's upsurge there. The bureaucrat bourgeoisie of Albania, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba are also holding on to their guns even though the people's unrest is developing there also. The overthrow of the social fascists in these countries is also not far off.

1.7. The so-called communist parties which have been overthrown in the former socialist countries are disintegrating. Some are even disappearing. The remaining forces and sections are getting polarized along the above-mentioned lines of supporting either the bureaucrat bourgeoisie or the new bourgeoisie. The same polarization is being extended to the revisionist parties of other countries also. In India, the Communist Party of India (CPI) is officially supporting the new bourgeois line of Gorbachev, though other elements are also there as a minor force. On the other hand, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has officially opposed the latest positions of Gorbachev while generally supporting the bureaucrat bourgeois sections in the Soviet party as well as in the Chinese party. But in the CPI(M) also elements supporting the Gorbachev line are reported to be active. Some degenerated Marxist-Leninist forces at the international level as well as in India are also getting polarized along these lines.

1.8. The bourgeoisie and the anti-communist forces all over the world have been utilizing these developments to propagate that communism is dead. Even though Marxist-Leninist forces were propagating that it was not socialism, but social fascism which was existing in all these former socialist countries, the fact is that people were not fully convinced or were not accepting this view as such. So the bourgeoisie have been successful in projecting the overthrow or the crisis of social fascism as the defeat of socialism and communism. Of course, the bourgeoisie is realizing that the crisis faced by state monopoly capitalism and social fascism is going to engulf them also. But they have been able to cover it up, because of the setback suffered by the communist movement. Under these circumstances, even among people who are generally in favour of socialism, doubts and apprehensions about the viability of socialism have already started raising their heads.

1.9. In this situation, it is the duty of the genuine communists to look back and identify the root cause for the problem faced by the communist movement. Without answering the basic issues raised in front of us, no communist organization can advance in its own practice. Such basic questions, if left unanswered for long, will demoralize the cadres and weaken the organization. Therefore, the resolution of these problems, or at least attempts at resolution, must be taken up as an urgent political task. It is in this spirit that we call upon all genuine communists to re-examine the whole history of the communist movement and the basic concepts we have held aloft so far, so as to get a clear picture of the dictatorship of the proletariat as practised until now.

2. Dictatorship of the Proletariat

2.1. The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat is central to the Marxian scheme of proletarian revolution, socialist construction and the advancement towards communism. Ever since this concept was put forward in a clear-cut manner by Marx and Engels, the entire development of the international communist movement has been inseparably linked with the practice centred around this concept. That is why we have to examine the emergence and development of this concept and its practice through its different phases.

2.2. Let us start with the clear-cut statement made by Marx on this subject: "As to myself, no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: 1) *that the existence of classes is merely linked to particular historical phases in the development of production*, 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, 3) that this dictatorship itself only leads to the transition to *the abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*." (from the "Letter to Joseph Weydemeyer", *Marx Engels Selected Works (MESW)*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973, Vol. I, p. 528)

2.3. Along with such a clarification Marx had summed up the experience of the European revolutions of 1848-51, deriving this explicit conclusion: "All revolutions perfected this machine instead of smashing it." (from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, MESW, Vol. I, p. 471) Thus he made it clear that the proletarian revolution has to smash the existing state machine. And after the most valuable experiences of the Paris Commune, in the preface of the *Communist Manifesto* dated June 24, 1872, Marx and Engels recognized that the programme of the *Communist Manifesto* "has in some details become out-of-date", because "one thing especially was proved by the Commune, namely, that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes'". (MESW, Vol. I, p. 99)

3. Marx and the Paris Commune

3.1. The Paris Commune provided the answer to the most important question: what is to replace the smashed state machine? In his first outline of *The Civil War in France*, Marx beautifully expressed his concept of the Commune: "The Commune -- the reabsorption of the state power by society, as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organized force of their suppression -- the political form of their social emancipation, instead of the artificial force appropriated by their oppressors (their own force opposed to and organized against them) of society wielded for their oppression by their enemies. This form was simple like all great things." ("On the Paris Commune", Moscow, 1976, p. 153)

3.2. In the final version of *The Civil War in France*, he observed its functioning thus: "The Paris Commune was, of course, to serve as a model to all the great industrial centres of France. The Communal *regime* once established in Paris and the secondary centres, the old centralized government would in the provinces, too, have to give way to the self-government of the producers. In a rough sketch of national organization, which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet, and that in the rural districts the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short term of service.... The few but important functions which still would remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by Communal, and therefore strictly responsible agents. The unity of the nation was not to be broken, but on the contrary, to be organized by the Communal Constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the state power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence... nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to supersede the universal suffrage by hierarchic investiture. ("On the Paris Commune", Moscow, 1976, p. 73)

3.3. How did such a new political institution come into being? Marx explains: "The first decree of the Commune... was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people. The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of the central government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the administration." (Ibid., p. 71)

3.4. Out of all these measures, the first decree, "*suppression of the standing army and the substitution for it of the armed people*", is the crucial act differentiating the Commune from all the old states. Lenin declared that this "...constitutes the very essence of the Commune...." ("The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution -- A New Type of State", *Collected Works (LCW)*, Vol. 24, p. 68) In his first outline to *The Civil War in France*, Marx wrote: "The people had only to organize this militia on a national scale, to have done away with the standing armies; the first economical condition... for all social improvements, discarding at once..., this constant danger of government usurpation of class rule at the same time the safest guarantee against foreign aggression and making in fact the costly military apparatus impossible in all other states...." ("On the Paris Commune", p. 154) In other words, the replacement of the standing army by the armed people was considered by Marx as a measure which would help the people to keep in check the danger of both internal usurpation and foreign intervention. Thus the Communal form of political system which not only mobilized and organized the political will of the working masses but also ensured its enforcement through an armed force

which truly represented this will – i.e., the armed people. Marx considered that "...it affords the rational medium in which the class struggle can run through its different phases in the *most rational and humane way*." (Ibid, p. 156, emphasis added)

3.5. The Paris Commune lasted only for a few months. Summing up the reasons for its defeat Marx pointed out two mistakes. First, the Communards did not take the offensive against the retreating bourgeoisie. Second, the Central Committee surrendered its power *too soon* to make way for the Commune. Later on Engels repeated this point: "...it was the want of centralization and authority that cost the Paris Commune its life. *Once you have won* you can do with this authority what you like... but the fight needs to have all our force brought together in a fist..." ("Letter to Carlo Terraghi", "On the Paris Commune", p. 292, emphasis added) Thus in their view, the defeat of the Commune did not lie in its unique structure --the absence of a standing army, elective posts, etc. In fact we can see that they have always upheld the Commune as the model of the dictatorship of the proletariat. They pinpointed the reason for defeat in the Central Committee's handing over its power *too soon* (before winning), i.e., the absence of a centralized authority necessary to safeguard the Commune. Yet Marx and Engels never undertook a detailed re-examination of the Commune lessons in the light of defeat, and left many questions unanswered.

4. Lenin and Proletarian State Power

4.1. After the Paris Commune, the October Revolution in Russia provided the next historical opportunity for materializing the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The theoretical and practical experiences achieved by the Bolshevik Party in this regard, under the leadership of Lenin, still remain as the fundamental positions of the international communist movement on this question. So let us examine Lenin's concept as well as the experiences of the Bolshevik Party in relation to the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

4.2. It was in the period after the February Revolution in Russia that serious discussions on the question of state and revolution emerged among the communists. Lenin took it up and tried to answer various questions raised from different angles and formulated the Marxist position on the subject. Lenin's famous book *The State and Revolution*, which was first published in August 1917, was the result of these attempts.

4.3. Lenin based all his analysis on the following understanding of the Marxist position on the state: "The essence of Marx's theory of the state has been mastered only by those who realize that the dictatorship of a *single* class is necessary not only for every class society in general, not only for the *proletariat* which has overthrown the bourgeoisie, but also for the entire *historical period* which separates capitalism from 'classless society', from Communism. Bourgeois states are most varied in form, but their essence is the same; all these states, whatever their form, in the final analysis are inevitably the

dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The transition from capitalism to communism is certainly bound to yield tremendous abundance and variety of political forms, but the essence will inevitably be the same: *the dictatorship of the proletariat*." (LCW, Vol. 25, p. 418)

4.4. During this period leading up to the October Revolution Lenin was basing his arguments mainly on the lessons of the Paris Commune as evaluated by Marx and Engels. Lenin evaluated the basic characteristic of the Paris Commune in this way: "The Commune... appears to have replaced the smashed state machine 'only' by fuller democracy: abolition of the standing army; all officials to be elected and subject to recall. But as a matter of fact this 'only' signifies a gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of a fundamentally different type. This is exactly a case of 'quantity being transformed into quality': democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois into proletarian democracy; from the state -- a special force for the suppression of a particular class -- into something which is no longer the state proper." (Ibid, p. 424) Lenin pointed out that while the Commune retained the representative institutions, it could overcome the parliamentarism of bourgeois democracy by abolishing the division of labour between the legislative and the executive. (Ibid, p. 429)

4.5. Lenin defined the nature of democracy during the transition period thus: "Democracy for the vast majority of the people and suppression by force, i.e., exclusion from democracy, of the exploiters and oppressors of the people -- this is the change democracy undergoes during the *transition* from capitalism to communism." (Ibid., p. 467) Further, he explained the relation between democracy and the state. "Democracy is a form of state, one of its varieties. Consequently, like every state, it represents, on the one hand, the organized, systematic use of force against persons; but, on the other hand, it signifies the formal recognition of equality of citizens, the equal right of all to determine the structure of, and to administer, the state. This, in turn, results in the fact that, at a certain stage in the development of democracy, it first welds together the class that wages a revolutionary struggle against capitalism -- the proletariat, and enables it to crush, smash to atoms, wipe off the face of the earth the bourgeois, even the republican-bourgeois, state machine, the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy and to substitute for them a *more* democratic state machine, but a state machine nevertheless, in the shape of armed workers who proceed to form a militia involving the entire population. Here 'quantity turns into quality'; *such* a degree of democracy implies overstepping the boundaries of bourgeois society and beginning its socialist reorganization." (Ibid, p. 477)

4.6. Lenin stressed the point, following Engels, that "the abolition of the state means also the abolition of democracy: that the withering away of the state means the withering away of democracy." (Ibid, p. 460) Lenin linked this withering away of democracy with its advance. He said, "Communism alone is capable of providing really complete democracy, and the more complete it is, the sooner it will become unnecessary and wither away on its own accord." (Ibid, p. 468)

4.7. "...When there are no classes (i.e., when there is no distinction between the members of society as regards their relation to the social means of production), *only* then 'the state ceases to exist', and '*it becomes possible to speak of freedom*'. Only then will a truly complete democracy become possible and be realized, a democracy without any exceptions whatever. And only then will democracy begin to *wither away*... people will gradually *become accustomed* to observing the elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all copy-book maxims. They will become accustomed to observing them without force, without coercion, without subordination, *without the special apparatus* for coercion called the state." (Ibid, p. 467) This was how Lenin envisaged the withering away of the state and the rise of a new social organization under communism.

4.8. Like in the case of the Commune, the significance of the Soviet form of political organization was seen in the fact that it enabled the proletariat and the working masses "to take the organs of state power directly into their own hands, in order that *they themselves should constitute* these organs of state power." (LCW, Vol. 23, p. 326) Lenin said: "*The people need a republic in order to educate the masses* in the methods of democracy. We need not only *representation along democratic lines, but the building of the entire state administration from the bottom up by the masses themselves*, their effective participation in all of life's steps, their active role in the administration." (LCW, Vol. 24, p. 181, emphasis added) Following Marx, Lenin repeatedly stressed the significance of abolishing the standing army and replacing it with the armed people as a means of drawing the masses into the administration of society and to check the danger of restoration.

5. The Soviets and the Practice of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

5.1. Lenin put forward the overall practical programme for the seizure of power by the working class in his famous April Theses, with the resounding slogan, "All Power to the Soviets". He defined that the new state will not be a parliamentary republic, "but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country from top to bottom". (LCW, Vol. 24, p. 23) Lenin tried to introduce the major aspects of proletarian state power which had emerged under the Paris Commune, except the principle of universal suffrage. Though the dissolution of the standing army was accepted in principle, it also could not be put into practice.

5.2. This overall programme for seizure of power was implemented by the second All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies held on October 25-26, 1917. The Congress took power into its own hands and decreed that "all power in the localities shall pass to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, which must guarantee genuine revolutionary order". (LCW, Vol. 26, p. 247) Transfer of the land of the landed proprietors to the peasant committees, protection of the rights of the soldiers by introducing complete democracy in the army, establishment of worker's control over production, ensuring the convocation of the Constituent Assembly at the time appointed, etc., were also decreed.

5.3. The political system which was being developed in this way was centred around the Soviets as the organs of political power. The system of proportional representation along with the right to recall was adopted. An important crisis in the system surfaced in relation to the promised convocation of the Constituent Assembly. This was a demand and promise upheld by the communists before and after the revolution. The Constituent Assembly which was elected immediately after the revolution was still representing the pre-revolutionary situation. So it was not prepared to accept the new authority of the Soviets and its Central Executive Committee.

5.4. Under such circumstances, the Bolsheviks decided to withdraw their delegation from the Constituent Assembly. It was justifiable in the sense that the power of the Soviets which had emerged through revolution was really representing the political will of the vast majority of the people. And this qualitative change had to be reflected in the Constituent Assembly. Finally the Central Committee of the All-Russia Soviets dissolved the Constituent Assembly through a decree. With this the change over to the new political system was reaching a significant point. At the same time it was facing new challenges.

5.5. In a major policy declaration made a few months after the revolution, Lenin defined that the "socialist character of Soviet, i.e., *proletarian* democracy, as concretely applied today, lies first in the fact that the electors are the working and exploited people; the bourgeoisie is excluded. Secondly, it lies in the fact that all bureaucratic formalities and restrictions of elections are abolished, the people themselves determine the order and time of elections, and are completely free to recall any elected person...." (LCW, Vol. 27, p. 272)

5.6. He defined the other aspect of the new system. "Dictatorship, however, is a big word, and big words should not be thrown about carelessly. Dictatorship is iron rule, government that is revolutionarily bold, swift and ruthless in suppressing both exploiters and hooligans." (LCW, Vol. 27, p. 265) In reply to Kautsky's charge that the Soviet system is dictatorial and not democratic, Lenin emphasized: "The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat is rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws." (LCW, Vol. 28, p. 236) Lenin also refuted Kautsky's argument that classes can only rule, but not govern, by pointing out examples from history where classes not only ruled but also governed. Here Lenin's argument was actually based on the assumption that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a system in which the working class itself is governing.

5.7. But what was developed as the new political system was gradually coming under the control of the Communist Party. Lenin explained the situation thus: "What happens is that the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dictatorship cannot be exercised or the functions of the government performed without a foundation such as the trade unions. These functions, however, have to be performed through the medium of special institutions which are also of a new type, namely the Soviets.... The whole is like an

arrangement of cogwheels.... It cannot work without a number of 'transmission belts' running from the vanguard to the mass of the advanced class, and from the latter to the mass of the working people." (LCW, Vol. 32, pp. 20-21)

5.8. Further, Lenin categorically declared the role of the Communist Party thus: "After two and a half years of the Soviet power we came out in the Communist International and told the world that the dictatorship of the proletariat would not work except through the Communist Party." (LCW, Vol. 32, p. 199) Now the circle is complete. The practical programme for establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat which started with the attractive slogan, "All Power to the Soviets", ended with the reality that the dictatorship of the proletariat was exercised through the Communist Party, where the Soviets became mere cogwheels in the machine. Even though Kautsky's criticism was coming from the angle of bourgeois parliamentarism, the fact remains that in the present-day world situation, when a qualitatively new political system as envisaged in a genuine dictatorship of the proletariat has not emerged as a historical reality, it is not the class, but its party that actually governs.

5.9. The position taken by Lenin in relation to the party and the dictatorship of the proletariat is not very different from the position Stalin adopted and implemented. Stalin argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat is "in essence", the dictatorship of the party. And in exercising this dictatorship, the party uses the Soviets as mere transition belts like the trade unions, Youth League, etc. (*Concerning Questions of Leninism, Collected Works*, Vol. 8, pp. 14-39) From this position, the nature and course of development of the bureaucratization process and the emergence of new classes can easily be traced. Under such a political structure, the absence of a conscious policy to restrict bourgeois right and the increasing reliance on material incentive for promoting production laid the economic foundation for bureaucratic capitalism. And when we reach the stage of Mao's finding that under the dictatorship of the proletariat the bourgeoisie emerges within the party itself, the picture becomes complete.

5.10. Here it is important to note that Trotsky's criticism of Stalin did not answer any of the basic questions faced by the dictatorship of the proletariat. His criticism of bureaucratization did not lead to any basic understanding of the problems faced by the whole political system under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Rather he was also upholding the line of the development of the productive forces practised by Stalin. And as far as the major controversy between Stalin and Trotsky, that of building socialism in one country, Stalin was correct.

6. Criticism by Rosa Luxemburg

6.1. In her unfinished rough draft on the Russian Revolution written in prison, Rosa Luxemburg raised many serious criticisms on many fundamental questions related to the October Revolution. She wrote: "The basic error of the Lenin-Trotsky theory is that they, too, just like Kautsky, oppose dictatorship to democracy. 'Dictatorship or democracy' is the way the question is put by Bolsheviks and Kautsky alike. The latter

naturally decides in favour of 'democracy', that is, of bourgeois democracy, precisely because he opposes it to the alternative of the socialist revolution. Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, decide in favour of dictatorship in contradistinction to democracy, and thereby in favour of dictatorship of a handful of persons, that is, in favour of dictatorship on the bourgeois model. They are two opposite poles alike being far removed from a genuine socialist policy...." (*Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, New York, 1970, p. 393)

6.2. She observed that the model of the dictatorship of the proletariat established under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, after the October Revolution, was actually trying to eliminate democracy as such, in the name of "the cumbersome nature of democratic electoral bodies". Her piercing criticism touched on the central question raised in relationship to the dictatorship of the proletariat: "To be sure every democratic institution has its limits and shortcomings, things which it doubtless shares with all other human institutions. But the remedy which Trotsky and Lenin have found, the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure: for it stops up the very living source from which alone can come the correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammelled energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people." (Ibid, p. 387)

6.3. The basic defect of the Soviet system is exposed by Rosa in this way: "Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party, however numerous they may be, is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of 'justice' but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when freedom becomes a special privilege." (Ibid, pp. 389-390)

6.4. Opposing Lenin's claim that the Soviet system of proletarian democracy is a million times better than bourgeois democracy, she evaluated the situation under the dictatorship of the proletariat practised by the Bolsheviks thus: "In place of the representative bodies created by general popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down the Soviets as the only true representation of the labouring masses. But with the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the Soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule." (Ibid, p. 391)

6.5. Rosa Luxemburg raised serious criticism on the basic approach of the Bolshevik leadership: "The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin-Trotsky theory of the dictatorship is this: that the socialist transformation is something for which a ready-made formula lies completed in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which needs only to be carried out energetically in practice. This is unfortunately -- or perhaps fortunately -- not the case. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the

practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and judicial system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future, what we possess in our programme is nothing but a few main signposts which indicate the general direction in which to look for the necessary measures, and the indications are mainly negative in character at that." (Ibid, p. 390)

6.6. Rosa Luxemburg had raised many other criticisms against the Bolshevik policy on nationalities, peasant policy, Constituent Assembly, etc. But after coming out of prison and getting direct information about the situation in Russia she withdrew some of the criticisms, and kept silent on some others. She realized the difficulty in allowing unlimited freedom to the enemies. Even then some of the observations she made on basic questions like democracy under the dictatorship of the proletariat are of far-reaching significance and relevance, while her position on the national question still remains [word illegible].

7. Mao, New Democratic State and Cultural Revolution

7.1. Mao's attempt to evolve a healthy ideological and political struggle within the communist party by developing the two-line struggle to a higher level helped in creating a new atmosphere. Also his attempt to build a New Democratic state with a broad united front of different classes under the leadership of the working class was a departure and development conforming to the different situation in a semi-colonial condition.

7.2. But in spite of all these major breakthroughs, it can be seen now that the New Democratic People's Dictatorship established immediately after the completion of the revolution in China and the dictatorship of the proletariat which followed did not mark any significant advancement from the basic framework developed by Lenin and Stalin. Since the New Democratic state was formed as a united front of different class forces, some other political parties other than the communist party were also participating in it. But all these parties were accepting the leadership and the authority of the communist party. Therefore, in effect, the situation was not much different from that in a state with single-party rule. This is one of the reasons why the advancement from this state of affairs to that of the dictatorship of the proletariat went on smoothly.

7.3. So the basic problems faced by the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, namely the lack of a political system in which the people can directly participate and assert their political will, socialization of the means of production leading to centralization and the accompanying bureaucratization of the whole system, were all manifested in China also. Hence, the same process of capitalist restoration which had already reached an advanced stage in the Soviet Union had started in China also.

7.4. Mao could realize the gravity of the situation. He initiated investigations at the theoretical level as well as attempts at the practical level to break out of this situation. His theory on continuing the class struggle under the dictatorship of the proletariat was a major breakthrough in this direction. (Lenin had already put forward the position that class struggle would continue in different forms throughout the period of the

dictatorship of the proletariat. But he did not develop it as Mao did, finding out new forms of struggle to deal with the question.) Mao's breakthroughs on other theoretical questions were also profound. He identified the economic reductionist position of the capitalist roaders, manifested in the form of the theory of the productive forces. His emphasis on the revolution in the superstructure as well as in the relations of production, his slogans during the Cultural Revolution such as "Put politics in command", "Take class struggle as the key link", "Grasp revolution, promote production", etc., were all a departure from the thinking that was dominant in the communist movement until then. Actually he was coming closer to the crux of the problem when he identified the areas of struggle in the superstructure, and in the relations of production. Similarly, he recognized the fact that political power was not in the hands of the working class and other toiling masses of the people. Here he identified the crux of the matter --how to bring political power into the hands of the people.

7.5. He frankly admitted that there was no way out, no ready-made answer to the question. As Mao himself pointed out it was actually the masses who developed the new forms of struggle, the Cultural Revolution. It was actually a struggle against the structures of the bureaucratization existing under the dictatorship of the proletariat. As it was a spontaneous outburst of the masses, the anarchic deviations it developed were quite natural. But what had to be done was to systematize all these lessons into a new political system and form of struggle to be practised under the dictatorship of the proletariat. But, unfortunately, we cannot see any such positive development during Mao's lifetime. As can be seen in Mao's discussions with Chang Chun-chiao with regard to the Shanghai Commune, he had no new answer to the basic question which confronted them during the Cultural Revolution. Instead he went back to the theme of the party's ultimate authority to safeguard the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was a reflection of the same old concern which was haunting the communists since the bitter lessons of the defeat of the Paris Commune. Mao's confusion is evident in the following quotation: "In regard to the form of Soviet political power, as soon as it materialized, Lenin was elated, deeming it to be a remarkable creation by workers, peasants, and soldiers, as well as a new form of proletarian dictatorship. Nonetheless, *Lenin had not anticipated then that although the workers, peasants, and soldiers could use this form of political power it could also be used by the bourgeoisie*, and by Khrushchev. Thus the present Soviet has been transformed from Lenin's Soviet to Khrushchev's Soviet." (*Mao Miscellany*, Joint Publications Research Service, Arlington, VA, USA, Vol. 2, p. 452, emphasis added) Mao's main point is that what matters is not the *form* of the state structure but which class seizes power. This shows that Marx's emphasis on the new form of state under the dictatorship of the proletariat was almost forgotten.

7.6. The Cultural Revolution could not break this limitation. On the contrary it itself revealed the very same limitation. The Cultural Revolution was possible only because of the leadership of Mao and it developed outside the existing political structure. Even though Mao had pointed out that many more Cultural Revolutions will be required during the whole period of socialism, it is quite clear that they are not going to continue in the absence of a system where such Cultural Revolutions are ensured, and Mao and

other socialist leaders in China could not develop or envisage such a system. What they tried was to establish an all-round dictatorship over the bourgeoisie, using the same old framework of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Such an approach appeared to be only more authoritarian, and even the anti-bureaucratic content of the Cultural Revolution was misrepresented in this context.

7.7. With all its limitations, the Cultural Revolution has no doubt helped Chinese society to take a leap as far as its political development is concerned. Even though capitalist roaders could seize political power, the political discussions, investigations and trends that have come up in the post-Cultural Revolution period clearly reveal this situation. Though complete information regarding all these developments are lacking, available information shows that profound discussions regarding the problems of socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat have started there. These developments also reveal both the positive and negative aspects of the Cultural Revolution itself, especially the fact that the whole experiment was limited within the framework of the old concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat which has already been proved quite inadequate to face the new problems.

8. Basic Error

8.1. Our review reveals that the dictatorship of the proletariat practised so far in the former socialist countries since the October Revolution all ended up in the dictatorship of the party instead of developing towards a genuine system of the dictatorship of the proletariat, though there are many positive lessons to be assimilated by the working class. The whole system which was established and developed was mainly based on the concept and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat put forward by Lenin. Even Mao could not come out of that basic framework. So now we have to find out where and how Lenin went wrong.

8.2. As has already been pointed out, Lenin was fully relying on the experience of the Paris Commune as narrated and evaluated by Marx and Engels in order to develop the concept and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat. That is why when the workers in Russia evolved a new form of organization during the 1905 Revolution, the Soviets, Lenin immediately upheld it as a potential form of organization corresponding to the needs of the future proletarian state structure.

8.3. It was in this background that Lenin raised the most crucial slogan of the October Revolution, "All Power to the Soviets". In his most important theoretical work on the state, *The State and Revolution*, he envisaged the Soviets as the main form of the political organ of the proletariat and other sections of the people. A political system functioning through the Soviets as the representative bodies of the workers, peasants and soldiers, was envisaged as something similar to the Commune of Paris.

8.4. In the political structure of the Paris Commune, the communist party was not having any direct role. But while evaluating the defeat of the Commune, Marx pointed to the fact that the Central Committee handed over power to the Commune too soon. It means

that the Central Committee should have kept the political power in its own hands for a short period sufficient enough to defeat the enemies and ensure the functioning of the new proletarian state. But it is not clear how Marx would have looked upon the role of the Commune in relation to this new central role of the Central Committee during that transition period. It is also not clear how such a situation would have transformed into one where the party had no central role to play.

8.5. The absence of any mention of the role of the party in the whole scheme of the dictatorship of the proletariat as explained in *The State and Revolution* by Lenin is very conspicuous. It may be due to this influence of the political structure of the Paris Commune. But here, unlike in the Paris Commune, the party was going to play the crucial role because by the time of the October Revolution, a party had already been developed as the vanguard representing the class interests of the proletariat. So this was the crucial theoretical question to be resolved during that period. Lenin's total neglect of this question was a serious lapse leading to the basic error in developing the understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

8.6. After the seizure of power in October, the Congress of the Soviets became the formal authority of the new political power. But actually the party was playing the crucial role in evolving all important policies and tactics behind the scene. In effect the party was controlling the Soviets, though its specific role in the new state structure was not defined.

8.7. So, under the pressure of circumstances, in the face of both external and internal threats, the party was forced to play the central role, relegating the Soviets to the background. And Lenin openly admitted this situation and justified it saying that the proletariat can exercise its dictatorship only through the party. In order to justify this new role of the party Lenin even pointed out the degeneration of the working class, making it unable to rule as a class. (*LCW*, Vol. 32, p. 21) Moreover, Lenin was not raising this question as a specific problem of Russia, but as a universal problem, thereby making it a principle that only the party can exercise the dictatorship. Hence Lenin had reached a position just opposite to that of Marx.

8.8. The basic point of departure for the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat had already been identified by Marx while summing up the lessons of the Paris Commune -- "the reabsorption of state power by society as its own living force". But Lenin did not take up the questions of translating this concept into practice, and thereby making a qualitative break with the hitherto existing understanding on political power. Even though he was talking about Soviet deputies being revocable agents of power and also about creating the new state with the armed people, in practice no concrete steps were taken to realize this. The unavoidable force of circumstances may be pointed out as the factor preventing any advancement in this direction. But we have no evidence to show that Lenin paid any serious attention to this basic question itself. He did not understand the necessity of evolving a qualitatively new political system under the dictatorship of the

proletariat. On the other hand, his whole attempt was to achieve this change by changing the leadership of the state, from a bourgeois one into that of the proletariat through its party.

8.9. Actually the structure of the new proletarian state envisaged by Marx and Engels had nothing to do with the existing structure of the bourgeois state. This is well reflected in the above quoted statement of Marx (reabsorption...) and in Engels' statement, "The proletariat seizes power and... then puts an end to itself as proletariat... and thus also to the state as state." (*Anti-Dühring*, Peking, 1976, p. 362) This is the point of departure -- a state which itself becomes the guarantee for the reabsorption of state power by the society, a state which ceases to be a state in the traditional sense. How can the proletariat achieve such a goal which involves deep internal contradictions? Two practical steps taken by the Paris Commune are in front of us -- a political system run through the revocable agents of power and the replacement of the standing army by the armed people.

8.10. But if we are really to achieve a qualitative break with the existing understanding of political power, we have to go deeper into its dynamics. In a class society, the dominant class wields political power claiming to represent the whole society. This reflects a contradiction between the political will of the ruling class and that of the society as a whole. It is to resolve this contradiction that power is concentrated in the state structure and wielded by the ruling class as its executive power. So this concentration of the political will of the ruling class in the name of the political will of the whole society, in the concrete form of the state, especially in its armed might, is characteristic of the political power so far existing in class society. The proletariat is aiming at qualitatively breaking with this structure. It must initiate a process which makes the society as a whole capable of reabsorbing this concentrated power. And the replacement of the standing army by the armed people is a concrete initial step in this direction. But in the absence of a complete economic, political, social system which guarantees this reabsorption, this alone will not serve the purpose. In the whole process, conditions and structures should be created so that the (political) will of the whole society can get expressed and realized directly without the mediation of a state. It is only then that the proletariat can achieve its goal of a society where the state withers away. If the proletariat cannot put forward such an alternative political system, it cannot make any qualitative break with the existing bourgeois system.

8.11. It is here that the whole system of the dictatorship of the proletariat so far practised, starting from Lenin and up to Mao, failed. The whole system revolved around the idea of seizing and maintaining the political power through a centralized state structure. It not only did not initiate any process of reabsorption of power but, on the contrary, led to more concentration of power. Of course, during the Cultural Revolution, Mao tried to reverse the direction, but he could not make any qualitative advance since he could not come out of the basic framework already established. Mao had also not

grasped the importance of a new political organizational structure. This is what is reflected in his remark that the Soviets of Lenin could easily be transformed into Khrushchev's, meaning that the discovery of Soviets was of no significance.

9. Bourgeois Dictatorship and Proletarian Democracy

9.1. The reason for such a basic deviation is to be further investigated. We may get some clue to understand the problem if we try to look at how Lenin analyzed bourgeois democracy and attempted to replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was absolutely correct on the part of Lenin to evaluate that all different forms of bourgeois states are inevitably the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and that all the different possible forms of transitional proletarian state are essentially the dictatorship of the proletariat. But this aspect of dictatorship is only the essential part, not the whole of it. A bourgeois democratic state deals with an important question of human society, the contradiction between individual and society. But a bourgeois fascist state does not give room for dealing with that contradiction at the same level, even though both are essentially dictatorships of the bourgeoisie. For the first time in the history of human society bourgeois democracy recognizes the individual as a political entity and gives him/her a role in the political system, though formally. The weakness of this bourgeois democracy is that it is based on the rule of private property whereby it ensures the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Thus the equality professed by it becomes not only formal, but also bogus.

9.2. It is on this basis that Lenin stressed on the point: "democracy based on private property or on a struggle for the abolition of private property". Here he is emphasizing the class-dominant aspect of democracy, the rule of private property. But by equating bourgeois democracy to the bourgeois state, he has neglected the non-class aspect of democracy reflected in bourgeois democracy. The recognition of the individual's political role in the political system of a society is actually a historical advance in dealing with the non-class contradiction of individual/society. Bourgeois democracy is reflecting this non-class aspect also. It is actually a development in the forms of social functioning which was (and is) taking place in the whole process of social development in close relation with the development of class struggle. Even though Lenin talks about the formal equality reflected in bourgeois democracy and its representative nature, he does not demarcate between the class-dominant and non-class aspects of democracy. So he comes to the solution of replacing the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by the dictatorship of the proletariat by simply reversing the dictatorship of the minority over the majority into a dictatorship of the majority over the minority. Hence no qualitative break with the old structure is required. Ultimately, the old structure which concentrates political power in the hands of the state leadership leads to the emergence and strengthening of a new ruling class from among the working class and the ranks and leadership of its party itself.

9.3. The development of proletarian democracy will not take place simply by reversing the dictatorship of the minority over the majority. Elimination of private property and socialization of the means of production are certainly crucial steps for establishing the

system of proletarian democracy or the genuine dictatorship of the proletariat. But as has already been seen from the experience of the former socialist countries, the mere juridical socialization of the means of production is not going to solve this problem. Rather, that will create concrete conditions for further centralization of political power since the whole means of production get concentrated into a single entity. So the real socialization of the economy, an essential for proletarian democracy, can be achieved only through an effective political system which can ensure genuine democracy by decentralizing the political power, by ensuring the realization of real power by the people directly. So the socialization of the means of production and the development of a political system that ensures proletarian democracy are essential, complementary aspects of the socialist system which must be capable of surviving on its own.

9.4. Bourgeois democracy will be transcended only by passing through this transitional phase of proletarian democracy which will create a new form for social organization in communism. Here the non-class aspect of democratic functioning will further develop, creating favourable conditions for the all-round development of the individual, though within the contradictory relationship between individual and society.

9.5. Proletarian democracy is essentially a dictatorship of the proletariat in the sense that the class interest of the proletariat, of liberating itself through emancipating the whole of humanity, is aimed at and achieved through this system. And the economic and political system envisaged above is ensuring the attainment of such a goal. Such a social system can exist and survive only if the majority of the people accept it and protect it as their own. Hence the role of the communist party in this whole process will be basically different from that known and practised so far. The communist party, representing the genuine interests of the proletariat as the most advanced class, will certainly play the vanguard role in leading the struggle of the people against the existing bourgeois reactionary system and smashing it, and in creating and establishing the new proletarian democratic system. It will also play a very active political role to ensure the political system as envisaged by it -- politicizing the people throughout the period, and mobilizing them to defend and develop it. But the survival of this new socialist system will not depend upon the protective role of the communist party. Rather the system will survive only by passing the test of history.

9.6. In the light of this evaluation of the basic reason for the grave deviations in the concept and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat from the time of Lenin onwards, we will have to come to the conclusion that the whole practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat up until now and the experience of building socialism was marked by serious deviations. As a new social system, emerging from the old, socialism was bound to suffer from many blemishes. But apart from those caused by circumstances, the line followed by communists from Lenin onwards has also played its part in this. While upholding the heroic effort to create a new society and the new things which emerged through socialism (things which have played a positive role in shaping history), as communists our own task is to focus on our mistakes and correct them, not justify them in the name of historical limitations. Examining these mistakes in the light of

Marxism, we can see that they really reflected deviations from the proletarian world outlook. But at the same time we have to identify in which concrete form it is reflected. One dominant tendency can be identified as that of a class-reductionist tendency. That is, analyzing society only in terms of class and class struggle, thereby neglecting the non-class aspects in the complex phenomenon of society. Lenin's one-sidedness in understanding the complexities of the dictatorship of the proletariat and his total neglect of the need to develop a political system will have to be attributed to this class-reductionist approach, which is still very dominant in the whole communist movement.

9.7. Similarly, another tendency encouraged by Lenin's stand on the Party's central role in the dictatorship of the proletariat is the dominant thinking in the communist movement which considers that the party determines everything in relation to social revolution. A one-sided subjective approach towards the party, blind faith in the party, etc., get strengthened as a result of this tendency. Of course, the conscious vanguard role of the communist party in the social revolution is still relevant and important. But how can a communist party play this role? Can it be achieved by imposing an unquestionable hegemony over the movement and society? Rather, this vanguard role can be achieved and maintained only if the communist party has a realistic understanding and it is capable of constantly remoulding its style of thinking and practice in order to make its policies and programmes conform to the ever-changing reality. If such a dynamic and flexible approach is not adopted, any party will easily degenerate and will be discarded by the people. After Mao's finding that the new bourgeoisie is emerging within the communist party itself, this question has become all the more important.

10. The Need for a New Orientation

10.1. As no socialist country is existing, the proletarian forces have to seize power anew everywhere. The world situation is favourable for this. People's struggles are mounting everywhere unabatedly. Especially after the collusion between the two superpower blocs, who were trying to intervene into and utilize each and every anti-imperialist national liberation struggle in their favour, now the struggles of oppressed peoples and nations are intensifying more directly against the whole imperialist system. The advancement of revolution in Peru, which is uncompromisingly fighting against both the imperialist blocs, is a good example clearly proving the nature of the revolutionary potential that is inherent in the present-day world situation. Many non-communist anti-imperialist forces are also advancing along the path of struggle more directly and forthrightly.

10.2. But if these struggles are to be guided along the correct path of advancing towards socialism and communism, the proletarian forces are duty-bound to explain to the people how they envisage the future of revolution. In the context of all the new developments in the former socialist countries, without a proper programme for preventing capitalist restoration and the possible degeneration of proletarian power into social fascism, it is practically impossible for winning over the struggling peoples of the

world on a broad basis towards socialism and communism. That is why putting forward such a programme with a new orientation has become all the more important and urgent.

10.3. The essential aspects of the new system envisaged under the dictatorship of the proletariat have already been explained in the previous two sections. They can be summed up as follows: A qualitatively new understanding of proletarian political power must be the starting point. It must reflect Marx's concept of the Paris Commune -- as the reabsorption of state power by the whole society. So the proletarian state should not be a state like the bourgeois state or the state under socialism so far practised by the communists which concentrated the whole power in the centralized state structure. It will have to be a new political system in which the state ceases to be a state by starting the process of reabsorption of state power by society, through a process of decentralizing political power, aiming at reaching a stage when the (political) will of the whole society can get expressed and realized directly without the mediation of the state. Such a system can be developed only by achieving the genuine socialization of the means of production, which can again be assured through a political system which ensures proletarian democracy. This socialist system, in which the socialized economic base and the proletarian democratic political system are complementary aspects, must survive on its own, becoming a social system acceptable to and practised by the whole people, under the leadership of the proletariat.

10.4. The crucial question faced by the proletariat in achieving such a system will be in relation to evolving the concrete steps for the transitional phase. The means adopted for smashing the existing state machinery will be crucial in relation to the new understanding on political power. Since the existing forms of bourgeois or reactionary political power are all concentrated in the state structure centred around the armed forces, proletarian forces can smash them only by using force. So the revolutionary overthrow of the existing state will have to be achieved by a violent revolution. This will be possible only under the leadership of a vanguard party of the proletariat with its people's army. The smashing of the existing state has to be followed by the establishment of the new political system, again under the leadership of the vanguard party. Here one of the crucial initial steps will be the arming of the people, as a part of the process of replacing the standing army with armed people. At present we will not be able to predict the duration of this transitional period. But we can definitely define the criterion to decide the duration of this transitional phase. The vanguard party of the proletariat will have to play the leading role until the new political system starts functioning effectively, by completing the process of the socialization of the means of production and then consolidating the power in the hands of the new ruling classes under the leadership of the proletariat. Once this is achieved the communist party must give up its monopoly control of the revolutionary transformation and allow the system to function on its own. Under the proletarian democratic system, the effectiveness of the new system will be accepted or rejected by the people through an open democratic process in which the whole people will be freely involved through their own political organizations or otherwise.

10.5. During this transitional phase the role of the party, both in smashing the state machine and in establishing a new political structure, will be crucial and central. But even then, after the seizure of power, the party should not directly wield the power. Rather it must assert its authority only politically through the bodies elected by the people. As the party plays this crucial role in the overthrow of the enemy classes, it will be enjoying tremendous prestige and authority among the people. During this phase masses will also be drawn into active political life on an unprecedented scale. So, even though the party will be playing the central role, development of its political line through line struggle, etc., must be known to the people. It means the party will have to function rather as an open party. The internal life of the party will also have to be very democratic, even allowing factions, etc., as a matter of principle.

10.6. Organs of power by the people will have to be developed by transforming the united front or other similar forums which were playing an active role in mobilizing the masses for waging the war against the enemies into revocable representative bodies. These bodies must represent the political will of the majority of the people who have aligned with the working class in the struggle against the enemy classes. Those belonging to the overthrown enemy classes will not enjoy the right to be elected to such bodies of power, and they will be denied other civic rights also during this transitional phase. During the transitional phase, the attempt must be to make these bodies the real organs of power, gradually reducing the role of the party in the whole process of administration.

10.7. While during the pre-revolutionary phase, the role of armed force is principal, after the seizure of power, the role of force changes. Mobilization of the political will of the people becomes principal while the use of force follows it. This political mobilization should be carried out mainly through the political bodies, mass organizations and other open forums under the guidance of the party. The use of force in general will have to be transformed from the activity of a special body into the activity of the armed people themselves.

10.8. Socialization of the means of production is to be carried out thoroughly during this transitional phase. As we have already seen, mere juridical socialization will not solve the basic problem. The real socialization is closely linked up with developing an appropriate political structure to make the people capable of realizing the power in their own hands. So by developing the socialization process, both at the economic and political level, a genuine socialized economy can be promoted.

10.9. Once the functioning of the new political and economic system develops in this way, the communist party should formally relinquish its monopoly of power. Its right to govern should be strictly based on the electoral support gained by its platform, just like any other platform. The essential characteristics of the new political structure will be the rule through decentralized, revocable representative bodies, guarantee of all democratic rights including universal suffrage, abolition of the standing army, etc., and its legitimacy will be based on the protection and development of the socialist system leading to communism. Since socialism itself is a period of revolutionary transformation, this

system itself will have to evolve further. The question of such changes in the political-social-economic structure will itself be a matter of class struggle. And the communist party must play its vanguard role in leading this class struggle by politicizing and mobilizing the masses on the basis of the correct line. But unlike in the hitherto practised forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the new political structure, the people wielding the real power in their own hands, also with the arms in their hands, will be playing a very active role in the whole political life of the society, thereby being the best guarantee against restoration and also ensuring the best conditions for seizing back power if restoration takes place.

11. Role and Functioning of the Communist Party

11.1. Now, let us see what will be the role of the party in this new scheme of things. Lenin defined the Communist Party as the organized vanguard of the proletariat to lead the working class and other sections of the people in the revolutionary seizure of political power. We can see, here also, the influence of the lessons of the Paris Commune.

11.2. The principle of democratic centralism, evolved and implemented by Lenin, is still the most effective and advanced principle of functioning for any social organization. The iron discipline of the party envisaged in this system is necessary for an organization which wages a revolutionary war against the superior enemy forces. As far as the functioning of this system is concerned, Lenin provided the best model of dialectically linking up the democratic functioning within the organization before taking the final decision, with its implementation in a centralized manner. If this internal democracy is not ensured, the whole system can easily degenerate into an authoritarian centralism, and this usually happens, as the revolutionary organizations occasionally face emergency situations when internal democracy will have to be curtailed. But if this is not strictly limited to such special circumstances and internal democracy is not ensured as a basic principle, the possibility for deviation is very much there. And this is the major weakness of the system of democratic centralism.

11.3. The practice under Lenin shows that there was a free and lively atmosphere within the organization to voice different views and opinions and to debate over such differences. In the post-revolutionary situation, groups were allowed to function openly and even to publish their own materials separately. But in the context of growing counter-revolutionary attempts, the 10th Congress of the Party (in 1921) under Lenin's guidance decided to ban such factions and their separate functioning. Even though it can be seen as a particular decision in a particular context, the approach adopted in the resolution and the nature of discussion in the Congress shows that the decision was arrived at on the basis of the principle of unity. The 10th Congress resolution on Party Unity declared, "The Congress... hereby declares dissolved and orders the immediate dissolution of all groups without exception formed on the basis of one platform or another (such as the Workers' Opposition Group, the Democratic Centralism Group, etc.). Non-observance of this decision of the Congress shall entail unconditional and instant expulsion from the Party." (*LCW*, Vol. 32, p. 244) The same resolution explained the

approach towards the question: "In this question, propaganda should consist, on the one hand, in a comprehensive explanation of the harmfulness and danger of factionalism from the standpoint of Party unity and of achieving unanimity of will among the vanguard of the proletariat as the fundamental condition for the success of the dictatorship of the proletariat; and, on the other hand, in an explanation of the peculiar features of the latest tactical devices of the enemies of the Soviet power." (Ibid, p. 242)

11.4. Afterwards, the whole concept of the monolithic communist party, propounded by Stalin and solidified during the whole Comintern period and afterwards, was centred around this 10th Congress decision. And this monolithism naturally gave rise to an atmosphere where centralism was always emphasized, while democracy was belittled or neglected. Stalin's open declaration that the dictatorship of the proletariat is in essence "the dictatorship of the Party" strengthened this trend. Any opposition to the leadership could be suppressed using the state machinery in the name of establishing this 'dictatorship'.

11.5. Mao's attempts to develop the two-line struggle within the party was a step to re-establish the style of functioning of democratic centralism practised by Lenin, in a more systematic manner. He could also bring forward the question of correct ideological and political line as the determining factor in establishing the correct leadership of the party. But as Mao did not openly criticize the above concepts, in effect the two-line struggle, etc., were only some minor steps at rectification within the overall framework established earlier.

11.6. The sanctification of the party and the consequent religious attitude towards it developed on the basis of the above concepts. The concepts of revolutionary authority put forward by Stalin by defining Leninism and establishing the authority of Lenin, intensified the negative effects of this religiosity. All views of the opponents of the established authority were considered not only irrelevant but taboos to the communists. For example, while criticizing their ideas, nobody thought it necessary to examine whether any ideas put forward by Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, Bukharin, etc., were correct and worthwhile for consideration. Even though Mao's style of open two-line struggle through open debate and polemics created a new atmosphere, we can see that even during the Cultural Revolution the concept of revolutionary authority emerged in a more powerful way, again curtailing the democratic atmosphere. The personality cult, as the follow-up of the concept of revolutionary authority, assumed dangerous dimensions during the Cultural Revolution, especially at the instance of Lin Piao. Our own experience in the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) regarding the consequences of the concept of the revolutionary authority of comrade Charu Majumdar is a case in point.

11.7. After we have reached the stage of Mao's finding that the bourgeoisie emerging within the communist party is the most important danger faced by the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is high time that we re-examine this whole experience in relation to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the party's role in it, especially in a context when the people are rising up in revolt against the so-called communist parties which were ruling

them in the name of proletarian dictatorship. No eye-wash is going to save the situation. A thorough re-examination of the concept and role of the communist party in the historical process of building socialism and communism is the need of the hour. Instead of making the party the whole centre of political power, a new organizational structure and approach for the party have to be evolved suiting the working class aim of abolishing classes themselves. Some possible steps are suggested here:

12.1. Demystification of the Communist Party.

The communist party's role of being the vanguard of the proletariat is to be tested and proved in the course of the historical process. Whether it serves the proletarian class interest or not is also to be judged by examining whether its programmes and policies conform to the changing reality, making it capable of leading the class struggle of the working class and other sections of the people against the exploiting classes under a given condition. The proletariat class interest itself, under a given condition, is very much relative, changing according to the changing reality, though the ultimate interest of the working class, of building communism, remains as a long-term goal. Under a given condition, the tasks of a specific revolution, or its stage, can be defined; but that itself will be subject to change and modification, even though the basic outlook of the proletariat on that specific revolutionary phase will remain constant. Only when a communist party realizes its delicate position in this way, when it realizes that it is always subject to the test of historical reality, can it come down to the complexities of reality. Then only can it realize that no authority has been bestowed upon it either by the working class and the people or by history. It can only serve the people. Here we may note the qualitative distinction between the party leading a revolution to seize power and the party with monopoly in power. In the first case, the party is compelled by the very context to be self-critical and continuously correct and develop its line and practice in order to mobilize the masses for revolution. But in the second case, the pressure of circumstances operates in the opposite direction. When this is coupled with the sanctification of the party degeneration is not far off.

12.2. Discard the concept of the Revolutionary Authority

Marxism is an ever developing philosophy and science. It has got the potential to assimilate the wealth of knowledge produced by innumerable branches of human investigation. It is true that the leadership of a real revolutionary movement can contribute much more than anybody else. But if the contributions to Marxism are limited to such personalities of specific periods, then the development of Marxism will be much curtailed. During the period of Stalin's authority the negative effect of such a policy was fully manifested. Even during the rich experience of the Chinese revolution only Mao's contributions were counted for the enrichment of Marxism. Moreover, as in the case of Stalin, while we refuse to recognize the contribution by anybody other than the authority, generally we also refuse to recognize any mistake committed by that authority. Even the Marxist-Leninist forces, including us, tried to defend the mistakes of Stalin by arguing that his intentions were to serve the proletarian interest. We were forgetting that

such an argument is thoroughly anti-Marxist, because Marxism teaches us to evaluate the correctness of any policy not on the basis of the subjective intention of its author, but on the basis of actual results. The concept of the revolutionary authority created a kind of blind obedience or a sort of religiosity among the followers. Without smashing this religiosity, Marxism cannot re-establish its vitality and vigorous scientificity.

12.3. *Constant remoulding of the style of thinking and functioning*

On the basis of the above approach a thorough remoulding of the style of thinking and functioning is to be carried out throughout the organization. We had already started to tackle the question of remoulding the style of thinking and functioning, and have developed some concepts and practice also in that direction. We have to further develop them including the above findings also.

13. Some Further Questions

13.1. The above evaluation of the past experiences and the suggestions put forward as theoretical and practical solutions of the crisis faced by the communist movement are to be considered only as beginning steps in this direction. An important aspect totally left out here is the analysis of the philosophical basis for the deviations committed by the communist movement and the steps for rectifying them. The question is very important and vital so far as a genuine communist movement is concerned. Even though there is a consistent philosophical approach behind our analysis and investigations as an undercurrent, we have to take up the study of this subject specifically and thoroughly, which is not attempted here.

13.2. In our analysis above, we have already identified one tendency existing for a long period in the whole communist movement -- that of class-reductionism. Actually, during the past few years, when we were developing the new line, we were confronting this problem again and again. In understanding the national question itself, we faced this problem. Even though we resolved the problem of counterposing the class struggle with national struggle, we had not yet grasped the non-class aspects of the national question because of our own class-reductionist approach. While breaking with the old mechanical approach on the woman question and caste question we had recognized the non-class aspects involved in these questions. Still we had not started a struggle against the class-reductionist tendency which is well entrenched in our thinking. So, in these specific areas also we are facing serious obstacles, which can be overcome only when we really start a struggle against the concrete manifestations of this class-reductionist approach. Now we are realizing the importance of the non-class aspect of the individual-society relationship, in relation with the task of developing proletarian democracy. Also we realize the gravity of the setback suffered by the communist movement due to the lack of a correct dialectical understanding between class and non-class aspects involved in developing a political and economic system during the transitional phase of socialism.

13.3. In this relation, there is another important question which has not yet been taken up for discussion. Marxism is facing a serious theoretical challenge from the

environmentalist movement emerging and developing all over the world. The crisis of the capitalist mode of production is getting exposed in the form of the dark future of the whole of humanity and this globe itself. The environmentalists raise the relevant question that socialism could not produce any alternate model of production forces other than developing the production forces already given by capitalism, and thus show the way to overcome this crisis. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao had answered this question, even though from a different angle. He exposed the reactionary nature of the theory of the productive forces which was very much dominant in the whole communist movement, especially during the period of socialist construction, and established the course of revolutionary transformation based on the revolution in production relations. By emphasising the need to resolve the contradiction between town and countryside, he introduced a different concept of developing the production forces themselves. Actually this provided the theoretical basis for an alternate mode of production under socialism. During the Cultural Revolution many breakthroughs at the practical level also were achieved. Of course this is only a beginning. More questions are to be solved in this area.

13.4. While we have realized the complex nature of the individual/society relationship, it demands further deepening of our understanding on the differences and interrelationship between the class-individual and non-class individual. Marx had already pointed out this division between personal and class individual. Marx said: "...in the course of historical evolution... there appears a division within the life of each individual in so far as it is personal and in so far as it is determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it." (*The German Ideology, MESW, Moscow, Vol. 1, p. 66*) But this question was not taken for consideration afterwards. It is in relation to this individual/society contradiction that the question of value system comes in. The Marxist position that there are no eternal values, and that the value system of different periods are closely linked with the socio-economic systems of each period has already been proven beyond doubt. But at the same time, the role of the complex interrelationship between class individual and non-class individual in shaping the value systems of each period is to be studied further. Moreover, while struggling against the existing value system, the revolutionary movement has got the responsibility to develop new alternate value systems according to the specific stages of revolution. The value system is closely linked up with the dynamics of the cultural realm which plays a very important role in the whole social fabric. But generally this task of developing the new value system is neglected while focusing on the economic and political tasks.

13.5. While we had tried to grasp the dynamics of capitalist restoration in the former socialist countries, we had realized the role of mechanical materialism which had dominated over the whole revisionist thinking. Now we see that in the whole history of the communist movement, the dominance of mechanical materialism played an important role in the deviations analyzed above. In spite of the positive role played by Lenin and Mao, in defeating the influence of mechanical materialism, as a whole it dominated over the movement. The economic reductionism in the form of the theory of the productive forces and many other forms, and class-reductionism reflected in the neglect of other aspects of social dynamics, are the major manifestations of this

influence. Even though Marx and Engels considered settling accounts with mechanical materialism as important as settling accounts with idealism, the communist movement as a whole has not been able to carry forward the task as was needed. Lenin and Mao could make significant contributions in this direction, but the state of affairs in the movement as a whole remained very negative.

13.6. As Lenin correctly pointed out Marx did not give us a "logic with a (capital) L". Even though Marx's methodology of materialist dialectics is well applied in his theoretical works, he could not sum it up in the form of a systematic exposition of dialectical logic. Lenin was referring to this. And Lenin and Mao contributed in the course of their attempts at the application of Marxian dialectics, according to the concrete conditions they faced. Still, we can see that materialist dialectics remains at a very preliminary level. And this backwardness is reflected in the continuous, repeated experiences of one-sidedness, inability to grasp the emerging new phenomena, etc, in the whole communist movement. Our own experience shows how late we were in grasping the actual social dynamics of our own societies. And even now we are only at a preliminary level in achieving this task.

14. Conclusion

14.1. Marx made the following illuminating, objective observation about the proletarian revolutions of the mid-19th century in which he was a direct and intimate participant: "...proletarian revolutions like those of the 19th century criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses, and paltrinesses of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, recoil ever and anon from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible..." (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, MESW, Vol. 1, p. 401) Marx is talking about the spontaneous proletarian revolutions whereas we are now discussing the 20th century proletarian revolutions led by the conscious vanguard of the proletariat, the communist parties. Still, the above observation gives us a deeper insight into the method we have to adopt for evaluating the experiences of the 20th century revolutions. Now, we realize that these experiences cannot be analyzed merely at the level of the subjective weakness of the communist parties. Rather, they have outgrown this to the level of the historical reality of this period. They have to be understood and evaluated in the broader, objective canvas of the history of the period. The communists of the 20th century have to be the most active, vanguard participants in this process. They have to analyze "with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltrinesses" of their previous attempts. And this will have to be repeated again and again, "until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible", because we realize that the path of making proletarian revolutions for realizing communism is a very protracted and tortuous one.

14.2. All the subjective and objective experiences of the whole communist movement as well as the whole historical experiences of this period amply prove that the historical materialist approach developed by Marxism is the only effective tool in our hands to comprehend the complexities of social dynamics and the process of historical development. The same tool helps us to understand the weaknesses of the communist movement itself. And this is one of the most important revolutionary qualities of Marxism. The analysis and attempts at rectification are to be grasped in this background. When the people of the former socialist countries put the communist strategy of monopoly power for the party during the whole transitional phase of socialism on the dock of history, communists cannot remain satisfied with the consolation that this is the result of backward thinking among the people. On the contrary, these experiences again and again indicate the Marxist teaching that the people alone are the creators of history. Communists have to be humble enough to learn from this experience without any attempts to cover up their own weaknesses and mistakes. Then only can they regain their vanguard role in the process of ever advancing historical developments. Communists have to ruthlessly expose and defeat the brand of Marxism propagated and practised in the form of sterile, dead dogmas. Marxism is a dynamic philosophy and guide to revolutionary practice. Our urgent historical task is to regain its vitality and dynamism in order to carry forward the task of revolution at all levels.

[end]

See Also:

Democracy: More Than Ever We can and Must Do Better Than That by Bob Avakian,
Chairman of the RCP