

The Restoration of Capitalism and the Rise of Social-Imperialism in the USSR

Soviet cartoon propagandizes for detente saying, "Let no other ice come between us," but the military budget and preparations for war are increasing rapidly in both superpower countries.



In August, 1974, a member of the October League conducted this interview with Kurt Lundgren, a leading member of the Swedish Communist Party (SKP). The SKP was founded in January, 1973, as a Marxist-Leninist party having grown out of the pre-party formation known as the Communist League (M-L).

In the time since its founding, the SKP has devoted a great deal of its attention to understanding the role of the USSR today as a social-imperialist country and an aggressive superpower. As Lundgren points out in this interview, the "negative example" of the Soviet Union has intensified the struggle against all forms of revisionism with the Marxist-Leninist movement. But the study of the Soviet Union is also a question of particular importance to the Swedish people, a people caught in the crossfire of superpower contention. In the last few years, the USSR has flagrantly invaded Swedish waters, carried out mock-landing operations off Sweden's coast, and attempted to bring economic and political pressure to bear on Sweden in numerous ways.

Faced with the growing aggression and penetration of social-imperialism in Northern Europe, the Marxist-Leninist parties and organizations in that region recently held a joint conference devoted to countering superpower hegemony.

In this interview, Lundgren summarizes the general conclusions Swedish Marxist-Leninists have drawn concerning the danger of social-imperialism. He also brings out facts and information from his own intensive research of the subject which was summed up in the Swedish pamphlet "Sovjet Idag" (Soviet Union Today) published by the SKP last year.

Could you talk briefly about why your party decided to take up the study of social-imperialism as a main campaign within the party?

Over the last few years, we have observed great changes in the world situation, as whole new contradictions have developed. The Soviet Union plays a big role in all these contradictions. They are threatening China's borders with millions of soldiers and nuclear war. They are building up their conventional armed forces in Europe. We see too that they take part in the exploitation of the Third World. We have also seen that they both cooperate and struggle with U.S. imperialism in the domination of the Third World. All of these factors have shown us the importance of coming to better understand the system of social-imperialism.

This question is especially important for us in Sweden, because we are neighbors of the Soviet Union. Czechoslovakia, too, was a neighbor of the Soviet Union.

Another reason is that it is our internationalist duty to support all of the world's people struggling against all imperialist domination. Increasingly, the oppressed countries of the Third World are coming under the domination of the USSR. It is also our duty to support the people of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe who are suffering under the oppression of the new tsars.

Furthermore, when we talk about a socialist Sweden, this talk would make no sense unless we studied the negative example of the Soviet Union today. We strengthen the understanding of what genuine socialism is, by criticizing social-imperialism. This, through our study is strengthened not only among party members, but among the masses of people as well.

Could you trace some of the main developments in the restoration of capitalism since the death of Stalin?

Already during Lenin's lifetime the class enemy existed both outside the state and party, and inside it as well. But as Lenin and Stalin both pointed out, the most dangerous enemy of socialism is the "communist bureaucrat." Some of these "communist bureaucrats" already held important positions during Stalin's lifetime, but the important point here is that they did not hold the power of the state in their hands. The policies of the USSR during the 40s had many shortcomings, but the main feature of them was always that they were proletarian policies. When Stalin died, a stone in the way of the new bureaucrats was lifted. They saw their chance to gain state power through a peaceful coup d'etat.

From this point forward, the dictatorship of the new bourgeoisie was rebuilt step by step. The "state of the whole people" was proclaimed as a mask for introducing revisionist ideology. The new ruling clique knew that by eroding the ideology of the people it would not be long before they would be able to tighten their grip on the means of production and return entirely to capitalist relations, which was always the ambition of this self-serving group. After the introduction of the "state of the whole people" ideology, which obscured the new class exploitation, they began with their so-called "economic reforms."

However, the new bourgeoisie found itself caught in a trap, as the economy stagnated, and the masses lost interest in the zealous efforts in production which they had shown since the revolution as long as proletarian policies were in command. The only right way out of stagnation in a socialist country is the mobilization of the masses, but the new tsars could not do this, or the socialist enthusiasm of the masses would have toppled the ruling clique as well. Their only other alternative was to offer the directors of the various productive enterprises a personal interest of some type in promoting production. Profit, thereafter became the motive force in production, and all sorts of capitalist innovations followed. This included the undermining of the basic principles of a so-

cialist planned economy, and allowing the capitalist market system to dominate.

The natural effect of these changes was to stabilize a certain class who had interest only in increasing profits, since their salaries and their personal fortunes were tied to the labor of the masses. Therefore the needs and demands of the workers were first ignored, and then opposed outright. This led to the stabilization of an exploited class, a class who, as under capitalism, had nothing but their labor power to sell.

You say that the new tsars don't actually own the means of production personally in the USSR as they do, for example, in the U.S. What then is the main motive behind their desire to accumulate profit?

* At first the main interest of many farm managers, factory directors, and so forth, was merely a better material life, a desire not to have to sacrifice for socialism—a feeling that they had given much of themselves to the socialist cause, and now it was time to get something back. This type of thinking stemmed from a weak class stand, and a poor grasp of Marxism. But it was manipulated by the men at the top who were out for the total restoration of capitalism. Managers were told that "It is good for socialism to make profits" and "Our country must accumulate capital." Once the basic elements of capitalism (private property, the market system, the profit motive)[†] are established, capitalism can regenerate itself easily. In order to make better profits, one must invest. In order to get investment capital, one must increase the rate of exploitation of the worker. In order for profit to increase efficiently, one must not produce only what the people need, but rather, that which will sell on the market at the best price.

Acquisition of investment capital, in the era of imperialism, led the new tsars naturally into the export of capital, like all other imperialist powers. In 1973, they had a capital export of about 5 billion rubles. They have a tremendous military build-up going on, and a very large percentage of the profits extracted from the labor of the workers is being invested in arms and weapons which can help the new bourgeoisie defend their international economic interests, and ultimately compete with the market and labor pools of U.S. imperialism. According to our research, at least 40 per cent of the USSR gross national product is involved in the production of military goods.

I understand that one of the main reasons behind Soviet invitations to Ford and Fiat and other Western corporations to invest in the Soviet Union, is that so much of Soviet investment capital is tied up in arms production, that on their own, they would not be able to expand other industrial and consumer spheres. What do you think of this?

† These are the essential elements. These are, approximately, money-as-capital, wage-laborers, commodities sold, production of surplus value, profits.

They certainly are taking advantage of collaboration with the Western nations to exploit their own working class. But they are also very short in a number of technological fields, which they need Western assistance to develop. But also, there is tremendous dissatisfaction among the masses because of the lack of consumer goods. At the recent "Congress of the Congress" Brezhnev promised to step up investment in consumer sectors, but he cannot do this without taking away from the investments in planes, tanks, and nuclear weapons. Therefore, Western help is of much necessity to him in providing at least a few of the consumer goods most in demand.

How does the Communist Party of the Soviet Union function as the arm of this new class of exploiters?

It is very interesting to see the change in the class composition of party members. In Stalin's time, there was a majority of workers in positions of leadership as well as among the rank and file. Today, almost all the major party positions are held by engineers, professionals, managers, etc.

We know many Soviet citizens with whom we are in touch. They feel that while there are good people in the party, in the main the party is an elite which you can only enter because other members feel they can "trust you" to carry out the revisionist party line. It has become a prize sought after by careerists. There are very few people in the party who have studied Marxism in the last ten years. The party is the arena in which "new" Marxist theories are thought up and developed to popularize among the people in order to maintain the status quo, and develop capitalism further.

In your research have you come across much documentation of mass resistance to the restoration of capitalism?

Some of the examples are well-known. For example, two years ago a group of very high-ranking party functionaries from the Baltic regions of the USSR sent a letter to the Swedish newspaper, "Daily News" protesting the "Russification" policies in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

The struggle of the suppressed nations within the USSR is very sharp and very important. Brezhnev, after all, talks about a "state of the whole people," made up of "one Russian people." But of course the most exploited areas are the same nations which the Tsar exploited as well, in the name of "great-Russian supremacy." Some of our comrades who have travelled extensively in the USSR, especially in the Asian regions, report that wherever people gather, at soccer matches for instance, it is not uncommon to see banners and slogans protesting the rule of the new tsars and the oppression of their region.

"The Soviet Union today is under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, a dictatorship of the big bourgeoisie, a dictatorship of the German fascist type, a dictatorship of the Hitler type."

Mao Tsetung

We have also seen the development of a workers' movement. It is impossible to read the Soviet press without finding examples of workers complaining that directors have dismissed them illegally, even by Soviet laws. There is a very big movement right now to protest the way directors dismiss workers at will, either to lower production costs or to keep down resistance. It is impossible, however, for the workers to take up the struggle in the trade unions, which are composed of only the most trusted party people. Yet there are many examples of spontaneously organized strikes.

The working class in the Soviet Union is also responding to their new oppression with tremendous alienation. The alcohol problem is very big—you see many people drunk in the streets. This has also led to a lot of absence during work-time, which worries the Soviet bourgeoisie very much. Instead of changing the objective conditions to solve these problems, they call on the people to be "vigilant against decadence," and beef-up their repressive state machinery to deal with problems such as absence from work.

The Soviet working class is not yet at the barricades. But one thing is certain: They are fighting, striking, and through these battles will find the means to overthrow their oppressors. Many Marxist-Leninist groups have been built underground in the Soviet Union. There has been the Stalin Group, the Old Fighters Group, the Committee for Re-Building a Marxist-Leninist Party, and we know also that at the universities there are many Marxist-Leninists. Of course, the repression against Marxist-Leninists is the most brutal. We hear a lot about Solzhenitsyn and other intellectuals who are suppressed by the government, but these petty-bourgeois people suffer nothing compared to the Marxist-Leninists who are ruthlessly suppressed whenever the government can find them.

Mao Tsetung has referred to the USSR as a "fascist dictatorship of the Hitler type." Do you think this is an accurate description?

When we speak of fascism in the USSR, we must examine this question very seriously. I will give you some examples from Soviet society. I read for example in a Soviet newspaper (Sovietskaya Rossi) from April, 1965 an account of an election of a trade union committee in a factory. It went like this:

"When I finished my shift, guards were surrounding the plant preventing us from going home. The names of the candidates... were read very rapidly, and after this the formalities of the election came. After the voting was over, there was already a printed list of who had won."

To back up this kind of repression, the USSR has been expanding very rapidly its police force. Pravda, in January of 1974 editorialized about the need to use the police and the courts fully against the "parasites," meaning the workers who do not work up to standard or who miss work. In his speech at the last Congress, Brezhnev urged more respect for "law and order," exactly as Nixon talks, and praised the police and the army for their work in maintaining order.

We have also studied their election process on every level from the trade union to the government, and we have found that it is absolutely impossible for the people to even nominate candidates of their own choosing.

When we look at this altogether, we see that a worker in the Soviet Union doesn't even have the democratic rights of a worker in capitalist Sweden, or even the United States. Taking all this into account, I think it is correct to use the term fascist. Although it may not be identical to Hitler's Germany it shares a very important resemblance, and that is that today, in no other capitalist or imperialist country is the militarization of the state apparatus so great.

Some people say that because some socialist forms, or remnants of the socialist system still exist in the USSR, it is therefore a "semi-socialist, semi-capitalist" country. What is your analysis of this position?

Yes, of course some of these forms exist. But that is not what is important—the important thing is the content of these forms. For example, you have state-owned and collectivized means of production in the USSR. This is a socialist form, but the class content of this ownership serves only the exploiting class who have a direct interest in the profits of these enterprises. In Sweden, too, we have many factories and mines which are owned by the capitalist

state. It is not uncommon to find wages and working conditions the worst among workers who work in these state-owned sectors.

When people talk of these "socialist forms" in the USSR, they give examples like the small amount of money workers pay for rent. It's true, rents are generally low. But this is only because the Soviet ruling class has not found it necessary to exploit the people in the form of high rents. In capitalist countries, you have different sections of capitalist interest including landlords and building-owners. Each division in the capitalist countries, must try to exploit the people to its own advantage. But in the USSR, the ruling class oversees all aspects of capital accumulation and exploitation. They are total capitalists.

What are some examples of developing capitalist forms of organization within the economy?

We have seen that there is a great competition among the enterprises and small and medium-sized ones are collapsing and being absorbed into bigger ones. Since 1973, we have noticed a trend towards the establishment of "cartels" where as many as a thousand factories are combined into a comprehensive unit under one centralized leadership. If anyone thinks that these developments mean that the USSR is returning to a socialist planned economy, under which there is a certain amount of centralization for the sake of efficiency and productivity, one only has to read what Brezhnev said at the last Congress. He said that these cartels must become the main source of profits for the economy, and he called on more enterprises to join together under centralized leadership. What this really means is a new step in the restoration of capitalism, an increase in the ability of the monopolies to exploit the workers.

What is the connection between the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, and its emergence as an imperialist superpower?

I think it is very important to study Lenin's work on imperialism. He mentions five criteria in the world transformation from capitalism to imperialism. The first two points Lenin makes are that under imperialism there is extensive monopolization of production in the hands of a few, and that second, there is a merger between industrial capital and finance capital. I think that in no other country are these points better seen than the USSR. The monopoly capitalist class in the Soviet Union controls everything, there is near-total monopoliza-

tion of all sectors. As a degenerated class of bureaucrat-capitalists, coming from a socialist economy, they also have total control over finances, investments, and the export of capital.

The USSR clearly has the other characteristics Lenin mentions, but I think these two are the most important, because it shows why they are so dangerous as a superpower. Because of the extent of monopolization, they can concentrate all their forces of production, of the state machinery, of the military and so on, in a way no other imperialist country can. This could be very decisive in the event of a war. This is not to say that there are no contradictions among the capitalist rulers of the Soviet Union, but because of the development of their system there is much greater unity of the capitalist class than there is in the United States or Sweden for example.

Lenin also points out that once the process of capital accumulation is begun, the various sections and enterprises within the economy have no choice but to survive by expansion and monopolization, or die. He further points out that in the era of imperialism, the best method for this expansion, is to export capital to the colonial areas of the world, and expand the markets. By this process, the cheap labor of the Third World can be exploited. The Soviet Union has certainly done exactly this in India and in other areas of the Third World. In general we have seen that the Soviet Union has exactly the same motives as other imperialist countries, although their methods may be different, and their business carried out under the banner of socialism.

Even Castro has criticized the method that the USSR does business with Cuba. I have here a quote from him, from several years ago, where he says: "On many occasions the USSR has sold engines to Cuba. We have seen the results of their economic standpoints. They are willing to sell any old machine, even if it doesn't work, in our country. This means they are selling old, bad machines to a developing country which is trying to make revolution."

I will not say that this is the main method of the imperialist foreign trade of the Soviet Union. But you can see that when Castro, who is tied so directly to the USSR, criticizes the profit incentive in their foreign trade, these type of practices must be very widespread.

How do you see the global strategy of Soviet imperialism in terms of its contention with U.S. imperialism?

They have seen over the last five to ten years, the very rapid decline of U.S. imperialism, and they have moved to gain control over new hemispheres. Everywhere they see the U.S. on the way out, they are following quickly. Of

course they depend very heavily on their own sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, as was proven by the invasion and continued occupation of Czechoslovakia. But the main characteristic of Soviet imperialism over the past few years has been its rapid penetration of new spheres; its establishment of new hegemony.

In a very short amount of time, for example, they have gained the upper hand over the U.S. and other imperialist powers in India and Bengla Desh. We have seen the Soviet sponsored coup d'etat in Afghanistan (1973), new trade and "aid" agreements negotiated with the various African and Latin American countries, and in general, today they have penetrated very quickly and very deeply all over the world.

But even more than these developments is the fact that the USSR is actively attempting to penetrate into the Western countries, especially Western Europe. I don't think I have to quote the figures, but all you need to do is look at an economic map of the world and you will see that industry, technology, skilled labor, raw materials, and finance capital, are very highly concentrated in Europe.

Soviet imperialism and U.S. imperialism: They have the most to win and the most to lose respectively in Europe. It is a tremendous market. Of course some people think that the imperialists expand only into the areas of raw material wealth. Kautsky thought this, but Lenin corrected him pointing out the "German appetite for Lorraine." So we can see that while there is great contention between the superpowers all over the Third World, the focus of this contention is in Europe, where all the contradictions between the two superpowers are very highly developed.

The Soviet view towards the U.S. in Europe is to gain the upper hand by making use of the growing splits between the U.S. imperialists and the West European countries. These countries have shown a lot of independence from the U.S. lately, and this is a very good thing for the peoples of Europe, and the working class. But the USSR is also trying to make use of this fact, especially since the war in Indochina, where millions of Europeans became disgusted with U.S. policies and domination. Right now, the Soviet Union is negotiating many trade agreements with the European countries.

Even while calling for a European Security Conference, we have never seen in peacetime a nation which carries out such extensive military build-up as the USSR is now doing along every inch of East-West border and coastline. In the long run, they are hoping for a weak and divided Europe, with the U.S. forced outside more and more; with Europe dependent on the USSR for oil and natural gas, access to Asia, and other spheres of Soviet military control and economic interest.

They have already proposed to many European countries the "merger" of

the social-imperialist COMECON with the Common Market. It is not inconceivable, given the economic, political and military strength of the USSR, that they will attempt to bring West Europe under their hegemony in the same manner as East Europe. This, of course are the likely conditions of world war.

This is a very serious situation in Europe. We have already seen two world wars in this century which found their main contradictions on the European continent. Looking back at the similarity of those wars to the present situation, we see that Europe was a focus for the redivision of the world, as one imperialist power was falling and another was rising. If the superpowers continue their competition for hegemony at the present rate, the chances of war are very great.

The key to avoiding a world war, is the revolutionary struggles of the people in Europe, who must maintain their vigilance against both imperialist superpowers, and defend the independence of their countries.

What do you think of the role played by the revisionist parties in Europe?

One of the main tactics of the Soviet Union in penetrating Western Europe, is that they are looking for some access to the state apparatus of the European governments. For this reason, they are urging the revisionist parties to enter the governments regardless of principles, and to unite with the social-democrats. The revisionist parties are very active in building up a base of support among the people for social-imperialism, because they defend the aggressive policies of the USSR as policies which are "bringing peace" to the world. The USSR hopes to use this sentiment among the people as a base from which to "Finlandize" Europe.

Could explain what you mean by "Finlandization"?

After the Second World War, in which Finland had been used as a base to attack Soviet Russia, the USSR sought an agreement of peace and friendship with Finland. This was perfectly correct, and the peoples of both countries desired better relations between them. The treaty called for Finland and the USSR to join in mutual defense, and to act jointly in the event of aggression in Europe.

Today, this agreement is being used as an alibi for social-imperialist control of Finland, and the Finnish border is filled with Soviet war equipment and troops, who in Brezhnev's own words, would feel free to cross the border if the Soviet command felt that the "security" of either country was threatened.

But more than this military question is the economic one. After the Second World War, the Finnish bourgeoisie was very antagonistic to the USSR. They had collaborated with Hitler during the war, and the agreements which they

were forced to sign afterwards were signed against their will. But with the rise of the new tsars in the USSR, the Finnish monopoly capitalists began to change their views. They began to see the Soviet monopoly capitalists as the guarantee of "law and order" in the region. They enjoyed the thought of a new market, a new trade partner, and a "big brother" to protect them. They formed joint imperialist business ventures to exploit the Third World.

In Finland, fascist organizations have been prohibited since the war. But now, the people who speak for Finnish monopoly capital find it convenient to say that fascism is defined by "anti-Sovietism." For example, the Marxist-Leninists are considered "fascists" under this definition because they criticize social-imperialism. Both the Finnish ruling class and the USSR have found this reactionary alliance very helpful in silencing Marxism-Leninism.

We can also see how Finland's economy, bit by bit, came under Soviet domination. Two of Finland's three atomic power plants are run by the Soviet Union. A treaty to explore natural gas jointly has resulted in the building of huge gas pipelines, but the control of these lines is on the Soviet side of the border and can be stopped at any time. During the energy crisis, the Soviet Union was getting oil very cheaply from the Arab countries, but Finland was finding it hard to get from its former U.S. suppliers. What did the USSR do for good-neighbor Finland? They raised the prices higher than those in the capitalist world. This meant that, in one sweep, Soviet controlled-sectors of Finnish trade jumped from 12 per cent to 20 per cent. This has caused Finland a sharp deficit in its balance of payments. These are only a few examples of the Soviet pressures on Finland's economy.

Politically, no party in Finland dares oppose the Soviet Union in any way. This is especially true of the revisionist party itself. It is well known in ruling circles that the minister of foreign affairs has tried to pass laws prohibiting radio or other media from criticizing "countries with whom Finland has good relations," meaning the USSR.

This is only a brief description of the situation. But you can see that Finland is rapidly losing its independence—politically, economically, and militarily. And we see too how the Soviet Union got this influence there, and how they are trying to increase it. Perhaps they will try the same with other countries, for example, Sweden. Not exactly the same methods, because the contradictions are different, but some type of "Finlandization" of other countries in order to lay the groundwork for expansion.

As this happens, the U.S. will see its interests more and more threatened, and the situation will become extremely dangerous. But of course every people in every European nation needs to fight both against U.S. imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism. Those two superpowers, and the contention between them, this is our main enemy.