

Movement must analyze catastrophe in USSR

written by Sam Marcy
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Moscow workers defending Soviet socialism clashed with Boris Yeltsin's riot police in October 1993. Thousands were massacred with the approval of President Bill Clinton's administration.

Sam Marcy, a leading Marxist thinker and fighter of the second half of the 20th century, died 25 years ago on Feb. 1, 1998. To mark the occasion, Struggle-La Lucha is publishing a selection of Marcy's articles that demonstrate the breadth and depth of his analysis and strategic thought on behalf of the workers and oppressed, while also providing insight into today's struggles.

Marcy delivered the following statement on May 4, 1994, to a session of the International Seminar of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organizations in Brussels, Belgium.

We are submitting this statement in the hope it will contribute to a fuller discussion of the basic issue for our epoch — namely, what is the meaning of the collapse of the USSR?

There can be no question that this is the most important of all political issues. It would serve no purpose to shove it under the rug, even if that could be done, because the imperialist bourgeoisie and their kept press and media will invariably bring it up again and again. The movement would be defenseless without a thought-out approach to combat the propaganda of the bourgeoisie and their social-democratic helpers.

It is first necessary to understand that the contemporary struggle reduces itself in essence to a struggle between two diametrically opposed social systems based on two mutually antagonistic class structures.

It is impossible to have a discussion about the class struggle and the road to socialism unless we have some definite, although unfinished, view of Russia today

and of how the greatest and most profound social and political revolution has been undone.

It would be most unfortunate if the discussion reduced itself to merely a defense of the positions of Stalin, Trotsky, Mao or others. Their importance in the historic evolution of the communist movement will not suffer if we proceed according to an evaluation of political and theoretical concepts, rather than the individual leaders who may stand for them. To do otherwise is not worthy of revolutionary communists who are seriously attempting to find their way out of the catastrophic predicament in which all socialists and revolutionary Marxist-Leninists in particular find themselves today.

Attributing the catastrophic destruction of the USSR solely to the policies of individual leaders, or even to a collection of them, is contrary to the materialist interpretation of history.

The ancient slave system, for example, produced many brilliant leaders. The bourgeois historians attribute the decline and fall of the Roman Empire to the fault of these leaders.

But what do Marxists say about the relation of these leaders to the ancient Roman and Greek empires? That slavery was becoming an outmoded social system. It was not the leaders who caused the collapse of these empires. It was the decay of slavery.

Bourgeois historiography puts the subjective causes first. They regard slavery, feudalism and especially capitalism as eternal categories. But the internal struggles of the leaders, the murders, the poisonings, all this symbolized the decay of the institution of slavery.

Nevertheless, we don't want to deny the role of leadership. Leadership is crucial

when the objective situation is ripe.

But leadership is not a substitute for the class. All history attests to that.

According to Marxist doctrine, no social system ever passes away without first fully exhausting its possibilities. The USSR had not exhausted its possibilities for growth. Its growth was aborted by a combination of internal corrosion and external pressures.

Does the collapse of the USSR undermine the nature of the contemporary struggle in capitalist society?

Of course, the overthrow of the Soviet Union enormously strengthened the power of capital all over the world, if only by virtue of the fact that it removed an enormous source of revolutionary energy, encouragement and material aid to the proletariat, oppressed peoples and all socialist countries.

Nevertheless, it must be very clearly affirmed that the nature of the class struggle as outlined by Marx in the Communist Manifesto remains wholly valid today.

The inevitability of the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale remains valid, despite the defeat in the USSR.

The main thing is to identify the basic forces in contemporary society. These still are the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. And what Marx said about them in 1848 is still basically true.

Should we return to Marx's concept of the class struggle as outlined in the Communist Manifesto? That would also entail and fortify an understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the rule of the workers and oppressed masses.

The need is for all revolutionary communists to unite on the basis of a common

struggle against capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression. It is not necessary for any grouping to abandon its propaganda in support of the views of individual leaders.

What is needed is the broadest united front of revolutionary communist groupings, as long as they adhere to the spirit of revolutionary class struggle as generally promoted by Lenin in his writings on admission to the Communist International.

In the course of further discussion, we will surely find out where we stand and how to continue the struggle for revolutionary Marxism-Leninism in this very difficult period.

The name of Lenin is a kind of synonym for revolutionary class struggle. The failure to agree on that is in reality a line of demarcation between communism and social democracy, with its various hues.

It would be a great achievement to be able to set aside secondary aspects and unite on the general understanding of the nature of our epoch and the tasks of the working class and the oppressed masses.

We must affirm in the strongest terms that the present expansionist period of U.S. monopoly capital is the most dangerous and aggressive since the collapse of the USSR. But the disintegration of the socialist camp does not necessarily add up to permanent stability for imperialism. It is unable to stabilize itself and the unbridled forces of capitalist production lead it inevitably into a new crisis.

What the collapse of the USSR confirms is that the world center of economic activity is and has remained in the imperialist countries — the “West” — whereas the revolutionary center of gravity has been in the “East” — the oppressed nations of the world, the bulk of humanity.

But today the material foundations are being laid for a return of revolutionary

activity to the West.

The further development of monopoly capitalism in this stage will inevitably produce devastating convulsions within the imperialist system.

The present so-called capitalist prosperity in the United States, which the Clinton administration in particular is so boastful of, rests on a decrepit foundation. It conceals the extent of capitalist overproduction and the enormous debt that U.S. capitalist expansion has incurred.

For the moment, the analysts of imperialist finance capital have neglected to call this to the attention of the broad public. Such revelations coming at a time of high confidence could prove devastating to the so-called financial community.

It may be 1929 all over again. Whether this period is of a shorter or longer duration is impossible to say. What we have to prepare for is the next phase in this development. We must not be caught off guard.

Holding a firm position on the nature of monopoly capitalism — which, as Lenin pointed out, is really the precursor for socialist revolution — we can only view the future with confidence.

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