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China: Building socialism in an imperialist world

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PART 1
How China fought to build a new society
 China's rise as the world's major industrial center is reshaping the global economy. What was once concentrated in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan has shifted toward China, where hundreds of millions of workers now produce the machinery, electronics, and manufactured goods that underpin everyday life around the world. This shift disrupts the underlying economic structure of imperialism that has governed the world capitalist system for more than a century – where dominance in the most advanced sectors of production has provided the capitalist powers with a decisive material advantage.



The victorious People's Liberation Army enters Beijing in 1949.

China's lifting of more than 800 million people out of extreme poverty since the late 1970s has been the largest global reduction in economic inequality in modern history. It's a victory of socialism.

The contrast with the United States and other imperialist powers is stark. As China eliminated extreme poverty, the U.S. saw homelessness rise, hunger worsen, wages stagnate for almost two decades, and millions pushed into unstable, insecure living conditions despite enormous national wealth.

Deep poverty is a significant and persistent issue in the U.S. Approximately 5.0% of the population lives in deep poverty, and 40% are poor or low-income. The difference is structural: one system mobilizes around human need, the other around corporate profit.

China's role in the world today cannot be separated from the long course of its revolution: the victory over foreign domination in 1949; the first decades of socialist construction; the Cultural Revolution to block the rise of a new privileged stratum; and the post-1978 turn that opened space for private capital and created the mixed system whose contradictions still shape China's development.

Socialism means social ownership of the means of production and an economy organized to meet people's needs rather than maximize profit. That is the core of the struggle.

Development under capitalism and socialism follows two very different paths. Capitalism expands through its own internal motion, driven by competition and profit. It can operate under almost any political form – parliamentary democracy, military rule, even open fascism. Its crises are periodic and unavoidable: when the system breaks down, production collapses, jobs vanish, and living conditions for the most exploited layers take the hardest hit. Yet capitalism rebuilds itself on the same foundations, preparing the ground for the next crisis.

Socialist development is different. It does not arise spontaneously. It has to be built – through planning, public ownership, and a workers' state led by a revolutionary party. Without the leadership of a party firmly anchored in socialized

property and committed to advancing socialist construction, the system does not simply stall. It begins to break down and open the door to capitalist restoration, often in conditions marked by intense struggle.

China is a workers' state (that's what Lenin called the Soviet Union) that retains the core instruments of proletarian power: state ownership of key sectors of industry, technology and banking; central planning capacity; Communist Party control over the military and political system.

Yet it is also a state threatened by capitalist relations that have grown within it over the past four decades: the expansion of a large private sector, profit-driven market activity, wide differences in income and economic security, and an increasingly influential, privileged layer that does not hold power but holds sway.

To understand China today means looking at how a workers' state was built,

By Gary Wilson

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China: Building Socialism in an Imperialist World is a report on how over a billion people are building a socialist society inside a world dominated by imperialism. It follows the Chinese Revolution as a long struggle to create new social relations: from the land reform and collectivization that broke feudal power, to the mass campaigns that built industry from scratch, to the Cultural Revolution's effort to curb rising privilege and keep the revolution on a socialist path.

The report shows how socialist construction created the foundations of modern China: state ownership of key sectors of industry, technology and banking, planning, broad participation, universal education and healthcare, and an industrial base able to withstand pressure from the capitalist powers. It also examines how these foundations were strained after 1978, when market policies widened inequality and allowed new layers of privilege to grow — and how today's leadership is working to limit these pressures and strengthen the role of state ownership and planning.

Instead of treating China as a puzzle or a template, the report approaches it as a workers' state developing inside a global capitalist order. China's advances and its difficulties both arise from the ongoing work of socialist construction — work shaped by struggle, challenged by capitalist forces, and still rooted in the revolution of 1949.

China: Building Socialism in an Imperialist World offers a clear, direct account of how socialism is built in real conditions — and why that process continues to shake the world system shaped by imperialism.

