

ownership of the means of production have remained basically intact in spite of the marauding incursions of the Soviet bureaucracy. How else explain that the worldwide capitalist economic crisis has not overtaken the USSR?—a fact so plain that only the politically blind, those who will not see, can ignore it.

Bettelheim and Sweezy

Another version of the restoration of capitalism theory is that of Charles Bettelheim, which unfortunately has been embraced by some who in our view should know better, such as Paul Sweezy. In Bettelheim's view, the basic cause of the degeneration, or rather the transformation, of the USSR into a capitalist state ruled by a "new" state bourgeoisie lies in the theoretical error presumably pursued both by Stalin and even more so by Trotsky in stressing the development of the productive forces rather than in changing social relations. It's hard to take this thesis seriously and one wonders how serious people who have devoted much of their lives to the struggle for socialism can come up with a theory that defies the very basis of the Marxist conception of history and does so much violence to the actual developments in the USSR.

Bettelheim, and Sweezy too, are comforted and bolstered in their new theory by the belief that it is also the conception of Chairman Mao—a dubious proposition which events in China, especially as they are unfolding, are sure to disqualify.

Why have Bettelheim and Sweezy found this new detour to explain social development in the USSR?

First of all there has been the strong pull of China—but the victory of the Angolan people and the reactionary foreign policy of Peking are sure to create second thoughts among many of China's followers.

But there is another reason, too, aside from the disillusionment and disenchantment which followed in the wake of successive setbacks in the USSR and which have discredited the Soviet leadership for many, many years.

If Stalin and Trotsky both thought that the main emphasis had to be put on the productive forces to develop a workers' state in a backward country, they were right—that was not an erroneous conception. Therein does not lie the fundamental difficulty faced by the new social formation, by the new society which issued

from the October Revolution. It was not neglect of the social relations. That's avoiding the issue.

To put it properly, it was the growth of the Soviet bureaucracy, headed by Stalin, which perverted the social relations which issued from the October Revolution. That was possible because Soviet society was characterized by a fundamental contradiction which the bureaucracy was unable to resolve by its methods. The contradiction was that the productive forces were too meager and inadequate to give the new social relations in the USSR a socialist character.

Whereas in all the older modes of production the productive forces first outgrew the social relations and then rebelled against them, in the new Soviet society the productive forces were inadequate to assure a socialist development. Unable to pursue a revolutionary policy either at home or abroad, the bureaucracy took on the character of a coercive and repressive force and began the construction of socialism in a way which destroyed the political gains of the working class *but retained the fundamental social conquests necessary to insure the existence of a workers' state but not of a socialist society.*

So that what we have is not a new ruling class, not a new state bourgeoisie, but the very familiar phenomenon of a bureaucracy which has expropriated the proletariat politically while it—the bureaucracy—rules on behalf of the proletariat. In doing so, it naturally appropriates in its own self-interest a good deal of the privileges and emoluments that go with governing, but this does not nullify the fact that the proletariat, in a historical and sociological sense, is still the ruling class, hampered by a bureaucratic upper crust.

Is this a new phenomenon in world history? Not really. If we examine other classes, both the British and the German bourgeoisies, for example, they were not able to rule directly on their own behalf until many, many decades had passed. In Germany it took Bismarck, a Junker, a feudalism, and his array of bureaucrats to unify the bourgeoisie in a national state and to dominate over them.

Vast difference between bureaucracy and class

It makes a great deal of difference whether one characterizes the ruling group in the USSR as a bureaucracy or as a social class