

Leninist State vs. World Socialism

What can one say about the Socialist Workers Party except that they do quite rightly respond with indignation to the iniquities of capitalism and they do understand that there is a class struggle going on - even if their idea of the working-class is hopelessly narrow, including mainly manual workers rather than an people dependent upon selling their labour power in order to survive. The SWP is a radical party, in the old sense of not liking society as it is and wanting something to be done. This "something" they call socialism but despite their claim to be a socialist party, their speakers are conspicuously silent on, and their literature notably empty of any definition of socialism.

The Socialist Party has a clear definition of socialism; it will be a society of common, not state or private, ownership of the means of wealth production and distribution; there will be democratic and not minority control of social affairs; production will be solely for use rather than for sale or profit; there will be free access by an people to an goods and services, without the fetters of the money economy. All of that is clear and anyone who cares to go back to 1904 will find all of our literature advocating the same principled and unequivocal socialist aim.

What sort of society is the SWP aiming for?

The so-called socialist aim of the SWP has always been obscure. They regard the Bolshevik coup d'etat in Russia as an example of a successful socialist revolution, yet they argue that after ten years of its happening Russia had become a state capitalist country which should be opposed by socialists. They have told workers to elect Labour governments whenever elections have taken place but they argue that Labour governments are anti-socialist. They have tried the opportunist policy of supporting courses of action and then dissociating themselves from the inevitably unpopular consequences. But now, after years of refusing to tell anyone what socialism means to them, the SWP has published a pamphlet, *The Future Socialist Society* in which all is explained. They would have done themselves a favour to have kept their confusion a secret. They have done us a favour, for now we can see quite clearly that the SWP does not stand for socialism, but for a Leninist state - which should be resisted by all workers.

The Socialist State

There will be no state in a socialist society. The state is the body which has existed for as long as property society has existed, in order to defend the propertied ruling class against the propertyless majority. Socialism will be a classless society, without exploiters and exploited, rulers and ruled, coercion and submission. Not so, according to the SWP:

...the working class will have to create its own state. This state, like any other, will be a centralised organisation exercising ultimate authority in society and having at its disposal decisive armed force (p.8)

There is no point in having a state unless there are people to be bullied and coerced. According to the SWP, the new state will be bullying and coercing the capitalists - the exploiters who live by robbing the working class. But if the workers can dominate the capitalists with a state, why allow them to continue exploiting and robbing the workers? Why not immediately dispossess the parasite minority? Once the capitalists have been stripped of their power to exploit workers economically there will be no need to control them with a state: there will be a classless society without the need for a body of class rule. The SWP argue the absurd case that this all-powerful workers' state will "exercise ultimate authority in society" but for the authority over the most crucial aspect of society in which the capitalists will still be having power. In order to have authority over the exploiters on behalf of the exploited - it is like a proposal for the prisoners to be given control over the screws - there will need to be a new "socialist army":

The old capitalist armed forces. . . will be replaced with organisations of armed workers - workers' militias, (p.8)

Conscription will be re-introduced:

. . . service in the militia will be on a rota basis so as to train and involve the maximum number of workers in the armed defence of their power . . . (p.9)

We do not know whether the SWP would allow conscientious objectors to refuse military service under the new state or whether such dangerous subversives would be sent to "socialist prisons". The new militia will not only be an army but a police force also - a military police, in fact:

The militia will also be in charge of everyday law and order . . . they will perform far more effectively than the capitalist police, (p.9)

No more getting away with breaking state-imposed laws under the new state: the crime detection rate of the "socialist police" is already guaranteed to be better than at present. There will be officers in the militia - no doubt they will have little red stripes on their uniforms to show us that they are "socialist" super-thugs, and

"All officers in the militia will be elected . . . " (p.9).

So, there you have it: establish SWP-style socialism and you get to vote for the Chief Inspector at your local nick.

The new state will have a "socialist government" which will probably be run by "the party which has led the revolution"(p.9). But not everyone will be allowed to vote for the government:

There will not be complete universal suffrage because the nature of the system will exclude the old bourgeoisie and its main associates from the electoral process.(p,10)

So capitalists will not have the vote. If there are still capitalists in the SWP's "socialist society" they would not need to vote, for capitalists have economic power already and the only use which voting performs is to get hold of that power. If the capitalists are abolished as a class, then firstly there is no need for a state - because there will be no contest between classes - and secondly it would be stupidly anti-socialist to deny votes to ex-capitalists who are now equal members of a classless society. Worse still, the SWP proposes to deny votes to the "main associates" of the old capitalists. Does that mean that all previous supporters of capitalism will have no right to vote? Or will the right to vote be denied to active anti-SWPers - including The Socialist Party, which would be working actively to democratically overthrow the new state? The Socialist Party need be in no doubt about our place in this horrific new state, for we are told that political parties will only be allowed to operate freely "providing they accept the basic framework of the revolution"(p.9). Quite simply, the new state will be undemocratic - and once there is a state of such power anyone can be placed in the role of one of the enemies of the state, denied the right to vote or to oppose the regime. All too often the first people to be persecuted by new states are the ones who helped to create them. Take the example of the SWP "promise" about the freedom of artists:

There will be no repetition of the disastrous Stalinist policy of proscribing particular artistic forms or proclaiming that only one style of art . . . has validity. Apart from reserving the right to prohibit direct counter-revolutionary propaganda, the revolutionary government will promote the maximum freedom in this area. (pp.33/4)

Let us consider a practical case. Suppose there is a socialist film-maker under the new state who makes a good movie about the way in which life under a militia is not freedom but just another form of oppression. At the end of the film there is a scene in which a socialist makes a speech against the new regime, pointing out that wherever the state exists there is an absence of freedom. The new state bosses might conclude - quite rightly - that such a film could turn workers against the state, make them feel unfree, make them ungrateful to the government which had led them to supposed freedom, incite revolutionary activity which the state would regard as counter-revolutionary. The film would have to be banned, or parts of it censored. These are the inevitable requirements of running a coercive state. As the SWP tell us now, before we could be foolish enough to grant them such power.

. . . it has to be frankly stated that some repression, some use of direct force, will be necessary not only to overthrow the capitalist state but also after the revolution to maintain workers' power.(p.11)

As they say of their heroes, who established a previous "socialist state": "The Bolsheviks had no choice but to introduce a highly authoritarian regime" (p.12).

All of these absurd ideas about socialism are based upon three basic errors. Firstly, that "The class struggle does not come to an end with the victory of the revolution"(p.11). For the SWP, socialism is a class society in which one class rules over another. In fact, once workers gain control of the state our

one simple task will be to abolish both classes and the state by means of the immediate dispossession of the capitalist minority. This will put an end to the class struggle forever. Secondly, that workers can take power in one country alone. The only action a socialist majority in one country can do is to use all its might to hasten the process of developing class consciousness of workers across the world. It is not possible to do that by setting up a so-called workers' state which would be forced to run capitalism in one country - state capitalism - and in doing so would set back the development of socialist ideas in other countries as workers looked on to see the failures of the "new socialist state". The SWP states that ". . . a workers' state cannot survive indefinitely in one country"(p.17). In fact, it would be fatal for workers ever to take responsibility for running a state in any country. The sole task of the workers against whom the state is used is to use the state for one purpose and then get rid of it.

Thirdly, the SWP accepts the ideas of Lenin about revolution as an act of leaders taking the majority who are led to a new social order: Such an authoritarian revolution could only be like all previous revolutions in history, ending in the domination of the leaders, forming a new state over the led. So it was that the Bolsheviks promised to set up a dictatorship of the proletariat but in fact constructed a dictatorship over the proletariat. The SWP aim to do the same thing, with their own pathetic band of leaders in the 1980s role of the Lenins, Trotskys and probably plenty of Stalins. This is not a socialist vision, but a nightmare of Leninist state dictatorship which workers should not be tempted by but should resist.

The New Economy

Most of the SWP's pamphlet is devoted to describing the role of the new state. Conspicuously little is said about the economic arrangements under "the workers' state". It is admitted that "Socialism cannot be built in one country"(p.17). But the new state will exist in one country. So we must assume that it will be running capitalism - state capitalism. There is plenty of evidence in the pamphlet to suggest that this is what the SWP has in mind. We are told that "The formal mechanism through which economic power will be established is a familiar one, namely nationalisation"(p.14). Indeed, it is all too familiar: nationalisation can be simply translated as state-run capitalism. Not all of the means of wealth production will be nationalised: ". . . the working class will immediately . . . take into its hands all the major means of production in society" (p.14). Only the major ones, included among which will be

...nationalisation of the banks and the imposition of strict exchange controls backed by other revolutionary measures to prevent the inevitable attempt at a flight of capital abroad.(p.14)

So, there will still be banks and capital under the SWP's "socialism". But some capitalists will be spared from being taken over by the new state capitalist: "Small businesses employing only one or two workers can mostly be left to later" (p.14).

Take note of that if you are currently working in a shop or sweatshop. Workers will continue to be in the working class, selling their labour power. Therefore they will need trade unions and

the trade unions will also retain the right to strike, since even under a workers' state sections of the working class may need to defend their interests against abuse and should keep this ultimate weapon. (p.13)

Incidentally, after the so-called workers' state was formed in Russia Trotsky told the workers that their trade unions could only be used to make the state-run industries more profitable and we have no guarantees that the new state rulers would not do the same if they had power.

If you are a "technical expert" who does not support the new state the SWP has some bad news for you:

...they will simply work for and under the direction of the factory or industrial council just as today they work for the bosses. ..If absolutely necessary they will have to perform with workers' guns at their heads . . . (pp.15/6)

We are referring here to scientists, auditors, architects, surgeons - all of whom are now workers - people forced to sell their labour power in order to live. They are being told that life for them will be "Just as today", working for bosses and possibly having to do so with guns pointed at their heads. Workers will still be wage slaves, dependent on wages or salaries:

...the supply of goods will remain limited and workers will still work for money wages which in turn they will use to purchase these goods. (p.21)

So the workers under the new state will still have to buy the goods and services which they produce. From whom will they buy them? From the state which, like any other capitalist, produces nothing and sells what the workers produce to the workers.

A socialist society, based on the common ownership of all resources by all the people, would have no resemblance to what the SWP describes. There will be no classes, no banks or exchange controls or capital, and no money - for what use could money have in a society where everything belongs to everyone? The SWP simply do not understand this conception of a moneyless society of common ownership. Instead they offer confusing notions, such as that

In order to move, people will either transfer to vacant accommodation or exchange houses instead of buying and selling them. (p.22)

The SWP is proposing the establishment of a system of barter to replace the buying and selling system. But it gets worse. Rather than the abolition of wages and money, which Marx pointed out is essential to socialism, they propose the gradual abolition of wages and money:

Buying and selling will fade away. Money . . . will steadily lose its usefulness to the point where it can be dispensed with altogether. (p.22)

Now, either society is based on property in which there is buying and selling and a need for money or on propertyless common ownership. The two conditions are mutually exclusive: you can no more have a bit of both than you can be a bit pregnant. The SWP pamphlet writers know, because of their reading of Marx and their knowledge of The Socialist Party, that it would be a major mistake for them to try to describe a socialist society without mentioning the abolition of money and buying and selling. But they are petrified by the thought that this would make them appear utopian. After all, they are always telling The Socialist Party that although they know we are right in stating that socialism will be a moneyless, wageless, classless society it is folly to tell the workers that because they will reject socialism. That is Leninist arrogance: only some people - the leaders who monopolise theory - can be told the truth: for the workers it is better to offer palatable nonsense. That is why the SWP, in a confused and embarrassed manner, have inserted a few words alluding to the abolition of money, buying and selling - but only the gradual abolition, with money fading away - presumably one tenpenny piece at a time.

The SWP's picture of socialism would be a joke if the future of humanity was something to laugh about. In fact, given the supreme urgency of the need for socialist transformation of society, the nonsense being sold as socialism by the SWP is an insult to the intelligence of those who read it and a sinister picture of a Leninist state under which no worker should want to live.