

Comment

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It is heartening to learn from Politprosvet that comrades thousands of miles away in the Urals are debating questions similar to those raised in the discussions in London which led to the publication of International Socialist Forum.

Viktor Avdevich's arguments, against 'communist parties' that try to substitute themselves for the working class or speak in the class's name, ring true. So does his argument that socialists must clarify ideas. The most important thing, he says, is to raise the level of working-class struggle and make that struggle conscious. 'If proletarian organisations today concentrate on "practically attainable aims" ... will they be working towards this crucial goal. No!'

'Why not fight for "the purity of ideas"?' asks Avdevich. Good question!

With this in mind, I would raise two points.

1. Comrade Miliakha says: 'The trouble is that, in socialist times, the majority of people became so used to the idea that the state would not leave them in poverty, that they can not believe that it will throw them out of their flats or refuse to help them resist hunger.'

For a start, I do not think that this is 'the trouble'! If Russian workers regard flats, or protection from hunger, as theirs by right, this is the reflection in consciousness of past class struggles - which, albeit indirectly and not straightforwardly, produced a situation in which the state felt compelled to protect workers from hunger and provide them with flats. (British history, which could hardly be more different from Russian history, has also produced in workers the belief that state education, state health care, etc, are theirs by right. That is not a bad thing.)

More important, however, is that Miliakha takes for granted the very thing that must be challenged by socialists: that the Brezhnev years, to which many older Russian workers look back fondly, were 'socialist times'.

If we use the word 'socialist' in this way, without qualification, we accept the foul perversion of its meaning carried on for decades by bourgeois ideologists and the rulers of the USSR alike. Without entering here into discussion of the class character of the USSR, or of the historic achievements of the Russian revolution (vital subjects which must be discussed), I would say that a rejection of the idea that the USSR constituted 'socialism' is an im-

portant starting-point for such a discussion.

Socialism surely implies a society in which the domination of capital is thrown off, in which the oppression and inequality left over from class society is being overcome, in which the state 'withers away'. The USSR, trapped in a world in which capital remained dominant, was a society corroded and finally overwhelmed by the oppression and inequality bred by capital, a society in which the state did not wither away but on the contrary grew into a monstrous weapon of tyranny.

Political education must START by rejecting the proposition that Brezhnev's USSR was socialist.

2. Another starting-point of discussion must be to reject the notion of Ziuganov and others, embraced by S. Miliakha, of uniting 'all national-patriotic forces'.

V. Avdevich explains perfectly well that the replacement of El'tsin by Ziuganov would change little for workers, and that what is required is to build an independent workers' movement. Further. Such a movement will be corrupted and damaged by the idea of uniting 'all national-patriotic forces', which in the present-day Russian context implies uniting - as both the CPRF and RCWP have done consistently and continue to do - with Russian nationalists and near-fascists of every kind, simply on the grounds that they are opposed to El'tsin. Ziuganov and co. embrace this nationalism equally enthusiastically when it is directed against Russia's traditional colonies, e.g. Chechnia, and age-old targets of racism, e.g. the Jews, as they do when it is directed against 'imperialism'. A serious discussion of socialist ideas can not even begin without a categorical rejection of this reactionary poison, and an acceptance of revolutionary internationalism - the unity of the international working class in struggle against capitalism - as a fundamental principle.

This is by no means a 'Russian' issue. In western Europe, those of us who campaigned to assist workers' organisations in Tuzla, Bosnia, to defend their multi-ethnic community from Serbian genocide, found ourselves up against 'socialists' who would not condemn this genocide because they saw something 'socialist', or at least 'anti-imperialist', in Milosevic and Karadzic.

These two issues are in no way separate from the points raised by comrade Avdevich. 'Communism' that identifies itself with Brezhnev's rule, and replaces internationalism with 'national-patriotism', is the same 'communism'

that arrogantly presumes to substitute itself for the working class and to strive for 'practically attainable aims' (election victories etc) outside of the struggle to rebuild the working-class movement. This 'socialism' is alien to the working class; it is the 'socialism' of fragments of the shattered state bureaucracy in the eastern countries or of

the pro-bourgeois labour bureaucracy in the western countries. The fight against its methods (substitutionism, parliamentarism) must be bound up with a fight against it on ideological grounds, to re-establish the meaning of socialism and internationalism.

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