

BEGINNING THE BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY

If we had a genuine radical left, the battle for democracy would take up a lot of its time. It would recognize the tyrannies as our main enemies. The well armed and aggressive ones are of particular concern. Russia, China, Iran and North Korea obviously come to mind here. We also have the regimes that should be the targets of the next instalment of the Arab Spring. Then together with China we have the "socialist" tyrannies in Cuba, Venezuela and Vietnam. And we mustn't forget the kleptocracies of Sub-Saharan Africa. In sum, we can say that there is an enormous amount of unfreedom on this planet.

In the bourgeois democracies the left would be a prime mover in awakening a mass democratic movement that (1) harasses their governments into pursuing policies that weaken rather than strengthen the tyrannies; and (2) defends democracy and political freedom at home from attempts to undermine it.

The fact that we do not see street rallies demanding unlimited military support for Ukraine is clear proof that there is neither a left nor a democratic movement at the moment. Defeating Russia would achieve a great deal! Both Ukraine and Belarus would be free and Europe no longer threatened. The fascist ultra-nationalist gangsters in Russia would be in a much weaker position. The monsters in Beijing would be more likely to think twice about invading Taiwan. We can see a similar failure with Gaza. People in the West are not out on the streets calling for international intervention to take over the Palestinian territories to ensure a transition to a freely elected government. Instead we get vapid chants of "Free Palestine".

The left would of course also constantly point out the problems that capitalism poses for democracy and open government. Three come quickly to mind. Firstly, there is the corrupting effect of vested interest in a society where everyone is seeking personal gain. Secondly, the government, no matter how democratic, is governing capitalism; it is the servant of the present system with all its obstacles to human progress. Thirdly and most importantly, fascism is a "solution" for capitalism embraced by many when conditions become too unstable and rebellious for their liking. There is the threat of these types seizing power.

For a future radical left it would be particularly important to attack the "socialist" tyrannies and look forward to their demise. This would allow it to clearly distinguish itself from much of the pseudo left and provide an opportunity to explain both the obstacles and objectives of the proletarian revolution.

There are the "anti-imperialists" to deal with. They call supporters of democracy "social imperialists". In turn they should be called social fascists or fifth columnists. These individuals are just a small fringe however their ideas cannot be ignored because they permeate the common "discourse" and they threaten to infect any new generation of people spurred into political action. So, a harsh light needs to be shone in this dark corner.

According to the social fascists, western imperialism is the main enemy and "multipolarity" would give countries more scope to break free from it. Such multipolarity in fact means closer ties to Russia or China and greater scope for corruption and dictatorship.

While defeating tyranny is of course highly desirable in itself, it is also critical for a future proletarian revolution. Firstly, growing up in a freer society makes workers more prepared for their task of transforming themselves and society once they have dispensed with the bourgeoisie. They are less obedient and deferential and have cast off more of the backwardness inherited from pre-capitalist society. Secondly, the far lower level of repression in a bourgeois democracy provides much more favorable conditions for a revolutionary movement to emerge.

The battle for democracy lies ahead of us. And the only way a radical left movement can emerge and grow is by joining it.

"Democracy is indispensable to the working class because only through the exercise of its democratic rights, in the struggle for democracy, can the proletariat become aware of its class interests and its historic task."

Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform and Revolution*

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THAT LETTER TO WEYDEMEYER

If you want to know what Marx was on about, a good place to start is the following often cited sentence from a letter he sent to Joseph Weydemeyer on March 5, 1852. Let's have a look, and discuss it.

"What I did that was new was to prove: (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production, (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat, (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society."

When we talk of classes we are thinking of societies where one group of people subjugates another group for the purpose of exploiting their ability to labor. There were no classes in hunter-gathering society because there was little or no way of extracting a production surplus from a subjected group. In the case of inter-group conflicts enemies were killed rather than enslaved. It was only with grain cultivation that we get serious about one class exploiting another.

In agrarian societies the lower class could either be slaves or a serfs. While slaves were OK for some things such as domestic service, serfs were certainly better for grain production. It is hard to supervise farm work so it is better to force them to live off whatever is left over after meeting some "customary" impost from the lord.

While slaves and serfs are owned or otherwise tied to individual masters, workers under capitalism are "free". There is also greater mobility between classes. Also while you endure subjection and exploitation in production, you may find things are more free and easy in society at large. When you encounter a member of the bourgeoisie in the street you are not required to bow, remove your hat or tug your forelock. You can sit anywhere you like in church and everyone is equal before

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the law.

This leads people to believe that we no longer have a class society. But as we have already said, class is about the control of the labor power of others. And that is still the case. The capitalists may not own you but they definitely still own your labor power. Or if they don't, you are stuck on welfare or marginal self-employment. (As the saying goes, the only thing worse than being exploited by capitalism is not being exploited by it.) And wealth - mansions and means of production - is simply congealed labor power.

It is worth keeping in mind here that the proletariat or working class is the vast majority of people in developed capitalist societies. We are not just talking about factory workers or miners. It is pretty well everyone on a wage or salary.

Of course, struggling against exploitation and subjugation would all be rather futile if nothing better could be achieved. This was certainly the case with peasant rebellions in pre-industrial societies. However, in the case of capitalism, it is a different story. The level of development created by the present system makes a better classless society plausible. Equality would mean sharing ever greater prosperity, leisure, and work that is free of hard grind and the old oppressive division of labor. History shows that there is little interest in sharing poverty and endless toil. So we now have the makings of a better society and economy, based on cooperation rather than the law of the jungle.

We have no way of knowing how long it will take for a growing number of workers to see the road ahead and then overcome a cornered bourgeoisie that will viciously bite back with the help of anyone they can rally around words like property, family, country, individual, order and god.

Once you have seized power from the capitalists, your job has only just begun. The dictatorship of the proletariat involves a lot more than unseating the capitalists and keeping an eye on a small hostile minority. We won't have the peasant problem in the future but there will still be a petty bourgeoisie who generally have their mind set on becoming capitalists rather than joining the ranks of the proletariat.

But it is more than that. You have to put in place the foundations and fabric of a new society, and get rid of a lot of old stuff. We will have the social ownership which is a good start. We will have the material basis in the form of high per capita output and automation, although this may require a bit of post-war reconstruction if things get messy. Plus we will have general levels of education that are good enough to

start seriously eating away at the old division of labor.

So we will have a lot of the hardware and firmware in place. The main remaining problem is the software - our thinking and behavior. Some of that will have changed during the process of successfully seizing power. In particular, the fact that this has occurred necessarily means that there has been a significant minority of people (the vanguard) committed to seeing the revolution through to the end.

But problems abound. People generally have limited experience running things. There will be a temptation to rely too much on people with expertise from the old society. The vanguard will have to be very adept at dealing with all sorts of perverse behavior that will disrupt the workplace and make life miserable. There will be sociopaths, concealed opponents, seriously disturbed people, people with low social skills that limit their ability to

deal constructively when tensions arise. The worst will be those who try to make out that you are the problem rather than them. The vanguard will have to learn very quickly, and be determined and courageous.

A special problem will be people who benefit from the old division of labor and don't want things to change. Indeed members of the vanguard could fall into this category if they get too comfortable making all the decisions. Indeed they could become a new bourgeoisie as we saw in the Soviet Union and regimes derived from it. The dictatorship of the proletariat will not only have to get rid of the old bourgeoisie, it will also have to stomp on this new bourgeoisie and double their effort to eliminate the conditions left over from capitalism that spawn it. This will require a firm revolutionary hand on the tiller of state backed up by a very active revolutionary "civil society" (a.k.a. mass movement).

INTRODUCING *RED SPECK*

The aim of *Red Speck* and *David's Political Substack* is to put forward views I believe a radical left would have if it existed. These clash totally with the mess dished up by the reactionary pseudo left which while existing only does so in a state of rather smelly decomposition.

Here are a few highlights:

- Support the Maoist view that the proletarian revolution requires a protracted period of struggle to ensure that the state does not change from a revolutionary to a reactionary force. The demise of regimes that have turned into their opposites is not to be lamented. There was nothing worth rescuing from the Soviet empire when it collapsed 35 years ago. The same can be said for present-day China, Cuba and Vietmen that badly need bourgeois democratic revolutions;
- An opposition to "anti-imperialism" which started out as something progressive but turned into something totally reactionary in particular because of its support for highly dubious regimes in the "South" and its failure to distinguish between aggressor and non-aggressor powers;
- Much like the 1930s, the major powers are divided into non-aggressor bourgeois democracies on the one hand and fascist aggressors on the other. A genuine left would be working with others to demand that the leaders of the former pursue a ramped up policy of collective security and provide unstinting support for Ukraine. The battle for democracy and victory against tyranny are important preconditions for proletarian revolution;
- Opposition to the green movement and support for economic growth. The success of the proletarian revolution requires advanced industrial development on a global scale. Coexisting with and harnessing nature requires increasingly more advanced technologies; and
- Opposition to identity politics. This turns concern about discrimination into something absurd and toxic, and prevents the open discussion of views that is required in order to acquire the proper understanding. It also allows the mainstream conservative aversion to this stuff to be exploited by the far right and fascists.