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Marxism in the Post-Globalization Era

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It would be strange, to say the least, to speak about Marxism as a progressive or even influential theoretical school in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989-1991. Marxist ideas have come to be associated with the repressive practices of the totalitarian Stalinist era, the failed Soviet economy and the conservative, nostalgic views of the older generation and a small segment of youth that failed to integrate into the market economy. Naturally, this attitude to Marxist theory was typical for the former communist countries that rapidly transitioned from a Soviet-style managed economy to neo-liberal capitalism. The word “socialism” was largely discredited in these countries.

By contrast, at Western European and North American universities, courses in Marxism remained a fixture of sociology departments, while radical left-wing intellectuals continued to actively participate in public debates. However, it would be naive to assume that the crisis of trust in Marxist thought was limited to the former Soviet bloc countries. It was in the West that advocates of the liberal ideological mainstream launched a massive counter-offensive in the 1990s, after their positions had been seriously undermined by the events of 1968-1974 (the Vietnam War, student riots in France and Italy, the revolution in Chile, and the downfall of right-wing dictatorships in Portugal, Spain and Greece, which contributed to the widespread radicalization of intellectuals far beyond Southern Europe).

In the late 1970s, the crisis of mainstream liberalism in terms of ideology and practice was accompanied by serious economic setbacks in Western consumer societies. This crisis was eventually overcome, but not by an anti-capitalist transformation or social reforms advocated by the left. To the contrary, it was the product of a renunciation of the mixed economy built on Keynesian concepts, the step-by-step dismantling of the welfare state, privatization, deregulation and the privileging of financial capital. In other words, the mainstream underwent a radical shift to the right, replacing the centrist ideas of progressive liberalism with the rigid principles of modern neoliberalism.¹

The triumph of neoliberalism and the crisis of the left

Not only did the left fail to offer a comprehensive strategic response to the changes in global capitalism, they split into two camps that proposed equally unconstructive approaches. One chose to ignore reality and sought to prove that capitalism had not changed one iota, whereas the other mythologized the changes, taking at face value the explanations and concepts offered by the ideologists and propagandists of the ruling class. It is no surprise that the Soviet Union’s collapse served as a signal for the attack of the neoliberals, who were already consolidating their political and economic gains into an ideological and cultural hegemony. The parties and theoreticians that represented the communist tradition or were linked with the Soviet project in some way were not their only target. Western leftists, including communists, had been publically criticizing the USSR since 1968, but this by no means furthered their cause in the ideological struggle of the late 20th

¹ The British left-wing writer Tariq Ali ironically called this phenomenon “the extreme center” because the policy and ideology of the mainstream acquired features that are usually associated with far-left or far-right radicalism. See: Tariq Ali, *The Extreme Centre: A Warning*, London, Verso, 2015.

century. Neoliberals interpreted the collapse of the Soviet system as empirical proof that it was fundamentally impossible to build any successful social model that differs from modern capitalism. In their eyes, the Soviet failure showed that any form of economic policy that was not guided by “the invisible hand of the market” was doomed by definition. Thus, not only the proponents of centralized planning who relied on the Soviet experience but all other leftists – from the most moderate social-democrats who urged careful market regulation to the most radical supporters of worker self-government and anarchic network self-organization – were dismissed from the sphere of “serious discourse” as hopeless utopians.

Having sustained a number of political setbacks, the social-democratic and communist parties began to surrender themselves, one after another, to the mercy of the victor, joining the neo-liberal system and recognizing the logic of the new consensus. Many communist parties ceased to exist. Social-democratic parties carried on but only as an electoral brand. They were no longer a social force that sought to substantially alter capitalist policy, if not to reform capitalism altogether. Eventually these debates were reduced to the nuances of “cultural differences,” tactical management issues and correct personnel recruitment.

Small groups on the left sought salvation in rigid dogmatism. They became something like “keepers of the flame” who had only one task – to pass along the Marxist and socialist tradition more or less intact to future generations of revolutionaries (though they did not stop squabbling over whose tradition was more authentic). Having lost political support, most intellectuals went into a panic. Eventually they found ideological refuge in various forms of post-modernist theory, whose ideologists criticized Marx for not being radical enough. They tried to prove that the 19th-century thinker depended too much on the prevailing views of his age and could not get beyond the traditions of the European Enlightenment, notions of progress and faith in science, which are also part of the bourgeois system of values. Not surprisingly, while denouncing Marx for being historically narrow-minded and “bourgeois,” post-modernists did not raise the issue of their own cultural limitations or involvement in neo-liberal capitalist institutions.

Since the Marxist project was rejected as inadequate both in its revolutionary and reformist versions, it had to be replaced with a fundamental critique of the principles of modern civilization that was so thorough that it did not envisage, even in theory, any opportunity for practical action in social policy, the economy, etc. The beauty of this approach was that it allowed its proponents to combine their claim to intellectual radicalism with a principled, consistent renunciation of any attempt to change society. This trend was best described in the book *Empire* by Antonio Hardt and Michael Negri, which rapidly rose to prominence. Radical rhetoric aside, the book was an attempt to prove the progressive nature of the neoliberal capitalist model as a prelude to communism.²

It should come as no surprise that, in practical terms, the authors were zealous supporters of the European Union, took part in the campaign for the European Constitution and consistently backed the strategic path towards European market integration that encountered unexpectedly fierce resistance from the majority of Western Europeans. In many cases this resistance was not led by influential leftists. It was often politically amorphous and at times plagued by ideological

² See: M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Imperiya*, Moscow, Praksis, 2004. Original English publication: M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 2000.

contradictions, but proved to be the main challenge for European and North American elites after the collapse of the USSR. This situation was ironically described by Mexican writer and activist Subcomandante Marcos, who pointed out during the rebellion of Indians in the state of Chiapas that the local residents knew nothing about the fall of the Berlin Wall or the collapse of the USSR and simply continued defending their rights and interests as if there had been no ideological revolution.³ In fact, the rebellion of Zapatistas in Chiapas in 1994 signaled the beginning of a new global resistance movement. Another turning point was reached in Seattle in 1999, when thousands of demonstrators disrupted the WTO ministerial meeting and the start of the latest round of talks on further trade liberalization.

The “anti-globalization” movement

In the final years of the 20th century, this spontaneous resistance to the neo-liberal system began to organize. Journalists dubbed these movements “anti-globalization” although initially participants strenuously tried to disassociate themselves from this label. They preferred to call themselves a “global movement for social justice.” New large-scale movements united into broad coalitions that tried to coordinate a common agenda. Eventually they established the World Social Forum, which became their global platform for unity and discussion. The European Social Forum emerged in 2002. And following the world economic crisis in 2008, new political parties finally began to emerge: Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Contrary to the expectations of many analysts, the 2008 crisis did not cause a change in the economic policy of leading Western countries. Nor did it contribute to the growth of the anti-globalization movement. The European Social Forum went into sharp decline after 2008 and then disappeared altogether. The World Social Forum still gathered for meetings but interest in it substantially declined. Social movements turned their attention to local and national issues.

In France, there were large-scale successful protests against the First Employment Contract that restricted youth labor rights and even bigger but less successful protests against pension reform. In Greece and Spain, massive demonstrations greeted the harsh austerity policies pursued by successive governments under pressure from the EU and international banks. These protests culminated in the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York. Its media branding was so successful that it was copied by organizers of protests all over the world even if their agenda had nothing to do with the demands or ideas of the “occupiers” in New York.

Of course, media success by no means translated into political victory. Unlike the protests in Seattle in 1999 that impeded the WTO’s decision-making, Occupy Wall Street did not have any practical consequences and did not push the powers that be to make any changes.

³ See: Subcomandante Marcos, *Drugaya revolutsiya. Sapatisty protiv novogo mirovogo poryadka* [The Other Revolution. Zapatistas against a New World Order], Moscow, Gileya, 2002. See also Naomi Klein, “Farewell to the End of History: Organization and Vision in Anti-Corporate Movements,” *The Socialist Register*, 2002, London, Merlin Press.

The ineffectiveness of these mass protest movements prompted its participants (or at least some of them) to think about the need for an organized policy. It was at this point that they fell back on the legacy of Marx as a great economist who analyzed the contradictions of capitalism and also on Marxism as a theory of political action. But they needed to formulate a new agenda and new political projects on the basis of Marxist analysis, not just chant century-old Marxist slogans with religious fervor.

Class analysis for a changed society

The class structure of society has drastically changed just since the 20th century, when industrial capitalism reached its peak, let alone since the times of Marx. Two global social processes that both complemented and contradicted each other were taking place in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. On the one hand, this period witnessed the unprecedented proletarianization of the global population. Enormous numbers of people, who were previously engaged in traditional occupations, were becoming part of the modern economy and industrial production in Asian, African and Latin American countries. In industrialized European countries, former members of liberal professions, technical experts, intellectuals, scientists and even home-based software engineers, designers and other representatives of “the creative class” were irrevocably turning into hired labor. The outstanding American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein described this period as a time of total proletarianization.⁴ But on the other hand, the class structure was becoming increasingly blurred; traditional ties were growing weaker, and familiar mechanisms of solidarity and collective efforts no longer worked. New proletarians were much less connected to one another than workers of industrial enterprises in the 20th century. Businesses were becoming smaller, their workforce was shrinking and their structure was growing more differentiated. The old industrial regions, whether in Western Europe, former Soviet bloc countries or America, lost much of their production, which moved to Latin America and Eastern Asia, China in particular. The organized industrial proletariat was replaced by service employees, education and healthcare specialists and scientists. In turn, the new working class was taking shape in countries that did not have socialist traditions or conditions for establishing free trade unions and left-wing political parties. The wage gap between different groups of hired labor sharply increased, which inevitably called into question the strength of their solidarity. In other words, the contradiction between labor and capital did not disappear, but the world of labor became much more complex and far less united. In a sense, proletarianization was accompanied by the atomization and declassification of society, as well as by the formation of a new global social geography that was bound to affect the future of world politics.

Under these new circumstances, the usual methods of organizing, slogans and political practices required serious adjustments, if they could still be used at all. However, this did not mean that Marxism was becoming any less important as a theory for the practical transformation of society. Only those theoreticians and practitioners who stubbornly clung to old dogmas and were reluctant to critically analyze the changing historical circumstances failed to move beyond this impasse. They parroted old Marxist conclusions instead of subjecting the changing reality to Marxist analysis, at time when this was exactly what the mounting social changes required.

⁴ See: E. Balibar, I. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London, Verso, 1991. Russian publication: *Rasa, Natsiya, Klass. Dvusmyslennyye identichnosti*. Moscow, Logos Publishers, 2004.

A new welfare state?

Wherever left-wing parties stuck to their usual patterns or, to the contrary, followed in the wake of liberal ideology, modernism and political correctness, they gradually – and sometimes fairly quickly – went into decline and were replaced by new populist movements that redefined the concept of solidarity.

Paradoxically, as the world of hired labor has become more heterogeneous, the goals and slogans forming the basis of new coalitions and methods of building solidarity have become broader and more generalized. In the past, the common interests of workers engaged in similar types of labor at similar enterprises served as the foundation of their conception of class community, which gradually gave rise to the need for a common trade union or political organization. According to the new perspective that is emerging, coalitions are now forming around widely shared social and economic issues. This is the point of departure for various social forces to join together and deepen their solidarity and mutual understanding in the process of practical cooperation. Thus, they have a common interest in preserving, upholding or regaining the fundamental social rights – and the basis of the welfare state – that were lost or undermined in the last decades of the 20th century and the early 21st century – free healthcare, free education, affordable housing, public transport, and institutions that promote upward social mobility, to name a few. In other words, while solidarity used to take shape from the bottom up, now it is the other way round – from the top down, i.e., from broad-based unification and coalitions of social movements to unification and mutual assistance at the local level. It is another matter that the fight for basic social guarantees is not itself the ultimate goal, nor the only meaning of the new policy of the left, which continues to be oriented toward structural social transformation.

In his provocatively titled book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, prominent French economist Thomas Piketty argues that the welfare state proves a key issue of our time. He wrote: “Today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, inequalities of wealth that had supposedly disappeared are close to regaining or even surpassing their historical heights.”⁵ The decline in inequality in the 20th century was by no means the result of the natural logic of capitalism, but conversely, was caused by an aberration of this logic under the impact of wars and revolutions. However, after giving a gloomy diagnosis of capitalism’s socioeconomic degradation, Piketty suggests very modest remedies, and instead of proposing structural reforms, he offers up as a panacea merely the modernization and strengthening of the surviving Western institutions of social welfare through the progressive taxation of capital.

It is abundantly clear that the very notion of the welfare state should be reevaluated on the basis of historical experience. Filipino public activist Tina Ebro talks about the Transformative Social Agenda⁶ in this context. Russian sociologist Anna Ochkina also emphasizes that the goal is not only to maintain the living standards of working people but to create new mechanisms of social and economic reproduction controlled by society itself. She writes about the need to transition from the

⁵ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, London and Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 471.

⁶ See: Tina Ebro’s speech in Brussels in 2012: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAybSc39LoQ>.

“passive democracy” of welfare recipients to the “active democracy” of consciously organized development in the interests of the majority.”⁷

Populism and politics

Politically, these movements are generally no longer traditional social-democratic or communist parties, but rather broad associations that often look “populist.” However, they do not consist of random elements that rally around a popular leader. Rather, these social forces unite around the shared practical goal of transforming their countries and the rest of the world. Two striking examples are Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, which rapidly came to the fore against the backdrop of the declining “old left” in these countries. The similarity of their policies is striking considering how different their origins are. Syriza’s history goes back several decades. It first existed as a parallel, “domestic” alternative to the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) after abandoning the party’s pro-Moscow line, then as the left-wing socialist party Synospismos, and finally as a coalition of radical leftists that only came together relatively recently. In contrast, Podemos has almost no history to speak of – it rapidly emerged from the protests during the economic crisis. In 2014, the political wing of the mass movement of the “indignant” (indignados) that took to the streets of Madrid turned into a party, and by 2015 its leader Pablo Iglesias was recognized as a legitimate candidate for prime minister of Spain.

Syriza’s policy is based on a critical reevaluation of the decades-long experience of the “old leftists.” Conversely, Podemos declared from the very start its break from the “old” left-wing parties that had proved incapable of defending the interests of working people in the new circumstances they faced. However, this break by no means implied a renunciation of the Marxist tradition. Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias began his career in the Communist Party’s youth organization and later honed his theoretical skills as political scientist in academia, while at the same time taking part in the anti-globalization movement. As the head of the party, the young politician has insisted that its struggle cannot be reduced to the traditional confrontation between classes. He believes that the “fundamental divide now is between oligarchy and democracy, between a social majority and a privileged minority.”⁸

From the viewpoint of orthodox Marxism, this formula seems completely heretical. But practically all Marxists who led successful revolutions proved to be heretics – from Lenin with his idea of the working class-peasantry bloc, to Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, and Ernesto Che Guevara, who placed their bets on rural armed struggle. In reality, Marx, who described the proletariat as the most consistent historical force with a stake in superseding capitalism, never said that social and revolutionary transformation was the exclusive privilege of industrial workers and their party. Moreover, it was the 20th century Marxist theory in the person of Antonio Gramsci that raised the issue of forming broad social blocs and fighting for the ideological and political hegemony at the scale of the whole society. The problem was that for decades, such ideas were either ignored by the bureaucracy of traditional parties or, to the contrary, were used to justify their unscrupulous

⁷ See: Anna Ochkina, “Novoye sotsialnoye gosudarstvo kak model postkrizisnogo razvitiya” [The New Welfare State as a Model of Post-Crisis Development], *Logos*, 2014, №2 (98).

⁸ *The Nation*, Feb. 2, 2015, p.13.

collusion with some or other groups within the ruling elites. Conversely, the new populism represented in Europe by Syriza and Podemos relies on the formation of a broad-based grassroots bloc and an equitable union of mass social movements. In addition to organizational forms, the style of political behavior is changing, as are the methods of cooperation between activists and society, their image, speech and even appearance.

The question of how radical, effective, successful and consistent the political bloc that forms the basis of new populism can be remains open for the time being, because neither the scale of the movement, nor its commitment to democracy can replace a serious political strategy, which requires organizational, advertising and, last but not least, intellectual efforts. And, logically, the Marxist theoretical tradition is again in high demand and will eventually become irreplaceable.

While in Europe the growing wave of left-wing (and, in some countries, right-wing) populism is, to a certain extent, a political novelty, in Latin America and former Asian colonies such movements have a long history. Populist coalitions took shape during the anti-colonial struggle and national-liberation uprisings. Today their primary target is political corruption and the monopoly on power that traditional elites have maintained for decades regardless of their political affiliation.

The Aam Aadmi (Common Man) Party in India is an instructive example. In February 2015, it scored a huge victory in the elections in New Delhi. In addition to winning more than a half of all votes, it received 95 percent of seats in the legislature (a feat that even the most successful Indian parties have failed to achieve). Defending the interests of the poorest Indians, as well as ethnic and religious minorities, this party went from outsider status to one of the leading forces in national politics.

Indian political scientist Praful Bidwai wrote: “It’s the kind of force the Indian left once was, but recently ceased to be: irreverent towards authority; militant in opposing hierarchy and privilege based on birth; passionately egalitarian; and ready to bring the tall claims of ‘the world’s largest democracy’ down to earth through greater public accountability for rulers.”⁹

BRICS countries

The change in global social geography and the industrialization of Asia and Latin America, as well as the incorporation of the former Soviet bloc countries into the world market, changed the alignment between the center and the periphery of the capitalist system. In the 1990s and 2000s, multinational corporations consistently moved industrial production from the West to Latin America and later to Eastern Asia and China. They did this not just to access cheap labor and avoid high taxes and environmental restrictions. It was a conscious – and successful – policy aimed at weakening organized labor and worker movements back home.

⁹ The Guardian, Feb.11, 2015.

However, ultimately these efforts led to the rapid growth of the industrial capacity of the leading countries of the periphery, which logically made the new industrial powers and their elites more ambitious, believing they could and should change the world order. Thus, having neutralized the domestic threat from its own labor movement, Western capitalism came face to face with an outside threat.

This threat emerged with the formation of the BRICS economic bloc – an association of Brazil, Russia, India and China that was soon joined by South Africa. Such a union was difficult to imagine even in the late 1990s, since the participants' economic, political, social and cultural realities were vastly different. Paradoxically, this union initially came from the minds of Western experts who detected common features of the four major peripheral economies, specifically the high industrial growth rates they experienced in the early 2000s. Having become a trendy topic among experts, BRICS materialized somewhat later as a more or less formal international alliance.

Of course, Russia stands out among other BRICS countries in its socioeconomic, cultural and historical characteristics. Brazil, India and China went through industrial revolutions in the early 21st century, whereas Russia was recovering from a deep crisis that was accompanied by massive de-industrialization, which had disastrous consequences. Its economy had substantially declined since the 1980s, even though the country preserved meaningful scientific and production capacity.

Nevertheless, it is Russia's presence that makes BRICS a fully-fledged geopolitical force with the potential to alter the configuration of the global economy. As BRICS's only European country and the only old industrial great power in this bloc that simultaneously remains part of the modern capitalist periphery, Russia acts as a kind of a bridge between worlds, a vehicle of historical, intellectual, military and industrial traditions, without which the newly industrialized countries would be unable to fully protect their interests in the event of a clash with the West. This largely explains why anti-Russian attitudes of the ruling Western oligarchies sharply increased after BRICS became a capable international association. Notably, the anti-Russian line of the Western elites began to take shape several years before Moscow's confrontation with the United States and the European Union over the Ukrainian crisis. The problem for the Western ruling classes was not caused by Russia's practical foreign policy, which remained very conservative and moderate throughout the 2000s, let alone its economic policy, which fully embraced the general principles of neoliberalism. They were worried about Russia's potential role in reconfiguring the international order. Paradoxically, neoliberal ideologists and analysts in the West realized that Russia could play this role way before this idea dawned on the Russian elites, who were clearly trying to shirk this historical mission.

Social conflict and global confrontation

The natural course of events is turning BRICS into a lynchpin for other states that also want to overcome their dependence on the West and the logic of peripheral development. However, in order to form an alliance that can change the international system, all these countries must themselves undergo a domestic crisis and a radical transformation. The economic growth and consolidation of the middle class these countries experienced against the backdrop of the economic crisis in the 2000s were not evidence of the stabilization of the capitalist system. On the contrary, they pointed to its

mounting contradictions, because major new demands also emerged that could not be met under the existing order. “The problems of the middle classes in the BRICS countries are very specific,” economist Vasily Koltashov writes. “One of them is a demand regarding the level of public freedom. Another has to do with the psychology of its representatives, which is largely a product of their surroundings. The social policy of a state can play a large role in this respect.”¹⁰

The rapid growth of the BRICS economies was largely the result of neoliberal globalization, which created increased demand for their products and resources at the global level. But this demand could not be endlessly maintained within the established system whose contradictions triggered a crisis of overproduction and exhausted the existing consumption model. And it also gave rise to new contradictions, new opportunities and new demands at the global and national level. The countries that were peripheral just yesterday may occupy a completely different place in the world. But to achieve this, they and the surrounding world must change. Obviously, there is no reason to hope that this process will be smooth or conflict-free.

Large new coalitions reflecting the new alignment of forces in society should come into being in the BRICS countries. In this case, the ongoing processes in Europe – i.e., the mounting resistance to neoliberalism – may impact events unfolding in Russia and other BRICS countries.

The configuration of the modern global system does not allow a single country or a victorious party to radically change it. The difficulties that the left-wing Greek government faced just a month after its election graphically bear out the contradictions of modern political processes, which are bound to be national and global at the same time. The population of sovereign Greece legitimately elected a government and gave it a mandate for a radical change of economic policy and for the end of the economic austerity measures imposed on the country by the bureaucrats in Brussels, fully in line with the requirements of neoliberal theory. Nevertheless, representatives of the EU financial and political institutions that had not been elected by anyone and had no democratic authority still managed to push Athens into signing an agreement that runs counter to the will of the overwhelming majority of Greeks and Syriza’s program. The Greek government’s concessions evoked strong criticism among the voters, activists and the international left. Somewhat earlier, US economist and Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman (by no means an ardent revolutionary) wrote that the main problem with the Greek leftists who came to power is “that they’re not radical enough.”¹¹

Needless to say, Syriza can be criticized for lacking resolve and, more importantly, a clear-cut strategy. But it is important to keep in mind the global balance of power. New populist movements in Greece, Spain and potentially in Italy will hardly score a decisive victory if they have to face the EU oligarchy single-handed. By the same token, in the event of a larger confrontation with the West, the BRICS countries are unlikely to achieve an unconditional win unless they find active and loyal allies in the West. However, the emerging global configuration is opening up a window of opportunity: the protests of European social movements are acting like a catalyst for the events in the periphery and creating a new political situation and the prospect of new global coalitions. It is another matter that this prospect cannot become reality unless serious changes take place in the peripheral countries, first and foremost in BRICS states.

¹⁰ Levaya Politika, 2013, №21, p. 12.

¹¹ The New York Times, Jan. 26, 2015.

Need for change

Globalization and its consequences are making Marx's views of the world revolution as a global social transformation increasingly relevant. It is not happening everywhere at once, but it is not restricted to one country or even region, either. It is gradually enveloping the entire planet, drawing various social forces and territories into its maelstrom. Will the imminent changes put an end to capitalism or merely create an opportunity to move beyond the current neoliberal model and replace it with a new welfare state? This question is already practical rather than theoretical. The answer will depend on the participants in events, the ultimate configuration and alignment of forces, and the inertia of changes. The gradual destruction of the neoliberal model of global development compels us to rethink the Soviet experience – both the positive and the negative. In the early 1950s, Western experts saw the achievements of the Soviet planned economy as a success story, albeit one that was overshadowed by enormous losses and sacrifices (economic, human and moral), whereas in the 1990s the same system seemed like a project that was doomed from the start. Meanwhile, today it is becoming clear that the critical reevaluation of this experience (alongside the experience with market regulation gained by the followers of John Maynard Keynes) allows us to adopt new approaches to social development and to find answers to the questions raised by the crisis.

“In today's Russia, the Soviet welfare state, which was not given enough credit by Soviet citizens and was destroyed by the government's reforms, is being reborn as a phenomenon of social consciousness, an element in the system of values and motivations of Russian citizens,” Anna Ochkina writes. “This is not a conscious desire to bring back the Soviet system, or the goal of the more or less rational political or social programs of this or that movement. For the time being, this is a semi-conscious striving to reaffirm that which the government is now turning into services of varying degrees of accessibility, which existed before as social rights. It is the perception of education, healthcare, culture and social guarantees as social rights that forms the legacy of the Soviet past. Today this legacy is becoming a kind of ideal image....”¹²

Importantly, this is not some abstract striving for justice, which Friedrich Engels sneered at in his time. Rather, this striving merely reflects the moral awareness of entirely new, objective and overdue social demands. However, dissatisfaction with the status quo does not guarantee positive changes and may even turn into a destructive factor, a mechanism of social self-destruction. Since the crisis is objective, it will continue to grow regardless of developments or the existence of any constructive alternative. A comprehensive economic, social and political strategy is required to turn this crisis into social transformation and to prevent it from triggering a chain of senseless disasters. It is impossible to devise such a strategy without a serious theoretical foundation, which itself cannot be conceived today without the theoretical achievements of Marxism.

¹² Logos, 2014, N^o2, pp. 201-202.

A new development strategy

The main features of this new development strategy are already coming into view with the deepening of the current crisis. Politically, it is above all necessary to democratize decision-making and to set up new government institutions that are open to the majority of rank-and-file citizens rather than a narrow circle of professional representatives of “civil society” who have long been part of the political oligarchy. Economically, it is essential to form an efficient public sector and integrate it into a uniform complex (economic, social and institutional) both at the national and interstate levels. No matter how many thrilling stories about the creative class the ideologists of the post-industrial era may tell us, the real triumph of post-industrial technologies will be impossible without the transformation and rapid development of industry, advanced production methods, and applied science. The same goes for the dissemination of engineering knowledge and the formation of a broad stratum of highly skilled and well-paid workers for material production, science and education. In the coming era, Russia and many other “old industrialized countries” will have to develop a new industry based on expensive and highly productive labor, which, in turn, is impossible without the formation of high-tech, integrated energy and transport networks in the public sector.

It is also necessary to establish institutions for strategic planning and regulation and to consistently develop the internal market oriented to the needs of the population at home. This will make it possible to reorganize the world market via the interaction of well-organized and democratically regulated national economies.

Finally, one of the major persisting tasks of our time and age is to turn social development into a tool of economic expansion and to create demand via social policy.

Government economic policy must prioritize science, education, healthcare, the humanization of the life environment, and the resolution of environmental problems in the interests of society rather than environmentalists.

All these tasks, no matter how pragmatic they may seem, will never be achieved without radical socio-political changes, as that is the only way to create relevant institutions and social relations that encourage rather than inhibit such development. The goal is not to replace existing elites by other elites. The goal is to completely rebuild the mechanism of social reproduction and form new social strata that would not only be inherently interested in democratic development but would also be able to carry it out.

Naturally, many representatives of traditional Marxism, who are awaiting the immediate emergence of socialism by means of a proletarian revolution, will consider this prospect too “moderate” and “reformist,” but it offers the only way to mobilize public energy for profound socioeconomic transformation and facilitate the formation of a broad alliance that is ready and willing to carry it out.

The revolutionary nature of Marxism has nothing to do with reiterating flashy anti-bourgeois slogans. It lies in the ability of its most discerning supporters to make an unbiased analysis of reality. They think through their conclusions and come to the root of social relations. Instead of complaining about social injustice they prefer to scrutinize the structures of power and dominance that inevitably reproduce injustice.

The global crisis that started in 2008 signaled the end of the era of neoliberal globalization but not the end of the processes it engendered. In this sense, the present period may be described as the era of “post-globalization.” It is impossible to overcome the consequences of neo-liberalism without accepting that the current changes are irreversible but by no means final. No matter how important and attractive the achievements and ideologies of the 19th and 20th centuries are, there is no way back. But we can move forward with the help of this experience, studying its lessons and using the theoretical legacy left to us by the great thinkers of the Enlightenment and the ideologists of the liberation movement. Like it or not, Karl Marx remains the greatest of them.

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