

# New Thinking about Socialism

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### *Two Tendencies*

The economic, social, and political reforms that have begun in the Soviet Union are based on new thinking about socialism, its goals and methods, its moral values. This new thinking, which is asserting itself with such force today, has deep roots in the past. In essence, it goes back to the sources of our revolution.

During the 1920s there already existed not only two points of view concerning socialism, but two distinct models which competed with each other in practice.

The first of these models was “war communism” (1918 through 1921). This model was developed under conditions of a cruel civil war. Yet it partially reflected uncertain, half-anarchistic ideas about socialism as a system in which all market mechanisms and money transactions could be abolished, where everything was done on command, where agricultural products were taken directly from the peasant - in a word, through violence.

The second model, the New Economic Policy (NEP) (1921 through 1928), was based on a market economy. Enterprises of various types – state, cooperative, private – competed, and the peasant freely sold his products on the market and bought, in exchange, manufactured goods. A basic

ingredient of the NEP was democracy, particularly in the workplace. There was also a struggle between different schools of thought in arts and culture.

This question of the two tendencies was thoroughly studied by Lenin in his speeches and articles at the time of transition from war communism to the NEP. One need only look at such articles by Lenin as “On Significance of Gold at Present and after the Complete Victory of Socialism,” “On Cooperation,” “How Should We Reorganize the WPIB (Workers-Peasants Inspection Board),” “Better Less, but Better,” and others. I think, we should refer again and again to these 1920s documents which, by no accident, are termed “Lenin’s political will.”

Without going into the question of why and how the NEP was abolished, I will just say that the struggle between the two tendencies, the two approaches or ways of understanding socialism, has been continually in progress over the entire course of our history. Personalities in favor of continuing the NEP, such as N. Bukharin, Y. Rudzutak, A. Rikov, as well as S. Kirov, fell victim to this struggle. They were executed. Following World War II, it was N. Voznesensky who once again brought up the notion of normalization of the economy with the reintroduction of market forces and the principle of cost accounting in production (self-management of factories and collective farms or “kolkhozes”). He too was executed by Stalin.

After Stalin’s death, it was N. S. Khrushchev who initiated a “thaw.” He contributed enormously to de-Stalinization and set in motion a process of economic and political reforms. This process, however, ran up against hard resistance from conservatives in the country’s leadership, as well as the inability of the average citizen to understand the nature of the reforms. Besides, many specific reforms were not properly thought out (for example, the division of the provincial and local party committees and even the Soviet administrative apparatus into two groups: industrial and agricultural). As a result, the reforms bogged down and the country’s leadership was taken over by conservatives. This resulted in a slowing of the rate of economic development and in the rate of increase in living standards, and it caused a growing lag in the introduction of new technology.

These problems became particularly acute in the 1970s as a new technological revolution was sweeping the world. We faced a threat of stagnation, social tensions, and even political crisis.

### *The Beginning of Reform*

The April 1985 Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union brought to the leadership of the party and the country new forces, headed by M. S. Gorbachev. This move started an intense struggle for revolutionary reform.

### *International Arena*

New thinking and new policy in the international arena are closely bound with problems of war and peace. It seems obvious to everybody that a world nuclear war would not only destroy modern civilization, but all human existence as well. For many decades before and after World War II, both Marxists and anti-Marxists proceeded from the concept that opposition of these two world systems would inevitably lead to a military clash between them, or at least to military competition and confrontation. This has now become a particularly dangerous position from a political point of view. Nuclear weapons have made it clear that this approach is obsolete and that it is time to denounce “cold war” logic.

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To be fair, it is necessary to note that political thought has often been ahead of philosophical thought. Let’s recall that as early as the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, the most essential conclusion was stated: War is not predestined or inevitable. The contradictions between socialism and capitalism should be resolved on the basis of peaceful coexistence, economic competition, and ideological struggle.

Thirty years later, it was clear that such an approach was the best means to achieve practical solutions for today’s pressing problems of disarmament, as well as for the settlement of regional conflicts in the Middle East, in and around Nicaragua, and in Afghanistan.

### *Domestic Arena*

The intense struggle for revolutionary reform started in April 1985 has not been limited to just the international sphere. On the contrary, it has brought profound forces to bear within the Soviet Union. It has found a firm base of support in new attitudes towards socialism, an orientation toward its humanistic concerns, towards free democratic relationships in economics, as well as in social life and in culture.

The first symptom of this process was “glasnost” (openness). This process is not limited solely to informing society about the activities of the organs of power, nor is it just a demand for truth about all the social problems of our society. It calls for honest information about other countries in the world, about their accomplishments and problems. It

provides the right to be critical in the press and television, in every collective, in the party, in the trade unions, and in cooperative organizations. The quintessential nature of glasnost is that, with its help, an independent public opinion may be born, which may increasingly become a permanent and effective element of our political system.

For example: The Soviet government not too long ago decided to reverse the course of Siberian rivers in order to irrigate the Central Asian desert. Such a decision, however, met sharp resistance from Soviet scientists and writers, such as S. Zalygin, V. Rasputin, and V. Astafiev. The press got involved, and the government changed its decision.

Now, thanks to glasnost, the public is able to discuss problems involving our reforms broadly and in depth and to compare alternative solutions. It criticizes bureaucracy, writes of such social diseases as alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, narcotics, and prostitution. Examples include the works *A Sad Detective* by B. Astafiev, *Fire* by V. Rasputin, and *The Executioner's Block* by C. Aitmatov. These novels, and the movie *Repentance* by T. Abuladze deal with acute and deep problems of alcohol abuse, destruction of religion, morality, and the creation of a personality cult within our society.

In my own recently produced television drama "Two Points of View from the Same Office," I tried to show the struggle of opinions within the party itself. I showed two senior party figures, one who supports reform, the other who is in favor of former leadership methods. And in the spring of this year, in my article "Two Points of View on International Journalism" (published in *Sovietskaya Kultura*), I posited the question of correctness of information on the West and the entire contemporary world. That is to say, about the need to develop an informed society in the Soviet Union.

#### *The Essence of 'Perestroika'*

So what is the essence of the "perestroika" (structural transformation) which has taken hold of our society? It consists of the task of creating an effective, self-managing economic system, where plans are firmly based on market forces. Also, it seeks to open the road for the introduction of the technological revolution in all spheres of activity - in the economy and its administration, in culture and the mass media. It consists of a qualitative lifting of our people's standard of living to give them enough to eat, a good place to live, and modern industrial consumer goods. Perestroika means that all aspects of our political life must be democratized - our electoral system, our judicial processes, our guarantees of basic human rights. In a word, perestroika must take us into a new socialist society, flourishing, democratic, dynamic, showing rapid progress.

Is it possible to develop self-management and democracy under a one-party system? This is a question one often hears in the West. Yes, it is

possible, if democracy is developed within the party itself. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) consists of 20 million people. The victory within the party of the idea of revolutionary reform is the prerequisite for acceptance of the new model of socialism in our society.

Such a sharp turn in the area of politics requires a reevaluation of many stagnant dogmas and stereotypes in our philosophy, in our attitudes towards socialism.

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The year 1987 was crucial from the point of view of our attitude toward development programs. In January, the Plenum of the Central Committee set the course for the democratization of the country. Then in June, it set forth a program for the radical reform of our economy. There will be three phases to this economic reform: attaining elementary order and discipline in the economy and in all spheres of its administration; changing working conditions in our agricultural economy and public services, relying on intensive use of family, individual initiative, and volunteer cooperatives; and revamping administrative structures throughout all of industry, based on self-management, self-financing, and cost-accounting practices.

#### *Dynamism and Contradictions*

Dynamism has been unleashed in our society by glasnost and perestroika. Before continuing to discuss additional aspects of the revolutionary reforms underway, it is important to understand the context of “contradictions,” (i.e. clashes or conflicting approaches) within socialism.

In the 1930s, the significance of contradictions under socialism was exaggerated. Erroneous theoretical political conclusions were even reached, such as the notion that along with the development of a socialist society, the class struggle inevitably intensifies. Also, in China, the concept of “aggravation of contradictions within the nation” became a basis for the devastating “Cultural Revolution.” Thus, dramatic excesses evolved in practice.

On the other hand, it would not be an exaggeration to say that over the last twenty to thirty years the contradictions within socialism have been suppressed in Soviet political theory, especially by use of propaganda. Contradictions are essential for the development of socialism, as for the development of any system in the modern world. Conservative thinking tries to deny this fact. The result is stagnation.

In other words, contradictions were viewed as trash which should be discarded as soon as possible or, in a word, “eliminated.” Such “elimination” was often reduced to silencing the real problems emerging in our society.

Instead, we need a more profound analysis of the sources of crisis and social tensions in socialist countries, especially those which are in a transitional stage from capitalism to socialism, or in such countries where subjectivism in the policies of the leadership are becoming a factor in slowing down the country’s development. It is worthwhile to seek a theoretical interpretation for past crises in a number of socialist countries: Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, Poland at the end of the 1970s, and the “cultural revolution” in China in the 1960s.

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The main issue when dealing with contradictions in socialism is the realization that they are the most important mechanism of development, an internal engine that supplies dynamics and competitiveness to society. It is an elementary truth for a Marxist that the construction of socialism means overcoming class antagonisms and forming a society of friendly working people of all classes. However, any attempt to disregard contradictions under socialism and any refusal to use them in the interest of developing a flexible policy would mean the stagnation of society. It would also mean weakening the initiative of scientific and technological progress. To assume that socialism is a conflictless society having neither competition nor struggle is not only incorrect, but dangerous. It can result in serious mistakes in economic and social policy. It is perfectly evident that serious transformations in socialistic society are impossible without reforms.

A practical conclusion follows that pluralism, competitiveness, and honest struggle are important stimuli of the acceleration of our development. Workers, peasants, writers, actors, artists, doctors, and waiters are all competing in the process of creating material and spiritual values and examples of the highest quality work. And who are the judges? They are the readers, viewers, and consumers of these values, in short, the people. And people judge in the simplest way: They either read or do not read a book; they go or do not go to a play, a movie, or an exhibit; they either buy or do not buy goods; they go or do not go to a particular restaurant, and so on. And there should not be any administrative or authoritative privileges for those who create these values, regardless of their positions and titles.

There should be no artificially created bottlenecks in order to enforce a product upon people. The game should be played honestly with the public.

This is how Lenin thought in the 1920s when competitiveness was encouraged in the economy, culture, literature, and the arts. None of these areas had the authority or possibility to “liquidate” its opponents, to establish a monopoly. Everybody faced the necessity to work hard, to learn, and to develop their talents.

### *Revolutionary Reforms*

So competitiveness and contention are very much a part of a healthy socialist system. In addition to aspects already discussed, further reforms are essential and are underway. This will require reexamining public property in order to put the actual producer – worker, peasant, working intellectual – under conditions which will stimulate high-quality labor, a deep interest in using the latest achievements of science, machinery, and technology, and further improvement of professional skills. The point is we need a more consistent application of the core principle of social justice that rules our society: “From everyone according to his ability, to everyone according to his work.”

Therefore, it is not accidental that the question of socialist property has now assumed an important place in our theory and practice. An idea of some lower and higher forms of property has been dropped. Underestimation of the importance of private (cooperative) and other forms of corporate and group property, and of the possibilities of using individual family contracts on a broad scale are being overcome. The new approach is being manifested in many recent resolutions and legislative procedures.

The use of family contracts in China has provided for a rapid increase in agricultural output and in the standard of living. The development of individual forms of labor and cooperatives in towns and villages may have a significant impact.

### *The Question of Democracy*

Socialism cannot exist without consistent development of democracy. Perhaps only now do we understand the importance of this principle for the acceleration of our socioeconomic development and for use of the latest achievements of the technological revolution for the entire spiritual and moral renovation of society.

Some resolutions planned by the party are not being carried out as quickly as they should be. Management who think conservatively and lack the democratic and legal substantiation of the reforms appear to be “spinning their wheels” in resistance to change. Another reason for slowness of reforms is passive attitudes on the part of the people. As more

and more individuals participate, public opinion in turn will become one of the most significant vehicles of the political system, part of decision making, and a control for the prompt and steady fulfillment of goals. This will take place through the election of individuals to office, public debate, and constructive criticism of party and enterprise leadership.

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Procedures for electing leaders of enterprises and collective farms are being developed. Changes are also being introduced into our political election system. For instance, the nomination of several candidates is becoming a rule for the election of top party organs. Similar practices are being introduced into the election system of our representative organs, the “soviets,” and potentially into the election of the Supreme Soviets of national republics and our Soviet parliament, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Having said that, the nomination of several candidates for the same position at elections to the soviets creates some problems since all the candidates represent a united block of communists and nonparty members. In such a case, emphasis will not be on the comparison of their programs, but rather on the candidates’ personal qualities.

In short, democracy is one of the most important values for every person: the right and opportunity to participate in the administration of state and social affairs guaranteeing protection of one’s legitimate interests. Finally, we need democratization for overcoming red tape, corruption, bribery, and other abuses which are unfortunately still taking place in our society.

#### *Socialism and Humanism*

New thinking and contemporary social practices have as an ultimate goal the stimulation of a new approach to understanding socialism as a whole, its humanity, and its moral-ethical criteria. As General Secretary M.ÊS. Gorbachev said in one of his presentations: “No system has the right to exist unless it properly serves a human being.”

It is common knowledge that the gains of modern socialism have been accompanied by negative phenomena. Some of these were directed at the people it was serving. One need not mention the development of phenomena such as a personality cult, unjustified repression, and an exaggerated role of violence, which have badly damaged socialism and its image in the eyes of world public opinion.

No one should be frightened by the concept of ethical socialism as an important component of scientific socialism. Socialism has a simple and obvious goal: the welfare and culture of a working person. All the rest -for example, the nationalization of industry - are a means for realization of this goal. Engels, after Marx's death, once made the penetrating remark that if Marx had the opportunity to know some of his followers, he would retort: "I am not a Marxist."

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Marx and Engels not only did not ignore the ethical principles of socialism, but on the contrary strongly criticized those pseudo-communists who denied culture and civilization. This is what Marx wrote about brutal, "barracks"-type communism, a "morbid shadow" of truly scientific communism:

This communism, denying everywhere the personality of a human being, is only a consistent expression of private property . . . Any man with private property, as such, experiences, at least toward a wealthier man with private property, envy and thirst for parity . . . Brutal communism, proceeding from an idea of some minimum for everybody, is an implementation of this envy and parity. This form of communism is limited. One can see that this manner of liquidating private property is not a true assimilation. It groundlessly denies the whole realm of culture and civilization and signifies the return to the unnatural simplicity of a poor and crude man who did not rise above or understand the concept of private property.

These are some of the trends of transformation that are vigorously unfolding in our country.

#### *Questions of Westerners*

Representatives of the Western world quite often ask questions and express their doubts about the efficiency of our changes. The most frequent question is: What is the guarantee that the transformation process in the Soviet Union is irreversible? Will it not happen again, as in the early 1960s, when new serious political and economical reforms began but produced no results?

This is an important question. The leaders of our country and our party must not only think about this question, but also do whatever is possible to carry out the transformation at all levels. There are at least two factors pointing towards the guarantee of success in our reforms.

The first is the political will of our party and its leadership who have seriously embarked on restructuring. There is no turning back. We understand and are deeply convinced that there is no other road available. We cannot impede this path. There is no other alternative for accelerating the development of our country than by using the modern achievements of the technological revolution - none.

Another perhaps even more important point of guarantee of transformation will be the growing involvement of all our people, of every Soviet citizen in this process. Of course, people do not get involved only because appropriate publicity and encouragement are provided. When practical results are observed, their conviction in the necessity of transformation strengthens. The development of cooperatives and their operation on a self-supporting basis, together with the emergence of new standards of labor and life, are leverages used in involving every person in the transformation, resulting in efficiency and professionalism. In a word, democratization is, in the final analysis, the best guarantee of the success of our revolutionary cause.

The second question often asked by foreigners is: Where is the resistance to the transformation coming from? They look for the sources of resistance in different layers of society, in social groups, especially in spheres of management termed bureaucracy in the West. In fact, resistance has not emerged from a certain group or organized opposition. There is no political opposition to the transformation in our country. The major opponent of perestroika is tradition, traditionalism, conservative thinking, and the habits and behavioral stereotypes of both the bosses and the masses.

Therefore, the resistance exists on a "vertical" rather than a "horizontal" plane. On all levels of society we meet people who find themselves involved with great enthusiasm in transformation. Undoubtedly, they constitute the majority and are the vast social basis of our revolutionary transformations. But at the same time, on all levels we find people who have doubts about transformation, and the necessity of its deep, radical structural changes. It is these latter individuals who fear the loss of their positions and material privileges.

Sometimes the third question we are asked by Westerners is whether today's transformations mean some stepping back from socialism and using capitalist methods. Such questions can be explained either by their misunderstanding or dogmatic interpretation of socialism, or by their failure to understand the true nature of it.

I would remind everybody that our transformation is bound in the slogan: "More socialism!" For example, "more socialism" means a proper use of commodity-money relations. It is a serious misconception that commodity relations originate from capitalism. It is a known fact that commodities and

money existed long before the emergence of capitalism. They existed both under slave-owning and feudal systems. These relations cannot disappear under socialism. Money remains a basic measurement of expense and exchange. In other words, we come back to the Leninist interpretation where the socialist plan goes side-by-side with the marketplace; where democratization represents the most essential and important aspect of socialism.

Finally, we are asked about the relationship between the internal reforms and foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Some claim that our efforts in the area of disarmament can be explained by the economic difficulties that exist in our country and by an exclusive intention to reduce the military budget for the sake of development of a civilian industry. This is your target, they tell us. It is true that there is a tie between our domestic and international policies. But it is not governed by those motives.

Of course, we want to reduce our military budget. Understandably, we want to employ the reserved funds for peaceful branches of our economy. But don't other countries, including the leading Western powers, need the same thing? This is a common problem.

New thinking about the question of global survival, including our own, is what governs the policy of the Soviet Union in the world arena: This is what motivates us in the struggle for disarmament, for the gradual elimination of nuclear weapons, for banning the biological and chemical weapons, and the limitation of conventional weapons.

Besides, the release of resources now spent by mankind for military purposes will open broad possibilities for providing assistance to developing countries. This would greatly contribute to the resolution of the North-South problem and other current global problems.