

Soviet Union, 1917 - 1987

Leninism, Glasnost and Socialist Renewal

Seventy years ago, the October Revolution made history by founding the world's first socialist state. As we celebrate this anniversary, the Soviet people and party are not simply resting on their laurels. Quite the contrary, they are engaged in a renewed revolutionary process under the twin banners of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring).

Most immediately, the new policy appears as a creative response to the problems which surfaced in the Soviet economy in the late seventies and early eighties. However, the implications of socialist renewal go much deeper, involving the political, social, cultural and theoretical spheres as well. This becomes obvious if we view *glasnost* and *perestroika* in their historical context.

Marx and Engels developed dialectical materialism as the theoretical tool for analyzing the world *in order to change it*. While they demonstrated scientifically that history is objectively moving towards socialist revolution and eventually communism, Lenin and the Bolshevik party contributed the theoretical premises and practical experience for *how* such revolutions could become a reality, chiefly through the role of the party and its leadership of the masses. The Soviet Union was the fruit of Marxism-Leninism, consolidated in hard struggle against formidable odds ranging from the backwardness bequeathed by the Czar regime to the imperialist-sponsored counterrevolution, Hitler fascism and later US imperialism's cold war subversion.

As the first socialist state to be established, the Soviet Union is also the first to reach a level of development where new, unanswered questions and challenges arise concerning the continuation of socialist development towards communism. In this perspective, *glasnost* and *perestroika* are not only policies for rectifying past mistakes, though that in itself is very important. They are just as much a sign of Soviet strength, showing ability and determination to move on to higher



levels of progress. If fundamentally pursued, socialist renewal in the Soviet Union will make a new contribution to the theory of scientific socialism, which will be of great use to revolutionary movements the world over. In this sense, we are witness to a process which can be just as ground-breaking as was the October Revolution in its time.

Already the process underway in the Soviet Union has reminded us that Marxism-Leninism is not a static dogma; nor is socialist construction, or any revolutionary endeavor for that matter, a question of mechanically following uniform, prescribed methods or recipes. Rather, scientific socialism is a living, dialectical theory, open to new development. The dynamics of Leninism are brought to the fore with their emphasis on the party acting boldly and creatively, according to a concrete analysis of the concrete conditions, in tune with the masses and unleashing their full potentials.

THE ECONOMY AND THE SUBJECTIVE FACTOR

In line with its sound, materialist understanding, the CPSU determined

to tackle problems at the roots. Thus, the economy was the starting point and the base for the restructuring initiated by the Central Committee at its April 1985 plenary meeting, and adopted more comprehensively at the 27th Party Congress in 1986. The aim is to accelerate socio-economic development and specifically to attain a new *quality* of growth, based on vertical rather than horizontal development. This means restructuring industry based on scientific-technological advances, rather than simply expanding the existing production system. At the same time, new modes of management and stimulation of labor would be introduced. This would strengthen the Soviet economy overall, while more efficiently providing the Soviet citizen with consumer products. The watchwords are collective work, incentives for labor, self-management, self-financing and cost-accounting for the various industries and enterprises. A key factor is better organization of workers and employees, drawing them more closely into the decision-making process and thus giving them greater responsibility and motivation for achieving results.

So, already on the economic level, one clearly sees that while based on objective factors, restructuring involves the subjective factor, striving to maximize the potential of the working people - the human beings that both build and benefit from socialism. As stated by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in the Central Committee's Political Report to the CPSU's 27th Congress: «The main thing that will ensure us success is the living creativity of the masses, the maximum use of the tremendous potentials and advantages of the socialist system.»

This emphasis on the subjective factor as part of the rectification process is also connected to the Soviet view of the roots of the problem: Here it is a question of attitudes prevailing in the party and leadership as pinpointed by Georgi Smirnov of the USSR Academy of Sciences, writing in *New Times*, April ►