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### SCIENCE, CLASS, AND POLITICS

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## To Our Readers

What follows is a statement by the Editorial Board of Science, Class, and Politics. For almost a decade, we have been attempting to stimulate debate on fundamental issues facing the communist movement, and trying to assist in the resurgence of that movement. Clearly, we--along with others--have not been successful.

We believe that we have been handed a golden opportunity with which to focus debate on the crucial theoretical matters that face the movement. Recent developments in the Soviet Union have allowed a clarification of the questions and issues. It is clear that, to put the movement back on track, to separate the wheat from the chaff, it is necessary to undertake a re-evaluation of and debate on the so-called "Stalin Era". It is our firm belief that such a debate, carried out under principled guidelines and for as long as necessary, will serve as the tool that will allow us to regain our theoretical, and thus practical, lodestar. To this end, we invite your attention to the following statement, and we welcome your comments as to whether you agree as to the significance of such a debate, and, if so, how best to conduct it.

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE DIE IS CAST

For three decades (indeed longer), the communist movement has been in disarray. Increasingly, Marxism has become infused with ideology borrowed from that developed in support of minority ruling classes; increasingly, Marxism has become anti-Marxist; the communist movement, anti-communist. We have reached a level of

disintegration in which our "friends" are our enemies.

Now, finally, we have a clear statement that sums up this decades-long anti-Marxist trend within the communist movement. Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, has announced an all-out attack on the working class of that confederation of nations. No more sneaking about, no more treading lightly to minimize the stepping on sensitive toes, no more of the zigs and zags characterizing previous Menshevik regimes which instituted more and more capitalist programs while pretending to "modernize" socialism. Gorbachev has issued an unequivocal challenge to the working class, a veritable clarion call of capitalist regeneration.

It is clear that to pave the way for the institution of the program of the Gorbachev gang, an ideological campaign must be waged. The heart of this campaign is the renewed and heightened attack on Stalin. And it is this attack that establishes the basis for the possible restoration of Marxism, the possible resurgence of a communist movement. It is here that the dividing line must be drawn. It is here that the theoretical and practical battles must be fought--if the working population of this world is to finally have the opportunity to establish a world free of war, free of hunger, free of fear.

The question of Stalin (as it has been termed) encapsulates the very essence of Marxist theory and Marxist practice: class analysis, class struggle, the meaning of capitalism, of socialism. All this (and all else) is contained in its quintessential form in the 35 years known as "The Stalin Era". If we cannot sort out this period, if we cannot make sense of what then happened and why it happened, then we are not Marxists and we must remove ourselves from any organization or movement claiming to rest on Marxist grounds. But if we can understand, then our position is made more secure, our ability to defend ourselves and attack our enemies (indeed, to even determine our enemies) is much enhanced.

Consider the basic issues involved: We say we accept the class analysis as set forth by Marx,

Engels, and Lenin, yet we follow every argument of every hack capitalist journalist, of every hack capitalist academician, of every emigre--even those, such as the venerable Solzhenitsyn, who are clearly motivated by personal vendettas, in addition to the standard reactionary outlook. That is, on the assumption that where there's smoke, there must be fire, we believe those sources that our supposed theory tells us we should not believe, at least not without adequate documentation to support their assertions. Gradually, then, these distortions, half-truths, and outright canards have influenced our perception until they've overwhelmed our rational faculties. And we become irrational, like our class enemies.

We say we believe in the class struggle. Yet a Khrushchev cannot lie when he recounts the massive crimes of Stalin. And surely a Bukharin or a Radek or a Trotsky--all good Bolsheviks--cannot have been guilty of all the charges laid against them. Lenin warned us against the Menshevik position in both *The State and Revolution* and *What Is To Be Done*, did he not? These have been read, digested, accepted as canons of the Marxist literature. Yet when a Menshevik rears his ugly head, we cannot recognize him. So a Khrushchev (a Brezhnev, and Andropov, a Bukharin) gets away with it--and we sink further into the morass of manufactured stupidity, our political compass pointing South rather than North.

We say we fight against the individualist view of history, we despise the "Great Man" theory. Yet, what have we accepted when it comes to Stalin? Are not all the errors, the crimes, the problems of the Soviet Union his responsibility? Was not the progress therein accomplished in spite of him? As *The New York Times* would have it, so it is.

Wouldn't it be lovely if socialism were built without rancor, without discord, without the need to struggle? Surely, those exploiting classes now dispossessed along with their bootlickers and stooges are decent folk. Surely, they wouldn't fight back merely because they've lost the basis of their money-making opportunities. Surely, all

that business of "kulaks" must have been made up just so Stalin could use the myth to consolidate his personal power. After all, the capitalists can't be all bad--we accept their view of the world, don't we? We "forget" that they invaded the Soviet Union. We forget that they murder millions of innocents each year. We forget that they exist solely on the backs of the working populations of the world. Surely, they wouldn't stoop to assassination, to drug-running, to organized criminal networks dedicated to the overthrow of democratically elected regimes, to the murder of labor organizers, to the poisoning of socialist leaders. We can work with these people--they just need a bit of re-education. There's no need to get huffy about it--like Stalin did. So, what we work for is a nice, neat, tidy, "justice for all" socialism in which everyone pulls together for the same common goal. Isn't this what the social democrats, the Fabians, the Mensheviks have been telling us for over a century? Yet, we claim to be Marxists.

Since 1956, when the Khrushchev gang first announced its intentions with the "secret speech" denouncing Stalin, the communist movement has been disintegrating--or, rather, self-destructing. Within weeks, parties split, splinter groups, all claiming to be united against "revisionism", were organized and spent most of their time fighting each other to claim the mantle of "true successor". Many cast their lot with the theories of other anti-Marxists who shielded their nationalist, pro-capitalist position under a defense of Stalin. Thus, rather than attempting to understand what was going on, rather than examining our principles and applying those principles to the problem at hand, we jumped on the "Mao" bandwagon (or whatever "great man" we chose), and further aggravated the problem.

But, what followed the Khrushchev speech was only symptomatic of a much more significant and deep-rooted pathology, one that had already developed into epidemic proportions, but had not yet realized itself. In the capitalist countries, the communist movement was already bankrupt; in the Soviet Union and the various People's

Democracies, the Bolshevik position had not been consolidated, Marxists were actually in the minority (and this was compounded by the enormous toll World War II took on the young communists of the U.S.S.R.). So, it was a relatively easy task for the various parties to be taken over by the Mensheviks--where that hadn't already occurred. Khrushchev was not the cause of the collapse of the movement, but only a signal that the collapse had taken place. It was only necessary to rid the various organizations of those "Stalinists" who remained. And this, as is apparent, was a comparatively easy task.

What was not so easy was to diminish the stature of Stalin in the Soviet Union. After all, there the attack on Stalin was much more clearly understood as an attack on socialism. And, much of the population was socialist in its orientation. Thus, in the initial stages, the anti-Marxist, anti-socialist Menshevik groupings had to tread fairly carefully. So carefully that, according to Mr. Gorbachev, they did not do their job properly, much remained to be done. After many fits and starts, advances and retreats, changes in the characteristics of the population and the Party, it is now felt that the time has come to launch an all-out war on socialism, necessitating an all-out war on Stalin. And so, the barricades are being built and the ammunition readied. Should anyone doubt this, all that is required to convince oneself is to read the current periodical literature in the U.S. (see, The Nation, Oct. 24, Oct. 31, 1987 issues, for example), and peruse the various speeches and reports of the honorable Gorbachev ((Reorganization and the Party's Personnel Policy; Restructuring is Carried Out by the People, etc.). Of course, the anti-Marxist "Marxists" breath the sigh, "finally".

This attack on Stalin coupled with the clear renunciation of socialism in the Soviet Union presents us with both a challenge and an opportunity. Now that the situation has finally been clarified (as if it hadn't before this), it becomes necessary to debate those theoretical matters that should have been debated before: The

nature of the state; the nature and role of the party; class analysis and the struggle between the classes both under capitalism and under socialism; and, within the context of all the above, the place and role of Stalin. Up to this point, it was easy to argue, following the Trotskyites and the Social Democrats, that Stalin betrayed socialism, that what was observed in the Soviet Union during Stalin's time was not "true" socialism, but an aberration. Or, following the traditional Parties' line, that Stalin was guilty of violations of the norms of "democracy". Arguing thusly, many "Marxists" became respectable--did they not adopt the position of outright capitalist authorities? Moreover, these same "Marxists" sounded suspiciously similar to those Christians who argue that the 2000 year history of the Church is not "true" Christianity. Both groups can hide their reactionary ideology under the cover of a hypothetical "pure" system which is constantly vulgarized through the actions of humans who abandon the true faith. But, no more.

Now, it is fairly simple to separate the wheat from the chaff, to distinguish those who hue to a Marxist position in general (regardless of differences on some points) from those who merely parade under Marxist colors while holding hands with the Rostows, Bells, Kristols, et al., while spewing forth their anti-communist venom--in a most respectable way, of course. And the way to make this distinction is to take up the question of Stalin. No clearer point of demarcation can be found. No clearer way in which to show the bankruptcy, liberal claptrap, vulgar distortions and outright dishonesty on the larger questions of the state, classes, socialism, capitalism is open to us.

And, in addition to drawing sharp lines between those of a Marxist orientation and those of an anti-Marxist position, such a debate will raise the basic disagreements among Marxists to a point where the central theoretical issues can be understood clearly and grappled with cleanly. Debating the central points raises the theoretical ability and integrity of us all, and allows us then to approach the secondary (though still

important) questions within a framework upon which we agree.

The opportunity is now. Are we up to the challenge? Can we afford not to be?

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Clear, that is, to those with at least a rudimentary knowledge of Marxism.