

Understand the new world and act

David Epstein

Let me first of all thank the organizers of this wonderful conference for allowing me make a presentation. This is a great honor for me.

The topic of my report is: To understand the new world and act!

Remembering Lenin, we cannot but admire his purposefulness, determination, and consistency. Having embarked on the path of struggle against Tsarism already at the university, and then, having entered the highway of revolutionary Marxism and the creation of the revolutionary party in 1895, Lenin never left this path. Moreover, he was constantly developing the theory and tactics of the revolutionary struggle in Russia, the struggle for socialism, never losing sight of this goal.

One hundred years have passed since the death of Vladimir Il'ich Lenin. The world has changed enormously since then. We would like to follow the basic ideas of Lenin, to correspond to his transformative activities in the history of mankind. What was the main thing in his activities? In our opinion, this is the main thing - this is the greatest devotion in deeds and in thoughts to the advanced social idea (if you like - the paradigm) of our time. This is a humanistic idea of liberating the

working class and all of humanity from exploitation, the idea of building a socially just society with the priority of the interests of workers.

But if the world has changed in a hundred years, it means that we must strive to create an equally substantiated theoretical picture of the new, changed world, trying to further follow the humanistic and active transformative model of Lenin's activity.

We will try to consider the main changes, limiting ourselves, in view of the established regulations, to two questions.

- I) changes in the global geopolitical situation,
- II) changes in our understanding of socialism and the ways of moving towards it.

I. Changes in the global geopolitical situation

We see that the human world is fundamentally one, thanks to the ever-increasing communication between people, societies, and countries. But today it is split into four camps:

1) USA+, that is, the USA and the countries that clearly follow the instructions of the USA, first of all, these are the NATO and EU countries;

Similarly:

2) Russia+ (part of the former republics of the USSR that support Russia) +;

3) China + Asian socialist countries +,

4) neutral countries.

The root cause of the current division and the changes that have occurred over 100 years is the uneven development inherent in the global economic process, as well as the struggle of geopolitical groupings.

In each of the three camps (let us leave neutral countries for now), there is a hegemon, but the US+ camp is economically the most powerful.

At the same time, the fear of the hegemon (USA) of economic and then military competition remains, imposed on the old aggressive and defensive strategies peculiar to the hegemons for many centuries.

Let us emphasize that these strategies have always worked on the world stage... As soon as states appeared, and perhaps even earlier: we capture weak competitors – we defend ourselves from strong competitors preemptively and we surround them with satellites and bases. This applies to any country and any region and has almost always been the case.

Hence, we have the fear from Russia in the West since the 18th century and earlier. This fear intensified after the end of the Civil War with the victory of the Bolsheviks, and increased by an order of magnitude after the victory of the USSR and its allies over Nazi Germany.

Even after the collapse of the USSR, Russia is large, unpredictable, potentially very strong and dangerous for them.

Today's conflict between the United States and Russia, the United States and China is based on the same nature.

This fear of competitors from the United States, imposed on a rather low rate

of labor productivity growth (in the range of 1.5-2%) and economic growth, is dangerous, since it leads to erroneous and dangerous aggressive economic and geopolitical (military) policies, which we observe in the United States.

Since the early 90s, the United States has repeatedly shown its readiness, without the approval of the UN Security Council, to strike at any regime that pursues its domestic or foreign policy, but is unable to repel armed aggression.

Russia's demand to move the danger away from its borders, that is, not accept Ukraine, which is clearly aggressive, with growing nationalism, joining NATO and involving in the EU, was justified from the point of view of the security of all parties, from the point of view of justice, equality of relations between countries, that is, from the position of socialism (but not in relation to classes, and in relation to countries and peoples). Although, of course, the interests of Russian companies, including state and semi-state ones, were behind this requirement also.

The division of the world by alliances of major imperialist powers was also in the early 20th century, but what are the differences in the current situation?

1) Huge amounts of nuclear weapons have been accumulated, and the threat of a world-wide war is the threat of the destruction of mankind;

2) The imperialist alliances themselves were much weaker 100 years ago, and their military capabilities were generally local, in reality they could not significantly affect all states and the entire globe. There was no total structure covering almost all countries through a system of regional hegemony. There was also no system of containment by one imperialist camp (USA+) of the development of another imperialist camp, a system capable of really and totally restraining the economic development of another country or group of countries.

3) The struggle of the imperialist powers and their alliances in the first quarter of the 20th century was for the colonies, on both sides it was unfair. Today, there may be a right and a guilty side in conflicts associated with a real total deterrence of development, today in geopolitical conflicts there may be an attacking and forcibly defending side.

Therefore, today, in the 21st century, fundamentally new rules are needed, a new international law that would implement the requirements of justice in relation to geopolitics, that is, the requirements of creating conditions for the development of each country. This means that Marxists must put forward their new theory of international development and a new world order, a new international law.

This new theory should reflect and realize the chances for evolutionary development, for development without external interference, to develop ways to guarantee equal and fair treatment of each state, as well as the right to self-defense and protection of the world community from aggression.

That is, it should be a theory of a kind of socialism in relations between countries.

So the task of the Marxists of the 21st century is to study and understand the geopolitical structure of the new world and put forward their principles of equality and justice and their theory of its improvement as socialism in relations between states and peoples.

II. A debate on socialist planning in the 21st century

Here we turn to the second part of our report and to one of the most important problems that Lenin's followers must solve today within their countries. What is socialism today, taking into account the experience of a hundred years?

Socialism can be understood, on the one hand, as what existed in the Soviet Union without significant changes. This is the first variant. There is a second variant - the Soviet Union, but in a corrected democratic version, with self-government of labor collectives and civil society, but without a market and commodity-money relations, as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Kautsky and many other Marxists assumed. May be also democratic socialism with a regulated market. This is the third variant.

But it can also be understood as the movement of society towards greater social justice and solidarity without fixing any ideal models. This is the fourth variant. And between them there may be several intermediate variants. It turns out, essentially, a whole continuum of variants for what socialism is. Which one is correct, scientific? That is, what is socialism?

Let us start with the question of the market. Today, in my opinion, it has been proven practically and theoretically that the idea of Marx and Engels about the destruction of the market and commodity-money relations under socialism turned out to be wrong. I will try to explain this briefly. This is a difficult question, even for many economists.

The economy should produce mainly what the consumer needs. But consumers need a lot of products and in different quantities. But the degree of the need, the severity of the need is different. If there is a market, the consumer, focusing on prices and his budget, chooses for himself what and in what quantity he needs. He compares 1) the importance of this type of product for him with others, 2) its price from different manufacturers with the price of other types of products and their substitutes, 3) the possibilities of his budget. As a result, the consumer chooses and buys exactly what he needs, taking into account the importance of a specific need and other needs, actually paying for it with his own money.

This determines the real demand for each type of product, its quality and its price, which balances supply and demand. Moreover, this ratio is flexible; it changes quickly depending on the time of year, changes in production, the export and delivery of imported products, etc. If this market mechanism does not exist, then the State Planning Committee, without a market and commodity-money relations, must determine what needs to be produced and in what quantity, of what quality, and for each of the hundreds of thousands of enterprises and millions of types of products. But the State Planning Committee only has last year's data on production and sales and new wishes of enterprises that are ready to take more of everything and better quality, since they will receive the necessary budget from the state.

Therefore, in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries there have always been colossal shortages of many types of products, many types of products had low quality, and there were constant queues for shortages. This is an ineradicable planning defect in the absence of a market, when the choice is determined not by the real money of the real buyer, but by the management body. And this fundamental

defect of the absence of a market cannot be corrected by any powerful computer or network of computers, because without a market there is no necessary information for effective planning. It is similar in the field of planning scientific and technological progress. The State Planning Committee can only choose from new technologies already known to it and tested, and the task is to stimulate in the new period the creation and implementation of new technologies that are not yet known to the State Planning Committee.

And finally, one more important, most important factor. In the absence of a market and the prohibition on everyone who wants to be engaged in entrepreneurship and production, only managers of enterprises and research institutes are included in the search for the most effective production options and new types of products and technologies. And if there is a market, millions more people are involved in entrepreneurship and the search for effective options, creating new types of products and new methods of production. Therefore, a market economy can be efficient, but with directive central planning in the absence of a real market, efficiency decreases, each percent of growth costs more and more and growth rates drop to very low and even negative.

This was proven both by the practice of the Soviet Union and the world socialist system, and by the theory that studied the role of economic information generated by the market in optimizing economic development.

In recent decades, there have been attempts to develop effective planning methods that are based on repeated consultations of all possible participants in the economy with everyone - enterprises, producer unions, consumer unions, trade organizations, trade unions, political parties, and the state. But so far no convincing positive result has been obtained. And I doubt that it can be obtained if there is no market in the economy, market prices, freedom of choice for producers and consumers, etc.

How does this affect our understanding of what socialism is? Our previous understanding was that socialism is the system that is required by the new, emerging productive forces today. They already demanded it under Marx, 150 years ago. Socialism directly realizes public interests, that is, the interests of social justice, solidarity, freedom and development. This is directly realized sociality. In this way it fundamentally differs from the existing capitalist system. But the capitalist system also realizes certain interests of society, the interests of economic development and growth, income growth, but it realizes them indirectly, through the market. The market realizes some public interests, but incompletely; it reproduces social inequality and social injustice, monopolism, long-term crises, etc.

But, as we have found out, the direct implementation of social requirements without a market is impossible; it leads to a loss of economic efficiency.

Consequently, it is necessary to supplement the indirect implementation of public interests with direct implementation, that is, public property in various forms and regulation of the market, private property, the entire system of economic relations and planning... On this path, we can achieve a combination of economic efficiency and social justice, creating conditions for the full and comprehensive development of every person and society.

However, the very content of the requirements of social justice and solidarity

should not be unchangeable and dogmatic, it should be updated by society taking into account the changes achieved in the productive forces and the requirements for their further development, improvement of education, health, nature protection, development of self-government, etc.

The concept seems attractive. In fact, we have come to the concept of NEP, which was first developed by Lenin as a path to socialism.

But where are the guarantees of victory and preservation of socialism today, and not the victory of capitalist forces, given that NEP means class struggle?

The only guarantee of victory is that in the end it is beneficial to the majority of workers and, even more, it is beneficial to the majority of entrepreneurs, because the socialist state must take care of favorable conditions for entrepreneurs.

But in order to implement such socialism, its unconditional supporters must come to power. The party or parties of supporters of socialism must come to power. That is, it is necessary to mobilize the masses, to attract them to the supporters of socialism. And in order to achieve this, an attractive theoretic example of socialism is needed.

Members of these parties must become tough, demanding supporters of consistent improvements in the direction of human and social development, development that meets the capabilities of nature and the planet, and implements the ideas of social justice, solidarity, freedom, and humanism. And they must lead the masses.

Let me finish my report here.

Thank you for your attention!