

SOCIALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORLD SOCIALISM

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The use of high-intensity warfare to maintain U.S.-based unipolar imperialist domination is now a structural reality of the new phase of world history, as attested by the war the U.S. and NATO have provoked against Russia with their uninterrupted and increasingly aggressive eastward advance and the 2014 coup in Ukraine in order to encompass this country militarily, politically and economically into the Western camp. The use of genocidal mass violence against peoples who aspire to independence and struggle for the liberation of their own country, as is that of Israel against the Palestinian people, is justified, protected, shamelessly supported by Western imperialism, in the name of its strategic interests, in defense of its unipolar domination. The architecture of the world order built after the World War II is deeply and irreparably cracked by the West's perverse use of "international law," invoked and applied in alternating currents, only when it suits the West, brutally violated and disregarded when it does not suit it, as happened with Kosovo, wrested from Serbia, and as has been the case for decades with Palestine, where Israel systematically violates all UN resolutions.

The international communist and socialist-oriented movements today do not present a single trend in all areas of the world, the situation is rather differentiated and characterized by lights and shadows, advances and retreats, and, especially in the West, the weight of the military, political, ideological pressure of U.S.-based imperialism, of its cultural hegemony, of its media power, which, despite being in crisis, still manages to keep large masses out of political engagement, to diseducate them, to disintegrate them, to

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isolate them in individualism, is still strong. The old world is ending, a new era is dawning, but the birth pangs of a new world – that multipolar world characterized by the fundamental role of the PRC – can be very long; the world socialist movement is fully inside the storm of this transition.

In this context, the theme proposed here, *the relationship between Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and the development of world socialism*, is of great interest to communists and leftists throughout the world where the communist movement arose and developed extensively in the 19th and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 20th century, giving rise to an important Marxist culture.

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and World Socialism are not two antithetical, opposing poles, nor are they two separate subjects from each other. *Chinese socialism was and is in its own right an integral and fundamental part of world socialism.*

This statement may seem pleonastic and obvious to the participants in this 14th World Socialism Forum that meritoriously the Academy of Marxism and the Center for the Study of World Socialism – CASS have been organizing for many years now, but it is not so obvious to a section of communist and leftist oriented parties in the world.

This approach to the question of PRC socialism is in my view dogmatic and anti-dialectical, fundamentally contrary in substance to Lenin's approach – whose death centenary anniversary we commemorate this year – had toward the great question of the transition to socialism in the USSR, particularly in his speeches and writings following the seizure of political power in November 1917, and even more so in his writings between 1921 and 1923, from the launching of the NEP to the seminal article on cooperation. In those texts, the great Lenin, the rigorous defender of Marxism and at the same time the extraordinary innovator of Marxism, the leader of the October Revolution and at the same time the founder of the Communist International, who with extreme clarity and determination placed at the center the unity of the proletariat of capitalist countries and

the oppressed masses of countries subjugated by colonialism and imperialism – which gave impetus to the emergence of communist parties in Asia from China to Vietnam, which moved the red star of the world socialist movement to the East –, Lenin thinks of the transition to socialism as a long and complex process, in which the class struggle continues, and which requires the work of more than one generation, with the formation of a new civilization. Lenin says nationalizing enterprises by decree by having political power can be done in a day, but actually socializing requires instead a new civilization, requires a long process of learning how to work modernly and how to direct economic processes in a planned way. And it requires coming to terms with the ways of life, culture, customs, and traditions of tens and hundreds of millions of people constituted over a millennia-long history. To believe that one can replace semi-feudal and capitalist relations with mature socialist relations in the space of a morning by decree is an error that does violence to history, to the materialist conception of history that underlies the foundations of Marxism.

Chinese communists have learned well Lenin's lesson, his dialectical and anti-dogmatic approach, keeping a firm grip on the rudder of the course toward Socialism, as President Xi Jinping often reiterates in his speeches. The Chinese communists understood well that Marxism and socialism must be rooted and grafted into the great historical trunk of China's millennia-old culture and civilization, which could not be the top-down imposition of abstract principles worked out in another historical-cultural context in Western Europe. Mao Tse-Tung speaks about the "sinicization of Marxism" and the grafting of socialism into the characters of Chinese history and society. This position of Mao, later taken up and developed extensively by the CPC and its top leaders from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping, is not nationalistic-particularistic, not in opposition to Marxist universalism thinking about the emancipation of all humankind, but in dialectical continuity with it: universalism – that is, thinking of humankind as a whole and not just of a class

or people – can only be effectively realized on the condition of accommodating the specific concrete characteristics produced by the millennial history of each people. Otherwise it is an abstract universalism, which is not surprisingly used by bourgeois West-centric ideologues to affirm the Western one as the only and superior form of civilization.

The Chinese Revolution seizes an early success with the seizure of political power in China on October 1, 1949. The path taken by the CPC is different from that of the Bolshevik CP led by Lenin and later Stalin, and this is because of the different historical, social, and cultural conditions of the two great countries. The CPC does not establish a socialist republic *tout court* but a People's Republic and carries forward the revolution of New Democracy. Class relations are also different in China and Russia.

In building the foundations of socialism under the leadership of the CPC, the Chinese communists initially looked to the Soviet model, which, with its first five-year plans, had made the USSR in the 1930s take giant strides – accomplish in 10 years what the bourgeoisie in the West did in 100, Stalin said – and had succeeded, thanks to the power of its industrial base, in producing weapons in greater quantity and quality than those of Nazi Germany, and in winning World War II. But the schematic application of the Soviet model did not fit China's reality, so a different strategy had to be developed and implemented. Already Mao Tse-Tung set out some critical notes toward the first Soviet *Manual of Political Economy of Socialism* (1954), on merchant-monetary relations and the production and distribution of consumer goods.

The CPC has been able to proceed according to the Chinese saying of crossing the river by feeling the stones, and to take truth from facts, that is, basing itself – as Niccolò Machiavelli, the founder of Political Science, also said in the 16th century – on effected truth, learning from concrete experience, with its successes and mistakes. The CPC's decision in the late 1970s to launch a new economic policy of reform and openness stemmed from

the analysis of the domestic and international situation and from the conviction – always held by Marx and Engels – that socialism cannot be the socialization of misery, cannot be built on a low level of productive forces, but requires that they be widely developed. It was therefore necessary to open the Chinese economy to the then more advanced Western technologies in order to equip the country with the industrial structure necessary for the advance of socialism. (Even Lenin called for inviting Western technicians to Russia and even paying them handsomely to learn the science of modern production).

Chinese socialism has used and uses the tools of the market to develop productive forces. And it reformed the structure of public ownership, denationalizing some sectors and opening up for the emergence of a private sector and foreign investment. Such paths, however, were not and are not entrusted to the spontaneity of the capitalist market and the impositions of the monopolies and oligopolies dominant in it, but are directed in an organized and conscious way by the CPC on the basis of a strategic vision of future development, a program-plan. It should also be remembered that the 1978 breakthrough of the new economic policy of reform and opening up was not in opposition to, but in dialectical continuity with, the paths of building socialism and the strong foundations laid with the great economic-social development of the first three decades following the founding of the PRC.

The error of those on the left who regard the 1978 turning point of initiating reform and opening up as the transition from socialism to capitalism is one of dogmatic abstractness and anti-dialecticism. They miss the essence of the issue, which is – throughout the long transition phase to socialism – the maintenance and strengthening of the political power of a Communist Party, firmly faithful to its “original mission” (as Xi Jinping often reminds us, see in particular the important July 2021 centenary speech of the CPC) of building socialism and to the strategic vision and fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism.

The leadership role of the communist party is fundamental and indispensable in the path of transition to socialism

The historical experience of the world communist movement has shown – with the reversals in Eastern Europe and the USSR in 1989–91 – that the loss of political power or the overthrow of political power implies the interruption of the socialist transition and the transition to capitalist and imperialist rule. In the USSR, the CPSU had undergone an internal ideological attack – Khrushchev’s revisionism, revived and expanded by Gorbachev – that undermines it at its base, severely weakens it, and disrupts its “original mission,” until Yeltsin, leader of the CPSU until a few months earlier, outlaws it in August 1991, and Gorbachev, president of the USSR, declares the end of the Union in December 1991. Chinese socialism and the CPC, although subjected to the ideological and political storms of the second half of the 1980s, when the overthrow of socialist countries was incubated, is able to resist, reaffirm the CPC’s key leadership role, and revive reform and opening up (Deng Xiaoping, “trip to the south” in 1992).

Between the 1990s and today, China completes an extraordinary course of economic-social development that, in terms of the masses of population involved (1.4 billion people) and short time span (a few decades) is unparalleled in all of human history. The result, celebrated already with the achievement of the “first centenary” goal in 2021, is not only that of having conquered poverty, not only that of extraordinary growth in GDP, per capita income, etc, but that of a *structural shift in world power relations* that at the economic level (for the first time in contemporary history after the successes of the USSR) were dominated by the neoliberal West and its neo-colonial policies (based predominantly – although the U.S. and Western satellites often resort to direct military intervention – on dollar dominance, control of the IMF, the World Bank, and the main financial institutions of the economic-political architecture of U.S.-based Western imperialism). The unipolarism proclaimed and

practiced by the U.S.-led West after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 can no longer rest, with the rise of the Chinese economy, on a dominant economic structure on a global scale, as it was in the 1990s, and must give way to a new multipolar world order in which the role of the PRC is inescapable.

In this way, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, and the CPC leading China's mighty development, has not only significantly increased the welfare of the Chinese people and lifted the country from a semi-colony of imperialism to a major world power, but also *makes a fundamental, structural contribution to the changing international framework*: the path to the resumption of the now centuries-old struggle for socialism passes, in concrete historical conditions and not in dogmatic schemes divorced from reality, through the downsizing and weakening of U.S.-based Western imperialism, an imperialism that has always been, throughout the 20th century to the present, the gendarme of the imperialist world order (the series of coups or military interventions by proxies or direct organized by the U.S. to overthrow democratically elected governments of socialist orientation is long: exemplary, but certainly not the only one, Allende's Chile in September 1973. And even in my country, Italy, where in the post-World War II years the ICP had nearly two million members and came to have 1/3 electoral consensus, the U.S. promoted and organized dark plots, coup attempts, and political crimes to prevent Italian communists from going into government).

Objectively, the path of the PRC, by downsizing U.S. unipolar imperialism, provides great support for a possible revival of communist, socialist-oriented, anti-imperialist and national liberation movements in the world.

But the CPC, the world's largest communist party, is not limited to this objective role. Directly, and through its mass bodies, cultural institutes, associations, etc., it promotes international exchanges with the world's communist and socialist-oriented parties, associations and Marxist intellectuals around the world. The Academy of Marxism of CASS has been developing a study project on in-

ternational communist movements for several years and publishes an annual Report (the *Yellow Book*). The Center for the Study of World Socialism (CASS) annually promotes international forums of socialism and initiates journals for the development of Marxism worldwide. The efforts of Chinese communists to develop international ties and provide material for study, analysis, and reflection to elaborate and implement the most appropriate tactics and strategies to root and develop communist parties and forces of socialist orientation in their respective national societies are manifold and articulate, with a view that is on the one hand overall strategic on the movement of communists and socialist forces in the whole world – since the cause of socialism is worldwide, it is liberation from misery, exploitation, and oppression of all humanity –; and on the other hand, it is attentive to the study of the different specific situations of different countries and areas of the world, based on the principle of grafting the general vision of Marxism into the specific realities produced by historical development that has had different ways and times.

Today, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is a fundamental and indispensable pillar of the world socialist movement, which, thanks to the development of Chinese socialism, now has before it the prospect of reviving itself and resuming its path of emancipation after the heavy setback of 1989-1991.

A historical lesson that the CPC has also learned well is that of the relationship with other communist parties. In the history of the Comintern there has also been – not always and not everywhere – a relationship (arising from the objective role of victorious Russia in the socialist revolution, the world base and vanguard of the international communist movement) between the CPSU and the other communist parties, from “father party,” “big brother.” In my personal experience, as in that reported to me by several other comrades, the CPC moves in its relationship with the other communist and socialist-oriented parties on a ground of absolute equality-although the great weight and strength of the CPC is more

than evident-and non-interference in the internal affairs of other parties. The CPC promotes mutual understanding, exchange of information and views, offers reflections, study materials, in a frank and open relationship, fully respectful of the internal life of the different communist parties.

The changing international framework, the structural economic weight of China, the fall of Western hegemony, its claim to impose its values absolutely, its inability to impose itself even militarily on Russia, may lead to a revival of world socialism.

The West is going through a major crisis both in its prospects for development, in its ideological hegemonic apparatus, and in its societies, and it seeks war as the solution to its contradictions. This crisis can spill over to the right, into a refuge in old conservative values, supremacist and exclusionary nationalism and racism, or into the revival of a mighty and articulate movement for socialism around the world, from Latin America to Africa to Asia, but also in the West. Chinese socialism is in this particular context a key reference point.

Therefore, communists and Marxists in the world, those who are oriented toward socialism, should set themselves the task of:

- Intensify political-cultural relations and exchange with the centers of Chinese socialism, including CASS, make them systematic and constant, in a path of organic cooperation for the development of socialism.
- Study in depth the historical experience of socialism with Chinese characteristics, make it known and propagate it among its militants, sympathizers and in the wider circle of the population, countering dogmatic and anti-dialectical readings.

In this regard, our small publishing house “MarxVentuno” will continue and intensify the work of publishing articles for the journal and books on Chinese socialism, hoping for and promoting collaborations with other publishing enterprises, in order to develop a broad international network of study materials and dissemination of knowledge on this fundamental pillar of world socialism.