

**Chairman answers questions on USSR**

# WHY WE CALL IT SOCIAL IMPERIALISM

The following discussion between Bob Avakian and some African students took place after the Chairman's speech in Madison, Wisconsin. Both the questions and answers have been edited, with some small changes made for clarity.

**Q:** I was provoked when you mentioned the question of the so-called social imperialism of the Soviet Union. And as far as I am concerned, I still take the Leninist definition of imperialism as being the highest stage of capitalism, and I associate imperialism with economic exploitation. By that definition, I still don't see exactly how the Soviet Union, however expansionist their policy has been, has been able to entrench itself economically. In other words, when I look at such countries like Angola, like Vietnam, etc., I don't see the multinational corporations from the Russian sector like we see them from the capitalist western areas which promote the cause of imperialism.

And secondly, for a long time we have associated the Soviet people as having sided with the liberation movements in Africa. While the western camp was arming the Vorster/Smith regimes it was only Soviet people and the Soviet govern-

ment that came to aid the liberation struggle until today. Now we find this orchestrated cry about Soviet social-imperialism as having been a dividing influence among the rank and file of the communist movement, especially among the working class and the people who are still trying to liberate themselves.

Now can you clarify this issue? In other words, how do you see these two imperialisms as being characteristically different from each other?

**B.A.:** Well, first of all we did a whole book on this, it's called *How Capitalism Has Been Restored in the Soviet Union and What This Means for the World Struggle*. In this book we analysed Soviet imperialism both from the internal and international aspects. Basically I would say that the Leninist analysis of imperialism does apply to the Soviet Union; however, there are some particular features, given that this came from a formerly socialist economic base and a socialist superstructure and then reverted to capitalism. And so in the main, though not entirely, the form of monopoly capitalism and imperialism in the Soviet Union is through the state. It's not in the form of private capital, in the sense

of different corporations, but what you do have increasingly is basically the same analogies.

All capitalist corporations are collective bodies; they are not under the private ownership of one person; there are banks and blocks of capital interlocking in these things, so that—in fact Lenin pointed this out in his book, *Imperialism*—you get these corporations and banks that are straining against the limits of private ownership but are still on that foundation. And the Soviet Union has production associations as well as different ministries basically occupying the same role as the large corporations and banks, cartels, trusts and so on, in the Western countries. And the decisive thing is that the Soviet planning and Soviet economic ministry, as they call it, have restored the law of value and in particular the law of accumulating surplus value—profit—as the guiding principle of the economy, in other words, now, the same way they're doing in China.

In fact, when the central ministry or bank decides whether or not investments will be made or a loan will be made to a particular ministry, it makes it on the leading criterion of profitability of that particular industry or enterprise or venture. So this accounts for the fact that Soviet agriculture, for example, in the past number of years has been increasingly lagging behind other sectors of the Soviet economy. While Soviet agriculture is deteriorating and in a more and more woeful state, Soviet investments are going overseas, just like they do here. Just like Lenin said, imperialism would not be imperialism if the money were re-invested in the home country to develop agriculture, to raise the standard of living of the people. That takes socialism. But in the Soviet Union, agriculture is allowed to lag further and further behind while capital is taken, driven by profit, and invested in Iran, in India, etc.

Let's take Iran. What happened to the Soviet Union when the Iranian revolution came along? They had this deal with the Shah whereby they were buying natural gas at a certain price, supplying a certain amount at fixed rates to the Comecon countries (Soviet economic bloc), (often at a price greatly above the world market), and then also selling a certain amount of this oil to other parts of the world. And this was all on a basis not much different from other imperialist countries—the Soviets supplied Iran a certain amount of technology and machinery and equipment and so on. On that basis they were sucking off the natural gas from Iran, really basically living off the surplus value of the Iranian workers.

When the Iranian revolution came along, it threw a lot of chaos into the whole of Comecon. Or the same thing is done with India—Soviet-built steel mills in India. Often the form of the Soviet export of capital comes through a bookkeeping arrangement whereby unequal trade is set up so that in exchange for the Soviets supplying technology, or what have you, the Soviets receive a certain amount of the finished product or some other product at a reduced price. In turn what the Soviets provide is paid for at inflated prices. It appears to be just a trade arrangement when in fact the Soviet Union is exporting capital and exploiting the people of those countries.

And in relation to countries like Vietnam, Cuba, what have you, the Soviet Union practices a policy like U.S. imperialism. The Soviet Union is willing to lose some money in a particular area of the world for a political reason. In order to build up Cuba, for example, as a fifth column it is willing to lose some money—though it also makes money

off Cuba. Just like the United States, when it fought in Vietnam. It was losing more money than it was making in Vietnam, but it was doing it for political reasons.

On the last point you made about the Soviet Union supporting struggles, you have to draw a distinction between different kinds of "support." What in fact is the nature of that support and what does it lead to? In Angola, in Cuba, in Vietnam, the price is Soviet domination, where the people of those countries don't even have control over the technology that's supplied to them. And remember U.S. imperialism, especially after WWII when British and French or Japanese imperialism were being forced to retreat. The U.S. often came in, posing, as the Soviet Union does now, as an ally of the oppressed, like they did in the Philippines in 1900, and they did it again in 1945. In Suez when British and French imperialism and Zionism went up against Nasser, the U.S. went in under the guise of supporting Nasser and opposing imperialism to tighten its own hold over the Mideast. So you have to look at the nature of support; it is something that has to be analysed, what is the content of the support and what does it lead to.

**Q:** I understand, but this puts us in a straitjacket. Here we are fighting a war against an entrenched capitalist or colonial system, whichever it is, in southern Africa. The West cannot arm us because they are arming the other side. Here is the man who can arm us but you are telling me that he is going to entrench and dominate you. In other words what you are saying is, since I cannot fight with a stick, I can neither turn to the West because they are arming my enemy, but I cannot go to the Soviet bloc or the socialist countries because they will dominate me after my independence so you are forcing me...

**B.A.:** What's wrong with the way Mao did it?

**Q:** What?

**B.A.:** What's wrong with the way Mao did it? When Mao...

**Q:** Well, of course they had a strong backing by Stalin.

**B.A.:** Well, look what happened. In 1946, in fact not only did Stalin not back Mao but Stalin continued to send military aid to Chiang Kai-shek; so did the U.S. who sent him several million dollars of military aid. In fact Stalin told Mao not to try to overthrow Chiang Kai-shek in 1946. And he had certain military agreements and political agreements with Chiang Kai-shek established during WWII which Stalin continued to honor all during that period and there were many in China who argued basically what you're arguing that because of all that, "There's no way we can win." And Mao defeated them and that's why the Chinese revolution went on to victory because he said we don't have to rely on imperialism and we don't have to rely even on the Soviet Union. We can do it by fighting on the basis of self-reliance and that's what they did.

**Q:** We have reached a stage where it is impossible to fight a war with a knife. It is impossible to confront a rocket with a knife. And the only man who can give me rockets is the Soviet Union.

**B.A.:** Well, wait a minute. You see, some principles have to be drawn. We have to get our facts straight first. The question is: is the Soviet Union imperialist or not? If it is imperialist, it is the duty of revolutionaries to expose it as such. Now if the Soviet Union is not imperialist, that's another matter. But if it is, then it's the duty of revolutionaries to expose it.

And since the Soviets are imperialists, even the kind of military aid they give is basically more suited to im-

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(Above) Except for the picture of Lenin, this might well be a Wall Street businessman's luncheon club, but these are Soviet businessmen and the photo is from the USSR, as the Russian labels on their Pepsi bottles indicate. (Right) Promotional ad for Fortune magazine—U.S. imperialists know the nature of who they are dealing with in the Soviet ruling class.



perialist than to revolutionary aims. They don't concentrate on supplying weapons that the people can use in a people's revolutionary war. They give big modern weapons that require Soviet "experts" and are suited to conventional war. That's what they did in Vietnam and it's what they try to do everywhere. They don't want to see the masses really mobilized in people's war, because then when the U.S. got whipped they'd be prepared to deal with the Soviets, too. The Soviets demand a price for their aid. If the price of taking the guns is to cover up the nature of the Soviet Union then you're disarming the people and how are they then ever going to be in a position to stand up to Soviet domination? Because you're telling them that a potential enemy who is only assisting them for its own imperialist interests is actually a friend. That's precisely what happened, for example, in the Philippines, when they had a struggle back in 1900. You know the U.S. aided the movement to a certain degree, then assassinated the leader of it and you know what they did in the Philippines—they destroyed a whole revolutionary movement because the leadership then was bourgeois and they didn't understand the nature of imperialism and they thought the U.S. would actually assist them and it assisted them to get out from under Spain in order to come in themselves. And today the people of the Philippines, 80 years later, are still struggling against U.S. imperialism.

**Q:** The Soviet Bloc has often said that since capitalism has taken a global aspect, you cannot confront it unless communism also takes a global perspective. In other words, if U.S. imperialism, backed up by western countries, is encroaching across the world, then the only way to counter such a move is for the communist bloc also to push, in the same way. In other words, what you call social imperialism is international struggle against them.

**B.A.:** But you know that's hypocrisy. Because when Soviet revisionism triumphed and Khrushchev came on the scene the first thing he did was to tell people all over the world *not* to struggle against U.S. imperialism; and he said it was too dangerous, coming up with a revisionist thesis that it was possible to have peaceful transition to socialism and that it was not necessary any longer for people to wage an armed struggle. And the reason that happened was at that time the Soviet Union, having just restored capitalism, was not in a position or did not feel confident or was not in a mature position to challenge the U.S.

Look what the Soviet Union did in the Congo. They collaborated with the U.S. to get rid of Lumumba and to suppress the struggle of the Congolese people. They did the same thing in Algeria. All over the world, they worked with the U.S. imperialists until the Soviet

Union got to the point where it felt it was strong enough, on an imperialist basis, to challenge the U.S. Then all of a sudden it started talking more militantly, supplying more guns and attempting to use the revolutionary struggles around the world but only as a battering ram to knock the U.S. out of the way and get the Soviet Union in.

I believe the way Mao says, that if you're going to fight imperialism worldwide, it's what Lenin said too, you should rely on the strength of the people. The socialist countries should support the people. But it is *not* support for the people when the Soviet Navy is contending with the U.S. Navy for control of the Mediterranean. That's just imperialist, superpower politics. That's got nothing to do with the struggle of the people.

Why, you know, when China was revolutionary it supported the revolutionary struggle and they didn't have any troops outside of China but they were internationalists. But they weren't international gangsters, they didn't send some navy all over the world, they didn't send their army all over these other countries and then say, we're doing it to fight imperialism, so it's okay. But where do the people in these countries figure in then. Where do the people of the Middle East, where do the people of Africa, where do the people of Latin America figure in if it's just going to be superpower contention between the Soviet and the U.S. bloc? And what of the people under the Soviet rule. For example, why did the Soviet Union do what it did in Czechoslovakia? Why did it have to rely on armed invasion?

**Q:** But Czechoslovakia's been revisionist for a long time.

**B.A.:** Sure Czechoslovakia's been revisionist for a long time. But who is the Soviet Union to say somebody's going revisionist? That's like a murderer when it sees someone stealing a purse, shooting them and saying I did it because they're a thief. The Soviet Union is the biggest revisionist in the whole world and you don't believe that they're going to come down on Czechoslovakia for being revisionist! They just came down on Czechoslovakia to make sure it stayed under their domination instead of going under the U.S. But how could one be better than the other?

You see what the Soviet Union has done is very interesting. This is why they have to go to war now. The Soviet Union when they went revisionist, wrecked the economic base of their country and the material base by going for profit in command and so on through a series of reforms. They recognized that the only way they could deal with the world as it was and buy some time and deal with their own internal economic crisis was if they put a tremendous amount into military expenditures in order to build up the basis to go to war. So they have a very

lopsided economy with a tremendous amount of armaments production on an industrial base about half that of the U.S. But their military production is at least as large. So they have even invited Japan, West Germany and the U.S. to come in and make profit investing in the Soviet Union for one simple reason:

they are calculating that they are going to go to war, and they're going to win the war, and on that basis they can force a readjustment of all these relations. But that's precisely why they have to go to war, because they have such a lopsided economy. Their agri-

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# Chairman answers questions on USSR

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culture is stagnating and they have a tremendously parasitic military expenditure on top of a not very strong industrial base. Unless they redivide the world fairly quickly and get more areas under their control, more areas to exploit, their thing is going to come apart completely at the seams. There are also reasons that the U.S. has to go to war against the Soviet bloc territory. But the Soviet Union made a calculated gamble.

Khrushchev's had a role in this. His role was to carry out the transition from destroying the socialist system to more or less bringing about the restoration of capitalism. Then Brezhnev and Kosygin, recognizing that the basis had been laid, wanted to start reaching out more aggressively and came into conflict with Khrushchev. That's why Khrushchev got it (although they didn't kill him so it wasn't all that antagonistic). Then Brezhnev and Kosygin started going to Vietnam and other places to start implementing a slightly different policy of acting a little tougher in the face of the U.S. They figured now they could stand up to the U.S. a little more. Whereas when Khrushchev was in there, they figured they had no basis to stand up to the U.S. That's why they backed off every place and Khrushchev openly said what you're saying in a more straight-

testimony by the Honolulu Chief of Police. In fact the Chief refused to testify and this testimony came from the former head of his TAC (SWAT) force.

On page 10, col. 1, reference is made to "Workers and Tenant Farmers Against Evictions in Waihole/Waikane." There is no such organization, and the speaker was an individual tenant.

up form. He said the atomic bomb will kill everybody, worker and capitalist alike, and *Pravda* put it straight out: what good are principles if one's head is going to be cut off? We might as well keep capitulating to imperialism because they'll blow us up anyway if we don't. And then they further made the argument, what's the use of building and working to develop your economy if it's just going to be blown up anyway? And these were their arguments at the time; and you can read them, about why they had to capitulate to the U.S.

They did it to buy time. They didn't do it for a long-term strategy of capitulation. They did it to get into position where they're ready to *confront* the U.S. as a world power themselves, that's what they're doing now. ■