

# **SOVIET SOCIALISM**

Social and Political Essays

L. G. Churchward

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L. G. CHURCHWARD

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L.G. CHURCHWARD



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## PREFACE

The essays in this book were written at various times between April 1983 and September 1984. They were written on themes on which I had lectured and done research in earlier years but which seemed of continuing interest. They were written in retirement but not in isolation from the stimulus of students and colleagues. I have found it interesting to retrace footsteps and I hope that readers will share my interest.

The book was not written as a textbook but as a series of essays – afterthoughts. As such it should be useful for reference purposes in university teaching and in research. It should also be of interest to the wider circle of readers who are interested in the Soviet Union. The essays do not present a full coverage of Soviet society and politics but merely a selection of interrelated themes dealing mainly with the domestic scene. Yet as the essays were all written by myself and all written over a short space of time they should prove more integrated than the normal essay collection.

I should like to thank all those who have assisted in one way or another in the preparation of this book. In particular, I should like to thank Leslie Holmes and Harry Rigby who read through the manuscript and gave helpful advice, and other colleagues in the Department of Political Science at the University of Melbourne who offered encouragement throughout. I should like to thank the Chairman of the Department, Arthur Huck, for providing me with a room and other resources in my old Department. Finally, I must thank my wife and family for their tolerance and support for one who had the temerity to write a book when almost blind. I am especially indebted to my daughter Alison, who helped prepare the final text.

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

L.G. Churchward  
*September, 1986*



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L.G.C.

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## GLOSSARY

**Aktiv** The leading cadres and most active members of a particular organization or society. The Party *aktiv* – the cadres and most active members right down to the Primary Party Organizations.

**Apparat** Organizational structure: the paid staff. Typically the paid officials of the Party or state.

**Apparatchik** Typically a Party or state official. The term is not used in official descriptions of the CPSU.

**ASSR** Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

**AUCCTU** All-Union Central Committee of Trade Unions.

**BAM** (*Baikalo-Amurskaya-Magistral*) Baikal-Amur Trunk Railway – total length over 3,500 km. Built between 1967 and 1984.

**Bich** From *byvshii intelligentnyi chelovek*. A dissident intellectual in temporary exile in remote places such as Siberia.

**Byurokratia** Bureaucracy.

**Byurokratizm** Bureaucratism: The undesirable behaviour of (some) office-holders.

**COMECON** Council of Mutual Economic Assistance. Formed 1949.

**CPSU** Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

**Demokratichesky tsentralizm** Democratic centralism.

**Glavki** Main Departments (of ministries).

**Gosplan** State Planning Committee.

**Gossnab** State Committee on Material-Technical Supplies.

**Gosudarstvo** State.

**ITRs** (*Inzhenerno-tekhnicheskie rabotniki*) Engineering-technical workers.

- Kantselyarshchina** Red-tapism, bureaucratism.
- Komsomol** All-Union League of Communist Youth.
- Kolkhoz** Collective farm.
- Krai** Territory.
- Kulak** A rich peasant. From the Russian for 'fist'.
- Kustar** A small-scale industrialist.
- MTS** Machine Tractor Station. Abolished 1958.
- Nachalnik** A person holding an official position – Party, state, or other.
- Nachalstvo** Authorities, officials.
- Nakazy izbiratelei** Electors' mandates.
- NEP** (*Novaya ekonomicheskaya politika*) New economic policy – introduced March 1921.
- NKVD** Commissariat of Internal Affairs.
- Nomenklatura** A list of official positions and also a list of those entitled to hold them.
- Obkom** Oblast (regional) Party Committee.
- Oblast** Province (region).
- Obshchenarodnoe gosudarstvo** State of the whole people.
- Okrug** Area. The Autonomous Area is the smallest national group given administrative recognition.
- Orgburo** Organizational Bureau of the CC of the CPSU.
- Podmena** Subordination: normally meaning the tendency for Party committees to supplant government agencies.
- Politburo** Political Bureau of the CC of the CPSU.
- Rabfak** A workers' faculty – a factory-based educational establishment to qualify workers for professional careers.
- Rabkrin** Workers and Peasants Inspectorate (1918–21).
- Raiispolkom** Executive Committee of a District Soviet.
- Raikom** District Party Committee.
- Raion** District. An administrative area in rural and (large) urban areas.



- Razvitoi sotsializm** Developed socialism.
- Sblizhenie** Drawing together.
- Shabashnik** A worker who does private contract work (after hours).
- Sluzhashchie** Employees (white-collar workers). The category often includes the intelligentsia.
- Sovkhoz** State farm.
- Sovnarkhoz** Regional Economic Council. Most recently established by Khrushchev in 1957. Abolished 1965.
- Union Republic** A constituent state in the USSR. There are fifteen of them at present of which the largest is the RSFSR, the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic.
- USSR** Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
- Utverzhdenie** Confirmation (of appointments).
- Volokita** Red tape.
- Vozhd** Leader: a term used to describe Lenin, Stalin, and occasionally, Brezhnev.
- VUZ** (*Vysshoe uchebnoe zavedenie*) Tertiary educational establishment (Plural: VUZy).
- Yezhovshchina** The height of the Stalin terror under the direction of Yezhov.
- Zek** A person undergoing forced (corrective) labour.
- Zemlyachestvo** An urban group consisting of migrants from the same rural district.
- Zhenotdel** Women's department of the Central Committee and lower Party committees. Established 1919.

*PART*

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# **1** SOCIAL ESSAYS



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# 1 THE SOVIET APPROACH TO SOCIALISM AND ITS MARXIST CRITICS

Socialism reached Russia in the 1860s. While main sources were West European, chiefly French, German and English, Russian socialism was not simply a carbon-copy of any imported socialism. From 1861 up to the first Russian Revolution in 1905 the dominant revolutionary tradition was Populism, which while it drew some inspiration from Marx, was not a socialist movement in the Marxist sense. The Populists envisaged a rural socialism based on the survival of the peasant commune. The revolutionary movement was to be led by the intelligentsia with the support of the peasantry and the proletariat. Industrialization and urbanization were to be avoided.

Marxism began in Russia in the early 1880s as a breakaway from Populism and in opposition to it. It was led largely by Russian emigrés in Switzerland and London, the most important of whom was Plekhanov. From the outset the Russian Marxists challenged the basic propositions of Populism. They denied that Russia could avoid capitalism and industrialization. On the contrary, Russia was already well advanced on the path of capitalist development. They argued that the peasantry was not a revolutionary class in the full sense of the term, but only in their opposition to the landed aristocracy. The main revolutionary class, the class that would lead Russia beyond capitalism to socialism was the proletariat. While this class was still a small minority of the population it would grow in numbers and experience with the further growth of capitalism. Socialism was a promise for the future; it could come only after the overthrow of autocracy and the success and consolidation of a bourgeois revolution. Finally, the Russian socialists challenged the preferred strategy and tactics of the radical wing of Populism. They condemned terror and assassination as revolutionary methods. Their emphasis was on education, agitation, organization, mobilization and struggle of the entire working class.

Russian backwardness was a perennial problem for Russian socialists. Generally speaking, the more rigid and inflexible their Marxism, the less likely they were to support an early socialist

revolution. But the pressure of events could force even the most rigid and 'orthodox' Marxist to flirt with the prospect of an early proletarian revolution. Witness the writings and speeches of Akselrod and other Menshevik leaders during the 1905 Revolution.

Of the two wings of Russian Social Democracy it was the Bolsheviks rather than the Mensheviks who made the greater adjustments to orthodox Marxism. This fact was noted by their rivals just as it has been by many Western critics of Lenin and Bolshevism. Thus Plamenatz considered Bolshevism as 'the distorted Marxism of a backward society exposed to the impact of the West'. But this is no more than a half-truth. Marxism for Plamenatz was economic determinism, but Marxism for Lenin was anything but determinist. From his first published work in 1894 Lenin demanded that Russian socialists should study the concrete reality of Russian society and not abstractions. In commenting on the aims of the newly formed Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (in *Our Program*) he declared that Marx's analysis was not to be regarded as 'something final or inviolable' but rather as 'general guiding principles' that 'had to be applied differently to England than to France, differently to France than to Germany, differently to Germany than to Russia.' In 1899 Lenin published his *Development of Capitalism in Russia*, a book comparable in some respects with *Capital*, Volume I. Lenin showed not only the rapid growth of capitalism since 1861 but the unevenness of that development. He discussed the development of large factories in key areas, the growth of *kustar* industry in the provinces and the growing class differences amongst the peasantry associated with the move from subsistence farming to production for the market. This book was followed in the early years of the twentieth century by the detailed analysis of Russian agriculture after the Stolypin reforms. These analyses made it possible for Lenin to make a re-evaluation of earlier Russian Marxist policies towards the peasantry. From this came, in September 1905, Lenin's call for an alliance of revolutionary workers and revolutionary peasants, especially of the poor and landless peasants. On this new appreciation of the class basis of the Russian revolution Lenin evolved his theory of the uninterrupted revolution, just as Trotsky, on a slightly different reading of the evidence, developed his theory of permanent revolution. Lenin and Trotsky were brilliant revolutionary leaders because they understood that Marx's theories could not be applied automatically to Russia. This lesson was generally understood by the entire Bolshevik leadership by 1917. This is not to suggest that the Bolsheviks did not frequently make inaccurate assessments and predictions and consequently make wrong policy decisions. Thus Lenin's insistence on the seizure of power in October 1917 was based not only on

an assessment of the revolutionary situation in Russia but on the strength of revolutionary and anti-war feelings abroad. His evaluation of the former was undoubtedly more accurate than it was of the latter. Lenin's confidence in November 1917 that the Russian proletariat could build the 'lofty, towering edifice of socialism' was based on the assumption that proletarian revolutions would occur almost immediately in Germany and other advanced capitalist countries and lend support and material aid to the Soviets. The possibility of building socialism in Russia alone did not occur to Lenin until several years after 1917. But the necessity of formulating such an objective was evident as early as 1921.

Bolshevism, like many revolutionary movements suffered from the fetishism of concepts and slogans. Concepts like 'proletarian revolution', 'the worker and peasant alliance', 'socialism in one country', 'mature socialism', 'developed socialism' and 'the state of the whole people' assumed a mystique that obscured reality. But these concepts themselves are the result of adherence to the objective of building a communist society.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: first, to provide an historical account of Bolshevik theorizing about the building of socialism, and, second, to review some of the main Marxist critics of the Soviet achievement. It does not attempt to justify either the Russian Revolution or the Soviet achievement but merely to aid the understanding of these events.

### **Building socialism**

The Russian Revolution of November 1917 was planned to be a socialist revolution. Kerensky's Provisional Government had to be overthrown because it did not represent the interests of the Russian masses, of the workers and the peasants. The March Revolution, which had brought the Provisional Government to power, was regarded as an unfinished bourgeois revolution which had neither completely overthrown the old order nor fully established a democratic order. It had failed most abjectly in its refusal to abolish the landed aristocracy and to strengthen the peasantry and in its continuation of the War. Lenin's Bolshevik Government was pledged to peace and land reform, to achieving greater democracy, and at the same time to beginning to build socialism. Thus Lenin, while the fighting for the Winter Palace was still in progress, in an address to the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, declared enthusiastically:

We shall now proceed to build, on the space cleared of historical

rubbish, the airy, towering edifice of socialist society. A new type of state power is being created for the first time in history, a power that the will of the revolution has called upon to wipe out all exploitation, oppression and misery, the world over . . . From now on all the marvels of science and the gains of culture belong to the nation as a whole, and never again will man's brain and human genius be used for oppression and exploitation.<sup>1</sup>

The Bolshevik Government acted quickly to destroy the last remnants of Tsarism and feudalism. Within a month of taking power Lenin's Government had abolished landed estates, confirmed the peasant seizures of land, withdrawn Russia from the War, abolished titles and the classification of the population into estates, abolished the old courts, police, ministerial structure and even the dumas. It had also declared its support for the liberation of the oppressed nations of Russia and commenced to dismantle the Tsarist Empire. New governmental agencies replaced the old ones – a Council of People's Commissars responsible to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets replaced the Provisional Government, Workers and Peasants Soviets replaced the municipal dumas, elected People's Courts replaced the old courts, and soon a new police and army replaced the Tsarist agencies.

The honeymoon period lasted only until February 1918. Opposition to the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Germany resulted in the withdrawal of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and of some Bolsheviks from the government. Growing resistance to Bolshevik social and economic policies and methods produced open opposition and in July the outbreak of Civil War. Civil War combined with foreign intervention caused a rapid acceleration of military and police agencies and a reduction of popular participation in all areas of public life. During 1918 the early experiments with workers' control of factories and other economic agencies gave way to one-man management under the control of central bureaucratic agencies – War Communism. Most of the industry became nationalized and extensive rationing and control over the distribution of supplies and services produced an illusion of early achievement of communist equality. Towards the end of the Civil War mounting popular resistance to government economic policy caused the Bolshevik leadership to alter course and introduce the New Economic Policy in March 1921. This replaced the compulsory acquisition of grain surpluses by a tax in kind. Surplus grain could then be sold on the market. There was a partial return to private trading and small-scale manufacturing, a temporary retreat in economic policy. Despite the partial restoration of capitalism the state continued to control the

'commanding heights' of the economy – mining, large-scale manufacturing, banking, foreign trade, most transport and communications. And the government apparatus continued to grow. By 1923 Bolshevik leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky were becoming increasingly critical of Soviet bureaucracy and bureaucratism.<sup>2</sup> Lenin was particularly critical of the poor quality of Soviet officials and declared in 1923 that:

Our state apparatus, with the exception of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, represents in the highest degree a hang-over of the old one, subjected to only the slightest extent to any serious change.<sup>3</sup>

Did Lenin change his mind then about the possibility of building a socialist society in Russia? It seems unlikely, even though he became increasingly realistic about the difficulties of the task. Like most Russian socialists in 1917 he believed that bureaucracy was alien to socialism. In his work, *State and Revolution*, written in the autumn of 1917, Lenin had argued that the revolutionary workers could rule without the need for a special apparatus of repression, with only a very simple machinery of government. This belief was quickly modified. Thus in January 1921 in writing on 'The Party Crisis' Lenin conceded that:

A workers' state is an abstraction. What we actually have is a workers' state with this peculiarity, firstly, that it is not the working class but the peasant population that predominates in the country, and, secondly, that it is a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions.

But although this admission was followed by the partial retreat of the NEP, Lenin never ever conceded that the Mensheviks had been right in denying the possibility of building socialism in a backward and largely agrarian country. While the delay to the world revolution would cause a slowing down of the socialist revolution in Russia, it would not cause its abandonment. From early 1922 Lenin began to urge on the party the need to challenge the advance of capitalism in agriculture by pushing rapidly ahead with cooperative peasant farming and with state farms. He made his underlying confidence quite explicit in his article 'On Cooperation' in January 1923 when he wrote that:

As a matter of fact, the power of state over all large-scale means of production, the power of state in the hands of the proletariat,