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Ernest Mandel in Moscow

- Works -

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[The following introductory notes and remarks by Ernest Mandel were translated from the French manuscript for the Bulletin in Defense of Marxism by Stuart Brown.]

On January 18, in Moscow, at the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Russian edition of the magazine "Socialism of the Future" was presented to the media. It is a theoretical journal published by the Spanish, Italian, French, and German Social Democratic parties, bringing together in a pluralist forum representatives of various currents in the international workers' movement. The directors and editorial staff include in particular Mikhail Gorbachev ; Zdenek Mylnar, the former general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party during the period of the Prague Spring ; Adam Schaff, Polish Marxist expelled from the Communist Party during the 1980s ; Ota Sik ; Andre Gorz ; Ralph Miliband ; and Ernest Mandel, representing the Fourth International.

At this news conference, the journal was represented by Adam Schaff (initiator of the magazine), a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the USSR CP, Ernest Mandel, and Zdenek Mlynar.

The importance of the event lies in the fact that, for the first time since the expulsion of the Left Opposition in 1927-28, the Trotskyist political current as such is recognized in the USSR as a real and legitimate part of the workers' movement. This constitutes a step forward in the context of a renewed recognition of the importance of Trotsky's role in the history of the Soviet Union " and a step forward in the publication of his writings. Mandel demanded in his comments not only that all the writings of Trotsky and the principal leaders of the Soviet Left Opposition be published in the USSR, but also the main works by representatives of the Fourth International.

During his trip to Moscow, Mandel was given a long interview concerning Trotsky, Trotskyism, and the Fourth International by the weekly publication, "Argumenti i Fakti," which has the largest circulation of any newsweekly in the world ; almost 30 million copies. The theoretical review, "Dialog," which prints 400,000 copies, published an article by him concerning the organization of a democratic, self-managed, planned economy, in opposition to both the despotism of capitalist wealth and the despotism of the state. Mandel gave several lectures at scientific institutions and met with representatives of the principal left organizations in Moscow. We print here the text of the comments made by Ernest Mandel before the Soviet media :

Dear Friends and Comrades,

The Fourth International, in whose name I speak today, continues the fight of Lev Davidovich Trotsky and the other militants of the Left Opposition against bureaucratism and Stalinism, against capitalism, imperialism, and fascism. We pursue the struggle for emancipation and for direct democracy which inspired the October revolution. Stalin considered the Opposition to be his principle enemy. He assassinated all of its militants, practically without exception. He assassinated a million communists using the pretext of Trotskyism or of an alliance with Trotskyism. These are the crimes of counterrevolution, not the product of revolution.

Today, the historical truth about Trotsky and the Opposition is coming to light. This work, of moral and political importance, must be completed. We demand of the USSR's judicial authorities that they lift from Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov all the infamous accusations made against them as part of the verdict of the first Moscow trial in 1936. We demand that all the works of Trotsky and of other spokespeople of the Opposition be published in the USSR, as well as the principal writings by representatives of the Fourth International.

As a citizen of a country occupied by German imperialism in May 1940, as a militant from the first hours of the popular antifascist resistance in my my country, as a former prisoner of the Nazi camps, I consider it my duty to express here my recognition of and admiration for the indomitable courage of the Soviet army and the citizens and peoples of the Soviet Union, and for all the workers of Moscow, of Leningrad, and of besieged Stalingrad. Thanks to their heroic resistance the attempt at world domination by German imperialism under the Nazis failed. All humanity owes an eternal debt to these heroes and heroines. Hitler wanted to exterminate 100 million people in Central and Eastern Europe. There would have been additional millions in Africa and Asia if he had been able to break the resistance of the USSR. It is above all the Soviet Union which foiled this bloody and barbaric project.

The activities of the Soviet workers between 1941 and 1944 are the material and moral product of the October socialist revolution. Here that revolution finds an incontestable historic justification. But the bureaucrats who usurped and monopolized power from 1923 — who suffocated the real power of the Soviets, who strangled democracy within the Communist Party and the trade unions in order to defend their exorbitant material privileges — undermined and discredited the work of this great revolution.

They discredited it with their monstrous crimes against the communists, the workers, the peasants, the oppressed nationalities of the USSR, against the peoples of Eastern Europe, against the workers of many countries. They undermined it by suffocating the creative initiative of the masses and of the intellectuals, by a generalized irresponsibility and indifference in the economy. The failure of their "command economy" is obvious today for all to see. The economic, social, political, moral crisis which results is extremely grave.

Faced with this crisis, some call for the privatization of industry as the only possible alternative. They assert likewise that, without the predominance of the private sector, personal liberty, a state based on law, and democratic freedoms for the masses and for nationalities cannot be guaranteed. However, the experience of the capitalist world demonstrates that when private property is predominant, the great majority of working men and women are subject to the despotism of the wealthy. This is no less serious than the despotism of the state. The masses must, under these circumstances, submit to chronic or conjunctural unemployment, to the periodic lowering of wages, to material and moral misery as a result of decisions over which they have no control, which are imposed behind their backs. There are today, in those countries considered rich, 40 million unemployed. This will grow to 50 million during the course of the economic crisis which has already begun. More than 100 million live in poverty.

In the capitalist countries of the Third World, there are more than 100 million unemployed and a billion living in poverty. The attempt to impose a regime of private property in Poland has already brought about a 35 percent lowering of real wages, a grave decline in production, and a crushing poverty.

The politics of Reagan and of Mrs. Thatcher have produced in the United States and in Great Britain a graver economic crisis than in other countries. The gap between rich and poor has increased without letup during the last decade.

On a worldwide scale, this gap has grown even more. Between 1980 and 1988 the per capita income went down, in an absolute sense, in 62 countries totaling 808 million inhabitants. In Africa it is 50 times lower than in the USA. And it is certain that if the Soviet economy becomes privatized, the USSR will become a Third World country, not a Sweden or a Finland.

As the masses resist, sooner or later, against these abominations through their struggles — including with big strikes — the defenders of private property will have to use repression, restrictions on democratic liberties, just like open dictatorial regimes, in order to protect free enterprise. Private economy and the rights of men and women are, therefore, opposed to one another ; they are far from mutually reinforcing each other. Faced with these two dictatorships — of the state and of great capitalist wealth — we, socialists of the Fourth International, defend a third

path : one of a collective, self-managed, and democratically planned economy.

The meaning of this can be summed up in the idea that the masses of producers/consumers decide for themselves "after a democratic, public, open, pluralist debate" the broad priorities of what should be produced, how it should be produced, and how it should be distributed. The decisions on economic management should be imposed neither by the state nor by the market, but made consciously and democratically by the people themselves.

When we say "collective economy" we do not mean "state economy." We mean the power to make decisions resting in the hands of the producers/consumers. This means that one part of the product remains at the disposition of the workers of each enterprise ; another part goes to the citizens of each municipality, of each region, of each nationality, and to the country as a whole. But the decisions must be coordinated, and therefore planned "by industrial branch, by commune, by nationality, in the entire country" through democratic bodies elected from below.

This third path is not only more democratic than the dictatorship of the state or the dictatorship of wealth, it is also more efficient. It liberates an immense creative capacity, not only for a small minority of independent entrepreneurs (which only makes up a small percentage of the population in the West) but for the great majority. They will sense, finally "convinced by experience" that they are working for themselves and for their own, verifiable and measurable interests. To eliminate unemployment, to reduce the hours of work, to assure goods and consumer services of a high quality, to guarantee a rapid and honest distribution of goods : this will become the business of each and all.

The third economic model thus satisfies a moral requirement. This is not the least of its advantages. Men and women do not live by bread alone. In discrediting socialism, in demoralizing the workers and the masses, the Stalinist dictatorship created an immense moral and ideological void. Out of this void today arise cynicism, egoism, indifference, and scorn with regard to others "indeed criminality" as well as retrograde ideas which find their sustenance there : irrationalism, chauvinism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, racism. In the face of this unfurling of reactionary mentality, we reaffirm our belief in everything that is rational and generous in human nature, particularly cooperation and solidarity as fundamental qualities for the reconstruction of the economy, of society, and of the world. This has become literally a question of physical survival for humanity "since the struggle of each against all, egoism, thirst for private profit, contempt for others, are leading us directly to disaster : nuclear catastrophes, wars of extermination, ecological breakdowns, appalling misery in the Third World.

Each year 17 million children die of hunger or curable diseases. Every four years as many dead as during the Second World War. Every four years a world war against children. One hundred million children work in inhumane conditions, often approaching slavery. Solidarity, cooperation "even more, equality" must be extended to everyone, but above all to the most deprived. This means especially the sick, the disabled, the retired, single mothers, marginalized layers, the "new poor." On a world scale it means the most oppressed and persecuted, our brothers and sisters of South Africa, Central America, and Palestine. We must energetically condemn the war of the Western powers against Iraq. We must condemn the collaboration between the governments of the United States and the USSR which tolerate these two acts of aggression.

After a long period of persecution and isolation, the Fourth International is today recognized as a part of the workers' movement and of the "new social movements" in a series of countries, thanks to the role which we play within the mass movement. We have developed within these movements a profoundly unifying approach. We advocate unity in the struggle for common objectives, overcoming all the differences that separate the Communist parties on the one hand, and the Social Democratic parties on the other.

These differences deal with the duty of socialists to defend intransigently the interests of the workers, of women, of oppressed nationalities, of ethnic minorities, of the environment, and of peace "against anything which might harm

them. They deal with the duty of socialists to be intransigent defenders of democratic rights without restriction, notably against any limitation on the right to strike and freedom of the press. They concern the duty of socialists to stimulate the self-activity, the mobilization, the self-organization, and the democratic leadership of the masses, without subordination to any considerations of "realpolitik" or to the manipulations and hesitations of bureaucratic structures.

The confrontation of different ideas and strategies of struggle is inevitable under such conditions. But this prohibits neither unity in action nor dialogue. That is the reason I am participating in the publication of this magazine as a leader of the Fourth International. Without such an ongoing dialogue, our indispensable unity in action is impossible. That is why the confrontation over ideas and strategies must take place under conditions that exclude the utilization of violence and repression, of prohibitions against written works, of slander, of lies, of falsification of texts, of censorship "regarding anyone who is part of the workers' or mass movements. Respect for these principles is indispensable for the conquest of socialist democracy, of democratic socialism, or a real democratic soviet power elected on the basis of political pluralism.

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