

The Proposed C. P. Changes

By Robert Minor

"2. It seemed to me that every great Marxist writer from Marx to Palme Dutt, felt that the essence of capitalism was that capitalism cannot plan. Isn't Browder asking the nature of the beast to change when he assumes it can and will plan after this war?" [This is the second of seven questions asked by Mr. "One-who-thought-that-Communists - marched - breast-forward."]

The questioner appears on the surface to argue that the United States and Great Britain, being capitalist countries, cannot carry out the economic planning that we see in the Tehran agreement.

What he is really trying to show is that a world coalition of socialism and capitalism cannot plan.

But let us take him first on his own ground.

Is it true that "the essence of capitalism" is that "capitalism cannot plan"? No.

We often point out that capitalism is utterly unable to plan in such a manner as to eliminate crises in national or world economy. Especially we have emphasized that capitalism as contrasted with socialism cannot be rid of anarchy in production. We have rejected decisively the contentions of those who in the 1920's were arguing for a so-called theory of "organized capitalism," and those who, with Karl Kautsky, argued for the possibility of an "ultra-imperialism," meaning a system of organized relations between capitalist-imperialist states and cartels which would, according to Kautsky, probably be able to banish war from the world and enable capitalism to continue on a smooth road of history with internal and external peace.

But it is an absolutely different thing when one speaks of a supposed inability of capitalism to plan. Fifty-three years ago, in 1891, before the decisive beginnings of the modern imperialist epoch, when the German socialists spoke of "planlessness" (Planlosigkeit) as an attribute of capitalism, Engels proved conclusively the error of this view.

It has been considered so important by all Marxists since that time, that there is no lack of reference to it in the most modern of our Marxist literature. For instance, in 1916, in his famous work *Imperialism*, Lenin wrote that:

"When a big enterprise assumes gigantic proportions, and, on the basis of exact computation of mass data, organizes according to plan the supply of primary raw materials to the extent of two-thirds, or three-fourths of all that is necessary for tens of millions of people; when these raw materials are transported to the most suitable place of production, sometimes hundreds or thousands of miles away, in a systematic and organized manner; when a single center directs all the successive stages of work right up to the manufacture of numerous varieties of finished articles; when these products are distributed according to a single plan among tens of hundreds of millions of consumers (as in the case of the distribution of oil in America and Germany by the

American 'Standard Oil')—then it becomes evident that we have socialization of production, and not mere 'interlocking'; that private economic relations and private property relations constitute a shell which is no longer suitable for its contents, a shell which must-of necessity begin to decay if its destruction be postponed by artificial means . . ." (my emphasis). (Lenin: *Imperialism*; Selected Works, V. p. 118.)

It was not a casual notion by Engels in 1891, nor by Lenin in 1916, that one must get rid of the easy assumption that "capitalism cannot plan." Again in 1917 when this same question was again considered in the Soviet Union after the successful revolution—and it was considered from the point of view of the need to raise the economy of the new-born socialist state, Lenin repeated the same fundamental fact.

But these words of Lenin were written prior to the existence of the present enormous socialist state and socialist economy of Soviet Russia, and prior to all of the enormous events which have changed the old question "can capitalism plan" into the present-day form: Can a world economy which is mainly capitalist but which contains an enormous socialist sector, be brought into a degree of planning, by coordinating the socialist and capitalist sectors of world economy, sufficiently to permit a long-time enduring world peace based upon world economic stability?

The importance of the point of theory raised by Mr. "One-Who" is not that it stuck in his individual craw, but something much bigger.

The huge capitalist enterprises of our America and of Great Britain are now quite certain to move into the largest economic job ever undertaken, the job of aiding in the reconstruction "according to plan" of the economic life of the two most populous continents of the world. If it were true that "capitalism cannot plan"—in the very substantial degree and manner implied by the Tehran Agreement—then, of course, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin would be wrong and the whole world outlook would be extremely different.

But that is not the case, and we can make no concessions to the small middle-class view that is put forward here as "Marxism."

Mr. "One-Who" has the privilege of disagreeing with Engels and with Lenin, but not to attribute to Marxism the view that "capitalism cannot plan."

But having cleared up that general question—we have to get down to the concrete reality, not of 1891, not even of 1916 or 1917, in Lenin's time, and not even of 1940.

Speaking of what is possible now, in 1944, it is a question of planning of what, by whom?

It is a question of a planning of economic inter-relations of the world by the initiative and strength of three great powers. These three are Great Britain, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

No one believes that the planning and ordering of the world market could be accomplished if the Soviet Union were not included. That is to say, no one in the world believes now, under the concrete conditions of today in respect to the world market—that "capitalism [alone] will plan after this war."

Not only no Marxist believes it, but neither does any responsible business executive anywhere on

earth believe that the problem of planning concretely this present-day national or world economy can be successfully handled without the participation of Soviet Russia.

The Soviet Union is a socialist state, with a socialist economy extending from the borders of Central Europe to the Pacific Ocean. The strength of both the Socialist State and the socialist economy has been tested in the greatest strain ever exerted by military force; and has been proven to be impregnable and permanently so. The United States is, and will be after this war, a capitalist country stronger than any that ever existed in the world before. Great Britain will be the capitalist power of next greatest magnitude. The planning that could not be done by the United States and Britain is to be done and can be done by the joint efforts of the three powers that made the agreement at Tehran.

The part in the planning that is taken by the United States and Great Britain will not be socialism; it will be the hardest-boiled capitalism, but at its highest degree of capitalist planning. Since opportunists falsely claim that a growth of state capitalism within a capitalist country is the development of a form of socialism which they called "war socialism," we will head this off by finishing the unfinished sentence in our foregoing quotation from Lenin. He completed the sentence by saying—"a shell which may continue in a state of decay for a fairly long period (particularly if the cure of the opportunist abscess is protracted) but which must inevitably be removed."

But here we have an example of the need to quote Marxists not independently of changes in the world of reality, but always in connection with the situation in the real world. For in the enormously changed situation of today the opportunists and all corrupt elements are fighting openly or by indirection against the Tehran agreement; and their contention is, not that such planning as capitalism accomplishes is "socialism," but that "capitalism cannot plan" in a coalition with a socialist state.

When Mr. "One-Who" speaks of "expecting the nature of the beast to change"—what is he really driving at? He means that the nature of the problem is not changed by the presence of a great Socialist state. But the only unchangeable thing in nature and society is the constant, inescapable, eternal process of change. This applies even to beasts. But when it comes to human societies, it is still more immediate—a lack of change in the world today is the only impossibility. Mr. "One-Who" means to say, of course, not that "capitalism cannot plan," but that the presence of a great socialist state—and the alliance of that socialist state with the strongest capitalist states does not make an effective difference in the matter of the human race to plan the economy and politics of nations jointly. He is mistaken.

The next question to be answered in Friday's Daily Worker, is the third of the seven asked by Mr. "One-Who"—"What has happened, then, to the contradictions of capitalism? If suddenly the best monopoly capitalists (contradiction in terms!) are going to work happily together? Are they? Does that mean we ACCEPT cartels?"

Answers
to
Questions