

Reflecting on the Soviet Union on the 30th anniversary of its dissolution

Editorial Board of *Revolutionary Marxism*

Thirty years ago, on 26 December to be exact, the USSR was declared dissolved by its constituent nations, the republics that formed the *Soyuz*. This was the pacific counter revolution that then started a chain reaction of radical transmutation, leading to the unwinding of all the characteristics that made it possible to attribute to the Soviet Union and hence to its constituent republics the character of a workers' state, albeit under the distortions and convolutions of a heavy-handed bureaucratic degeneration.

The republics that dispersed in different directions as so many scattered glass marbles took very different roads into the future. To the west, the Baltic republics joined the former workers' states in Eastern Europe to access the European Union and thus shed almost the smallest trace of a workers' state even in the form of a relic of a bygone era. To the east, the central Asian Turkic and Persian speaking peoples were subjected to the despotism of the previous supposedly "communist" leaders of each republic, despotisms that became even more absolutist than at any time in the 20th century now that they were released from any restrictions imposed by a

multinational federation with progressive features whatever the political forms that imposed severe limitations on democracy, imposed by none other than the bureaucracy. In only one country, Kyrgyzstan, was there any alternation of political power, but that was the work of mafia gangs mingled with political factions to engage in successive instances of the violent overthrow of the previous clique, which itself had come to power through the same method. The dictators of the others simply ruled pretty much in the same half-comical, half-tragic style into which the rule of the Kim family had already degenerated in North Korea over the decades. However, this was the worst of both worlds, since none of the gains for the working class that still to a certain extent exist in North Korea any longer existed in the former Soviet republics.

As opposed to the uniformity of the marchlands to the west and to the east, the itineraries adopted by the republics of the original heartland of the USSR, i.e. the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and the three states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in Transcaucasia, widely diverged over the decades. As a most unfortunate replay of historical precedent, the Armenians and Azeris fought each other rather than class struggle, as has happened each time there has been a major crisis within the Caucasus or in the region at large since the beginning of the 20th century. However, the overall path of development of the region was stamped by the imperialistic strategy implemented in unison by the United States and the European Union of provoking enmity between the smaller republics and the Russian Federation even under the obliging pro-imperialist rule of Yeltsin in the 1990s, but more markedly face to the tough stance of Putin in the 21st century.

The most important results were the so-called color revolutions in Georgia (the so-called “Rose Revolution” of 2003) and Ukraine (the so-called “Orange Revolution” of 2004-2005), the Russia-Georgia war of 2008, which left Georgia in scars, the Maidan uprising of 2014 and Russia’s counter moves of annexation of the Crimean Peninsula on the Black Sea and underhanded support extended to the establishment of newly-formed “People’s Republics” in Donetsk and Lugansk in the Donbass in eastern Ukraine. Belarus on the other hand has remained to this day in limbo under the heavy-handed despotic regime of Lukashenka, trying to weld capitalist socio-economic relations with the state forms of earlier Soviet times.

Despite this diversity in state forms, regimes and the place of the countries in question in the geostrategic chessboard, one fact stands out with indubitable clarity: the restoration of capitalism has been the engine which has molded social relations in all of the republics. Thus, whatever differences exist especially with respect to relations with the imperialist powers, a question of considerable importance in deciding the future of the region, the overriding movement, the one with decisive historical impact regionally and internationally, is the fact that, in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the fruits of the October revolution of 1917 and, in particular, the socio-economic forms of a society in transition to socialism have been eradicated. The latter rose on the back of the public nature of property in the major means of production and distribution, the prohibition of the use of wage-

labor by private economic agents for the purpose of profit-making, the dominance of central planning over the market, the protection of the domestic market of the Soviet space from the direct determination of the law of value through diverse means, in particular through the monopoly of trade, severance of links with international bourses etc., and, most importantly, the elimination of the character of labor power as a commodity through full employment.

In short, the dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in the collapse of the workers' state and the society in transition to socialism over the entire former Soviet space albeit in different modalities and at a different pace in each case. This did not always come about in swift and peaceful fashion. The most important incident that symbolized the counter revolution that was unfolding was the shelling and storming of the Russian Supreme Soviet by the army on 4 October 1993. Then president Yeltsin dissolved the Supreme Soviet (acting as the legislative arm of the Russian Federation at that stage) in September 1993 although he had no authority to do so. In response the leaders of the Supreme Soviet took over the building of parliament, impeached the president and proclaimed Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi acting president. To this Yeltsin retaliated by ordering the army to bomb and storm the parliament building. The ten-day conflict, which brought Russia to the brink of civil war, saw a lot of street-fighting, and cost the lives of hundreds of people, ended in a victory for Yeltsin, i.e. the unabashed counter revolutionary party. This was the apogee of the counter revolutionary process that the Russian Federation, the largest and key republic of the former Soviet Union, was going through after the break-up of the Soviet Union. In other words, the dissolution of the *Soyuz* brought in its wake the dissolution of the major gift of the October revolution to world history, the soviet as an organ of workers' rule. Thus was undone the fundamental instance of the workers' state established by the October revolution, led by the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. This is the historic significance of the dissolution of the USSR 30 years ago on 26 December.

This much is crystal clear. What is, or rather should be, a matter for research and reflection is why the Russian and, more generally, the Soviet proletariat did not roll up their sleeves and start a fight to stop the restoration of capitalism in the first homeland of socialism, despite all the socio-economic benefits that the October revolution and the state born of that revolution brought them, benefits they had enjoyed, throughout generations, over seven and a half decades, benefits that had become a way of life for the Soviet working-class family, benefits the like of which had never ever been experienced in any of the much more economically advanced countries that lived under capitalism. This is perhaps the fundamental question for Marxists if we are to achieve new revolutions in the 21st century and thereupon set to work with the aim of building socialism once again, but this time without the threatening pitfalls and unsurpassable barriers of the experiences of the precedents of the 20th century.

Phenomenally, the international left is simply looking the other way. In the more than three decades that capitalist restoration has wrought its extremely brutal ravag-

es on the previous workers' states, serious attempts at explaining the unravelling of the 20th century socialist experiments in building socialism are almost nonexistent. More importantly, there is not one that can be regarded as a theoretical explanation that comes from quarters that used to propagate *ad nauseam* the idea that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was the leading force of "international communism". It was this self-same party that acted as the leader of, not international communism, but the restoration of capitalism! The same, it should also be remembered, has turned out to be true for the arch-enemy of this party in the so-called communist camp, the Chinese Communist Party, which is still, to this day, overseeing the restoration of capitalism over the ruins of the Chinese village commune, the provincial light industry and the "iron rice bowl" of the earlier workers' state. How shameful of those bigmouths, enjoying then the luxury of the lifestyle of the Soviet and other nomenklaturas and chanting the achievements of the supposedly communist parties that was their instrument, to keep absolutely silent today! How shameful is the deafening silence of the entire intelligentsia of the so-called communist parties of the imperialist countries and the dependent ones in the capitalist world, who vaunted vociferously the virtues of the Soviet Union before the fall! Does this silence not give away who really is responsible for the collapse of 20th century socialism?

Revolutionary Marxism and its Turkish language mother publication *Devrimci Marksizm* did not keep silent when confronted with this crime against the proletariat and humanity at large. We have taken the question of the dissolution and collapse of the Soviet Union and the more general collapse of workers' states internationally and the elemental restoration of capitalism in countries such as China persistently and systematically, more so in the Turkish quarterly publication than in the annual English version for sheer lack of space in the latter. We devoted some issues entirely to this question, whether it be the collapse of socialism in the land of the October revolution or the gradual and elemental destruction of the workers' state in China. On this 30th anniversary of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a watershed moment in our present epoch, we also devote a dossier to the question of the fall of the Soviet state, its uniqueness in modern history, the underlying causes for its collapse, and its prospects for the future.

The first piece of this dossier is a text of historic importance. As opposed to all the braggarts and bigmouths of the pre-1991 period who lied endlessly then and sank into shameful silence now after the fall, Iosif Grigorievitch Abramson, an intellectual who personally experienced both the grandeur of the first proletarian state and the first experiment of a centrally-planned society, on the one hand, and the hideous and disgraceful repression of communist cadres and workers and the abandonment of the path of world revolution by Lenin's party, on the other, has been reflecting on and dissecting the cells of the first (and most advanced) workers' state for three decades since the collapse. We are honored to publish here his conclusions on the objective and subjective causes that led to the dismemberment and destruction of his socialist homeland. Here is a man who lived as a communist under the Soviet state for decades and who now looks back critically to understand the entire experience so that future generations do not repeat the same mistakes. One may or

may not agree with his overall assessment. However, here is the quintessence of the Marxist attitude to life: wrestling earnestly and in good faith with the complications of the real world, Iosif Grigorievitch is trying to unearth the long-hidden vices of the Soviet leadership. The honesty, coupled with courage and perceptiveness, makes Iosif Grigorievitch a role model for younger Marxists. We are proud to have a comrade like Abramson.

The other two articles by our comrades Savas Michael-Matsas and Sungur Savran are both the texts of presentations made at a conference held in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) in November. The one by Michael-Matsas proceeds from the past to the future in terms of the character of our epoch and of the Soviet state to conclude that the latter is still of actual importance on the world scale and will be so in the future. Sungur Savran points to the unique quality of the USSR as a state without a nation and comes to the conclusion that it is the form best adapted to the internationalist program of the welding and fusion of nations in the transition to a classless society.

