CHAPTER VI : SOCIALISM IN USSR

1. Hegelism in Russian Soil

Hegel's interpretation of history strongly influenced the nationalist movements that had raged over Europe during the middle of the nineteenth century. For Hegel, the realization of self-conscious reason found its fulfillment in the collectivity of state or nation. History is a process in which at different stages different nations assume positive and progressive roles and overcome opposition from other states. At each stage a particular nation is the decisive carrier of the world-spirit and of world progress. Thus, the nation assumes a peculiar importance in Hegelian philosophy. Russian Slavophils found themselves to be destined for this historical role.

During the 19th century along with the conception of the unity of the Slav world went the demand that Russia would be the liberator, the protector and the unifier of the Slav-speaking race. The Russian Slavophils advocated the superiority of Russia and of the Slav race because of the purity of the Orthodox Greek Church. But later on, the Slavophils combined the theme of Hegel that various nations appear in succession on the historical stage as the bearer of world Spirit with the German idea of separate cultural historical types and fourfold cultural historical activity. Russia will predominate over other nations as she has developed all the four spheres of historical activity, viz., religious, cultural, political and socio-economic. Thus the burden of pan-Slavism became firstly to unify the Slavic race and secondly, to emerge as the leader of nations.

While the pan-Slavic movement drawing inspiration from the doctrine of world-historical nation emphasized the Messianic role of the Tsar, revolutionary ideas derived from Hegelian dialectics flowed into Russia and fertilized the soil for new vegetation. Russian Westernizers like Belinsky, Bakunin and Herzen discovered in the dialectical law the theoretical support for "the historical necessity" of ending Tsarist despotism and reviving human rights and laws in accord with
reason and justice. In 1837 Belinsky and Bakunin read Hegel and Belinsky wrote:

"A new world opened before us — might is right! No, I cannot describe to you with what emotion I heard these words — it was a liberation. I understood the idea of the fall of the empires, the legitimacy of conquests; I understood that there is no wild material force, no rule of the bayonet and of the sword, no arbitrariness, no contingency — and my worry for the fate of mankind was ended and the significance of my fatherland appeared to me in a new shape. The world "reality" became for me synonymous with the word God. Man can live: everything in him, every moment of his life is great, true and sane." ¹

The same stream widened into the anarchist agitation for the overthrow of Tsarism. The leaders of the Nihilist movement found a scientific explanation of political revolutions in Hegel's dialectic. Hegel saw an intelligent development in the physical universe and in human society. The law of this development which is called the dialectics made not even the Prussian monarchy a perfect state. The law of dialectics and inevitable progress will allow permanence or perfection to any system or institution. Russian revolutionaries who demanded the overthrow of the Tsar thus found a philosophical justification to replace Tsarism by a new system.

The revolutionary import of Hegelian ideology was stamped not only on the national movements of Russia but was incorporated in the Marxian philosophy itself which later became the creed of the Russian revolution. Marx accepted Hegelian dialectics and his thought was the climax of the Left Hegelian movement. The Left Hegelians, while remaining loyal to Hegelian idealism, sought the explanation of the gospel and of religious dogma not in any divine inspiration but in the social milieu. The philosophical predecessors of Karl Marx from Strauss to Feuerbach gave a socio-economic interpretation of religion and Feuerbach, the philosophical archrebel of the forties was the

intellectual leader of Marx and Engels.¹ Marx agreed with Feuerbach that man is the measure of all truths. But it is not abstract or essential man but man in class, in material conditions of life who is the instrument of struggle and progress. Thus, unlike his left-Hegelian predecessors Marx made a fuller application of dialectics in social progress.

2. From Marx to Stalin

The U.S.S.R. is claimed as the land where the first successful experiment of communism has been made under the successive leadership of Lenin and Stalin. But both of them had to put some new interpretations to Marxian doctrines and change them in some fundamental matters to suit the situations of their time.

In the wake of the democratic revolutions of the mid-nineteenth century Marx foresaw a series of social revolutions coming as surely as the former as a result of the contradictions of capitalism. The contradiction and crisis of capitalism become acute in the industrially developed countries getting ripe for change because the law of dialectics demands that capitalism should grow fully and that only when it has exhausted its possibilities will come the time for social revolution. Marx visualised a world revolution which would destroy the capitalist system and predicted that the first assault would come in a country like Germany where capitalism had matured.

Hence the organization of the working class should spread its ramifications all over the world. They would be enlightened and militarised by waging an incessant class struggle in their own countries through the trade unions and other mass organizations. Marx hoped that if a social revolution could be victorious in one country, a chain of revolutions would follow as a matter of course in the rest of the world. With this end in view he formed the First Communist International which was to unite the workers in the leading European countries and create the primary condition

¹. See ante, pp.18f.
for the emancipation of the world proletariat from the bondage of slavery and oppression.

In the twentieth century when the clouds of imperialist war had thickened over the horizon of Europe Lenin wrote his classic analysis of imperialism and set forth a new theory according to which a highly industrial country is no longer considered as the birthplace of revolution; revolution rather is the breaking of the chain of the world imperialist front at its weakest link. The proletariat can easily break this chain in alliance with the peasantry and the other toiling and exploited masses. He found in Russia all the explosive elements needed for a social upheaval. There was feudal tyranny, exploitation of imperialist finance capital, military oppression, enslavement of nationalities. But inspite of his correct assessment of imperialism and the Russian situation Lenin, like Marx, underrated the longevity of capitalism. In the eyes of the Bolshevik leaders Russian revolution was only the beginning of a series of social revolutions in other countries and Lenin proclaimed his conviction that "we stand in the vestibule of the world-wide proletarian revolution." In 1919 Zinoviev went further to prophecy that in a year the whole of Europe would become communist. The failure of revolution in Germany gave the quietus to such expectations and the Bolshevik leaders were confronted after Lenin's death with a controversy which shattered the unity of the party. Trotsky fanatically clung to the dogma of world revolution on the grounds that a socialist society encircled by capitalist countries could not survive, that the conditions in Russia were not yet ripe for social revolution and lastly that the problem of socialist revolution is international in essence. Unaided by revolutions abroad, the ignorance and backwardness of Russian masses are bound to lead back to privilege and inequality and to strengthen the state, with its army and police, as a bulwark for the privileged class. In opposition to Trotsky's theory of 'Permanent Revolution' Stalin

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1. V.I. Lenin: Imperialism, the Last Stage of Capitalism, 1916
2. Leon Trotsky: The Revolution Betrayed, Trans. by Max Eastman
believed that the Soviet Union could construct its national economy by its own efforts and that an isolated socialist country could survive without revolution in other capitalist countries. He even claimed that socialism stabilized in the USSR will accelerate the pace of world revolution. The Party had to 'consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat', i.e., to strengthen the state machinery and the Party's control over it in order to use the Soviet state as a base for the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism.

The texts of Marx and Lenin though not very clear on this point are nearer to the viewpoint of Trotsky than of Stalin. For, like his predecessors, Trotsky minimised the vitality of capitalism and shared their optimism, even after there was no ground for it, that proletarian revolutions will follow all over the world on the wake of the first. Since then, revolutionary communism has virtually disappeared from Europe. Instead of launching an offensive, communism had to turn on the defence. Stalin's thesis of 'socialism in one country' was accepted in the Party Congress of 1925 and thenceforth Bolshevism or Russian communism made a fresh departure from Marxist theory. The proletarian state, instead of preparing its own demise, had to grow into a political colossus strong enough to absorb the shock of world imperialism. And its allies were not, as Marx had calculated, other proletarian states, because no other, there were no other, but communists of other countries claiming to be parties of the proletariat.

3. State Plans and Socialism

The Soviet state emerged from War Communism with an economy shattered by famine, civil war and low production. The attempt to reconstruct national economy on a socialist basis and to liquidate capital by a stroke of pen had failed miserably. The big agricultural interests were strong and the burden undertaken by the party and the state was too heavy for them to bear. An alarming decline in production due to subdivision of agricultural land and disparity between the

1. Joseph Stalin: The Foundations of Leninism
prices of industrial and agricultural products, together with peasant outbreaks and the revolt among the sailors in the Soviet fleet forced Lenin in 1921 to adopt the New Economic Policy. It was a retreat to capitalism while keeping the way open for advance towards socialism. Farm lands were restored and the peasants were allowed to sell their produce in open market. Retail traders resumed their buying and selling for profit. Private enterprise on small scale manufactures was tolerated, the banking and credit system was restored. The state, on the contrary, retained in its hands foreign trade, banks, mines, forests, railways and the heavy industries. The concessions made to individual initiative were, however, provisional and during the period of 1921-31 the state completely liquidated the Nepmen and the Kulaks and dominated all industries big and small.

In sphere of large-scale industry, mines, forests, railways, etc. were owned and operated by state agencies. The elimination of the capitalists necessitated the creation of a new structure for the nationalized industries. They were organized on the basis of trusts which were associations of factories. The trusts enjoyed autonomy in the commercial and economic sphere but subject to the control of the State Supreme Economic Council. These trusts combined to set up common marketing organizations termed Syndicates. Subsequently, they were assigned the task of carrying out the state programme of production. Industry was financed from three sources -- the trusts, the banks and state subsidies. If there was profit a percentage was taken by the state so as to utilise the profit of one industry for the object of financing the others.

These measures could not offset the fall of production consequent of the Revolution. In order to step up production, to make the USSR self-sufficient in essential commodities and to extend the sphere of socialist economy the State Planning Commission was set up and the first Five Year Plan was started in 1928.

The aims of the Soviet state plan are "increasing the public wealth", "raising the material and cultural standards of the working
people", "consolidating the independence of the USSR" and "strengthening its defensive capacity." During the first two Five Year Plans the people had to suffer tremendous hardships and forego consumption goods so as to harness all available resources for the production of much-needed capital goods. As a result, the condition of the peasants and the workers during the first decade sank down to a very low level. The weakness of the USSR lay in its economic backwardness arising out of technical deficiency. The new slogans, therefore, were for mastery of technique and for labour as a patriotic duty. Now the reconstruction of the Soviet economy on an industrialised basis and a corresponding rise in the standard of living of the masses have been achieved. Further, the planned economy has eradicated one principal evil of capitalist system, viz., periodical crisis of production and mass unemployment. "The war has been won, unemployment has been conquered, the growing productivity of the Soviet Union stands in startling contrast to the deliberate organization of scarcity in the capitalist countries."  

The economic achievement of the USSR may be understood from the following comparative figures.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UK (million pounds)</th>
<th>USA (million dollars)</th>
<th>USSR (million roubles)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>4178</td>
<td>87,355</td>
<td>28,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>5980</td>
<td>81,347</td>
<td>128,300</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Index of Industrial Production</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>135</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vast economic achievements registered by the state plans have not, however, gone to establish a workers' state. This is evident from

1. Constitution of the USSR, 1936, Art.11
the position of the workers in the 'triangle of factory control'.
The triangle consists of the manager, the Communist party members
and the trade unionists representing the factory workers. No
control over the management is exercised by the trade union. The party
members implement the policy of the party with ruthless vigour.

The most momentous change produced by the Bolsheviks is in the
sphere of agriculture. During the first phase of the agrarian revolu­
tion the landlords were expropriated and land was given to the occupa­
tion of the peasants. This had resulted in a deadlock in agricultural
production which was ended by the second agrarian reform. In 1929
the decision was taken to collectivize peasant farming. Lands were
taken away from individual farmers and entrusted to the group. Three
types of collective farms were set up representing three different
degrees of collective economy. The first is an association of peasants
(kolkhoz) who collectively cultivate their land in common but privately
own their animals. The second is an association of members (artel)
who share not only labour but capital, implements and farm buildings.
Thus land, labour and capital are collectivized while dwelling houses
and other necessary things for livelihood remain in private possession.
The third (commune) collectivizes all branches of rural economy. It
is the most advanced type as here production and distribution are
collectivized.

Obviously, the collective farms are not socialist institutions
as claimed in the constitution (Art. 7). For they are not state but
cooperative undertakings and the land is vested in a group of coopera­
tive producers who enjoy the profits which are earned. Nor are the
collective farms communist institutions because payments are based on
the work performed, not on the workers' need. Further, the differential
advantage that springs from climate, soil, size and other factors
gives rise to inequality among the collective farms. A wide variation
of income exists among them. There are also state farms where labourers
work on pay run on a fully socialist basis. But they constitute only a
very small percentage of the total agricultural land and show no sign
of expanding. Here also payment is not according to need. The constitu­
tion has revised the very principle of socialism into "from each
according to his ability, to each according to his work" (Art. 12).

Progress towards economic equality has not been commensurate with prosperity and sociali sm. There is large inequality of income not merely in agriculture and industries but also in the state services. Totalitarianism, militarization and technological development are leading towards a managerial system in which authority is concentrated in the hands of a few managers, i.e., military, technical and administrative experts. There is wide disparity of salary and other amenities between these experts and common man. According to several observers, the managerial system has come in Russia to replace both the capitalist and the socialist systems.1

4. Soviet Constitution and Democracy

The foundation of the present Soviet state was laid by the constitution of 1936 which, according to Stalin and the Communist party, marks the transition from proletarian dictatorship to democracy. The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics is a federal state formed on the basis of voluntary union of Socialist Republics which have equal rights. Every Union Republic has the right to secede (Art. 17). The highest organ of state power is the Supreme Soviet by which the legislative power of the USSR is exercised exclusively. This federal parliament consists of two chambers with equal rights: Soviet of the Union elected by citizens voting on election districts and Soviet of Nationalities elected by citizens voting by Union Republics, Autonomous Republics, Autonomous Regions and National Areas. The highest organ of executive and administrative power is the Council of Ministers appointed by the Supreme Soviet who direct and control the Union Republics and can even "suspend decisions and orders of the Council of Ministers of the Union Republics" (Art. 69). Similarly, the Council of Ministers of a Union Republic has the right to suspend decisional and orders of the Council of Ministers of its Autonomous Republics (Art. 82). Thus the control comes from the top to the bottom. Although the Supreme Soviet is the creation of the lower soviets the latter are fully controlled by the former.

1. Burnham : The Managerial Revolution
The system is known as democratic centralism in which the authority of the party is fully assured. The soviets are built on the same hierarchical principle as the party itself. They constitute a structural power pyramid. At the base are the city and village soviets, over which rise successively the administrative territorial tiers of the districts and areas, regions or territories and autonomous republics, constituent republics and the central all-Union organs. There are elections at four stages: first, the electors choosing their village and city soviets; second, the plenums of the village and city soviets electing their own executive organs as well as delegates to the district congress; third, the district congress electing a district executive committee and delegates to the territorial or regional congress; fourth, territorial and regional congresses electing their executive committees and delegates to the congress of soviets of the constituent republic and to the all-Union Congress of Soviets.

The elections are conducted and the candidates are proposed in the name of a "bloc of communists and non-party people" and it is repeatedly emphasized that only candidates devoted to the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideology should be put up. Electoral areas for election to the Council of Union are established on the basis of 300,000 people to each area (Art.34). Electoral areas for election to the Council of Nationalities are set up as follows: 25 areas in each Union Republic, 11 areas in each Autonomous Republic, 5 areas in each Autonomous Region and 1 in each National Area (Art.35). The competence of the local soviets is strictly local and in fundamental aspects is much controlled by the higher or federal organs.

Marx and Lenin emphasized the necessity of proletarian dictatorship to overcome bourgeois habits, traditions and influence. But the top control system of the Russian constitution is actually the Communist Party control. As Stalin has admitted, the dictatorship of the proletariat is substantially the dictatorship of the Communist Party as the force which guides the proletariat. In the Soviet constitution the dominant position of this single party is left unimpaired (Art.126).

1. J. Stalin: Leninism, p.138
Thus although the Soviet political structure has been reconstructed on a broader basis and the 'basic rights' of citizens comprise the right to work, the right to rest and leisure, the right to maintenance in old age and in sickness, the right to education, the right to equality in all spheres of life irrespective of nationality or race and sex, the right of religious worships and of anti-religious propaganda, freedom of speech, of assembly, of street processions and demonstrations, the right to unite in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in the trade unions, cooperative societies, cultural associations and in other public organizations and the right to inviolability of the persons and of the homes; yet no other party except the Communist Party can exist or place an election candidate, none can criticise the policy of the politburo, there is no liberty to change the government by peaceful and constitutional means. It is not possible to advocate views which are not in agreement with the state policy. The well-known democratic means of safeguarding the liberty of the individual against the absolutism of the government, viz., separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, multi-party system, etc., are conspicuous by their absence. In intellectual and cultural fields the Party and the Government have sought to take up a policy which may soon lead to a dull uniformity. The economic revolution of the USSR has been achieved at the cost of fundamental political rights. In respect of its one party totalitarianism it bears a close resemblance to the fascist state and consequently has not appeared as an ideal system to all socialists in other countries.

But it will be wrong to carry the analogy between Bolshevism and fascism any farther. The Soviet constitution has assured popular participation not in the framing but in the implementation of policy. Popular criticism of bureaucratic mistakes or slackness is allowed. With universal suffrage the proletarian or the party dictatorship is leading towards identity of interests between state and the people.

1. Now Party Presidium
party and the masses, Union and Nationalities, community and individuals.

The ideology of Soviet communism is built up on the four pillars of socialism, productivity, external safety and expansion. These, it is believed, will inevitably lead to the victory of socialism all over the world, end of state and complete individual liberty. According to the latest policy statements of Stalin and the Russian politburo (October, 1952) signs of this development are already visible. The gigantic fabric of the economy of USA is now built up on universal exploitation. It is bound to accentuate the jealousy of the other capitalist states and lead to open hostility. The mounting threat of economic crisis and unemployment is staved off by keeping up an anti-Soviet campaign and by resorting to feverish war preparation. War or no war, this system is bound to collapse under the pressure of its own contradiction. Till this situation is reached there cannot be any more freedom in the Communist camp than is given now. Till then all nations will have to choose between political liberty and economic democracy. The Russian people have made their choice.

5. Revision of Marxian Communism

Marx wrote in the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy that "no social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed, and new higher relations of production never appear before the conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society." Plekhanov and the old Marxists of Russia believed in this doctrine and held that if the proletariat were to be the vanguard of the socialist revolution, they must first become the most numerous class in Russia. The orthodox Marxists, therefore, argued that the Party should support the bourgeois revolution, accelerate the pace of industrialization under its aegis and then, after a numerous and conscious proletarian force was created, should overthrow the bourgeoisie and bring about the proletarian revolution.

But Lenin who was more a practical politician than a philosopher cast aside orthodox Marxism and hastened the pace of revolution. He...
wanted to drive it to success and then to force the pace of indus-
trialization without which, according to Marx, a proletarian state
cannot exist. "They first capture the 'superstructure' and then use
it to transform the 'foundation'— so that 'proletarian revolution',
from being an effect of mature industrialism, becomes the prelude to
it." Stalin's thesis of 'socialism in one country' and the Five Year
Plans are recognition of this inversion of the dialectical social
process. Thus, the Marxian doctrine of economic determinism was tacitly
dropped, though lip service was still paid to it, for political
determinism.

Accordingly, Soviet Communism passed through another spell of
transformation during the stress and strain of the second world war.
The much ridiculed 'phantasies' of State, Nation and Church were ex-
tolled and taken back in the Soviet system. The Communist International
was dissolved and Stalin proclaimed that revolutions cannot be exported
across the frontier. On July 30, 1942, when Russia was attacked by the
Nazis he voiced the national patriotic feeling by calling upon the
people to be inspired by "the daring spirit of our great ancestors"
and by setting as examples heroes of the feudal past. Anti-religious
propaganda was suspended and the role of Christianity in Russian
history was appreciated. In 1943, the Orthodox Church was officially
recognized. The patriarch was ceremoniously installed in Moscow Cath-
dral. His successor, Alexei ordered the churches to offer prayers
"for the health and well-being of the God-sent leader of the peoples
of our Christ-loving nation".

In 1935 Stalin restored the titles and decorations of the bour-
geois regime. He himself assumed the title of Marshal and gave back
to the officers the gold-braided uniforms of the Tsarist times. Co-
education was abolished in schools and girls were educated for mother-
hood. In education, emphasis was laid on family and authority.

Communist Parties outside the USSR toed the line with this new
trend. Emphasis on tradition and patriotism did not sever the inter-
national bond of Communism. The Comintern was replaced by the Cominform.

1. John Plamenatz: German Marxism and Russian Communism, London,
1954, p.238
which was announced as a bureau of information for Communist Parties. But the aggressive tactics of international communism was modified and the theory of co-existence between capitalism and communism has been pushed with renewed vigour since the death of Stalin. Taken at the word, it means a complete burial of Marxism. It appears, however, rather like diplomatic verbiage under the garb of theoretical conviction.

Whatever be in store of the future it is obvious that Russian socialism has not developed on the lines visualised by Marx. Both Lenin and Stalin have deviated from the Marxian course because the world situation has changed conspicuously since Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto and the Capital. Due to the uneven development of capitalism the pace and nature of the socialist movement have differed in each country. Each country has been set its own problems and socialism has been called upon to solve it in its own way. Thus, socialism is confined within national borders, adjusting itself to national needs and losing extra-territorial influence. Lenin's conception of moribund capitalism appears to be now an empty verbiage, for capitalism is still strong after thirty-six years of Lenin's prophecy. The growth of privileged classes among the proletariat and the remarkable power of recovery and readjustment shown by the capitalist class have retarded the decay of capitalism. The leaders and expounders of communism to-day have changed their policy and tactics not to follow the strictly Marxian line but to suit the exigencies of its time and situation.