

Raymond Lotta: Concluding Remarks

I want to try to briefly answer some of the questions that were raised, and then try in the time I have remaining to make some concluding remarks. First, someone asked about the difference between social surplus and surplus value. This is a very complex issue that would have to be more deeply examined than time permits. I do think, however, the way to approach this question is that the surplus product of a society is a materialization of surplus value if it is the embodiment of a certain process, and that process is the expansion of value as an end in itself. That has real consequences in terms of the very starting and end point of the circuit of capital, which is to say, that means of production and labor are combined with each other only insofar as they serve the self-expansion of capital. In other words, all of the elements of the productive process must first be transformed into capital to become elements in the process of capital expansion, and that is mediated by exchange — between capitals and between capital and labor. The surplus product embodies an objective process that's going on in society. The surplus product in the Soviet Union is expressed financially as net national income. But what that actually expresses is surplus value: the whole dynamic of society is that investment decisions and the combination of means of production with labor power are determined by the ex-

pansion of value. This means, as I have said in the earlier part of my presentation, that it is not the planned creation of use values and the conscious allocation of labor to serve the goals of proletarian revolution worldwide that dominates the production process, but something else, something entirely different, even though both dynamics result in a physical thing.

The key point to grasp here is that in all societies some mechanism must regulate the production of a surplus. But in a socialist society, once the mere production of the surplus as an end in itself becomes the overriding concern, once the question of doing it in the most efficient way, i.e., anything goes, then what is happening is that the conscious organization and allocation of social labor is giving way to something else. So I believe that's a starting point for making an analytic distinction between the existence of a surplus that embodies surplus value and a surplus product that will be produced in a socialist society, which is the product of a different dynamic, the dominance of the labor process over the expansion of value as an end in itself.

Several questions were raised concerning the policies of Lenin and Stalin. It's very difficult in five minutes to go into this. I would only urge people very strongly to study what I believe is a seminal document dealing with these questions, which is *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will* by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party. But with respect to some of the specific questions raised: First, someone asked whether I agreed with Lenin's positive appraisal of the Taylor system. Do I think that was wrong? Yes, I do. Because the Taylor system represents, as anyone who's seen *Modern Times* by Charlie Chaplin can attest, the domination of living labor by dead labor, the subordination of the human to the machine. The Taylor system was developed with mass production lines, it's a cost-effectiveness organization of the labor process (subdividing it into its smallest units of work) which brings the dead labor into a position of dominating living labor. Now Lenin was of course operating from the vantage point of developing a socialist economy where there had been no experience before. The questioner asked, "Why do we disagree with Lenin," or how could we? Because experience has been accumulated and there are other ways of organizing production besides this Taylor system, so it is not something that can be upheld today. That's not an intellectual question in itself, there was actual, concrete ex-

perience that was gained and understanding forged through the Cultural Revolution in China, where the conscious initiative of the masses was the key tool in pushing the productive process forward as part of a larger perspective, which was the proletarian revolution looked at from the standpoint of liberating the working class internationally.

Several questions focused on Stalin's policies. It's very difficult to go into this in any depth, but as pointed out in *Conquer the World* there were some real contradictions that were being dealt with in the Soviet Union. Lenin was dealing with the whole problem of building socialism in one country and at the same time promoting world revolution. Then there were questions of how to actually build that socialist economy. What's pointed out in *Conquer the World*, and what I believe is very important, is that even with Lenin there was a tendency to identify socialism in a one-to-one way with the process of industrialization itself and the dominance of industry over agriculture. Such problems of course reflected the fact that this revolution was in its infancy. How to go about building socialism and handling the relationship between defending a socialist state and promoting world revolution were objective contradictions faced by the proletariat and Stalin after Lenin's death. And it must be said that Stalin didn't handle these contradictions very well, particularly the relationship between defending socialism and advancing world revolution.

There was a tendency on Stalin's part, which became very, very ugly in fact as the situation progressed, to look at things from the standpoint of "fortress socialism." How can we fortify the socialist state against external assault, how can we *defend* it, as opposed to the standpoint, which is argued and gone into in great depth in *Conquer the World*, of putting the socialist state on the line, so to speak, to promote world revolution. The interests of the world revolution must take precedence over the defense of a socialist state, even though there are concrete tasks involved and real necessities related to the defense of that socialist state. Stalin, it must be said, didn't handle the contradiction very well, and both problems that I spoke of in regard to Lenin were magnified during that period: that is, "fortress socialism" and also much more the identification of socialist development with the productive forces, with "catching up and overtaking" the advanced countries as the secure guarantee.

This orientation led to a variety of policies and programs —

bribing the upper strata, relying on wage incentives to motivate workers, changes in the educational system — all of which were geared to fortifying this socialist state, and it had very negative consequences. Mass mobilization and revolutionary politics were subordinated to that approach and that orientation. It must be said that coming out of World War 2 the proletariat was in a weakened position in the Soviet Union and, as pointed out in *Conquer the World*, the situation faced immediately coming right out of World War 2 was the capitalist road or the socialist road. What would have been required was indeed a Cultural Revolution.

So, the dialectics of the situation was such that Stalin was actually attempting to secure socialism, but the means and methods used to do that actually had the effect of disarming large sections of the masses. The bourgeois forces generated within the upper reaches of the party and the government were very well positioned, coming off of the dislocations of the war and a period, it must be said, of political paralysis and demobilization related to this fortress socialism orientation, to consolidate the rule of a bourgeois clique. What must be stressed, however, is that Stalin was trying precisely to defend the Soviet socialist state and looking out into the world and world revolution. But the people who came to power, led by Khrushchev, and the revisionists in power today have absolutely no pretense, there's no commitment here, there's nothing that vaguely resembles socialism. What's involved here is imperialism, the extension and spread of that imperialist network, and real changes in the material base, that is, the dominance of the value-creation process which correspond to this political clique, to its political program. What Stalin was trying to do was reflected in the fact that there was a real socialist society with socialist relations of production, although very weak and although very contradictory, with aspects of that society, structures in that society, components in the superstructure that were firmly in the hands of bourgeois forces. But, overall, the line that held command in that period was a proletarian line. So that's some backdrop.

I would urge people to study the *Conquer the World* document and take into account that there is a very strong attack on Stalin. In other words, when the revisionists come to power they make use of mechanisms and policies that were in fact serving this "fortress socialism" and "catching up and overtaking" orientation. But it's on a whole new basis, within a whole new framework, which is, again,

the extension and the defense of the interests of a new imperialist bourgeoisie, and the alteration, in a very real sense, of the measuring rods and the organizing tools of the productive process itself, and that's what I got into in terms of the law of value.

I would like in the time I have left to make some concluding remarks. It's rather difficult in this short time, but I do want to speak to some of the overall points that were raised by Szymanski in his presentation and what I think their implications are for understanding the process of revolution. Just in brief, it seems to me that his whole orientation is that it doesn't really matter what line is on top in society and what the real nature of the productive base is. As long as some notion of social welfare is being advanced — in fact at one point in his presentation he defined the ruling ideology of Soviet society as social justice, it had nothing to do with revolution, with overcoming the differences and divisions of society, with promoting world revolution — things are on the right track. I think this view of socialism is a view that sees it mainly as a continuum of the progress of bourgeois democracy, that somehow if you can get the right combination of democracy and economic justice. . . that's really what socialism is all about. It doesn't really matter if value categories underlie this, if it's market socialism or something else. As long as there's this weird amalgam of democracy, workers' participation, and some notion of social welfare — then you're on the right track.

I think the key thing about Szymanski's approach is that the question is never posed in terms of socialism versus capitalism. What we really have, then, is a vision which amounts to a "decapitated capitalism." In other words, this is a capitalism without the ugly capitalists on top. You've knocked these avaricious Rockefeller types out of the picture, then what you do is you stress efficiency, use whatever methods you can to develop material abundance from the standpoint of the nation-state, and then you move on to something else. Society is organized around incentives and all kinds of inducements because, after all, as he said, the people want meat and that's what they got. In other words, the masses are only capable of consumption, of altering their consumption requirements, and that's what they want; they vote with their mouths. As he said, it smells like socialism, but I think it smells exactly like capitalism from everything he describes about it.

The other aspect of his analysis is the system of "structural

guarantees." Again, this is all based on the notion that there's some structural form that is impenetrable to capitalism. I think the point to be emphasized is that any of these forms can be transformed into bourgeois institutions. Then there is this idea that you have leaders who, in order to be politically savvy, have to espouse a revolutionary ideology (that way they'll get over on the masses). Since they've espoused this revolutionary ideology, these leaders have no choice but to implement it, while the masses are all being educated in this ideology so they in turn can distinguish genuine from sham Marxism. The assumption is that the masses are spontaneous Marxists or that the ruling clique doesn't in any way promote public opinion, educate people around *its* vision of "communism," which is exactly what Szymanski has been educated in, which is, if the people want meat they get it.

I would like to sum up this society in good Maoist tradition by using a numerical description, what I call the "three cynicals." This view of socialism is first of all based on "cynical realism." "The masses certainly don't want to go for the heavens, certainly don't want to change the world, so let's just go with what's possible." And that is, of course, along the lines of what he was saying — a budget which has social expenditures in it, improved housing, and so on and so forth. "Let's not be unrealistic." So that's "cynical realism."

The second cynical is "cynical naïveté." "What?! Leaders sell out?! Why would they do that, why would they feather their own nest?!" That's "cynical naïveté." And of course leaders are subject to all kinds of structural constraints. We of course have to put the matter quite bluntly: the ultimate structural constraint, as we've seen in the case of Poland, is martial law. So any illusions about such structural constraints should be reconsidered.

The third cynical. . . I had another "cynical." Well, I'll get back to that "cynical."^{*}

I really want to emphasize that there is no higher vision here than just the alteration of bourgeois relations and bringing a capitalist society under central control, using optimal planning methods. What we really have here is the same ideology, the same culture, the same political system, but suited to the bourgeois interests of a state

*. The author writes: The essence of the "third cynical" was incorporated into the first. The "third cynical" was "cynical disdain for the masses," i.e., "the masses want meat on the table, not the struggle to grasp and transform the world."

monopoly capitalist bourgeoisie. I think it's also very important to take note of the fact that the advantages that the working class obtains in the Soviet Union can't be separated from the fact that this is an imperialist power. All this oppression, stultification, and boredom ultimately rest upon the plunder of the people of the world anyway.

Let me conclude in terms of why the question is important. First, I think clarity about the nature of the Soviet Union is decisive, in part because of what came out in this discussion. The Soviet Union concentrates so much of the experience of the international proletariat: the first successful seizure of state power, the first experiences in developing a socialist economy, having to deal with the contradictions of promoting revolution and dealing with world war. Then of course this was the first instance in which the process of proletarian revolution has been reversed by a capitalist restoration. I think an understanding of this question is very vital towards an understanding of the goal and the nature of the revolutionary process, that is, what will it actually take to transcend class society. So I don't think this is an academic question, it has everything to do with what it is that we're striving to accomplish, what it is that the proletariat is all about in terms of eliminating classes and class distinctions on a world scale.

Second, I think this question is extremely important in relation to the situation we face in the world today, the situation that is shaping up in which two imperialist blocs are on a collision course with each other. We've seen that in terms of proxy wars, new weapons systems being developed, constant tensions within and between these blocs. We ought just consider the fact that the two blocs are holding their big economic summits and they're both plagued with serious economic crisis and disarray and pulling their blocs together for the ultimate confrontation, which is to redivide the world.*

But the same forces which are bringing these two imperialist blocs into confrontation are also heightening all of the contradictions in the world. There are increasing signs of revolutionary struggles and there are increasing signs of new initiatives being taken by revolutionaries all around the world. What's shaping up in the world today is a situation in which the contradictions of the world

* The author points out that the COMECON summit scheduled for the spring of 1983 was subsequently cancelled because of unresolved disputes within that body.

imperialist system are converging and coming to a head. The same forces driving the imperialists to war are also opening up unprecedented opportunities for the proletariat to make a decisive advance on a world scale. An understanding of the nature of the Soviet Union and the nature of the revolutionary process is absolutely essential if we are going to maximize the gains of our class on an international scale in a period in which we can make extraordinary gains in relation to periods of relative peace and quiet, and in relation to the requirements of advancing the revolution to the maximum degree possible.

Finally, our view of the process of proletarian revolution is not, again, some idle academic question. How we analyze the historical experience of the Soviet Union and how we analyze the developing situation in the world has everything to do with the kind of struggle we wage. Communism can only be achieved through the fiercest, the most determined, and the most conscious struggle to make a leap into the future of mankind. Thank you.