

Critique of State-Socialist Achievements - Postliterate - Medium

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Allow these kind men to do everything for you and we will call it “the people.”

One can, with ease, offer critiques of the supposed successes of international state-socialist revolutions by pointing out the horrific actions imposed by the heads of these socialist nations and the force of violence they instituted. However, there lacks an adjacent critique of the policies of the state-socialists which are *individually* considered successes. In other words, one can easily point to Lenin’s Cheka as an instance of brutality, but many do not attempt to apply such methodology also to Lenin’s specific employment or educational achievements. The latter, it seems, must be entirely ignored, or viewed as the product of *socialism*, and the brutality that grew in the same regime as the product of *statism*; both are easy answers for any socialist who feels unease surrounding these regimes.

However, I am under the assumption that these so-called achievements were, in and of themselves, nothing which should be praised. Taking the example of the USSR, the only period of mild hope, the only beacon of socialism, lay in the period of Lenin. Even within this period there were horrible atrocities committed in the name of the “health of socialism”, and even then socialism itself was not achieved. What is worse is that all of the “progress” Lenin made, in truth, sounds like nothing less than the crafting of a statist hell to me.

Am I expected to praise the mandating of universal education? Am I supposed to praise full employment? It is no less odious to me than if I were asked to praise full incarceration of the population into state-owned prisons; the situation is made even worse when, in the case of education, we are talking about children.

Am I expected to praise the banning of Orthodox Church services on television? Is such meticulous control of media by an institution which has a monopoly on violence acceptable? Am I supposed to hail Mao’s cultural revolution, purging “*reactionaries, purveyors of bourgeois ideas*”? [1] Is it not completely implied in this that the slaughter of innocent people will occur, or otherwise, of people who merely hold certain ideas deemed unacceptable? Am I supposed to praise such murder and state oppression?

Another specter which constantly haunts these supposedly democratic regimes is the clear class distinctions between party and non-party members. One group held the power, the other did not. The workers could not liberate themselves, no, the communists had to liberate them *on their behalf*. Many of these communists were not even proletarians themselves. The workers were at the mercy of those who pretended to know better than them and what had to be good for them. You could not be master of yourself, you had to be a *party member*, the new ruling class. And what the proletariat did receive was but a new slavery...

The only actions of these regimes even worth noting is their social progressivism, which is indeed admirable. However, one must remember that these achievements ultimately have nothing to do with the mode of

production itself; this is not to say they are not intertwined, but that these progressive policies do not inherently change the mode of production. It is quite possible, as we've seen in the social democratic countries, to maintain an admirable level of social progressivism without fundamentally surmounting the mode of production. Wishing to go further, I could even apply this concept to the socialist states themselves, specifically the USSR, pointing out its social progressivism coexisting with its failures to truly overturn the capitalist profit motive, etc. And indeed, social progressivism is not at all incompatible with capital's tendency to destroy tradition and resolve to a subjective state of confusion.

As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels write in *The Communist Manifesto*:

“[Capital] has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation.”

The subjectivity disorientation of capital — as capital posits itself as the only universality [2] — can go, as Slavoj Žižek has noted before, hand in hand with the anti-traditionalism of social progressivism (at least on a superficial level). This is not to denounce social progressivism, rather it is to denounce it as something worth revolution itself. Social progressivism is, ultimately, a far cry from the economic base of society, a drop of water in the sea of capitalism.

[1] Donna Goodman, *Women and socialism: Three revolutionary case studies*

[2] Karl Marx, *Economic and Political Manuscripts*, “Private Property and Labor”