

## CONCLUDING REMARKS, AUGUST 2003

During the 1980s, when the bulk of this book was written, it made sense to think of our species as undergoing a global transition from capitalism to socialism. Socialism might be an unrealistic dream to most Americans, but its growth over the past two centuries suggested that it might indeed be the wave of the future.

From a utopian dream at the beginning of the nineteenth century, socialism grew to a mass movement by the beginning of the twentieth century.

The terrible devastation of the two World Wars were the death throes of dying social order, each resulting in a world-shaking revolution. In 1917, the October Revolution led to the creation of the Soviet Union and the victory of the People's Liberation Army led to the creation of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949.

The Second World War discredited both capitalism and colonialism, and the earlier imperialist powers were either defeated (Germany, Italy, Japan) or severely weakened (Great Britain and France).

Communism emerged with tremendous prestige, given the leading role that the Soviet Union had played in the defeat of Fascism and that Communists throughout the world had played in the resistance to Fascism.

By 1950, one third of humanity was involved in the conscious attempt to build socialism. Whatever the shortcomings of Soviet and Chinese societies, they dramatically improved the lives of their people, and provided hope for a better world. The Soviet and Chinese models were inspiring revolutionaries throughout the world.

But no ruling class gives up power willingly. The United States emerged from the war as the undisputed leader of world imperialism (or, as they like to call it, the "free world"). Even before the end of WWII, the leaders of U.S. imperialism began establishing the institutions that would enable imperialism to endure.

Of these, none was more important than the Atomic Bomb. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 marked not so much the end of WWII as the beginning of the Cold War, the war against Communism.

The next four decades, through the 1980s, saw two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, each armed with enough nuclear weapons to destroy our species. Although it seemed as though the world had gone MAD, for Mutual Assured Destruction, the world revolutionary process was unfolding. If we could escape nuclear annihilation, perhaps a saner, socialist world could be born.

The 1990s, however, saw the apparent triumph of U.S. imperialism. The bold efforts of glasnost and perestroika initiated by the Soviet leadership led, not to a new stage of socialism, but to the overthrow of socialism and the restoration of capitalism in what had been the Soviet Union. As the imperialists began to construct their New World Order in earnest, people began to speak of "the end of history" and TINA "There Is No Alternative." Resistance was futile in the face of the world's single and supreme superpower, the United States.

The struggle persisted however, even in the darkest hours. As the century drew to a close, the world was electrified by WTO protests in Seattle. In the words of Amy Goodman, the momentum of world history shifted from the corporate suites to the Seattle streets. Struggle was possible again. We saw the emergence of a new movement

against corporate-style globalization, which only grew in strength, even after the renewed assault by the imperialists after 9/11, the so-called "war on terror." In March of 2003, during the resistance to the war against Iraq, this movement was anointed the world's "second superpower" by the New York Times.

The world has changed dramatically since 1990, but in many ways its underlying structure has remained the same. The history of the present is still a history of class struggle, and we need to understand it as such. As the Hungarian philosopher, Geog Lukacs noted, we still need Marx:

There is, of course, plenty of darkness around us now, just as there was between the two wars. Those who wish to despair can find cause enough and more in our everyday life. Marxism does not console anyone by playing down difficulties, or minimizing the material and moral darkness which surrounds us human beings today. The difference is only—but in this "only" lies a whole world—that Marxism has a grasp of the main lines of human development and recognizes its laws. Those who have arrived at such knowledge know, in spite of all temporary darkness, both whence we have come and where we are going. And those who know this find the world changed in their eyes: they see purposeful development where formerly only a blind, senseless confusion surrounded them. Where the philosophy of despair weeps for the collapse of a world and the destruction of culture, there Marxists watch the birth-pangs of a new world and assist in mitigating the pains of labor. (Lukacs 1948:2)