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GORBACHEV'S "NEW POLITICAL THINKING" AND THE PRIORITY OF COMMON INTERESTS

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When M. S. Gorbachev gave his book *Perestroika* the subtitle "New Thinking for Our Country and the World," he was signaling the fact that the ideological changes accompanying the current Soviet reforms pertain to the international as well as the domestic arena. Fully half the book is devoted to the elaboration of what Soviet spokesmen now often call "the new *political* thinking," meaning by that expression those specific aspects of the overall "new thinking" that pertain to international relations. Gorbachev and his supporters portray these developments as a fundamental and far-reaching reorientation of the Soviet international outlook—nothing less than what the Academician Evgenii M. Primakov, head of the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations, has called "a new philosophy of foreign policy."¹

Along with these broad assurances of innovation, specific developments in Soviet policies and actions in the international arena also suggest a reorientation in international thinking. Concretely, the intensified Soviet interest in arms control agreements with the United States, the decision to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan, and personnel changes within the Politbiuro all testify to shifts in thinking concerning the USSR's world posture and the requirements of national security. Furthermore, specific themes stressed by Gorbachev and his supporters in their statements are consistent with the idea of a basic reorientation in international thinking. This is particularly evident in the stress on the need to acknowledge the "legitimate interests" of all nations and effect a "balance of interests" among them; in the emphasis on a defensive military stance and the principle of a "reasonable sufficiency" of military means; and in the repeated attack on von Clausewitz's dictum that war is "a continuation of diplomacy by other means." The dictum is "hopelessly out of date" in the nuclear age, Gorbachev insists, when war threatens universal destruction. Nuclear war, he contends, "cannot be a means of achieving political, economic, ideological or any other goals."²

Welcome as these sentiments may be to a world weary of nuclear confrontation and yearning for a lasting accommodation among the great powers, is there in fact a "new philosophy" behind them? Do Gorbachev's hopeful pronouncements have a theoretical grounding, and if so how does it relate to the familiar Marxist-Leninist picture of a world in which global class conflict is manifested as international hostility, and even "peaceful coexistence" is defined as "a specific form of the class struggle"?³ Have the Soviets abandoned the Leninist theory of imperialism, according to which modern capitalist states, governed by the insatiable economic greed of their respective national bourgeoisies, are inevitably expansionist and aggressive?

This paper will argue that the ideology of *perestroika* does include genuine theoretical innovations in the area of international relations, and that these innovations stem largely from a new willingness to approach human *interests* from a nonclass point of view. Without openly rejecting the significance of class interests on the international scene, the "new philosophy of foreign policy" advanced by Gorbachev and his supporters is centered on aspects of interests other than their class character. The ideologists of *perestroika* hold, for example, that all nations, including capitalist nations, have specific interests that must be given what Gorbachev has called "a reasonable reflection in world politics."⁴ These are the divergent interests—class

motivated or not—among which a “balance” must be effected on the world scene. More important still, it is argued that all nations have major common or shared interests—“the common interests of all mankind”—in pursuit of which international cooperation and harmony can be achieved.

The idea that a state, though capitalist, can have distinctive interests worthy of respect is a departure from the hard-line Marxist-Leninist class orientation that has typically dominated Soviet international thinking in the past. On that way of thinking, since capitalist states are vehicles for the advancement of the bourgeoisie, their interests must be resolutely combated as inimical to the proletariat, to the world socialist movement, and indirectly to the betterment of mankind. Thus when Gorbachev at the 27th Party Congress in 1986 asserted that every state has its own “completely legitimate interest,”⁵ he was displaying a significant modification of the established view. Primakov has concretized the new attitude in what he has called “new conceptual approaches to the problem of security,” one of which is the principle that the security of some nations must not be secured at the cost of the security of others, inasmuch as “the new philosophy of foreign policy takes into account the necessity of acknowledging the objective character of the national interests of the various countries”—i. e., acknowledgement that such interests are real and reasonable, and cannot simply be dismissed as the interests of a class enemy.⁶

To say that these divergent interests must be balanced, however, is not to identify any real motivation or ground for doing so, in the absence of which class interest and hence class hostility might still be expected to predominate in international relations. But the new philosophy does find such a ground in the existence of *convergent* human interest, which are said to be the key to transcending a narrowly class approach to international relations and establishing the real possibility of world harmony.

The idea of convergent or common human interests—interests shared by both proletariat and bourgeoisie along with other human beings—has never been a significant part of Soviet Marxist ideology. Marx himself—except in his early writings, which were unknown at the time of the Bolshevik revolution—paid little attention to the common needs of human beings as such, preoccupied as he was with the class struggle. Lenin, moreover, in his forcible arguments for the inevitability of revolution, championed the idea that opposing class interests under capitalism are *irreconcilable*, thereby propagating the view that there is no common ground on which bourgeoisie and proletariat might reach accommodation and avoid conflict. Translated into international terms, this Leninist view promoted a comparable analysis of international relations: the interests of bourgeois *states* are irreconcilable with those of proletarian states; there is no common ground for the elimination of international hostility. The universal assumption became that, in the words of the Academician P. N. Fedoseev, “the basic content of the modern era is the struggle of the two systems, which must end with the victory of socialism and communism.”⁷ Stalin’s thesis that the class struggle grows more intense rather than moderation during the building of socialism only added emphasis to this fixation on class differences rather than convergences, both within the Soviet Union and between the socialist and capitalist camps. In the words of a present-day Soviet historian, “in the foreign policy sphere, absolute priority was given to the class struggle.”⁸

Gorbachev on the whole defends the class focus of earlier Soviet international thinking—just as he defends the domestic policies (if not all of the specific measures) of industrialization and collectivization pursued during the Stalin era. Until recently, he argues in his book *Perestroika*, class struggle did constitute what he calls “the pivot of social development,” and he finds it understandable, therefore, that Marxist philosophy was “dominated by a class moti-

vated approach.”⁹ His point is not that a wrong approach was taken in the past, but that the world situation has changed in such a way as to require a new approach today.

That change is the real threat of nuclear annihilation, which creates an overriding mutual interest in survival. The prospect of universal destruction has produced what he calls “an objective limit for class confrontation in the international arena.” Class confrontation, in other words, must not be allowed to generate armed conflict, because the latter would threaten something more important than class objectives—human existence itself. Thus there is now a genuine and immediate shared interest: “For the first time ever there emerged a real, not speculative and remote, common human interest—to save humanity from disaster.” It was on the basis of these considerations, Gorbachev states, that the old definition of ‘peaceful coexistence’ as “a specific form of the class struggle” was deleted from the Party Program in its new version adopted in March, 1986.¹⁰ Peaceful coexistence, then, is to be understood not as a continuation of the class struggle by other means but as a condition marked by accommodation rather than conflict.

In addition to citing new global circumstances, however, Gorbachev also seeks to give further theoretical backing to his subordination of class interests to general human concerns by enlisting the support of Lenin. The Bolshevik leader in his day expressed “a thought of colossal profundity,” Gorbachev affirms—namely, “the priority of the interests of social development, of common human values, over the interests of this or that class.”¹¹ Gorbachev returns to this theme repeatedly, arguing that Lenin was able to “go beyond class-imposed limits” in his analysis of social needs.¹²

Given the importance Gorbachev attributes to the point in the “new political thinking,” it is worth looking more closely at the statements of Lenin to which Gorbachev is referring. The only actual text that he and the theorists of *perestroika* cite is a passage in “A Draft Programme of Our Party,” written in 1899 (but not published until 1924), in which Lenin advocates the writing of a program for the Russian Social-Democrats and suggests its contents. Arguing that the struggle for political liberties against the autocracy must be recognized as the primary political task of the working class party, Lenin goes on as follows:

To explain this task it is necessary, in our opinion, to describe the class character of the present-day Russian autocracy and the need to overthrow it, not only in the interests of the working class, but also in the interests of social development as a whole. Such a description is essential—in regard to theory, because, from the standpoint of the basic ideas of Marxism, the interests of social development are higher than the interests of the proletariat—the interests of the workers’ movement as a whole are higher than the interests of a particular stratum of workers or of particular phases of the movement.¹³

A careful reading of this passage shows that Lenin refers only vaguely to “social development” and in fact makes no mention of “common human values” at all. In all likelihood, by stating that “the interests of social development are higher than the interests of the proletariat” he meant only to suggest that the historical mission of the proletariat is to create a better society in general—better for all toiling humanity—an interpretation that is supported by the oppositional comment that “the interests of the workers’ movement as a whole are higher than the interests of a particular stratum of workers.” In any event, the passage is far from asserting that all mankind—including the bourgeoisie that is to be overthrown in order to produce that better society—shares common interests. And of course Lenin’s statement was not made in the context of international relations, but referred to the internal situation in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus there appears to be no good textual support for Gorbachev’s claim that Lenin “spoke about the priority of interests common to all humanity

over class interests, “much less that he spoke about it “more than once.”¹⁴

All of which only serves, of course, to point up the seriousness of Gorbachev’s own commitment to the thought he attributes to Lenin. However firmly Lenin may have believed in the “irreconcilability” of opposing class interests under capitalism, Gorbachev appears to be equally firm in his belief that on the international level, the opposing class interests of bourgeois and proletarian states are reconcilable, without violence or world revolution, on the basis of a shared interest that transcends class considerations. This notion that the common concerns of humanity can outweigh all motives for conflict is the recurring central theme of Gorbachev’s discussion of international affairs.

In Gorbachev’s speech at the 27th Party Congress he referred to a remark by President Ronald Reagan to the effect that if the earth were threatened by an alien invasion from outer space, the U. S. and the U. S. S. R. would quickly find common ground for cooperation ; but an even clearer common ground, Gorbachev contends, exists today : “Isn’t a nuclear catastrophe a more real danger than a landing by unknown beings from another planet ?”¹⁵ Indeed, he has also pointed out, the two superpowers did unite, despite their differences, against the fascist threat—a lesser danger, he contends, than the present one.¹⁶ The same notion is behind the images Gorbachev consistently uses in describing the interdependence of the earth’s inhabitants in the modern day—as passengers in the same boat, as people who can “sink or swim only together”, as mountaineers connected to each other by a climbing rope, who “can either climb on together to the mountain peak or fall together into an abyss.”¹⁷ In all of these images, class differences are forgotten in the face of a shared condition requiring cooperation.

Thus when Gorbachev speaks of “the new thinking with its common human criteria,” he is pointing to the central notion of the new international philosophy cited by Primakov : the idea that in the present day, commonalities take precedence over differences, including class differences. We should “step over the things that divide us,” Gorbachev urges, “for the sake of the interests of all mankind.”¹⁸

The New Respectability of “Common Human Values”

The idea that all people share certain overriding interests can also be phrased as the assertion that *values* appropriate to human beings as such are the most important social values, and this “value” idiom as well is employed by the champions of the new international orientation. Gorbachev uses it in the foreign policy section of his book *Perestroika*, where he describes “the backbone of the new way of thinking” as “the recognition of the priority of human values.”¹⁹ In this form, the theses of the new political thinking make contact with a long-standing question in Marxist thought, and their development is not an isolated phenomenon but parallels notable changes in Soviet thinking in the broad areas of morality and the relationship between society and the individual.

Specifically, the new political thinking reflects the third and latest stage in the history of Soviet treatment of the nature of human values.

(1) In the first stage—early Soviet history, continuing essentially through the Stalin era—Soviet ethical thought was dominated by the identification of values with class interests and a consequent rejection of the idea that there are values common to all mankind. Soviet philosophers, accepting Marx’s thesis that morality is a form social consciousness generated by social being, regarded value conceptions as ideological echoes of the economic base of society—that is, as expressions of economic class interests.

Although Marx himself did not spell out this implication, his colleague Friedrich Engels, on whose more explicit philosophical writings Soviet philosophers relied more than on those of Marx himself, did elaborate on the class nature of values. "Men, consciously or unconsciously," Engels wrote, "derive their ethical ideas in the last resort from the practical relations on which their class position is based." One's class situation, then, determines the morality one espouses, and the relativizing of values to class interests appears to be complete: "Morality has always been class morality; it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or, ever since the oppressed class became powerful enough, it has represented its indignation against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed."²⁰ Bourgeois morality and proletarian morality were thus pitted against each other with no acknowledgement of a common ground. This reduction of values to class position was but one expression of the so-called "vulgar sociology"—the "class-angling" of all social phenomena—that characterized the early Soviet period.

There were individual thinkers even in the early years of Russian Marxism who opposed this interpretation of values. Both George Plekhanov (1856–1918) and Liubov' Aksel'rod (1868–1946), drawing on a passage in which Marx referred to "simple laws of morality and right," argued for the existence of ethical standards that are universally binding on human beings, regardless of class membership.²¹ Because these thinkers were identified politically with Menshevism, however, their philosophical convictions were viewed with great suspicion by the victorious Bolsheviks. Plekhanov and Aksel'rod were accused of owing greater allegiance to Kant than to Marx, and the expression "simple laws of morality and right," despite its Marxian lineage, took on what one Soviet observer calls "an odious character," as symptomatic of an anti-Marxist denial of the class character of morality.²² This attitude, now sometimes dubbed "ethical nihilism" by Soviet theorists, persisted essentially unchanged through the Stalin era.

(2) Ironically, Stalin himself unintentionally initiated the second stage in the Soviet treatment of human values when he suggested, in his letters on linguistics in 1950, that language and other important social phenomena have functions that cut across class lines and cannot be interpreted in purely class terms. Though Stalin made no direct reference to moral or other values in this connection, his remarks helped to undermine "vulgar sociology" generally and encouraged philosophers, particularly after his death in 1953, to explore possibilities of "declassifying" various social phenomena. By the late fifties, Soviet philosophers were actively discussing questions of value theory and the idea of values that transcend class position. Even Engels, it was remembered, despite his comments about the class nature of all morality, had also paradoxically referred to "a really human morality which stands above class antagonisms."²³ In this spirit, Soviet philosophers began to speak of common values as standards flowing from the basic requirements of community life, such as the need to be honest and truthful in social relations, to refrain from harming others, to aid others in distress—none of which appears necessarily connected with class interests. As one Soviet philosopher wrote in the 1960s, "it is hard to say what class interest guides a man who carries a child from a burning building."²⁴

The new attention to Marx's "simple laws of morality and right" received the blessing of the Communist Party in its new 1961 program, which acknowledged the existence of universal moral values, calling them "fundamental norms of human morality which the masses of the people evolved in the course of milleniums." The Program contained what was called "The Moral Code of the Builder of Communism"—a set of precepts that included such seemingly universal elements as "honesty and truthfulness" and "humane relations and mutual respect be-

tween individuals.”²⁵

At the same time the Moral Code of 1961, though recognizing these universal elements in morality, was suffused with a kind of proletarian militancy that set the class struggle above common human values—particularly in international relations. The first and foremost principle in the Code—the principle clearly intended to dominate the moral system—was phrased as follows: “devotion to the communist cause; love of the socialist motherland and of the other socialist countries.” And that form of socialist nationalism was amplified by another article of the Code, which called for “an uncompromising attitude to the enemies of communism.”²⁶ A clear sentiment of “us against them” pervaded the 1961 Code, with no suggestion that “simple laws of morality and right” were applicable to the international hostility of the socialist and capitalist camps. And this sentiment persisted into and through the Brezhnev era. As recently as 1983, an article in *Kommunist* stated that love of others is a quality that must be expressed “with great discrimination” and that it must be accompanied by “hatred for social enemies.”²⁷ In this second period, then, common human values were recognized but were not regarded as superseding the class struggle as the focus of international relations.

(3) The further step that has been taken in the Gorbachev era, beginning in 1985, is the elevation of common human values to the point of taking precedence over class-based or other values of limited scope. In this most recent stage of Soviet thinking about values, “simple laws of morality and right” are not only acknowledged but are invoked to justify and support international cooperation.

A clear indication of the shift in emphasis may be seen in the party Program of 1986, billed as simply a revised version of the 1961 Program but in fact radically different from the latter in many respects. In the new version the “Moral Code of the Builder of Communism” is replaced by a broader treatment of “communist morality” that drops the commandment format and stresses universal human values. “Our morality,” the Program reads, “has absorbed both the moral values common to all mankind and the norms of people’s behavior and interpersonal relations that have been engendered by the masses in their many centuries of struggle against exploitation.” No longer is “love for the socialist motherland” given pride of place as the dominating principle of socialist morality. The Program still presents patriotism and defense of the socialist homeland as values, of course, but they are introduced only after the moral system as such has been characterized in terms of altruism and humanism.²⁸

Indications of the increased weight accorded values that join all people independently of class considerations may also be found in the theoretical literature of Soviet philosophy. A particularly striking event was the recent publication in *Voprosy filosofii* of an article by Iakov Mil’ner-Irinin, a Soviet philosopher never before published in a leading Soviet journal but widely known as the proponent of a theory of ethics that stresses not class values but absolute moral imperatives—“principles of true humanity,” he calls them—that are valid for all mankind. Ethics for Mil’ner-Irinin is a science that specifies the universal moral standards implicit in the ideal nature of man:

Ethics, true to itself as a science of what should be, takes its departure from the nature of man by no means as something that is but as something that should be, not from the real but from the ideal nature of man. It orients man precisely and exclusively toward this ideal human essence, toward his free (free and necessary), creatively transforming (morally revolutionary) essence as just that ideal to which a human being who is forming himself morally is obligated to live up, in order to achieve some degree of human perfection.²⁹

These universal standards, Mil’ner-Irinin argues, oblige us to develop and improve our

own capacities, to work to benefit others and create a better world, to seek freedom, and “always, in all things, and unfailingly to act in accordance with our conscience.”³⁰

When Mil’ner-Irinin’s views were presented in a book published in the republic of Georgia in 1967, they provoked a storm of criticism and were condemned at a special Moscow conference at which they were called “fantasies” that “can bring nothing but harm.”³¹ For these views now to appear essentially unchanged in the leading Soviet philosophy journal is a token of a major change in the climate of Soviet thinking about values.

Although Gorbachev’s own statements on the question of common human values are not as far-reaching or as fully elaborated philosophically as those of a theoretician like Mil’ner-Irinin, Gorbachev does present a justification for the new-found interest in them in Marxist thought. Without denying the past reality of what he calls “eternal’ human values,” he argues in his book *Perestroika* that when philosophers spoke of them in the past they were engaging in “scholastic speculations’ doomed to be a utopian dream,” inasmuch as real life offered no compelling need to recognize and implement them. But the nuclear age and the development of instruments of universal destruction have changed all that, he goes on, so that “in the twentieth century, at the end of this dramatic century, mankind must acknowledge the vital necessity of the priority of what is common to all people as the chief imperative of the age.”³² He grants that “it may seem strange to some people that the communists should place such a strong emphasis on human interests and values. Indeed, a class-motivated approach to all phenomena of social life is the ABC of Marxism.” He attempts to suggest that the class approach has in no way lost its significance, but at the same time he continues to argue that in the present perilous situation of mankind it is imperative to recognize “the priority of what is common to all people.” It is this priority that Gorbachev appears to have in mind above all when he calls, as he frequently does, for “new ideas about the correlation between class principles and principles common to humanity in the modern world.”³³ (145)

The call to rethink the relation between class and human values has become a refrain of the new thinking, but like many refrains in Soviet ideology, past and present, it is open to different interpretations by those who repeat it. Note, for example, the phrasing of the conservative ideologist Egor Ligachev, speaking on the subject of education at the February, 1988 plenary session of the Central Committee :

It is very important that young people, in mastering social-science subjects, learn the *class vision of the world* and gain an understanding of the connection between common human interests and class interests. This includes an understanding of the class essence of the changes taking place in our country.³⁴

The emphasis here, contrary to Gorbachev’s, is clearly on the side of the class principles, with no suggestion of the “priority” of common human values.

The verbalization of anti-*perestroika* sentiment in the notorious letter of the Leningrad schoolteacher Nina Andreeva published in the newspaper *Sovetskaia Rossiia* in March, 1988, makes clear that the shift from class analysis to talk about common human values is one of the principal concerns of ideological conservatives in the USSR. Among the currents of thought Andreeva cites as bent on “exterminating socialist values” in the USSR, the chief current is the one she identifies as “left-liberal socialism,” which seeks to expound what she calls “a humanism that is very true and ‘clean’ from class incrustations.”³⁵ She quotes with approval Ligachev’s statement of the need to teach children “the class vision of the world,” and she excoriates those who regard the class struggle as “supposedly an obsolete concept”—in particular an unnamed philosopher and Academician (no doubt P. E. Fedoseev) whom she represents as having stated that “the present relations between states of the two different social and econo-

mic systems are devoid of class content." Noting that "for several decades he had written the exact opposite," she challenges the Academician to explain why he apparently no longer believes that the international working class, through its state organs, acts as a "countervailing force" to world capital.³⁶

One of the more thorough attempts to specify just what the "correlation" between class and human interests consists in was undertaken recently in *Kommunist* by Alexander Bovin, a political commentator for the newspaper *Izvestiia*. Bovin stresses the importance of what he calls "the thesis of the priority of common human values," arguing that "no class or group interest, no ideology is worth collective suicide."³⁷ Only by adopting the "common human approach", he contends, can one correctly assess and resolve the international problems of the world today. At the same time, Bovin goes on, it must be recognized that the conflicts of that world are created precisely by the existing antagonisms of international class interests, which will only ultimately be eliminated by the historical triumph of socialism over capitalism:

From the universal historical point of view, capitalism and socialism are not two variants of civilization existing parallel to each other but two steps, two stages of civilization, one of which will replace the other. That is the deepest content of their antagonism. The policy of peaceful coexistence does not remove this antagonism, but proposes to impart a civilized form to this struggle, this competition of civilizations.³⁸

The elimination from the new Party program of the definition of peaceful coexistence as "a specific form of the class struggle," Bovin goes on, was meant to emphasize that there is an "objective limit" (Gorbachev's expression) to class confrontation in the international arena—the threat of universal annihilation. Though limited to a "civilized form" by this threat, the class struggle moves on toward the eventual victory of socialism—though Bovin also acknowledges that this victory will take "a far longer time than communists previously imagined."³⁸

Gorbachev, too, sometimes qualifies his remarks about common human values with acknowledgements of the continuing importance of class struggle, though the emphasis in his statements is generally placed more on the former side of the "correlation." "It is time, he told a group of Italian communists in 1987, "to stress people's spiritual and material needs which are basically the same."⁴⁰ The "new role of universal human values," Gorbachev states in February, 1988, is "the central element in new thinking" in the international sphere."⁴¹ Gorbachev's own pronouncements, in other words, often appear to be the embodiment of the very "left-liberal socialism" condemned by Andreeva. Gorbachev may in fact share Bovin's convictions concerning the underlying continuation of the class struggle, but neither his actions—his support for Andreeva's critics and his lack of support for hard liners, for example—nor his public statements suggest much attention to that aspect of the "correlation."

The Doctrine of Imperialism Revisited

It can be argued, of course, that even on Gorbachev's part the new rhetoric of common human values masks an unshaken commitment to a class approach to international relations and to the victory of specifically socialist values. This interpretation gains support from Gorbachev's repeated assurances that the new thinking conforms to "Leninist principles." For among those "principles" is the theory of imperialism, one of Lenin's principal contributions to Marxist doctrine. This theory appears to provide far stronger Leninist backing for the priority of *class* interests in international relations than is provided, on the other hand, for the priority of *common* interests by the single debatable sentence from Lenin that Gorbachev uses

to buttress his talk of “new political thinking.”

The new thinking must confront the theoretical problem that it requires the capitalist side to be as cooperative and as mindful of common interests as the socialist side is. A policy based on the recognition of interdependence and common interests and of the need for cooperation is possible only if both sides acknowledge these things and adopt non-aggressive policies as a result. It is not enough for one side to adopt the attitude; if the other does not share it, the former would be required to counter all of the hostile actions of its rival and build up a deterrent force of whatever scale is necessary to do so. The feasibility of the “new political thinking,” then, appears to assume that the capitalist states will reciprocate with their own peace-loving policy.

But have not Marxist-Leninists for decades asserted that capitalist states cannot act in this way? By their very imperialist nature, Soviet orthodoxy has maintained, capitalist states are aggressive, militaristic, and expansionist—ever a threat not only to socialist and nonaligned states but to each other as well.

The theoretical basis for this view was laid by Lenin in his work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), in which he carried the Marxist analysis of capitalism to what he considered the final prerevolutionary stage of that system—monopoly or finance capitalism. In that stage, Lenin argued, the continual accumulation of capital in fewer and fewer hands creates the need to find outlets for investment (and markets for products) outside the home country. This need in turn promotes the attempt to gain control, economically and politically, of other portions of the world: imperialist colonization, actual or virtual, is thus the natural expression of the working of capitalism on an international scale.

Indeed imperialist aggrandizement brings the capitalist many advantages. In addition to new markets for both capital and the products of domestic agriculture and industry, the control of other territories helps the capitalist to acquire needed raw materials and assure their future supply. Another signal advantage is that it permits the exportation of exploitation. By transferring manufacturing and processing operations abroad, the capitalist can take advantage of cheaper labor in less developed countries, which in turn permits him to co-opt the home proletariat, creating what R. N. Carew Hunt has called a “labour aristocracy,” “bribed by higher wages...into renouncing its revolutionary role in favour of collaboration with the bourgeoisie.”⁴²

As imperialism develops, the theory goes, world economic activity is increasingly dominated by great monopoly cartels and trusts, which seek to extend their influence over ever larger regions of the world. But in doing so they of course come into conflict with each other, and their quarreling over colonial outlets creates international tension and eventually leads to war. Thus the connection between imperialism and war is close and direct for the Leninist. Both of the great wars of the twentieth century are seen as originating in the struggle of imperialist powers for world markets, and on the Leninist analysis it would appear that one could only expect similar conflicts in the future, as long as monopoly capitalism exists.

Given this outlook, the belligerent tendencies of imperialism are a phenomenon inseparable from the nature of capitalism, so that it is difficult to see how the new political thinking, with its stress on the cooperation of the two world systems on a basis of mutual interests, could possibly succeed. True, Soviet Marxist-Leninists did decide years ago that imperialist hostility need not lead to world war, but that conclusion was grounded on the supposition that the armed might of the socialist camp could deter aggression and create international stability through a balance of terror. That position, however, while already a change in the doctrine of imperialism, assumes the continuation of hostility and of the arms race, and thus is a far cry

from the objective of international harmony and disarmament sought in the new ideology. Gorbachev's references to the "egocentric, narrowly class laws of the capitalist system" and the continued existence of "contradictions" between capitalist and socialist states suggest, as Wettig argues, for example, that for all the talk of common interests and international cooperation, the old thinking based on the Leninist doctrine of imperialism and the presence of profound class antagonisms between capitalism and socialism still governs Soviet thinking at its foundation.⁴³

Thus if the new international ideology is to be taken seriously, we must look for evidence of, if not an outright rejection, then at least a fundamental modification of the doctrine of imperialism—a modification that makes it genuinely compatible with a "peaceful coexistence" based not on a balance of terror but on a balance of interests. Without such modification in the theory we could justifiably conclude that the talk of common interests is mere rhetoric with no organic connection with the fundamentals of Marxist doctrine. But if the doctrine itself is altered to accommodate the changed policy, we may have more confidence in the latter's seriousness.

In fact a major revision of the classic Leninist doctrine of imperialism has been proposed by Gorbachev himself—though without, of course, calling it a 'revision' (a term reserved in Marxist-Leninist jargon for illegitimate changes hostile to the principles of the theory). The proposal was elaborated at some length by Gorbachev in his ceremonial address on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in 1987. In the portion of the address devoted to foreign policy, Gorbachev acknowledges that there are "difficult questions" that must be asked if the goals of the new political thinking are to be regarded as feasible—questions having to do precisely with the nature of imperialism. He identifies the principal questions as three in number: First, is it possible that "the new level of the world's interdependence and integral unity" now existing can "block" the most dangerous manifestations of imperialism? Second, can world capitalism function and develop without militarism? Third, can the capitalist system function without "neocolonialism," or in other words without inequitable exchanges with the Third World? He then proceeds to sketch affirmative answers to each of these three questions in turn, in an exercise in theoretical innovation seemingly addressed more to skeptical Soviet ideologists than to an international audience.

(1) As to blocking the dangerous manifestations of imperialism, Gorbachev expresses confidence that it is possible. He argues that in many respects the "contradictions" in world capitalism that in the past led inexorably to world wars have undergone a "thorough-going modification" in the postwar period. He identifies several different factors as contributing to this modification. First, "the lessons of the last war," by which he presumably means the devastating consequences of attempts at imperialist expansion by Germany, Italy, and Japan. Second, the fear, on the part of capitalist states, of weakening themselves in the face of socialism; the existence of a countervailing "world system," Gorbachev contends, has kept capitalism from "taking its internal contradictions to extremes." Among the capitalist states, he argues, technological competition has replaced military competition, resulting in a "a kind of new, 'peaceful' redivision of the world"—though this "neocolonialism" still conforms to Lenin's analysis in that the richer and stronger capitalist states get the larger share. Internal contradictions in some capitalist countries have also been assuaged, he maintains, by pumping money into the military-industrial complex "under the pretext of 'the Soviet threat'."⁴⁴

Interestingly, still another factor in the "modification" of imperialist tendencies mentioned by Gorbachev, though not elaborated upon, is a change in the nature of capitalism itself. "The transformations taking place in the technological and organizational foundation of the capi-

talist economy," he stated, "have also helped to reconcile contradictions and balance interests."⁴⁵ This idea that the development of capitalism is accompanied by changes that do not exacerbate but rather assuage its internal "contradictions" is a refreshing departure from the standard cries of the increasingly severe "crisis" of the capitalist world served up by previous Soviet leaders and ideologists. It is evidence that the analysis of interests and their interrelations is being applied to the understanding of capitalism as well as socialism in the USSR, with correspondingly less attention to the "class struggle" as such.

Finally, Gorbachev cites as a significant factor in "blocking" the evil effects of imperialist tendencies the recognition, gained in the second World War, that the two world "systems" can unite against a common danger. "If in the past an alliance between socialist and capitalist states was possible in the face of the fascist threat, shouldn't this be a definite lesson for the present, when the whole world faces the threat of a nuclear catastrophe and the need to ensure the safety of nuclear power engineering and overcome ecological danger?"⁴⁶ The common interest of avoiding universal annihilation is thus presented as playing a role not only in promoting cooperation between the two world systems but in mitigating the world effects of imperialism among the capitalist states themselves.

As Gorbachev summarizes the argument regarding the first question, in language seeking to retain the elements of the doctrine of imperialism while arguing that its Leninist conclusions are no longer valid, it is now realistic to hope that "the law-governed patterns of an integral world, in which values common to all mankind are the main priority, will be able to limit the range of the destructive actions of the egocentric, narrowly class-based patterns of the capitalist system."⁴⁷ It is remarkable here that the *Marxist* orientation is presented as the analysis based on universal values, in opposition to the "narrowly class-based" approach of the capitalist perspective.

(2) The remaining two questions are taken up to buttress the affirmative answer to the first, and to quiet the doubts of those (Soviet and other Marxist) critics who persist in identifying capitalism with threatening and destabilizing international behavior. As to whether it is possible for a capitalist economy to develop without militarization, Gorbachev cites the post-war experience of Japan, West Germany, and Italy. While he decries the signs of increasing militarism that appeared after the completion of the "economic miracle" in those countries, he suggests that the phenomenon is due not so much to "the essential laws governing the functioning of monopoly capital today" as to extraneous factors such as the "infectious example" of the United States, the cold war atmosphere, and the like. Whatever the causes, Gorbachev maintains, one cannot deny the historical evidence that "there was a period of rapid development of a modern capitalist economy in a number of countries with minimal military expenditures."⁴⁸ Conversely, further evidence that the fortunes of capitalism are not inseparably linked with increasing militarism is provided, Gorbachev contends, by the experience of the United States, where the "supermilitarization" of the past decades, at first economically stimulative, has created an enormous wastage of resources, a huge debt, and has thus in the end been detrimental to the capitalist economy itself. This spectacle of a Soviet leader lecturing Communist Party members on the need to dissociate capitalism from militarism is an irony to be savored.

(3) As to the third question—whether capitalism can function without neocolonialism, or "inequitable exchanges" with the Third World—Gorbachev again indicates his conviction that, as he puts it, "the situation does not appear to be unresolvable."⁴⁹ This is not to say that capitalism can do without the resources of these countries: that will never be the case, no matter how cleverly capitalism attempts to change its stripes. At present, Gorbachev con-

tends, the exchange between capitalism and the Third World is inequitable and hence exploitive ; the great transnational corporations abetted by the capitalist governments milk the less developed countries, leaving only an enormous "debt bondage" in the form of a trillion-dollar burden that cannot be lifted given present arrangements. But Gorbachev also offers the hope that the economic relations with the Third World that are so necessary to capitalism can be rendered benign and acceptable by being purged of their exploitive character. In other words, he envisages capitalism as continuing to function and develop on a world scale, but without "colonialism."

How is this possible ? The key to this "blocking" of the pernicious effects of imperialism, as Gorbachev presents it, is the recognition by the capitalists themselves that it is not in their interest to continue the present course. That course is leading, he argues, to an "explosion," compounded of serious problems in the capitalist countries themselves and the resistance of the Third World to continuing exploitation. Thus even the capitalist must eventually become aware that his future lies in restructuring his international economic relations in such a way as to eliminate exploitation and respect the interests of his economic partners :

If things reach the brink of an explosion and it proves to be impossible to continue enjoying advantages through exploiting the Third World, the question of the unacceptability and intolerability of a system that is incapable of existing without this may be posed very sharply on a political plane...Capitalism is faced with a tough choice : Bring things to an explosion, or reckon with the laws of an interconnected and integral world, one that calls for a balance of interests on an equal basis. Judging from the situation as we see it, this is not only necessary but also possible.⁵⁰

Among the factors making it possible, Gorbachev comments, are the facts that "forces in the Third World itself are acting along these lines" and that domestic restructuring in the Soviet Union will strengthen that country's economy and permit it to "join in the worldwide division of labor and resources" on a far greater scale than before.⁵¹ For capitalism as for socialism, Gorbachev concluded, "there is no reasonable way except coexistence and competition."⁵²

The overall result of all these "modifications" in the classical Leninist version of imperialism is a radically changed doctrine, according to which, although the doctrine's original predictions are retained as "tendencies," defeating those tendencies is both shown to be possible and urged as desirable. Gorbachev notes that the age of imperialism ushered in novelties in historical development unforeseen by Marx or Engels, and the implication is that Lenin cannot have been expected to anticipate the developments of the decades after his death, and cannot be held responsible for "Stalinist" interpretations of the doctrine's requirements : "Just as, at the beginning of the century, all the propositions advanced by Marx and Engels could not be dogmatically extrapolated to fit the era of imperialism, it is all the more true that a similar operation cannot be performed by assessing our own time using postulates that came into being in the 1950s, the 1960s, or even the 1930s."⁵³

The new doctrine of imperialism, as Gorbachev appears to envisage it, retains the view that capitalist states are inclined toward expansion and aggrandizement, but it holds that enlightened self-interest can restrain them from expressing these tendencies in full force. Thus we can say that the "nature" of imperialism has not changed and cannot change, but still accept a profound change in imperialist *behavior*.⁵⁴ The new doctrine retains the central Marxist conviction that capitalism is historically doomed, but it forecasts that capitalism's end will come not in imperialist conflagrations that precipitate violent revolutions, or in armed engagement with the socialist camp, but in peaceful competition in which socialism eventually demon-

strates its economic and human superiority. The “contradictions” within capitalism as an economic system—the weaknesses creating the exploitation of labor, the ups and downs of the business cycle, rampant unemployment, and the like—are still expected to lead in the long run to capitalism’s destruction, but not through the generation of irresolvable *international* contradictions.

While it could be said, then, that the crucial ideological changes here concern the short-term rather than the long-term outlook, it is just these “short-term” changes that have the greatest significance for the foreseeable future, for they provide a theoretical basis for the hope of international accommodation and harmony. In the measured words of the Party’s “Theses” for the Nineteenth All-Union Party Conference: “The influence of the realities of today’s world and possible modifications of a number of objective factors that have given rise to wars make it possible to think that ensuring the security of states will increasingly move out of the sphere of the alignment of military potentials into the sphere of politics and the primacy of law and universal human morality in the fulfillment of international commitments.”⁵⁵

Notes

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- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- 4 Gorbachev, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
- 5 *Current Soviet Policies IX. The Documentary Record of the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Columbus : The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 1986), p. 33.
- 6 Primakov, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- 7 “Obzor obsuzhdeniia v Prezidiume AN SSSR,” *Voprosy filosofii*, 1987, No. 12, p. 43.
- 8 “Historian Discusses Ideological Innovation,” *Federal Broadcast Information Service*, Sov-88-047, 10 March 1988, p. 43.
- 9 Gorbachev, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 146–147.
- 11 “Vremia trebuet novogo myshleniia,” *Kommunist*, 1986, No. 16, p. 12.
- 12 Gorbachev, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
- 13 V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 4th ed. (35 vols. ; Moscow, 1914–1951), Vol. 4, p. 220.
- 14 Gorbachev, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
- 15 *Current Soviet Policies IX*, p. 16.
- 16 Gorbachev, *op. cit.*, p. 147.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 140, 146.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 146.
- 20 Frederick Engels, *Anti-Duhring. Herr Eugen Duhring’s Revolution in Science* (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1975), pp. 114–115.
- 21 James P. Scanlan, *Marxism in the USSR : A Critical Study of Current Soviet Thought* (Ithaca and London : Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 266.
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- 23 Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

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- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 566–567 ; see also Scanlan, *op. cit.*, pp. 262–266.
- 27 R. Petropavlovskii, “Po povodu odnoi knigi,” *Kommunist*, 1983, No. 8, p. 109.
- 28 *Current Soviet Policies IX*, pp. 149–150.
- 29 Iakov A. Mil’ner-Irinin, “The Concept of Human Nature and Its Place in the Science of Ethics,” *Soviet Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1 (Summer, 1988), p. 14.
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–16.
- 31 Scanlan, *op. cit.*, p. 271.
- 32 Gorbachev, *op. cit.*, pp. 145–146 (the English translation has been corrected here by reference to the original Russian text).
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 “Ligachev Sets New Education Guidelines,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. XL, No. 8 (March 23, 1988), p. 11 (italics in original.).
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- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 A. Bovin, “Novoe myshlenie–novaia politika,” *Kommunist*, 1988, No. 9, p. 120.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
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- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 “Dialektika novogo myshleniia,” *Kommunist*, 1987, No. 18, p. 9.

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