

Class Formation in Post-Soviet Russia

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Marcel van der Linden has drawn attention to the theoretical problems posed for the conceptualisation of the working class by the diversity of forms in which the exploitative relation between capital and labour is institutionalised. The starting point of this paper is the idea that the coherence of Marx's concept of the working class is determined by the unity of capital in its relationship with the various fragments and diverse forms of existence of the working class. Such an idea shifts the focus of the theoretical problem from the theorisation of the working class to the theorisation of capital. The present paper will explore this problem through an analysis of the class character of soviet and post-soviet Russian society.

The question of the class character of the Soviet Union was the topic of doctrinaire Marxist debates that generated more heat than light, but it is a vital question for developing an understanding of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the character of the society that is emerging from its ruins. This paper will begin with an analysis of the class character of the Soviet Union, which will provide the basis for an identification of the social forces which destroyed the Soviet Union and drove forward the integration of the Soviet Union into global capitalism. This will in turn provide the basis for an analysis of the changing character of the Russian working class and the forms of class struggle emerging in contemporary Russia.

Marx's theory of class, at least in relation to a capitalist society, is in principle relatively simple and straightforward. Capitalism presupposes an accumulation of capital, at one pole, and the dispossession of the mass of the population, at the other. On this basis, capital purchases labour power and sets those workers to work to produce surplus value. The fundamental determinant of the dynamics of capitalist society is the dynamics of the production and appropriation of surplus value.

One fundamental tendency of capitalist development is the tendency for capital to expand its writ and to penetrate the furthest recesses of the globe. Non-capitalist forms of production are subsumed under capital as their products assume the form of commodities and their reproduction is subsumed under the reproduction of capital. In time the development of the forces of production under the command of capital tends to undermine the reproduction of non-capitalist forms of production and they are dissolved, often with the application of force, those formerly working under those modes of production being absorbed into the ranks of the class working for capital.

Of course, a substantial proportion of those set free from direct access to the means of production and subsistence are not immediately transformed into wage labourers for capital, but join the ranks of the pauperised and unemployed. Nevertheless, those consigned to the reserve army of labour constitute an integral part of the working class, despite their exclusion from direct participation in capitalist production relations.

The objective constitution of the growing mass of the population as a working class, whose reproduction is subordinate to the reproduction of capital, is not immediately reflected subjectively in the consciousness of the working class. Workers do not engage with capital as an anonymous mass of wage labourers, but as individuals, working in particular occupations, in

particular organisations, employed by particular capitalists. The immediate working and living conditions and future prospects of different individuals differ according to their age, sex, civic status, qualifications, occupation, place of employment and so on, so they may not perceive their life situation and their individual interests as being determined by their subordination to capital. The diversity of working and living conditions underpins a differentiation of the working class which maintains its subjective fragmentation in the face of capital. The various fragments and diverse forms of existence of the working class are unified objectively by their subordination to capital as the abstract power of command of accumulated labour over living labour power.

Marx thought homogenisation etc. would lead to unification of working class.

Polarisation between labour and capital. But Marx underestimated decomposition and recomposition of the working class by capital and by the capitalist state.

Class character of the Soviet Union

Maybe incorporate critique of Resnik and Wolf.

Soviet Union has a working class, although official soviet line was that labour power was not a commodity, no labour market etc.

But this does not mean it can be theorised as state capitalist. Not production of surplus value. So it is a sui generic class formation.

What is the ruling class? Depersonalised, but this is also the case under capitalism.

The development of capitalism in Russia

Soviet Union was a non-capitalist mode of production, increasingly subsumed under the dynamics of capital on a global scale so that capital accumulation on a world scale undermined the reproduction of the soviet mode of production.

In the first instance the transformation takes the form of the penetration of the market, ending state monopoly of foreign trade, etc. Me versus Michael, cf Brenner debate.

Formal to real subsumption of labour under capital

Who is the capitalist class in Russia?

Depersonnification of capital. Comprador versus patriotic capitalists etc. Crap.