

## **Critique of Paresh Chattopadhyay’s “Twentieth Century Socialism”**

Paresh Chattopadhyay once visited me at my rented residence after we launched our party, the World Socialist Party (India) here in Calcutta (now Kolkata), 1-3 March 1995. He listened to my long speech via audio cassette of Bishnupur public meeting and highly appreciated it. After a detailed discussion he agreed to send articles in the event we published a journal in Bengali which however didn't mature. At that time he was sympathizing with the Trotskyists. I wanted to know why he should support the Trotskyists at all. His answer was that this gave him the opportunity to meet and speak to them at their annual gathering in Paris and that's all. The matter ended there.

Recently he came to Calcutta and delivered a lecture at Presidency College. Subsequently, he wrote an article titled "Twentieth Century Socialism A Minority Rule" published as a “Special Article” in the *Economic and Political Weekly* EPW May 14, 2016. It is claimed that this article has benefited from a discussion on certain points with friends in the Kolkata Marx Circle.

The article is “Dedicated to the memory of the great libertarian George Orwell,”

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In much of his article he is spot on in carefully recounting some of the heinous misdemeanors perpetrated by Lenin, Trotsky and their Bolshevik coterie in Russia and contrastingly upholds some pertinent positions and principles of Marx and Engels that are in opposition to them. After his long interesting and informative criticism and citations he concludes his narrative with the Kronstadt revolt and massacre, wherein he affirms, “The Kronstadt sailors and toilers called this incident the “Third Revolution,” after February and October.” This he just cites without any comment presumably because of a “libertarian” perspective which sees movement as more important than the goal. But Libertarianism, be what it may, is not Marxism. As world socialists we evaluate situations from a Marxist point of view. For argument’s sake, even if the Kronstadters happened to be victorious, it was not going to be a socialist revolution anyway. You cannot achieve socialism without an exclusively clear-cut socialist goal and class-wide revolutionary organization within a matured revolutionary situation. The Kronstadters had no socialist agenda and organization and circumstances were non-socialist. Anyway, they were asking for some liberal democratic rights only.

More importantly, Russia was then a peasantry dominated agricultural country with its working class comprising hardly ten per cent of the population. And you know socialism is the revolutionary perspective of the working class. Thus, immense majority of the population there had no socialist objective at all. Even granting that the Kronstadters along with their fellow workers in Russia had become socialist, there would still have been no way that they could have imposed their minority will for socialism on the overwhelmingly non-socialist peasant population. This episode, however, pertains to a past dreadful experience. The question now is what is to be done today.

Professor Chattopadhyay says nothing about what we socialists have to do today to end the rule of capital.

‘Twentieth Century Socialism’ is the name he gives to Leninism-Bolshevism as the most prominent form of socialism in the last century. This term is ill-conceived as it suggests that not only was Leninism-Bolshevism a form of socialism but that all who worked under the same name ‘socialism’ during the twentieth century, whether to educate or mislead, to organize or disarrange the working class were as well. This use of the term ‘socialist’ is one-sided and misleading and has to be contested, as no doubt it would by Marx and Engels were they alive today.

It ignores the fact that, in opposition to all the sundry ‘socialists’, there were, and till today are, the genuine socialists in the same sense as Marx and Engels – the Socialist Party of Great Britain (ever since 1904) and the other Companion Parties of the World Socialist Movement, of which Professor Chattopadhyay is quite aware, being personally acquainted with us and familiar with our Movement’s relentless presence in the socialist milieu. We are Marxist, we are world socialists and we are present here in India.

Professor Chattopadhyay creates an amalgam “party-state” and equates this with the Leninist construct and frame. This is to confuse these two very different and vital but transient institutions. True, the Leninist “party-state” was a form of ruthless state capitalist dictatorship. But that doesn’t necessarily lead to the conclusion that party and state are of no use for the working class. Both are necessary and useful even during the “political transition” (Marx) from capitalism to socialism, though certainly not in their present-day capitalistic forms. These organs will have to be revolutionized, transformed and converted from their present repressive formation into participatory democratic formation – as agents of emancipation in the hands of the victorious working class. Marx and Engels were neither against nor for the state and the party as such. As scientists of the working class they analyzed their dynamics – their origin, evolution, and eventual ultimate demise.

As Engels aptly remarked, in Part 3, Chapter 2, of [\*Anti-Dühring\*](#):

“The interference of the state power in social relations becomes superfluous in one sphere after another, and then ceases of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things and the direction of the processes of production. The state is not "abolished", it withers away.”

And in *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*:

“The society which organizes production anew on the basis of free and equal association of the producers will put the whole state machinery where it will then belong – into the museum of antiquities, next to the spinning wheel and the bronze axe.”

To accomplish this revolutionary historical task the workers possess only two effective weapons at their disposal – universal knowledge of history and a class-wide revolutionary organization

i.e., a participatory democratic party and movement. This is indispensable. Without such a party and movement the workers are nothing but defenseless, wretched, competitive, alienated and mutually hostile wage slaves. When workers unite for higher wages and reforms they are merely a *class-in-itself*. They become a *class-for-itself* when permeated with socialist knowledge about their common radical cause and by uniting themselves politically “to win the battle of democracy” (Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*) by unseating the bureaucratic ruling elites everywhere.

“It is true that Marx did not believe in drawing up recipes for the cookshops of the future, but he did describe the basis of the society he thought was going to replace capitalism: “an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common” (chapter 1 of *Capital*); “a co-operative society based on the common ownership of the means of production” (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*); “abolition of private property”, “the Communistic abolition of buying and selling”, “the conversion of the functions of the State into a mere superintendence of production” (*Communist Manifesto*); “abolition of the wages system” (*Value, Price and Profit*). In short, a classless, stateless, moneyless, wageless society based on the common ownership of the means of production.” (*Socialist Standard*, November 2012).

According to Marx, the dynamic principle of socialist production and distribution will be: from each according to ability, to each according to need. (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*). This will usher humanity in a new era of equality and freedom replacing pre-history of men with their history proper.

The working class will have to get it done by applying their franchise in elections state-wise and world-wide more or less simultaneously to seize the reins of states, get them transformed to use to dispossess the capitalist class, by lopping off their repressive organs, dismantling the bureaucratic-military structure, democratizing and absorbing its useful organs into the new socio-economic formations of production for use in place of production for profit – rearranging administration of affairs of life on local, regional and global organizational scales.

**To accomplish this task Marx and Engels consistently urged political action and organization, e.g. Resolution IX, London Conference of the International, 1871:**

“Considering, that against the collective power of the propertied classes, the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes; That this constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to ensure the triumph of the social revolution and its ultimate end – the abolition of classes.”

What exactly does it mean the working class has to do to achieve this? Marx brought home the point in definitive terms as follows:

“Considering

That the emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race;

That the producers can be free only insofar as they are in possession of the means of production;

That there are only two forms under which the means of production can belong to them:

1. The individual form which has never existed generally and which is being more and more eliminated by the process of industry;
2. The collective form whose material and intellectual elements are being formed by the very development of capitalist society.

Considering

That this collective appropriation can only be the outcome of the revolutionary action of the productive class – or **proletariat – organized in a separate political party.**

**That such organization must be pursued by all the means, which the proletariat has at its disposal, including universal suffrage, thus transformed from the instrument of trickery, which it has been up till now into an instrument of emancipation.”** [Emphasis added]

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As early as in 1847 Karl Marx, in his polemic *The Poverty of Philosophy* aimed at *The Philosophy of Poverty* by Pierre Joseph Proudhon, the “Father of Anarchism”, arrived at the conclusion:

"The working class in the course of its development will substitute for the old bourgeois society an *association* which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be *no more political power properly so-called . . .*"

Marx-Engels Collected Works, Vol. 6, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1976, p. 212; Also see: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch02e.htm>

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