

Pages 11-186 (preface, introduction, part 1, part 2)

- 1) Does Bettelheim's idea that the NEP could be a policy leading towards socialism so long as steps are taken to limit or subordinate the capitalist mode of production within the social formation make any sense? Can the subordination of the capitalist mode of production be measured or analyzed? For example: a) how and when does a party know that steps are to be taken to subordinate the capitalist mode of production? b) how is the party to determine when the absence of such steps would lead to the reversion of capitalism as the dominant mode?
- 2) What is the difference between immediate production relations (which the political interventions connected with planning do not effect directly) and the conditions for the expanded reproduction of these relations (which the interventions connected with planning do influence directly)? (p.74).
- 3) What are the conditions under which planning can aid the struggle towards communism? How did the proliferation of planning agencies in the Soviet Union fail to meet these conditions?
- 4) Why was the lack of supply of small scale agricultural means of production a political and ideological event as well as an economic one? (p.96).
- 5) Why did the contradiction between the NEP and the industrial plan result in the procurement crisis?
- 6) What approach did the CPSU take towards the middle and poor peasants? How did this effect voluntary, peaceful collectivization? Compare this approach to what you know about China?
- 7) How does Bettelheim's discussion of "peasant ideology" relate to overdetermination and relative autonomy?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR PART 3, VOL. 2 OF CLASS STRUGGLES IN THE USSR

1. Discuss the changes and contradictions in the NEP policy from 1925 to 1929 and the effects of these changes on the proletariat, the peasantry, the "nascent state bourgeoisie", and other classes or strata. (The object of this question is to bring out the historical process and occurrences of the period to give us a better basis for the rest of the discussion. Please try to inter-relate the events.)
2. Bettelheim says that in this period there was both a capitalist and a communist aspect to the social formation. Discuss the "dual nature" of a) the state, b) the production process, c) the proletariat, and d) the management of industry in this period. How is this dual nature related to "the constraints of the valorization of capital"?
3. Discuss wages and profits as forms revealing (or concealing) certain social relations; include here "value" and "use-value". Discuss the Bolshevik party's view of these matters in the latter part of the NEP.
4. Discuss the working class in this period, its struggles (particularly against the "nascent state bourgeoisie") and its contradictions. How successful were its struggles and why? Comment on the role played by the party in relation to these struggles.
5. Is accumulation necessary during socialist transition in a country like the USSR? Is it compatible with a "socialist road"? What is the difference between "socialist expanded reproduction" and "the demands of the accumulation of capital"? (see especially pp. 304-305)

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS STRUGGLES - PART 4, CHAPTERS 1 and 2

1. Much of the debate over the program for developing the Soviet economy focused on the relationships among light industry, heavy industry, and agriculture. On the economic level, the problem was characterized as a problem of accumulation of "value."

What does Bettelheim mean when he uses the term accumulation in this context?

What were the possible sources of "value" at this time and how and where could this "value" be accumulated?

(pp. 401,409-410,and others)

2. Bettelheim attempts to show that although the official policy of the Party was to generally support the NEP and the Worker-Peasant Alliance, that this policy was never really practiced at all levels of the Party and the state.

What were the various "relatively autonomous" forces which operated to undermine the official Party policy of cautious and balanced economic development?

What were some of the contradictions between this policy and the actual concrete programs that were put into practice?

How were these contradictions allowed to develop and what could have been done to avoid them?

(pp. 387,391,and others)

3. In Part 4, Bettelheim presents Bukharin's positions on a number of important policy questions and notes how some of these positions changed over time. Bettelheim does not draw all the connections between these various positions which would illustrate the basic coherence of Bukharin's analysis and world view.

Discuss the relationships among the various aspects of Bukharin's general line on the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union. How were his economic analysis, his political stands on the Worker-Peasant Alliance and democracy in the Party, and his view of the international situation all linked together?

It could be said that although Bukharin had some correct ideas, that he failed to develop these ideas into a concrete program that could be effectively supported in political struggle. What were the strengths and weaknesses of Bukharin's programs and the methods he used to advance them?

(pp. 409-410, 419-424)

4. Stalin's position also vacillated over time, but it too eventually achieved a certain coherence on the economic, political, ideologic, and theoretical levels.

Discuss the relationships among the various aspects of Stalin's general line on the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union. How were his economic analysis, his political stands on the Worker-Peasant alliance and democracy in the Party, and his view of the international situation all linked together?

Which aspects of his line do you agree with,disagree with?

(p. 431, pp. 413-418, and others)

5. Can you enumerate the various factors which combined to allow Stalin's line to predominate at the 16th conference? Can you identify a "weak link" in this set of factors?

Questions for Part 4 (c) of Vol II Bettelheim Class Struggles

1. What is the "Bolshevik ideological formation"? How is it distinguished from "revolutionary Marxism"? Generally what sort of force shaped its development? Broadly speaking, what type of process led to the general abandonment of Marxism-Leninism within the CPSU? Did any tendency within the Party consistently oppose this development? (pp. 500-508).
2. In Bettelheim's view, what are the basic elements of the theory of the primacy of productive forces? What were the objective conditions in the Soviet social formation which supported the increasing dominance of this theory? In what way is it based on a reading of Marx? What is a more correct interpretation of Marx's work? (pp. 508-519).
3. How did the CPSU view the process of ideological change in the Soviet Union? How did it view the role of the state apparatus and state ownership by the end of the NEP? How are these conceptions linked theoretically and how do they deviate from revolutionary marxism? (pp. 519-524)
4. In what two forms did commodity relations exist during the NEP? How did the CPSU misconceive the role of economic planning? What were the consequences? (pp. 529-534).
5. What view of dialectics developed within the CPSU? How does it vary from dialectical materialism as developed by Marx and Lenin?
6. What political errors in the conception and practice of the CPSU were supported by an incorrect view of dialectics? What effects did this have on the relationship between the CPSU and the masses of the USSR? (pp. 535-547, 550-566).
7. What is the Stalinian Deviation?