Some writers are unlucky. They start to write a book on some subject and are then overtaken by events before it is published. This has been the fate of Paresh Chattopadhyay whose book on Russia—and how, despite the various claims, it was neither socialist nor non-capitalist nor post-capitalist or whatever but capitalist in a strict Marxian sense—was overtaken by the collapse of the state capitalist system there, the changes of "is" into "was" at the proofreading stage notwithstanding. It is to be hoped that this won't put people off reading the book on the grounds that this is all now ancient history, since Chattopadhyay's analysis of Russia under Bolshevik rule is excellent. His basic argument is that Russia during this period was capitalist because the economic system there was based on wage-labour and that, as Marx pointed out, wherever wage-labour exists so does capital and so capitalism.

Capital is not a thing but a social relation, one that comes into being whenever the producers are separated both from the means of production and from the products of their labour; this means that they can only get a living by selling their mental and physical energies, their productive skills, for a wage or salary. This is why the fact that one class in society has to work for wages is in itself evidence that capitalism exists; it is a sign that the producers are separated from the conditions of production, irrespective of who controls these conditions and how.

Chattopadhyay points out that Marx distinguished between two kinds of property—what Chattopadhyay calls "economic property" and "juridical property"—only the first of which is essential to capitalism. "Economic property" describes the actual social relation whereby one class holds and another class is excluded from the means of production; it is a factual situation. "Juridical property" is where this social fact is recognised by the law in the form of legal individual private property rights. These existed before capitalism—in Roman law for instance—and capitalism can exist without them. In this sense they are the icing on the capitalist cake not its essential ingredients.

The mistake, says Chattopadhyay, made by those who saw Russia as socialist (the Stalinists) or non-capitalist (the Trotskyists) was to identify the abolition of capitalism with the abolition of "juridical property" instead of with the abolition of "economic property". At no time after 1917 was this latter abolished, as was demonstrated by the continued existence and indeed general expansion of wage-labour there.

Some dissident Trotskyists and Stalinists have been prepared to go some distance down this road, but Chattopadhyay goes all the way. He argues that the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917 was not even an attempt to establish socialism in the Marxian sense. Lenin in fact had a quite different conception of socialism from Marx's:

"Socialism, even as a concept, appearing in Lenin's State and Revolution, contains elements such as 'state' and 'hired employees' earning 'wages', that are alien to Marx's socialism, conceived as free association ... Socialism, according to Marx, is a free association of producers without state, without commodity production and without wage labour."

What Lenin and the Bolsheviks aimed to establish—and did in fact establish—was a state-run capitalism in which the role of Marx's "functionaries of capital" was played not by individual private capitalists nor by paid directors of joint-stock companies but by Party/State officials. It follows from this that the Bolshevik seizure of power was not a socialist or proletarian revolution. It also follows that, as capitalism (the exclusion of the producers from the conditions of production and their having
to work for wages) was never at any time abolished in Russia, all theories of "the restoration of capitalism" there—and there are people who would date this from the coming to power of Stalin or Khruschev or Yeltsin—were wrong; in fact nonsensical.

As can be seen, the approach of this book is very close to that of the Socialist Party. Certainly, it is now a book about history rather than the contemporary scene but it is yet another nail in the coffin of Leninism.

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