

Three Nostalgias

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Introduction

During the 1960s and 1970s, many youth in North America, particularly in Canada, expected social progress: a shorter work week; universal, affordable daycare; a guaranteed minimum wage; gender equality; etc. Perhaps there are others who share our nostalgia for the hopefulness of that era; if so, this raises a question: why were the hopes of the 1960s dashed? Why didn't more social progress occur? The answer to this question is linked to widespread nostalgia for socialism in the former Soviet bloc. Large numbers of people in the former Soviet bloc miss guaranteed employment, state-subsidized food prices, gender equality, personal security, and confidence in the future. With the collapse of Soviet socialism, pro-capitalist Western states could abandon any pretense of social progress that had been necessary to demonstrate the superiority of capitalism over socialism. As John Lanchester writes, the end of the socialist model removed "a powerful impetus to show that ordinary people's lives were better under capitalist democracy" (2010:16).

Despite Western assurances to the former USSR that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe, such expansion was spearheaded by the Clinton

Administration after dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. Subsequent Russian resistance to NATO expansion has revealed another nostalgia – viz., the longing of NATO hawks and conservative Western politicians for a return to Cold War levels of military spending and confrontation with Russia. This nostalgia, perhaps a holdover from Cold War habits, is reflected in deployment of NATO forces to Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the Baltic states, and the Black Sea. The Cold War attitudes seem to still pervade Western mass media.

Triumphalism regarding the 'end of history' after dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact was accompanied in various parts of the West by relentless attacks on social safety nets and deregulation of finance capital. This may have resulted in the economic collapse of 2008, and in widespread resistance to the imposition of policies of 'austerity.' These consequences were not anticipated by anti-Soviet Western social democratic parties who may have seen the Soviet bloc as an embarrassing impediment to the growth of mass support for social democracy. The connections between the three nostalgias mentioned above is explored here.

Dimensions of Progress in Canada

Medicare

The promise of progress in Canada during the 1960s and 70s was underpinned by adoption of North America's first single-payer medicare system. Canadian medicare was pioneered by the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation government in Saskatchewan in 1962, despite opposition from the Saskatchewan College of Physicians and Surgeons, insurance companies, and various business groups (Brown and Taylor 2012). The struggle for medicare in Saskatchewan led to The National Medical Care Insurance Act which was passed in the House of Commons on 8 Dec. 1966. The Act provided that the federal government would pay about half of the Medicare costs in any province with insurance plans that met the criteria of being universal, publicly-administered, portable and comprehensive. The starting date was 1 July 1968. By 1971 all provinces had established plans which met the criteria.

Health care in the former USSR had been provided by the state since the 1920s. By the 1970s, the USSR had the highest ratio of doctors to population in the world. Preventative health care measures were undertaken in rural and urban polyclinics. Doctors made house calls. The cost of most medicines was covered by the state (Szymanski 1984).

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women

The introduction of medicare coincided with exploration by governments of further progressive measures, particularly regarding gender equality. In 1966-67, the Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson responded to calls from grass roots women's organizations across Canada, including the Voice of Women, the Canadian Federation of University Women, and the Federation des femmes du Québec, to establish a Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The RSCSW was composed of seven members, including Florence Bird (Chair), Elsie G. MacGill, Jeanne Lapointe, and Doris Ogilvie. The RSCSW's report was submitted in 1971. Its recommendations touched upon several issues that were widely discussed in the 1960s and 1970s. These included equal pay for equal work, access to birth control and abortion, a

guaranteed annual income, access to affordable child-care, provision of low-cost post-secondary education, access to affordable housing, prevention of abuse of women and children, particularly 'Indian' and 'Eskimo' women and children.

In the former USSR, all able-bodied adults, including women, were legally required to work or study. Educational levels of Soviet women were among the highest in the world. Women were guaranteed equal pay with men, and had entered many professions – e.g., engineering and medicine – which had been traditionally almost closed to women in North America. Affordable universal daycare and widespread availability of low-cost semi-prepared foods reduced the 'double burden' of childcare and housework, although the double burden still existed. Contraception – i.e., condoms – were widely available. Abortion was available on demand (Szymanski 1984; Mandel 1975). A wide range of educational and occupational opportunities were available to indigenous women in the far north and northeast (Bartels and Bartels 1995).

The Pro-Choice Movement and Dr. Henry Morgenthaler

The pro-choice movement in Canada centred on the actions of Dr. Henry Morgenthaler, whose first abortion clinic was publicly opened in Montréal in 1969. Morgenthaler countered successive attempts by federal and provincial governments to prosecute him with the "defense of necessity" – i.e., as a physician, he had a duty to safeguard the life and health of the women who came to him for abortions. Despite violence and massive publicity by anti-choice religious institutions and individuals, successive juries refused to convict Morgenthaler. In spite of successive acquittals, Morgenthaler served ten months in prison, suffering a heart attack while incarcerated. Morgenthaler's struggles received support from women's groups across Canada. In 1976, the Attorney General of Québec announced that abortions performed in free-standing clinics were legal in the province. Eventually, abortion was legalized and supported by medicare plans in almost every province.

The Canada Pension Plan

Before 1966, income for most seniors was around 50% of the average industrial wage despite a universal Old Age Security (OAS) pension which was first introduced in 1927. Most employment-based pension plans were not portable, required long contributory periods, and had inadequate survivor benefits.

The Pearson government introduced the Canada Pension Plan in 1966. The CPP was a compulsory, contributory scheme for waged/salaried workers between the ages of 18 and 70. Benefits were based on the amount of contributions. The CPP included portability, and provided death, survivor, and disability benefits. A sister programme, the Québec Pension Plan (QPP) was also introduced in 1966. In 1967, an income-tested Income Supplement was introduced. It was intended to assist those who had retired before introduction of the CPP. By 1971, eligibility for CPP and OAS was lowered to age 65, and both were indexed. A spouse's allowance was introduced in 1975. Provisions were made to adjust the CPP contribution period for parents who left the workforce to raise children.

The measures described above significantly improved the retirement incomes of many Canadians.

In the Soviet Union, pensions were introduced in 1924 for Red Army veterans. Pension rights were extended to most Soviet citizens during the 1930s, and by 1940 approximately 2 million people were receiving pensions. (Williamson, Howling, and Maroto 2006:166). During the 1970s, men in the Soviet Union could retire at age 60 after 25 years of work. Women could retire at age 55 after 20 years of work. Pension levels were determined by types of work and years of service, and averaged about 70 percent of maximum wage. Many retirees continued to work part-time. Pensions of workers without sufficient years of service were supplemented by the state. Pensions unrelated to work were received by people with disabilities, including disabled war veterans. In 1989, there were approximately 44 million pensioners.

In many families pensioners were partially supported by younger family members who were working. Many pensioners assisted with childcare and housework. Although all pensioners benefitted

from the 'social wage' (see below), a minority of pensioners, particularly those who lived alone, were poor by Soviet standards – i.e., with an income around 70 rubles per month (Myers 1959; IMF 1991; see below). It should be noted, however, that cafeteria meals and staple foods were heavily subsidized by the state, as were housing and energy costs.

In 1983, incomes of less than 70 rubles per month were not taxed. Incomes of 70 rubles per month were taxed at 25 kopeks. Incomes above 100 rubles were taxed at 13 percent. Collective farmers, disabled people, and war invalids were not taxed. The income tax of individuals with four or more dependents was reduced by 30 percent. A small tax on bachelors was aimed at promoting marriage. (Feldbrugge et al 1985:756).

A Guaranteed Annual Income

In his 1971 book, *Agenda, a plan for action*, Liberal politician Paul Hellyer wrote that the proposal for a guaranteed annual income had achieved a "climate of acceptability in many circles" (149). Proponents of a guaranteed annual income argued that it would free the lowest strata in society from poverty. Critics argued, among other things, that it would remove incentives to work. In Dauphin, Manitoba, the federal and provincial governments supported an experimental guaranteed annual income program – "Mincome" – between 1974 and 1979. For unknown reasons, neither the provincial or federal government issued a report on the results of Mincome. In 2011, Dr. Evelyn Forget concluded that the only groups who worked less after the introduction of mincome were teenagers and mothers of newborns. Mothers wanted to stay at home longer with their babies. Teenagers worked less because they weren't under as much pressure to support their families. Consequently, graduation rates increased. Those teenagers who continued to work were given more opportunities to choose what type of work they did. Hospital visits dropped 8.5 percent, with fewer incidents of work-related injuries, and there were fewer emergency room visits from car accidents and domestic abuse. Additionally, there was a reduction of rates of psychiatric hospitalization, and in the number of mental illness-related consultations with health

professionals (see Carol Goar, “Anti-poverty success airbrushed out,” *Toronto Star*, 11 January 2011).

The Soviet constitution guaranteed employment to all Soviet citizens. Soviet law stipulated that no one could live from rents, speculation, profits, or black marketeering. Workers enjoyed extensive job security, a 40-hour work week, and three weeks’ paid vacation (Szymanski 1984). In the 1970s, most Soviet workers earned considerably more than the legally-guaranteed wage of 70 rubles per month (IMF et al 1991; Szymanski 1984). The ‘social wage’ provided by state for all Soviet citizens included access to subsidized housing, food, transportation, medical care, education, and household utilities. The Soviet subway fare of five kopecks had remained unchanged since the 1930s (Szymanski 1984).

In 1973, the average monthly wage of an industrial worker was 146 rubles (Szymanski 1979:52). Of this, about 30 rubles, or 15% of family income, covered housing (including utilities), medicine, transport, and insurance (Szymanski 1984:129). The remainder went for food, clothing, and luxuries – e.g., savings for an automobile. It should be noted that most families had two incomes.

The range of consumer goods available in the former Soviet Union was small in comparison to the range available to the ‘middle classes’ of Western Europe and North America. This was sometimes attributed by pro-capitalist critics to the absence of free market dynamism in the USSR. Some critics of capitalism attributed the relative abundance of consumer goods in the West to exploitation of cheap labour and raw materials in the ‘Third World’ by multinational corporations. Such ‘spoils of imperialism’ were not generally available to the Soviet economy. Perhaps it should also be mentioned that the production of many consumer goods is now not always seen as a benefit, but as endangering our increasingly fragile environment.

Affordable Housing

The 1970s saw progress in provision of affordable housing. The Liberal minority government, pushed by the New Democratic Party (1972-74), amended the National Housing Act to allow the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation to provide start-

up grants and 100% mortgages at below-market rates to housing co-operatives. Provincial and federal rent supplements were made available to low-income co-op members, while high-income members paid relatively high rents. Seven thousand seven hundred co-op housing units were established by 1979 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2011).

The Soviet state and state-owned enterprises and institutions provided low-cost housing for most Soviet citizens. After the Revolution of 1917, many Tsarist palaces and mansions were converted into small flats. Housing required 2 to 3 percent of the average family budget. Albert Szymanski concluded that in the late 1970s, Soviet working-class housing standards were about a generation behind those of the U.S. (1984:134-35). Many apartment buildings had shared kitchens. Even though approximately 4.1 percent of the Soviet population was provided with new housing every year, demand for housing could not be met. Red Army soldiers sometimes assisted in construction of apartment buildings. Housing was allocated on the basis of need (usually according to family size) and time spent waiting to live in a particular area. Tenants in state-owned housing could only be evicted in very exceptional circumstances (Szymanski 1984).

The development of housing co-ops was encouraged by the Soviet state to help relieve the housing shortage. Co-operatives made up about five to seven percent of the housing stock of the USSR. Co-op members paid a portion of construction costs by instalment (Lykova 2002).

Petrocan

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the formation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) brought a rapid rise in oil prices in the early 1970s. Major US oil companies’ wildly-fluctuating estimates of Canada’s oil reserves led the Trudeau government to establish a state-owned oil company, Petrocan, tasked, among other things, with guaranteeing a steady supply of oil to Canadians. In contrast to the US, supplies of petroleum products to Canadian petrol stations were maintained during the ‘oil crisis.’ Despite opposition from major US oil companies, the government of Alberta, and the

US government, most Canadians approved of the creation and activity of Petrocan (Laxer 2008).

In the USSR, all the major means of production and exchange, including the petroleum industry, were owned by the Soviet state (Szymanski 1979). Revenues from state-owned enterprises, including the petroleum industry, supported, among other things, the ‘social wage’ (see above). In the 1970s, natural gas production in Western Siberia expanded, and exports of natural gas to West Germany began. Oil and natural gas were sold at below world-market-prices to the Eastern European socialist countries and to Cuba (Szymanski 1979).

Reagan, Thatcher, and the ‘End’ of the Cold War

In light of the developments mentioned above, it did not seem unreasonable in the late 1970s to expect that Canadian governments would continue to respond to social movements which sought to bring progress through further state intervention in the economy. Many on the left saw the 1979 election of Margaret Thatcher, the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan, and the 1984 election of Brian Mulroney as setbacks which would only temporarily put progress ‘on hold.’ In the meantime, social programmes were cut back or eliminated. In 1985, the Mulroney government was forced by public pressure to cease its efforts to de-index OAS, but in 1989, the universality of OAS ended with the introduction of a clawback for pensioners earning incomes above a certain level. Petrocan was privatized. Federal support for co-op housing was largely eliminated. Polysar, a profitable crown corporation which produced petrochemical products, was privatized in 1988. The Canadian National Railroad (CNR) was privatized in 1995. But the popularity of Medicare insured that Conservative governments could not overtly curtail its funding.

Cold War tensions escalated under Reagan and Thatcher. For example, a 1983 NATO exercise codenamed Able Archer was mistaken by the Soviets as preparation for a ‘pre-emptive’ nuclear strike on the USSR (Prados 2006). Jeffrey Carney, a member of the US Air Force, informed the GDR (East German) intelligence service that Able Archer was only an exercise (2013). His action may have avoided

a nuclear war. This incident never received the notoriety of the earlier Cuban missile crisis.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Soviet socialism were unexpected. In the West, surprise was followed by triumphalism. The ‘magic of the market’ would shortly bring worldwide prosperity. The ‘end of history’ was at hand. Without the counterbalance of the Soviet bloc, NATO was free to subvert governments and to militarily intervene in Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and elsewhere without much concern about possible Soviet, United Nations, or other constraints.

Blowback from Western support of Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan during the Soviet period was not generally anticipated in the West. There have been some suggestions, however, that the US government or its agencies may have had prior knowledge and decided not to interfere with the events of 9/11. In 2006, Senator Patrick Leahy (D, Vermont) asked, “Why did 9/11 happen on George Bush’s watch, when he had clear warnings that it was going to happen? Why did they allow it to happen?” (quoted in Summers and Swan 2011:168). There is little doubt that the 9/11 attacks were used by some Western governments to pursue wars in the Middle East and to reduce the civil rights of their citizens.

Post-Soviet Nostalgia in the Former Soviet Bloc

Educational institutions, mass media, academics, and major political parties in the West have, for decades, attempted to equate Stalin with Hitler and to equate the former Soviet Union with Nazi Germany. For example, Peter Vronsky of Ryerson University claims that “the Russian [*sic*] dictator [i.e., Stalin] killed twice as many people as Adolph Hitler” (quoted in the *Toronto Star*, 25 January 2012). *Bloodlands* (2010), by Stephen Snyder, is an influential reiteration of the equation of Stalin and Hitler. (The U.S. scholar, Grover Furr, has contested all of Snyder’s claims (2014)).

In light of this pervasive equation of Hitler and Stalin in the West, it came as an unhappy surprise to many Western academics and commentators that there is widespread nostalgia for socialism in the former Soviet Union and in other parts of

the former Soviet bloc. For example, Olivia Ward is scathingly critical of Oksana Chernysheva, an 18-year-old Russian who heard from her parents, a bakery manager and a factory worker during the Soviet period, that during Soviet times “the food was tasty and ice cream was cheap.” Ward speculates that Oksana’s parents’ “minds had misted over during the chaos of the Yeltsin era when life savings turned to dust, “wild East” capitalism reigned and swaggering mafia *vors* were the nobility” (*Toronto Star*, 21 June 2014). Ward seems to confuse the period in which Gorbachev’s faction of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union began dismantling Soviet institutions with the effects unleashed by the “shock doctrine” after the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Klein 2007). These included increased infant mortality and suicide rates, de-industrialization, and decreases in life-expectancy and living standards, especially for pensioners (Parenti 1997). As well, gender inequality significantly increased (Jennissen and Lundy 2009).

Ward and others seem to have overlooked aspects of Soviet life which many Russians now fondly remember. These include state provision or heavy subsidization of education (including university), medical care, food staples, public transport, daycare, and housing (including utilities). Funding these services came from surplus generated by state-owned enterprises, including banks (see above). As well, the Soviet state attempted to ‘insulate’ the Soviet bloc, with varying degrees of success, from the effects of capitalist economic recessions and ‘market corrections.’

Plans to privatize housing and utilities in the former Soviet Union were widely unpopular because many people did not want to pay ‘market prices’ for rent, home heating, and electricity that would further enrich a new class of capitalists. Partial re-nationalization of the Russian fossil fuel industry (Goldman 2010) provided profits which allowed the Putin government to stabilize and improve Russian living standards (Lynch 2011).

Seth Mydans, in a 2011 *New York Times* article, quotes Lyubov Komar: “I felt more comfortable in the U.S.S.R. ... You always had a piece of bread. You always had work. Yes, sure you can go overseas now, but you have to have money for that and you have to

go into debt. Now, it you don’t have money you can’t do anything.” Mydans suggests that many Russians share this view.

In a *Los Angeles Times* article, Carol J. Williams writes,

The share of Russians who look back approvingly [on Stalin] has been increasing steadily in recent years, and the segment of those who tell pollsters they have no opinion on his place in history has shot up even more sharply, said Denis Volkov, a sociologist with the [independent] Levada Center. He points to this year’s massive Victory Day events as the Kremlin’s message to ungrateful neighbours that they owe their peace and prosperity to the war-time death of more than 20 million Soviet citizens. [reprinted in the *Toronto Star*, 27 June 2015]

Current characterizations of Russia as a corrupt kleptocracy centred on Vladimir Putin “[ask] us to shut out the wider realities of profit-making in Russia which are rooted in the capitalist system that was imposed in the 1990s, at such cost to Russians themselves but to much applause from abroad. That system is something the West has no interest in attacking” (Wood 2015).

Nostalgia for Soviet institutions is not always confined to reminiscence. In the Eastern Ukraine, rebels have nationalized coal mines and revived collective farms. Boris Litvinov, the Chair of the Donetsk Peoples Republic, said, “The Soviet Union was not about famine and repression. The Soviet Union was mines, factories, victory in the Great Patriotic War and in space. It was science and education and confidence in the future” (*New York Times*, 4 Oct. 2014). A popular song celebrating Vladimir Putin’s **attempt to revive the Soviet Union** was mentioned by Susan Ormiston in a CBC TV report from Moscow on 5 February 2015.

In Germany, mockery of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany) following reunification has given way to adoption of various East German institutions, policies, and practices, including ten-year plans to train young football/soccer players, equal pay for women workers, provision of daycare nurseries, generous maternity leave, recycling of household waste, provision of medical

polyclinics, and reforms of the education system. Sometimes, there is reluctance to acknowledge the success of East Germany:

When Germany introduced a bottle deposit system to encourage recycling in 2002, it pointed toward Scandinavia, even though East Germany had a sophisticated recycling infrastructure since the 1960s... When poor results in OECD school ranking led to call for reforms of Germany's education system at the turn of the millennium, a delegation was sent to Helsinki to study Finland's top-ranking system. The Finns told them that they, in turn, had taken their inspiration from East Germany. [Oltermann 2014]

It should be noted that East Germany's institutions and practices were largely based on those of the former Soviet Union.

Tariq Ali writes,

In a poll taken in January [2015], 82 per cent of respondents in the old East Germany said that life was better before unification. When they were asked to give reasons, they said that there was more sense of community, more facilities, money wasn't the dominant thing, cultural life was better and that they weren't treated, as they are now, like second-class citizens. [2015:22]

Progress and Cold War Competition

Competition between the West and the former USSR, including the period of the Cold War involved, among other things, comparisons between various aspects of everyday life in the West and the Soviet Union in an effort to marshal political support for capitalism or socialism. For example, Dr. Norman Bethune and Nobel Prize-winner, Dr. Frederick Banting, returned from visiting the USSR during the 1930s and became outspoken proponents of 'socialized medicine.' The extent to which their views influenced T.C. Douglas, the architect of Canada's medicare system, are unclear, partly because the complete RCMP file on Douglas has not been released in the interests of 'national security.'

During the Great Depression, pro-Soviet commentators in the West contrasted economic stag-

nation in the industrialized capitalist countries with full employment and spectacular industrial growth in the USSR. Prominent supporters of the USSR included the African-American singer and civil rights champion, Paul Robeson (1988), and Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury (1940). Johnson wrote,

The vast moral achievements of the Soviet Union are in no small measure due to the removal of fear. Fear haunts workers in a capitalist land. Fear of dismissal, fear that a thousand workless men stand outside the gate eager to get his job, breaks the spirit of a man and breeds servility. Fear of unemployment, fear of slump, fear of trade depression, fear of sickness, fear of an impoverished old age lie with crushing weight on the mind of the worker. ... Nothing strikes the visitor to the Soviet Union more forcibly than the absence of fear. The [economic plan] removes at one stroke many of the most obvious fears. No fear for maintenance at the birth of a child cripples the Soviet parents. No fear for doctors' fees, school fees, or university fees. No fear of under-work, no fear of over-work. No fear of wage reduction, in a land where none are unemployed. [Johnson 1940:187]

Margaret Gould, a prominent Canadian social worker and champion of gender equality (Jennissen and Lundy 2009), visited the USSR in 1935 and wrote,

What price the vanity of silk stockings? The Russian woman, poor thing, wears cotton stockings, but she has free medical care before birth, at birth, and throughout her own and her child's life. If she is employed in industry or at a profession, she has sixteen weeks' leave from work on full pay, while her job is kept for her. This also is her right if she is a student attending the university. [1937:165]

After the 1917 Revolution, the life expectancy for all age groups in the USSR went up, and infant mortality declined. A newborn child in 1926-27 had a life expectancy of 44.4 years, up from 32.3 years thirty years before (Dinkel 1985). "In 1960, in the USSR, life expectancy was 68.4 years, in 1970 70.0 years and in 1975 70.4 years. In 1975, life expectancy in the US for the white population was approximately 71.0 years (8 months longer than in the USSR in the same

year), and 67.9 years for the non-white population” (Szymanski 1984: 136).

William Beveridge (b. 1879 – d. 1963), the architect of Britain’s post-war welfare state, was heavily influenced by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Fabian socialists who, in a Minority Report to a Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief Distress (1905-1909), anticipated the measures recommended in Beveridge’s Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services of 1942. The Beveridge Report sold scores of thousands of copies, and was widely regarded in Britain as a blueprint for the sort of society for which Britain’s armed forces were fighting.

Beveridge worked as a researcher for the Webbs on their Minority Report. He wrote, “the Beveridge Report [of 1942] stemmed what from all of us had imbibed from the Webbs” (Harris 2009).

The Webbs were strong supporters of Soviet socialism. During the 1930s, the Webbs chronicled Soviet attempts to provide full employment, health care, old age security, and gender equality (Webb and Webb 1935). It seems very likely that these accounts influenced the Beveridge Report which envisaged institutions that would secure “freedom from” the “five giants” of want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness for men and women (Beveridge 2014). In their last book, *The Truth about Soviet Russia* (1942), the Webbs appended the 1936 Soviet constitution, translated by Anna Louise Strong. The constitution guaranteed the right to work (Art. 118), the right to rest and leisure (Art. 119), the right to health care and to maintenance in old age (Art. 120), the right to education, including higher education (Art. 121), and equal rights for men and women (Art. 122).

The affinity between the Beveridge Report and the 1936 Soviet constitution is unmistakable.

Soviet proposals to the British and French governments for a pact of collective security to contain Nazi aggression were rejected in favour of a policy of appeasement which yielded Czechoslovakia to Hitler in 1938 (Cockburn 1973). This led the Soviets to conclude a Non-Aggression Pact with Nazi Germany in 1939. Many Soviet sympathizers in Western Europe and North America, including the novelist Eric Ambler, were disillusioned because

they had seen the USSR as the main bulwark against Nazi aggression (Marcus 1990).

Finland had been part of the Tsarist Empire before its independence was recognized by the new Soviet government in 1917. In 1918, a bitter civil war was fought in Finland between Communist Reds and conservative ‘Whites.’ Under the leadership of Carl Mannerheim, the victorious Whites starved or killed large numbers of Reds (Taylor 2010). The Mannerheim government shared extreme anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism with the Hitler regime.

In November, 1939, the Soviet Union went to war with Finland in order to secure the approaches to Leningrad. In the West, sympathy for the USSR eroded, and there was much sympathy for Finland. Although Britain and France were at war with Nazi Germany, their governments prepared to send significant military forces to assist the right-wing Finnish government. The US, which had not yet joined the war against Nazi Germany, planned to send significant military aid to Finland. The Finnish government surrendered to the Soviet Union in March, 1940, before British, French, and US plans to go to war against the USSR could be implemented (Fleming 1969). The Soviets secured the Karelian Isthmus and the approaches to Leningrad, but did not occupy the rest of Finland or remove Finnish heavy weapons. In 1941, the Finnish military participated in the Nazi invasion of the USSR (Lunde 2011). A Finnish Volunteer Battalion was part of the Nazi elite *Waffen-SS* (Holmila 2013). In 1947, the victorious World War II Allies (Britain, the US, and the USSR) concluded separate peace treaties with Nazi Germany’s former co-belligerents: Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Finland.

The USSR and Communists who had resisted the Nazis in occupied Europe won immense prestige for the key roles that they played in the defeat of Fascism. As Winston Churchill said in a speech to the House of Commons in October, 1944, “I have always believed and I still believe that it is the Red Army that has torn the guts out of the filthy Nazis.”

In the postwar years, the Canadian authors H. Dyson Carter and Charlotte Carter extolled Soviet society and institutions. In *Sin and Science* (1946), Dyson Carter described Soviet programmes aimed at

ending prostitution and venereal disease. The Carters' periodical, *Northern Neighbors*, was widely distributed in Canada from 1956 to 1989. In *We Saw Socialism* (1951), Charlotte and Dyson Carter wrote,

Capitalists in Canada are fond of sneering at socialism. They call it a "charity system," "living off the government," "handouts from cradle to grave." But nobody lives on charity in the Soviet Union. People there don't "ask the government for new housing, free medical care or old age pensions anymore than we "beg" free public school education! The people do the work, pay themselves wages, make the profits, *take the profits and distribute these profits* fairly to everyone in the form of social benefits. [57-58]

Sympathy for the USSR eroded in the West after mass media campaigns portrayed Western Communists as 'atom spies' for the USSR. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in the US in 1953 despite an absence of evidence that they had passed atomic secrets to the Soviets (Schrank 2004). In Britain, Alan Nunn May and Klaus Fuchs were imprisoned for passing atomic secrets to the USSR while working for the British war effort during World War II, despite the wartime British treaty obligation to provide the USSR with "military and other assistance and support of all kinds" (Ashely and Soames: 49-50; see Broda 2011).

Leftists in the West were disillusioned after revelations by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956 of injustices during the Stalin period (1929-1953), and in 1956 after Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising. Some disillusioned leftists became pro-capitalist cold warriors who persistently attempted to equate injustices of the Stalin period with the crimes of the Nazis. It seems likely, however, that Khrushchev exaggerated or lied about the injustices of the Stalin period in order to consolidate power (Furr 2007). Michael Parenti writes,

Soviet labor camps were not death camps like those the Nazis built across Europe. There was no systematic extermination of inmates, no gas chambers or crematoria to dispose of millions of bodies. Despite harsh conditions, the great majority of gulag inmates survived and eventually returned to

society when granted amnesty or when their terms were finished. In any given year 20 to 40 percent of the inmates were released according to ... archive records." [1997:79]

In order to inflate the number of victims during the Stalin period, anti-Soviet commentators usually add the number of Ukrainian famine victims during collectivization during the early 1930s to the number of gulag victims. It must be remembered, however, that, despite Soviet mistakes in collectivization, many poor and middle peasants favoured transformation of privately-owned land into collective farms. Some rich peasants, in order to avoid taxation and/or expropriation, destroyed their own crops and domestic animals (Werth 1971; Tottle 1987). According to Vladimir Kozlov, head of Russia's Federal Archive Agency, "Not a single document exists that even indirectly shows that the strategy and tactics chosen for [Ukrainian agriculture, 1930-34] differed from those applied to other [Soviet] regions, not to mention strategy or tactics with the aim of genocide" (NBC News, 2 Feb., 2009).

During the Cold War, Soviet foreign-language media reported constantly-improving living standards and industrial growth in the USSR – for example, see *Soviet Economy Forges Ahead*, (translated by Yuri Sviridov, 1973, Moscow: Progress Publishers; also, see various editions of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia Publishing House)). As well, the Soviets gave scholarships to many students from Third World countries for study in the USSR – e.g., at Lumumba University in Moscow. At the same time, Western governments and corporate-controlled mass media barraged Western readers with stories of Soviet human rights abuses, relatively low Soviet living standards, and Soviet economic inefficiencies. For example, when we took an introductory Russian language course at Middlebury College in Vermont in 1980, the course was based on Soviet materials. These included a story about an urban family moving into a new apartment with hot and cold-running water. Some of the American students regarded this story as an example of blatant lying by Soviet propagandists. The students who had this reaction were probably influenced by an

endless stream of Western media accounts of chronic Soviet economic inefficiency. At the same time, Western mass media were filled with stories about the threat of ever-improving Soviet weaponry (see various editions of *Soviet Military Power*, published by the US Department of Defense during the 1980s). The obvious question of how a chronically inefficient Soviet economy could consistently produce world-class weapons was seldom addressed (Bartels 1997).

In 1991, with the dissolution of the USSR and the outlawing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the economic/propagandistic competition between the USSR and the West ended. As John Lanchester writes, there could no longer be “strong and explicit admiration” by left-wing Western European political parties

of the socialist model. In America, the equivalent pressures were far fainter – which is why American workers have, to Europeans, a grotesquely limited vacation time (two weeks a year), no free health care, and a life expectancy lower than that of Europe. Canada, too, is significantly ahead of the U.S., with a life expectancy which is a startlingly three years longer, 81 as opposed to 78 years – and that notwithstanding the fact that Canada spends a dramatically smaller amount on health care, 9.7 percent of GDP as opposed to the U.S.’s 15.2 percent. [Lanchester 2010:16-17]

In a 2010 interview, the U.S. political scientist, James Scott, said, “In a strange way, I find myself nostalgic for the Cold War in two senses. First, I think you could argue, as my colleague Roger Smith argued, if you want to understand the success of the civil rights movement in the US, one major reason during the Kennedy era was the fact that the US was losing the Cold War in part – they thought – because of the fact that we were a racist society. So winning the Cold War became premised upon reforms I fully endorsed, to make society more equitable. Secondly, when it was a bipolar world, the US and the West were interested in land reform in places where the land distribution was wildly unequal. After 1989, the IMF and the World Bank have never talked about land reform again” (Schouten 2010).

Western Nostalgia For the Cold War

Despite vigorous denials that the West gave assurances to the Soviet government that NATO would not expand eastward after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is a matter of public record that on 10 February 1990, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the West German foreign minister, told Edvard Schevardnadze, the foreign minister in M. Gorbachev’s government, that “one thing is certain: NATO will not expand to the east. ... As far as the non-expansion of NATO is concerned, this also applies in general” (quoted in Klußmann, Schepp and Wiegrefe 2009).

Seumas Milne writes that by sending military advisers to the Ukraine, the U.S. and Britain have violated the Minsk peace agreement of February, 2015.

Thousands of NATO troops have been sent to the Baltic states – the Atlantic alliance’s **new front-line** – untroubled by their indulgence of neo-Nazi parades and denial of minority ethnic rights. ... For the western military complex, the Ukraine conflict has the added attraction of creating new reasons to increase arms spending, as the US Army General Raymond Odierno made clear when he complained... about British defence cuts in the face of the “Russian threat.” [*Guardian*, 4 March 2015]

In June, 2015, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the former secretary-general of the Atlantic alliance, said that “the Kremlin’s **true goal is to shatter Nato solidarity** and reassert Russian dominance over Eastern Europe” (*The Telegraph*, 22 June 2015).

A *New York Times* article (24 June 2015) by Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers was headlined, “NATO Refocuses on the Kremlin, Its Original Foe.” According to Schmitt and Myers, US heavy weapons are being deployed in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. US Air Force B-52 bombers, symbolic of the Cold War, dropped dummy bombs in Latvia about 180 miles from the Russian border.

In a *Guardian* article (24 June 2015), Ewen MacAskill wrote, “NATO, in an echo of the Cold War, is preparing to re-evaluate its nuclear weapons strategy in response to growing tensions with Russia over Ukraine, sources at the organisation said.”

The demonizing of Russia and Vladimir Putin by Western mass media shows that Cold War attitudes remain strong.

Social Democracy And The End Of The Cold War

The split between evolutionary socialism and revolutionary socialism/communism began in the late 19th century when the German social democratic leader, Eduard Bernstein, proposed a 'revision' of Marx's work which omitted the necessity of socialist revolution. Instead, he argued, socialism could 'evolve' from capitalism by electoral and other non-violent means. (Hunt 1995) In contrast, Marxists argued that chronic capitalist crises would compel continuation of capitalist rule by undemocratic means, thus necessitating socialist revolution. At the beginning of World War I, evolutionary socialists supported the German war effort while revolutionary socialists, including Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, opposed it. The split was further exacerbated when the evolutionary socialist/social democratic government of the Weimar Republic authorized suppression of the Communist-led German Revolution of 1918, including the assassination of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

In Canada, the split between social democrats and Communists was exemplified during the 1930s by differences between the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Canada. Some CCF leaders, including Tommy Douglas and William Irvine, were willing to maintain dialogue with Communists (Mardiros 1979), while others were bitterly anti-Communist. For example, David Lewis's father's family came from Russia where they had supported the Mensheviks in the struggle against the Bolsheviks. After emigrating to Canada in 1921, an "anti-Communist ethos" permeated much of Lewis's **political activity, including** "overcoming" the Communist-led Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union in Sudbury, Ontario (Centre for Policy Alternatives, David Lewis Lecture, 3 November 2011, by Stephen Lewis and Michele Landsberg).

The CCF Regina Manifesto of 1933 advocated nationalization of major banks and industries, and a centrally-planned economy. David Lewis successfully

led efforts to remove nationalization as a policy aim of the New Democratic Party which succeeded the CCF in 1961.

Canada's entry into NATO in 1949 was supported by the CCF.

M.J. Coldwell, speaking for the CCF party, seemed to be interested only in showing that he was tougher on the communists than either of the two "old line" parties. The social democrats, obviously embarrassed by their support of the military alliance, emphasized the need to stress the economic aspects of the treaty, while urging the [Liberal] government to eliminate private profit-making on munitions. [Warnock 1970:41]

A contract employee of the NDP who worked in Ottawa during the 1990s said that the NDP seemed to be fighting a "war on two fronts": against leftists in their own party as well as pro-Soviet Communists who favoured nationalization and central planning, and against neo-liberal conservatives on the right. The collapse of the USSR may have been interpreted by the leaders of the NDP and other Western social democratic parties as a welcome elimination of any possible association of social democracy with Soviet socialism. With the 'taint' of Soviet socialism gone, the floodgates holding back the masses from supporting social democratic parties were expected to open. The war on two fronts would end. But things didn't work out that way. After the end of the Soviet Union, Western social democratic parties were unable or unwilling to stop Western involvement in disastrous foreign wars. New Labour under Tony Blair joined the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Liberal government of Jean Chrétien and the NDP did not. But the NDP supported the NATO bombing and subsequent dismemberment of Yugoslavia in 1999, and the Western bombing of Libya in 2011.

Western European social democratic parties were unable or unwilling to stop deregulation of the financial sector which culminated in the crash of 2008. And, they were unable or unwilling to stem the tide of austerity policies which have subsequently eroded Western social safety nets (Evans and Schmidt 2012; McKibben 2014).

In 2006, the NDP, under the leadership of Jack Layton (b. 1950 – d. 2011), like the Conservatives, focussed on bringing down the Liberal government of Paul Martin, which was on the verge of introducing a national daycare programme and negotiating settlement of many outstanding issues with First Nations. During the subsequent election campaign, the NDP concentrated almost exclusively on Liberal corruption. The RCMP chimed in with allegations – perhaps politically-motivated – of corruption against a Liberal cabinet minister. After the Harper Conservatives came to power, the RCMP allegations against the former Liberal cabinet minister were withdrawn (May 2009).

Almost needless to say, there was no movement by the Harper regime toward a national daycare program. The Parti Québécois established a low-cost daycare programme in Québec, and Liberal governments in Ontario have established full-day kindergarten starting at age four. Neither of these provincial initiatives were supported by the federal Conservatives.

Development of Alberta's tar sands and promotion of pipelines to export tar sands bitumen were the major policy initiatives of the Harper regime. The disastrous environmental and economic consequences of these policy initiatives are now increasingly apparent. This is perhaps reflected in the electoral defeat of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party by the New Democratic Party in May, 2015. Whether the Alberta NDP government can make meaningful reductions in carbon dioxide emissions associated with the Alberta tar sands remains to be seen.

The End of Nostalgias?

In Russia, nostalgia for Soviet socialism has given way to partial restoration of state control and central planning of the economy, particularly in the fossil fuel sector. Maintenance of Russian living standards may thus be overly dependent on continued oil and gas revenues. If these revenues decline because of lower international oil/gas prices, or because of international action to curb burning of fossil fuels, this may threaten Russian living standards. Would such a threat bring an upsurge of political activity aimed at further restoration of Soviet institutions, including

state farms, state-owned non-fossil fuel industries, and comprehensive central planning? Such political agitation would almost certainly involve class struggle as oligarchs and foreign investors' property is threatened. Such class struggle would perhaps increase the threat of pro-capitalist, foreign – i.e., NATO – intervention reminiscent of the Western and Japanese military attempts to overthrow the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War (1918-20; see Kinvig 2006). NATO attempts to quell resurgent revolutionary socialism might also increase Cold War nuclear confrontations. These developments would be fueled by the Cold War-style nostalgia of NATO leaders and right-wing politicians.

Would the processes envisioned above have analogues in the West? The failure of social democracy to replace nostalgia for progress with *actual* progress as social democratic parties drift to the right, could lead to further marginalization of social democratic parties as Western political activists attempt to revive initiatives which require extensive state intervention in the economy – e.g., provision of affordable housing, reduced dependence on fossil fuels, provision of national daycare programmes, restraint of the financial sector, improvement of pensions and old age security, etc. Such initiatives will, no doubt, be opposed by the usual panoply of pro-capitalist forces: chambers of commerce, right-wing think tanks, conservative political parties, etc. These processes might revive or accelerate class struggle.

In the West, it is doubtful that leaders of the sorts of class struggle envisioned above will look to Russia as a model. The years of the Great Depression when the Soviet Union was widely seen in the West as a beacon of progress are long over. The Cold War equation of the USSR with Nazi Germany, remains pervasive and fuels the resurgence of Western nostalgia for Cold War confrontation. Nevertheless, the possibility of revolutionary socialism may arise again in the former Soviet Bloc *and* in the West. While the prospect of progress and communism is uncertain, the prospect of anthropogenic climate change is not. It will shape class struggle and all other aspects of human society for the foreseeable future.

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