Albert Szymanski: Concluding Remarks

I'd like to clarify my remark about smelling like coffee. I was paraphrasing Clark Kissinger's quotation of Ann Landers yesterday. But by the way, I think Clark has put an immense amount of time and energy into the conference for a whole year, and I really think we should give him some kind of thanks for his work.

I'll try to address some of the questions, but there just isn't time to deal with all of them. One question was why did not the Soviet Union give sufficient support to liberation movements before the early '70s. I think they were unduly afraid of nuclear war. It was basically the change in their position on Vietnam, and particularly the events of 1975, that was pretty much decisive in changing my mind about the Soviet Union. And I think it's their general change and much more active support of world revolutionary movements in the latter part of the '70s that means that U.S. imperialism is really jamming them today — they're suffering for it. What I would like to point out is that the worst you can say about the Soviet Union in the '50s and '60s is that they gave *in*sufficient support to revolution. In the early '70s China *betrayed* the world revolution, and that is a qualitatively worse kind of phenomenon, while Mao Tsetung was alive.

As to Central America being a contest between superpowers, I

mean, that is just bullshit. The only, the best stake, or the biggest stake you could ever say the Soviet Union had in El Salvador or Guatemala is maybe they gave a secret subsidy to the CP bookstore in the capital. What's going on in El Salvador or Guatemala is a class struggle by two of the most vicious ruling classes in history, supported by the most vicious imperialism, against the people of those countries.

As to the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, if we reasoned the same way as the long article about India reasoned in the book published by the RCP, it's clear that the Chinese by building a railway between Zambia and the ocean facilitated commerce in those countries, and neither I nor the RCP would argue that Zambia or Tanzania is a socialist country. Now what could facilitate the building of capitalism more than building a railway? Therefore, since China helped build the railway it must be imperialist. But it's a bullshit argument. I think Chinese foreign aid was a little better than Soviet aid. The Chinese technicians went in there and lived at the same level as the people; the Soviets don't do that. But you don't judge whether a country is imperialist by whether or not the people live at the same living standards. You might say it was better, but qualitatively they were the same — neither one of them were instances of social-imperialism.

The Horn of Africa. The Soviet position on the Horn of Africa is that there should be a federation involving Somaliland, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, as well as South Yemen. The Ethiopians offered autonomy to the Eritreans. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front is, I believe, a revolutionary and Marxist organzation that got its guns and training from the Soviets and Cubans before the Ethiopian revolution. I do not personally believe that the Soviets should have anything to do with the dispute between the Eritreans and the Ethiopians. As far as I know, the Cubans live by that principle. That's an argument among revolutionaries and not an example of imperialism.

The question is, is the Soviet Union moving towards communism? Well, if you define communism as increasing distribution according to need, as opposed to labor, and increasing involvement in running the day to day aspects of lives in the factories and in the neighborhoods and so on, on a voluntary, participatory basis, rather than through paid officials and so on, the movement is in that direction. Now whether or not they can achieve it is another ques-

tion, but certainly they're not moving toward capitalism.

A couple of questions about labor power being a commodity in the Soviet Union. It was posed by the other speaker that essentially the condition of the Soviet working class is "work for me or starve." That is again just total nonsense. There's an extreme labor shortage in the Soviet Union and the workers basically can't be fired, and so if there was nothing else, workers are not faced with "work for me or starve." They could get a hundred jobs like that, and the manager can't fire them. Plus, increasingly the food subsidies and the rent subsidies mean that you can almost live for nothing in the Soviet Union now; almost, okay.

As to capital export, I have not heard any evidence whatsoever that the Soviet Union exports capital. The thing that you can mostly say is that they do in fact build factories in other countries. Like the Chinese built the railway, the Soviets build dams and steel mills, and they want some compensation for their resources — it's not doubly tied aid. What they do is provide the materials and the technicians, and say: rather than have to provide us with hard currency as the Americans require, we want partial payback. Now that's a loss of 12½ percent to them. Had they kept those resources in the Soviet Union they would grow, you know, 15 percent. Instead, they make a tremendous subsidy to countries like India by sending the materials and the technicians and building those factories there. That is not imperialism.

I've tried to say over and over again what my position is. The quesion of socialism is defined as what class is in power? It's not a question of a continuum, or welfare, or bourgeois right, I've said over and over again, and the position is totally distorted — socialism means the working class is in power, and the evidence is pretty strong that the working class is in power in the Soviet Union.

There was a question about this guy Matthews and supposedly he says that the very top elite in the Soviet Union earns six to eight times more than the average worker. Well, let's make it real clear. The president of General Motors and these big corporations now are making between two or three to ten million dollars a year. The average salary for a worker in the U.S., what is it, like $17,000 or $18,000. Now just in terms of the top managers and the average worker, we're talking about a spread of about 150 to 1. So even given Matthews' distorted data there is still a qualitative difference. And when we talk about the owners, the Rockefellers and the Mel-

lons, you're talking about people making $20 million a year, you're talking about a difference of 1,000 to 1. Even with Matthews' data, that's a qualitative thing. And by the way, I did not even cite the Matthews book, *Privilege in the Soviet Union*, as the source of my data; I do list it, but I didn't use it for that data. That data comes from a number of sources — Yanowitch, Nove, Hough, and Lane. And we're not talking about some minor official out in Siberia, we're talking about the wages of the 49 or so top economic ministers in the Soviet Union being pretty much frozen at 600 rubles. Now it's not insignificant that Andropov's apartment has 5½ rooms. This is not an insignificant fact. It's a qualitative difference. There is petty privilege there, and yes they do have access to a car of the enterprise and they can probably get Western whiskey. Big deal. It's no evidence whatsoever that the country is capitalist.

Let me then just sum up; I've taken about half my time. The RCP's arguments are not Marxist arguments, the arguments that if you get in a position of power you're taken over by this compulsion to want to be a capitalist, and furthermore, that once you're in that position you have the means to transform whole modes of production (because a few leaders have a bad line). These ideas are ideas of bourgeois social theory, ideas of Michels and Max Weber, and have nothing in common with Marxist class analysis or Marxist analysis of modes of production.

And again, I think that somebody raised a question, if socialism can be taken away from the working class so easily, that even with forty years of education in the Soviet Union hardly any workers or no workers even thought that the country went capitalist, if it's that flimsy a system, why can we ever think that we can make socialism in the United States or any place else? Why bother if socialism can't work? That's really what you're saying, and that leads you to the same kind of cynicism that bourgeois social science says.

Now I've heard no evidence today that there's any export of capital, and that before '55 there wasn't while after '55 there was. I've heard no evidence that labor power is a commodity. I've heard no evidence that the logic of expanded reproduction holds, that it's money — labor power — expanded money. I've seen no evidence, and pretty much the RCP has conceded, that nothing that acts like or looks like a capitalist ruling class exists. I've seen no real evidence that profits are in command. The kind of arguments I've seen are arguments by assertion over and over again. Asserting has a certain

credibility because we are all born with, not born with, but born into a society that has those prejudices. If somebody asserts something we agree with, we applaud. And I've seen all kinds of circular arguments and if it's A it's social-imperialist, and if it's not-A it's social-imperialist. I've seen very little logic, very little Marxism, and even less evidence.

I have more time than I thought I had. Okay, again, this is a very brief review. I think the RCP has in good part said that it hinges on whether or not it's capital accumulation or socialist accumulation, whether or not labor power is a commodity or not. And I think we've reviewed the evidence. The Soviet Union has no reserve army of labor, while all alleged "other" capitalist societies do have it. The managers really don't have the power to fire workers or to move whole factories. That it's the *plan* that's predominant. And that plan is in good part organized both in the immediate interests of the working class *and* it has politics in command. Again in terms of education, quality of life, increasing the social wage, increasing participation, politics is in command and it's working class politics. I think production has been shown basically to be for use value, both by the expansion of the social wage, the fact that production is really oriented to the working class, and there is no evidence of the M—C—M' logic; that the plan generally operates to diminish the existing inequalities, to diminish the division of labor, to increase the quality of life; that prices are set by political criteria, and increasingly so as the subsidy on dairy and meat point out. If anything there is more of a divergence away from the law of value in the Soviet Union. And further, as I think the RCP fairly correctly points out, it's very important to talk about the direction of a society, and it's pretty clear again, by the increasing distribution on the basis of need, and the rather radical increase in equality *between* the very top jobs — the economic ministers, the Central Committee members, and the working class — the direction of the Soviet Union is forward.

Let me end, and this partially addresses what somebody asked me about Cuba, with a quote from Fidel Castro in 1975. Fidel says:

> There will be many changes in the future. The day will even come when capitalism disappears in the United States. But our feelings of friendship for the people that helped us in those decisive and critical years, when we faced starvation and extermination, will be ever-lasting. Our confidence in Lenin's homeland is

unbounded because in the course of more than half a century the Soviet revolution has proved its adherence to the principles and consistent line or behavior in its international policy. It has shown this not only in Cuba but in Vietnam, in the Middle East, in the Portuguese colonies fighting for their independence, in Cyprus, Yemen and Angola, in every other part of the world where national liberation movements confront colonialism and imperialism, as it once did in an exemplary manner in the struggle of the heroic Spanish people. Its detractors are like dogs barking at the moon.

Thank you.