

WHAT WILL A SOCIALIST SOCIETY BE LIKE?

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INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the political economy of a socialist society, in the light of contemporary developments. Because the USSR claimed to be socialist, Stalinism has made socialism appear either repressive or utopian. As a result, socialism now seems to be inefficient and even morally repugnant. The argument of this article is that socialist society provides both an efficient economy and a free environment for humanity. The USSR introduced new forms of organisation which have to be clearly differentiated from socialism in order to understand the non-utopian and free nature of a socialist society. In this article an attempt is made to re-state the nature of a socialist society, as understood by the classical socialists.

In order to clear the way towards a fuller understanding of a socialist society, this article proceeds logically from the position of the individual to the nature of the society rather than the more common method of starting with the various societal forms such as nationalisation. The association of socialism with a controlled collectivism and totalitarianism makes it imperative that a counterbalance be provided. In Marxist theory it is only in a socialist society that the individual can be truly an individual and hence a free individual.¹ I will, therefore, outline an argument proceeding from the needs of the individual.²

THE GOAL IS FREEDOM

Marx and Hegel start from a view that mankind is evolving towards the goal of human freedom. The usual definition of freedom, which is taken from Hegel, is that freedom is the recognition of necessity. In other words, the understanding of nature and society creates the scope for human freedom because mankind can utilize both the forces of nature and its own talents to create a society adequate to itself. For the purpose of widening human freedom then, mankind has had to go through a series of social forms which have become progressively outmoded.

The problem is that such a definition is not really an explanation of freedom but rather a condition for freedom to exist. It was easy for Stalinist philosophers to trot out this argument because it seemed to imply that the Stalinists understood the world and the USSR was the only form possible. A society in which the needs of the individual were understood, in the wider context of society and nature, could be free. While it is improbable that such a society would then stand opposed to its constituent individuals, it is nonetheless possible, at least for a time. It is possible to imagine a ruling class or group continuing to extract a surplus product in its own selfish interest, although it is well aware that the best interest of all individuals would be served by a socialist society, simply because it is afraid that it will lose out, if not in the long run, then at least in the immediate aftermath of any change. Indeed, it could be argued that the Stalinists were in precisely such a position. It is also possible and indeed probable that the nature of capitalist society is such that it prevents a true understanding of reality because a particular group benefits from the status quo.

Two consequences follow from the above argument. Firstly, it is not sufficient to specify that humanity should *understand* the conditions for its own freedom. It is necessary to have the opportunity and the means to change society in that direction. Secondly, freedom is only possible when the form of the society does conform to the needs of the individual. A person is free, when he or she is able to fulfil his or her own social needs. What then are these social needs and what is their importance?

Mankind has certain social needs which are as much part of the condition of humanity as biological needs.³ Above all, everyone needs to engage in social labour both in order to obtain the necessities of life but just as importantly in order to be truly human. Robinson Crusoe from this angle is less than human in so far as he could not be social. The need to co-operate with others, using language, thought and emotional relations is an essential aspect of humanity, closely related to the division of labour. The point says Marx, is rather that private interest is itself already a socially determined interest and can be attained only within the conditions laid down by society and with the means provided by society, and is therefore tied to the reproduction of these conditions and means.⁴

As the social surplus has developed so have the non-labour social aspects appeared to be separated from labour itself. Over time, with the emergence of class society, the ruling class developed a system of thought with a

complex language structure and particular rules for displaying emotions, apparently very different from the process of labour, which was the province of the exploited classes.

Plato's Republic set forth the ideal of all ruling classes since that time. The rulers were to be isolated from the majority and given the task of ruling. The majority would simply work, because that was their destiny. In fact, however, this ruling class ideal was imperfectly approached. Nonetheless both in the Platonic Ideal and in all actually existing societies both rulers and ruled are alienated. The rulers lost the ability to take part in co-operative social labour and distorted the whole nature of their humanity. The ruled, on the other hand, were alienated from their product and labour process and were also deprived of their humanity. All human attributes were debased. The emotional and psychological needs of mankind were fundamentally repressed. The immediate material needs of the majority have never been supplied in the quantity and quality required, while the minority wallowed in a surplus.

It is not surprising that all throughout history the most humanitarian and forward looking thinkers have tried to discover a society which corresponds to human nature. In other words they were looking for a form of society which corresponds to the needs of the individual.

CAPITALIST AND SOCIALIST SOCIETY COMPARED

In a capitalist society, however, that form stands in contradiction to the needs of the individual, profit stands opposed to what most people want. The need to make money stands in the most direct and immediate conflict with the requirements of mankind. The goal of those who look for money, value or profit is to produce as much as possible by employing as few as possible at the lowest wage, consistent with an output of reasonable quality. Hence elementary human rights such as the right to a job, a living wage, good education, free health provision etc are always in conflict with the imperatives of capitalism. This is particularly obvious in the case of those goods and services produced by the needs based sectors like education and health, where the approach of a truly human society would be very different.

Education is based on producing people trained for industry rather than for developing the talents and creativity of the students and society. As a result even the very best schools are of poor quality. This is one point on

which Rudolf Bahro, the East German dissident produced a very strong argument.⁵ In a socialist society, children would be taught *how to learn* and be provided with a basic approach to learning, rather than being taught a mixture of religious and state propaganda, along with a mountain of facts. They will learn creatively and develop a full critical understanding of their subjects.

Capitalism is not interested in a critical understanding of the arts or social and physical sciences. Such an understanding would inevitably lead to a critique of capitalism itself. It, therefore, prefers to reduce the discussion of each subject to a collection of ever more detailed facts, data and definitions. The vision of the whole and hence a critique of the whole is impossible, because few can see anything other than numerous divisions and sub-divisions of knowledge. Because knowledge is necessarily both total and critical, in a socialist society there would be no barriers to criticism while there would also be a stress on understanding the whole nature of a subject. As a result, students in a socialist society would be able to develop their understanding of reality to the maximum degree possible. The naturally inquiring minds of children would not be artificially disciplined but assisted to explore reality. The needs of industry or capital are very different from the needs of the ordinary individual. Capital and Industry need a workforce trained to subject itself to the dumb routines of modern industry. Socialism, on the contrary, starts from the need to develop minds of children, students and adults. It sets itself the task of liberating mankind from the discipline of the modern division of labour.

Today *health* is increasingly maintained and developed for the rich. Costs of medicines and medical training are so great that nationalized medicine is in decline. Doctors have to make money and are less interested in mass preventive medicine or the healthy individual. Doctors and dentists are necessarily interested in expanding the number of their patients and the complexity and length of their diseases in order to raise their incomes. In a socialist society, in contrast, the all round health of the individual is primary. *Efficiency*, although not unimportant, comes second in a list of priorities. If an industry is deleterious to health it might have to be closed down completely, rather than ruin the lives of those working in it. Rather than waste money on armaments, the police or other forms of control as in a capitalist society, the socialist society would use its resources first and foremost in order to raise everyone's health and well being to the elementary level that all ought to have by right.

This same point, that capitalism reduces the potentiality of every individual to a fraction of what each is capable of, can be made using the example of other sectors in the economy, which are not needs based, with suitable emendations. This question is dealt with in some detail below.

The answer is not the abolition of machinery and a return to manual labour, however. It is not enough, as the repetition of tasks, day after day is a tyranny of its own kind. When societies have an established order in which individuals have definite tasks which are social but defined by nature, then the whole society is dominated by nature. Then all members of the society are alienated from their own nature.

In other words, for the individual to be truly human he/she has to be able engage independently in creative social labour. In so doing, the individual will then be able to develop physically, intellectually and emotionally. In modern society only those engaged in independent research or physical activity can consider themselves less alienated than others. Such people may be free of both wage slavery and of routine labour but are involved in creative work. Nonetheless, they must be bound within the market and money and so the division of labour.

Hence the goal of a socialist society is that "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all". A socialist society must therefore conform to the requirements for such a goal. As we have argued, the first condition must therefore be the opportunity to engage in creative social labour. While it sounds simple, it is, in fact, both simple and complex. It is simple to understand like all profound statements, but it is very complex in its nature. To achieve a society of creative labour a series of pre-conditions are essential.

THE MATERIAL PRECONDITIONS FOR SOCIALISM

The following is an outline of the material pre-conditions that I regard as the basis of a socialist society.

1. The most important political pre-condition is that socialism as a system must have won against capitalism. This would mean that the socialist system had come to predominate in the world to the point where it was only a matter of time before all countries would go socialist. In the first instance, this would imply the victory of socialism in the advanced

capitalist countries. This does mean, of course, that socialism in one country is impossible, as has been graphically illustrated with the collapse of the USSR.

The objections to this view are usually of two kinds. In the first instance, it is pointed out that socialists have to fight for socialism on a national basis, even if they are internationalist, simply because the state is national. That is true and it may be that once again socialists will succeed in a single country. The problem, however, is that they cannot actually construct socialism in that country. They will be constrained by the international division of labour and the world market as well as by the *antagonism of the international capitalist class*. On the other hand, it may begin the process, which will assist other countries to go socialist. If they do not then the original country will either go Stalinist or return to capitalism. It is more likely, however, that if a developed country goes socialist, others will rapidly follow.

In the second place, it is argued that it is utopian to expect that a number of developed countries will go socialist within a sufficiently short period of time to ensure the permanence of the socialist victory. Hence the conditions for the existence of socialism are impossible.

This argument, which is ultimately Stalinist, fails to understand the nature of a socialist victory in a developed country. It would imply not less democracy but more democracy, with the democratic elections of all administrative posts throughout the society, from factory managers to head teachers. It would mean that the members of all elected bodies would be instantly recallable. The demands of the Chartists for annual elections would be implemented. Immediate measures would be introduced for full employment, free health and education for all and the abolition of all privilege. It would instantly make all neighbouring countries unstable because it would demonstrate the possibility of a democratic alternative to the existing regimes.

It has to be remembered that capitalism did not triumph in a single country but as a world system. That indeed was the view of Marx.⁶ The move to socialism is composed of two elements; the first one concerns the actions of the working class itself and the second the real movement of the categories. The latter refers to the way capital itself is gradually declining. The socialisation of production has made insurance com-

panies and pension funds the owners of the country. A few large firms dominate industry. Money is no longer a spontaneously acting form but controlled by the government, which issues not gold but paper at will. The real demand for the replacement of the few who control, by the majority who work, is irresistible.

2. The forces of production must have reached such a high level that machines make machines. Robots will be making robots. Hence no-one will be engaged in routine blue-collar labour. Marx foresaw such a development almost 150 years ago simply on the basis of the nature of capitalist industrial development. It is unlikely that capitalism will ever reach this point, although it is constantly getting nearer. The reason is partly that it prefers to use cheap labour, wherever it can find it, and partly that it prefers to transfer capital out of industry into finance capital. The ultimate reason is that the effect of robots making robots will destroy value and so price itself. If machines make machines and machines extract the raw materials, there are no longer any costs, if the raw materials are either infinite or infinitely substitutable.

Already in 1992, the mechanisation of production has proceeded to the point where a fraction of the number of workers required in industry thirty years ago are now needed to produce the same output. It is not utopian to project this forward to the point where very few will be involved in simple manual work. The consequence of such a result are revolutionary. The most important result would be the progressive reduction of the working day.

3. The result of introducing a very high level of development in the productive forces would be a society of relative abundance. The term is *relative abundance* rather than absolute abundance because there is considerable confusion over the term abundance itself. It does not mean that there would be infinite quantities of different coloured television sets or cars. Not being alienated, people would be satisfied with a standard of living much higher than anyone now enjoys. Most people would not want more than one or two television sets per person. This point has been the occasion for the accusation that the big brother state would decide what you could have or not have. That would not be the case. If someone actually needed 3 television sets then he would take them but most people would have no use for them. Human beings live best, we are told, by having a controlled diet. Hence the quantity

of food per person would be limited. Only those who wanted to die early would consistently eat too much. The society would produce the best possible variants of what is needed. The result would not be less choice but more real choice for everyone. The rich today will choose between a Mercedes and a Rolls Royce unless they want to appear more chic in which case they might buy a sports car. Their choice is limited to a few makes. The poor have no choice. They cannot have a car at all.

The whole nature of the economy changes towards the satisfaction of human needs. Thus, for instance, the very concept of transport changes. Systems which lead to mass human destruction, such as the car, would have to be seriously questioned. Mass communal forms of inner city transport such as the railways, underground and bus services could be made free almost immediately. They are close to free in a number of cities already. The only purpose in charging for transport and the utilities is a rationing device to prevent people overusing it. There is every reason to believe that the society could develop sufficiently to provide enough itself with more than enough fuel, whether through the use of hydrogen, or other forms of power.

4. Every individual would have his hours of necessary labour progressively reduced over time. In other words, no-one would have to work at repetitive, non-stimulating jobs for more than a decreasing number of hours per day. The number of jobs which could be regarded as non-creative in the developed socialist society would be small and declining. They could be shared among all the individuals in the society, who would work at them for a small number of hours per week. Most of the time, however, individuals would be engaged in creative social labour, which would mean that they would work far more efficiently than most people work today. Control over labour will be abolished in favour of self-discipline. Since good work will be in the interest of the individual, there is no interest in working badly.
5. As Marx makes clear in the *Gotha Programme* and elsewhere,⁷ value and so price and hence money is abolished under socialism. This does not necessarily mean that there may not be tokens used for items which are not yet in sufficient supply for all or may never be, like Mediterranean homes. The society will gradually distribute more and more goods on a free basis, beginning with those items which are

communal because they are natural monopolies or so costly that they require the intervention of the society to ensure provision like transport, housing, water and power.

6. The parasitic forms of finance capital will be abolished. The banks, insurance companies, stock exchange, and forms of adding up and collection of money will be abolished. Bookkeeping will either be abolished or be computerised. Routine white collar labour will be abolished.
7. The capitalist and non-capitalist forms of waste will be abolished. Arms production, specific ruling class luxury production, unemployment, unemployed resources, destruction of food and other surpluses, duplication of effort through competition, shoddy working, bureaucratic apparatuses of control from the police and censors to bureaucratic management will all be eliminated.

The effect of these necessary pre-conditions would be to create a society liberated from the dead hand of necessity. It will be a society where everyone will be creative and where innovation will be part of everyday life.

THE FREE INDIVIDUAL REPLACES THE WORKER

Put in another way, the result of these conditions would be the abolition of abstract labour. Abstract labour can be defined as the imposition of the specific social form of homogeneous human labour on the labour force in order to ensure a uniform rate of exchange. Without workers working at similar rates there is no basis for value and so price. It is in the nature of capitalism to ensure a fluid supply of labour with workers moving easily from one job to another, so constituting exchangeable units of labour.

Abstract labour is the very essence of capitalism. It is the basis of calculation of price and profits, it is the kernel of control over labour and it is the foundation of class under capitalism. It is the specific form of alienation under capitalism. It is the reduction of the human being to a commodity, labour power, which constitutes the form of domination of the commodity over the producer. It is only when labour power is homogenized that it is truly a commodity.

This form of domination of the commodity over labour or commodity fetishism also therefore goes back to abstract labour. It must therefore be abolished to establish socialism. Yet it necessarily involves the complete destruction of exchange value and so the market. As long as firms work for the market, abstract labour continues. There can be no compromise with exchange value or the market, because any such compromise necessarily means that labour continues to be subject to control. Hence the worker will continue to be subject to the machine and so the manager, the capitalist and the system rather than being able to control his/her own life, as long as the market continues.

The necessary abolition of abstract labour creates a series of problems, which if not solved can lead to a different form of control over the worker, leaving the worker alienated in a new form, as under Stalinism. It follows from the definition given above that the elimination of abstract labour leads to lack of control over labour, no way of calculating costs and an absence of class control which could lead to alternative forms of atomisation. Such is the nature of Stalinism.

The alternative is in the very essence of socialism itself. This brings us to the necessary solution which is that of direct control over management of all institutions in the society. In other words, every member of the society will elect and control those who administer the institutions of the society and every member will themselves be elected to the organs of administration and control of the society at one time or another in their lives. We will return to this point below. It must be noted that we have arrived at this conclusion negatively, by arguing that the abolition of alienation within production and assumption of creative labour requires a new kind of authority, popular authority. The authority of all is the negation of authority since there is no special authority standing over and against mankind.

We can put the same argument in yet another dimension. Under capitalism the majority must work for an employer to whom they sell their labour power. The capitalist appropriates that surplus value and so maintains his own standard of living at the expense of the majority, while establishing control over the re-investment of the surplus value extracted from the workers. The capitalist has a degree of freedom in that he is able to direct his own life and the lives of others. In a socialist society, everyone is able to enjoy a high standard of living and direct their own lives.

The very socialisation of the means of production or, in other words, the increasing integration of the division of labour demands social control from below. In the absence of such control from below, industry necessarily malfunctions because the employers are too distant from production to understand it and too afraid to devolve power to permit the necessary democratisation to ensure efficiency.

The proletariat in taking power abolishes itself as a proletariat. The working class defeats capital in order to overcome its own condition as wage-slaves. It, therefore, ceases to exist and its old slave culture is replaced by a new culture of free men.

Such are the pre-conditions of a socialist society. It is now necessary to turn to the construction of a socialist society itself.

SOCIALIST SOCIETY - ITS EARLY PHASE

It is first essential to make the point that socialist society is not differentiated in a **Stalinist** manner from Communist society. Marx in the Gotha programme made a distinction between the lower phase of socialism and its higher phase. In the first and lower phase, which still bears the hallmarks of its birth, payment would be by amount of labour input but this would be phased out. The higher form of socialist society would be characterised by distribution according to need. In fact Lenin and Preobrazhensky both adopted the phraseology of socialist and communist societies referring to the lower and higher phases, though often with qualifications. Under Stalinism this terminology was generally adopted to justify the USSR by producing a very clear distinction between the two forms of society. In Marx's understanding there would be no very clear distinction except that in the initial phases distribution according to need would not be applicable. Nonetheless, it is clear that the lower form would have to gradually metamorphose into the higher, so that the elements of the higher would be present in the lower. Distribution according to need would then be gradually phased in. Marx certainly did not use two different words to describe the two forms. In view of the identification of communism with Stalinism and the equivalence of the terms socialism and communism, I will use socialism in this article.

Under modern conditions it is also necessary to make a series of distinctions between the different societal forms which could come into existence

before socialism itself. There are successively: the period of taking power, the period of reconstruction after taking power, the transition period proper to socialism, the lower phase of socialism or communism and finally socialism in its fullest sense.

The first period, that of taking power might be protracted in two ways. In the first place, it might take some time to defeat the capitalist class. It does not matter whether this would be a direct civil war or a period of mass popular upsurge, shown in elections, which took time to take effect. In the second place, socialism in one country could not exist and hence there would be a period of time while socialism spread over the major developed countries. During this period there could be large destruction of the economy and society both through direct violence and through the disintegration of the old economy. The political institutions required for the embryonic society would come into existence even if only in a limited sense. New forms of self-organisation would develop. Large-scale industry would be nationalised.

The second period is one in which the destruction of the previous period would be overcome. This reconstruction period would necessarily be a period of regression while private property continued to be used in the old way. As reconstruction was successfully achieved finance capital would be gradually eliminated and the reserve army of labour gradually phased out. Social welfare provision would be extended.

The transition period would be characterised in the classical manner as the epoch of conflict between planning and the market. Although the major firms would be nationalised and gradually socialised they would operate within a market at first. It is this period that would have the greatest problems because planning and the market do not mesh together.

Planning is defined as the conscious co-ordination and regulation of the economy by the associated producers themselves. This appears to assume that planning is democratic by definition. In fact, the word "conscious" can only mean democratic as only through some form of institutionalised democratic system of choice could conscious regulation be established. A system of directed centralised management cannot be regarded as conscious regulation as it inevitably implies a dictatorial regime, in which the workers receive orders, which they re-interpret to suit their own interests. This usually means that the results are the opposite of the

so-called planners' intentions. The centre cannot then achieve their goals and the economy evolves in a manner undesired by either the organisers of the economy or the ordinary workers. Such has been the fate of the USSR. There is no way in which planning can be established without the involvement of the whole society. This would necessarily imply the introduction of workers' self-management with institutionalised elective forms.

In the absence of private property there are no capitalists and hence management does not have the same incentive to operate on market criteria. At the same time, planning requires maximum interplay between the direct producers and the planners. But in a market situation decisions are made on the basis of profits and workers can only be hired and fired on market criteria. A market requires a reserve army of labour as well as a capital market, which implies firms going bankrupt and laying off workers as well as a pool of unemployed workers. Workers who are controlled in that way cannot really manage the firms for which they are working. Alternatively they do control those firms and they do not permit themselves to be controlled by market criteria and the planners use social criteria for investment and refuse to allow individuals to be treated as inanimate things to be ordered around according to the needs of exchange value. The exact form of the transition period is the most controversial and possibly the most interesting question of the post-revolutionary situation.

THE POLITICS OF SOCIALISM

The early transition to socialism is about the elimination of exclusive control over the surplus product, which gives both power and privilege. The social group which holds this surplus product has to be abolished. Nothing can be achieved in the absence of this pre-condition. The extraction of the surplus product from the majority is the source of alienation and hence the first struggle is one for the overthrow of the capitalist class. The elimination of this control also implies the automatic decline of the state, since it is in the nature of societies ruled by a few that the state apparatus and so secret police has to become extremely powerful in order to maintain order. Conversely, the elimination of the ruling group, whether capitalist or Stalinist and their replacement by the rule of the majority, necessarily leads to the dissolution of the State itself. The apparatus of force begins to dissolve.

Decentralisation and all attempts at providing contracts between different interests will always be a failure as long as the real power rests with the few who control the surplus product. There must, therefore, be a fusion of the political and economic in order to ensure that the economy is controlled by the ordinary worker. In other words, the administration of society, which replaces the market, must be conducted with the maximum degree of participation.

This clearly requires that there be a multi-party system, or at least a multi-faction system with different views, platforms and open voting when necessary, combined with a real secret ballot.

The Maoist concept of a socialist society, where people would parade on the streets demanding this or that, under instruction from above, has little in common with democracy or genuine socialism. There has to be direct freedom of expression, through open media, and political and cultural forums, with different viewpoints being expressed, for there to be any kind of control from below. Such questions were not addressed by Marx, Lenin or Trotsky. Luxemburg did, on the other hand, stress the importance of freedom of expression. The reason why they did not discuss the question was not that they were dictatorial, but because they argued that they abolition of class interest and the 'replacement of economics by the administration of things' meant that there could be no fundamental clashes of interest.

In the transition period, however, there would be divergent interests, while in socialism itself there would necessarily be different viewpoints, even if interests converged. The two situations are very different, however. The divergences in the transitional period can only be solved through a temporary economic compromise achieved through a thoroughly democratic system. Such a system would necessarily phase out the market. The alternative is to crush those involved with value by force and in that process establish a powerful state and a regime which rules from above.

In a socialist society, the different viewpoints are important for arriving at a reasoned understanding of reality and in establishing a common responsibility for decision making. The political institutions that such a society might establish cannot be guessed at now. We can only note that Stalinist type institutions of a one party state variety are simply forms of rule by a ruling exploitative group and nothing whatsoever to do with socialism.

It is, however, not enough to establish political institutions to run the administration of society. It is essential to establish a means of overcoming the division of labour so that everyone will be able to govern as opposed to voting for a government. In a socialist society everyone must enter the management of his/her own unit and of the larger society as a whole for a time in their own lives. In that way administration ceases to be the province of the privileged few.

The division of labour is also reduced in its effect through everyone altering their occupation over their lifetimes. The effect is to remove the division between mental and manual labour, between creative jobs and routine jobs, between research jobs and jobs which only carry out orders. With education being free to the highest levels, all will be able to develop their talents to the maximum degree. Men and women will be giants of the body and of the intellect in the future society. It does not mean that anyone could become a doctor or that a doctor would only practise for a year or two before becoming a musician. That is absurd. But it would mean that the doctor could spend time being a musician and move out of being a doctor after practising for some time in order to become a sculptor. The actual division of labour must always continue in the sense that people will necessarily specialise but that specialisation does not have to reduce them to helpless playthings of the system because they know very little of anything else.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOCIALISM

This naturally leads to a more detailed discussion of the socialist economy. We have already referred to a number of features of the socialist economy. It would be a planned economy, where planning is defined as a social relation between planners and planned. The planned economy is consciously regulated by the associated producers themselves. For this purpose, there are elections to regulating bodies and to the administration. More important everyone spends a part of their lives in planning the society. There is no separate bureaucratic apparatus. Clearly there could be no private property in the means of production but then only someone who wanted to exploit others would actually want it.

In order to permit maximum participation there has to be maximum devolution of decision making consistent with central planning. Central planning has been associated with the supercentralised forms of control in Eastern Europe. A socialist society would be very different. While certain

aspects of the society have to be decided centrally, such as the co-ordination of transport, the extraction of certain raw materials, the development of sources of energy, other questions might be devolved even if there is a high level of centralised co-ordination.

At this point it is usually argued that there have to be criteria for decision making and if the market is abolished, there are no criteria. It is true that the abolition of the market appears to make economic decision making more difficult. But then the socialist society is not interested in making profit, even if it is interested in efficiency. The socialist society is not interested in growth for its own sake. Everyone is happily employed and has sufficient for their own needs. For that reason, economic growth follows more or less the same pattern as the previous years with certain exceptions which can easily be planned. The disruptions due to war, revolutions, crises, and slumps do not exist. The coefficients of the relations between the different sectors, in other words, change slowly.

Furthermore, in the socialist society the disincentive to work will vanish. The usual argument for capitalism is that it provides the only incentive known to mankind, money and profits. In fact, for most people there is little money and no profits. Hence this incentive boils down to a system of economic force.⁸ Either the worker conforms or he loses his livelihood. The effect is to reduce the incentive of the worker ever to perform in the ways of which he or she is capable. Every worker only provides sufficient of his ability to maintain his job or obtain a better job in so far as that is possible. In a socialist society, everyone is responsible for the economy and society and hence they will perform in the most creative way possible. Efficiency is, therefore, doubly improved. The worker abandons his/her sabotage of production and instead develops the very nature of the job to the very limit of what is possible. Capitalism is extremely inefficient in that it stunts the development of the worker and has to maintain an army of workers checking on the quality of the work of other workers. As this is not enough to ensure the loyalty of the worker, it needs unemployment, which is a further massive waste of resources.

Together with the abolition of wars, armies, police, the military sector and the whole apparatus of control under capitalism, the ending of slumps, unemployment and the massive waste on the needs of the capitalist class from Concorde to Rolls Royces, socialism starts with an enormous head start. Socialism will be the most efficient and innovative society hitherto

existing. The word efficient is used here in the sense of producing the optimum output from given inputs.

More concretely, the criteria for decision making are as follows:

1. The previous years' output is used as a basis for the current year.
2. The society maintains large levels of stocks and can observe the changes over time. That acts as the necessary signal for change.
3. The need to improve the health, education and well-being of its citizens will lead to constant innovation. The development of these innovations will depend on both the cost to the society and the intensity of the need. Most innovations will cost very little to the society and hence the decision to produce will depend on demand. That can be determined by surveys and tests.
4. In general the society will assume that it makes mistakes and learns by them. The argument that a socialist society does not have a market and hence cannot calculate costs is basically correct. If everyone works at their own rate in a creative way, each in his/her own fashion, then value cannot be calculated. It necessarily does not exist. A rough approximation is the best that can be done. Hence, approximate numbers of hours of labour time may be calculated and if there are odd items in short supply at any one time they will act as a constraint.⁹ The decision to go for some major production items rather than others will then become a decision for the local society or, if the production requires very large quantities of resources, it will be a decision for the society as a whole. The planners will not be able to decide on their own as the consequences of their actions will become obvious, when implemented. In general, however, the planners will not be separate from the rest of society and hence would have no interest in promoting one or other project.

In the end, all questions within a socialist society go back to the starting point. Because it is the first truly human society, there is no separate group exercising a greater or lesser control over the surplus product. Hence everyone has the same basic interest.

In turn this would mean that it would be in the interests of all that discrimination of all kinds be abolished. Sexism, racism, anti-semitism etc would all reduce the humanity of the society and so would offend everyone. In the transition period to socialism they would have to be eradicated. The conditions for their removal would come into existence very quickly with the introduction of full employment, higher education for all who could benefit, and the abolition of privilege. Without competition for jobs and with an end to social mobility since no-one would receive more than the wage of a skilled worker discrimination would begin to die. An education based on needs and common humanity would end prejudice.

None of this is to imply that languages would merge or that cultures would cease to exist in one grand culture. Marx refused to speculate on the exact details of this kind because he argued that we could not know.

SOME OBJECTIONS TO THE CONCEPT OF A SOCIALIST SOCIETY

It has to be said that only those who have defended the existing social order have opposed the concept of socialism itself. There have been very few people who were not a professor, parliamentary politician, bureaucrat or maker of money, who actually set out to oppose the concept. The most usual objection from those who are intellectually honest is that there appears to be no way of getting there. It is utopian. This, indeed, is the main objection at the present time. We can only reply that it is not a question of choice. Value is dying and the material pre-conditions for the socialist society are already here. Efficiency and justice demands that those who prevent ordinary people from governing themselves make way for the new society. Whether the majority, who are the proletariat, as they sell their labour power, will take power peacefully or through conflict remains to be seen. Modern society is already changing but this is another subject.

If we turn to the objections put forward by those in whose interest it is to preserve the existing order, then we may note the following points.

It has often been argued that there must always be an *elite*, either because it is in human nature or because an authority always arises. There is no evidence that the majority want an elite or that it is in the nature of society that there must be the privileged and unprivileged. Of course those in power want to remain there but that is another matter. It is true that society has to be administered, but it is the democratisation of that administration that

destroys the old form of the authority. Some academics have tried to object that only a kibbutz could have a democratic authority because the large numbers in contemporary society only permit of a parliamentary procedure, with anonymous candidates, who proceed to act their own interests. Yet, these same academics never attempt to consider the consequences of very simple democratic changes in modern societies, like the elections of managers and all controlling personnel in institutions, annual parliaments and the introduction of societal funding of magazines and newspapers to permit a wider expression of opinion by encouraging groups of citizens to write their programmes, analyses etc. It is obvious that the introduction of any one of these measures would change the nature of government in modern societies.

Of course the anti-socialist will then object that any societal control gives rise to *bureaucracy*, so that only the bureaucrats will have freedom of expression. He can then go further and say that the bureaucrat then controls. This point seems to be very strong when we look at the Stalinist societies and indeed at nationalised industries or bureaucracies in the West. There can be no question but that governmental control and nationalisation *in themselves* do not lead to socialism or democratic forms. In fact a case can be made that the situation is actually worsened as compared with the market. The anti-socialist then says that both kinds of society have elites and the bureaucratic form is worse than the market. The answer simply returns to the point that the bureaucrats have to be subject to election, popular recall, and regular replacement.

It is then pointed out that there may be specialists, who are not easily replaceable. This last point then involves an argument over the nature of the specialism. If all people are highly educated and regularly take part in administration of different kinds, then there are very few pure specialisms left, which will make people irreplaceable. The economists, who are usually making this point, seem to be pleading for the unique nature of their own profession. Most of their tools could be learned quickly by school children or at the very least by all students in higher education, provided that the system of education was improved as discussed earlier. In any case, the real issue is whether there would not be specialists of different views and many others who had a considerable knowledge of the field.

In short, bureaucracy itself is a consequence of capitalism and not of socialism. It arises out of the attempt to apply market type criteria to

non-market sectors. Once administration is thoroughly democratised bureaucracy will cease to exist. The same point then applies to the assertion that centralisation is necessarily evil because it entrenches bureaucracy.

Some anti-socialists assert that there will also be different interests which will necessarily compete and hence break up the society. If scarcity and unemployment is abolished then the different interests will clearly have a much lower intensity. It is hard to imagine such different interests that people will not be able to understand each others' problems. The whole point of a socialist society would be that everyone would gain by promoting the interests of its members and hence it would be in the interest of society to solve the problem. If there were those, for example, who loved trees and others who wanted to level a vast arboreal region in order to have a new supermodern airport then a number of solutions will present themselves from alternative sites through smaller airports to alternative transport.

Those who present these problems do not take account of the real source of modern conflicts. When one section of workers objects to the promotion of another section it is due to the low wages, poor education and absence of alternatives for all workers. The real source of all significant conflicts in modern societies lies in the different material interests involved. Once these are either abolished or reduced, much or all of the problem vanishes.

We have argued that a socialist society will be one when social labour becomes man's prime want because for the first time work will have become creative, truly social and fulfilling for the individual. Under these conditions the objections that there is no incentive without money or that competition is essential to make people work or develop falls away.

There are of course many other possible arguments, which basically question the assertions or assumptions that have been made here. Such is the view that relative abundance is impossible. This is, perhaps, the most important objection because a society of relative abundance is the necessary pre-condition for a socialist society. The very idea of relative abundance undercuts the basis of orthodox economics. Yet many, if not most, practitioners of orthodox or bourgeois economics never tire of justifying spending on armaments, the police, high salaries for bureaucrats and company management, unemployment and the destruction of food surpluses in the developed world.

The removal of this vast waste of resources as well as the amounts spent on other unproductive sectors like finance can immediately release sufficient to raise the standard of living in the developed world to new heights and permit the ending of the absolute poverty of the third world in a very short time. When the effects of harnessing the energy of the population instead of oppressing and exploiting them is considered then we may consider that very rapid progress may be made towards the goal of relative abundance.

CONCLUSION

Socialist society is the only form of society which conforms to the nature of mankind. It is inevitable that mankind will find its way to a society which is neither oppressive nor exploitative. Only in a socialist society will the relations of production conform to modern means of production and so release all the potential of humanity. For the first time in history a truly human society will have come into existence. Perhaps the last word should belong to Marx:

"In a more advanced phase of communist society, when the enslaving subjugation of individuals to the division of labour, and thereby the antithesis between intellectual and physical labour, have disappeared; when labour is no longer just a means of keeping alive but has itself become a vital need; when the all-round development of individuals has also increased their productive powers and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can society wholly cross the narrow horizon of bourgeois right and inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs."

FURTHER READING:

Bertell Ollman: "Marx's Vision of Communism: A Reconstruction", *Critique* 8, 1977.

Hillel Ticktin: *The Origins of the Crisis in the USSR, The Political Economy of a Disintegrating System*, Pages 175-181 are on socialism in particular, while the rest provides an analysis of Stalinism.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Free individuality, based on the universal development of the individuals and the subordination of their communal, social productivity, which is their social possession, is the third stage". Karl Marx: *Grundrisse*, Collected Works Vol 28, p.95. Note that Marx used the word communal rather than socialist or communist to discuss future society.
2. See Ian Forbes: *Marx and the Individual*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1990. He puts it this way speaking of communism: "This is the society in which individuality loses all abstractness and conditionality. There is for the first time, 'free individuality'." p.166. Again: Marx can properly be described as a theorist of individuality.p.235
3. There have been a number of books, which have broken with the Stalinist and social democratic concept of the plasticity of man. See for instance: Norman Geras: *Marx and Human Nature, Refutation of a Legend*, Verso, London, 1983.
4. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Collected Works, Vol 28, p94
5. Rudolf Bahro: *The Alternative*, Verso 1979.
6. Karl Marx: "The particular task of bourgeois society is the establishment of the world market, at least in outline, and of production based on the world market." Marx to Engels, London 8 October 1858, *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1936, p117. The Stalinists reinterpreted world history to imply that capitalism had indeed begun in a small way like some kind of new mutated virus which then gradually infected the rest of the world. See Maurice Dobb: *The Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, Routledge, London, 1946.
7. Karl Marx: Critique of the Gotha Programme, *The First International and After*, Penguin, 1974, p.345: "Within the co-operative society based on common ownership of the means of production the producers do not exchange their products; similarly, the labour spent on the products no longer appears as the value of these products, possessed by them as a material characteristic, for now, in contrast to capitalist society,

individual pieces of labour are no longer merely indirectly, but directly, a component part of the total labour." Also Karl Marx: *Grundrisse*, Collected Works, Vol 28, p 109, where after the reference in footnote 9 below to planning and the need for labour time in a socialist society he argues that: "this is essentially different from the measurement of exchange values by labour time."

8. Karl Marx: *Grundrisse*, Collected Works, Vol 28 p. 251: "... wealth made independent in general exists only through direct forced labour, slavery, or through mediated forced labour, wage labour."
9. "If we presuppose communal production, the time factor naturally remains essential." Karl Marx: *Grundrisse*, Collected Works, Vol 28, p 109.

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