

Socialism?*

Once again, after a long period of silence following the collapse of the Soviet Empire, calls for "socialism" can be heard echoing across the political landscape, especially in Latin America. Moreover, these calls are not issuing faintly from isolated, underground revolutionaries, but loudly from heads of state. Most notably, Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and recently elected Bolivian president Evo Morales are rejecting the neoliberal, free market "Washington Consensus" and speaking out, not only against unconstrained capitalism but in favor of some form of socialism.

Now there can be no doubt that one of the longest standing critiques of capitalist development has been that of the socialists. From pre-Marxian analyses of the way capitalist development generates extreme poverty and suffering alongside extreme concentrations of wealth, through Marx's dissection of capitalist exploitation and alienation, through Luxemburg, Bukharin and Lenin's work on imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, to more contemporary critiques of dependency, socialists have lambasted the international expansion of capitalist social relations as a process which has brought misery rather than improvements in living conditions for the vast majority of the world's peoples. Rather than "developing" the colonial and ex-colonial areas of the South, they have pointed out, capitalism has "underdeveloped" much of it - made things worse than they were when it was still "undeveloped," i.e., free of the imposition of capitalist class relations.

At the same time, socialists have consistently proposed the adoption of an alternative "socialist development." This has been especially true since the construction of socialism in the USSR provided, its supporters claimed, a real life alternative to capitalism, and not just a theory. The extremely rapid (by historical standards) industrialization of the USSR, which at the time of the Revolution of 1917 was still an overwhelmingly agrarian society, convinced many of the superiority of socialist over capitalist development, of socialism over capitalism, *tout court* - despite the obvious political shortcomings of Soviet-style socialism, e.g., the presence of a repressive police-state that made a mockery of claims to liberty, justice and democracy, even more so than in the West.

Socialist development had a particular appeal in the South where anti-colonialism often came to include anti-capitalism and many intellectuals in the independence movements were impressed with Soviet efforts to foster development. They began to consider ways Soviet economic policies, if not its political structures, might be adapted to their own circumstances. Such intellectuals included both revolutionaries and those who sought more peaceful change. Already, by 1920 Mao ZeDong had been drawn into Marxism and the struggle for socialism. By 1927 Jawaharlal Nehru, returning from the Brussels' Congress of Oppressed Nationalities and a visit to Moscow, was ready to proclaim that his goal was socialism as well as the independence he had hitherto pursued as a disciple of Mahatma Ghandi. In 1936, he enunciated a view of the relationship between socialism and development which would be shared by a generation of leaders throughout the South: "I see no way of ending the poverty, the vast unemployment, the degradation and the subjection of the Indian people except through socialism."

Elsewhere in the British Empire similar socialist visions were repeated, as with Kwame Nkrumah in the Gold Coast (Ghana), Julius Nyerere in Tanganyika (Tanzania), and Eric Williams in Trinidad & Tobago. Against the French Empire, leaders such as Ho Chi Minh in Indochina, Ben Bela in Algeria, Léopold Senghor in Senegal, Modibo Keita in Mali, and Sékou Touré in Guinea, also sought some form of socialism or communism beyond colonialism and capitalism. Among the many other leaders who turned to various (and often quite different) forms of socialism, we must also mention Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in Cuba, Patrice Lumumba in the Belgian Congo, Amilcar Cabral in Portuguese Guinea, Camilo Torres in Colombia, Muamar Qaddafi in Libya, Michael Manley in Jamaica, Pol Pot in Cambodia, Salvador Allende in Chile, the Sendera Luminosa in Peru, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. The adoption of variations of Soviet-style socialism by China and Cuba after their revolutions, as well as the introduction of such methods into Eastern Europe after World War II, and their apparent success in eliminating the most obvious evils of capitalist development - starvation, dramatic extremes of wealth and poverty, illiteracy - which continued unabated elsewhere reinforced the case for socialist forms of development.

In short, throughout the four decades after World War II a contest between capitalist and socialist development raged in the South that paralleled the contest between capitalism in the First World and socialism in the Second. While the United States government and the ex-colonial powers of Western Europe pushed their own development strategies under Point Four and other foreign aid programs, the Soviets (mostly after Stalin's death), the Chinese and to some degree the Cubans sought to export their own development models, partly through the support of various revolutionary movements, partly through their own foreign aid packages. Paralleling Western methods, the socialist countries financed trade and infrastructure development, from dams to roads and agricultural research, built schools and brought thousands of students to the socialist countries for education. Only in the absence of private foreign investment could socialist foreign aid methods be differentiated sharply from those of the West. Within the context of this history, it is not an exaggeration to say that the majority of revolutionary movements in the South aimed at overthrowing local institutions of capitalist power turned to the socialist countries for both help and alternative models of development.

Given this history, the collapse of socialist governments throughout Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s and the subsequent collapse and dismemberment of the Soviet Union itself caused a major crisis for proponents of socialism throughout the South. Disillusionment coupled with local repression backed by the United States government and other Western powers led many to abandon revolutionary aspirations and turn to social democracy and the capitalist spectacle of professional electoral politics. Unfortunately, far too many have bought the dominant capitalist "line" that the crisis of Soviet-style socialism was brought on by outside pressure, especially the anti-Evil Empire crusade led by the United States government under Ronald Reagan.

Against this self-serving neoconservative propaganda that celebrates the "end of history" and a glorious new neoliberal age, we must recognize and keep in mind that *the socialism of those lands was not brought to an end from the outside, but from the inside* where decades of passive resistance gave birth to widespread, overt social uprisings. Let us give credit where credit is due: to the peoples of the ex-socialist countries who after a series of aborted revolts in 1953 (East Germany), 1956 (Hungary), 1968 (Czechoslovakia), 1970, 1976 and 1980 (Poland) and countless molecular acts of resistance and rebellion finally succeeded in freeing themselves from Soviet-style socialist development. If, in spite of its benefits (more or less full employment, guaranteed housing, cheap basic food stuffs, free medical care and free education), the masses of people in those countries rejected these variations on Soviet-style state-socialism then certainly some serious rethinking is called for.

The tragedy, of course, has been that having failed to define viable alternatives the peoples of those countries have been unable to escape either capitalism or development. The iron heel of the Soviet police state has been largely replaced by those of various local authoritarian regimes overseen by the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization who, today, define the international rules of the capitalist game and, to varying degrees, dictate internal policies within individual countries. Those who revolted and brought the socialist regimes to an end quickly found themselves subject to harsh neoliberal austerity measures that soon stripped them of what benefits the previous regimes had provided.

Much the same is true with respect to China. Although direct revolt by students and workers was squashed by the bloodbath in Tienamen, the rapid adoption by the Chinese government of what are obviously capitalist development policies, backed by large-scale foreign capitalist investment, has involved social policies every bit as savage as those implemented in Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet republics. Not surprisingly there is widespread grassroots resistance to all these changes, in factories, in schools, in peasant villages and in the streets of the big cities where wealth and poverty are both being rapidly accumulated.

Opponents of capitalism, who recognize the movements in Eastern Europe as truly popular, and the grassroots resistance in China as a justifiable response to new capitalist enclosures are being forced to retrench and rethink. The trauma, of course, has been greatest for those who most closely allied themselves with Moscow and its satellites, and for some who have identified with Chinese communism. But many

others who have long condemned Soviet and Chinese-style socialism as Stalinist perversions, are also being forced by these rapid and unforeseen changes to redefine and rethink their own visions of socialism.

Indeed, for all of us who struggle for a better world beyond capitalism, whether we call ourselves socialists or not, for all of us who claim to believe in the power of common people to reshape our world, this dramatic upheaval in the socialist world must be the occasion for serious reconsideration of socialism as an alternative to capitalism. We may reject the claims of both capitalist ideologues and Communist hard-liners as self-serving propaganda, but we can certainly agree that something very significant has happened. Should we read in the actions of the people of Eastern Europe the definitive rejection of socialism by the only people who count - the working class (understood broadly) - and therefore, taking their lesson to heart, stop talking about socialism and socialist development as desirable alternatives to capitalism? Or, have the regimes been rejected because they were Stalinist police-states rather than because they were socialist? If that is the case, then what is there left of socialism to hang on to as a guide to thinking about moving beyond capitalism?

Resistance to neoliberal reforms throughout the area suggest that a great many people there did not want to give up many of the benefits of socialism such as guaranteed employment and wages, subsidized housing, free health and child care, or old age pensions. The existence of such resistance gives credence to socialists who are presently maintaining that the popular upheavals have been directed not against socialism *per se* but against its Stalinist perversion. They emphasize the ideals of equality and social justice which, for them, socialism has always borne within it, as well as the real material benefits (however limited) Soviet-style socialism brought to many. While one approach to deciding what, if anything, is left of socialism that is worth defending and using as a guide to moving beyond capitalism is to examine the nature of those benefits, and compare them with the alternative set of benefits available within the capitalist world, I would rather, in the context of this essay, examine another side of the socialist argument.

That is to say, as against Soviet or Chinese style socialism with their characteristic police-state monopoly of power by the Communist party, other socialists, who often call themselves "democratic socialists" or "social-democrats," have long maintained that the essence of socialism has been its humanistic social ideals. As opposed to the capitalist ideology, and practice, of competition, at the levels of persons, firms and nation states, they argue, socialism has always, from its earliest formulations affirmed the centrality of the social context of people's lives, of the naturalness of social cooperation and joint social action. As opposed to the capitalist ideology of self-serving egotism and narcissism, socialism has always affirmed that personal development and individual satisfaction could only be achieved through the kind of intimate, non-competitive relationships that only exist in the context of cooperative living. Socialist programs for the reform of economic and social institutions, therefore, have always been aimed at the creation of a framework within which such cooperation could thrive. The real lessons of the upheavals in the East, I suspect most such socialists would argue, are that, not only did the Soviet and Chinese approaches fail to create such a framework, but doing so is still a desirable goal and can still provide a theoretical perspective for thinking about moving beyond capitalism.

Against such arguments, the more sophisticated of capitalist critics can raise the charge that even though the concept of socialism can be separated from the Soviet and Chinese experience, in part because it predates both, nevertheless the concept has always had a totalitarian side to it. That side has derived from the misguided notion that capital accumulation, economic growth and social development can be planned more efficiently than they can be regulated by the market. Planning has always meant there had to be those with the power to plan, and such a concentration of power must, and has always, led to totalitarian government. (This argument, of course, has largely ignored the extensive planning that takes place within capitalism, from the carefully laid out shop floor, through national macroeconomic and industrial planning of supply and demand, to the global planning of multinational corporations and supranational state institutions such as the International Monetary Fund.)

Is this true? Has socialism always had something like a "totalitarian" element that is missing in capitalism? Or, as the democratic socialists argue, has such been a perversion of the essence of socialism? These are questions to which we can give at least a tentative answer by taking a look at the history of the concept. What we find, it seems to me, is that while the concept of socialism has certainly mutated repeatedly over

time, meaning many different things to many different people at different times, there have indeed been within all of its history two contradictory meanings in struggle with each other. The first is that emphasized by its capitalist critics: a tradition that honors intentional social and economic planning over the supposedly automatic adjustments of capitalist markets. The second is that emphasized by the proponents of socialism: a tradition of believing that human beings can indeed cooperate to jointly determine their collective future in ways far superior to that possible under the regime of capitalist exploitation and the markets that have always been associated with it. Let's examine the history of these two meanings as they have been interwoven in the history of the concept of socialism.

For a long time the idea of socialism was a dream. It was a dream that first appeared in Western Europe simultaneously with the development of capitalism and its industrial revolution. It was a dream conjured up by those oppressed by the violence and exploitation of capitalist society in their work-a-day lives or by those outraged at their observations of misery and injustice around them. Dissatisfied with the co-existence of outrageous wealth and abject poverty, appalled by the destruction of traditional communities with all their intimate personal bonds and their replacement by individualism and the competitive war of all against all, offended by ugly cities crammed with dark factories and dank dwellings, dismayed by the displacement of craft skills by a crippling division of labor, many workers and social reformers yearned for a better world. A few contented themselves with old dreams of the city of God in which they might find peace after a difficult life of toil. But others crafted new dreams of alternatives which did not yet exist – utopias – but which could perhaps be constructed. Dreamers such as Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, Etienne Cabet, Wilhelm Weitling and their followers designed new and, they believed, better social structures than the ones around them. But these dreams were not just fanciful imaginings, they inspired people to act, to struggle for their realization. What could be dreamed today, might be achieved tomorrow and these men and their followers struggled to transform their world either in large, through reform or revolution, or in small, through the founding of experimental communities.

Such struggle, based on dreams of a better world, predated capitalism but seemed to flourish with its growth. Outrage with the excesses and exploitation based on landed property had helped fuel the English Revolution in the 1640s and the French Revolution in 1789. The Levellers and Diggers in England had fought to turn the world upside down. The *enragés* and *sans-culottes* had overthrown the old order and the Parisian radicals and Babouvists in France had battled under the banner of *égalité* against counter-Revolution in the 1790s. These revolutions, however disappointing their immediate outcomes, left a legacy of radical social imagination that spread and mutated, inspiring discontents to political action throughout the 19th Century. During the July Revolution of 1830, the Revolutions of 1848, the Chartist Movement of the late 1830s and 1840s through the formation of the First International in the 1860s to the Paris Commune of 1870, men and women fought and bled for the realization of their dreams even in the midst of the massive historical changes that consolidated the power of capitalism throughout most of the world.

The term "*socialisme*" was apparently first used in 1832 by the Frenchman Pierre Leroux, a disciple of Saint-Simon, in his journal *La Globe*. It was also used in the 1830s by the followers of Robert Owen in England. It appeared in the midst of a swirl of revolutionary and reformist ideas and in that confusion its meaning changed and evolved with the development both of capitalism and of the struggle to get beyond it. From the beginning, however, the concept of socialism shared with that of communism the argument that only through a transformation of fundamental social relations could the evils of poverty and unequal, hierarchical distributions of power and wealth be overcome. From Saint-Simon and Owen onward, socialists condemned the destructive antagonisms and anarchy of free market, competitive capitalism. Even when they accepted the Natural Law tradition which underlay the philosophical justifications of capitalism, they rejected the reasonings of men like Hobbes and Smith that the unrestrained pursuit of individual self-interest was both natural and would lead to an acceptable social harmony. Their emphasis rather was on the naturalness and possibilities inherent in human cooperation and solidarity at the social level. Despite the experience of capitalist competition, they believed, people could learn to cooperate, to work with each other instead of against each other, to conceive their self interest more broadly in terms of their community instead of narrowly and egotistically. This was the side of their thought that democratic socialists tend to emphasize.

Yet at the same time, not only in the surrounding swirl of conflicting reform ideas, but even in the concepts of Saint-Simon and Owen, there was another side to their socialism, the side pro-capitalist critics point to as harboring the seeds of totalitarianism. Owen, it will be recalled was himself a capitalist, a reform-minded capitalist to be sure, but a capitalist nevertheless. He was certainly no democrat, neither in theory or in practice. His was a socialism-from-above in which the oppressed and irrational masses would need to be educated to new habits by a socialist elite. All of society should be taken care of, he thought, "as the most advanced physicians govern and treat their patients in the best arranged lunatic hospitals." And as he sought to achieve the kinds of reforms - the reduction of working hours, improved working conditions, greater cooperation between workers and masters - his followers would call socialism, he turned first and foremost to other capitalists and to the aristocracy in an attempt to convince them that such reforms if implemented by the state would make British industry more productive and profitable than ever. Eventually, disheartened by his failure to convince his peers of the wisdom of his views, Owen turned his efforts to the organization of trade unions and cooperatives and eventually to utopian community experiments. Nevertheless, even these activities were shaped by his belief that reforms could be achieved through the use of existing state power and the development of British trade unionism was strongly influenced by this belief.

Saint-Simon's concept of socialism, even more than Owen's, had an elitist bias toward centralized, top-down planning. A noble who had survived the Revolution, his desire to get rid of the poverty and crises caused by what he saw as the anarchy of capitalist markets, led the Count Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon to call for the centralized state regulation of production and distribution. With no faith whatsoever in the wisdom and abilities of common working people, he called for bankers and economic experts to control the allocation of investment and the determination of the optimal distribution of the product according to people's needs. No leveller, Saint-Simon would argue for a kind of meritocratic hierarchy as the means of organizing his socialist society. Not surprisingly, like Owen, he also turned to the existing power elite of politicians, bankers and industrial entrepreneurs with his ideas. Both his plans for socialism and his personal politics would lead some later commentators to see in him an ancestor of 20th Century technocracy.

We should note, at this point, that the elitist proclivities of these two founding socialists, were not entirely inconsistent with the even more radical communist tradition of the time. The Jacobin insurrectionary heritage of the French Revolution which was preserved in the politics of Babeuf, Buonarroti and Blanqui had the same contradictory tendencies between a humanitarian concern with the elimination of poverty and the privileges of property and a belief in the necessity of a highly centralized and tightly controlled governance of their alternative communist society.

On the one hand, their radical egalitarianism called for equality in the distribution of both property and the enjoyment of material wealth. Babeuf and the Babouvist movement drew on the utopian traditions of the enlightenment to call for the community of goods (mainly tools and land), while Buonarroti and Blanqui carried this tradition well into the period of the capitalist industrial revolution so that their communism came to mean not only the dispossession of the landed rich but also the new industrial bourgeoisie.

At the same time, despite their radical egalitarianism, their approach to revolutionary activity and to the governance of post-revolutionary society, should they be successful, was quite explicitly elitist. Their Jacobin heritage was, above all, a politics of the seizure of power. However much they may have fought for the poor, the downtrodden and later the working class, their means was the secret conspiratorial organization of a relatively small group of revolutionaries. Blanqui, for example, is well known for having called for a post-revolutionary dictatorship in which the revolutionary elite who were able to displace the old ruling class would wield power in the name of and with the assent of the masses. Buonarroti followed him in thinking the repressed and exploited workers incapable of "making useful choices." He too called for "a revolutionary and provisional authority . . . [which could] give it [the people] the necessary will for the adoption of republican institutions."

This revolutionary heritage was embraced by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels and their followers, in their call for the overthrow of capitalism. Their analysis of the possibilities of socialism, based upon an analysis of the antagonistic class forces of capitalism, came some years after their earliest socialist forerunners and

was developed within the context of a more mature capitalist development. At least in the wake of the Revolutions of 1848 and of the *Communist Manifesto*, they mostly rejected the reformist approach to getting beyond capitalism, be it through legal changes or utopian experiments. For Marx and Engels such changes as could be achieved in this manner - such as the Factory Acts in England, or later, representation in parliament - might constitute important steps in the development of working class organization but could not bring about the complete transformation of the system.

Like their socialist forerunners, however, Marx and Engels elaborated a vision of socialism, which although partial - for they rejected utopian speculation - contained most of the earlier socialist preoccupations with the possibilities of creating a more equal and just society. Their analysis of exploitation and alienation in capitalism led them to believe that the working class overthrow of capitalism would not only lead to workers' control of production and distribution, but to the overcoming of all the aspects of alienation inherent in the capitalist use of work as its fundamental mechanism of social control. Exactly how this would be done, they did not know. Marx studied the extremely brief experience of the Paris Commune for some glimpse of what the proletariat would actually do when it took power. He especially and repeatedly celebrated its moves toward the abolition of the state and toward real democracy - universal suffrage with representatives revocable at short terms. Also, when he was drawn into a debate in Russia over the applicability of his analysis to the class struggle in that land, he studied the Russian peasant commune and saw it as a possible point of departure for the construction of socialism.

Once workers were in command of the means of production, Marx clearly believed they could transform it so that that products would once again be an expression of the workers' will, so that the work process itself could become an interesting activity of self-realization (understood both individually and collectively), so that conflicts among workers which had been so much the basis of capitalist ability to control them would be replaced by a real flowering of self-organized cooperation. At the same time, his understanding of both the role of imposed work in capitalism and the long history of the workers struggle to reduce it led him to believe that in post-capitalist society free time as the basis for the "full development of individuality" would replace labor as the source of value in society. Thus, post-capitalist society would most likely be characterized, at least in part, by the open-endedness characteristic of "disposable time," an expanding sphere of freedom which would allow a multi-sided development of the individual and of society. Some of these ideas have remained highly influential in subsequent socialist thought and constitute much of Marxism's continuing attraction to democratic socialists.

At the same time, it must be said, that the conflict in socialist thought between the desire to foster a new kind of social cooperation and a tendency to have recourse to elitist methods that I have been tracing, did not disappear with the development of Marxism but only took on greater ambiguity. On the one hand, as the forgoing discussion suggests, Marx was very much convinced of the possibilities of a classless, stateless free society. His theory of capitalism included a theory of how its contradictions could give rise to its transcendence through proletarian revolution. On the other hand, his own political practice and to some degree his theory argued in ways ambiguous enough to allow many of his followers to derive justification for an elitist conception of socialism as a prolonged transition to classless communism.

Most important here are two elements of this work and thought: the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat implemented by a revolutionary communist party and the idea that the central object of that dictatorship should be the replacement of the market anarchy of capitalism by the centralized planning of social and economic life. Certainly Marx was no elitist in the sense of those socialists like Saint-Simon or Owen who were willing to turn to the capitalist state to achieve the realization of their hopes. Moreover, it is clear that his recurrent use of the term communist "party" must be understood not in terms of 19th Century secret conspiracies or in the contemporary terms of either the Leninist organization of professional revolutionaries or of social-democratic electoral politics, but rather in the more general (and more ambiguous) sense of those who represent the most fundamental interests of the working class. This sense is what guided him in his work within the workers' movement, first in the Communist League and then in the International Working Men's Association (the First International). To this end he fought continuously against those tendencies of the socialist movement which he felt would either subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie (conservative trade union reformism or Proudhonist schemes for workers' banks and cooperatives) or would lead to defeat (conspiratorial insurrectionism à la Blanqui or Bakunin). While Marx

never spelled out in any detail what he felt the role of the working class (or communist) party would be after the overthrow of capitalism, he clearly felt it should play a leading role in the development of the struggle that would lead to such a victory.

On the basis of his understanding of the defeats of the 1848 Revolutions - in which the bourgeoisie dominated the formation of provisional governments and followed up by turning their power against the workers - he embraced the idea of working class political autonomy. In bourgeois revolutions against absolutist power, he called for permanent revolutionary militance before, during and after the revolution to maximize the gains of the workers, and where possible for a permanent revolution which would replace the dictatorship of capital by a transitional "dictatorship of the proletariat." In the 1850 instructional *Address of the Central Authority* of the Communist League to its branches, Marx called for greater centralization not only in working class organization but in the aftermath of revolutionary upheavals. Warning against bourgeois efforts to disperse and weaken, Marx called for workers to strive "for the most determined centralization of power in the hands of the state authority."

This was one of the central points of contention between Marx and the anarchists in the First International. While the latter felt that the immediate abolition of the state was the shortest method of ending exploitation and class domination and renounced the call for any working class "seizure of power," which they argued would merely reinforce the state, Marx argued first, that the capitalist state was a manifestation of the power of the capitalist class and that without ending that power the abolition of the state would be at best short lived, and second, that after the overthrow of the capitalist government the workers would need some means to prevent a counterrevolution (such as occurred in the 1848 Revolutions and in the Paris Commune) and achieve the transformation of society along communist lines.

That transformation, both Marx and Engels had argued, from their earliest writings, would involve the abolition of the capitalist subordination of human life to endless work and tyranny of the market. Their alternative was planning by workers on a social scale of both production and distribution. Sometimes they spoke of such planning being accomplished by "the whole of society", sometimes by "associated producers." In both the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Address of the Central Authority* they called for the take-over and management of various sectors of the economy by the state. In the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx renewed his insistence on the necessity of a workers' state - of the dictatorship of the proletariat - yet nowhere in any of these writings is there any attempt to spell out concretely what such a "state" would entail or to address the objection repeatedly raised by the anarchists that any workers' state would recreate tyranny. The closest Marx ever comes to answering that objection was in his analysis of the Commune where he emphasized how the ability of workers to recall their representatives and the avoidance of any concentration of military power that could be used against the workers were themselves steps in the abolition of the state. The ambiguity of Marx's writing lay in the vagueness of his more abstract discussions of these issues of revolutionary power - a vagueness almost inevitable in a discourse that refused both utopian speculation and *a priori* prescription. Almost unavoidably that ambiguity left his thought open to the widest possible range of interpretation - to which it was subjected even before his death.

The first great debates in Western Europe about "what Marx really meant," about the proper strategy for the achievement of socialism took place within the context of the Second International (1889-1914) which was a renewed attempt to organize the socialist movement internationally. It was an effort led and dominated by the German Social-Democratic Party which while seeking governing power through the electoral process was also attempting to head off a major European war. The debates within the socialist movement of that period are numerous and touch on many issues which go beyond my immediate concerns here. However, in terms of the contradiction in socialism that I have been tracing, it is easy to identify the most salient issues.

What made it possible to speak of a socialist movement at that point in time was the common vision of the possibility of a more just, democratic and egalitarian post-capitalist society. Among the socialists, the central debate was over the best method for overthrowing capitalism. Dominant among the Social-Democrats at the time, was the view that electoral politics and gradual social reform was the best, perhaps the only, path beyond capitalism. One such argument was put forward by Edward Bernstein whose understanding of the growing ability of capitalism to regulate itself dramatically reduced the possibility that a catastrophic crisis would occur to provide the occasion for a working class revolution. Against such

reasoning, other Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg argued both that the capitalists could not eliminate crisis from the system and second, that therefore the continuing role of the socialist party must be to prepare the workers for revolution and to be prepared to lead them when the time came. With the collapse of the Second International in 1914, when the Social Democrats voted for appropriations to support the German war effort, these debates became even more acrimonious. The German radicals around Luxemburg and the Spartacus League were joined in their attack on the Social Democrats by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Russia. We should note that on neither side of this debate was there any call for the socialist party to abdicate its leading role in political struggle; the debate was only over how it should lead, not whether.

During this whole period, however, all of these debates, about how capitalism could be abolished and what "socialism" might be like, were largely speculative projections based on the analysis of what was and what had been. With the growth of the intellectual hegemony of Marxist ideas in the socialist movement, the notion that the socialist future was inevitably rooted in the socialization of production achieved by capitalism had convinced most socialists that the post-capitalist future was at least foreshadowed in the struggles of the present. Marx had studied the Paris Commune and the Russian peasant commune, but these were extremely limited case studies - one of only brief duration, the other of primarily local interest. The only other concrete opportunities for workers to actually experiment with alternative "socialist" social relations were limited to the scattered intentional communities of the utopians and, like the Paris Commune, their isolated and short-lived character did little to transform socialism from an imaginative ideal into a real, concrete alternative for people to evaluate and then embrace or reject.

With the October Revolution and the Bolshevik seizure of power, however, all that changed. Suddenly, overnight it seemed to most, a socialist society was being constructed - not as a small, isolated experiment, but on a huge scale, as huge as the fallen Czarist empire upon which the new Soviet Union was built. All of a sudden, socialism leaped from the world of dreams and speculation - however rooted it may have been in the workers' movement - into concreteness. The spontaneous creation by Russian workers and peasants of the Soviets and factory committees seemed to herald the popular self-governance that so many socialists had long anticipated. All around the world socialists, and even anarchists, celebrated the Revolution as the realization of their dreams.

Immediately after the October seizure of power, however, the Bolshevik leadership moved with blinding speed to consolidate all power in the hands of the party. Step by step they stripped both Soviets and factory committees of their autonomy and gathered the reins of control into their own hands. They were not unopposed, there was real resistance among the Russian workers and peasants, even among the Bolsheviks; but they were victorious. While the meaning of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," may have been ambiguous in Marx, there was no ambiguity at all for the Bolsheviks. If the widespread dislocation and hardship left in the wake of World War I were not enough, the attack on the Revolution by the "white" army backed by Western powers provided Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders with all the excuse they needed to rationalize the need for centralized control - both military and economic - a control they would not relax when the attack was defeated. As a result anarchists, radical communists and social democrats in Western Europe all challenged the legitimacy of Bolshevik power and policies. The anarchists, such as Emma Goldman, and the radical communists, such as Rosa Luxemburg and those who would become known as the "council communists," saw in the dismantling of the workers' factory committees and Soviets, the solidification of a Bolshevik state, a reconcentration of Power antithetical to their concepts of popular power. Against this, they called for democracy and the subordination of the party to the workers' own institutions. The social democrats also decried the concentration of Bolshevik power, lamented the destruction of democracy and, for the most part, reaffirmed their reformist politics against what they saw as the subversion of the Russian Revolution.

While, during the period of (civil) "war communism" many socialists were willing to give the Bolsheviks the benefit of the doubt, the end of that war brought new criticism, this time not only over the centralization of power but also over the purposes for which that power was being wielded. Little by little it became apparent, at least to some Western Marxists, that the nationalization of industry, the imposition of strict industrial labor discipline, the collectivization of the peasantry and finally the brutality of forced labor in the Gulag, all of which were carried out in the name of the people, were not merely unfortunate and temporary means to an end but had come to constitute permanent characteristics of Soviet-style socialism.

The deliberate diversion of the fruits of rising productivity away from both consumption and less work toward investment and more work had become an endless process. Under such circumstances it became increasingly difficult to take seriously the Soviet claims to be a "workers' state." To be sure, certain concessions were made to the workers and peasants in Russia. They were things such as guaranteed employment, state constructed housing and free education and health care. But over time at least some socialists began to see these concessions as not all that different from those won by workers in the West. And upon close examination some socialists even concluded that what detailed comparisons of Soviet and Western economies revealed was a striking similarity.

Beneath the veneer of socialist rhetoric lay merely a different method of organizing the accumulation of capital. Some, such as C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, went so far as to conclude that what the Bolsheviks had created, under first Lenin and then Stalin, was a form of "state capitalism" and not socialism at all. Others, such as Leon Trotsky, Max Horkheimer or Cornelius Castoriadis, would refuse such a characterization, preferring "degenerate workers' state", "authoritarian state" or "bureaucratic collectivism" or "state socialism". Except for those closely wedded to Moscow's line, a great many Marxists came to see Soviet-style socialism as a new kind of class society, containing severe class antagonisms which, if not exactly the same as those of capitalism, are at least similar and thus remote from any kind of "socialism" they could identify with. The forced extension of this model of "Soviet-style socialism" to all of Eastern Europe after World War II, the revelations by Krushchev in 1953 of Stalinist crimes and then the violent suppression of popular uprisings in Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956 and then Czechoslovakia in 1968 reinforced critics' skepticism about the socialist character of the Soviet Model, even before the current series of dramatic popular revolts.

All of this reinforced the strong tendency among many socialists in the South to *adapt* socialist ideas rather than to slavishly adopt the Soviet "model" - in any of its permutations: before, during or after Stalin. It is well known how Mao reworked both revolutionary strategy and the building of socialism in a predominantly peasant society, how Nehru embraced the socialist vision, and even state planning, but not the overthrow of private property, how Senghor elaborated his theory of the indigenous roots of "African socialism," how Nyerere developed Ujamaa which sought to base socialism in the African family and village, and so on. In part these adaptations were the outcome of attempting to take account of specific local conditions and history. In part they were the result of critical assessments of the Soviet experience. They have all contributed to the continuing mutations in the meaning and content of "socialism."

What, in the light of this history, are the implications of the massive upheavals in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China for the concept of "socialism"? For those who would still like to recuperate the concept from the jumbled ruins of its history, the answer is probably that those meanings of "socialism" which we have identified to be associated with attractive alternatives to capitalism are worth preserving, while those meanings which have been associated with elitism and then authoritarianism ought to be rejected. This is certainly the project of "democratic socialists" and is signaled by the adjective "democratic" which is now being highlighted more than ever to distinguish it from "authoritarian" or "totalitarian" socialism - either as it was imagined in the past, or practiced in the present.

I must admit to a certain sympathy with this attempt to preserve a term which has been associated with so many people's best aspirations and sacrifices. On the other hand, it also troubles me. Not only has the term become one of opprobrium to the millions who have revolted against it, but as a result of the long history of political repression and economic exploitation in regimes which have called themselves socialist it is really hard to see how the term can now be accepted as designating *only* the best of the ideals and practices that have been associated with it.

Beyond this problem, however, I have yet another difficulty with the continued demand for "socialism" as an alternative to the existing order. Not with this or that use, but with any use at all. Throughout its history, even when we strip the concept of its immediately authoritarian variations, the concept of socialism has been designed to discuss the replacement of the capitalist social order by the construction of *an* alternative social order. *Socialism*, it has always been said, will replace *capitalism*. Not just in terms of ideology but in terms of social systems. Even the most casual perusal of the history of the socialist imagination shows a repeated attempt to either design a new social order to replace the present one (as in the case of utopians

like Saint-Simon, Owen, Cabet or Fourier), or to discover which social order will most likely replace the current one as a result of the working out of historical forces (the Marxists). Where socialists have actually achieved the power to construct a new "socialist" society, they have in fact been consistent with this tradition and sought to design and impose a unified social order. The debates over the nature of the Soviet Union, or those over the Chinese, Cuban or Tanzanian experiences for that matter, are always over whether the particular model is the best that could be designed or, at least, the best under the historical circumstances and material conditions available.

This concept of alternative system building, which is present throughout every concept of socialism and every effort to actually construct a socialist society, seems to me to reproduce one of the most fundamental characteristics of the kind of society that it has always sought to replace. That characteristic is the essence of what has always been meant by domination: the subordination of social diversity to a standard measure. Such subordination is exactly what capitalism has always sought to do to the diverse and variegated societies of the world in which it emerged and over which it has sought to gain control. With capitalism such subordination has meant the obliteration of many societies and cultural groups and the partial destruction of all the rest. It was in part against just such destruction that the first socialists raised their voices. Saint-Simon, for example, shared with the Romantics a sense of tragedy and outrage over the destruction of traditional communities and their fabric of intimate human relations. At the same time, he and many other socialists condemned the capitalist reduction of human relations into purely commercial, monetary exchanges and the exploitation of some by others who profited from their labor. Unlike reactionaries, of course, they wanted to go forward, not backward to a lost Golden Age, but when they designed their alternatives their imagination was too limited by their experience in capitalism to let them see beyond the substitution of one social hegemony for another. Indeed, when we look closely at the mechanisms they designed for regulating their alternative social systems, we find that in their attempts to correct the injustices of capitalism, they remained trapped in the capitalist practice of measuring everything in terms of labor and money - in short in that social reductionism so characteristic of capitalism.

Marx also recognized how capitalism tore apart all old social ties and substituted universal exchange relations. His analysis carried him behind the fetishism of exchange and he was able to show in theory what every worker experiences daily, that every form of alienation in capitalism derives from the universal and unending imposition of work and surplus work. His labor theory of value expressed perfectly the nature of capitalist reductionism, its tendency to convert every social activity into just one more form of work (disembedded as Polanyi would say from the fabric of its social meaning) comparable with every other kind of work and, thus, the ultimate subjection of every aspect of society to a single measure: money. Unlike other socialists, however, both those who came before him and those who came after him, Marx's efforts to see beyond capitalism by carrying the logic of capitalist development, i.e., the logic of class antagonism, to its ultimate conclusion brought him, as I mentioned above, to the insight that the end of capitalism would mean the end of labor value and the emergence of socialism would involve the emergence of a new, open-ended value system based on free or "disposable" time. He therefore rejected all utopian plans - such as those of Proudhon or Bray and Gray, the followers of Owen for substituting labor chits for cash money - and imagined instead the socialist abolition of all kinds of money along with the dramatic reduction of labor and the replacement of markets by the direct distribution of collectively produced wealth among the producers.

Such insights, however, were mostly lost in the history of post-Marx socialism as the desire to create a new system led many, from the British Ricardian socialists to the Russian Bolsheviks to maintain labor not only as the standard of value but also to reproduce the capitalist practice of making the very mechanism of domination into a religious virtue. Indeed, in Soviet and Chinese-style socialism, the cult of labor replaced every other religious practice and the Calvinist work ethic that Marx, Weber and Tawney had so identified with capitalism was replaced by a secular socialist work ethic that legitimated the endless subordination of peoples' lives to work in socialism just as they had been in capitalism.

In short, just as capitalism, by disembedding labor from every prior social fabric, used labor as its fundamental means of ordering its society (and in this light markets and competition must be seen as merely the forms through which this was carried out) so too did 20th Century socialists in the USSR and then in Eastern Europe and China, employ the same methods only with a different mix of markets and

planning. Moreover, the tendential effect on the diverse array of social and cultural practices of the millions of people in Eastern Europe, the USSR and China was the same as that of capitalism elsewhere: a tearing apart designed to purge those practices of all activities antithetical to the one overarching goal of socialist development - capital accumulation through endless labor.

It is doubtlessly true that the socialists in every socialist country have given lip service to the so-called "national" question of diverse ethnic nationalities within their borders. They have made a political point of allowing such nationalities to preserve and reproduce those aspects of their cultures which have not been judged obstacles to socialist development. But in reality a great many aspects - such as language, religious practices and festivities - were judged incompatible with socialist development and have been banned. Moreover, the socialist authorities of those countries have actually used ethnic differences to control their own peoples. It is well known, for example, how the Soviets always staffed their officer corps with ethnic Russians while the bulk of the enlisted men and women were made up of "ethnic minorities." Such manipulation of ethnicity is a divide and conquer technique of rulers older than either socialism or capitalism. Within this context, ethnicity not only provided a source of collective strength and resistance to centralized state power among subjected minorities but, unfortunately, it has also fueled some of the ugliest aspects of old national chauvinisms and hatreds that resurfaced with a vengeance as the old system was overthrown - as was so tragically demonstrated in the break up of Yugoslavia and subsequent brutal wars of ethnic cleansing.

The point is this: it is hard to see how such a result is avoidable given the basic concept of socialism as a unified and homogeneous social system. The openness to social, cultural and ethnic diversity that was at least implicit in Marx's notion of the transcendence of labor value by an indeterminate free time, has been both ignored and contradicted by the very concept of a specific socialist project as well as by the attempts to implement it. Only lately have a few autonomist Marxists sought to recuperate and explore the possibilities of real multilaterality in post-capitalist society. Some such work has picked up on the Zapatista notion of a struggle of "One No, Many Yes's" and of a vision of a world where many worlds fit. In the language of post-modernism (which in its own peculiar ways also celebrates diversity), Marx's master narrative of capitalism (his theory of capital) was appropriate to capitalism's own attempt to impose its master narrative on the world. But while his refusal of utopian design bespoke a refusal to impose a master narrative on a post-capitalist future, his persistence in speaking of socialism (or communism) without specifically addressing the issue of social diversity left a fundamental weakness in the heritage he bequeathed, a weakness which, most unfortunately, has barely begun to be remedied by his successors, either in theory or in practice.

From all of this, I conclude that the continued use of the term "socialism," or the pursuit of any variety of "socialist development" carries an inescapable historical baggage of misconception and error. Not only has the history of actually existing socialism failed to provide any real alternative to capitalist development - socialist development has shown itself to be but a modified form of capitalist development which has preserved its most essential and worst aspects - but the history of socialist thought is shot through with fundamental conceptual problems. I certainly believe that it is reasonable to attempt to disentangle those elements and insights of past socialist thought (including utopian thought) which seem worth preserving from the more objectionable elements with which they have been interwoven - not only to preserve the memory and ideas of those who have fought to better the world, but also because the persistent popularity of many of those ideas shows that they express the real hopes and desires of a great many people. On the other hand, it seems to me that we can avoid a great deal of conceptual and communicative difficulty by stopping to use the terms "socialism" and "socialist development" as a shorthand for what we want. Better we set these terms aside and attempt to figure out and then articulate, without jargon or historically loaded slogans, exactly what characteristics of a post-capitalist future we want to fight for. And to those who demand, "Well, if you don't like this system, what system do you want?" we respond (much as the Zapatistas have come to do) "No 'system' at all, but a world of worlds where difference thrives and politics consists not of imposing this set of rules or that set of rules but of negotiating those differences with minimum possible antagonism and the greatest possible appreciation of the rich variety of human social creativity."** This, it seems to me is likely to be the most useful method of proceeding for those of us who are struggling against, and to get beyond, capitalism.

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Austin, Texas
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**When the Zapatistas first emerged on the world scene in January of 1994 and declared war on the Mexican government, they also declared that theirs was a struggle for "socialism". In the months and years that followed, however, that rhetoric was replaced with a much more clearly defined language that made clear that their struggle was for the recognition not only of indigenous autonomy but for the appreciation and acceptance of many kinds of "otherness" that are presently marginalized and exploited under capitalism.

Bibliographical Suggestions

So mutable has been the meaning of the concept of socialism for its advocates, so biased have been its opponents, and so unsatisfactory have been the many commentaries on the history of the concept and of the socialist movement, that there is really no substitute for reading its proponents writings in the original and for examining their actual practices as closely as possible.

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