

SOCIALISM OF THE FUTURE

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To provoke a creative discussion, free of taboos, it may be useful to re-examine the idea of what constitutes a socialist society, what aim we have in mind when we speak of the construction of such a society. Both the idea and the aim represent a sharp contrast between capitalist and socialist relations of production, and between the economic laws of capitalism and socialism, and need to be re-examined in the light of historical experience, complex theoretical conflicts, and new tendencies which have arisen on a world level. It is important to stress that if one rejects an identification of socialism with collective ownership of the means of production; if one realises the need for diverse forms of private, state and cooperative ownership of the means of production; if one recognises that the role of the market should not be marginal, whether or not one still adopts some method of planning, then it is difficult to define and visualise a 'socialist society' as a system which is the total antithesis of the mechanisms typical of capitalism.

The dispute about which is the road to socialism divided the European labour movement for decades, but already it is a thing of the past. The revolutionary road has for some time been indefensible. But what is still problematic today is the issue of which perspectives can be opened for socialism. It is not the contradictions of capitalist

development which are in question so much as their result, and whether such contradictions can give rise to the construction of something entirely different. Furthermore, the construction of a socialist society has traditionally been conceived as something irreversible: but this is almost like saying that it is irreconcilable with full respect for the rules of the democratic game. It is not sufficient to say that the arrival of a socialist society must not be conceived in terms of a violent overthrow of the existing order, but as the result of an objective historical process, seconded by political action for the gradual transformation of the society. It is necessary to understand that the gains of a socialist type may be followed – due to the relation between the forces of the left and the conservative forces in a given country – by phases of 'restoration', suppression, or a change in the dimensions of those gains, in a process which will be far less linear and 'objective' than might appear from certain readings of Marxism.

Keeping all this in mind, it seems more defensible to define socialism as a set of goals and values inseparable from the development of democracy. Socialist goals and values must be reformulated and pursued in the context of capitalist societies and economies which have already been profoundly transformed and are undergoing further change in a world which is increasingly interdependent. In the countries of Western Europe, the

workers' movement and the parties of the left have made efforts over recent decades to translate the goals and values of socialism – based on the defence of the material interests of the working classes – into objectives for reform. This reflects a gradual change in the relations between classes and 'spontaneous' tendencies in capitalist development. It is now necessary to set new objectives for reform, for adapting and changing the general development of society. Discussion will always remain open on the validity, *from a socialist perspective*, of such aims, and of the results which can be obtained through social conflict and democratic politics, since there is no sacred text, no authority to which to appeal for a definitive decision. But we can draw on widely shared models to estimate the significance and scope of the programmes of the left, as well as their results and, especially, the experience of government.

The proposed definition is not an easily acceptable one. It necessitates an evaluation of the specific elements effective in bringing about social change that socialism is capable of gradually introducing into society. It has always been easy to maintain a closed identity for socialism, indefinitely postponing 'the construction of a socialist society' for some hypothetical moment in the distant future, thus evading all action that puts to the test the connection between current objectives and behaviour, and the ideals of socialism.

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To what extent, and in what sense, compared to the past, is there a reduction in the scope for socialist strategies in national terms, and to what extent is there a change in both content and future perspectives? It can be said that at the end of the first half of the 1970s, a period of oil crisis, the forces of the left in various West European countries carried out strategies of a national character with substantial success. The improvement of the economic, social and cultural conditions of workers and the general advance of society, achieved in some countries by political and trade union action, can be considered an important achievement of the socialist movement. But since the oil crisis, there has been a strong acceleration of the phenomena of interdependence, of technological innovation, as well as internationalisation. Even so far as foreign policy is concerned, it appears that the national dimension is increas-

ingly insufficient in relation to the past, when socialist or social democrat governments – such as the German SPD or the Swedish Social Democrats – made great contributions to international relations from a national base. The most evident example is the growing mutual relations between the economic and monetary policies of the countries of the European Community. As a result of new developments, the process of European integration sanctioned by the Single Act of 1985, common action in foreign policy by the 'twelve' has become increasingly important. It seems fair to say that those parties which represent the left have generally recognised the need to give a European dimension to their strategies for reform, for economic development, for social progress, and to place their national strategies in a wider perspective of coordination and common action on a Community-wide scale.

However, there is also an increasingly close connection between development in Western Europe and development in the rest of the world. Worldwide questions and challenges are increasingly important. The national situation of each West European country is still highly specific and continues to evolve in a different way; inside each country the interests of the working class, the principles of equality and justice, the values of liberty, of democracy, of tolerance are sustained by individual platforms, which reflect the specific realities, the historic peculiarities of each case. Nonetheless, it is a fact that there is a new joint sphere of problems and objectives common to all the countries of the EC and to all the parties of the left which operate in those countries. Also the links of competition and the need for cooperation on a European and worldwide scale are increasingly conditioning the possibilities of action and the options open at a national level. It is not easy to find a satisfactory point of equilibrium, which points to one single strategy for socialism.

Take a specific example. 'Competition' also means the effort to retain and to improve the relative position of one's own country within the EC and the creation of a single market. Can this effort – which implies policies to restructure, modernise, etc. – be accepted by forces on the left as a priority, compared with policies of social balance, the fight against unemployment, the defence or improvement of wage levels, or of the laws protecting labour? The problem of the relation between the protection of class interests and the representation of national interests exists today in a much more complex context as a result

of the effect of the continuous acceleration of the processes of integration and international competition. But from the point of view of socialism a much more difficult and acute problem is the relationship between the action of the forces of the left in the more developed capitalist countries, in the richest societies of the West, and the commitment to a new balance in worldwide economic development, and in particular, to more equitable relations between North and South. This is one of the great 'worldwide' challenges of our times, in the sense that for everyone, even for non-socialist forces, even from the point of view of the most industrialised countries, the persistent deterioration which afflicts the poorest and most populated countries may have catastrophic consequences, denying the possibility of development for the world economy as a whole. In reality, Western socialist forces should consider the commitment, which should be irreversible, to a coherent initiative in favour of a *transfer of resources* towards the South of the planet. Furthermore, the need to support the processes of reform and change in the economies of Eastern Europe implies a need to revise policies of the use of resources in the countries of Western Europe.

Lastly, a break from imbalance and injustice in international economic relations, and from the poverty and backwardness in so many parts of the Third World, becomes a question of survival for human civilisation. This is becoming more generally recognised with the question of stopping and reversing the process of the deterioration of the environment. They also are related issues, since uncontrolled use of resources in the more developed countries aggravates a desperate ecological situation in immense areas of the underdeveloped world. All in all, a new vision of socialism must relate class interests, national interests, and the interests of the survival of the species in a very different manner than in the recent past. The accent must be placed on the formulation and pursuit of the objectives of justice and progress on a supranational and global scale. There can be no stronger justification for the action of socialist forces than that of banishing the grave threats to human civilisation, starting with nuclear war – and of guaranteeing a much more balanced quality of development.

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The crisis of systems structured and guided by communist parties in power, and the attempts at

reform which have begun in the Soviet Union and other countries are not only facing grave difficulties, but causing serious and sometimes convulsive tensions. We must reject the thesis according to which the failure of so-called real socialism means the failure of the socialist ideal. Essential elements of the ideology and the practice of the biggest communist parties have led to disastrous results whether this concerns the conquest and exercise of power, the role of the state and the management of the economy, the socialist state as a monolithic society, or the function of one party as the representative of the working class. On the other hand, it was not possible, for some time, to talk of a communist movement different from the doctrines and experiences of those communist parties in power, especially since the failure of the experiment of Eurocommunism, and despite the importance of a different and original experience such as that of the Italian Communist Party.

It is not easy to see how, after 'the end of historical communism', there can be a return to either the origins of communism or to an equally imprecise neo-communism. We do not know where the processes of reform and democratisation which have begun in the East will lead, or what will be the results of changes suddenly imposed, in East Germany or Czechoslovakia, by popular pressures. We do not know, therefore, what 'reformed communism' will be. But we have already seen, starting with Poland, Hungary, and the Soviet Union itself, how important are Western experiences of a state of law, of representative democracy, of a market economy. The reform and evolution of the societies of 'real socialism' were placed on the agenda with great audacity by Gorbachev, in a perspective which is no longer that of the old contrast between socialism and capitalism (or imperialism), but that of the necessary cooperation and integration between the different systems of the world of today and tomorrow: an increasingly interdependent 'one world'. The old ideas of 'convergence' are out of date, because it is only the 'socialist system', in clear crisis, which seems to be verging towards a capitalist system which has recovered – in the more developed countries – from the shock of the 1970s; also because we must think of greater and more complex interrelation between different experiences (even inside the West), and of new experiments with various paths towards social and economic development.

This contribution nonetheless also needs to make a lucid critique of the reality of the more industrialised and democratic capitalist countries,

and the reality of the Third World. The 1980s saw a clear success in the West of the policies (and ideologies) which are based on the maximum use of efficiency, of innovation, of competition, even with heavy social and civil costs. This decade saw also, at the same time, a strong decline in the poorest and most indebted countries of the South, while the centralised or state-managed economies of a socialist nature lost all attraction as a consequence of the decline of their previous dynamism, and their increasing and manifest inability to guarantee the levels of social security and equality which had been central to their own image. But from all this, there arise new responsibilities for all those democratic and socialist forces which do not accept identification either with the neo-conservative logic which is prevalent in the West, or with the old schemes of the East, and which do not think it acceptable to close their eyes to the explosive reality of the South. The democratic systems of Western Europe cannot ignore the crisis of values, the inequality and marginalisation, the concentration of power, the defects of uncontrolled growth, which weigh heavily on the balance of development and prosperity as the century comes to a close. It is the task of the forces of the left to secure a reversal of the concessions and policies which prevailed in the 1980s. Only in this manner will European democracy be able to show that it still adheres to its best traditions, not separating liberty and political pluralism from new developments in the field of social justice, the management of power, or the protection of the general interest.

Socialists in Europe, at the beginning of the 1990s, are faced with starting afresh, looking beyond the borders of the Old Continent, and considering the questions posed recently by Norberto Bobbio: 'Are the democracies which govern the world's richest countries able to resolve the problems which communism has been unable to resolve? This is the problem. Historic communism has failed. But only fools can be happy with this failure, and congratulate themselves and say: 'I told you so!' Don't deceive yourselves: do you really think that the end of historic communism has put an end to the need and the thirst for justice? Would it not be better to take into account the fact that in our sovereign and prosperous part of the world the society of the two-thirds has nothing to fear from the one-third living in poverty, but that in the rest of the world it is the two-thirds, four-fifths or even nine-tenths of society that comprises the poor. Democracy has not come out smelling of roses from the challenge which it received from historic communism, let's admit it. But with what means and which ideals does it intend to face the same problems which led originally to the communist challenge?'

The answer to those questions can come not only from the forces of the left in Western Europe. But undoubtedly these forces will be called upon to play a key role in the search for new peaceful and democratic avenues which will advance justice around the world. To the success of this search the future of socialism has been entrusted.