

THE MEANING OF SOCIALISM

by PAUL CARDAN

SOLIDARITY PAMPHLET No. 6

Price 5p

INTRODUCTION

The following text originally appeared - in a somewhat different form - in the Spring 1961 issue of International Socialism. It was written by Paul Cardan, one of the editors of the French magazine Socialisme ou Barbarie.

A fundamental restatement on the objectives of the socialist movement is, we believe, imperative. The 'left' today is not noted for the originality of its thought, the intelligibility of its message or for its mass appeal. Its main features are in fact its conservatism, its antiquated, almost ritualistic jargon and its utter isolation. Its adherents 'whistle in the dark'. Followers are consoled with assurances that the stagnant years are only temporary. The capitalist crisis will sooner or later descend upon us. The day of the sects will then arrive.

Meanwhile influence wanes. Circulation of papers and magazines dwindles. The jargon becomes more rarefied, more obscure and more irrelevant. Few have the temerity to challenge the hallowed concepts. Those who do are quickly excluded as pariahs or 'agents of the counter-revolution'. Or they are accused of 'throwing the baby away with the bath water'. But what is it really that is going down the drain? Is it a viable infant or is it some putrefying abortion that has been poisoning the water for several decades?

Forty four years after the Russian Revolution and sixteen years after World War II, the infallible dogmas of yesterday still serve as good coin. The fact that people display an ever increasing indifference is scarcely noticed by the self-appointed repositories of 'revolutionary' rust.

The decay of the 'marxist' left is due, we believe, to its refusal to recognize the new reality. We are reminded of some of the leaders of the Paris Commune of 1871, who tragically attempted to garb that essentially proletarian movement in the phrases of the petty-bourgeois radicals of 1793.

The crises and contradictions of exploiting society have not lessened. They express themselves however in forms that differ from those accepted in the 'classical' left. The standard of living of the working class has not worsened under capitalism. In this respect, Strachey is right and the 'orthodox' marxists wrong. But other, more important changes have taken place. Proletarianisation has proceeded

relentlessly. Thousands of jobs and professions formerly requiring skill and training and offering their occupants status and satisfaction have today been stripped of their specialized nature. Not only have they been reduced to the tedium and monotonous grind of any factory job, but their operatives have been degraded to simple executors of orders, as alienated in their work as any bench hand. Marxists would be better employed analysing the implications of this important change in the social structure rather than waving their antiquated economic slide rules at Strachey.

Both the ruling and the working classes have amassed a whole new historical experience. It is ludicrous to assume that only the proletariat is capable of learning. The wholesale nationalisation of the means of production in Russia and increasing State intervention in economic affairs in the West have shown that the abolition of private ownership and state planning do not of themselves lessen exploitation or bring socialism any nearer. Such measures may in fact strengthen the grip of the rulers and save their economies from the recurrent slumps which were once such a common feature of capitalism. They are accepted by 'progressive' capitalism and bureaucracy alike. All this necessitates a complete change in emphasis in socialist propaganda. Precisely what we mean is well illustrated in Cardan's article.

A number of urgent questions confront us. What is the nature of exploitation in the contemporary world? How do people struggle against it? How do they show their alternative to the present society? How will people build the new one?

Cardan's article does not provide all the answers to these questions. No blueprint ever will, of course. But it boldly sweeps aside the accumulated theoretical cobwebs of a generation. It attempts to discuss real problems and avoids the fruitless and endless arguments about interpretations of socialist Holy Writ. In our opinion, this is reason enough why it should be widely read.

We largely endorse the ideas put forward by Paul Cardan. Perhaps readers would care to write to us what they think of them. Others might even be prepared to associate with us in their dissemination.

* * * * *

THE MEANING OF SOCIALISM

I. THE NEED FOR A SOCIALIST PROGRAMME

It is amazing how little discussion there is about Socialism among the socialists of today. It is even more surprising to hear self-styled revolutionaries claim that we ought to concern ourselves exclusively with the 'practical, day-to-day issues' of the class struggle and let the future take care of itself. These views remind one of Bernstein's famous saying: 'The goal is nothing, the movement everything'. In fact there is no movement except towards a goal, although the objective may have to be redefined constantly, as the movement develops.

Carefully selected quotations from Marx, directed at the utopian socialists, are frequently resorted to in order to avoid fundamental discussions about Socialism. Now, a quotation is not, of course, a proof. It is, in fact, the exact opposite: a proof that real proof is lacking. We quote no authority to prove that water, left long enough on the fire, will boil. But what of the substance of the matter? Marx rightly argued against those who wanted to substitute minute and unfounded descriptions of the future society for the actual struggle taking place under their very noses. He did not, however, refrain from stating his own view about the programme of a proletarian revolution. He, in fact, appended the elements of such a programme to the Communist Manifesto. He missed no opportunity offered him, through the growth of historical experience or by the needs of the movement, to develop, elaborate or even modify his own previous programmatic conceptions. Examples of this are his generalisation of the experience of the Paris Commune into the formula of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' and his 'Critique of the Gotha Programme'.

To propound, in 1961, that we cannot and should not go any further than Marx is tantamount to saying that nothing of importance has happened in the last eighty years. This is what some people - including many self-styled 'marxists' - really seem to think. They admit, of course, that many events have taken place, duly to be chronicled, but they reject the idea that this requires any basic change in their programmatic conceptions. Their theoretical and political stagnation goes hand in hand with their organizational disintegration.

We feel that what has happened during the period we are discussing, and particularly since 1917, is more important for socialists than anything that has happened before in human history. The proletariat took power in an immense country. It victoriously withstood the attempts at a bourgeois counter-revolution. Then it gradually disappeared from the scene and a new social stratum, the bureaucracy, established its domination over Russian society and set out to build 'socialism' through the most ruthless methods of terror and exploitation. Contrary to all prognoses, including Trotsky's, the Russian bureaucracy withstood the test of the biggest war in history. Today, it disputes industrial and military supremacy with the USA. (1)

After the war, the same bureaucratic regime established itself in countries as diverse as Eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia on the one hand, and China, North Korea and North Vietnam on the other, without a proletarian revolution. If nationalisation of the means of production and planning are the 'foundations' of Socialism, then obviously there need be no link between Socialism and working class action. All the workers need do is sweat to build 'socialist' factories and keep them running. Any local bureaucracy, granted favourable circumstances and some help from the Kremlin could do the trick.

But then something happened. In 1956 the Hungarian workers undertook an armed revolution against the bureaucracy. They formed Workers' Councils and demanded 'workers management of production'. Whether Socialism was simply 'nationalisation plus planning' or whether it was 'workers councils plus workers management of production' was shown to be no academic question. Five years ago, history posed it at the point of a gun.

(1) On the eve of the war, Trotsky was daily predicting that the bureaucracy would not survive this supreme test, because of 'contradictions between the socialist foundations of the regime and the parasitic and reactionary character of the bureaucracy'. Today, the trotskyists say that the increasing military power of Russia is the product of the 'socialist foundations'. If you are unable to follow this kind of logic, apply the rule: when a sputnik is successfully put into orbit, it must have been launched from the depths of the socialist foundations. Explosions in mid-air are due to the parasitic nature of the bureaucracy.

Traditional ideas about Socialism have in many ways been tested by events. We cannot run away from the answers. If socialism equals nationalised property plus planning plus Party dictatorship, then Socialism equals Khrushchev, his sputniks and his 'butter in 1964'. If such are ones conceptions, then the best one can do is to be an opponent within the regime, a critic within the ranks of the Communist Party, trying to 'democratise' and 'humanise' the system. And why even that? Industrialisation can take place without democracy. As Trotsky put it, a revolution has its overhead costs. That these costs need be reckoned in terms of heads is only to be expected.

These considerations are not only relevant to any discussion about socialism; they are also fundamental to our understanding of contemporary capitalism. In various capitalist countries basic sectors of production have been nationalised and important degrees of State control and economic planning have been established. Capitalism itself - 'orthodox', western-type capitalism - has undergone tremendous changes. Reality has rudely shattered most traditionally held ideas - for instance that capitalism can no longer develop production, ⁽²⁾ that there is an inevitable perspective of booms and ever deeper slumps, that the material standards of living of the working class cannot rise substantially and durably under capitalism, that a growing industrial reserve army is an unavoidable product of the system. 'Orthodox' marxists are forced to indulge in all sorts of verbal gymnastics in order to defend these views. They day-dream about the next big slump - which, for twenty years now, has been 'just around the corner'.

These problems, presented by the evolution of capitalism, are intimately related to the programmatic conceptions of the socialist movement. As usual, the so-called 'realists' (who are reluctant to discuss Socialism as it is obviously 'a matter of the distant future') are the ones who are blind to reality. Reality demands that we re-examine here and now the fundamental problems of the movement. At the end of this article, we show why it is impossible, without such a discussion, to take a correct stand on the most trivial day-to-day and down-to-earth practical problems. At this stage, however, it should be obvious that no conscious movement can exist, which evades answering the basic question: what is Socialism? This question is but the converse of two others: what is capitalism? And what are the real roots of the crisis of contemporary society?

(2) This is stated quite explicitly in Trotsky's Transitional Programme: 'Mankind's productive forces stagnate. New inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth.'

2. THE CONTRADICTION IN PRODUCTION

Traditional marxism sees the crisis of capitalist society as brought about by the private ownership of the means of production and by 'the anarchy of the market'. A new stage of development of human society will start, it is claimed, with the abolition of private property. We can now see that this has proved to be wrong. In the countries of Eastern Europe there is no private property. There are no slumps. There is no unemployment. Yet the social struggle is fought out no less fiercely than in the West. (3) Traditional thought held that economic anarchy, mass unemployment, stagnation and miserable wages were both deep-rooted expressions of the contradictions of capitalism and the mainsprings of the class struggle. We see today that despite full employment and rising wages the capitalists have constant problems in running their own system and that the class struggle has in no way diminished. (4) People who, when confronted with this situation, continue to quote old texts, can make no real contribution to the essential reconstruction of the socialist movement.

Traditional marxism (5) saw the contradictions and irrationality of capitalism at the level of the economy as a whole, not at the level of production. The defect, in its eyes, lay in 'the market' and in the 'system of appropriation', not in the individual enterprise or in the system of production, taken in its most concrete, material sense. Now the capitalist factory is of course affected by its relation to the market: it would be absurd for it to produce unsaleable products or

(3) Need we quote Eastern Germany, 1953; Poland and Hungary, 1956; China, 1957 and the echoes of daily struggles in Russian factories which find their way into the official Soviet press, including Khrushchev's published report to the XXth Congress of the CPSU.

(4) The forms of the class struggle have altered, for certain deep-going reasons, which are intimately linked up with the problems we discuss in this text. But the intensity of the struggle has not lessened. The interest of workers in traditional 'politics', 'left' or otherwise, has declined. But 'unofficial' strikes in Britain and 'wildcats' in the USA are increasingly frequent. Cf. P. Cardan in issue No. 31 of 'Socialisme ou Barbarie': Revolutionary politics under modern capitalism.

(5) 'Marxism' here and later in the text is taken in its effective, historical sense. By marxism we mean the ideas most prevalent in the marxist movement, barring philological subtleties and minute interpretations of this or other particular quote. The ideas discussed in this text are rigorously those which Marx propounded in Capital.

armaments. Traditional marxism acknowledges, of course, that the modern factory is permeated with the spirit of capitalism: methods and rhythms of work are more oppressive than they need be, capitalism cares little about the life or physical health of the workers and so on. But in itself, the factory as it now stands, is seen as nothing but efficiency and rationality. It is Reason in person, from the technical as well as from the organizational point of view. Capitalist technology is the technology - absolutely imposed upon humanity by the present stage of historical development, and relentlessly promoted and applied to production by those blind instruments of the Historical Reason: the capitalists themselves. The capitalist organization of production (division of labour and of tasks, minute control of the work by the supervisors and finally by the machines themselves) is the organization of production par excellence, since in its drive for profits it constantly adapts itself to the most modern technology and makes for maximum efficiency of production. Capitalism creates, so to speak, the correct means, the only means, but it uses them for the wrong ends. The overthrow of capitalism, the 'traditionalists' tell us, will gear this tremendously efficient productive apparatus towards the correct ends. It will use them for the 'satisfaction of the needs of the masses' instead of for 'the maximum profit of the capitalist'. It will incidentally eliminate the inhuman excesses inherent in the capitalist methods of organization of work. But it will not - it could not, according to this 'traditional' view - change anything, except perhaps in a very distant future, in the organization of work and in productive activity itself, whose characteristics flow inevitably from the 'present stage of development of the productive forces'.

Marx saw, of course, that the capitalist rationalization of production contained a contradiction. It took place through the ever increasing enslavement of living labour (the worker) to dead labour (the machine). Man was alienated, insofar as his own products and creations - the machines - dominated him. He was reduced to a 'mere fragment of a man' through the ever increasing division of labour. But this was, in Marx's mind, an abstract, 'philosophical' contradiction. It related to the fate of man in production, not to production itself. Production increased, pari passu with the transformation of the worker into a 'mere cog' of the machine, and because of this transformation. The objective logic of production has to roll over the subjective needs, desires and tendencies of men. It has to 'discipline' them. Nothing can be done about it: the situation flows inexorably from the present stage of technological development. More generally it flows from the very nature of the economy, which is still in 'the realm of necessity'. This situation extended as far into the future as Marx cared to see. Even in the society of the 'freely associated producers' Marx claimed 'man will not be free within production' (Vol. III, Capital). The 'realm of freedom' would be established outside work, through the 'reduction in the working day'. Freedom is leisure, or so it would seem.

IT IS OUR CONTENTION THAT WHAT MARX SAW MERELY AS A 'PHILOSOPHICAL' CONTRADICTION IS IN FACT THE MOST REAL, THE MOST PROFOUND, THE MOST CONCRETE AND THE MOST BASIC CONTRADICTION OF CAPITALISM. It is the source of the constant crisis of present society, both in the West and in the East. The 'rationality' of capitalist organization is only very superficial. All means are utilised to a single end: the increase of production for production's sake. This end in itself is absolutely irrational.

Production is a means to human ends, not Man a means to the ends of production. Capitalist irrationality has an immediate, concrete expression: by treating men in production simply as means, it transforms them into objects, into things. But even on the assembly line, production is based upon man as an active, conscious being. The transformation of the worker into a mere cog - which capitalism constantly attempts but never succeeds in achieving - comes into direct conflict with the development of production. If capitalism ever succeeded in fulfilling this objective, it would mean the immediate breakdown of the productive process itself. From the capitalist point of view this contradiction expresses itself as the simultaneous attempt on the one hand to reduce work into the mere execution of strictly defined tasks (or rather gestures), on the other hand constantly to appeal to and rely upon the conscious and willing participation of the worker, on his capacity to understand and do much more than he is supposed to.

This situation is thrust upon the worker eight hours or more each day. As one of our comrades in the Renault factory put it, the worker is asked to behave simultaneously 'as automaton and as superman'. This is a source of unending conflict and struggle in every factory, mine, building site or workshop in the modern world. It is not affected by 'nationalisation' or by 'planning', by boom or by slump, by high wages or by low.

This is the fundamental criticism which socialists should today be levelling against the way society is organized. In fighting on this front, they would be giving explicit formulation to what every worker in every factory or office feels every moment of every day, and constantly seeks to express through individual or collective action.

3. CAPITALIST PRODUCTION

In our society men spend most of their life at work. Work for them is both agony and nonsense. It is agony because the worker is constantly subordinated to an alien and hostile power, to a power which has two faces: that of the machine and that of management. It is nonsense because the worker is confronted by his masters with two contradictory tasks: to do as he is told... and to achieve a positive result.

Management organizes production with a view to achieving 'maximum efficiency'. But the first result of this sort of organization is to stir up the workers' revolt against production itself. The losses brought about in this way exceed by far those resulting from the profoundest slumps. They are perhaps of the same order of magnitude as total current production itself. (6)

To combat the resistance of the workers, the management institutes an ever more minute division of labour and tasks. It rigidly regulates procedures and methods of work. It imposes controls of the quantity and quality of goods produced. It institutes payment by results. It also proceeds by giving an increasingly pronounced class twist to technological development. Machines are invented, or selected, according to one fundamental criterion: do they assist in the struggle of management against workers, do they reduce yet further the worker's margin of autonomy, do they assist in eventually replacing him altogether? In this sense, the organization of production today, whether in Britain or in France, in the USA or in the USSR, is class organization. Technology is predominantly class technology. No British capitalist, no Russian factory manager would ever introduce into his plant a machine which would increase the freedom of a particular worker or of a group of workers to run the job themselves, even if such a machine increased production.

The workers are by no means helpless in this struggle. They constantly invent methods of self-defence. They break the rules, while 'officially' keeping them. They organize informally, maintain a collective solidarity and discipline. They create a new ethic of work. They reject the psychology of the carrot and the stick. Both rate-busters and slackers are forced out of the shops.

(6)

See J.A.C. Brown, 'The Social Psychology of Industry'. (Penguin).

With its methods of organizing production, management gets involved in an endless tangle of contradictions and conflicts. These go well beyond those caused by the resistance of the workers. The strict definition of tasks which management aims at is nearly always arbitrary and often quite irrational. Standards of work are impossible to define 'rationally' when the workers are in constant and active opposition. To treat workers as individual cogs contradicts the profoundly collective character of modern production. The result is that there is both a formal and an informal organization of the plant, of the flow of work, and of communications. These are permanently at variance with one another.

Management of work is more and more separated from its execution. In order to overcome this separation, in order to administer - from the outside - the immense complexity of modern production, management is compelled to reconstruct and mirror, within its own ranks, and again in a completely arbitrary manner, the whole process of production. This is not only impossible; it also leads to the establishment of an enormous bureaucratic apparatus. A further division of labour occurs within this apparatus and the whole set of previous contradictions is reproduced. Management divorced from execution cannot plan rationally. It cannot correct in time the inevitable errors. It cannot compensate the unforeseeable; it cannot accept that the workers should do these things... and it cannot accept that they shouldn't. It is never properly informed. The principal source of information - the workers at shop-floor level - organize a permanent 'conspiracy of silence' against it. Management finally cannot really understand production because it cannot understand its principal spring: the worker.

This situation, this set of relations, is the prototype of all the conflicts in today's society. With appropriate variations the above description of the chaos in a capitalist factory applies to the British Government, to the European Common Market, to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to the National Coal Board, to the United Nations, to the American Army and to the Polish Planning Commission.

The behaviour of management in the course of production is not accidental. Actions are imposed on management by the fact that the organization of production is today synonymous with the organization of exploitation. But the converse is also true: private capitalist and state bureaucrat are today able to exploit precisely because they manage production. The class division in modern society is increasingly stripped of all its legal and formal trappings. What is revealed is the kernel of fundamental relationships in all class societies: the division of labour between a stratum directing both work and social life, and a majority who merely execute. Management of production is not just a

means for the exploiters to increase exploitation. It is the basis and essence of exploitation itself. As soon as a specific stratum takes over management the rest of society is automatically reduced to the status of mere objects of this stratum. As soon as a ruling stratum has achieved a dominating position, this position is used to confer privileges upon itself (a polite name for the appropriation of surplus value). These privileges have then to be defended. Domination has to become more complete. This self-expanding spiral leads rapidly to the formation of a new class society. This (rather than backwardness and international isolation) is the relevant lesson for us, when we study the degeneration of the October revolution.

4. SOCIALISM MEANS WORKERS' MANAGEMENT

It follows that if the socialist revolution (7) is to do away with exploitation and is to abolish the crisis of present society, it must eliminate all distinct strata of specialised or permanent managers from the domination of various spheres of social life. It must do so

(7)

By 'Socialism' we mean the historical period which starts with the proletarian revolution and ends with communism. In thus defining it, we adhere very strictly to Marx. This is the only 'transitional period' between class society and communism. There is no other. This transitional society is not communism, inasmuch as some sort of 'state' and political coercion are maintained (the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'). There is also economic coercion ('he who does not work, neither shall he eat'). But neither is it class society, inasmuch as not only the ruling class is eliminated, but also any sort of dominating social stratum. Exploitation itself is abolished. The confusion introduced by Trotsky and the trotskyists in this field, through the insertion of ever more 'transitional' societies between capitalism and socialism (workers' states, degenerated workers' states, more degenerated workers' states, etc...) must be exposed. The ultimate result of this confusion is to provide justification for the bureaucracy and to mystify the workers, by persuading them that they can be at one and the same time the 'ruling class'... and yet ruthlessly exploited and oppressed. A society in which workers are not the dominant social force in the proper and literal sense is not, and never can be, 'transitional' to socialism or to communism (except, of course, in the sense in which capitalism itself is 'transitional' to socialism).

first and foremost in production itself. In other words, the revolution cannot confine itself to the expropriation of the capitalists; it must also 'expropriate' the managerial bureaucracy from its present privileged positions.

Socialism will not be able to establish itself unless it introduces from its very first day workers' management of production. We arrived at this idea in 1948 as a result of an analysis of the degeneration of the Russian revolution (8). The Hungarian workers drew exactly the same conclusion in 1956 from their own experience of the bureaucracy. Workers' management of production was one of the central demands of the Hungarian Workers' Councils.

For some strange reason, Marxists have always seen the achievement of working class power solely in terms of the conquest of political power. Real power, namely power over production in day-to-day life, was always ignored. Left opponents of Bolshevism correctly criticised the fact that the dictatorship of the party was replacing the dictatorship of the proletarian masses. But this is only part of the problem, and a secondary aspect at that. Lenin's 'programmatic conception' - as opposed to his practice (9) - was that political power should rest with the Soviets, the most democratic of all institutions. But he was

(8)

See the article 'Socialism or Barbarism', in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, No. 1 (March 1949). A summary of this text has been circulated in English under the title 'Socialism Reaffirmed'.

(9)

We do not intend to discuss here the developments in Russia after 1917, nor whether Lenin or the Bolsheviks 'could have done otherwise'. This is a perfectly void and sterile discussion. The important point to stress is the link between what was done... and the final results. By 1919 the management of production and of the economy was already in the hands of 'specialists'; management of political life was in the hands of the 'specialists in revolutionary politics', i.e. of the Party. No power on earth could under these circumstances have stopped the bureaucratic degeneration.

also relentlessly repeating, from 1917 until his death, that production should be organized from above, along 'state-capitalist' lines (10). This was the most fantastic idealism. The proletariat cannot be a slave in production during six days of the week and then enjoy Sundays of political sovereignty! If the proletariat does not manage production, then, of necessity, somebody else does. And as production, in modern society, is the real locus of power, the 'political power' of the proletariat will rapidly be reduced to mere window-dressing. 'Workers' control' of production does not offer any real answer to this problem. Either workers' control will rapidly develop into workers' management, or it will become a farce. Neither in production nor in politics can long periods of dual power be tolerated.

History has shown that the problem of what happens after the revolution is of fundamental importance to socialist thinking. Almost everything depends upon the level of conscious activity and participation of the masses. A genuine revolution does not take place unless

(10) Some of Lenin's writings on this matter should be better known than they are to revolutionary socialists. The following passages from Lenin's article 'The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government' (Selected Works, Vol. VII, p.332, 342, 345) show very clearly what Bolshevik thinking was on the question of the organization of labour.

'The more class conscious vanguard of the Russian proletariat has already set itself the task of raising labour discipline... This work must be supported and pushed forward with all speed. We must raise the question of piecework and apply and test it in practice; we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system... The Taylor system is a combination of the subtle brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of its greatest scientific achievements in the field of analysing mechanical motions during work, the elimination of superfluous and awkward motions, the working out of correct methods of work, etc.'

'The revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process.'

'We must learn to combine the "meeting" democracy of the toiling masses... with iron discipline while at work, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader, while at work. We have not yet learnt to do this. We shall learn to do so.'

We believe these conceptions, this subjective factor, played an enormous role in the degeneration of the Russian revolution, a role that has never yet been fully assessed. It is obviously not a question of denigrating Lenin. But we can see today the relationship between the views he held and the later reality of Stalinism. We are not better revolutionaries than Lenin. We are only forty years older!

This activity has reached extraordinary proportions both in relation to the number of people involved and to the depth of their involvement. A revolution is a period of intense and conscious activity of the masses, trying to take over themselves the management of all the common affairs of society. A bureaucratic degeneration only becomes possible when there is a reflux of this activity. But what causes this reflux? Here many honest revolutionaries lift their arms to heaven, saying they only wished they knew.

One can offer no guarantees that a revolution will not degenerate. There are no recipes for maintaining a high level of activity among the masses. But history has shown that certain factors do lead, and in fact lead very quickly, to a retreat of the masses from political activity. These factors are the emergence and consolidation, at different points of social life, of individuals or groups who 'take charge' of society's common affairs (11). For mass activity to be maintained at a high level it is necessary that the masses see - not in speeches, but in the facts of their everyday life - that power really belongs to them, that they can change the practical conditions of their own existence. And the first and most important field where this can be tested is at work. Workers' management of production gives to the workers something which can be grasped immediately. It gives real meaning to all other issues, to all political developments. Without it, even revolutionary politics will rapidly become what all politics are today: mere rhetoric and mystification.

5. WHAT IS WORKERS' MANAGEMENT?

Workers' management does not mean that individuals of working class origin are appointed to replace the present day managers. It means that industry, at its various levels, is managed by the collectivity of the workers, employees and technicians. Affairs affecting the shop or the department are decided by the assemblies of workers of the particular shop or department concerned. Routine or emergency problems are handled by stewards, elected and subject to instant recall. Co-ordination between two or more shops or departments is ensured by meetings

(11)

All these remarks are of direct relevance to the problem of the revolutionary organization itself, and of its possible degeneration. One need only substitute in the text the word 'members' for the word 'masses'.

of the respective stewards or by common assemblies. Co-ordination for the whole factory and relations with the rest of the economy are the task of the Workers' Councils, composed of elected delegates from the various departments. Fundamental issues are decided in general assemblies, comprising all the workers in a given factory.

Under workers' management it will be possible at once to start eliminating the fundamental contradictions of capitalist production. Workers' management will mark the end of labour's domination over man, and the beginning of man's domination over his labour. Each enterprise will be autonomous to the greatest possible degree, itself deciding all those aspects of production and work which do not affect the rest of the economy, and itself participating in those decisions which concern the overall organization of production and of social life. The general objectives of production will be decided by the whole working population (12). The chosen plan will ascribe to each enterprise the tasks to be accomplished in a given period, and the means will be supplied to them for this end. But within this general framework, workers of each enterprise will have to organize their own work. Anyone familiar with the roots of the crisis in contemporary industrial relations, and anyone who has studied the demands of workers and what their informal struggles are all about, will readily understand along what lines the reorganization of production by the workers themselves will develop.

(12) We cannot here outline all the technical problems involved in truly democratic planning. These have been fully discussed in issue No.22 (July 1957) of 'Socialisme ou Barbarie'. The essence of the matter is that the general objectives of the plan should be collectively determined and as widely accepted as possible. Given certain fundamental data, electronic computers could produce a number of plans and could work out in some detail the technical implications of each, in relation to the various sectors of the economy. The Workers' Councils would then discuss the merits of these various plans, in full knowledge of all that they imply in terms of human labour .

Decisions, for instance, as to whether an increase in productivity of 10 per cent should find expression in higher wages - or in a reduced working week or in further investment are decisions in which all should participate. They affect everyone. These are not decisions to be left in the hands of bureaucrats 'acting in the interests' of the masses.

Should such fundamental decisions be left in the hands of professional experts they will very soon start deciding things in their own interests. Their dominant position in production will ensure them a dominant role in the distribution of the social product. The basis of new class relationships will have been well and truly laid.

Externally imposed standards of work will certainly be abolished (13); co-ordination of work will take place through direct contacts and co-operation; the rigid division of labour will start being eliminated through rotation of people between departments and between jobs.

There will be direct and permanent contact and co-operation between machine and tool-using departments and machine or tool-making departments and factories. This will result in a change in the workers' relation to the instruments of production. The main objective of today's equipment is, as we have already said, to raise production through the increased subordination of man to the machine. When the workers themselves manage production, they will start adapting equipment not only to the needs of the work to be done, but also and predominantly to their own needs, as human beings.

The conscious transformation of technology will be one of the crucial tasks confronting socialist society. For the first time in history man will become master of his productive activity. Work will cease to be 'the realm of necessity'. It will become a field where man exerts his creative power. Present science and technique offer immense possibilities in this direction. Of course, such a transformation will not take place overnight: but neither must it be seen as lying in a hazy, very distant and unpredictable communist future. These matters should not be left to take care of themselves. They will have to be systematically fought for as soon as working class power is established. Their fulfilment will require a whole transitional period. This period is in fact socialist society itself (as distinct from communism).

6. SOCIALIST VALUES

What will be the essential values of a socialist society? What will be its basic orientation? Here again, we are not speaking about a misty future, but about the tasks a proletarian revolution will have to set itself immediately. We are not sucking a new ethic or new metaphysics out of our thumbs. We are simply endeavouring to formulate

(13)

This was an explicit demand of the Hungarian Workers' Councils. It is the subject of constant struggle in every factory throughout the world.

conclusions which to us seem to flow inevitably from the crisis of the values of present society, and from the real attitudes of workers today, both in the factory and outside.

Workers' management of production, the conscious transformation of technology, the government of society by workers' councils and democratic planning will undoubtedly develop productivity and increase the rate of growth of the economy to a tremendous degree. They will make possible a rapid increase in consumption. Many basic social needs will be satisfied. The working day will be reduced. But this is not, in our view, the substance of the matter. All these are but by-products, although extremely important by-products, of the socialist transformation.

Socialism is not a doctrine about how to increase production as such. This is a fundamentally capitalist way of looking at things. The main preoccupation of the human race throughout its history has never been to increase production at all costs. Nor is Socialism about 'better organization' as such, whether it be better organization of production, of the economy or of society. Organization for organization's sake is the constant obsession of capitalism, both private and bureaucratic (capitalism constantly meets with failure in this field, but this is irrelevant). The relevant questions, as far as Socialism is concerned are: more production, better organization - at WHAT cost, at WHOSE cost, and to WHAT END?

The usual replies we get today, whether they come from Mr. Kennedy, from Mr. Khrushchev, from Mr. Gaitskell, from Mr. Gollan or from Mr. Healy are more production and better organization in order to increase both consumption and leisure. But let us look at the world around us. Men are subject to ever increasing pressures by those who organize production. They work like mad in factory or office, during the major part of their non-sleeping lives in order to get a three per cent annual rise or an extra day's holiday each year. In the end - and this is less and less of an anticipation - human happiness would be represented by a monstrous traffic jam, each family watching TV in its own saloon car (14), while sucking the ice-cream provided by the car's refrigerator!

(14) With current rates of increase in car sales, current degrees of immobilization in traffic jams and current production of TV sets, it will certainly become an economic proposition for car manufacturers to install TV sets in cars, probably by 1970.

Consumption as such has no meaning for man. Leisure as such is empty. Few are more miserable in today's society than unoccupied old people, even when they have no material problems. Workers all over the world wait longingly for Sunday to come. They feel the overwhelming need to escape from the physical and mental slavery of the working week. They look forward to being masters of their own time. Yet they find that capitalist society, even then, imposes its dictates upon them. They are as alienated in their leisure as they are at work. Objectively, Sundays reflect all the misery of the working week which has just finished and all the emptiness of the week which is about to start (15).

Consumption today reflects all the contradictions of a disintegrating culture. 'Rising standards of living' are meaningless, for this rise has no end (16). Society is organized to create more wants than people will ever be able to satisfy. 'Higher standards of living' are the electric hare used by capitalist and bureaucrat alike to keep people on the run. No other value, no other motives are left to man in this inhuman, alienated society. But this process is itself contradictory. It will sooner or later cease to function. This decade's standards of living make the previous one's look ridiculous. Each income bracket is looked down upon by the one immediately above it.

The content of present consumption is itself contradictory. Consumption remains anarchic (and no bureaucratic planning can take care of that) because the goods consumed are not goods-in-themselves, are not absolutes, but because they embody the values of this culture. People work themselves to a standstill to buy goods which they are unable to enjoy, or even to use. Workers fall asleep in front of TV sets bought with overtime pay. Wants are less and less real wants.

(15) See 'Correspondence' pamphlet 'The American Worker' by Paul Romano and Ria Stone. Copies from 'Correspondence', 7737 Mack Avenue, Detroit 14, Mich., USA. Also, D. Mothe, 'Les Ouvriers et la Culture', Socialisme ou Barbarie, No.30.

(16) It is exactly what Hegel used to call 'bad infinity' (Schlechte Unendlichkeit).

Human wants have always been basically social ones. (We are not speaking now about biological needs). Today's wants are increasingly manufactured and manipulated by the ruling class. The serfdom of man has become manifest in consumption itself. Socialism, we claim, is not primarily concerned about more production and more consumption of the present type. This would lead, through innumerable links and causal connections, to simply more capitalism.

Socialism is about freedom. We do not mean freedom in a merely juridical sense. Nor do we mean moral or metaphysical freedom. We mean freedom in the most real down-to-earth sense: freedom of people in their everyday lives and activities, freedom to decide collectively how much to produce, how much to consume, how much to work, how much to rest. Freedom to decide, collectively and individually, WHAT to consume (17), HOW to produce and HOW to work. Freedom to participate in determining the orientation of society. And freedom to direct one's own life within this social framework.

Freedom in this sense will not arise automatically out of the development of production. It should not be confused with leisure. Freedom for man is not idleness, but free activity. The precise content men give to their 'leisure time' is largely conditioned by what happens in the fundamental sphere of social life, namely in production. In an alienated society, leisure, both in its form and in its content, is but one of the expressions of alienation.

Nor will the 'increased opportunities of education for all' automatically produce freedom. Education in itself does not solve anything. In itself it simply results in the mass production of individuals who are going to reproduce the same society, of individuals who will be made to embody in their personalities the existing social structure and all its contradictions. Education today, in Britain or in Russia, by the school or by the family, aims at producing people adapted to the present type of society. It corrupts the human sense of integration into society which it transforms into a habit of subservience to authority. It corrupts the human sense of taking reality into account into a habit of worshipping the status quo. It imposes a meaningless pattern of work which separates, dislocates and distorts physical and mental potentialities. The more education of the present type is supplied, the more of the present breed of man will be produced, with slavery built into him.

(17) A genuine market for consumer goods, with 'consumers' sovereignty' will certainly be maintained or rather established for the first time in socialist society.

The development of production and the 'material plenty' it would induce would not of themselves bring about a change in social attitudes. They would not abolish the 'struggle of everybody against everybody'. Generally speaking, this struggle is much more harsh and ruthless today in the USA than it is in an African village. The reasons are obvious: in contemporary society, alienation penetrates and destroys the meaning of everything. It not only destroys the meaning of work, but the meaning of all aspects of social and individual life. The only remaining values and motivations for men are higher and higher (not just high) standards of material consumption. To compensate people for the increasing frustration they experience at work - as in all other social activities - society presents them with a new aim: the acquisition of ever more 'goods'. The distance between what is effectively available to the worker and what society sets as a 'decent' standard of consumption has been increasing with the rise in production and in actual living standards. This process and the corresponding 'struggle of everybody against everybody' will not stop until the present culture, its worship of consumption and its acquisitive philosophy are destroyed at their very roots. These capitalist attitudes have in fact completely penetrated, dominated and deformed what passes for 'Marxism' today.

Private capitalism and bureaucratic capitalism use a common method of maintaining people tied to their work and in antagonism to one another. This is a systematic policy of wage differentials. On the one hand a monstrous income differentiation prevails as one moves up the bureaucratic pyramid, be it in the factory or in the State. On the other hand artificial pay differentials are systematically introduced in order to destroy class solidarity. They are applied to people performing work very similar in regard to skill and effort required. When the class structure of society is destroyed, there will not be the slightest justification, economic or other (18), for retaining such

(18) It is impossible to discuss here the incredible sophistry with which so-called 'marxists' have tried to justify income inequality whether in Russia or under 'socialism'. In this respect we would stress two points:

a) the strict implementation of the 'pay-according-to-value-of-work-done' principle, advocated by Marx in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' would lead at most to a pay differential of the order of 1 (unskilled manual work) to 1.25 or 1.5 (nuclear physicist). By 'value of the work done' we mean value in the marxist sense, as defined by the labour theory of value.

b) inequality of incomes under socialism is usually justified on the grounds that society has to pay back to the skilled worker his training costs (including training years). The wage differentials in capitalist society pay this back many times over. The 'principle' will be utter nonsense in a socialist society, because training costs will then not fall on the individual but will be paid by society itself.

differentials. No collective, democratic management of factory, economy or society can function among economically unequal people. The maintenance of income differentiation will immediately tend to recreate the present nonsense. Equal pay for all who work must be one of the fundamental rules the socialist revolution will have to apply.

7. THE SOCIALIST ORGANISATION

When, as revolutionary socialists, we try to define our conception of socialism, what are we really doing? We are, surely, defining the movement itself. Who are we? What do we stand for? On what programme do we wish to be judged by the working class?

It is a matter of elementary political honesty that we should state openly and without ambiguity or double-talk the goals we think the workers should fight for. But this is also a matter of great practical importance. It is in fact a matter of life and death for the construction of a revolutionary organization and for its development. Why is this so?

Let us look first of all at the relationship between the revolutionary organization and the working class. What is this relationship to be? If the sole and main object of the socialist revolution is to eliminate private property and the market in order to accelerate, through nationalisation and planning, the development of production, then the proletariat has no autonomous and conscious role to play in this transformation. All steps that convert the proletariat into an obedient and disciplined infantry - at the disposal of 'revolutionary' headquarters - are good and proper ones. It is enough that the working class be prepared - or induced - to fight capitalism to the death. It is irrelevant that it should know how, why, what for. The 'leadership' knows. The relation between Party and Class then parallels the division in capitalist or bureaucratic society between those who direct and those who merely execute. After the revolution, management and power rest

with the Party which 'manages' society, 'in the interests of the workers'. This is a conception shared by stalinists and trotskysts alike. (19) The emergence of a bureaucratic, class society becomes absolutely inevitable.

If, on the other hand, the object of the socialist revolution is to institute workers' management of production, economy and social life, through the power of the Workers' Councils, then the active and conscious subject of this revolution and of the whole subsequent social transformation can be none other than the proletariat itself. The socialist revolution can only take place through the autonomous action of the proletariat. Only if the proletariat finds in itself the will and consciousness necessary to bring about this immense transformation of society will the transformation take place. Socialism realized 'on behalf of the proletariat', even by the most revolutionary party, is a completely nonsensical conception. The revolutionary organization is not and cannot therefore be 'the leadership' of the class. It can only be an instrument in the class struggle. Its main task is, through word and deed, to assist the working class to grasp its historical role of managing society.

(19) This conception, scarcely camouflaged, can be found in the October - November 1960 issue of Labour Review. An article by Cliff Slaughter entitled 'What Is Revolutionary Leadership', contains, inter alia, an attack on the ideas of Socialisme ou Barbarie. The article contains nothing beyond the standard collection of platitudes on the 'necessity of iron-trained leadership', of the kind found in any trotskyst article on the subject written in the course of the last twenty years. The author, moreover, follows the genuine tradition of Trotsky's epigones in carefully avoiding any attempt at understanding the ideas he criticizes. His theoretical level is amply illustrated by the fact that, for him, the whole history of humanity in the last forty years can only be explained by the 'crisis of revolutionary leadership'. For not a single moment does our author ask himself: what are the causes of this crisis? If the party is the solution to this crisis and 'has to be built by those who grasp the historical process theoretically', why is it that the grasping trotskysts have for thirty years now been unable to build it? Why have Trotskyist organizations disintegrated even in countries where they once had some forces? Slaughter's 'refutation' of anti-bureaucratic conceptions is based on the argument that consciousness is necessary for the overthrow of capitalism. Consciousness is then, quite naively, identified with the consciousness of the leaders of the Party. The author finally betrays his basically bourgeois mentality by depicting the centralization of bourgeois power, its organization, its weapons, etc, and by demanding, in order to combat this, a 'heightening of discipline and centralized authority to an unprecedented degree'. He does not suspect a single moment that proletarian centralization and discipline - as exemplified by a workers' council or strike committee - represents a completely different thing from capitalist centralization and discipline, of which he is constantly asking for more.

How is the revolutionary organization to function internally? According to traditional conceptions the Party is organized and functions according to certain well-proven principles of efficiency which are allegedly based on 'common sense', namely a division of labour between 'leaders' and 'rank and file', control of the former by the latter at infrequent intervals and usually after the event (so that control, in fact, becomes ratification), specialization of work, a rigid division of tasks, etc. This may be bourgeois common sense, but is sheer nonsense from a revolutionary point of view. This type of organization is efficient only in the sense of efficiently reproducing a bourgeois state of affairs, both inside and outside the party. In its best and most 'democratic' form, it is nothing but a parody of bourgeois parliamentarism.

The revolutionary organization should apply to itself the principles evolved by the proletariat in the course of its own historic struggles: the Commune, the Soviets and the Workers' Councils. There should be autonomy of the local organs to the greatest degree compatible with the unity of the organization; direct democracy wherever it can be materially applied; eligibility and instant revocability of all delegates to central bodies having power of decision.

8. WHAT ARE SOCIALIST DEMANDS ?

What should be the attitude of the organization regarding the day-to-day class struggle? What should be its demands, both 'immediate' and 'transitional'?

For the traditional organizations, whether reformist or 'marxist', the struggle is viewed essentially as a means of bringing the class under the control and leadership of the party. For trotskyists, for instance, what matters during a strike is to have the strike committee applying 'the line' decided by the party faction. Strikes have often been doomed because the whole upbringing and mentality of party members makes them, quite unintentionally, see as their first objective, their own control of the movement, not its intrinsic development. Such organizations see the struggle within the unions as essentially a struggle for the control of the union machine.

The demands advocated themselves reflect the reactionary ideology and attitude of these organizations. They do so in two ways. First, by talking exclusively about wage increases, about the fight

against slump and unemployment, or about nationalization, they focus the attention of workers on reforms which are not only perfectly possible under capitalism, but are in fact increasingly applied by capitalism itself. These reforms are, in fact, the very expression of the bureaucratic transformation taking place in contemporary society. Taken as such, these demands tend merely to rationalise today's social structure. They coincide perfectly well with the programme of the 'left' or 'progressive' wing of the ruling classes.

Secondly, by producing 'transitional' demands - sliding scales of wages and hours, workers' 'control', workers' militias, etc. - which are deemed to be incompatible with capitalism (20) (but are not presented as such to the working class), these organizations tend to mystify and manipulate the working class. The Party, for instance, 'knows' (or believes that it knows) that the sliding scale of wages will never be accepted by capitalism. It believes that this demand, if really fought for by the workers, will lead to a revolutionary situation and eventually to the revolution itself. But it does not say so publicly. If it did it would 'scare the workers off', who are not 'yet' ready to fight for socialism as such. So the apparently innocent demand for a sliding scale of wages is put forward as feasible... while 'known' to be unfeasible. This is the bait, which will make the workers swallow the hook and the revolutionary line. The Party, firmly holding the rod, will drag the class along into the 'socialist' frying pan. All this would be a monstrous conception, were it not so utterly ridiculous.

For the revolutionary organization, there is but one simple criterion in determining its attitude to the day-to-day struggles of the workers. Does this particular form of struggle, this particular form of organization increase or decrease the participation of workers, their consciousness, their ability to manage their own affairs, their confidence in their own capacities (all of which, by the way, are the only guarantees that a struggle will be vigorous and efficient even from the most immediate and limited point of view)?

(20)

In fact, some of them are not incompatible with capitalism: the sliding scale of wages is today applied in many industries and in various countries. But this manifestation of the trotskyists' ability to live in an imaginary world is irrelevant to our main argument.

We therefore stand unconditionally for direct decisions by assemblies of strikers on all the important issues; for strike committees elected and subject to instant recall (21); against the management of strikes by the union bureaucrats; for rank-and-file organization; for the unconditional support of shop stewards, and against all illusions about 'reforming', 'improving' or 'capturing' the bureaucratic apparatus of the trade unions.

Demands must be decided by the workers themselves and not imposed on them by unions or parties. This of course does not mean that the revolutionary organization has no point of view of its own on these questions or that it should refrain from defending this point of view when workers do not accept it. It certainly does imply, however, that the organization refrains from manipulating or forcing workers into particular positions.

The attitude of the organization to particular demands is directly linked to its whole conception of socialism. Take two examples:

a) the source of oppression of the working class is to be found in production itself. Socialism is about the transformation of these relations of production. Therefore, immediate demands related to conditions of work, and more generally, to life in the factory, must take a central place, a place at least as important and perhaps even more important than wage demands (22). In taking this stand, we not only express the deepest preoccupations of the workers today; we also establish a direct link with the central problem of the revolution. In taking this stand, we also expose the deeply conservative nature of all existing unions and parties.

(21)

This might seem commonplace for Britain; it is certainly not on the Continent.

(22)

It is of course no accident that unions and traditional political organizations remain silent on this problem, nor that an increasing proportion of 'unofficial' struggles takes place in Britain and the USA around precisely these demands.

b) Exploitation increasingly expresses itself in the hierarchical structure of jobs and incomes, and in the atomization introduced into the proletariat through wage differentials. We must relentlessly denounce hierarchical conceptions of work and of social organization; we must support such wage demands as tend to abolish or reduce wage differentials (for example, equal increases for all or regressive percentage increases, which give more to the man at the bottom, and less to the man at the top). In so doing, we increase, in the long run, the sense of solidarity within the working class, we expose the bureaucracy, we directly attack the whole capitalist philosophy and all its values, and we establish a bridge towards fundamentally socialist conceptions.

These are the true 'transitional demands'. Transitional demands, in the sense given to the expression by trotskyst mythology, have never existed in history. Transitional demands have existed and can only exist in one of two circumstances, Either that, in a given situation, demands which are otherwise 'feasible' within capitalism become explosive and revolutionary ('bread and peace' in 1917 for instance); or that immediate demands, if supported by a vigorously waged class struggle, undermine by their content the deepest foundations of capitalist society. The examples given above belong to this class.

PAUL CARDAN.

DON'T LEAVE IT TO THE CHANCE ENCOUNTER:

SUBSCRIBE TO

SOLIDARITY

The more-or-less regular publication for the rank-and-file militant and direct actionist.

(50 issues, 30 pamphlets and 2 books produced to date)

10s. will ensure you receive - post free - the next 12 items produced (issues of the paper or Solidarity pamphlets). Please send crossed postal order to:

SOLIDARITY, c/o Heather Russell, 53A Westmoreland Road, Bromley, BR2-OTQ.