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On Socialism

# 1985: The Actuality of Socialism

- Features - Ernest Mandel Archive -

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### 1. What is Socialism?

According to the tradition established by Marx and Engels, socialism means the first and lower stage of communist society. It means a society of associated producers that is characterized by collective ownership of the means of production, the immediately social nature of labor and the planning of production to satisfy needs (production of use-values and not commodities). It means a classless society without a state, without, that is, special organs or apparatuses for administrative, managerial or joint decision-making purposes that are divorced from the mass of citizens.

Such a society can exist only if it is managed by the producers, citizens (and consumers) themselves and only if it takes its destiny into its own hands. It must free itself from the tyranny of the "laws of the market" (the law of value), from the tyranny of despotic authorities, and from that of the state. Priorities for the use of available resources and social labor-time must be decided on the basis of a choice between structured and coherent proposals. This is why socialism must be based upon political pluralism in the true sense of the word and not upon a one-party state or a single "remote-control" apparatus. True pluralism implies a coherent choice between alternative national (and international) priorities. It does not preclude a large number of decentralizing mechanisms at the local, regional, and neighborhood levels and in the various branches of social and economic activity, nor of organs in which democratic choices can be made at the base.

Given the uneven development of the socio-political balance of power at the international level, the construction of such a socialist society may begin at the national level. But socialism can only be fully realized on a world scale; it must, that is, encompass the main countries in the world.

Defined in these terms, socialism means neither an earthly paradise, the fulfilment of millenarian dreams, nor the establishment of a perfect harmony between the individual and society or between man and nature. It means neither the "end of history" nor the end of the contradictions that characterize human existence. The aim pursued by the supporters of socialism is more modest: to resolve six or seven contradictions which have for centuries caused human suffering on a mass scale. There must be an end to man's exploitation and oppression of man and to wars and large-scale violence between human beings. Hunger and inequality must be banished forever. There must be an end to institutionalized and systematic discrimination against women and against races, ethnic groups, and national or religious minorities, which are regarded as being "inferior." There must be no more economic or ecological crises.

As a socialist, I am convinced that the resolution of these contradictions would represent a great leap forward in terms of progress and emancipation, both for our species as a whole and for the individuals who make it up. It would be as great a leap forward as the abolition of cannibalism and slavery. I am convinced that such progress is possible only if private property, commodities, and money are abolished. Their abolition is a precondition for the withering away of social classes and the state. But I am also convinced that the alternative to the withering away of classes and the state, and to the emergence of a worldwide socialist federation, is not simply maintenance of the status quo. The alternative is the possible collapse of human civilization or even the extinction of the human race as a result of increasingly unbridled competition and increasingly violent conflicts.

### 2. Socialism is Necessary

The areas in which self-destructive tendencies are most obvious are the race to acquire nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons of mass destruction, and the threats hanging over the ecological balance. This is not the place to enumerate the countless scientific sources which show how current trends may lead to the destruction of human life on earth. In these areas, the alternative is no longer "socialism or barbarism." It is "socialism or death."

The threat of pauperization and famine in the least privileged zones of the "Third World" and the possibility that a considerable proportion of the population of the imperialist metropolis will be transformed into marginalized or semi-marginalized strata are scarcely less threatening. If we accept as realistic that there will be forty million unemployed in the imperialist countries by 1985-87, and if we also take into account their families, short-time workers, the women "expelled from the labor market" and the young people who have never had access to it, we find that one hundred million men and women in the so-called "rich" countries are already suffering from material, intellectual, and moral poverty. And this represents only the first phase of a crisis which is far from having reached its apogee. If the bourgeoisie succeeds in establishing a "dual society," that figure will have to be at least doubled.

The illusion that things can go on as they are for a long time without having too catastrophic an effect is based upon the hypothesis that the capitalist market economy is infinitely flexible and that the so-called "self-regulating mechanisms" are all-powerful. It is also fostered by the fact that crises, wars, and catastrophes have not replaced the normal routine of "business as usual," but simply interrupt it periodically. One has to be blind not to see that these periodic ruptures are becoming more extensive and more serious decade by decade. Anyone who argues that this is not the case is guilty of making a very partial reading of the history of our century.

The First World War cost ten million lives; the Second eighty million. How many will the Third World War cost? Between the World Wars, there were a score or so of "local wars." Since the Second World War there have been about fifty. The figure is rising year by year, if not month by month.

In the inter-war period, some thirty million people died of famine in Asia and Africa. That figure could easily be multiplied by at least ten for the period beginning in 1945. As we can see from the tragedy of Ethiopia, the real catastrophes are just beginning in this area. Between the two wars, torture gradually spread to twenty countries; it is now endemic, even institutionalized, in at least sixty or seventy. The only good point is that there has not been another Auschwitz or another Hiroshima since 1945. But who would be so bold as to guarantee that we will be able to say the same thing in twenty years' time?

In the first half of the century, desertification and deadly pollution of water and of the atmosphere were marginal and restricted to a few areas of the planet. But now we suddenly learn that, quite apart from the catastrophes affecting Amazonia and the Sahel, half the forests in Germany are dying.

If it is irresponsible to underestimate these cumulative effects, it is equally so to conclude that we have already reached the point of no return. That pessimistic argument is simply a rationalization of fear, disappointment, and anxiety. It serves to discourage people and not to mobilize them. It is not based upon any scientific argument. It strongly resembles a deliberate abdication of reason.

All living species have an instinct for self-preservation, and they all cling dearly to life. Mankind is no exception. And that is why attempts to prevent catastrophes and to put out the fire if there is still time will always prevail. That is why the struggle for socialism will continue. It can still finally prevail in the face of defeatist and fatalist views of the future of mankind.

The thesis that we are inevitably heading towards the abyss is based upon a false diagnosis of the causes of the apocalypse that threatens us. Our self-destructive tendencies do not derive from our "hereditary capital" or from

some "congenital flaw" (the terms may be biological, but the underlying notion looks suspiciously like "original sin"), from "male aggression" or from the inevitable results of science and technology (a belief which, yet again, is suspiciously reminiscent of the Biblical warning not to eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge). The catastrophes that threaten us are not the result of too much reason or too much science, but of too little of both.

Modern technology may have caused some disasters, but only because we know too little about its side effects. Increased knowledge and new advances in the natural sciences would increase rather than decrease our ability to prevent catastrophes. The real problem lies elsewhere. Progress in the natural sciences and man's increased control over nature have gone hand in hand with - it might in fact be more accurate to say that they have been paid for or insured by - an almost total lack of control over mankind's "second nature," in other words, our social environment, the evolution of social structures and the determination of our social behavior. That is the real source of the catastrophes that threaten us.

One of the great insights of Marxism is the realization that *science and technology are socially determined*. Increasingly, the majority of non-Marxist scientists are also taking that view. The history of science and technology does of course have its own logic. It makes demands that are intrinsic to each particular discipline, but which are also closely related to developments in "adjacent" disciplines. But the major developments reflect an overall social logic and derive from new questions and new mental structures which, in their turn, relate to specific social needs and interests.

In that sense, the nuclear arms race is not the inevitable outcome of quantum physics. Developments in synthetic chemistry do not inevitably result in the pollution of the oceans. Desertification is not the inevitable outcome of attempts to increase the productivity of agricultural labor. All these threats and disasters result from the subordination of technological and scientific developments to the tyranny of capital, to the logic whereby each firm seeks to maximize its own profits, regardless of the long-term consequences for the labor force, for society as a whole or for the ecological balance, because it is subject to the implacable imperatives of competition and capital accumulation.

It is not the inevitable fragmentation of knowledge that produces political, ecological, and economic catastrophes. It is the determination of investment decisions by *fragmented short- and medium-term interests* that leads to crisis and wars because the overall or longterm effects are not taken into account. It is there and there alone that we have to look for the origins of the *ever-more explosive combination of partial rationality and overall irrationality* which characterizes the tendential development of bourgeois society.

This brings us to the heart of the problem. Socialism is necessary because the logic of bourgeois society, the logic of private property and the market economy, the logic of the quest for private wealth and, above all, the mechanisms of universal competition that they stimulate in every area of individual and social behavior, are feeding an infernal dynamic which is leading us to disaster. Investments are placed anywhere and everywhere, even if they result in debts totalling \$7 trillion and unemployment for hundreds of millions of people (taking the metropolis and the "Third World" together). Manufacturing goes on at any cost, regardless of the natural resources it destroys. We go on constructing nuclear bombs capable of killing the population of the world ten, twenty, or even forty times over, regardless of the monstrous absurdity of "overkill."

In the modern world, this dynamic is increasingly out of control. It applies both to the capitalist part of the world and to the division of the world into "two camps" (but unfortunately both "camps" are part of the same geographical and biological world). It can still be blocked, halted, reversed, or done away with by the victory of internationalism socialism. Mankind's acquisition of sovereignty over the way in which political, social, economic, and material existence is organized has become a matter of life and death. Mankind must gain control over the forces of nature. It is only insofar as the forces of nature are not mastered that they can kill. Nature can be controlled and used to give the vast majority of the men and women who live on this planet a better and happier life.

No purely mechanical force and no "inevitable chain of events" could prevent a worldwide association of 750 million producers from putting an immediate and permanent end to the manufacture of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons - or even all heavy weaponry - from destroying existing weapon stocks or from taking supervisory and coercive measures to ensure that its decisions are respected. They would simply have to be the masters of their own factories and run them collectively. If 750 million wage earners became associated producers, no "objective economic law" and no "iron laws" could prevent them from sharing out the total labor time needed to produce the goods and services they required to meet their rational needs, provided that they immediately introduced a twenty-five- or twenty-hour working week rather than dividing mankind into two groups: the men and women who slave away for forty-eight or fifty-six hours a week and the men and women who no longer perform any socially recognized labor and accordingly receive less and less reward for doing so.

### 3. Socialism is Possible

The productive forces have developed to such an extent that they have now created the preconditions for the abolition of penury and commodity production on a world basis. This would, of course, require a radical redistribution of resources and the elimination of the underutilization or wasteful use of resources (arms production, products harmful to health, etc.). It would also require a redeployment of investments in order to prioritize the satisfaction of basic needs on the basis of the democratically-determined preferences of producers and consumers, and not on the basis of arbitrary or technocratic *diktats*.

I am, however, convinced that existing resources would make it possible to resolve these problems within a reasonably short space of time. There is no reason to suppose that poverty is inevitable and that there are not sufficient goods and services to cover basic needs in terms of food, clothing, reasonably comfortable housing, culture, leisure, and public transport. It is not utopian to speak of the abolition of commodity production. It is certainly possible to feed all the men and women who live on our planet without destroying the ecological balance, provided that population growth is controlled on a worldwide basis, and the indications are that it is starting to be controlled. The currently available scientific data show no ground for fears that energy or mineral resources will inevitably be exhausted. [1]

A worldwide redistribution of the resources and net products required to eliminate famine and poverty does not necessarily imply a fall in the standard of living enjoyed by the average producer in the northern hemisphere. Redistribution could to a large extent be achieved using resources which are now wasted or make no contribution to living standards. Two figures are sufficient to demonstrate this.

World military expenditure totals at least \$700 billion a year. Over the last ten years, underutilization of industrial and agricultural productive capacity in the imperialist countries and the dependent semi-industrialized countries has averaged twenty percent. The total cost is twice that of military expenditure. The proportion of labor time which is not used for productive purposes (the time during which existing plant and workers produce nothing) is at least as high in the USSR and Eastern Europe, where an eight-hour working day is considered "normal." (Andropov once stated that thirty-three percent of all hours worked in industry were wasted annually.) If we add these figures together, we get some idea of our potential ability to meet mankind's basic needs, even if we do have to take into account the need for prudence in the use of what, on the basis of our current knowledge, are considered non-renewable natural resources.

Commodity production will obviously not disappear all at once. Nor will it disappear simply because some authority decrees that it should do so, even if that authority is the expression of a majority democratic decision verified in free pluralist elections. It will be in the interests of the associated producers who control the means of production to economize their productive effort as much as possible. That, together with the need to extend consumption to more than elementary needs, will create socio-economic tensions. The optimal way (and not merely one possible way) to resolve those tensions will be to maintain a commodity and monetary sector - essentially restricted to "superfluous"

products-alongside the non-commodity and non-monetary sector in which the principle of distribution in accordance with need applies. The coexistence of the two sectors means that there can be no sudden leap from the present organization of the economy in the capitalist and so-called socialist countries to the truly socialist economy envisaged by Marx and Engels. There will have to be a transition period. That period has already begun in the so-called socialist countries, but it is far from over.

The historical logic of the transition period is to *ensure the gradual disappearance* both of commodity production and of any determination or distribution of the surplus social product other than in accordance with the free and democratically determined wishes of the majority of producers. It will at the same time ensure the disappearance of social inequality and of the underlying material conditions which divide society into a managerial and a "managed" sector. These conditions include the length of the working day and modes of access to knowledge and data which mean that only part of society is in a position to manage and that the rest of society is relegated to productive activities. The disappearance of commodity production is therefore bound up with the withering away of social classes and of the state.

The principal aspects of the third technological revolution, which has now entered the phase of gradual generalization and "vulgarization," mean that in material terms it is quite possible to introduce these radical transformations. As semi-automation evolves toward robotization and full automation, the reduction of the working day by half in no way implies a fall in material production as a whole. Micro-electronics now mean that all men and women can have full democratic access to data and knowledge. All this is technically possible and relatively easy to achieve. The problem is political and social: how are we to ensure that the enormous possibilities opened up by modern technology do not lead to new catastrophes, new abuses, new privileges, and new monopolies enjoyed by minorities? There is only one answer: they must be subject to open democratic control by a collective organization of producer-consumers.

Historical experience, including that of the so-called socialist countries, definitely shows that the survival of a market economy, except in absolutely marginal terms, inevitably implies the survival of competition for access to the means of consumption and exchange (and at least certain means of production), to the survival of a tendency towards the private accumulation of wealth and therefore to the survival of the socio-economic motivations that lie behind them. Far from being an "innate part of human nature," these motivations did not exist for hundreds of thousands of years. Until very recently, they did not exist in the village and tribal communities in which the majority of mankind lived. But once commodity production expands (or, which amounts to the same thing, when its abolition applies to only certain areas of socio-economic activity), "socialist propaganda," "education," and "totalitarian indoctrination" can do nothing to prevent the spread of such motivations.

Socialism will finally become a new consolidated social system capable of reproducing itself automatically and without external constraints - and this includes constraints exercised by the state - when cooperation and solidarity between producer-consumers replace the selfish urge to acquire private wealth. Cooperation and solidarity were hegemonic in primitive society and must eventually become universal human characteristics. It is not utopian to speak of cooperation replacing selfishness, as both have anthropological roots. The abolition of penury and of the "struggle for life" it generates will provide the material basis for the change.

But the change in social climate and the psychological revolution required if this is to take place imply more than the development of the productive forces and more than a mere "implosion" of material wealth and well-being. They imply *a revolution in the relations of production and exchange* which will make cooperation and solidarity between producer-consumers the motor force behind economic activity. That revolution will have to be reflected in everyday life and the abolition of material and social privileges will have to be visible to all. None of this can be realized unless commodity production and the competition it generates disappear.

It is not my intention to describe the various stages that will lead to the disappearance of commodity production or the

world that will emerge from the general overthrow of capitalism and from the achievements of the so-called socialist countries. I will not even raise the question of whether those stages are "universal" or whether it might not be preferable, given the current state of our knowledge, to restrict the debate to a pragmatic analysis of the major problems that will have to be solved in terms of democratic planning and self-management, of the problems that arise and will continue to arise from the real process of the socialist revolution and from the bureaucratic deformations which have until now marred all such revolutions. It is precisely because these problems are so vital for the problematic of socialism that I intend to raise them in very general historical terms.

#### 4. Which Socio-Political Forces Can Establish Socialism?

Scientific socialism is based upon the thesis that a classless society cannot come about through *Aufklärung* alone; it will not result from education and "rationalist" propaganda, "science," a "desire for emancipation" or a noble (or ethical) desire to ensure the greatest possible good for the greatest number of people. Like Marx and Engels, socialist militants do of course have such motives, and they are essential if there is to be any sustained and lasting socialist activity. No socialist society can emerge without socialist theory (Engels even explicitly used the term "socialist science") or without a deep desire for emancipation.

But although these motives and impulses are necessary, the victory of socialism *requires a social force whose material interests coincide with the abolition of class divisions within society*. Socialism can result only from the *real movement of a real class capable of overcoming the obstacles that the bourgeois system and the remaining vestiges of pre-bourgeois society have placed on the road to classless society*. [2] Private ownership of the means of production is the major obstacle, but it is far from being the only one.

Marx's greatest contribution to the socialist cause, to the producers' struggle for their emancipation and, more generally, to the human race, was to provide a material basis for the old socialist project, which is in fact as old as the division of society into classes. Mankind has never accepted class divisions as inevitable and has rebelled against them throughout the ages, regardless of the relative success or failure of its rebellions. Marx's contribution helped the effective and consciously assumed organization of the working class (which is much older than Marxism) to merge into the socialist project. The fusion of the two reached its high point in the first third of this century, in the period between 1905 and 1932. Since then, it has been affected by a latent crisis. The crisis has at times taken the explosive or catastrophic form of historical defeats (Hitler, Stalin). The question is: are these conjunctural and historically transient crises which the real class movement can overcome? Or are they structural and historically irreversible crises? In political-strategic terms, it might be reformulated as: do the culminating points of the proletarian revolution which Marx and Engels outlined on the basis of their historical analysis of the class struggle in the latter part of the nineteenth century lie ahead of us or behind us?

The problem can be subdivided into three questions:

1. Once capitalist society has reached a given threshold of industrialization, does the proletariat actually have the economic, social, psychological, and moral resources needed to wage a victorious struggle against the bourgeoisie, and can it at the same time begin to construct a classless society with at least some chance of success?
2. Can it preserve those resources once capitalism reaches the limits of its world development and the system enters into a period of crisis? Or are those resources beginning to disintegrate as a concomitant of the break-up of capitalist "civilization" itself?
3. Are we faced with an exceptional historical impasse? Could it be that the proletariat is still economically (materially) capable of leading the world to socialism, but that the moral, psychological and social obstacles -in other

words, the *subjective* obstacles -are now insurmountable? One of the obstacles, which is most obvious at the political level, is the division of the proletariat itself. (The sectional interest of professional, industrial, regional, national, and ethnic groups are fostered by the segmentation of the labor market under capitalism, and can lead to very wide wage differentials.) Then there is the relative autonomy of the "leadership" factor, which in its turn reflects the discontinuity between the political activities of different strata within the proletariat, between their different levels of consciousness and organization, and the appearance of bureaucratic apparatuses within working-class organizations. Such apparatuses are relatively autonomous from the masses (bureaucratization) and acquire privileges which lead to the tendency to substitute the defense of the material privileges and the monopoly of organizational and political power upon which they are based for the interests of the class as a whole.

The first question is the easiest to answer in the light of the empirical data. The history of the growth and expansion of capitalism on an international scale since the industrial revolution and since the moment when Marx and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* is also the history of the growth and expansion of the working class, of the self-organization of the working class and of the working-class struggle that inevitably accompanies it. None of Marx's predictions has been more startlingly confirmed by history. In the 1840s, there were no more than one or two hundred trade unionists in the whole world. There are now more than two hundred million. Wherever capitalism opens a port, a workshop, a factory, or a bank - be it on a distant Pacific island or in a remote village in Amazonia or the tropical forests of Africa-sooner or later the wage earners it brings together will unite to challenge the bourgeois division of the net product into wages and profit.

Whatever birds of ill omen and pessimists may say, the mass of urban wage earners (and workers in the so-called socialist countries must of course be included in the total) continues to grow throughout the world. Even in the midst of a crisis, the number of wage earners has now reached the unprecedented figure of 750 million, which far surpasses the figures for 1914, 1940, or 1968. If agricultural wage earners are also included, the total figure is over one billion. The figure continues to rise, both in absolute terms, and as a proportion of the active population. In countries like the USA, Sweden, and Great Britain, wage earners now make up ninety percent of the active population. The number of countries in which that is the case is likely to rise. More than ever before, these colossal masses are objectively capable of taking control of the means of production and exchange they set in motion every day and of managing them in accordance with freely and consciously chosen criteria and priorities.

When we speak of "freely and consciously chosen" criteria, we emphasize one exceptional aspect of the socialist revolution and of the construction of socialism. The feature that distinguishes it from all previous social revolutions in history is the key role of the subjective or "consciousness" factor, and, therefore, of the political factor. This is why the first question is in part related to the third.

To be more accurate, this is why we have to make a distinction between the objective, socio-economic preconditions for socialism and its subjective, socio-political preconditions. And that is why our first question has to be reformulated. Socialism does not automatically or inevitably result from the development and the crisis of capitalism or from the class struggles they generate. It is only one of two outcomes: the other, as Engels pointed out when he drew a parallel with the fate of the slave society of the ancient world, being the parallel breakup of the two basic social classes. The correct way to formulate our first question is thus: have the development and crisis of capitalism created and maintained a revolutionary potential within the proletariat that will *periodically* allow the real movement to place the construction of a classless society on the agenda (when the subjective obstacles can be momentarily overcome).

History's answer to this question is positive. And history goes on giving it a positive answer. The most recent and most obvious manifestations of the "real class movement" -May 1968 in France, the "Hot Autumn" of 1969 in Italy, the Portuguese revolution of 1974-75 and the rise of Solidarnosc in Poland in 1980-81 - are enough to show that the historic potential is still there, even though the organized labor movement has been in crisis for the last fifty years. (In world terms, the crisis is obvious, but that does not mean that there have not been national victories, such as that of the Yugoslav revolution, which has been strengthened by the movement towards workers' self-management. Such



victories are, however, partial, limited, and contradictory, in that they take place within the framework of the general crisis.)

The answer to the second question is more debatable. In my view, however, it is quite obvious and is based, not upon some dogmatic "faith," but upon a sound analysis of the facts as a whole. It depends largely upon the definition of the proletariat and of the nature of its "revolutionary potential," in other words, its capacity to transcend bourgeois society.

The "revolutionary potential" of the modern proletariat is basically determined by its ability to create *the objective conditions for the cooperative concentration and socialization of labor* and to *channel its mass organizational and cooperative capacities in the direction of self-emancipation* through active, conscious, and voluntary solidarity within the organs and struggles it develops to defend its interest. The corollary of all this is the proletariat's objective ability to paralyze all the economic and social mechanisms of the modern world and then to set them to work under its own leadership and in accordance with its own ends.

If we analyze these conditions, it immediately becomes apparent that they are not specific to industrial manual workers (which is not to deny that industrial concentration obviously creates the most favorable conditions for the development of the above qualities). The important point is that they apply to wage earners or, to use the classic Marxist definition, to *those individuals who are economically obliged to sell their labor power*. (All such individuals belong to the proletarian class.)

Wage levels are in themselves irrelevant, provided that the economic obligation is reproduced (provided, that is, that wages do not reach such a level as to allow a large amount to be set aside for the acquisition of means of production or even for the accumulation of capital). The nature of the labor involved (manual or intellectual, "productive" or non-productive of surplus value) is equally irrelevant, especially as the historical tendency is towards concentration (large-scale unionization of assistants in department stores, clerical workers in insurance, etc.). Workers in power stations, telecommunications, and banks are as capable of paralyzing bourgeois society as workers in the steel or motor industries.

Leaving aside the question of the relative weight of the industrial manual proletariat (whether it is rising or falling in world terms is, at the moment, uncertain), the proletariat as a whole, as defined above, is definitely increasing, despite the long depression we are going through. The depression and the mutations it causes are in fact helping to increase the size of the proletariat. We are not witnessing the beginnings of a "post-industrial society." We are witnessing the gradual industrialization and mechanization of both the service sector and the industrial sector, thanks largely to microelectronics and computerization. All long-term statistics contradict the argument that this will lead to a huge deconcentration of labor (or even to a deconcentration of both capital and labor via the expansion of small-scale family firms). Given the innovatory and experimental role played by small firms and individual entrepreneurs, deconcentration in the "leading sectors" is a classically transient phenomenon. Once success is assured, concentration is inevitable, as the home computer sector has found to its cost in the USA, Great Britain, and Japan.

For the moment, the capitalist crisis is unlikely to lead to the break up of the proletariat. It is, however, likely to lead to increased possibilities of a division between those who keep their jobs and those who lose them, but that problem is as old as capitalism itself, and the labor movement can and must respond to it by fighting for a new and radical reduction in the working week. The proletariat is still the "anticapitalist subject" and the "socialist subject" par excellence. Marx analyzes the conditions which predispose the proletariat towards socialism in the first volume of *Capital*; history is now reproducing them within the "new" proletarian strata, sometimes with disconcerting rapidity.

The real problematic centers, then, upon the third question. It is no coincidence that that should be the case. By far

the most difficult thing to achieve is the creation of the subjective preconditions for the construction of socialism, both before and after the overthrow of capitalism.

There is nothing surprising about that statement in itself. The proletarian social revolution is the first revolution in history to place the fate of society in the hands of a class which, until the day of its political victory (and for a long period afterwards), remains economically and culturally dependent and exploited (oppressed). Whereas all previous social revolutions have resulted in the transfer of power to classes which have already achieved economic hegemony and the ideological hegemony that goes with it, it would be quite utopian to imagine that the proletariat could seize economic power within capitalist society. It would be even more utopian to imagine that it could achieve an ideological hegemony while it is still exploited and dependent in economic terms.

The consequences of its economic and ideological dependency currently restrict a potential for self-organization, cooperation, and class solidarity which, in other terms, results from the proletariat's conditions of existence within bourgeois society. The clash between these two tendencies gives rise both to the daily routine of proletarian life, with its "realism" or tendency to adapt, and to the periodic emergence of large-scale class conflicts (mass strikes, general strikes, political crises, pre-revolutionary crises, revolutionary situations) during which the overthrow of capitalism suddenly becomes possible in the short term.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the major cycles of the proletarian class struggle have been based upon this dialectic, which is itself governed by a deeper dialectic between "subjective and objective factors in history." The cycles may have varied from region to region and even from country to country, but the overall historical tendencies they represent can still be identified.

The first general upswing led to the revolution of 1848 and then to its defeat. This was followed by a long period of decline and then a slow recovery interrupted by the victory and defeat of the Paris Commune. A second general upswing beginning in the 1890s culminated in the Russian Revolution of 1917. The defeat of the revolution in Central Europe in 1919-23 then "overdetermined" the fate of the Russian Revolution itself. This new upswing then gave way to a period of decline and to a series of increasingly severe defeats (Japan, Germany, and Spain) culminating in the Second World War and the spread of fascism throughout almost the whole of the continent of Europe, from Gibraltar to the gates of Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad. The Resistance and the re-emergence of the revolutionary struggle produced a new upsurge which reached its high point with the victories of the Chinese and Yugoslav revolutions. This phase was, however, also marked by heavy defeats in Western Europe, the USA, and Japan (stabilization of capitalism, McCarthyism, and the Cold War).

This time, the decline of the revolutionary struggle was not worldwide. Nourished by the anti-imperialist liberation movement, the revolution spread to Indochina, Cuba, and Nicaragua. But for at least two decades, there was a real decline in revolutionary activity in the northern hemisphere, and it lasted until the new upsurge of 1968. Even so, the absence of revolutionary victories in the northern hemisphere has had a negative effect on the world balance of power, as was the long-standing passivity of the American and Russian proletariats.

The dialectic between daily routine and periodic revolutionary breakthroughs relates in its turn to the dialectic between "mass and leadership" or, more accurately, between the real class movement and its political expression. The fact that we have to recognize that the proletariat can periodically overcome the subjective obstacles that bar the road to socialism does not detract from the need to recognize that one of the main features of the last fifty years has been *the crisis within the practice of the organized labor movement* (both its social-democratic and its Stalinist branches). This crisis weighs heavily upon the possibility of ensuring the worldwide victory of socialism in the late twentieth century.

This is all the more serious in that the crisis in the labor movement is increasingly bound up with the crisis affecting

the "construction of socialism" in those countries which have abolished capitalism. The models of economic, political, cultural, and social management provided by those countries are themselves in crisis. The crisis in the construction of socialism combined with the capitalist crisis and with the crisis in the practice of the organized labor movement to sow objective doubts, scepticism, and demoralization in the minds of the exploited and the oppressed, not only in terms of which "socialist models" to follow, but also in terms of the historical ability of wage earners to emancipate themselves. These now obstacles can only be overcome by life itself and by new historical experiences (though theoretical contributions may have a decisive role to play in paving the way for them). Fortunately, the "real movement" inevitably produces "new models," as during May 1968 and as with Solidarnosc.

Insofar as it continues to gather strength and to gain experience from daily life (economic strikes, electoral movements, struggles for democratic reforms, etc.), the real class movement will continue to give rise to periodic explosive crises in bourgeois society and to the possibility of radical breakthroughs. As Marx and Engels always pointed out, socialists must prepare themselves for these crises and breakthroughs, and they must prepare the masses for them by taking the opportunity to demonstrate the audacity and the decisive role of revolutionary initiatives. In world terms, this is more feasible than it has ever been. In its initial phases, it may in fact be inevitable. History will teach those who believe that the "cycle of revolutions" is over the negative lesson they deserve. In 1905, the twentieth century began under the sign of revolution and counter-revolution. The twentieth century will end and the twenty-first will begin under the same sign.

The proletariat has two great allies. The first is the super-exploited peasantry of the "Third World," which is often motivated by powerful anti-imperialist liberation movements; the worker-peasant alliance was the motor force behind the victories of the Yugoslav, Chinese, Indochinese, Cuban, and Nicaraguan revolutions. It also finds new allies in the new social movements born of mass revolts against the nuclear and ecological catastrophes that threaten us, and against acute situations of oppression (the women's liberation movement). All these movements affect broad strata outside the proletariat itself. As we can see from an analysis of the conditions which make "socialism or death" such a very real dilemma, they have within them an extremely powerful anticapitalist and progressive potential. But that potential can only be realized if the labor movement succeeds in uniting them around clear anticapitalist aims, without trying to deprive them of their individual vitality, without denying their autonomy and without turning them into mere backup forces in an attempt to pressurize capitalism into "adapting."

The victory of socialism will not come about as the result of a world war (a monstrous absurdity) or because the socialist camp is obviously economically superior to the capitalist camp (an eventuality which is hard to imagine in the foreseeable future). It will come about in the manner forecast by Marx and Engels: through the transformation of the movement for the emancipation of wage earners in the major countries of the world into an association of producers that can take control of the means of production and exchange by establishing a system of political pluralism and democratically planned self-management. That transformation will result from a succession and combination of political, social, and economic crises produced by bourgeois society itself. It will be articulated with the movement for the emancipation of producers in the so-called socialist countries as it moves towards real workers' self-management (planning and distribution of the social product under workers' control and management) and political pluralism (the exercise of democratic political power by the productive masses; without this, workers' self-management can have no real content).

In other words, socialism is still a possibility. The stakes are enormously high. The difficulties should not be underestimated. But, more than ever before, devoting one's life to the emancipation of all exploited and oppressed peoples and to the creation of a classless society is the only ambition worthy of the human race.

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[1] Over the last twenty-five years, agricultural production has in fact risen faster than the population of the world. Discoveries of new sources of natural energy (including oil) have risen faster than energy consumption. In both cases, the ratio of one to the other is two to one.

[2] The concept of the "real movement for the emancipation of the real proletariat" is to be found in the works of Marx and Engels. The concept of "real socialism" is not. That concept is reductionist ("socialism = the abolition of private property", if that), dogmatic and idealist. It is arrived at "by definition," independently of the way in which the producers see their own situation and independently of their actual reactions to it (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, China, Poland...). It then becomes an essentially apologetic concept and is actually opposed to the real movement for the emancipation of the real class. This is no accident. According to Marx and Engels, socialism is inconceivable unless the working class *emancipates itself*. And, unlike Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who wrote prose without realizing it, the working class cannot emancipate itself unless it realizes what it is doing.