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What future society?

Proposal for a programmatic debate

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During our discussion on 3 June 2018, I proposed as one of the items on the agenda of the next International Committee a debate on the project for an alternative society that we should put forward. Comrades asked me to explain my proposal. So here are a few things.

1. TINA (There is no alternative). As the British philosopher Mark Fisher rightly pointed out, "if one is critical of capitalism - they'll say, 'Well it might not be the best system, but it's the only one that works.' One can think of it as a belief, but it's also an attitude, an attitude in relation to that belief, an attitude of resignation and defeat." [1] This attitude of resignation and defeat is of course linked, as this author says, to the inability of the political currents dominating the workers movement (but also of those who, like us too often, limited themselves to a criticism of these currents) to take up the challenge to "produce their own version of post-Fordism" which entered into crisis during the 1960s.

But it is also the product of the collapse of post-capitalist societies, claiming to be "socialist" or called "communist", which left "orphans" the majority of those who, in one way or another, identified themselves with the project of a socialist society (idealized or not). The end of the USSR and Yugoslavia, the restoration of capitalism in China (and, which will further increase the dominant defeatism, the steps forward in the restoration of capitalism in Cuba), have reinforced the impact of TINA.

The climate crisis and reflections (including our own) on ways to fight it is an additional element that requires a "re-foundation" of our conception of an alternative society (the comrades of the Ecology Commission have made progress on this subject and their text will soon be available...). Because in the absence of development of political thinking on this, the attitude of resignation and defeatism still scores points.

Finally, when the Communist Manifesto was formulated in the 19th century, at least in Western European societies, the dominant ideology was that of "progress". In this context, since at least the French Revolution, egalitarian utopias existed. The responses of the Manifesto were part of this ideological environment and therefore relevant - they mobilized....

As Bernie Sanders recently said, one of the elements of this resignation is that "people are working longer hours for stagnating wages, and worry that their children will have a lower standard of living than they do", without the formulation of a "hope", widely shared even by an active minority, that "we have solutions". On the contrary, even among radical youth, the dominant idea at the moment is that "we have no future". [2]

2. If Marx - at that time rightly in my opinion - defined the communist project as neither "a state that must be created, nor an ideal on which reality must be regulated" and if for them communism was "the real movement that abolishes the current state" whose "conditions (...) result from the premises that currently exist" [3], this definition is no longer sufficient since the attempt to "build socialism" has failed and "progress" is no longer part of the dominant ideology.

On the contrary, to speak of socialism - or of an alternative society to capitalism, whatever its name may be - is today to go against the current. Of course, "the first steps" currently exist even more than they did in Marx's time. But the dominant ideology, which integrated and digested the failures of the workers' movement and the 20th century revolutions, and allowed that "energies that were released by the kind of struggles against capitalism on the left then became diverted into this neo-liberal project" (M. Fisher), cannot be fought effectively today without a hope of another possible society at a mass level. And it is not enough - as the decline of the global justice movement has shown - to affirm "another society is possible" if it is not given an understandable content.

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This content cannot just be a reaffirmation of values. Of course, they must be reaffirmed, as do those who manage to make themselves heard/understand sectors of the masses. But today we need a real debate, as broad as possible, both on what is our history - revolution and counter-revolution in Russia, but also on the attempts of other social/production relations and past discussions on this subject as well as the "solutions already explored" within the framework of capitalism - and on the lessons we draw for the future. [4] In short, to fight against the resignation that the dominant ideology spreads in the ranks of the proletariat, it is necessary to reimpose the idea of an alternative society, thus reintroducing imagination into the public debate, i. e. to make imaginable what new social relations could be. And after 200 years of the workers' movement and its cumulative failures, it is not enough to have grandiose utopian flights (very penetrating, that is not the question) scattered throughout Marx's texts: "The reign of freedom begins only where one stops working out of necessity and opportunity imposed from the outside (...)" freedom can only consist in this: the associated producers - the socialized man - regulate in a rational way their organic exchanges with nature and submit them to their common control instead of being dominated by the blind power [of] exchanges." [5]

3. The majority of the workers' movement - or what remains of it today in some countries - remains in defensive positions: it is necessary to "defend the gains" continuously dismantled by the bourgeoisie. The problem is that these "achievements" were possible in the capitalism of the "post war boom" (Fordist), that they were the crumbs that Capital could then grant, but that it cannot and will not continue to grant. As Sanders rightly put it today, "While the authoritarian axis is committed to tearing down a post-World War II global order that they see as limiting their access to power and wealth, it is not enough for us to simply defend that order as it exists." It is necessary, he continues, to "look honestly at how that order has failed to deliver on many of its promises, and how authoritarians have adeptly exploited those failures in order to build support for their agenda. We must take the opportunity to reconceptualize a global order based on human solidarity, an order that recognizes that every person on this planet shares a common humanity, that we all want our children to grow up healthy, to have a good education, have decent jobs, drink clean water, breathe clean air and to live in peace. Our job is to reach out to those in every corner of the world who shares these values, and who are fighting for a better world."

4. "Reconceptualize a global order" is not only trying to enrich discussions about the past and diverse experiences - which is a necessary foundation. It means moving towards formulations (cautious, of course) on what the new social relations could be, on how to move towards, in short, an imaginary transition to a democratic, egalitarian, solidarity-based society... in short, on what would be "the socialization of the human being".

To do this is to give ourselves the goal of writing a pamphlet (or "manifesto") about the society we want. A text that could be adopted at our next World Congress, if we manage to write it...

I therefore propose to open a debate - which will essentially be in writing, and therefore public, but which, in my opinion, should begin with a common "thinking aloud" reflection in one of our meetings. And which would be followed by exchanges - oral and written - on how questions and answers could be formulated on some essential elements of a future society:

" Politics (i.e. institutions, law, the question of ownership and its overcoming, in short the State... as long as it has not withered away);

" Humanity/nature relations (on this subject work has already progressed within the Ecology Committee, it must be extended...);

" The satisfaction of needs (therefore also what the needs are/could be...) and how to achieve it...

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" Production-distribution (i.e. planning, if it is possible to overcome market relationships and how, centralization/decentralization, etc.)...

" ...and probably many other elements that we will need to clarify if we wish to make progress in our contribution to the "reconceptualization" of an alternative global society.

It is not, of course, a question of formulating a "catechism" on what the future society could be. In my opinion, it is a question of enriching a social project (and what says project, says modifiable...) by analysing the historical attempts of the movement for socialism - and their failures -, of integrating it into the process of criticism of the current evolution of humanity dominated by Capital, of drawing from this critical process the existing premises of the real movement which abolishes the current state.

*Paris,
12 October 2018*

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[1] See ["Capitalist Realism: An Interview with Mark Fisher"](#).

[2] See Bernie Sanders speech at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (October 9th 2018) ["Building A Global Democratic Movement to Counter Authoritarianism"](#).

[3] Karl Marx, *German Ideology*.

[4] On this subject, see Catherine Samary's article, ["D'un communisme d'@colonial @ la d'@mocratie des communs : Le @« si@» cle sovi@tique @» dans la tourmente de la @« r@volution permanente @»"](#), *Inprecor* No 642-3, August-September 2017. These ideas are developed in her book *Decolonial Communism, Democracy and the Commons*, [Merlin/Resistance Books/IIRE](#) 2019. Also @rad Vaysse ["La strat@gie ne se limite pas @ la prise du pouvoir"](#), *Inprecor* No 653/654, July-August 2018.

[5] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Book III [conclusion].