

SOLIDARITY, THE MARKET AND MARX

IN 1960 a group of ex-trotskyists calling themselves "Socialism Re-affirmed" began to publish a journal called Agitator, changed after a few issues to Solidarity. Solidarity modelled itself on another group of ex-trotskyists in France running a journal Socialisme ou Barbarie. In 1961 Solidarity, Socialisme ou Barbarie and similar groups in Belgium and Italy published a joint manifesto entitled 'Socialism or Barbarism'.

This represented a considerable advance beyond orthodox Trotskyism. The concept of 'socialism' being established by a vanguard party mobilising the masses during an economic crisis was abandoned. Instead, declared the manifesto, it "will only be achieved through the autonomous and self-conscious activity of the working masses". Capitalism was said to have acquired the ability to iron out slumps and booms and to ensure a slow but steady rise in living standards. So, in this view, the basic contradiction of capitalism was no longer economic, but was between order-givers and order-takers. The bureaucrats who managed capitalism were always trying to reduce the workers to cogs, to treat them as objects, but the workers were always resisting this. Out of this struggle, said the manifesto, 'socialist' consciousness would arise in the form of a demand for "workers' management of production".

In fact this was how Solidarity (and the others) defined 'socialism'. In one sense they had gone beyond Trotskyism which saw 'socialism' as the management of production by a 'workers state', i.e. a State controlled by a vanguard party purporting to represent the working class. But in another sense they had not. For 'socialism' was still considered as an era of 'workers power' between capitalism and communism, as a 'transitional society' in which money, wages, prices, etc would continue to exist:

"All revenue derived from the exploitation of labour will be abolished. There will be equality of wages and pensions until it proves feasible to abolish money" (paragraph 27).

This idea of 'equal wages' can be found in Lenin's State and Revolution and in fact Solidarity's concept of 'socialism' is taken from this pamphlet of Lenin's. The main difference being that 'workers power' was defined in terms of the government being controlled by a central assembly of factory-based Workers Councils rather than by a vanguard party.

At one time Solidarity never hesitated to say that by 'workers power' (which is still the sub-title of their journal) they meant "a Workers' Council Government", the phrase used in the 1961 introduction to the 'Socialism or Barbarism' manifesto. In the 1969 introduction, however, this was changed to "the rule of the Workers' Councils", reflecting the anarchist influence which Solidarity had in the meantime come under. Dropping the claim to stand for some kind of government did represent an advance in Solidarity's thinking. 'Workers power' was now re-defined to mean, in the words of a basic policy statement As We See It issued in 1967, the "democratisation of society down to its very roots". Not that this made its conception of 'socialism' any clearer. When in 1972 this statement was amplified in a pamphlet As We Don't See It readers were referred for more details of Solidarity's idea of 'socialism' to another Solidarity pamphlet issued earlier that year called The Workers Councils.

This pamphlet is an edited translation of an article which originally appeared in issue No. 22 of Socialisme ou Barbarie in 1957 under the title "Sur le Contenu du Socialisme" (On the Content of Socialism). It is in fact a blue-print for 'workers self-management' of a market economy. Cardan (alias Chaulieu) who wrote the article is clearly in the same tradition of so-called 'market socialism' as Tito, Liberman, Ota Sik, etc in East Europe, the main difference being that he wants such an economy to be controlled by Workers Councils while they want it controlled by a bureaucratic State (maybe in conjunction with 'workers councils').

Nobody who has read the original article can deny that Cardan was an advocate of so-called 'market socialism'. Solidarity themselves clearly found this embarrassing because they have edited out its more crude manifestations. In their introduction they apologise:

"Some will see the text as a major contribution to the perpetuation of wage slavery -- because it still talks of 'wages' and doesn't call for the immediate abolition of 'money' (although clearly defining the radically different meanings these terms will acquire in the early stages of a self-managed society)" (p.4).

and, again, in a footnote:

"All the preceding talk of 'wages', 'prices' and 'the market' will, for instance, undoubtedly have startled a certain group of readers. We

would ask them momentarily to curb their emotional responses and to try to think rationally with us on the matter"(p.36).

But Cardan did not speak only of 'wages', 'prices' and 'the market'. He also spoke of 'profitability'(rentabilite) and 'rate of interest'('taux d'interet'). This was evidently too much even for Solidarity's curbed emotion since these words nowhere appear in their edited translation.

It is very revealing to give some examples of the way Solidarity has toned down the 'market socialism' aspects of Cardan's original article:

<u>Original</u>	<u>Solidarity's version</u>
shops selling to consumers (magazins de vente aux consumateurs)	stores, distributing to consumers(p.24).
The market for consumer goods (le marche des biens de consommation)	consumer goods(heading,p.35)
This implies the existence of a real market for consumer goods(Ce qui implique l'existence d'un marche reel pour les biens de consommation)	This implies the existence of some mechanism whereby consumer demand can genuinely make itself felt(p.35).
Money, prices, wages and value	'money', 'wages', value(heading,p.36).

In fact Cardan envisaged a market economy in which everybody would be paid in circulating money an equal wage with which to buy goods which would be on sale at a price equal to their value(=amount of socially necessary labour embodied in them). And he has the cheek to claim that Marx also held that under socialism goods would exchange at their values. Before going on to refute this we must draw attention to two other phrases which occur frequently in the original, namely 'gouvernement' and 'parti ouvrier socialiste'(socialist workers party), which are nowhere to be found in Solidarity's version. 'Government' becomes "Council(of the Central Assembly of Workers Councils)"while 'socialist workers party' becomes "libertarian socialist organisation"!

But --and this brings us on to a discussion of whether or not Marx thought socialism would be a market economy-- the best change is towards the end. The original article says(of 'socialism' as a transitional society between capitalism and communism):

"In their essence these views absolutely coincide with the ideas of Marx and Lenin on the subject. Marx only considered one kind of transitional society between capitalism and communism, which he called indifferently 'dictatorship of the proletariat' or 'lower stage of communism'...Lenin's view, in State and Revolution, were only, in this regard, an explanation and a defence of Marx's view against the reformists of his time"(translated from the French).

In the Solidarity pamphlet this becomes:

"In their essence these views closely co-incide with Marx's ideas on the subject. Marx only considered one kind of transitional society between capitalism and communism, which he called indifferently 'dictatorship of the proletariat' or 'lower stage of communism'..."(p.57).

No mention of Lenin! Which is unfair to Marx since it is with Lenin's views on this point and not with Marx's that Solidarity's position coincides('absolutely' or 'closely', take your pick!).

For Marx never spoke of socialism as a 'transitional society' between capitalism and communism(indeed he never spoke of a 'transitional society' at all); and he did not use the phrases 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and 'lower stage of communism' indifferently. What he did do was to speak of a 'political transition period' between capitalism and 'the lower stage of communism'; it was the words 'socialism' and 'communism' that he used indifferently. 'Socialism' as a transitional society between capitalism and communism(or socialism) characterised by 'workers power' and equal wages, which Solidarity has inherited from its trotskyist past, was one of Lenin's distortions of Marxism.

Marx himself always made it clear that socialism/communism, even in its lower stage, meant the abolition of the market('commodity production') and, in the Poverty of Philosophy and Value, Price and Profit he specifically singled out the idea of a society of 'equal wages' for derision. For him socialism/communism was a society in which production would be democratically planned by the community(the State as a coercive instrument having disappeared immediately socialism/communism was

established)solely and directly to satisfy their needs. Writing in 1875 Marx had to concede that,in the early stages,consumption would have to be rationed(he suggested this be done by means of labour-time vouchers,but specifically said that these would no more be money than a theatre ticket was),but eventually all goods and services would be free for everybody to take according to need. Today,nearly a hundred years later,this stage could be reached very rapidly once socialism/communism had been established.

Solidarity,in advocating a self-managed market economy,is not advocating socialism at all,but some unrealistic blueprint which would never work --either because if the working class had reached the degree of consciousness needed to establish it then they would establish real socialism instead or,if they hadn't,then it would degenerate into some kind of state capitalism. However,it is significant that,as we have shown,Solidarity should feel guilty about advocating a self-managed market economy rather than a moneyless socialist society. In time maybe they'll have the intellectual honesty to repudiate their previous views on this,as they have done on the concept of a 'workers council government'.

Some members and ex-members of Solidarity have already come to do this and,faced with the dogmatism(or rather Cardan-worship) of the others on this and other issues,have left. For instance,a document issued by four ex-Solidarity members in Aberdeen entitled Revolutionary Politics and The Present Situation refers to workers' self-management of production as involving "the abolition of the production of exchange values and the production of use values"(instead). Another breakaway group The Oppositionist,in its October 1972 issue,calls for the 'abolition of the wages system':

"The Socialist Revolution is a complex and many sided struggle to eliminate the wages system itself. We do not advocate workers control of production whilst striving to retain the market economy of capitalist production. Without the destruction of the 'market' the ramifications of capitalism would grow stronger not weaker...
Workers cannot control production and retain the wages system"
(their emphasis)

Another document,issued in London,entitled a Critique of Cardan calls for the abolition of commodity production and wage labour and describes socialism as "a system where men can have full control over social wealth in common,for use,and so control their own natures" and says "it is also about a completely different kind of production;for the sake of useful consumption of the society as a whole,not for the creation of commodities".

Unlike Solidarity these groups are coming to adopt real socialism as their aim, though in fact it was Solidarity's rejection of Marxism rather than its 'market socialism' that caused them to split off.

Solidarity has published a number of texts by Cardan critical of Marxian economics, theory of history,etc and would now no longer claim to be Marxist. Actually these weren't criticisms of Marxism but rather of the crude economic determinism that passed for Marxism in the Trotskyist and ex-trotskyist movement. As such they were Cardan's repudiation of his own past.

At the same time Solidarity tended to move away from the view that the struggle for 'socialism' was primarily industrial and came to see it as a many-sided struggle to change all aspects --education,sex as well as work-- of social life. Apart from the fact that their aim wasn't socialism,this represented an advance on their former views which had tended to idealise the factory worker and to see the experience of factory life as the generator of 'socialist' consciousness. This was mistaken because socialism is not just an economic change;it is a total revolution in social relationships. So that movements outside the factory(such as protests against sex discrimination,war or pollution) have just as much chance,with socialist intervention,of generating socialist consciousness as the factory struggle.

Unfortunately,Solidarity's internal critics have not realised this and,regarding this change of emphasis as part of Solidarity's rejection of Marxism,have reverted to idealising the factory struggle and relegating the other struggles to a secondary status. In fact the Liverpool-based Workers Voice(though in fact not a Solidarity breakaway),with its detailed descriptions of particular factory struggles,reads like Solidarity did ten years ago --including talk of the need for a workers party and for workers to have their own state power. The Aberdeen group's document quoted earlier states that in its view the main area of struggle remains the factory,with the implication that it is from this struggle rather than that of "movements outside the factory"(such as those against pollution or for sexual liberation) that socialist consciousness will arise. The supporters of the American journal Internationalism in this country take a similar view.

Internationalism also reverts to economic determinism in making the rise of socialist consciousness depend on an economic crisis, though they are reasonably clear on what socialism/communism is (even though they do unnecessarily distinguish the two):

"While under capitalism use values are only the material form of exchange values, and commodities are produced for sale, under socialism production cannot be limited by the requirements of profit, of capital accumulation, but must be determined by the needs of the human community. The consumption of the working class cannot be limited by its wages or the value of its labor power, but will be determined by its needs and the technical capacity of the productive apparatus which it sets in motion. The elimination of wage labor, of production based on the law of value, is not a task for some future or higher stage of socialism, but the immediate task and content of the proletarian dictatorship. It is only on this foundation that the movement towards that higher stage of communism of which Marx speaks, the stage characterized by the formulation 'to each according to his needs' can begin".
(Internationalism, Political Perspective, pp. 9-10).

But all these groups still have a hazy conception of who the working class are, tending to confine it, or at least to make the most important part of it, the industrial proletariat, whereas in fact it is composed of all who depend for a living on selling their ability to work, irrespective of where they work or what work they do.

The basic contradiction of capitalism is that between socialised production and class monopoly of the means of production, which manifests itself as working class discontent with its general conditions of life, not just its work experiences, under capitalism. A failure to recognise this is the one great weakness of these ex-Solidarity groups. If they did, they would also realise that socialism is not just concerned with emancipating workers as workers (i.e. wealth-producers) but as human beings (i.e. as men and women). It would also give them a clearer conception of socialist society. Socialism aims not to establish "workers power" but the abolition of all classes including the working class. It is thus misleading to speak of socialism as workers ownership and control of production. In socialist society there would simply be people, free and equal men and women forming a classless community. So it would be more accurate to define socialism/communism in terms of the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production by and in the interest of the whole people.

Nevertheless, the emergence of these groups calling for the abolition of wage labour and of commodity production once again confirms that capitalism continually throws up socialist ideas.

Adam Buick
