

SOLIDARITY, THE MARKET AND MARX: A REPLY

Early in 1973 an article was published in a discussion bulletin produced by some comrades who had recently left the SPGB. The article was entitled 'Solidarity, the Market and Marx'. The discussion bulletin later became 'Libertarian Communism' (and later still 'Social Revolution').

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The article in question was an ill-informed attack on Solidarity and a gross misrepresentation of our viewpoint. The matter would not be worth taking up were it not for two facts. The first is that the author of the article (Adam Buick) has recently circulated members of SR with copies of this text - probably with a view to preventing the fusion.* The second is that there still seems to be a widespread idea in SR that Solidarity stands for something which the article called 'market socialism'.

Adam Buick's article was essentially a critique of Cardan's 'Workers Councils and the Economics of a Self-managed Society'. Such a critique, however hostile, would be perfectly legitimate. What is not legitimate, in my opinion, are the inferences

- a) that any Solidarity pamphlet represents THE Solidarity viewpoint on the matter;
- b) that there was something dishonest about us publishing the Workers Councils pamphlet in its present form;
- c) more specifically that Solidarity stands for something called 'market socialism'.

It is necessary to take up these matters - and also the main political content of the article itself - with a view to clearing the air and of ensuring that any possible fusion takes place under conditions of clarity and mutual trust.

Adam buick starts with a false assumption. It is the assumption that every pamphlet (and every formulation, in every pamphlet) that any Solidarity group has ever published, of necessity reflects THE viewpoint of Solidarity as a whole. This is not the case. It has never been the case, and the belief that it might be the case reveals a sadly traditional and monolithic attitude to the question of the publications of a revolutionary group. We know that in the SPGB no document or leaflet could ever be produced without 'vetting' by the Executive Committee. This whole approach reflected a deep belief that there was only one, marxist, truth (detained by the SPGB). It found expression in the famous formulation: 'the SPGB therefore enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties' - a formulation which incidentally shows that such authoritarian attitudes have not

* He is claimed to have the perspective of reorganising the SPGB - on a 'modernist' basis.

only appeared historically in leninist organisations (which is widely known) but have also flourished within the 'marxist' movement (which is less widely known).*

Once more - and for the record - Solidarity has never been obsessed with the doctrinal purity of everything it publishes. We are not political nit-pickers and we hope this pastime will not become the main concern of the 'fused' organisation. We have published articles and pamphlets which, in our opinion, had something interesting, or new, or challenging to say. Some people (the 'marxist faction' - now ⁱⁿ World Revolution) disagreed strongly with some aspects of what B. Dent wrote in 'LSE: a question of degree'. We published the text all the same, although not as a numbered Solidarity (London) pamphlet. Not everyone in the group agreed with everything in 'The Lump' pamphlet. Many of us had doubts about 'Vietnam: Whose Victory?' (we even published a specific disclaimer about some of the more contentious formulations in this text). We did the same about 'Bureaucrats and Women Cleaners'. Authoritarians cannot understand this attitude (see World Revolution no. 12 p. 7) attributing it, in their simple-mindedness, to 'confusion'. We hold, on the contrary, that an honest discussion of differing opinions can only contribute to understanding. Misrepresentation does not contribute to such understanding and that is why it is politically sterile as well as intolerable among comrades.

The article 'Solidarity, the Market and Marx' points out that there are a number of differences between the formulations used in the Workers Councils text (published by Solidarity - London, in March 1972) and the text 'Sur le Contenu du Socialisme' (published by Socialisme ou Barbarie, in 1957). This is not denied. But it does not have the sinister implications made by Adam Buick:

The alterations were made (as in all other Cardan texts we have published) with the knowledge and consent of the author. Our introduction mentioned (without perhaps stressing the specific differences sufficiently) that our text was not always a literal translation of the French original. If Adam Buick wants further examples (this time of much more profound differences between the English versions of Cardan texts and their French originals) we would refer him to Modern Capitalism and Revolution and to History and Revolution. Many in the movement seem to be under a profound misapprehension as to the nature of our relationship with Cardan (Castoriadis) and about our attitude to his writings. We are not in the hagiography business. We are not Cardanists to use the term coined by World Revolution, or addicted to 'Cardan-worship', to use Adam Buick's term. Our political aim in life is neither archivism nor the dissemination of textually immaculate translations of the Master's work. We have repeatedly stressed this in our publications, which are conceived in a very different spirit. We are not 'Cardanists' - or any other kind of '-ists' for that matter. We are ourselves. We publish material in a form and with a content which we think will be of use to our own constituency. We have on several occasions publicly expressed reservations or disagreements with some of Cardan's formulations. Incidentally how could we be both 'Cardan-worshippers' and deliberate distorters of Cardan's writings, as Adam Buick contends? What would be the purpose of such an exercise - apart from a machiavellian plot deliberately to confuse unfortunate ex-SPGBers?

* Another 'marxist' organisation in which dogmatic authoritarian views flourished was the old SDF. Its founding father had written: 'a slave class cannot be freed by the slaves themselves. The leadership, the initiative, the teaching, the organisation, must come from those comrades in a different position...' H.M. Hyndman, Record of an Adventurous Life, (London, 1911), p. 432.

MARX, ADAM BUICK AND THE MARKET

Let us now turn to the substance of the matter: Adam Buick's contention that the Workers Councils pamphlet describes something called 'market socialism' which is quite different from what Marx had in mind.

Just a comment to start with to put the discussion in proper perspective. Today, it is surely only of historical interest how the 'fathers' of 'scientific socialism' (or William Morris, or the Utopians, or Kropotkin for that matter) envisaged the structure of the new society. Adam Buick constantly argues as if a reference to what Marx said in the Poverty of Philosophy or in Value, Price and Profit was the knock-out blow, the final court of appeal, the ultimate yardstick in deciding whether something was feasible or not, desirable or not, in the second half of the 20th century. This is a religious, not a creative attitude. But some of us are interested in the study of religion (as a manifestation of human alienation), in a way that only agnostics can be. It is worth spending a few minutes (but not much more) putting the record straight.

It will be argued a) that Cardan's Workers Councils text is very much in the marxist tradition; b) that its emphasis on equality avoids some of the cruder errors made by Marx and Engels in this area; c) that Adam Buick's claim that Marx had something very different in mind - in relation to the 'transition period', to 'money', to the exchange of goods according to their labour value - just doesn't stand up to informed examination; d) that the very orthodoxy of Cardan's text, in terms of marxist categories, is today a source of weakness rather than of strength.

1. Marx and Engels certainly believed in the inevitability of a 'transitional' society between capitalism and the 'higher phase of communist society'.

Marx refers to such a society as 'a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society'. (1) He speaks of the period of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as 'the transition to the abolition of classes and to a classless society'. (2) In other words there are still classes in Marx's 'lower form of communism'!. One is entitled to ask 'on what are these classes based, since the means of production are no longer privately owned'?

(1) Critique of the Gotha Programme (CGP). Selected Works (SW), FLPH, Moscow 1955, vol. II, p.23.

(2) Letter to Weydemeyer, *ibid.*, p.452.

Or are they? True, Marx refers to this as a 'political transition period'. (3) But he clearly has more than just politics in mind. He sees the 'lower form of communism' as 'in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society'. Please note the 'economically'. It is just playing with words to say, as Adam Buick does, that Marx 'never spoke of a transitional society at all' but only - wait for it - of a 'political transition period'.

2. Marx and Engels held that during the transition period work would be a) compulsory; b) remunerated (possibly unequally).

Engels in his introduction to Wage labour and Capital describes compulsory labour as extending even beyond the 'transition period'. He states 'a new social order is possible in which the present class differences will have disappeared and in which - perhaps after a short transition period involving some privation, but at any rate of great value morally (sic!) - through the planned utilisation and extension of the already existing enormous productive forces of all members of society, and with uniform obligation to work' (4) the promised land would come. (See section 4 for how Engels, the factory owner, conceived of the organisation of production under socialism.) Marx even speaks of the positive aspects of child labour (in achieving the 'new' society). He wrote (in 1875) 'a general prohibition of child labour is incompatible with the existence of large-scale industry and hence an empty pious wish. Its realisation - if it were possible - would be reactionary, since with a strict regulation of the working time according to the different age groups and other safety measures for the protection of children, an early combination of productive labour with education is one of the most potent means for the transformation of present-day society'. (5) No wonder the bourgeois work ethic is so deeply implanted, if even the 'opponents' of the bourgeoisie seem so deeply committed to it. Cardan at least avoids pitfalls of this kind.

There is no doubt whatsoever that for Marx labour was to be remunerated during the transition period. 'The individual producer receives back from society - after the deductions have been made - exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual quantum of labour ... with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour. The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form he receives back

(3) CGP, *ibid.*, p.32

(4) SW, vol.I, p.78

(5) CGP, SW, vol.II, p.36.

in another'. (6) Again, note the formulation 'as much as costs the same amount of labour.'

What is wrong with calling a spade a spade? Why beat about the bush? There is a short word for remuneration for compulsory labour time. It is wages. And there is a short word for certificates which quantitatively reflect this remuneration. It is money. I am NOT arguing in favour of this system. I firmly believe that with the vast development of the productive forces that has taken place since Marx's time it may be possible to by-pass it almost immediately. What I am arguing is that it is downright dishonest to claim that Marx believed that the 'transition' period would be something quite different. The virtue of Cardan's text is that he states explicitly that 'wages', as long as they are necessary, should be equal for different kinds of labour (i.e. for intellectual and manual labour). Marx hints at this when he equates an 'equal performance of labour' with 'an equal share in the social consumption fund'. (7) But he spoils it all by going off at a tangent and saying that all this, in fact, is inequality, because 'one worker is married, another not; one has more children than another'. (8) He claims that with the same remuneration 'one worker will be richer than another'. He was clearly writing before the days when society started making provisions for inequalities of this kind.

Cardan's insistence on equality is leagues ahead of Marx's vision of a new society. Dealing with 'the elimination of all social and political inequality', Marx denounces 'the idea of socialist society as the realm of equality' as 'a one-sided French idea resting upon the old "liberty, equality, fraternity" - an idea which was justified as a stage of development in its own time and place but which, like all the one-sided ideas of the earlier socialist schools, should now be overcome'. (9) This is done through a disingenuous statement to the effect that 'alpine dwellers will have different conditions of life from those of people living on plains'. The argument, *however, is* about 'social and political equality,' not about ← warmer wind-jackets or stronger boots! It would be interesting to hear whether Adam Buick and other self-professed marxists agree with this reactionary, anti-equalitarian rubbish. Marx states that 'ideas of equality only produce confusion in people's heads'. (10) Is that why our marxists are so stridently silent on the matter?

(6) *ibid.*, p. 23

(7) *ibid.*, p. 24

(8) *ibid.*, p. 24

(9) *ibid.*, p. 43

(10) *ibid.*, p. 43

I cannot conclude this section without reference to the nonsensical claim that Solidarity has 'inherited' the notion of 'equal wages' from its 'trotskyist past'. Those of us who were in the trotskyist movement have abundantly repudiated this period of our political life. But we challenge Adam Buick to provide a shred of evidence that any strand of trotskyism, in any part of the world, at any time, has ever stood for this kind of equalitarianism. Trotsky, in this a faithful disciple of Marx, always repudiated such notions as anarchist utopianism - often at the point of a gun.

3. Marx held that, during the transition period, goods (means of consumption) would exchange with one another according to their labour value.

This proposition seems to have outraged Adam Buick. He writes that Cardan 'has the cheek to claim that Marx held that under socialism goods would exchange at their values'. Cheek or no cheek, this is exactly what Marx believed would occur 'in the first phase of communist society'. This is made quite explicit in his Critique of the Gotha Programme. Speaking about the exchange of the famous 'certificates' for 'means of consumption' (i.e. in plain language, about buying things) Marx wrote 'here obviously the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities, as far as this is an exchange of equal values'. And what about the 'distribution of goods among the individual producers'? According to Marx the 'same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity-equivalents: a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labour in another form'. If the SPGB went beyond Marx in this respect it was all to their credit. What doesn't help anyone, however, not even Marx's memory (which has no need of such 'defenders') is to pretend that Marx held other views about the economics of the transition period (sorry, ^{of} the 'political transition period') than he in fact did.

4. The founders of 'scientific socialism', as soon as they got down to brass tacks, saw the organisation of socialist production in extremely authoritarian terms.

The main 'culprit' here was undoubtedly Engels, although there is no evidence that Marx ever disagreed with Engels, or ever dissociated himself from Engels' views.

Engels defined 'authority' as 'the imposition of the will of another upon ours'.

He asked 'is it possible to have organisation without authority?' (11) And, in typical bourgeois manner, he answered in the negative.

Engels chooses cotton mills as his (no doubt familiar) example. 'All the workers, men, women and children, are obliged to begin and finish their work at the hours fixed by the authority of the steam, which cares nothing for individual autonomy ... the will of the single individual will always have to subordinate itself, (12) which means that questions are settled in an authoritarian way. The automatic machinery of a big factory is much more despotic than the small capitalists who employ workers have ever been ... wanting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself, to destroy the power loom in order to return to the spinning wheel'. (13) This was unavoidable and 'independent of all social organisation' (i.e. socialism could do nothing about it).

This shows a remarkable conceptual poverty as to how a socialist society might set about reorganising its technology and its productive base. The alternatives are not the power loom or the return to the spinning wheel. A vastly enhanced area of freedom within production itself will be an immediate concern of socialist society. This is not beyond the competence of human creativity. The notion that technology itself is socially neutral, objectively determined by developments in science, and that what is the matter with capitalism is that it uses this 'neutral' technology for reactionary purposes (to fill the pockets of cotton mill owners, for instance) whereas socialism would use the same 'neutral' technology for beneficial ends (production for use) is a typical 'objectivist', 'scientistic', marxist fallacy - and incidentally one that reflects many deep, but unformulated, bourgeois assumptions.

In Dante's mind the entrance to Hell (the Inferno) was surmounted by an inscription 'Lasciate ogni speranza, voi che entrate' (Abandon all hope, ye that enter). Engels cynically parodies this with the statement that 'at least with regards to the hours of work, one may write upon the portals of these (modern) factories: Lasciate ogni autonomia, voi che entrate.' This need to abandon all autonomy in large-scale production is, remember; 'independent' of how socialism may seek to organise production.

(11) On Authority. SW, vol. I, p. 636

(12) Interesting echoes of this can be found in Lenin's statement that 'large-scale machine industry - which is the material productive source and foundation of socialism - calls for absolute and strict unity of will ... how can this unity of will be achieved? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one'.

(13) SW, vol. I, p. 637

Isn't it time that those who talk so much of 'working class autonomy' realised the sort of hell that their ideological forefathers reserved for the working class (mentally, for 'marxists' had nowhere yet acceded to power). Isn't it time they started thinking of these problems? The problems are real ones. Cardan's text on the Workers Councils takes them up, and looks at them in a very positive way. Where does Adam Buick stand on these matters?

CONCLUSIONS

There is an enormous void in revolutionary theory as to how production and distribution might be organised in a free society. There have been some admirable science-fiction texts, but the revolutionary movement itself has produced virtually nothing. It is true that Pannekoek in his Workers Councils, and ICO (in their collection of texts called Fondements de l'Economie Communiste) sought to tackle some of these problems. But the whole approach in both is largely 'theoretical'. It is largely in the 'what-Marx-really-meant-or-really-said' tradition, or in the only slightly better 'how-Marx-should-be-interpreted-in-the-conditions-of-today' tradition. Even the SPGB never really went beyond parrot-cries of 'free access' and the production of exegetic texts such as 'Marx's conception of socialism' (Socialist Standard, December 1973). Adam Buick's 'The Myth of the Transitional Society' (Critique No.5, 1975) is in exactly the same style. Can't we do better?

What is needed now is to break with the marxist blinkers altogether, and to start thinking creatively - together. Maybe Cardan does not go far enough (he was writing over 20 years ago). But he was at least trying to give practical answers to real problems, to envisage the structure and functions of institutions that people could both understand and control, to discuss such questions as the flow of relevant information, to deal without cant with the difficult problems of direct democracy and of centralisation, to look at how modern computer and matrix techniques could vastly simplify the calculations of a free society (and enable it to predict the various repercussions its various decisions would have upon one another). He may have got it wrong. He may not have gone far enough. In discussing 'The Content of Socialism' Cardan may still have laid too heavy an emphasis on the economy (as most marxists still do). He may have dealt too little with life outside of work, with problems of education, culture and everyday life (incidentally, he has dealt at length with these matters in other writings). But to dismiss 'Workers Councils and the Economics of a Self-managed Society' as 'market

socialism' is just arrogant impudence, especially from someone who, as far as I know, has produced nothing original in this area. A display of having (rather selectively) read Marx doesn't, in my opinion, come under *this heading*.

All this is not what the problem is at, today. SR and Solidarity have enormous new tasks to tackle together, both practical and theoretical. In tackling these tasks we will find an obsession with the past, with its categories and with its jargon, to be a hindrance, not a help. To the extent that marxism is today an important part of the dominant ideology (and to the extent that it reflects, in many contradictory ways, the deepest essence of bourgeois thought) we will have to transcend it. It will be difficult. There is nothing as painful as the birth of new, liberatory, ideas. But neither is there anything which, in the long run, will prove quite as rewarding.

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