

Radovan Richta

MODELS OF SOCIALISM

The author, an eminent philosopher and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, directs a scientific institute which produced the following as a contribution to the discussion then being promoted as preparation for the 14th Congress of the Party. It was printed in the Communist paper Rude Pravo on July 10-11-12 1968. This translation is from the German.

THERE IS HARDLY A GROUP in our society which, during the course of the past months when the process of renewal was asserting itself, has not publicly pointed to the harsh conditions and obstacles with which they had to wrestle before the January days for their legitimate interests which had remained unsatisfied. When the curtain was lifting and people began to speak openly about their worries, naturally everybody saw a different aspect of the old system as the most aggravating. For a long time the workers had already come up against the barriers placed against their lives through the stagnation of the living standard and the waste of labor power. The technicians and specialists felt frustrated in their striving for creative activity and personal initiative. For the intelligentsia the suppression of democratic liberties had become unbearable, from Slovakia came the protest of a people which could not unfold its inner forces. For working women, securing the conditions for their existence had become a road of hardship. The youth expressed their dissatisfaction with the restricted possibilities to prove themselves in the future.

The multiplicity of these complaints could give rise to the impression that we are faced with a knot of diverse conflicts which cannot be disentangled: conflicts between the intelligentsia and the workers, between social security and economic dynamic, between social self-management and political democracy, between artists and technicians, between Czechs and Slovaks, between young and old, between party functionaries and ordinary party members, between Communists and people belonging to no party. But this interpretation is only a superficial expression or a distorted form of the deeper conflict which in reality is deciding the future of this country.

What is really involved is the model of socialism which has become established here in the past era. This model rests on a

restricted and distorted conception of socialism; it contains within itself the danger of degeneration and discredit. There is therefore no alternative but to dissociate oneself decisively from this model and to attempt to create a new model of socialist society free from bureaucratic narrow-mindedness and cleansed of arbitrariness based on power politics and doctrinairism.

The traditional model of socialism arose mainly in countries which did not immediately possess a material, social and cultural base for a socialist development. This concept unfolded as an attempt of a revolutionary negation of the fundamental forms of bourgeois society on a basis which did not enable it to fill this negation with a positive socialist content and to shape the life of the socialist society in accordance with its own inner logic. This led to a transition period during which the socialist orientation was carried through by means of external intervention by the centre of power. These circumstances have already by themselves deformed the base. Out of the necessity conditioned by the time a virtue was made. Stalin considered the restrictions and deformations as genuine and permanent attributes of socialism. The development of a functioning socialist system is not possible solely on the basis of the negation of the capitalist forms—the bourgeois institutions of power and private property—of the means of production. Socialism in its specific form cannot exist as a society in which bureaucrats rule, in place of the overthrown bourgeoisie, in which the state in place of the capitalists implements industrialisation and transforms the country into a single large centrally directed factory; where social justice and security for all is “guaranteed” in such a manner that nearly all the people are robbed of the possibility to develop their capacities and creative impulses.

Marx, Engels, Lenin and other socialist thinkers have conceived of socialism in a different way. In their opinion a truly new society can only come into being on the basis of a positive overcoming of capitalism, its economy, its cultural-political heritage and its whole base of industrial civilisation. This means an actual socialisation of the means of production, the creation of relations of all-round mutual co-operation and consequently also of an economic interest structure which will stimulate a general spirit of enterprise. This involves the constitution of particular democratic decision-making organs which guarantee a higher measure of freedom. It finally means the creation of an adequate material base, in other words a dynamic of the productive forces which can provide ever-growing scope for the creative self-realisation of man and the development of his potentialities.

Behind us lie years in which important elements were removed from this socialist project; as a result its whole content was falsi-

fied and distorted. Stalin's conception was an expression of this degradation. Those who defend socialism in its deformed shape either err themselves or mislead others. Thereby they discredit socialism as such.

Socialism cannot abandon the total complex of historical tasks which make it into socialism, that means into a higher form of society. Since Marx's day the revolutionary movement has proved that in order to fulfil such a huge task it is necessary, at every stage, to muster enough courage for the movement to be renewed and raised to a higher level. The courage, the force, to overcome the old model of socialism — that, above all, is what we need today.

For a free and democratic socialism

The socialist movement already faced the reversing tendency of political power when it took the first steps of the revolutionary transformation of human living conditions, when it established the dictatorship of the proletariat to expropriate the capitalists and break their power. Directly following the revolution there occurred such a concentration of power over all aspects of man's life as had never existed in any former social order. At the same time no guarantees were created against the misuse of this power, which soon began to get out of the control of the movement and to contaminate the leadership, by transforming the instruments of revolutionary change into power organs of bureaucratic forces. This experience should lead us to the conclusion that socialist society can only exist as such if alongside the overcoming of class differences it also liquidates step by step those instruments of repression which have lost their justification for existence.

A society can only be described as socialist if it gradually restricts and abolishes its organs of political power so that they cannot turn against the socialist development, a society which stops the intervention of the organs of power in those spheres which do not belong to it (such as economics, science, culture, party life etc.). This involves the continuous enlargement of freedoms and democratic rights for everybody. The citizen of a socialist country should not have only as many or even fewer freedoms than exist in a bourgeois society, freedom of movement and travel — but more; he should not enjoy fewer or as many, but more rights: personal and national right of self-determination, the right to education, to work and the development of his capabilities, the right to individual property, to participation and decision-making.

When ever the pre-conditions can be created, socialist democracy moves from the ordinary representative system to the higher form of direct democracy, to the system of self-management and combines these two forms. We currently face the task to develop

our own system of socialist democracy, to open up by stages new possibilities for representative democracy on the basis of the national front to which additional organisations which have proved their socialist orientation shall be added over a period of time.

The modern mass media, in so far as they truthfully reflect a lively public opinion, have a great significance for socialist democracy. We point to the fact that the modern means of science and technology present the old problem of democracy which Rousseau already recognised in a new light: it has become possible to give man a permanent over-all picture of public opinion, of expert views, to familiarise him with alternative scientific views, give him a maximum choice of potential leaders. Modern communication and computing techniques permit direct participation of the population in basic decision making. Socialist society should not allow itself to lose the initiative in this respect.

The alternative with which we are concerned today does not consist in the "substitution" of socialism by democracy, nor in "complementing" socialism with democracy by administrative means from the outside, as the defenders of the old model understand it, the alternative rather calls for: the development of the democratic dimensions or the collapse of the socialist project — for socialism without democracy and its development is not socialism.

For a socialism with a spirit of enterprise

During the last years we have reached the conviction that it is impossible to make the necessary changes in the economy without a radical turn to democracy in political life. The coming months and years will probably bring the experience that democracy cannot exist for long without its own positive socialist forms of economy which can reflect, unify and accomplish the fundamental interests resulting from social labor. In this respect, also, we face fundamental changes in the conception of socialism, changes which have already knocked at our doors for some years thanks to the initiative of our economists.

We have abolished capitalist property and thereby paralysed the former driving force of the economic self-movement. This mere negation however, has not by itself created any higher stimuli and forms of movement of the economic development, it has not brought into being a particular socialist system with a universal spirit of enterprise. The negation has merely transferred the direction of the whole economy to the centre which under these conditions had to succumb to bureaucratisation and subjectivism. Outside the centre this has led to a lack of interest and irresponsibility. As a result of this our society, in its attempt to create the social wealth which is the prerequisite for the fulfilment of the

fundamental humane tasks of socialism, has not achieved the degree of efficiency which is necessary for us and which has been achieved by some capitalist countries.

Our system, which allegedly represented a policy "in the interests of the workers", "in the interests of the people" was completely insensitive towards the working people as producers as well as consumers. The worker was forced to chase after quotas (or norms) which became an end in itself. At his place of work he was in constant struggle against disorder, against deficiencies in the preparation and the quality of materials and tools. He constantly suffered from the shortage of consumer goods and the high-handedness of the service industries, he was always looking for living quarters etc. The system which justified its centralised structure by the alleged requirements of scientific direction, did not provide scope for enterprise and technical initiative, it frustrated the will to work of a whole army of engineers, technicians, economists, foremen and skilled workers. In place of a dynamic social security which offered opportunities to everybody, the security offered under the old system consisted in the preservation of an intolerable state of affairs (at the expense of the economic dynamics and in the final analysis at everybody's expense). A society which does not have at its disposal an economic system with a socialist spirit of enterprise which has been positively thought through, will always tend to substitute the lacking economic instruments by direct intervention from the outside, in order to achieve the necessary advance of production in a bureaucratic fashion.

We are facing now the historically as yet unfulfilled task, to work out a particular positive economic system of socialism in which the subjectivity of social labor will really assert itself. This presupposes the freeing of enterprises from the tutelage of the state, whereby the enterprises, as economic subjects shall be constructed on the basis of the principle of self-management. At the same time market relations are to be fully developed, namely so that every working collective (or work-collective) will develop socialist initiative and be placed in a position where it has to mobilise all capacities and to convert them into economic activity for personal benefit as well as for the benefit of the whole of society. Only under these conditions will the state be able to carry out a rational and planned economic policy. The state will then no longer intervene to replace the other subjects of the economic dynamic, but will create the conditions in which the free effect of economic interests will be of benefit to all and where the whole economic activity will clear the way for the stream of suggestions which can come from modern science as well as from the initiative of the workers.

For a socialism with modern orientation

Full socialist democracy cannot be realised without a functioning economic system, at the same time the successful functioning of the economic system cannot be separated from a change in the orientation of economic development towards intensive growth. The method of guiding the economy by bureaucratic directives which looked upon the whole country as a single industrial enterprise arose out of the conditions of extensive industrialisation.

At the time, special historical circumstances led to the tying together of two heterogeneous processes: socialisation and industrialisation. In Stalin's conception industrialisation was simply placed alongside socialisation as the particular base and the particular historical task of socialism. This interpretation rather ignored the fact that the completion of industrialisation, the creation of an industrial structure of the productive forces, reaching "industrial maturity" constitutes a prerequisite for socialism.

The "industrialisation model" of socialism was applied for two decades to our conditions for which, at least during the last ten years, there was no longer the slightest justification. The process of industrialisation is connected with tendencies in respect to labor (growing abstractness, dehumanisation of work for the majority of the people), to consumption (limiting the majority to the mere reproduction of labor power), to leadership (sharpening of the contradiction between the leaders and those who are led) as well as generally with specific limitations for man's self-expression, which are in contradiction to the socialist development.

This leads to an interest structure, which does not permit a permanent, spontaneous free development of socialism in accordance with its real content. Such a structure therefore requires a particular interest group which comes forward in the name of the working class, which carries through industrialisation, but which at the same time separates itself from the working people and which acquires certain non-socialist traits. For this reason the bureaucratic forces hang on so tenaciously to the industrialisation program in which they see their justification for existence and which they absolutise. The ten year long artificial prolongation of the extensive development in our country, instead of a turn towards the scientific and technical revolution has led to a serious delay in technical development, to a huge waste of human labor in simple mechanical work, to a catastrophic situation in the services and the standard of living, to a restriction of the possibility for a shortening of working hours and for the enlargement of consumption.

This fact lies at the root of the crisis that we have been through. The "industrialisation model" of socialism already contains the

bureaucratic and anti-socialist deformation, and it would therefore be a hopeless attempt to try to "improve" this model by pseudo-reforms, without altering its nature. This problem is all the more difficult because here we are touching the core of the historical tasks of socialism. The greater part of our citizens to this day carry out only simple, monotonous, operative activities, which for them serve only the purpose of earning a living. At the same time this work, even on the basis of the time involved, consumes their main energies. Inner satisfaction they do not find in it. Socialism cannot be satisfied with this. It has to change step by step the profile of human labor and to shorten the working time, it must develop modern projects for the "humanisation of labor" which rationally take advantage of the social character of labor, which compensate for the fragmentation due to the division of labor, which reduce monotony and raise the culture of labor. These projects will need to take into account improvements in the standard of living, coordination of work and education, compensation for routine jobs by creative tasks, of manual by mental labor, the enlargement of participation and so forth. All this should lead to the position where man will gradually be freed from such restrictions, and come closer to freer, more creative work.

The same applies to consumption. A considerable proportion of our society exists on a standard of living which does not transcend the barriers of the daily cares of living, the simple reproduction of labor power. This consequently does not make it possible to lift everybody's style of living permanently and substantially. If, however, everybody does not find within his circumstances ever more time to free himself out of the sphere of necessity, if people do not have ever better opportunities for advancement, for the satisfaction of and the creation of new and higher requirements, then socialism cannot remove the barrier of the pressure of consumption and cannot satisfy the general interest in the up-grading of the whole of society. In this way socialism would lose its human core, its human perspective.

Socialism is tied in all directions to a transformation of the civilisation-base of human life, to a dynamic of the productive forces which can bring about a gradual alteration of human labor and of man's life. This would alter the general attitude of man whereby every success in the unfolding of human forces would create the pre-conditions for a further acceleration of the development of the structure and the dynamic of the productive forces. This involves finding the starting points to the scientific and technological revolution which is beginning to break through in the world.

We regard it as our duty to point out that the democratic model of socialism cannot be grafted on to the process of industrialisation.

Such an attempt is bound to fail, because in this way the whole nature of the lack of freedom, which millions of working people know and feel, would not change.

For a humane mission of the Party

The fate of the further development of socialism in our country depends today directly on the state of the Communist Party. If the Communist Party is to prove itself at the present time and to inspire a new model of socialism, then it must itself undergo a deep transformation and change its traditional form.

As a basic factor of the political system the Communist Party must constantly strive for a position which enables a control of power on the basis of partnership, the contest of ideas and people, and of confrontation and posing of alternatives. But even that is not sufficient. We are of the opinion that the time has come for communists to return to the thought which they expressed at their founding congress: namely that they are not only a political party, but strive to be the vanguard of a new epoch, a movement which grows out of depth of this time and strives to solve its fundamental contradictions.

The type of Party which developed under the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the process of industrialisation, now belongs to the past. The quicker the Communists grasp this, the quicker the crisis which has gripped the Party can be overcome. In the first place one has to give up the notion that everything which happens outside of the Party or without its sanction is either harmful or suspect. When the interests which are asserting themselves in society are already exhibiting socialist tendencies, then the above notion really expresses the fact that a particular group demands the right to decide without regard to the interests of the people.

The question how far something contributes to the strengthening of the political power of the Party can only have validity as the criterion for Party activity under conditions of a struggle for power. In the proper perspective the basic task for Party members is different—to accomplish the development of socialism as a movement, that means to stimulate the positive activities of the people. For this too much power can in certain cases rather be a hindrance.

The conception of the Party as a force which is held together from top to bottom by professional revolutionaries has no general validity and is obsolete. It rests on the assumption that all others are unable to fully comprehend social problems. Consequently they can only participate in the carrying out of tasks, but not in the decision about the future road. The organisational structure, the methods of work and the selection of cadres correspond to it—they all carry the stamp of a bureaucratic system. In today's

conditions the Party cannot carry out its tasks without the democratisation of the processes of decision-making, without the freedom to take different alternatives into account, without permanent renewal of cadres, without constant exploration of the opinion of Party members, without secret elections, without giving a free road to all leading positions in the Party to capable Communists who enjoy the confidence of the public.

The principle of democratic centralism was originally interpreted in a sense which arose from a period of violent class struggle as a temporary and forced measure. Essentially this pre-supposes that the Party does not need to look for new ways but simply needs to apply the old general schemes in the particular conditions. But today when we are concerned with the mobilisation of the creative forces we cannot regard groups within our Party with diverse opinions which are struggling for a crystallisation and sorting out of views as factions which have to be destroyed. The minority must have the right to strive before the eyes of the whole Party to become the majority.

To push differences of opinion on to the periphery of Party life, which was perhaps justified in conditions of hard class struggles, paralyses the development of thought at a time when the search for new ways for socialist development and the co-ordination of the socialist interests of all strata in society has become the main task of the Party.

If the Party is to open every door to science this must also apply to the bearers of science themselves, to all who are interested in the realisation of scientific knowledge. The Party should create organs which are capable of transmitting the most modern conclusions of science into our movement, conclusions which have been reached outside the Party in the autonomous domain of science. At the same time it is necessary to respect the specific, special "rules of the game" of science.

The strongly emphasised demand for unity of the Party must be freed from the superstitious connections which feed the sterility of thoughts and ideas. Not unity about everything and at any price, but capacity for action, that is the requirement. Where the unity threatens the capacity for action, it rests on false foundations and requires new differentiation and new creation. Unity as a process, as a consequence of a permanent inner differentiation — this is the only fruitful unity. The absolutisation of unity in critical moments when confronted with new and unusual tasks would understandably lead to a veto exercised by the conservative forces.

If the Party is to renew itself as a movement which wants to stimulate the permanent socialist development then it has to formu-

late aims and perspectives which transcend the horizon of today and the coming days. Then it must put forward a program to society without wanting to dictate to the people their manner of living. Otherwise the Party would continue on the path of the crisis and degenerate into an ordinary political party which even with the best of intentions has not got the right to lead the society of today.

Socialism as a system of society has its internal total logic and can only function when all its elements function. The realisation of the new model of socialism pre-supposes the realisation of all its basic elements. At the same time the necessary unity can only arise out of the total deeply-rooted forward movement which embraces all strata of modern life. Any attempt of a mere partial or compromise solution would destroy the unity. The choice before us therefore is clear: either we thoroughly realise the new conceptions of socialism and the Party or socialism remains stuck in the morass of compromise and struggle for positions, the pressure of the conservatives who do not shrink from the appeal to the most primitive instincts, and the desperate attacks of radicalised forces losing patience and calm.

One cannot escape from the crisis in which our movement has become embedded. The responsibility for this crisis cannot be placed on television, radio and the press, which — sometimes better, sometimes worse — reveal the depth of the crisis, but on the conservative elements which have brought our country to the brink of disaster. It does not make sense to scold the mirror if one does not like the reality it reflects. It is unworthy to point the threatening finger, in the name of concern for socialism, at those who are looking for a way to overcome the errors, instead of at those who want to block the road and thereby conjure up a repetition and a deepening of the crisis. It is dangerous to nurture the illusion that it is possible to defend socialism by defending its deformations. This is precisely the way to open the door to the real enemies of socialism. Our duty towards socialism and the international labor movement means: to realise socialism in our country in its genuine and complete form!

The Communists must counterpoise commandism and arbitrariness with the free socialist development of society and of man, the power hungry desire to order about by the democratism of self-management, the bureaucratic dullness by scientific reasoning, the humdrum by modern tempo, the violation of national and human values by patriotic and international responsibility, narrow-minded Party thinking by communism as a humanist movement, conservatism and capitulationism by socialist advance. They must do it consistently and in good time.