

FROM: THE RT.HON. SIR KEITH JOSEPH, Bt, MP



KJ/SMC

YPRR
Box

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Rt.Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, MP.

5th August 1977

Dear Margaret.

You may remember that I mentioned to you a powerful piece of writing by a man called Leszek Kolakowski. He, as a young Marxist, played an important role in the Polish 'revisionist' movement of the 1950s and 1960s, was expelled from the Communist Party in 1966 and later deprived of his post as Professor of Philosophy at Warsaw University. He is, at present, a Fellow of All Souls' College, Oxford where I meet him from time to time - and is just completing a history of Marxism.

He can be described as a disenchanted Marxist who has a firm belief in pluralism and democracy.

He and Stuart Hampshire convened a conference of Marxists and ex-Marxists about three years ago at which a number of papers were discussed. These papers were put together in a book called "Socialism" which the two of them edited.

I did not, myself, find the book worth reading because the papers were either beyond me or not illuminating. But the introduction to the book by Kolakowski is well worth reading as a trenchant statement of the contradiction between theory and practise and the inherent impracticabilities of Marxism.

I attach a photocopy of the introduction. I hope you may spare time to read it all but may I particularly draw your attention to the summary of the conference on pages 14-17.

Obviously, no need to reply.

Yours
Keith

Sir K Joseph

9 August 1977

Bot

In Mrs. Thatcher's absence on holiday, I am writing to thank you very much indeed for your kind letter of August 5 enclosing Leszek Kolakowski's introduction to "Socialism", which I will make sure she sees as soon as she returns.

Richard Ryder
Private Office

The Rt. Hon. Sir Keith Joseph, Bt MP

INTRODUCTION

Leszek Kolakowski

The papers in this volume* were presented at the April 1973 international meeting in Reading sponsored by the publishing house Weidenfeld and Nicolson and the Graduate School of Contemporary European Studies, Reading University. The organizing committee (Robert Cecil, Reading University; Stuart Hampshire, Wadham College, Oxford; Leszek Kolakowski, All Souls' College, Oxford; Sir George Weidenfeld, publisher) decided to change the title, originally 'What is Wrong with the Socialist Idea?', into a milder one, 'Is there Anything Wrong with the Socialist Idea?' The first title, in fact, seemed to take for granted that something actually *is* wrong with the socialist idea. It was, however, the overwhelming – though apparently not unanimous – opinion of those who participated in the meeting that the deep crisis affecting both contemporary socialist thought and socialist movements does not result only from contingent historical circumstances, but is also rooted in ambiguities and contradictions in the primordial socialist message.

The purpose of the meeting was not to criticize existing socialist regimes or movements but to analyse again the basic traditional concepts and values which constitute the socialist idea, and to question their validity in the light of both historical experience and of theoretical criticism. It was obvious that the discussion could not ignore the experiences of so-called socialist countries, but this critique was intended to help the analysis of the idea of socialism itself, rather than to express direct political attitudes.

The original proposal for the meeting laid out its tasks as follows:

The socialist idea has sustained so many blows – presented as great victories – that people who share traditional socialist values should

* Except for those by Richard Lowenthal, Steven Lukes and Gilles Martinet.

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reflect upon some fundamental issues which this idea involves, and should not be satisfied with criticism of existing socialist systems as its 'imperfect' or 'distorted' embodiment. The idea itself seems to be dying in socialist countries and it is manipulated and used elsewhere as a slogan in so many and such different political groups that it is hardly possible to find any clear content common to all its variants. We should ask ourselves at what point the traditional idea of socialism, the basic assumptions of socialist ideology, became resistant to theoretical objections and to modification in the light of historical experience. Such fundamental concepts as 'social control', 'working class', 'revolution', 'ownership' and 'equality' still call for new analysis, free of prejudice. The difference between the socialist idea itself and comprehensive projects of social reform (such as health service, insurance, pensions, general education, progressive taxation, etc.) should be reconsidered . . .

Here are proposals for the topics to be discussed:

1. *The concepts of economic self-management and social control of production*

It may be readily agreed that democracy in the productive process is the necessary condition for socialist development; and that, in particular, the influence of the working class on production, if limited to each productive unit separately, may coexist with despotic forms of government and leave to the ruling bureaucracy complete freedom in the application of the means of production, in investment policy and in the distribution of national product. On the other hand, contemporary technology itself – not to mention the complex nature of the modern economy – require very special competence at all levels in both economic and technical management of production. Is economic democracy possible and is it compatible with competent management? Or is the very concept of competence a 'bourgeois invention'? Is the alternative to bureaucratic despotism some system of free competition, based on co-operative property, with all that that entails? How far is the Yugoslav experience relevant to the question, and what may be learnt from it? Can society rid itself of bureaucracy and, if not, can it tame it? Or is bureaucracy perhaps not the product of technology at all but only of particular social conditions?

2. *The implications of modern technology for socialism*

In the traditional Marxist sense socialism was supposed to draw its historical strength from and demonstrate its superiority by abolishing the fetters which the capitalist mode of production imposed on tech-

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nical and productive progress. It is obvious that social problems are by no means solved either by economic growth or by technical progress in itself either in the East or the West (the very concept of progress in this sense being more and more doubtful, considering the price paid for it by mankind). It may also be argued that societies based on capitalist modes of production have not lost the ability to stimulate technical development – rather the opposite seems to be true; it is also arguable that the traditional Marxist distinction between productive and non-productive labour, and consequently the very concept of surplus value, is more and more doubtful. How far can the socialist idea be defined in terms of productivity? What is valid and rational in the idea that socialism, as opposed to capitalism, promises more free time for cultural development and more satisfaction of material needs? What is the meaning of the often-repeated statement that technology itself (not only its application) is not 'neutral' in relation to social conflicts, and what would a specifically 'socialist' technology signify?

3. *Socialist planning and the market economy*

The productive anarchy of the capitalist economy was traditionally seen in socialist ideologies (beginning with the early utopians) as the opposite of socialist planning. This opposition raises doubts on both sides. What does the concept of socialist planning mean, as opposed to the economic activity of the state in industrial capitalist countries? And how far is there interdependence between 'rational' planning and the 'irrationality' of the market even within the socialist economy? Briefly: how far has the relationship changed between the two pairs of 'opposites', planning–market and socialism–capitalism (they have certainly ceased to be regarded as opposites nowadays)?

4. *Socialism and ownership*

It is often argued (1) that ownership of the means of production has lost its primordial importance in highly developed capitalist societies; and (2) that the abolition of private ownership of the means of production is in itself irrelevant to the problem of socialism since, as is well known from experience, extreme despotism, both political and economic, may be established where the ruling group has no formal title of ownership. How far is this true? Is tyranny, based on monopoly of command over the means of production, the only alternative to capitalist society? Does the freedom of the individual – as many claim – involve freedom of possession, at least to a certain degree?

Is a non-despotic society conceivable in which the ruling group keeps monopolist power over the means of production? Or does the socialist idea involve many forms of ownership?

5. *Socialism and the nation*

Most Marxists (including Marx himself) believed that the national question would be automatically solved as the unity of human culture progressed and that socialist development would naturally abolish national conflicts, since the latter were a by-product of class antagonism within capitalist society. It has turned out, however, not only that socialist states have miserably failed to provide any solution for national conflicts, while preserving national oppression intact; we have witnessed also in recent decades, against all expectations, the growth of nationalism throughout the world. National and tribal tensions and struggles seem to dominate the current political stage more than other conflicts. Does the very existence of such an entity as the nation necessarily limit the validity of the socialist idea, which apparently failed to take account (except in a tactical sense) of the reality of the nation? Are Jaurès' ideals on this point piously naïve? What does the concept itself of national sovereignty mean in a socialist perspective?

6. *Socialism and the working class*

What is left of Marx's fundamental idea that the industrial proletariat would carry out – by virtue of its peculiar class origin – the socialist transformation? Was Marxian social philosophy as a whole based on a false prediction concerning class polarization in the capitalist society and the inevitable impoverishment of the working class? Looking at the most developed industrial societies, what remains of the theory that the bourgeoisie-proletariat conflict dominates the historical development of our epoch? What is rational in the argument that the working class was 'integrated', gained middle class status and lost its interest in socialism? Let us imagine what the dictatorship of the proletariat would mean if the (real, not imaginary) working class took over exclusive political power now in the United States. Was the Marxist philosophy of history at this crucial point just an arbitrary fantasy? If so – is there any 'class content' in the socialist idea?

7. *The meaning of equality*

Equality belonged to the very core of all traditional socialist ideologies. Engels' statement that equality means nothing more than the

abolition of classes does not sufficiently clarify the concept; neither does the slogan adopted by Marx (for the 'first phase of' socialism) 'to everybody according to his work'. Equality of wages has proved from much convincing experience to be economically impracticable. On the other hand, an economy which is supposed to be entirely based on use-value (if conceivable) cannot provide any common measure for comparing different kinds of 'work' in order to apply the slogan just mentioned. Moreover, some people claim that a certain social stratification is a necessary condition for social stability. Are there serious arguments in favour of such a statement? The existing socialist societies are full of privileges of different kinds, not only in income, but in access to scarce goods, in education, in freedom, in prestige, in power. Which of them could, and which could not, conceivably be abolished? What does the idea of equality mean in the light of this experience?

8. *Socialism, revolution and violence*

It is obvious that the question of whether or not a socialist society is bound to be preceded by revolutionary upheaval depends on the meaning we give to the words 'socialism' and 'revolution'. The history of revolutions based on socialist ideologies in the twentieth century does not fit into Marxian predictions. On what basis can we claim today that socialist revolution is likely (or more likely than before) to break out in highly developed societies? Is there anything that makes the prospect of socialism impossible without a revolutionary collapse of the whole system (whatever that means)? What does the concept of revolutionary class mean today? How can we deny – after so much experience of it – that violence has a self-perpetuating tendency, and why should we expect that if violence is applied to existing capitalist societies it will not produce a society based entirely on institutionalized violence?

9. *The ideal of unity of civil and political society*

According to the Marxian idea, the socialist society would abolish the distinction between real life, i.e. the entire mass of conflicting individual interests, the informal social structure, the relations of production etc., and the political and legal order, which expresses and falsifies these relations while giving the society an illusory unity. What is valid in this 'organicist' ideal, bearing in mind that in existing socialist societies this apparent abolition means simply the attempt to replace all spontaneous social ties by the forms of

organization imposed by the state? What does this unity mean, if not simply the totalitarian state? In what sense is it conceivable that the mediatory functions of law and of state institutions could be abolished without the destruction of society? And why should we tend towards such a unity? Does the Marxian ideal simply involve the inadmissible prediction that all conflicts will be removed from social life once class antagonism disappears?

10. *Socialism and Weltanschauung*

Is the socialist idea necessarily bound to have a philosophical basis? To be sure, a kind of naturalistic, Promethean, anti-religious philosophy was to Marx an integral part of the socialist consciousness. This connection has remained in communist parties, which believe that they cannot dispense with some sort of philosophical background – in contrast to social democratic movements, which seem to be philosophically indifferent. Is there something in the very nature of the socialist idea that makes it imperfect without a proper philosophy? If so, of what does this connection consist, and why should a certain *Weltanschauung* be applied to the social programme or even to a certain method of analysing historical processes?

11. *Education and 'Socialist Man'*

Traditional socialist ideology (Marxian or not) involved a vision of the 'new man' who would emerge as a result of new social relations (abolition of the distinction between manual and intellectual labour; replacing egoistic motives by social ones etc.). The question arises, however, of how the kind of education predicated by this idea can be distinguished from sheer compulsion. It may be argued that, for example, the abolition of the distinction between manual and intellectual work can really only be carried out by compelling people to do a certain kind of work, which presupposes mass repression and turns the socialist idea into a caricature of itself. The traditional controversy over whether people should change themselves before they start building the socialist society or are only able to change themselves in building this society does not seem to have lost its relevance.

12. *Socialism and the values of tradition*

The socialist idea in the Marxian version (and in the Fabian version also) was deeply rooted in rationalist ideals of the Enlightenment. It implied that the society of the future would throw off the burden of traditional values in all cultural matters, including in particular sex

and family life, and bring about emancipation from all restrictions, institutions and sentiments allegedly incompatible with the rational life (whatever that means). Consequently, it seemed that the dissolution of the family and unrestricted sexual freedom naturally belonged to the socialist idea (this view seems to have prevailed in Russia for a certain period after the revolution, to be replaced later by the return to a strictly puritanical morality; both Soviet and Chinese societies are in this respect the most conservative in the world). It seemed to many people, moreover, that socialist culture would bring about a complete rupture with previous history in all respects except that of technology itself (and sometimes even technology was not spared). In the light of our experience this rationalist ideal may seem not only naïve but dangerous as well. Can we imagine a society which will start an entirely new culture in a cultural desert? If not, are the values imposed by tradition to be accepted simply as such, i.e. as imposed by the tradition, in defiance of rationalist slogans? What is right in the view that no social stability and no moral education can be assured without a certain respect for tradition as such (including some traditional values concerning sex and family)? In what sense does socialism mean a rupture with the preceding culture and in what sense may it be viewed as its continuation?

For a variety of reasons this plan could not be entirely fulfilled; some topics were absent, some papers did not fit exactly into the proposed schema. To fill, at least partially, these lacunae, we decided to add to the volume three papers which were not presented at the meeting. Two of them, by Richard Lowenthal and Gilles Martinet, were read at the International Seminar on 'Socialism in Changing Societies' held in Tokyo in April 1972 and sponsored by the Japan Cultural Forum in co-operation with the International Association for Cultural Freedom and two Japanese magazines. Another, by Steven Lukes, was specially written for this volume. Five papers presented at the Reading meeting (by Kolakowski, Ludz, Harrington, Sirc and Hirszowicz) were commented on by other participants (respectively, Hampshire, Kusin, Brus, Nuti and Marek) and these comments are included in the volume.

We do not reproduce here the discussion – usually very animated – that followed each paper. It may be useful, however, to point out some recurrent topics of the discussion and to mention the main points which divided the participants.

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As could be expected, the discussion continually reverted to the meaning and validity of most traditional socialist values; in some cases the divergences and arguments followed patterns familiar in socialist thought for many decades or even centuries.

There was disagreement not only on how to define the concept of socialism but even on what approach to take in trying to define it. The Marxian tradition was usually the starting point in this debate. It was pointed out, however, that in some important issues Marxism itself tried to combine heterogeneous sources without removing their contradictions and achieving internal coherence. Thus, in conformity with the legacy of the Enlightenment, Marxism stressed the autonomy and free development of individuals as supreme values, while on the other hand it inherited a romantic nostalgia for the perfect unity of society. These two tendencies (as Taylor stated) run counter to one another and are reflected in two quite different conceptions of what a socialist society should be like. The rationalist and utilitarian side of Marxism produced visions of a socialism made up of individual happiness, abundance, leisure, creativity. The romantic side stressed the need for a return to the organic community and would tend to produce totalitarian socialist utopias – if it is true (as Kolakowski argued) that the ideal of perfect unity is unlikely to be carried into effect in any form other than totalitarian despotism. Another tension (stressed by Petrović) may be noticed between Marx's revolutionary humanism and his economic determinism. From the first point of view the movement towards socialism implies a permanent process of interdependence between the spiritual development of individuals and the changing material and institutional conditions of their lives; this means that socialist transformations cannot be defined in institutional terms. The other approach describes historical processes in purely 'objective' terms and leaves no room (as Raddatz pointed out) for reflection about how individual consciousness and personal values are affected by institutional transformations; consequently, it lets us conceive the socialist movement as a technical device destined to carry out certain institutional projects (in particular expropriation), and socialism as a condition where these projects are fulfilled, regardless of what happens otherwise to the human beings who make up the new society.

To define socialism merely in terms of public ownership and power negates the ideological concept of socialism – this point was not disputed among the participants. Neither was the belief that socialist theory cannot be a blueprint for universal salvation, removing all social

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conflicts and dissatisfactions. Such general agreement, however, did not pre-empt controversy on all the more specific issues. Should we define socialism as a certain desirable set of social relations, or rather (as Hampshire suggested) as a method of solving social problems according to the aspirations and needs of underprivileged classes? In the discussion two attitudes – the utopian and the pragmatic – constantly collided with one another. It was repeatedly stressed by some (Marek, Petrović) that we cannot dispense with utopias, i.e. with imaginary pictures of a 'disalienated' human community, even if we know that such an ideal is not within the reach of human potentialities; we need it as a kind of regulative idea, rather than as a real goal to be achieved; we need it to help us see a general direction to follow in all practical issues. However, a more pragmatic approach seemed to prevail in the discussion. Since it turned out that many social claims which, in nineteenth-century capitalist society seemed hopeless were in fact satisfied, the radical 'either-or' in viewing social systems (capitalism-socialism) lost its persuasive force (Walter Kendall's opinion). The pressure of the organized labour movement has proved undeniably successful in employing the existing state institutions to improve the lot of the working class, and thus there is no reason to put any *a priori* limit to the efficiency of this pressure; on the other hand, the existing socialist systems have proved themselves incapable of resolving any social problems which, judging from experience, could not be solved within capitalist society. They solved, at incalculable human cost, the problems of industrialization in some underdeveloped countries and so they assumed the role of organizers of primitive accumulation, but they have been unable to cope with a single task which, according to the tradition of socialist thought, was supposed to fall to the specifically *socialist* form of social organization.

Whether the existing socialist societies can be considered as poor preliminary steps towards the socialist form of life, as defined in the Marxian tradition, or simply as instruments of rapid industrialization in countries which lay on the peripheries of capitalist development – the answers to this question varied according to the participants' views on the criteria for defining the socialist world. Harrington's opinion that material abundance is a precondition for socialist development and that we should measure progress by the reduction of necessary work and by the growth of leisure carried the obvious conclusion that the socialist revolution has never yet occurred, that no society remotely deserving the name of socialist is in existence and that socialist development is in principle inconceivable in underdeveloped societies, in particular in the

Third World. This opinion was not shared unanimously. There was, on the other hand, the rather isolated opinion that existing socialist systems, inefficient and oppressive though they are, should be considered as crucial steps beyond the class society since, although failing to destroy all sources of social antagonism, they succeeded in destroying one of them, that resulting from class division (Nutti). This question led automatically to another: how far is it true that the Soviet-type societies have produced a new class division? Another largely unshared view was that the deficiencies of socialist systems are to be explained by the incompetence of the ruling bureaucracy and not by class antagonism between this bureaucracy and society (Nutti). Most of those taking part (Hirsztowicz, Walter Kendall, Kolakowski, Sirc) argued that the system of privileges instituted in these societies gave birth to a new clash of interests, different in some respects, but basically similar to class division (power without responsibility; exclusive control over the means of production by the ruling group; permanent conflict between the trend towards technological and economic progress and the monopolist position of the political bureaucracy).

Harrington's view of leisure as the basic criterion in evaluating socialist development was criticized for another reason. It was pointed out (Taylor) that the very idea of leisure is self-defeating, since the growth of leisure entails the growth of new demand for goods to fill the free time, with a consequent move towards new products and new forms of consumption. Taylor argued that the most urgent changes needed to allow the advanced industrial societies to escape the disastrous consequences of their economic growth (the endless spiral of mutually stimulating demand and production) imply a spiritual reorientation. To achieve a recycling technology and non-quantitative growth people would have to rearrange priorities in the personal needs, not only to reform their institutions.

No matter how important the divergences brought to light in the discussion, agreement seemed to prevail that any meaningful concept of socialism implies the ability of the working society to decide its own fate, which includes, in particular, control over the means of production. This topic was broached many times from different angles. Brus insisted upon the distinction between public and social ownership, the latter involving economic democracy (and consequently political democracy also, as the former is inconceivable without the latter). The experience of Eastern Europe proves that a system which achieves public ownership of the means of production makes none of the pro-

gress traditionally expected of a socialist society unless that ownership assumes a social character, i.e. unless the working society enjoys its rights to economic self-management. Marek stressed the demands for industrial democracy spreading throughout the industrial societies as a new phenomenon opening a fresh perspective both to Western socialism and to the people's democracies. A democracy which stops at the factory entrance does not deserve its name, nor does a democracy which stops at the factory exit. Hirsztowicz made the distinction between different levels of industrial democracy (technological, managerial and social) while stating that industrial democracy is conceivable only as part of a participatory democracy encompassing all aspects of social life.

It was not difficult to reach agreement on the meaninglessness of economic self-management without political democracy. But more specific issues concerning the feasibility and the practical content of economic self-management provoked debate. It was argued that no institutional devices had yet been invented to reconcile the contradictions between efficient management and industrial democracy; if we want to have both, this is conceivable only by means of all sorts of compromise. And are not many aspects of the Yugoslav experiment discouraging? More often than not, real management and the real power of decision lie in the hands of professionals, whatever the formal rights of workers. On the one hand, the greater the autonomy of particular industrial units, the more room is left for the unrestricted operations of the normal laws of capitalist accumulation, with all its destructive aspects. On the other, highly centralized planning is both inefficient and anti-democratic, judging from the experience of the Soviet-type societies, and the more sophisticated the technology of a country, the more glaring does the inefficiency of its central planning appear. It is impossible (as Sirc argued against Nutti) to run the whole economy. But can we expect that the existing economic system of Western Europe and North American will prove susceptible to important changes which would bring about a piecemeal transformation, with more and more equality in the distribution of wealth, more and more democracy in industrial management, more and more participation of all in the joint results of production? It was argued (by G. A. Cohen) that the possibilities which the tremendous technological progress in capitalist society opened up for the growth of leisure cannot, and never could be, be employed for this purpose since, faced with the choice between more output and more leisure, capitalism must by its very

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nature invariably opt for the former. Thus reductions in working hours were so far negligible within this system. It was argued too (Nutti) that progressive taxation could lead, theoretically, to a more egalitarian redistribution of social wealth, but in fact it does not.

Generally speaking, there was no agreement about how far the experiences of the socialist countries are relevant both to the prospects of the socialist movement in Western Europe and to the validity of the very idea of socialism. Nobody denied this relevance but its limits were differently defined. Are we to explain the technological and economic inefficiency of these systems by contingent historical circumstances or rather is it built into the very foundations? How much is due to failures in operation and how much to the basic faultiness of the construction? How far do these experiences cast doubt on the feasibility of socialist ideals and on the possibility of achieving all their values jointly? It appeared that some of the values belonging to the very core of socialist tradition conflict with each other in practical application: very often the need for freedom and the need for equality prove to be incompatible; the ideal of full industrial democracy can hardly be harmoniously combined with competent management; we need both more leisure and more consumer goods and it is difficult to see how we can get more and more of both; we need both security and technological progress, but complete security seems to imply stagnation and technological progress means permanent disequilibrium (Sirc). There is no theory capable of supplying a system of reasonable compromises between the conflicting values, far less eradicating their contradictions. We need (Hampshire argued) more and more comprehensive planning, yet lack a reliable theory for it, since our knowledge of society is necessarily limited, and we are bound, in social engineering, to produce many unforeseen effects. Is it not therefore safer and more responsible to test the possibilities of the existing forms of social organization, instead of promising a great leap towards perfection with no guarantee at all that the results will not be much worse than the present situation?

It was repeatedly pointed out in the discussion that some important changes in socialist consciousness in the Western world resulted not only from the failures of Soviet-type socialism but from the transformation of capitalist societies, which made some inherited socialist values irrelevant, less important or doubtful. According to Marxian predictions, socialism was supposed to do away with the restrictions which the capitalist mode of production imposed on the progress of technology and it was here that socialist organization would prove its

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superiority. Not only did it turn out that the existing socialist societies are losing the 'technological competition' while clumsily imitating Western models, but the very value of technological progress has become less and less attractive as the main criterion of social progress in view of its notorious destructive aspects.

The second important point on which nineteenth-century socialist thought seemed, in the light of new experience, particularly vulnerable, was the role of the working class in the socialist movement. While criticizing the theory of the *embourgeoisement* of the working class and opposing the tendency to identify the welfare system with socialist development, Bottomore pointed out that the socialist movement lacks any reliable class theory applicable to contemporary changes. The tendency, popular among various leftist groups, to look for another revolutionary vanguard in marginal or merely underprivileged groups (immigrant workers, lumpenproletariat, racial and national minorities), none of which is the working class in the Marxian sense, was on frequent occasions depicted in the discussion as a reflex of despair, rather than being based on sociological analysis. It was pointed out, on the other hand, that the changes in the position of the working class in highly developed societies are not restricted to welfare benefits but include the negative control the unions are able to exert in many important social and economic matters, which could be described as a limitation on private ownership or as partial expropriation (Kendall).

The third aspect of socialism where the crisis of values is patent is the internationalist tradition. An analysis of the 'state' concept of the nation as opposed to its 'class' concept was made in the discussion by Ludz. Many phenomena were depicted to show how the hostility between nationalist and socialist ideologies has lost most of its force: it is normal, not exceptional, for leftist movements to support nationalist claims of the kind which surely deserve the label of 'reactionary' according to old Marxist theories, and in many conflicts it is almost inconceivable for the left not to espouse the nationalist cause (Taylor). Nostalgia for the tribal community is very strongly felt in many leftist groups (Hampshire); on the other hand, nationalism is encouraged by the growing economic function of the state and for this reason, too, it often coincides with socialist programmes (Brus). In some forms nationalism (especially in Eastern Europe) coincides with democratic claims for autonomy and participation (Kusin), while in the large socialist powers socialist ideology became indistinguishable from chauvinist or imperialist aspirations. Some of the participants stressed

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the validity of traditional Marxist tenets that conceive the nation as a transitory phenomenon, without any specific value from the point of view of the socialist movement (Eric Hobsbawm); others did not see any incompatibility between the internationalist attitude and national allegiances (Ludiz). At least two points were not questioned: that the existing socialist states failed utterly to fulfil old promises to solve national problems, and that internationalist ideals had practically died out in the socialist movements. Great-power jingoism and claims for national independence both appear very often in socialist ideologies and nobody finds this unusual any longer.

To give a personal view of the Reading meeting I take the liberty of quoting my concluding remarks after the debates:

It was not the aim of our discussion to criticize existing political systems, movements or parties, socialist or communist. It is obvious, however, that one cannot discuss the socialist idea today as if the existing attempts to realize it were irrelevant to the discussion, as if nothing has happened since the idea was born. In organizing this meeting we wanted to avoid four categories of people, four kinds of mentality one often finds in discussion on the relationship of the socialist idea to its practical embodiments.

First, there are people who simply think that there is nothing wrong either with the idea or with the shape it has taken in socialist societies; the idea is coherent, consistent and splendid and was perfectly incarnated in the Soviet-type countries. This is the point of view of orthodox communists.

Second, there are people who think that the idea has proved utterly bankrupt in the light of existing experience and that there is therefore nothing to talk about; the communist system buried the socialist idea for ever.

Third, there is the approach typical of many Trotskyites and critical communists. It may be summarized as follows: one cannot deny that there is a bureaucratic distortion in communist countries, that many mistakes have been made, but the principle or the essence are sound; all right – if you insist, I concede that this system was built on several dozens of millions of victims, on invasions, on national oppression, on glaring inequalities, exploitation, cultural devastation, political despotism – but you cannot deny that the factories are state owned! And these state-owned factories in communist countries are of such priceless value to mankind that all other

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circumstances are irrelevant and secondary when faced with this achievement.

Fourth, there is the attitude which is quite common among the New Left and which can be expressed as follows: all right, I agree that the existing socialist states are all rubbish, but we are not interested either in their history or in their actual conditions because we are going to do better. How? That is very simple. We just have to make the global revolution that will destroy alienation, exploitation, inequality, slavery, discomfort, pollution, overpopulation and traffic jams. The blue-print is ready, all we have to do is make the global revolution.

If we look around we realize that there are few who would not fall into one of these four categories. We have succeeded at least in that these attitudes were absent here. This means that we take seriously both the socialist idea and the existing experience of socialist countries and we agree that this experience is very relevant to the discussion of the validity and the prospects of the idea. We must recognize, however, that within these narrow limits we turned out to be divided on all the issues raised in our discussion. This fact itself proves that almost 150 years after the word 'socialism' came into being we still have to go back to the beginning. I would not say, however, that this is a reason for despondency or despair. Even if it is true that we cannot ever abolish human misery, it may at the same time be true that the world would be even worse than it is if there were no people who thought that it could be better.

Where are we now? What we lack in our thinking about society in socialist terms is not general values which we want to see materialized, but rather knowledge about how these values can be prevented from clashing with each other when put into practice and more knowledge of the forces preventing us from achieving our ideals. We are for equality, but we realize that economic organization cannot be based on equality of wages, that cultural backwardness has a self-perpetuating mechanism that no institutional changes are likely to destroy rapidly, that some inequalities are accounted for by genetic factors and too little is known of their impact on social processes etc. We are for economic democracy, but we do not know how to harmonize it with the competent running of production. We have many arguments against bureaucracy and as many arguments for increasing public control over the means of production, i.e. for more bureaucracy. We bemoan the

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destructive effects of modern technology and the only safeguard against them that we know is more technology. We are for more autonomy for small communities and more planning on the global scale – as if no contradictions existed between these two slogans. We are for more learning in the schools and more freedom for pupils, i.e. in practice, less learning. We are for technical progress and complete security, i.e. immobility. We say that people should be free in their pursuit of happiness and we pretend to know the infallible criteria of happiness for everybody. We are against national hatred and national isolationism in a world where everybody is against national hatred, but there is more of it about than ever in human history. We maintain that people should be considered as material beings, but nothing shocks us as much as the idea that people have bodies: it means that they are genetically determined, that they are born, they die, they are young or old, men or women and that all these factors can play a role in social processes regardless of who owns the means of production, and thus that some important social forces are not products of historical conditions and do not depend on class division.

We were happy a hundred years ago. We knew that there were exploiters and exploited, wealthy and poor, and we had a perfect idea of how to get rid of injustice: we would expropriate the owners and turn the wealth over to the common good. We expropriated the owners and we created one of the most monstrous and oppressive social systems in world history. And we keep repeating that 'in principle' everything was all right, only some unfortunate accidents slipped in and slightly spoiled the good idea. Now let us start afresh.

Are we fools to try to keep thinking in socialist terms? I do not think so. Whatever has been done in Western Europe to bring about more justice, more security, more educational opportunities, more welfare and more state responsibility for the poor and helpless, could never have been achieved without the pressure of socialist ideologies and socialist movements, for all their naïvetés and illusions. This does not mean that we are exculpated in advance and allowed to cherish these illusions endlessly, after so many defeats. It does mean, however, that past experience speaks in part for the socialist idea and in part against it. We are certainly not allowed to delude ourselves that we hold the secret of the conflict-free society or the key to perfection. Neither may we believe that we possess a consistent set of values which can in principle be carried out together unless some unpredictable accidents occur, since most of human history is made up of unpredictable accidents. We

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cannot continue believing in the whole set of traditional socialist values and retain a minimum of mental integrity unless we remember a number of trivial truths: that among these values there is none which would not conflict with another when put into practice; that we never know all the results of the social changes we set in motion; that both the sedimentation of past history and the perennial features of human biology set limits to social planning and that these limits are only vaguely known to us. There is nothing surprising in the fact that we strongly resist the implications of many banal truths; this happens in all fields of knowledge simply because most truisms about human life are unpleasant.