

## *Does Socialism Have a Future?*

ONE OF TODAY'S most fashionable clichés both in Russia and the West is to speak of the total collapse of the socialist idea. Socialism has been anathematized. All the misfortunes suffered by the Soviet people and others who pursued that same chimera, or on whom it was imposed—all their sufferings are attributed to socialism. This is a false conclusion. The socialism about which many great minds in the history of humanity have written and about which millions of people have dreamed never did exist—neither in the Soviet Union nor in Eastern Europe, Asia, or Cuba. And if that is true, then it simply flies in the face of history as well as logic to assert that socialism was defeated.

Nevertheless what happened in those countries that for a long time were called socialist, even “communist,” has given us greater knowledge about socialism than any theory could. We now know what is incompatible with socialism and what it cannot permit. We also know what requirements must be met by any policy aimed at making the socialist idea a reality. Let me emphasize, we know this both from the experience of the Soviet Union and from that of Western countries, where elements and processes of socialization of the productive forces have also developed to a considerable extent.

My own opinion is quite definite: *The socialist idea has not lost its significance or its historical relevance.* This is so not only because the very idea of socialism, which includes such concepts as social justice, equality, freedom, and democracy, is one that can never be exhausted but also because the entire development of the world community confirms, with new urgency every day, that we need justice, equality, freedom, democracy, and solidarity. That need has not been extinguished but continues to grow. The popular movements that arise and develop in the most varied parts of our planet testify to this, do they not? What is it that Russia's citizens are dissatisfied with today?

It is social injustice, namely, the deepening division of society into the poor (more than half the population) and the super rich (less than 2–3 percent of the population). Russians are dissatisfied with existing limitations on democratic freedoms, violations of human rights, and subordination of the mass media to the dictates of a handful of men with deep pockets.

What are the citizens of the European Union demanding? They want unemployment brought under control. They want action to stop impoverishment and marginalization. They want the rights and powers of cities, towns, regions, and local government bodies increased and respected. They yearn for a political system that reflects the genuine interests and needs of the people, that protects their identity in the present context of globalization.

What about the countries that still lag behind the modern world? Don't their requirements for a normal life, for economic development, for overcoming hunger and poverty, illiteracy, and a primitive existence come within the framework of the socialist idea? Let me stress that I am speaking of that idea outside any particular party context.

True, the criteria differ everywhere, as do the various approaches to specific questions. But there is a common denominator: a demand for social justice, equality, freedom, and democracy—in all things, from politics to economics to everyday life.

Therefore I am convinced, first, that *the socialist idea is inextinguishable*. It will continue to inspire people to take action in the name of everything contained in that idea, namely, *natural* human rights and freedoms. (The term *natural* is entirely appropriate here.) Second, I believe that the question of implementing the socialist idea must be approached in a modern way, that is, taking into account the actual current situation, the experience that has been accumulated, and the real challenges and requirements of the near future.

Let us consider the matter. A development of any kind is possible only given the existence of an inner diversity. Achieving an “ideal” through the victory of one of the existing trends in society and the elimination of all others inevitably results in the destruction of the system so created.

Thus, for example, the suppression of political pluralism in the USSR, the forcible elimination of all non-Communist parties, and then of all differing shades of opinion within the Communist Party itself—those actions essentially amounted to the first step toward the establishment of totalitarianism, and at the same time toward all the subsequent dramatic turns of events. In other words, those actions led the way toward the emasculation of

the socialist idea, toward a deformation of the principles of socialism to the point of their complete negation.

That is why it seems *hardly correct or productive over the long term to pose the question of building a society in which socialist ideology would be completely dominant, a society with socialist features only, with socialist forces having exclusive sway.*

Previous conceptions of socialism were constructed as antipodes to the “model” of capitalist society (and in many cases such concepts continue to exist today). But our times have demonstrated the relativity of all social structures. They are all historical, in flux, changeable, especially in our dynamic age. The very terms *capitalism* and *socialism* in their ordinary and accustomed interpretation no longer offer much in the way of describing and understanding reality. The contemporary world is not a dichotomy; it is a multiplicity. Capitalist society has everywhere been highly variegated, and future societies will likewise be anything but copies of one another.

I think that any attempt to “construct” a single universally applicable “model” for implementing the socialist idea, relying on certain constants that would be identical in all cases—such an approach is fruitless. Isn’t a different approach required, one in which socialism will be regarded *not as a closed social formation but as a set of values*, whose implementation would create the conditions for the free development of all people as a condition for the development of each individual?

It seems to me that the cornerstone of the socialist idea, as understood at the present time, consists, above all, in the optimal solution to two problems. The first is efficiency of production, provision of the material bases for the fully rounded development of all people. The second is distribution of the social product in such a way that without undermining the efficiency of production all would be guaranteed a worthy and dignified level of existence, and that would include economically, socially, and ecologically disadvantaged groups.

The solution to these two problems would create the preconditions for implementing all the basic elements of the socialist idea. And of course it would create a reliable foundation for the free, democratic political and spiritual development of society. This kind of value-based approach would free us from the temptation to destroy the existing society “to its foundations” in order to build a society based on some intellectualized scheme starting from a clean slate. In adopting such an approach, our task would be different: It would be to investigate trends and possibilities that have already made

themselves evident, possibilities for realizing the values of socialism at the present time and in the real social world. We would attempt to bring together those forces that are capable of receiving and accepting these values, to promote or contribute to their education and organization, and to select adequate means and conditions for action. In other words, there would be no maximalistic utopias but rather a consistent and purposeful realism.

Here of course another question arises: How should we act, what should we do, since neoliberal values are the ones that prevail in society today?

Liberalism has denied and still denies socialist values. But what has it gained from this? Socialists and Communists deny and have denied liberal values, but what have they achieved in doing so? Such mutual negation is capable only of producing a dichotomy, a division of society and the world into two hostile camps. I do not think that is the road we want.

Historically both socialism and liberalism had a common source: the humanist ideas of the Enlightenment. *The difference is that liberalism bases its values on the individual principle, while the socialist idea places the freedom of the individual and his or her development within the framework of a system of collectivist relations.* There are grounds for each of these approaches. But are they really so irreconcilable?

The contradictions of early capitalism revealed the limited character of the political equality toward which liberalism oriented. Socialist theory linked progress with the establishment of social equality. This had a fundamental effect on the development of capitalist society. There occurred a steady process in which the intensity of exploitation was reduced and the participation of working people in the management of the economy, in political life, and so on, expanded (although this occurred both through sharp clashes, class struggle, and other forms of social confrontation and through compromises, agreements, and improved legislation).

When the limited nature of authoritarian collectivism, with its complete subordination of the personal to the public, of the individual to the collective, and in fact to government structures and other institutions, became obvious, the success of liberalism in practice in creating conditions for individual freedom and political rights became a challenge to the Soviet experience. It became clear that neither egoistic individualism nor authoritarian collectivism could produce optimal results.

Thus a historic interaction occurred between what seemed to be two opposing lines, approaches, or principles. I think that this interaction, and in

a certain sense the competition between these two trends of historical action, can enrich each of them and help overcome one-sidedness in the social process.

What lies ahead for us? Time is introducing and bringing into circulation new value-based orientations. In our times these are becoming increasingly identified with the interests of humanity as a whole.

On the one hand, we are talking about the very survival of humanity. In the light of the existing dangers it is becoming more and more evident that *all the traditional ideologies are vulnerable*. Also evident is the one-sidedness of any politics that pursues only some private interest—whether class, national, or other. Today the starting point for any rational policy must be the interests of all humanity, regardless of religious alignment or national, ethnic, and social status.

On the other hand, we are talking about the criteria and goals of progress. Its historically conditioned characteristic progress was that the necessary material conditions were lacking for putting in practical terms the following problem: Human beings must be the goal and meaning of progress, not merely instruments for achieving that progress.

Posing such a task, on the level of civilization as a whole, as a global phenomenon, requires a new value-based orientation.

Briefly, we are all in need of some new conceptual vision of the future. It can be defined as *global humanism*. I am not the first to use this term, but it seems to me a good definition of the “meta-ideology,” if you will, that will help us find a common language for the largest possible number of socially conscious people.

No one person and no one party or political tendency has a monopoly on solving the problems that face the human race today. These problems can hardly be solved in a definitive way, once and for all. The highest wisdom in politics is to move steadily in the desired direction, constantly searching for answers. And in this search there is room for all currents of modern democratic social thought.

The imperious necessity for such joint searching has been predetermined by the fact that civilization now finds itself at an impasse. It has exhausted its potential for positive development, or it is in the process of exhausting that potential. The external manifestations of this impasse are commonly known. There are the ecological spasms we all observe and the other global problems associated with them. There is the crisis in the contemporary forms of social existence, the accumulation of contradictions between the individual and society, between government and the individual.

And there is the obviously unhealthy state of international relations: Having emerged from the Cold War era, the international community to this day has not found the way to a new, genuinely peaceful world order. There is also the increasing complexity in the functioning of the world economy. And there is both a moral and an ideological crisis: None of the generally recognized schools of thought has been able to explain what is happening or to point the way toward overcoming the present dilemma.

But now I would like to pose the question in a somewhat different manner. The crisis is obvious, but what are its deepest roots?

I believe we have sufficient grounds for answering this question today. The roots of the present critical condition of civilization lie in a mistaken understanding of the relation between the human race and the rest of nature, a misunderstanding coming down to us from the time of the Renaissance. A basic postulate of the Renaissance has proven to be profoundly in error: the notion that "man is the king of creation," a notion we followed for too long. Fixation on technologically centered factors of growth has brought us to a global ecological crisis.

Unfortunately today, on the eve of a new century, prognoses are being made that to one degree or another link the future with further perfection or improvement of the technocentric model of development. The need to renounce technologically centered models of progress and make the transition to a new anthropocentric, humanist model is being ignored. This means we are risking not only the danger of not solving our current problems, which are already extreme, but we risk intensifying and multiplying those problems.

The deepest roots of civilization's present crisis, on the other hand, are social in nature. From time immemorial the fruits of economic development have been used, and are still being used, in such a way as to preserve and in many cases intensify social differentiation.

Existing social relations are characterized not by a search for a balance among the interests of differing social and national groups, but in most cases in hostile confrontation or opposition of these groups to one another. Unfortunately, among the prognoses being made for the future that are so widespread today, these same models of social structure prevail, even though they have essentially exhausted themselves. These models can only give rise to sharpening contradictions and dangerous conflicts, not only nationally but globally as well.

Obviously a different approach is needed, another paradigm, one that would be based not on the perpetuation of social antagonisms and national conflicts but on a consistent effort to avoid such clashes. Clearly we will never achieve complete social harmony. But what is most desirable, our optimal goal, is to bring harmony into social development as much as possible and free it from the vicious circle of the struggle of each against all.

The present crisis of civilization, in my opinion, is also deeply rooted in the sphere of international relations. In the twentieth century, international relations were imbued with the same confrontational approaches as permeated social relations. This resulted in the division of humanity into warring camps, each side claiming to represent absolute truth in its social orientations and seeking to defeat, if not physically exterminate, the other.

As a result of intense efforts based on new approaches, we have succeeded in bringing a halt to international confrontation. But what do we see happening today? Politicians and ideologists, in thinking about the international relations they envisage for the twenty-first century, too often return to the old models, to seeking geopolitical gains, to the idea that the world must inevitably be redivided into spheres of influence or that a single power, the United States, can maintain global hegemony. But what can such an approach achieve? Nothing can be gained but a repetition of the tragedies of earlier and recent times.

To generalize on what has been presented thus far, although of course the subject has by no means been exhausted, it is not difficult to draw the following conclusion: *The roots of the crisis of contemporary civilization lie in a profound separation from the genuine interests of humanity.* The motivating factor in contemporary civilization so far has not been the humanist approach but instead the instinct of self-preservation, of gaining advantages at the expense of others. If by force of inertia this situation continues, it can lead to new negative consequences.

Hence my conclusion: New approaches are needed, new orientations in both thought and action. We must make the transition to a new civilization. It is sometimes said that the time is not yet ripe for a new civilization. But the question cannot be posed as though a new civilization could start tomorrow, the way one might introduce new prices for energy sources.

We are talking of a *transition* toward a new civilization. No one knows what it will be like. What is important is to orient in that direction. The human race today is spending enormous resources to provide the means of

existence, even the most basic ones. The quantity of resources being expended is growing, because human needs are constantly expanding and are even being artificially cultivated. This is occurring at the expense of resources that are increasingly necessary to solve other vital tasks, tasks that are being posed with ever increasing urgency. This is an abnormal development. In principle, humanity today has already outgrown the framework of the struggle against nature and similar problems previously dictated by necessity.

The time has come for normal development, for what I call *humanist progress*. The very idea of progress, by the way, needs to “progress” in order for humanity to rise to the level at which it can realize the full meaning and purpose of its own history. This cannot take place any longer at the expense of irreparable injury to the human race itself and to the rest of nature, nor by humiliating and exploiting certain groups or entire nationalities with the irreversible moral and spiritual losses that entails. Progress is only possible under conditions of universal and equal cooperation stripped of any element of armed coercion, that is, under conditions of *co-development*, the simultaneous development of all.

On the broadest scale, this new civilization can be envisioned not as some kind of one-sided, totally unified entity but rather as a differentiated, pluralistic one. Only thus would it be able to adapt itself in the best possible way to the rapid tempo of change and the challenges of our times.

I am convinced that a new civilization will inevitably take on certain features that are characteristic of, or inherent in, the socialist ideal. However, over the course of centuries, in both politics and social consciousness, a great number of differing ideas have been churned out—conservative and radical, liberal and socialist, individualist and collectivist. This is the reality encountered everywhere. An attempt to *synthesize* these views, trends, and phenomena, an attempt to achieve an optimal interaction among them based on strictly humanist criteria—that is what will ensure movement toward a new civilization.

I will not go into further detail. The effort to construct speculative blueprints for the future is not a productive task. The future grows out of the present, out of the challenges of tomorrow that we must answer today, out of the objectively determined developmental tendencies of the social organism.

The Gorbachev Foundation does not stand alone but works together with others in the world community who are ready to participate in the



search for a way to a better future. Today the Foundation has undertaken the task of studying the problems created by *globalization*, problems affecting the entire world. Research on global problems is of course a fundamental task, and our work is only just beginning.

Preliminary conclusions have been reached, but they require further investigation. The first conclusions are as follows:

- The processes of globalization are not slowing down but are accelerating world development and making all its contradictions and problems more evident and more acute;
- Consequently, the crisis of the present-day civilization will not be easing; the tendency toward its intensification is becoming increasingly evident;
- Hence there is a quickly growing need to find new approaches and solutions aimed at overcoming the crisis, a need, at least as a start, to stop the crisis from deepening while taking into account the new conditions created by globalization;
- Obviously just as the future of civilization itself will prove to be global, so too will the path toward its formation and the solutions to its problems;
- Finally, all these factors, taken together, mean that the research on the problems that have accumulated, the efforts to work out proposals for solving them, and of course the implementation of these proposals—all must be the result of a joint effort on the part of both science and politics by the world community as a whole. Unifying these efforts, while taking into account the current world situation, is by no means easy; the world community is not yet prepared for this.

In light of all this, a question arises: Is a movement toward a new civilization realistic? I think the lessons of history—above all, the history of the perestroika era, which was, if I may say so, a practical test of humanist approaches to the transformation of society—allow us to give a positive answer to this question.

What do these lessons of history embody?

First, as perestroika demonstrated, the assertion of the ideas of humanism and democracy, even in a society burdened with the heritage of totalitarianism, is fully realistic. In the Soviet Union, in just over five years, enor-

mous changes took place, as I have discussed above. How much more easily such changes could be made in countries where democratic traditions have long been established, however they may have been distorted in everyday practice.

Second, policy-making must play a decisive role in implementing change. But these must be policies that are linked with moral principles and serve the cause of humanism. Perestroika tells us that the elaboration of such policies and their implementation are possible even in a society bearing a painful legacy of the past. How much more possible they would be in countries without that heritage.

Third, these lessons confirm that genuinely progressive, democratic change is possible only if it does not remain the province of a small political group in the top echelons of society, only if it becomes a genuine concern of the people as a whole and of public opinion in the broadest sense.

Taking heed of the lessons of the eighty years since October, as well as those of the recent past, and inspired by the ideas of humanism and universal human values, I believe we can look to the future with optimism.