The ‘Solidarity’ Group: Not so Solid

Men will never be free from exploitation and oppression until all work is voluntary and access to all goods and services is free. "Socialism" means a world-wide society, democratically controlled, without profits, wages or money. This is a practical proposition now.

All attempts to solve such problems as war, poverty, loneliness, miserable and degrading toil, inside a society based on wages and profits are sure to fail. We, alone of all political organisations, use Marx's slogan “Abolition of the wages system!”

Thousands of people come forward with plans to re-arrange the wages system. They imagine that slavery can be operated in the interests of slaves! They are wasting their time.

One such school of thought is the political group which calls itself "Solidarity." Their case is presented in a pamphlet entitled The Meaning of Socialism, which declares that the root of misery in work is, not wage-slavery, but the system of management.

The author, Paul Cardan, proposes to keep the compulsion to work through threat of starvation. He even quotes approvingly St. Paul's injunction "He that does not work, neither shall he eat." Production for the market is to be retained in Cardan's "Socialism" but it is to be "a genuine market for consumer goods, with consumers' sovereignty." The wages system is to be retained. We are still to be hired and fired, disciplined and dragooned—but with a difference which Mr. Cardan sees as important: instead of the majority of workers being supervised by a specially trained section of workers (management) the entire work-force in each place of production will manage itself democratically, through workers’ councils. The key feature of "Socialism" is that it will "eliminate all distinct strata of specialised or permanent managers."

The Socialist Party rejects "workers' management" as a solution to workers' problems. We insist on the abolition of wages.

It is to be feared that the tyranny of your mates might prove as terrible as the tyranny of your manager, if your mates are equally as bound up with production for sale on a market. This is the crucial difference between "Solidarity" and us. We say that tinkering with administrative forms is of no use. Buying and selling must be abolished. The wage packet—the permission to live—must be abolished.

The most crucial error in Cardan's analysis is his belief that the essential features of capitalism can be retained, and can be guided by "workers' management" towards humane and liberating ends. The market is to remain, but not, apparently, its laws. It should be obvious that if any enterprise produces to sell, and pays its bills out of its revenue, it will be subject to the same basic market laws as any other enterprise. Of course, at the moment these laws are observed and interpreted by management, which then makes the decisions and imposes them on the other workers in the interests of the shareholders. But it should have occurred to Cardan that these same laws might have the same force whoever does the managing and even if the shareholders, so to speak, are the workers. This is a suggestion which members of "Solidarity" ought at least to consider.

Perhaps they will say that the important thing is the removal of the ruling class. It is true that the capitalists, like all ruling classes, live in great luxury and possess immense power. But it is a mistake to think that the workers are poor because the capitalists consume so much. On the contrary, the wealth actually consumed personally by capitalists is an insignificant (and diminishing) fraction of total wealth produced. Taking the consumption of the capitalists and sharing it out amongst the workers would result in a rise for us all of only a few shillings a week. It is a fact that our masters live off the fat of the land, but if they starved in garrets we should still be slaves. Socialists an not
primarily concerned, like vulgar moralists and apostles of "fair play," to indict the caviar and yachts
of the Paul Gettys, but rather the misdirection of production: the subordination of consumption to
accumulation and the immensity of organized waste and destruction.

Similarly, though the capitalist class has power, we do not merely condemn the arbitrary,
irresponsible decisions of those in high places. We condemn also the decisions which capitalists and
workers are forced to make as a result of the workings of capitalism's laws of motion.

"Capitalism without capitalists" could never in fact come about. Should the working-class reach a
level of understanding where they could pressurize the ruling class out of existence, they would long
since have passed the stage where they would have abolished the wages system and established
Socialism. And there are several purely economic arguments why escalating differences in access to
wealth would always result from a wages-profits system. But even if we suspend these judgments,
and consider "Capitalism without capitalists" in our imaginations, we can see it would be no
improvement on capitalism with capitalists. Workers collectively administering their own exploitation
not a state of affairs Which Socialist aim for.

Some advocates of "workers' control" advance the argument that although it wouldn't solve workers'
problems it should still be supported because workers are too simple-minded to understand the
abolition of wages, and must therefore be given "workers' control" as the sugar on the pill (except
that these gentlemen invariably then forget about the pill altogether). Cardan cannot use this line
argument, and this is to his credit, for he has quite correct debunked it:

"The Party . . . "knows" (or believes that it knows) that the sliding scale of wages will never be
accepted by capitalism. It believes that this demand, if really fought for by the workers, will lead to a
revolutionary situation and eventually to the revolution itself. If it did it would "scare the workers off"
who are not "yet" ready to fight for socialism as such. So the apparently innocent demand for a
sliding scale of wages is put forward as feasible . . . while "known" to be unfeasible. This is the bait
which will make the workers swallow the hook and the revolutionary line. The Party, firmly holding
the rod, will drag the class along into the "socialist" frying pan. All this would be a monstrous
conception, were it not so utterly ridiculous."

We would certainly endorse this attack on Vanguardism, but it is hardly enough to compensate for
the page loads of absurdities which Cardan peddles.

In order to make credible his notion of "Socialism" (capitalism minus capitalism's laws) he says that
modern techniques of production are introduced under capitalism more to reduce the freedom of
workers than to increase profitability:

"Machines are invented, or selected, according to one fundamental criterion: do they assist in the
struggle of management against workers, do they reduce yet further the worker's margin of
autonomy, do they assist in eventually replacing him altogether? . . . No British capitalist, no Russian
factory manager would ever introduce into his plant a machine which would increase the freedom of
a particular worker or of a group of workers to run the job themselves, even if such a machine
increased production."

This astonishing claim is made without the smallest shred of evidence being supplied. Whilst it is
possible that a few shrewd managers may accept a cut in short-term profits for the sake of insuring
long-term profits by fragmenting workplace organization, the intricate conspiracy necessary for
Cardan's sweeping statement to be true would be humorous to contemplate. It borders on paranoia
to attribute "ever minute division of labour and tasks" to the management's conscious attempts "to
combat the resistance of the workers." Division of labour, and other atomizing and features of
modern techniques, are primarily the results of attempting to maintain or increase the level of
profits. Modern productive methods are dictated, at a given of technology, by market laws (that is,
from the management's point of view, laws of costs and revenue) and largely outside the will of the
capitalists themselves, or that of the managers.

A lot of Cardan's propositions are developed in contrast to what he calls "Marxism." It is quite
apparent that he is abysmally ignorant of Marx's theoretical system; the "Marxism" he denounces is
the crudest mish-mash of fifth-rate Bolshevism. That is doubtless a further condemnation of the dire results of Bolshevist confusion-mongering, but it hardly excuses Cardan for making statements about Marx without having read him.

For example, in *The Meaning of Socialism*, we read:

"By "Socialism" we mean the historical period which starts with the proletarian revolution and ends with communism. In thus defining it, we adhere very strictly to Marx. *This* is the only "transitional period" between class society and communism."

Marx of course, never drew any distinction between Socialism and Communism, and always gave these words identical meanings. "Solidarity," like the "Communist" Party and Trotskyists, concede that it is necessary to abolish wages and money, but say that this is an "ultimate aim" (translation: not an aim at all).

It is also claimed that Marx has been proved wrong by what happened in Russia, because private property was abolished there without his predicted results. Cardan ought to consider Marx's statement that as long as power over people exists, private property exists. Cardan further believes that Russia has abolished unemployment, which is admittedly not ignorance of Marx, but of Russia.

It is alleged that Marx saw the domination of men by machines as an inexorable consequence of the advance of technology, as a fact which had to be accepted even in Socialism. This is an outrageous howler. Marx was at great pains to stress that the domination of living labour by dead labour was in point of fact an optical illusion. When the instruments of labour appeared to be outside the control of Man, it was in actuality the case that Man's *social relations* were outside his control. Thus when Engels talks about the "mastery of the product over the producer" he does not mean that the products are actually the masters, but simply that they seem to be, as long as producers cannot control their social organization of production. They will remain unable to do so as long as these are commodity relations (1). Socialists have always emphasised that in Socialism production will be organized not just to make more goods, but also to make work itself enjoyable.

Like most Left-wingers, "Solidarity" believe that the Russian Revolution was Socialist. This belief is not an accident, but is closely related to their other misconceptions. "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," wrote Marx. The Nightmare of Leftism, which weighs so heavily on the brains of today's Romantic Revolutionaries, is the tradition of *capitalist revolutions*: the glorification of bloody insurrection, a mystical "Peoples Will" or "Proletarian Consciousness" which has no connection with what people actually will, or what workers actually understand, and hence the disparaging of political democracy, and the theory that revolutionary workers can be "held back" by a Party apparatus. "Solidarity" is no exception. Its ideas belong to the past; they have no future.

On the October Revolution Mr. Cardan comments:

"Many people (various social democrats, various anarchists and the Socialist Party of Great Britain) have said that nothing really happened in Russia except a coup d'état carried out by a Party which, having somehow obtained the support of the working class, sought only to establish its own dictatorship and succeeded in doing so.

We don't wish to discuss this question in an academic manner. Our aim is not to decide whether the Russian Revolution warrants the label of proletarian revolution. The questions which are important for us are different ones. Did the Russian working class play a historical role of its own during this period? . . . The independent role played by the proletariat was clear-cut and undeniable." (From *Bolshevism To The Bureaucracy.*)"

To this we can only retort that the view attributed to the Socialist Party is surely too silly to have even been held by anyone. All capitalist revolutions are highly complex phenomena, and 1917 was no exception. Cardan's aim "is not to decide whether the Russian Revolution warrants the label of proletarian revolution," despite the fact that in his writings he persistently refers to it as such, no less than four times in this particular pamphlet prior to the above excerpt! Of course workers played an
independent role in 1917. Workers have played an independent role in every capitalist revolution without exception. That should be elementary.

Two questions have to be asked; they answer themselves. Had Russia in 1917 reached a level of development where abundance for all was possible? And did the Russian working-class in 1917 possess a clear understanding of the need for a wageless, moneyless, stateless society?

To sum up, movements for "workers' management," "workers' participation" and "workers' control" (though their various adherents distinguish very loudly between these three) will probably be used by capitalism, as in Yugoslavia, to give workers the impression that the enterprise they work for in some way belongs to them. If all employees can be drawn into the process of management, and can be given the illusion of an identity of interests between workers and employers, this helps to muffle the trade union struggle and enhance the process of exploitation. This is not what the members of "Solidarity" want, but then neither is the present structure of the steel industry what Labour Leftists wanted. "Workers' management" is a cul-de-sac, to replace the cul-de-sac of nationalization. Please, don't take another fifty years to see through this one. . . .

We say that in an epoch of potential Plenty the cry should be, not "workers' management," but "To each according to his wants!"

(1) This point is made abundantly clear in Marx's Wage Labour And Capital, and Engels' Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, and is frequently stressed throughout Marx's writings.