

# Socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Synthetic framework for reflections

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## Introduction

Socialism is a project before being a concept. For this reason it is necessary to examine first its content as a preliminary step for the utilization of the word itself. As a matter of fact, what is socialism today? Is it stalinism, maoïsm, Pol Pot, social democracy, third way ? We are in full ambiguity and this requires a new frame of reference.

There is however a situation of great emergency facing the social and ecological destructions provoked by the present day economic model. The world hegemony of capital in its neo-liberal form, not only has been built on new material bases (information and communications' technologies) but allowed the generalization of the subordination of labour to capital (subsumption according to Karl Marx). It is not only a reeal subordination (within the production process through salary), but also a formal one, i.e. by financial means: raw material and agricultural product prices, foreign debt, fiscal haven, internal fiscal system encouraging individual wealth and also by juridical means: norms imposed by the international organizations like the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO.

This last subordination (the formal one) is affecting all the human groups, because of the ecological destructions and because of the global submission to the Law of value. Today, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples are affected in their survival possibilities, because of the exploitation of forests and the destruction of biodiversity; women are the first victims of privatization of health services, water, electricity; small peasants are victims of agrobusiness transnational enterprises. As a matter of fact, it is human life itself which is in danger. Cultural and social consequences are very serious, because such a process increases the contradictions within all social relations, not only through growing economical and social distances, but also through increasing gender, race and caste conflicts..

For these reasons, the new project must begin with a clear and radical delegitimation of capitalism, in its logic and in its concrete aspects in each society. The consciousness that it is no possible to humanize capitalism constitutes the necessary basis of a new concrete project. For this purpose it is possible to propose three reflection levels: (1) the level of utopia (which society do we want ?) (2) the means and finally (3) the strategies. We will try to apply those three levels to the various aspects of human reality: ecological, economic, political and cultural and to propose in a synthetic way a series of hypothesis as a base for discussion.

## **1. The objectives of the utopia**

Which society do we want to build? Such a question may appear very vague, a series of abstract ideas, a dream. But would we still be human beings without the possibility of dreaming? We want to live in an human society of cooperation and peace. This already means that we refuse to live in a world of pure competition and aggression. From its beginning, such a proposal introduces the contradiction with a neo-liberal society. In order to define more concretely what we can call utopia, we can define four objectives or principles, according to the quoted dimensions, ecological, economic, political and cultural.

### **1) Priority to the use of renewable natural resources**

There exist a fundamental symbiosis between human being and nature. Nature is source of life (pachamama, mother-earth, as expressed by indigenous peoples in South America; and in accordance to the immemorial tradition of hinduism and buddhism). One cannot aggress or destroy nature, without attempting against human life. Nature cannot be exploited in function of a purely instrumental rationality, characteristic of the type of modernity brought about economically and culturally by capitalism and which results in its progressive destruction. The “cry of the earth” as writes Leonardo Boff, the Brazilian Liberation theologian, is called today: desertification, destruction of the climate, averian flew, sida...

Such a principle of priority to the use of renewable resources means the rejection of ways of production and activities destructive of the ecological milieu. The use of non renewable resources would be submitted to a collective management in order to insure its rationality. However, such a principle is only a part of reality and must also correspond to the following principles.

### **2) Predominance of use value on exchange value**

Such a distinction made by Karl Marx is useful to think about the future. Use value is what contributes to quality of life in all its dimensions. Exchange value is the market, which has a subordinated function facing the use value. However, within the capitalist logic, the market is dominating not only the economic activities, but also all the collective organization of human life. For capitalism there is no economic value if labour, goods and services are not transformed in commodities. It is what can be called the imposition of the Law of value, which according to Franz Hinkelammert, economist and philosopher from Costa Rica and winner of the Libertador Price of critical thinking created by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, means the end of the subject. Human beings are submitted to this law which invaded the social reality, subordinating the whole of mankind to the logic of capitalism. For this reason, Karl Polanyi, the American economist, historian of capitalism, concluded to the necessity of reinserting the economy in society.

### **3) Democratic participation in all sectors of collective life**

Democratic participation, or the decision power of the human subject, cannot be limited to the political field. In this sense one can say that the whole social reality is political, beginning with the economy. The principle of democratic participation must be applied to all levels of collective life, from the local to the global dimension.

### **4) Interculturality**

All cultures are participating to the cultural and spiritual life of mankind. No one can be eliminated or marginalized. This includes all the cultural expressions, law, science, religions and spiritualities. Transformations originated in exchanges, mutual enrichment, are welcome, because cultures are not

static.

On the basis of those four principles we can approach the question of the means.

## **2. The means**

It is not enough to proclaim principles. To build a society means to apply means in order to bring the principles into reality.

### **1) Relation to nature**

To apply the first principle of predominance of the use of renewable resources, three main means can be quoted. The first one is public appropriation of natural resources essential for life, as water, seeds, air. Such resources constitute the "patrimony of mankind" and must escape to the law of value, as defined by the capitalist economic system.

Renovation of peasant agriculture is another necessary means. It implies first the struggle against concentration of land and of agricultural production and commercialization in the hands of transnational enterprises at the base of natural destructions, without speaking of social catastrophies, and .second, to promote an organic agriculture.

The last means is the tasks of renovation of the atmosphere, of soils, waters and finally of the climate.

### **2) Predominance of use value on exchange value**

There are numerous means to ensure such a principle. We will only quote some of them.

- To promote a production oriented toward the majorities of the populations, with the use of public instruments. This is in opposition to the present model of development favouring a spectacular development of only 20 % of the people. This is the consequence of the capitalist logic which needs to create strong purchasing powers of a minority in order to absorb the production of sophisticated goods, contributing so to capital accumulation.
- To introduce qualitative elements in the economic calculations, as wellbeing, (quality of life), natural environment, food security. Decisions would be quite different if such elements would be taken into account in the costs estimates of production and exchanges.
- To limit the influence of financial capital, by taxation of international flux (Tobin taxation), the suppression of fiscal haven and of bank secrecy, the abolition of the external debt of the Southern nations.
- To abolish patents in their present day form and to adapt the royalties system in order to avoid the monopoly of the transnational enterprises.
- To revalorize the enterprise as a place of common labour with a social function and not as a source of profits for shareholders.
- To recognize and revalorize jobs not recognized as such (women at home) or devaluated (social services, health services) and to create jobs in qualitative sectors (betterment of the quality of life, personal services, etc.)

- To organize a generalized social welfare under public supervision.
- To revalorize public service, as a service to the community and not as an attention to clients.

### **3) The Principle of Democracy**

Democracy is not only an end, but also a means. In this sense democracy must be extended to all levels of collective activity, including the economic sector. However participative democracy should also be promoted as a means to increase popular control in the same sectors.. It is not only a matter of territorial dimensions (villages, neighbourhoods, communities), but also of enterprises and administrations.

#### **4) The principle of interculturality**

Means in this area are also various, the main ones being the following.

- To affirm and concretize the Right of Peoples facing the Right of business, which means a fundamental change in the philosophy of international financial and commercial organizations..
- To protect cultures through adequate means in the various dimensions of their expressions.
- To socialize the results of science, without industrial or particular monopoly.
- To affirm the laïcité of the State, as base to philosophical and spiritual dialogue and of universal ecumenism.

## **3. Strategies**

To apply the means able to concretize such principles there are various types of strategies.

1. To delegitimize capitalism, as expression of a dehumanizing modernity, which implies to use all possible spaces to develop a critical thinking in economy, ecology, politics and culture. In this sense the Social Forums have played an important role in the development of a collective consciousness.
2. To accelerate the creation of collective actors at the global level through networks of resistances ( a good example is Via Campesina).
3. To renew the political field of the left, with the convergence of various political organizations (it is not anymore possible to think of a unique party, having the whole truth) and with the centrality of ethics.
4. To promote the birth of a new historical subject, which will not be only constituted by the working class but by all the social groups affected in their daily life by the capitalist system: small peasants, women, ethnic minorities, etc.
5. To affirm the centrality of ethics as collective and individual behaviour in coherence with the utopia, which implies the institutionalization of social and political processes as base of individual behaviours and a permanent redefinition of the concrete aspects of ethics with the participation of all.

We may conclude that if this is what we call socialism, it means a prophetic and constructive project, able to contradict "barbarism" and to translate in a post-capitalist reality, at the same time the

defense of mankind and the love of the neighbour.