

Finally, they have an ambiguous cultural record. For them, communism was tantamount either to state censorship or to intellectual elitism. By contrast, social democrats were betting on a genuine proletarian culture in an age when class culture was already disintegrating. The government of democratic socialists in the welfare state was a benevolent patron of the arts; and the socialist movement spread literacy and the light of knowledge where the darkness of ignorance had reigned supreme. We owe the discovery of, and the support for, the best products of working-class culture (in Great Britain), as well as some of the best novels (in Scandinavia and postwar Germany), to this welfarist patronage and social democratic spirit. But social democracy, in its aversion to intellectual elitism, has constantly lacked the great vision necessary for the flourishing of culture.

The vacuum created by the demise of communism is beneficial for socialists only if they are capable of making an inventory of their peak performances and serious limitations. For, let us be honest, the existence of communism was not merely an obstacle for democratic socialists. In strange ways, it was also a blessing in disguise. As long as communist governments of terror or repression existed, it sufficed for democratic socialists or social democrats to pinpoint the communist practices with the remark: we shall do it in a different way. This gesture alone guaranteed votes. But now, with the scarecrow gone, they are left alone on the left, and they have to do the work in a different way or perish. To be capable of performing the new task, it is mandatory that they address their own past record.

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### Branko Horvat

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**I**n order to find out how much a country is socialist, it is necessary first to define socialism. Characteristically, no clear, precise, and commonly accepted definition exists. My own definition is extensively discussed elsewhere (*The Political Economy of Socialism*, Sharpe, 1982) and can be only briefly summarized here.

1. *Socialism is a phase in the process of the individuation of men and women, of their emancipation from various collectivities (tribe, estate, class, nation), of their progress in the direction of individual self-determination.* (Note that individuation has nothing to do with possessive egoism and implies, rather than excludes, genuine social consciousness.) In this sense, socialism contributes to the fulfillment of the three proclaimed goals of the bourgeois revolutions: liberty, equality, and solidarity. The three ideals cannot be separated and imply each other: unequal liberty destroys equality, lack of equality makes the freedoms of some individuals deficient, and solidarity is the behavioral precondition for the achievement of liberty and equality. Against this standard, it is not particularly difficult to measure the performance of Sweden or any other country.

2. *If the full personal development of individual men and women is the supreme goal, social equity is the basis of the system called socialism.* That implies the elimination of any concentration of political and economic power. In this sense the three goals may be approximated through political and economic democracy and government-sponsored solidarity.

3. *Socialist political democracy includes all classical rights and freedoms of citizens and also replaces party politics (parties are concentrations of power) by citizens' politics.* In other words, elections do not depend on party finances and party bosses, and the relation between electors and their representatives in the parliament is personalized. The representative is primarily responsible to electors, not to a party, and the party whip is absent. The issues are decided on their merits, not in the interest of party oligarchies. Substantial, as contrasted to purely formal criteria are generally applicable: similarly, as a formal democratic procedure is not sufficient in socialist politics, neither is formal equality before law. A corporation or a state agency, with vast means at its disposal, and an individual citizen cannot be equal parties in the

court of law. That necessitates the creation of an ombudsman, an institution in which the Swedes have pioneered. Finally, the Leviathan-state must be decomposed into its seven fundamental functions (legislative, executive, adjudicative, administrative, recruiting, and controlling), replacing the classic separation of the first three powers.

4. *Economic democracy is perhaps the most distinctive feature of socialism.* It means that management rights are derived from labor and not from the ownership of capital. That implies that self-management replaces power hierarchy at the place of work. Self-management, in turn, implies an independence of firms and the existence of a free market without monopolies. It also implies full employment, which requires planning as a complement to automatic regulation of economic processes by the market. Since the firms are primary owners (and engage in all business transactions for their own account and independently, regardless of whose capital they use), a capital market is consistent with socialist economics.

5. *Income is basically distributed according to work performed.* That requires that social solidarity enter in two different ways: productive and ethical ones. Personality-building services (education, medical care) must not depend on the earning power of the recipients but must be delivered "according to needs." That is not only "just," but also helps to develop the productive potential of the society. The second case refers to handicapped individuals who cannot earn a decent living by their own efforts. Here pure human solidarity is involved.

6. *A socialist framework does not resolve technical issues (large corporations, large public sector and so on) by itself.* But it offers different possibilities for their solution. For instance, nationalization is a nonissue. Large corporations are large primarily because their financial power increases with size, and that is crucial for survival in the fluctuating capitalist market. Planning may reduce the advantages of financial power, and self-government will reduce the attractiveness of large size. An egalitarian distribution of income reduces the need for large government expenditures. The elimination of class distinctions makes conspicuous consumption an oddity. People accus-

tomed to evaluating their needs rationally will know how to use automobiles and buses, and we may safely leave such choices to them. Ecological norms are all that is necessary.

**H**owever, three important problems remain:

1. *First, it is not particularly difficult to establish a consistent set of socialist propositions. It is, however, terribly difficult to bring them about in reality.* A socialist program cannot be imposed by government fiat because that is a self-contradictory target, and the disastrous failures of such attempts all around are a sufficient reminder. A laissez-faire socialist development may be a very round-about affair. Thus, the program must be tailor-made for every country in particular.

2. *In Sweden, public discontent has been growing for some years now.* That is due not only to the fact that large government and ubiquitous trade unions get bureaucratized. People gradually become fed up with somebody making decisions on their behalf and tutoring them from the cradle to the grave—even if that is very beneficial to them. Healthy men and women need challenges in their life to be met by their own efforts. A superficial answer is liberalism. A more adequate answer has yet to be found.

3. *Finally, no country is big enough to build socialism all by itself.* The international environment is not socialist, although the European Community might by necessity begin to move in that direction. The international capitalist pressure is perhaps the strongest obstacle for socialist development anywhere.

### To Our Contributors

**B**ecause *Dissent* is usually quick in responding to submissions of articles, we cannot acquiesce to multiple submissions. They are a bad idea in principle, and they tend to waste the time of our editors who work in their "spare time." Henceforth multiple submissions will be automatically rejected.