

# **Socialism for the 21st century and the need for socialist globalization**

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Capital has the tendency to produce a working class which views the existence of capital as necessary. Marx understood this. ‘The advance of capitalist production,’ he commented in *Capital*, ‘develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of this mode of production as self-evident natural laws’ (Marx 1977, 899).

Marx, in short, understood that capitalism tends to produce the workers it needs, workers who look upon capitalism as common sense. Given the mystification of capital (arising from the sale of labour-power) which makes productivity, profits and progress appear as the result of the capitalist’s contribution, it followed that ‘the organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance’.

Breaks down all resistance! And, Marx proceeded to add that capital’s generation of a reserve army of the unemployed ‘puts the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker’ and that the capitalist can rely upon the worker’s ‘dependence on capital, which springs from the conditions of production themselves, and is guaranteed in perpetuity by them’ (Marx 1977, 899).

Thus, although workers may struggle over wages, struggle over working conditions and struggle to defend their victories from past battles, as long as they look upon the requirements of capitalism ‘as self-evident natural laws’, those struggles occur within the bounds of the capitalist relation. In the end, the subordination of workers to the logic of capital means that, faced with capitalism’s crises, they will sooner or later act to ensure the conditions for the expanded reproduction of capital.

It is often noted that there is a big difference between a crisis *in* capitalism and a crisis *of* capitalism. The latter requires conscious actors prepared to put an end to capitalism, prepared to challenge and defeat the logic of capital. But that revolutionary labour process requires a vision which can appear to workers as an alternative common sense, as *their* common sense.

Like the worst architect, we must build that goal in our minds before we can construct it in reality; only this conscious purpose can ensure the purposeful will required to complete the defeat of the logic of capital (Marx 1977, 284). To struggle against a situation in which

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workers 'by education, tradition and habit' look upon capital's needs 'as self-evident natural laws', we must struggle for an *alternative* common sense. But what is the vision of a new society whose requirements workers may look upon as 'self-evident natural laws'? Clearly, it is not the results of 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts to build socialism --- attempts which, to use Marx's phrase, ended 'in a miserable fit of the blues'.

### **The 'key link': human development and practice**

'*We have to re-invent socialism*'--- here was the statement with which Hugo Chavez electrified activists in his closing speech at the January 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. 'It can't be the kind of socialism that we saw in the Soviet Union,' he stressed, 'but it will emerge as we develop new systems that are built on cooperation, not competition.' If we are ever going to end the poverty of the majority of the world, capitalism must be transcended, Chavez argued. 'But we cannot resort to state capitalism, which would be the same perversion of the Soviet Union. We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything' (Lebowitz 2006, 109).

In short, neither expansion of the means of production nor direction by the state should define the new socialist society; rather, human beings must be at its center. There, at its core, is the premise of socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And, this marks a return to the socialist vision of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, it is a return to Marx--- to the contrast he drew in *Capital* between a society subordinate to the logic of capital (where 'the worker exists to satisfy the need of the existing values for valorization') and the logic of a new society, that 'inverse situation, in which objective wealth is there to satisfy the worker's own need for development' (Marx 1977, 772).

This concept of the worker's need for development is the culmination of Marx's consistent stress upon the centrality of human development--- his concept of 'rich human beings', the 'development of the rich individuality', that real wealth which is the development of human capacity. Here was the explicit goal of the new society, that 'inverse situation' which would allow for 'the all-round development of the individual', the 'complete working out of the human content,' the 'development of all human powers as such the end in itself' (Lebowitz 2003, 131-3; Lebowitz 2010, 42-4). With this inversion of the capitalist inversion, the society of associated producers would be one in which 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.'

But this is only one side of Marx's perspective. A focus upon the full development of human potential was characteristic of much socialist thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lebowitz 2006, 53-60). What Marx added to this emphasis upon human development was his understanding of *how* that development of human capacities occurs. In his *Theses on Feuerbach*, he was quite clear that it is not by giving people gifts, not by changing circumstances for them. Rather, we change only through real practice, by changing circumstances ourselves. Marx's concept of 'revolutionary practice', that concept of 'the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change', is the red thread that runs throughout his work (Marx 1976, 4). Marx was most consistent on this point when talking about the struggles of workers against capital and how this revolutionary

practice transforms ‘circumstances and men,’ expanding their capabilities and making them fit to create a new world (Lebowitz 2003, 180-3).

But this process of changing ourselves is not at all limited to the sphere of political and economic struggle. In the very act of producing, Marx indicated, ‘the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new powers and new ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language’ (Marx 1973, 494). And, certainly, the relations within which workers produce affect the nature of the workers produced. After all, that was Marx’s point about how capitalist productive relations ‘distort the worker into a fragment of a man’ and degrade him and ‘alienate from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process’ (Marx 1977, 799).

In short, it is essential to recognise that every human activity has as its result a *joint product*--- both the change in the object of labour and the change in the labourer herself (Lebowitz 2010, 50-5, 154-9). For every activity, we have to ask two questions--- how does this change circumstances? And how does this change the human actor? Marx’s combination of human development and practice constitutes the *key link* that we need to grasp if we are to change the world.

### **Socialism for the 21st Century**

As I have argued in my books, *Build it Now* and *The Socialist Alternative*, this concept of the key link of human development and practice has been an important element in the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela since its beginning. With the recognition in the Bolivarian Constitution (adopted in 1999) that the goal of a human society must be that of ‘ensuring overall human development’, in its declaration that ‘everyone has the right to the free development of his or her own personality’ and the focus upon ‘developing the creative potential of every human being and the full exercise of his or her personality in a democratic society’--- the theme of human development pervades the Bolivarian Constitution.

The other side of the key link can be seen in the constitution’s declaration that participation by people in ‘forming, carrying out and controlling the management of public affairs is the necessary way of achieving the involvement to ensure their complete development, both individual and collective.’ The *necessary* way. And, the same emphasis upon a democratic, participatory and protagonistic society is present in the economic sphere with the stress upon ‘self-management, co-management, cooperatives in all forms’ and upon ‘active, conscious and joint participation’ (Lebowitz 2006, 72, 89-90; 2010, 14).

Of course, we all know that there is an enormous gap between the real world and the words of the best constitution, and Venezuela is no exception. However, the emergence in Venezuela in recent years of communal councils, communes and workers control in recovered factories and state sectors is clearly an attempt to realise the vision of a society in which the protagonism of subjects is necessary for ‘their complete development, individual and collective’.

Creating the conditions in workplaces and communities by which people can develop their capacities is an essential aspect of the concept of socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But it is only one element. How can the worker’s own need for development be realised if capital owns our social heritage--- the products of the social brain and the social hand? And, how

can we develop our own potential if we look upon other producers as enemies or as our markets--- i.e., if individual material self-interest is our motivation?

Capitalism is an organic system, one which has the tendency to reproduce the conditions of its existence (including a working class which looks upon its requirements as 'self-evident natural laws'). That is its strength. To counter that and to satisfy 'the worker's own need for development', the socialist alternative also must be an organic system, a particular combination of production, distribution and consumption, a system of reproduction. What Chavez named in January 2007 as 'the elementary triangle of socialism' (social property, social production and satisfaction of social needs) is a step forward toward a conception of such a system (Lebowitz 2010, 24-5).

Consider the logic of this socialist combination, this conception of socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that has surfaced in Venezuela (Lebowitz 2007; 2010). Unifying those three sides of the socialist triangle is the theme of human development:

**A. Social ownership of the means of production** is critical within this structure because it is the only way to ensure that our communal, social productivity is directed to the free development of all rather than used to satisfy the private goals of capitalists, groups of producers, or state bureaucrats. But, this concerns more than our current activity. Social ownership of our social heritage, the results of past social labour, is an assertion that all living human beings have the right to the full development of their potential--- to real wealth, the development of human capacity. It is the recognition that 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.'

**B. Social Production organised by workers** builds new relations among producers -- relations of cooperation and solidarity. It allows workers to end 'the crippling of body and mind' and the loss of 'every atom of freedom, both in bodily and in intellectual activity' that comes from the separation of head and hand. Organization of production in all spheres by workers, thus, is a condition for the full development of the producers, for the development of their capabilities--- a condition for the production of rich human beings.

**C. Satisfaction of communal needs and purposes** as the goal of productive activity means that, instead of interacting as separate and indifferent individuals, we function as members of a community. Rather than looking upon our own capacity as our property and as a means of securing as much as possible in an exchange, we start from the recognition of our common humanity and, thus, of the importance of conditions in which everyone is able to develop her full potential. When our productive activity is oriented to the needs of others, it both builds solidarity among people and produces socialist human beings.

These three sides of the 'socialist triangle' form members of a whole. Parts of a structure in which 'all the elements coexist simultaneously and support one another', they mutually interact. 'This is the case with every organic whole.' Yet, the very interdependence of the three sides suggests that realisation of each element depends upon the existence of the other two. The idea of putting off some questions until a later (beautiful) stage is prepared is alien to a concept of an organic system.

What happens if you don't understand the system as a whole? The continued presence of elements of capitalism does not simply mean that socialism is at yet incomplete because a few parts are missing. After all, what kinds of people are produced within the old relations? In fact, every moment that people act within old relations is a process of reproducing old

ideas and attitudes. Working within a hierarchy, functioning without the ability to make decisions in the workplace and society, focusing upon self-interest rather than upon solidarity --- these activities produce people on a daily basis; it is the reproduction of the conservatism of everyday life--- indeed, the reproduction of elements of capitalism.

The concept of socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century as an organic system theoretically posits what the experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has demonstrated--- the need to build all sides of the socialist triangle. *One war, three fronts*. In the absence of a struggle to subordinate all the elements of the old society, the new society is inevitably *infected* by the old society.

This concept of socialism as an organic system points to a society in which ‘the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.’ Its premise is that everyone has the right to the full development of her potential and that the society that we must struggle to build is one based upon the principle of ‘to each according to her need for development.’ As Marx understood, in such a society, ‘the development of the human capacities on the one side [cannot be] based on the restriction of development on the other’ (Marx 1988, 190-2).

This is, of course, a concept of entitlement, and I have tried to sketch out some of its dimensions in *The Socialist Alternative: Real Human Development* by introducing the concept of a Charter for Human Development:

- A. Everyone has the right to share in the social heritage of human beings, has an equal right to the use and benefits of the products of the social brain and the social hand, in order to be able to develop her full potential.
- B. Everyone has the right to be able to develop her full potential and capacities through democracy, participation and protagonism in the workplace and society--- a process in which these subjects of activity have the precondition of the health and education which permits them to make full use of this opportunity.
- C. Everyone has the right to live in a society in which human beings and nature can be nurtured--- a society in which we can develop our full potential in communities based upon cooperation and solidarity.

### **International inequality and exclusion**

It is possible to struggle on these three fronts against capital in every country--- to struggle to replace private ownership of the means of production with social ownership, to replace the despotism of the capitalist workplace with democratic decision-making and to replace self-interest with a focus upon the need for the free development of all.

But what are the implications of such a Charter on the global level? We understand what occurs under capitalist globalisation. The logic of capital subordinates all human needs to the drive for profits and the growth of capital. ‘The goal-determining activity of capital,’ as Marx stressed, ‘can only be that of growing wealthier, i.e. of magnification, of increasing itself’ (Marx 1973, 270). To this end, capital seeks to increase the length and intensity of the workday, to lower real wages and to increase productivity relative to the real wage. It succeeds, however, only insofar as it can divide and separate workers. By increasing the degree of separation among workers, capital makes it more difficult for workers to form and maintain coalitions against it and, in this way, drives beyond barriers to its growth.

The vast differences among producers around the globe provide an environment which greatly enhances capital's ability to separate workers. Given the extent of the global reserve army of producers for whom low-wage labour represents a significant step upward in terms of their ability to satisfy their needs, capital can significantly benefit by transferring production operations to such regions where that labour supply is present and where a productivity gap does not counterbalance its reduced wage bill. Yet it is not simply the effect of low historical needs that are relevant here: authoritarianism and government repression of trade union organising offer the absolute advantage of repression to capitalist firms prepared to use such localities as export platforms. Thus, differential exploitation of workers through the suppression of worker and citizen rights aids production operations in such regions to win the battle of competition.

How would socialist globalisation differ? Obviously, its premise must be the replacement of capitalist ownership of the means of production with social ownership and the replacement of the despotism of the capitalist workplace with social production organised by workers. In short, we must end capitalist exploitation and the deformation of workers which occurs through the separation of thinking and doing. But, does the concept of socialist globalisation imply the same international division of labour--- modified only by the substitution of non-capitalist relations for the characteristic institutions of capitalism? Or, would that international division of labour differ substantially?

If we think about socialist globalisation, we need to begin immediately by considering explicitly the implications of current vast inequalities and exclusion with respect to the right to share in the social heritage of human beings. The means of production, after all, are the products of past labour; they are the products of the social brain and the social hand, what Marx (1973, 694, 704-6) called the '*organs of the human brain, created by the human hand: the power of knowledge objectified*'. The means of production are our social heritage--- the heritage of all humanity. So, why should one subset of society own our social heritage?

As Marx demonstrated, our social heritage currently is owned by capital because generations of workers have sold their capacity to produce to capital and have been exploited by capital in its drive for growth. All the power of social labour thus has become the power of capital. And, as long as capital continues to own the means of production, the capitalist process of production will continue to treat human beings and nature as means (rather than an end) and will accordingly destroy both these 'original sources of wealth'.

But, it is not enough simply to end capitalist ownership of the means of production at this time. We know that from the experience in individual countries. Even if the means of production are no longer the property of capital but are owned by society in the form of the state, examples like Yugoslavia, China and Cuba reveal the familiar phenomenon of differential access to particular means of production. This is not a problem when those who possess particular means of production are oriented toward ensuring that everyone has the right to share in the social heritage of human beings; however, differential access *is* a problem when those differences are combined with self-interest (individual or group). All means of production, after all, are not equal; and, if some producers are able to secure particular benefits (e.g., higher incomes) as the result of their privileged access to particular means of production, their advantage is the product of monopoly--- the ability to exclude others from those benefits.

Should that exclusion continue under socialist globalisation? If we recognise that the means of production, our social heritage, are largely the result of generations of exploited producers (rather than the product of current producers), what gives a particular group of current producers a greater entitlement than others to what Marx referred to as ‘the accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain’? Internationally, this differential access takes the extreme form of differences between urban producers of the North and rural producers of the South. Why should the latter be excluded from the inherited knowledge and our social heritage in general?

Aren’t the peasant of the South and the autoworker of the North, for example, equal in their position as members of human society, equal in their right to human development, equal in their non-responsibility for the production of our social heritage? There is no logic by which their current exploitation can be the basis for a privileged claim on the products of *past* social labour. To argue for that privileged claim is to argue effectively for group property rights which generate rent. In short, even outside the framework of capitalist relations as such, there is considerable potential for conflict. No magic wand can make this contradiction disappear.

### **The need for a concept of socialist globalization**

How can we build an alternative to capitalist globalisation, given the extent of existing global inequality and exclusion? If workers across the globe relate only as wage-labourers, their immediate interests collide; in capitalist globalisation they are in competition-- competition over jobs, incomes and working conditions. Twist and turn as we may, we cannot wish this away because it is not illusion but reality. True, we can assert that all workers have a mutual interest in opposing capital; yet, we must acknowledge that this interest is not necessarily as immediate to them as their struggle to satisfy their needs and those of their families.

As long as we allow capital to place wage-labourers into competition, they inevitably view each other as enemies. Capital, then, is the obvious beneficiary. Trade unions, of course, often have attempted to build international solidarity among workers by uniting them as wage-labourers against the common enemy, capital. However, if attempts to build unity among workers are limited to their interests *as wage-labourers*, these efforts are pursued in a dimension in which capital is stronger. Don’t we need to go beyond economism and to develop a new strategy rooted in the recognition that workers are not one-dimensional, that they are not only wage-labourers?

We need to develop a concept of socialist globalisation--- one where producers accept the right of all within the world to share in our common social heritage, the right to be able to develop our potential through revolutionary democracy and protagonism in the workplace and society and the right to live in a society in which cooperation and solidarity rather than self-interest prevails. In short, we need to recognise our goal as an international ‘association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’. That goal must guide our struggles because if we don’t know where we want to go, no road will take us there.

In short, the global ‘worker’s own need for development’ must be the hub of an alternative to capitalist globalisation. This should be a challenge to socialist theorists--- to envision a global collective worker, a producer composed of differing limbs and organs from around the world, who produces the necessary inputs for that collective worker in ‘full self-awareness as one single social labour force’ (Marx 1977, 171). In such a ‘thought-experiment’, that producer is not only a global collective worker *in itself*. Characteristic of the social relation among the producers in this structure would be their recognition of their unity as members of the human family and thus their activity to ensure the well-being of others within this family.

Such a concept of socialist globalisation necessarily points beyond the existing international division of labour. Rather than international trade based upon the results of unequal access to our common social heritage, socialist globalisation must have at its core a process of maximising the productive capability of the least well-off in the global society. If local producers are capable of providing for many local needs using the most advanced productive forces (thereby making unnecessary much energy-intensive shipping and transport over long distances), how could socialist globalisation not produce its own particular international division of labour?

In this world of vast inequality and exclusion, we are at the mercy of capital unless we develop a vision of a socialist alternative. We need a concept of socialist globalisation which can guide us in the struggle against global capitalism which leads us into the abyss, destroying the ‘original sources of all wealth’, human beings and nature.

International socialism or international barbarism.

### **Notes on the contributor**

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