

SOCIALISTS AND THE 'NEW CONSERVATISM'

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By the crucial test of what it has done for the vast majority of people, the 'new conservatism' whose nature and impact are analysed in this volume has been a grievous failure in the advanced capitalist world wherever it has been in power: the most blatant example of that failure is 'Thatcherism' in Britain. But Reagan in America has also increased poverty, strengthened the repressive apparatus of the state, encouraged managerial authoritarianism, provided a favourable climate for casino capitalism and relied on the arms race to provide fuel for the American economy. After years in power, the 'new conservatism' has left these societies more unequal, more violent, more inhuman and more prone to crisis.

However, the new conservatism has at least had one major **success**—it has shifted political debate much further to the right. A great deal that had come to be taken for granted in economic and social terms in the three decades following World War II has since the **mid-seventies** been powerfully and effectively challenged.

The success of this challenge does not lie in the conversion of the mass of the population to 'Thatcherism' or 'Reaganism': there is no good evidence of such mass conversion. In fact, the evidence points to the continued popularity of many welfare services even among those who voted for Thatcher or Reagan. This, incidentally, shows the extent of mass dependence on collective social and other services and the severe limits of private enterprise in defining and meeting human needs, however loud the rhetoric of 'market populism' may be.

The success of the new conservatism lies rather in the demoralisation and loss of confidence which has affected large parts of the Left, and the mood of defensiveness and retreat which has gripped very many socialists. In the sixties and seventies, there occurred a flowering of ideas about human emancipation and a confidence in the possibility of moving beyond the welfare state and capitalist democracy. This was expressed in the radical movements inspired by feminism, ecology, student protest, black resistance to oppression and discrimination, sexual liberation; and it was also represented in the shift of the Left in social democratic parties, for instance in Sweden, France, Britain and elsewhere. Indeed, the new

conservatism was in part a reaction to the challenges these movements and pressures seemed to present to the existing social order; and it is the failure of these challenges to fulfil more than—at best—a small part of their promise which has greatly contributed to the present mood.

That mood assumes very different forms, from the bitter and wholesale rejection of earlier and now derided convictions to the resigned belief that not much by way of reform is possible, and that to ask for more is futile and dangerous. But whatever the forms the mood assumes, there can be no doubt of its prevalence: the sag of conviction in the ranks of the socialist Left in the last few years has been nothing short of dramatic.

Even here, however, the new conservatism cannot claim to have initiated the current. Its real source lies in the failure of social democratic governments to achieve more in the years in which they have been in power, and their resort to orthodox conservative measures to try and cope with the economic and financial crises which they confronted. Nor should we overlook the successful resistance of orthodox social democracy to new socialist ideas and pressures—for instance the defeat of 'Bennism' in Britain, the retreat from the Common Programme in France, and the renunciation of the socialising purposes of the Meidner Plan in Sweden.

Moreover, social democratic failures helped to highlight the fact that between the kind of state interventionism within the framework of capitalism which social democracy favoured, and the often barren rhetoric of the revolutionary left, there was no effective agency remotely available to take up the task of socialist transformation. This too also helped to unnerve and demoralise many people in the socialist movement.

In this situation, what is required is something which is very difficult and demanding, and which can only be done by the endeavours of a lot of people, namely the reconstruction of a socialist perspective within which appropriate policies to meet the tasks of today and tomorrow may be advanced. The ugly face of capitalism which the new conservatism has brought to the fore in domestic policy, and the brutal face of imperialism in foreign and military policy, far from inducing despair and retreat, should serve to remind us of the enduring relevance of the socialist project. A crucial question that needs to be answered is this: what are the core propositions which form the essential and indispensable elements of that project in the light of present problems and needs?

I. Capitalism as a System of Domination and Exploitation

The first and most basic of these core propositions is that capitalism, even in its liberal democratic forms, remains a system of domination and exploitation. It is a system which involves a formidable concentration of economic power, based on the private ownership and control of the main means of material and ideological production; and the maintenance and

defence of this system continues to carry with it strong tendencies towards an ever-greater concentration of political power and a corresponding erosion of civic, political and democratic rights.

With every day that goes by, the Marxist analysis of capitalism appears more cogent, not less. There is a continuing revolutionising of the forces of production and the labour process, but in ways which are profoundly damaging to large numbers of different social groups, to the environment and to whole national economies. There is an increasing centralisation of production and finance into fewer and fewer hands, while at the same time the dynamic of competition governs the system ever more ruthlessly as global corporate giants and anonymous financial markets compete over rates of profits. As in all earlier crises, a vast reserve army of the unemployed has re-emerged even in the major capitalist countries. Old industries are abandoned or 'rationalised'; and through constant mergers and speculation new areas of accumulation are fostered on a global scale. 'Peripheral' capitalist regimes are weighed down by enormous debts, whose 'recycling' is accompanied by demands from creditors for 'austerity' measures on the part of the debtors; and these measures naturally fall most heavily upon already desperately impoverished populations. But the 'debt crisis' continues to grow, and threatens to engulf the whole capitalist world in a veritable economic cataclysm. All the while, fostered by narrow imperialist ends, militarism is ever more blatantly a necessary prop of accumulation. Further still, the evidence grows daily of the undemocratic lengths to which capitalist governments are prepared to go to protect bourgeois interests and values—and not only in the 'third world', but right at home as the 'strong state' is combined with the 'free market'.

In this crisis, class struggle in one of its forms, far from abating, has in fact increased. Class struggle is usually taken to mean that the working class struggles for reforms while the capitalist class defends the status quo: but the advance of the new conservatism has meant a fierce offensive on the part of capital and a major challenge to working class advances of previous decades. Of course, this is not a unitary strategy advanced by a monolithic bourgeoisie. What emerges as the predominant pattern of ruling class behaviour in a given period is the product of a complex range of ideas and practices which are by no means perfectly consistent. They are advanced and undertaken in different spheres of the economy and the political arena by various elements of capital and its champions in the corporations, the parties, the media, the universities and right-wing lobbies, foundations, institutes, etc. Among the most aggressive of these agencies, particularly in the United States, are those of the fundamentalist, Bible-thumping sort, whose nauseating religiosity serves exceptionally reactionary political positions.

Many of the articles in this volume describe and analyse the personnel, processes and institutions that came to offer a new capitalist agenda in

the 1970s. The targets were the policies and practices which provided the basis for collective working class defence against increased exploitation and the restructuring of production at the expense of labour, and which therefore stood in the path of the new global patterns of capital accumulation.

It is important to appreciate that this class mobilisation by capital and its allies represented above all a strategic attack on labour conducted inside and outside the state. The new conservatism constantly asserts its determination to free society from the grip of the state. This is demagogic nonsense of ancient vintage. A 'smaller' or 'weaker' state has never been part of the conservative programme: what is central to that programme is a restructured state and civil society in which the balance of class forces would be tilted even more decisively to capital's advantage, both inside national boundaries and in global terms. The major ideological premises of the 'new conservatism', above all the stress on competition and individualism as the prime components of 'freedom', do not run against 'the state', but they do run against and challenge the basic orientations of socialist movements, trade unionism, and those organisations of women, blacks, tenants and welfare claimants which focus on collective rights and seek to achieve collective benefits. It is the structure of rights which had been sanctioned by the state, whether through legal forms or by way of welfare programmes, that had to be dismantled; and it is in this sense only that the new conservatism has sought to 'weaken' the state.

It is notable, therefore, that under the new conservative regimes it is not only a restructuring of state expenditure which has occurred but, far more ominously, a restructuring of political rights. In so far as the new conservatism has attacked the institutional matrix of capitalist democracy, it has not done so in respect of its electoral aspects, party competition and individual voting rights: their attack has rather been directed to the rights which give meaning to freedom of association. This has involved severe restrictions on the right to strike, to picket, more generally the curbing of 'activist' rights—the right to organise, demonstrate and protest; and with this goes the labelling of such rights, or at least their exercise, as subversive.

II. *From Capitalist Reform to Socialist Democracy*

However, it would in many ways be misleading to draw too stark a contrast between this decade of crisis and an earlier epoch. Even during the post-war decades of capitalist expansion and growth, which were also the years of the greatest advances in welfare reforms and social rights, there was no eradication, nor could there be, of the innumerable limitations and injustices of an economic system whose dynamic is the maximisation of private profit. Even then, the system was unable to make rational and humane use of the immense productive apparatus it had itself brought into

being. Nor was the Keynesian state able—or willing—to do more than alleviate some of the economic and social ills produced by the logic of capital accumulation; and the bureaucratic and often inefficient nature of its interventions reflected the constraints imposed upon it by the capitalist context in which it operated.

There were no doubt important differences between countries. More was done by way of welfare in Sweden than in Britain; and in Britain more than in the United States. But in all cases, social relations based on domination, exploitation and competition continued to structure the everyday experiences of the populations of advanced capitalist countries; and the reforms which were then achieved by dint of pressure and struggle remained limited by the social relations of capitalism.

So long as the development of the welfare state and state intervention appeared to offer the possibility of full employment, and a steady rise in the standard of living for the majority, there were many people on the Left who believed that all the ills of capitalism (in so far as capitalism could still be said to exist at all) could gradually be reformed out of existence by 'incremental' advances on many fronts. In short, the case for 'gradualist reformism' was then easier to make, even if the actual reforms that were achieved had all the limitations that have been referred to earlier.

Even now, it is still true that these reforms need to be defended against the attacks of the new conservatism, and every attempt to reaffirm them and extend their scope must be supported. But it is surely now past argument that all such reforms, in the context of capitalism, are not only limited, but also extremely conditional, and depend upon the balance of social forces and the conjunctural patterns and trends of capital accumulation. The notion that reforms are in place forever once they are established and that the only remaining issue is the pace and scope of further advance, has been demonstrated by this crisis and by the whole thrust of the new conservatism to be no more than an illusion. The most that can now be said on this score is that mass unemployment is capable of being alleviated and that welfare services can, conditions permitting, be restored and improved.

For socialists, now more than ever in the post-war era, all this must mean that the establishment of conditions where social needs rather than capital's priorities are paramount patently depends on breaking the power of capital, and replacing that power by the forces of democratic planning. But this inescapably brings us to another core proposition of the socialist project: the appropriation of the main means of production into one form or another of social ownership as an absolutely necessary condition for overcoming the irrational, unplanned and exploitative nature of capitalism.

Socialists have long known—and the experience of Communist regimes has long confirmed—that the appropriation of the main means of economic

activity into the public domain does not necessarily bring about what may properly be called a socialist order. Appropriation of the main means of production into the public domain *without* advanced democratic political forms and controls vastly increases the concentration of power in the hands of those who control the political system. A socialist order requires as an essential, constitutive, element a democratic political system far more advanced than capitalism is ever able to provide.

Nor, in a different but crucial perspective, can socialists ignore or underestimate the problems which are posed by the management of a vast public sector. What this means is that public ownership is not a sufficient condition for the creation of a socialist society, and that it does not in itself offer a guarantee of economic efficiency. Even so, it remains an essential condition for the creation of a fundamentally different social order. Without it, any talk of socialism must be a deception or a delusion.

Labour movements in western capitalist systems have so far mainly sought to regulate and constrain capitalist power, and to improve the circumstances of the vast majority who are subordinated to that power: the point however, is to dissolve it, and to replace it with a democratic, co-operative and egalitarian social order, in which such inequalities as endure are solely based on function performed, and are freely endorsed by the community at large.

An essential part of this project is the creation of a new kind of state, far more democratic than liberal, capitalist democracy.

Liberal democracy is a political system which makes democracy synonymous with the limited choices involved in the **election** of 'teams' of leaders who then preside over a bureaucratic and military apparatus which is itself undemocratic. This is a form of democracy in which popular involvement and participation in political decision-making are left to indirect extra-parliamentary 'pressures', operating under the drastic constraints that we have already noted. Also, popular participation in the economic decision-making of corporations is virtually non-existent, save in the narrow realm of collective bargaining. What lends the system its democratic legitimacy is the highly attenuated popular involvement expressed via political parties, regular elections and freedom of expression.

For all their limitations, these mechanisms are not to be undervalued: for they make possible pressure and struggle and some degree of participation. But important though it is to acknowledge this, and to defend the rights which give life to these mechanisms, the fact remains that the actual decision-making process is exceedingly undemocratic, and is exercised by a combination of state power and corporate power which makes a mockery of the notion of popular sovereignty, and of democracy itself. The people themselves do not decide policies, or have much 'input' in the determination and shape of the policies which are adopted. Indeed, party **organisa-**

tion has it as one of its main concerns to ensure that party leaders are able to resist 'grassroots' pressure. In the case of social democratic parties, this has always meant the ability of party leaders to resist pressure *from the Left*.

For all its democratic pretensions, capitalist democracy vigorously *resists* the extension of popular participation, for the well-based but usually unspoken reason that such participation might force upon governments policies and measures which they and corporate power would find unacceptable. This fear, let it be said again, is not confined to conservative forces: it has always been felt by social democratic leaders as well.

Also, and to extend a point 'made earlier, it is essential to note how quickly democratic rights come under threat in conditions of crisis and retrenchment, and how persistent and stubborn is the attempt in these conditions to restrict even further the substance and scope of democratic participation. This bears most heavily on trade union and political activists on the Left; but it is the whole of society which is pervaded by the authoritarian currents which always lurk in the shadow of capitalist democracy.

The **Keynesian/welfare** state of the post-war decades reproduced the basic division between rulers and ruled, and did very little to tackle the undemocratic nature of capitalist democracy. Nor was it ever to be expected that it would or could. This is one of the essential tasks on the socialist agenda: the working out of the meaning and mechanisms of socialist democracy.

An anti-statist bias has to inform the socialist project. One of the gravest charges against capitalism is that it cannot, by its very nature, help having a profoundly statist incline, notwithstanding all the demagogic rhetoric deployed by conservative forces to suggest the reverse. Socialism, on the contrary, means the greatest possible development of civic and social power.

At the same time, socialists should not underestimate the indispensable tasks which a state will need to perform, not only in the transition to socialism, but in a socialist society itself. For there are functions of co-ordination, planning and adjudication to be performed; and this requires some kind of central authority. This central authority must be elected and accountable, and socialists will need to pay a lot more attention to the forms of representative decision-making inside the state. We have in mind that the elective principle should, to the greatest possible extent be the basis for the administration of state functions; and that elected bodies inside the state should be closely involved in policy-making at every level. The purpose, obviously, is to overcome the bureaucratic and unrepresentative character of policy-making which is such a prominent feature of capitalist democracy.

Socialist democracy, however, requires even more than a representative,

democratic and accountable state: it also requires, as a *sine qua non* of its reality, that there should exist in society itself a multiplicity of associations, autonomous of the state—parties, unions, associations, lobbies, organisations of every sort, expressing the many identities, interests, grievances and concerns which give civic life its substance and texture. In this way, the state and civil society would complement and check each other, and thus replicate in a truly democratic fashion the relationship which now exists in capitalist societies between corporate power and state power. It is in this anti-bureaucratic and anti-authoritarian perspective that we inscribe the socialisation of the main means of economic activity.

We do not pretend that any of this is easy. On the contrary, we know full well, given all the stresses and conflicts which are an inevitable part of the process, how difficult the question of the proper relationship between the state and society is bound to be in the building of socialism. But we unequivocally reject the notion, which has come to be held by many people on the Left, that the problems this raises are virtually insoluble in socialist terms.

III. *The Struggle for Socialist Advance*

How then is the socialist project to be advanced and eventually realised? Here too, we do not claim to have any **ready-made** answers. Nor, it should be said, has anybody else. But there are some elements of an answer which it is possible to set out.

For one thing, it needs to be emphasised that the question cannot be treated in the abstract, and that an answer to it must take into account the specific political and other conditions in the country for which the question is being asked. For another, it is essential that the socialist case should insistently be made, and that all the struggles and issues in which the Left is involved should be linked to that case.

This latter point is of obvious application to the relation of socialists to social democratic parties. These parties, or at least their leaders, offer at best a return to the days of the **Keynesian/welfare** state, a reflationary fiscal policy and corporatist-style relations with the trade unions. In effect, they boast of a 'new realism' which promises an even more thorough accommodation with capitalism than before. A cloudy rhetoric mingles some of the catch-phrases of the new conservatism with the theme of 'social compassion'. Thus, Neil Kinnock offers 'efficiency, individual liberty, wealth creation, patriotism' as the guiding tenets of the Labour Party, and then adds 'justice, compassion, and equality' for good measure. This is supposed to 'reassert democratic socialist values as an effective body of values for modern needs rather than a ghost from the past' (*The Future of Socialism*, Fabian Tract no. 509, 1985). But this verbiage, and the policy proposals which accompany it, leaves altogether

untouched something which is not ghostly at all, namely the existing structures of power, property and privilege of 'late capitalism', and the structures of domination which it is the purpose of socialism to dissolve.

This is why an essential task for socialists is to conduct a sustained, principled and informed critique of social democratic leaders, the result of whose endeavours is not to advance socialist transformation but to retard it. Making this critique presents many problems in the light of diverse electoral and political considerations; and there is always the danger that such a critique will turn into ineffective vituperation. Nevertheless, the socialist case has to be affirmed and developed if it is not to be lost in a fog of obfuscating rhetoric.

The difficulty of the task is underlined by the fact that socialists in Britain have to support the return of a Labour Government; and American socialists, presented with no alternative in many states, may even have to vote for Democratic candidates. In the constricted choice offered at the present time, it is clearly of great importance that the most reactionary bourgeois politicians should be driven from office. But socialists have long been aware that elections alone do not determine public policy. The outcome of elections has certain effects, and that is a virtue of capitalist democracy. But the reforms that may flow from electoral outcomes are limited and vulnerable. This is why the purpose of political action for socialists must not only be the achievement of immediate defensive victories, but the widening of the basis of support for reforms which open the way for more fundamental transformations.

We are under no illusion that the institutions of capitalist democracy provide the mechanisms of a smooth achievement of such reforms. Even if a government pledged to radical changes of policy at home and abroad were to be brought to office on the basis of a substantial electoral and parliamentary majority, we have no doubt that it would meet fierce resistance from conservative forces, international as well as national. But this is not the issue before us today in the countries of advanced capitalism. On any realistic assessment, the coming to office of such a government is not an immediate prospect, to say the least, and this makes speculation on the likely 'scenario' when such a government **does** gain office not very relevant to the immediate tasks facing socialists in these countries. Speculation on the degree of opposition even to the re-establishment of something like the **Keynesian/welfare** state might be more in order.

In this connection, we note that there are many people on the Left who believe that the goal of the Left today should be to establish a Swedish or Austrian-style social democracy in countries like Britain or the United States. Even if this were the appropriate goal for socialists to pursue, it is our view that this fails to address the structural factors which prevented the emplacement of a hegemonic social democracy in the past. It was not that the leadership of the British Labour Party did not look to

and admire Sweden; this was always the 'beacon' of even right wing social democrats. But the structural position of British capital in the world economy, the leading role of financial capital, the international function of the currency, all underwrote capital's opposition to anything more than the tepid Keynesianism which the British Treasury practised in the post-war decades. The same factors account for capital's successful opposition to effective trade union involvement in economic decision-making and the extensive 'decommodification' of services of the kind seen in Sweden and Austria. What is true of Britain in these respects is a *fortiori* true of the United States.

It was precisely such factors which rendered the advances that *were* made so vulnerable to the attacks of the 'new conservatism'. In this view, those people on the Left who do want Swedish or Austrian-style social democracy, but who reject a confrontation with capital as too 'extreme', are simply refusing to face reality. In the conditions of 'late capitalism' in these countries, radical reform inescapably entails such a confrontation.

This means that socialists have to take a long-term view. Two closely related issues are involved. How do we go about convincing more and more people that there are socialist solutions to the shortcomings and derelictions of capitalism? And what are the agencies which will enable socialists to contribute collectively to the advancement of specific struggles, to the spread of socialist ideas, and ultimately to the struggle for power? To link these two questions is to say, quite plainly, that we do not believe that the main political agencies which have dominated left-wing politics in western capitalist countries in the twentieth century are, for different reasons, adequate to the massive task of making socialism the dominant issue on the political agenda. Social democracy, for all practical purposes, has long given up any such project. When forces within social democratic parties have arisen—and they repeatedly have—to push their leaders to the left, these forces have sooner or later been defeated, among other reasons because leaders under challenge could always claim that the Left was not only unreasonable, unrealistic, etc., but also that its challenge must be fatally damaging to the electoral chances of the party, given the spectacle presented to the electorate by a divided and squabbling party. Electoral considerations, in this respect as in many others, are inevitably of great help to party leaders, since these considerations push followers to want a 'unity' which is of great advantage to those who are in control of the party. Social democratic parties will long remain major actors on the political scene of capitalist democratic regimes; and as we have already noted, they are always to be supported against conservative parties. The important point, however, is that on all the evidence that has accumulated over many decades and in many countries, these parties cannot be expected to address seriously and effectively the task of education, mobilisation and struggle which any party truly committed to socialist transformation

must undertake.

Communist parties suffer from different shortcomings. Some of these parties are burdened by the severe organisational and ideological problems that stem from their continued attachment to a repressive and bureaucratic interpretation of 'democratic centralism'. Others seek new paths, but do so hesitantly and uncertainly, and in ways marked by a high degree of opportunism and ambiguity of purpose, in which social democratic propensities mingle uneasily with remnants of revolutionary commitment.

This means that the two organisations which have dominated labour movements in the twentieth century—social democratic and Communist parties—are both inadequate and unreliable instruments for the realisation of socialist purposes. The recognition of their shortcomings led in past years to the coming into being of various Trotskyist and, later, Maoist groupings. However, they were captivated by the belief that strategies of revolution applied in Russia (or China) were necessarily appropriate to other times and other places. This, notwithstanding their dedication and militancy, relegated them to a marginal place in political life.

There are many people on the Left today who strongly feel the need of a party free of the various shortcomings which have burdened the socialist movement in the past. At present, the will to embark on such an undertaking is stymied by the thought of past failures and disappointments, and by the sense that what matters above all is to support the existing parties which, however inadequate they may be, offer a chance to get rid of reactionary governments. But it is perfectly possible to give such support and yet to envisage the coming into being of new socialist formations that would seek to fulfil the many tasks that now go largely by default.

There is, however, a different sort of inhibition which has in recent years prevented many socialists from thinking seriously about socialist alternatives, in this and in other realms, and to which we have already made reference. This is the loss of confidence and even belief that the socialist project is more than a utopian vision; and with this goes a great deal of self-flagellation and breast-beating about the sins of omission and commission with which the Left charges the Left. Self-criticism is of course very necessary; but much that goes on in this vein is not so much self-criticism as self-indulgent political masochism, accompanied by further retreat from socialist purposes and policies.

All this will pass; and the crying need for new agencies of socialist transformation will sooner or later come to be seriously addressed.

In large measure, it is the deficiencies of social democratic and Communist parties which have produced the 'new social movements' of the last two decades—movements whose focus is sexual and race oppression, ecology and peace. These movements have undoubtedly enlarged and enriched the meaning of socialism. All such movements are an essential

part of the coalition of forces on which a socialist movement must depend.

However, no such 'new social movement' can obviate the need for a socialist party (or parties). Nor can they replace organised labour as the main force on which a socialist movement must rely. Here, and in the actual or potential support of the working class in general, is where the main strength of such a movement has to be found. The 'working class' in advanced capitalist countries includes some three quarters of their population—blue collar, white collar, service and distributive workers, men and women, black and white, skilled and unskilled. The task of a socialist party is to afford a degree of coherence to a class which is inevitably fragmented and divided, and to do so without any pretension of achieving a necessarily artificial and imposed 'monolithic' unity.

In the coming years, two tasks are in this respect critical. The first is to persuade those workers who have moved electorally to the Right that the new conservatism is their enemy. The second task is to persuade those many members of the 'old' and the 'new' working class who have never supported the Left that their interests and aspirations are bound up with the struggle against capitalism.

This is the necessary perspective for anyone committed to the task of socialist transformation. Any other perspective exposes those who harbour it to disillusion, despair and retreat. But long-term though the perspective is, it is not 'millennial': for the socialist project is solidly grounded in the *growing* awareness of vast numbers of men and women that the system cannot deliver on the promises which its apologists so generously dispense. The central problem for socialists is that this awareness is not accompanied by the conviction that there exists a socialist alternative to capitalism. It is this which must be overcome; and it can only be overcome if the socialist case is articulated and developed in a mode of thought and speech which is rigorous, fresh and accessible.

There is one question which was raised earlier and which is not 'long term'. This is the question of the United States. For no discussion of socialist prospects, or for that matter of serious reform, can be realistic if it does not face squarely the challenge posed to such prospects by American imperialism. The issues involved are discussed at length in a number of essays in this volume. But we want to reiterate that socialists have to face the fact that any radical challenge to capital in any of the major capitalist states of the Western world will inevitably involve a confrontation with the United States. Similarly, any attempt to break with the American alliance must entail a confrontation with dominant classes and their allies.

Every since 1945, socialists in social democratic parties have faced—or rather, it must be said, have for the most part refused to face—a great paradox. The paradox consists in the fact that, whereas they themselves were committed to socialist advance, their parties were also the dedicated

supporters, whether in government or in opposition, of an alliance whose senior member was fully and effectively engaged in a global crusade designed to prevent both revolution and radical reform. This crusade has been conducted in the name of the defence of the 'free world' against Soviet aggression and expansionism. On the evidence, and notwithstanding the sharp criticism that has to be addressed to many Soviet policies and actions at home and abroad, the notion of a 'Soviet threat' has been no more than a convenient excuse and cover for the struggle of the forces of the old order, under the leadership of the United States, against all the forces of renewal, reform and revolution. This is why opposition to American interventionism, and struggle for liberation from the American alliance, is a matter of supreme and immediate importance for the Left.

We are well aware that nothing which has been said here provides a blueprint for the solution of the many practical problems that socialists have to resolve if they are to make headway with the socialist project. Our justification, if one is needed, is that at this point of the struggle for socialism in the countries of advanced capitalism, there is need for more than a concentration on the nuts and bolts of the enterprise. At least as important, and in some ways more important, is a clear perception of the structure which the nuts and bolts are intended to keep in place. In other words, what is also needed and badly needed, is a reaffirmation of the principles and values which make up the socialist project, and an insistence that there are radical, rational and feasible alternatives to the ways of life dictated by a system whose own needs are ever more sharply in conflict with human needs.