

## SOCIALISM FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

### Synthetic Framework for Reflection

François Houtart

#### Introduction

**Socialism is a project before being a concept.** It is thus necessary to examine its content before using the word. As a matter of fact, what is socialism today? Is it Stalinism, Maoism, social democracy, or a third way? **This significant and generalised ambiguity demands a new frame of reference.**

*There is however a tremendous crisis on account of the social and ecological destruction created by the present-day economic model.* The world hegemony of capital in its neo-liberal form has not simply been built on new material bases (information and communication technologies) but has even allowed the generalisation of the subordination of labour to capital (*subsumption* according to Karl Marx). It is not only a real subordination within the production process through wages and salaries, but also a formal one through financial means (prices of raw materials and agricultural products, foreign debts, fiscal havens, internal fiscal system encouraging individual wealth, etc.) as well as juridical means (norms imposed by international organisations like the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO).

*This formal subordination is affecting all human groups* because of the ecological destruction and the global submission to the law of value. Today, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples are affected in their survival possibilities by the exploitation of forests and the destruction of biodiversity. Women are the first victims of the privatisation of health services, water, and electricity. And small peasants are victims of transnational agrobusiness enterprises. *In fact, human life itself is in danger. Cultural and social consequences are*

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François Houtart is a well-known sociologist, author and activist. **Address:** Centre Tricontinental, Avenue Sainte Gertrude, 5, B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve – Belgium; **Email:** <cetri@cetri.be>.

*very serious*, because this process increases the contradictions within all social relations, not only through growing economic and social disparities, but also through increasing gender, race and caste conflicts.

For these reasons, **the elaboration of a new socialist project must begin with a clear and radical delegitimisation of capitalism**, in its logic and in its concrete aspects in each society. The awareness that it is not possible to humanise capitalism constitutes a necessary prerequisite. To formulate a concrete socialist project, it is useful to reflect on three levels: (1) our utopia as well as (2) the means and (3) the strategies. In this article, *we will therefore consider at these three levels the ecological, economic, political and cultural aspects of human reality, and propose in a synthetic way a series of hypotheses as a base for discussion.*

#### 1. The Objectives of the Utopia

**What type of society do we want to build?** This question may appear very vague, involving a series of abstract ideas, a dream. But would we still be human beings without dreaming? We want to live in a human society of cooperation and peace, which implies that we refuse to live in a world of pure competition and aggression. *This already introduces a basic contradiction with the neo-liberal society.* In order to express more concretely what we may call our utopia, let us spell out **four objectives or principles** in the ecological, economic, political and cultural fields.

##### 1) Priority to the Use of Renewable Natural Resources

There exists a fundamental symbiosis between human beings and nature. Nature is the source of life (*pachamama*, mother-earth, as said by indigenous peoples in South America; and in accordance with the immemorial traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism). *One cannot abuse or destroy nature without harming human life.* Nature should not be exploited in function of a purely instrumental rationality, a characteristic of the type of modernity brought about economically and culturally by capitalism and which results in its progressive destruction. As writes Leonardo Boff, the Brazilian liberation theologian, the “cry of the earth” is manifested today by desertification, destruction of the climate, avian flu, HIV/AIDS, etc.

*The principle of giving priority to the use of renewable resources means the rejection of production methods and activities that are destructive of the ecological milieu.* The use of resources should be submitted to a collective management to insure its rationality. Since the ecology is only a part of reality, this principle has to be combined with other ones.

## 2) Predominance of Use Value on Exchange Value

This distinction of Karl Marx is useful to visualise the future. **Use value** is what contributes to the quality of life in all its dimensions. **Exchange value** is the market, *which should have a subordinated function to the use value.* However, within the capitalist logic, the market is dominating not only the economic activities, but also the overall organisation of human life.

For capitalism there is no economic value if labour, goods and services are not transformed into commodities. It is what can be called the imposition of *the law of value*, which according to the economist and philosopher Franz Hinkelammert means the end of the *subject*. Human beings are now submitted to this law which has invaded the social reality, subordinating the whole of mankind to the logic of capitalism. For this reason, Karl Polanyi, the American economist and historian of capitalism, concludes to **the necessity of reinserting the economy into society.**

## 3) Democratic Participation in All Sectors of Collective Life

Democratic participation, or the decision-making 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 the sectors of collective life, from the local to the global level.*

## 4) Interculturality

All cultures are participating in the cultural and spiritual life of mankind. None should be eliminated or marginalised. This includes all the cultural expressions, law, science, religions and spiritualities. *Relevant transformations originate in exchanges, and mutual*

*enrichments are all welcome, because cultures are not static.* In India, people would say that cultural pluralism is fruitful!

**The socialism of the future will therefore pursue and integrate these four objectives:** *the respect of nature and the rational use of renewable resources, the subordination of the economy to the overall meaning and quality of life, the democratic participation of people in all sectors of collective life, and the promotion of cultural pluralism.* **It will thus be ecologically sustainable, economically people-centred, politically democratic, and inter-cultural and dynamic.** On this basis, let us now consider the question of means.

## 2. The Means

It is not enough to proclaim principles to build a truly socialist society. We must use efficient means to bring the principles into reality.

### 1) Relation to Nature

To give priority to the use of renewable resources, **three main means can be mentioned.** The first one is *the public appropriation of natural resources essential for life*, like water, air and seeds. Such resources constitute the 'patrimony of mankind' and must be above the law of value, as defined by the capitalist economic system. They should be protected from destruction and overuse.

*The renovation of peasant agriculture is another necessary means.* This involves the struggle against the concentration of land and agricultural production, and its commercialisation, in the hands of transnational companies. This is indeed the source of over-exploitation and destruction, without speaking of social conflicts. The renovation also demands the promotion of organic agriculture.

The third means is the renovation of the soil, water, atmosphere and climate.

### 2) Predominance of Use Value on Exchange Value

There are numerous means to ensure this principle. We will only enumerate some of them.

\* *To promote a production oriented towards the majority of the population, with the use of public instruments.* This is in opposition

to the present model of development favouring the spectacular development of only 20% of the people. For the capitalist logic develops the purchasing power of the rich minority to absorb the production of sophisticated goods and contribute to capital accumulation.

\* *To introduce qualitative elements in the economic calculations*, like well-being, quality of life, healthy environment, food security, and so on. Decisions would be quite different if such elements were taken into account in the cost estimates of production and exchange.

\* *To limit the influence of financial capital*, by the taxation of its international movement (the Tobin tax), the suppression of fiscal havens and bank secrecy, and the abolition of the external debt of the Southern nations.

\* *To abolish patents in their present-day form* and to adopt the royalty system to avoid the monopoly of the transnational enterprises.

\* *To revalorise enterprises as places of common labour with a social function and not as a source of profit for shareholders.*

\* *To recognise and revalorise jobs not recognised as work* (women at home) *or devalued* (social services, health services) *and to create jobs in qualitative sectors* (betterment of the quality of life, personal services, etc.)

\* *To organise a generalised system of social welfare under public supervision.*

\* *To revalorise public services as services to the community and not as 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 sectors of collective activity, including the economic sector. Participative democracy should be promoted as a means to increase the popular control in all sectors at all levels.

### 4) The Principle of Interculturality

There is also a variety of means in this area. Let us mention the main ones.

\* *To affirm and concretise the right of peoples against the right of business*, which requires a fundamental change in the philosophy of international financial and commercial organisations.

\* *To protect cultures through adequate means in the various dimensions of their expressions.*

\* *To socialise the results of science*, without any industrial or other monopoly.

\* *To affirm the secular character of the state*, as a base for philosophical and spiritual dialogue.

### 3. Strategies

There are various types of strategies to apply the means capable of concretising our principles.

1. *To delegitimise capitalism as an expression of dehumanising modernity*, by using all possible spaces to develop critical thinking about the economy, ecology, politics and culture. In this field, 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 resistance.*

3. *To renew the political field of the left* with the collaboration of various political organisations, for it is no more possible to think of a unique party having the whole truth.

4. *To promote the birth of a new historical subject*, not constituted only 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.

**If this is what we call socialism, then it is a prophetic and constructive project**, able to contradict the barbarism of capitalism and to translate both the defense of mankind and the love of the neighbour in a post-capitalist reality.