

## REVITALIZATION OF SOCIALISM OR RESTORATION OF CAPITALISM?

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### The Myth of Convergence

The ideology of reconciliation and the combination of communist and traditional, so-called capitalist, forms of production and society have proved virtually bankrupt. It is obvious without any experiment that convergence (merging what we called "socialism" and what was the stuff of our lives with the characteristic features of the developed Western countries) is impossible in principle. The idea of converging the two systems was a reflection less of the needs of the development of human civilization than of the despair of common sense, as the peoples of Russia and Eastern Europe lost all hope that they would be able to end totalitarianism by themselves. Hence, we arrive at the pessimistic prognosis about the long-term historical interaction of Western democracies and left-wing totalitarian régimes. We also find the concessions of Western theoretical thinking, the tendency to mythologize our achievements in planning and centralizing industry, and the forgetting of the basic truth that only efficient production can be efficiently regulated. We forget that Soviet centralism, based on fear, was essentially impossible to reproduce in different political and cultural circumstances. Fire and ice cannot be put together. The fire will melt the ice, and the water from the melting ice will put out the fire. And there will be neither fire nor ice.

Even before perestroika, before our attempts during the past five years to revive Soviet industrial and social structures with the help of borrowed economic mechanisms that we spied on the other side of the fence, we could have predicted the groundlessness of these hopes to reconcile the irreconcilable.

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As early as 1978, the well-known Polish economist Stefan Kurowski wrote that hopes to reform Soviet-type economies were in vain, that it was impossible to make the transition to efficiency without completely rejecting the ideological basis of planned economies, the labor theory of value, the ideal of directly socialized labor, and the principle of the primacy of politics over economics. At the time, not only in the USSR but also in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, a considerable part of the progressive, democratic intelligentsia believed in the possibility of a “third way”—the creation of a “true,” “pure” socialism opposed simultaneously to so-called Stalinist, barracks-style socialism and to modern capitalism with all of its ills. It is no accident that many Polish party commentators who joined Solidarity in 1980 worked on a conception of “Polish homegrown socialism” and advocated purifying socialism of various distortions. Later, in the mid-1980s, reformers in the leadership of the Socialist Workers’ Party of Hungary were similarly motivated. On the whole, one may say that in the 1970s and even in the 1980s, the intellectual attitudes of Soviet and East European countries were motivated by the ideals of the Prague Spring of 1968. The dream of “socialism with a human face,” which took hold in the mind of the Eastern European intelligentsia, not only stimulated democratic initiatives but at the same time gave them an ideological legitimacy. As late as December 1989, during the collapse of the political structures of East Germany, the overwhelming majority of that country’s intellectuals continued to believe that a “pure” Marxist socialism was possible and that the people of East Germany would be able to accomplish what “the Russians or Poles, who never understood Marx properly, could not do.” I believe that the idea of convergence, of “combining the advantages of true socialism and a market economy,” was most fully and consistently realized—only on paper, of course—by the authors of the well-known “Socialist Project” prepared in late 1989 by philosophers and economists of the Humboldt University in Berlin.

As we survey the results of more than five years of our efforts to revive the socialism built in the USSR during the 1930s, it becomes clear that we all had to go through this syndrome of the third way. There were many reasons. First, the mentality of people who had lived their entire lives in totalitarian societies, or rather who had led their existence in conditions they consider unnatural, took its toll. It is hard—very hard—to admit that your life and your work are being senselessly wasted and that you are living in an unnatural, false society, headed with your country for the dead end of history. Therefore, the hope that real socialism—a real socialist economy would be, in the end, successfully revitalized and made more rational—was

a comfort to the soul and enabled people to bear the hardships of everyday life. No less importantly, many people found it difficult to reject the socialist legitimacy of their state with its Marxist ideology. Having made such a step in the conditions of the Communist party's monopoly on power, the reformer ceased to be a reformer and became a traitor to the ideals of socialism with all the ensuing consequences. Hence, it is no accident that not one of the reformers of Eastern Europe spoke of the obvious: the need to restore the market and the civil society, and the need to save the life still left after socialist transformation. However, everyone spoke in unison of the need for economic or radical reform; these advocates were unaware that, in doing so, they were paying tribute to utopia and were giving a meaning to the initial and most tragic stage of socialist construction.

### Reform from the Top

It was even more difficult to avoid this transitional ideology in our country, burdened by our communist birthright in a country that had sacrificed tens of millions of lives in the name of the chimera of the Communist Eden. What makes perestroika different from the democratic revolutions of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany is the fact that it began from the top, at the initiative of the ruling Communist party. In Poland everything was started by the opposition—Walesa, Kuron, Michnik; here everything was started by the *apparatchiks*—Gorbachev and Yakovlev. The latter not only generated perestroika but created their own opposition. In Poland or Czechoslovakia, the people capable of heading a reformist movement were outside the party; from the very beginning, their political activity was directed at dismantling the party and state structures. Therefore, from the beginning, the struggle in these countries was against the communist legitimacy of the state, against communism and socialism. Here everything was different.

Since perestroika began inside the party, it could be declared only as an initiative directed at strengthening the position of socialism and of the party, as a campaign for a more adequate understanding of Marxism-Leninism. Perestroika began within the framework of the communist legitimacy of our state and, in its conception, was intended to strengthen the socialist and communist nature of our society. Here, again, characteristics peculiar to Russia were in evidence. Typically in our country, with the exception of the 1917 revolution, all revolutions are launched from above and are intended by their initiators as a means to fortify the existing system. This

applies to the revolutions of Peter the Great and Alexander II. This path of reform from the top has both advantages and disadvantages.

On the one hand, reforms from above ensure the preservation of the old consensus and an unbroken thread of political development. Stability can be preserved during reforms, and the disintegration of society can be avoided. Reforms from the top also allow the democratically oriented segment of the party and government apparatus to be involved in the changes. We should not forget that here, unlike in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, the best-qualified and most-authoritative segment of the intelligentsia was integrated into the party and had close links to it.

At the same time, however, the policy of reform within the framework of the old communist legitimacy of our state, from the very beginning, tied the hands of reformers and shackled the planned democratic changes in society. Revolution from the top and within the framework of communist legitimacy was a barrier to serious and profound analysis of the sources of our mistakes, our crises, and our deepening stagnation. It was a barrier to the full truth about our socialist choice and its consequences.

### Failure of Half-Measures

From the start we were doomed to half-measures, doomed to fail. We saw and understood that state ownership of industry was inefficient, that it shackled the development of productive forces. But since we were still communists and still insisted that the socialist choice was correct, we were forced to defend the idea of nationalization, of socialized means of production. Thus, while issues of denationalization, privatization, and transition to a market economy were being raised in Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Hungary, we had to restrict ourselves to cost accounting at state-owned enterprises. We had to combine the market with the government monopoly on industrial organization. This inconclusiveness and inconsistency had an especially strong effect on our decisions of 1987, which were the basis of the reforms that were carried out.

We were saying that the peasant would become a farmer only when he became an owner—and that was true. But we still insisted on the correctness of the socialist choice. We did not dare give land to the peasants or make them owners of the land they cultivated. Instead of denationalizing the land, we went no further than leaseholding within the framework of the existing collective farm and state farm system of labor organization.

We demanded a return to civilization, to the primacy of universal human values; it was on this basis that we attacked the crimes of Stalin. But we defended the Marxist teaching about revolutions and about the efficacy of revolutionary violence in Russia; we justified the Red terror and the suffering it inflicted. Because of all this, our ideology was rife with blatant contradictions.

As early as 1986 we spoke of the need for the rule of law. But we insisted the Soviet Constitution retain its article on the leading role of the Communist party in our society. We criticized even the possibility of adopting a multiparty system.

As it turned out, the very logic of the development of life has nothing in common with the laws for preserving the former communist legitimacy. Whatever can be invented by a person who is trying by all means to stay on the socialist platform cannot be carried out in real life. Leaseholding is fine in theory, when one needs a legal way to get away from Marxism and from the idea of socialized agricultural labor. Compared to the old Marxist agrarian program, the idea of leaseholding looks quite revolutionary. But in real life, to the peasants themselves, it looks like yet another ploy of the régime that has always cheated them. There is, after all, no guarantee that the régime will keep its word and will not confiscate the land they are leasing. Soviet peasantry as a whole has not accepted leaseholding; peasants are willing to farm independently only if the land is their own. It is equally impossible to combine in one's heart a moral condemnation of Stalinist terror with love of the Red terror of the civil war.

### Impossibility of Revitalizing Socialism

It took us five wasted years of perestroika to understand that, essentially, the revitalization of Stalinist socialism is impossible; there is no third way between modern civilization and socialism as it is. The market cannot be combined with a government monopoly on the organization of labor or with public ownership of the means of production. A return to the market is impossible without the restoration of various forms of private and collective enterprise, without broad-based privatization. It is impossible to have the rule of law without a multiparty system, without renouncing the communist monopoly on power. It is impossible to adopt moral values and to earn the right to return to civilization, to the European home, without rejecting the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the forcible transformation of society.

In other words, owing to our five years of experience of trying to reform real socialism and to the experience of political economic reforms during the 1970s and 1980s in Eastern Europe, we realize the inevitability of facing the need to restore everything we had rejected during socialist transformation; we must restore the structures and institutions of civil society. Within the framework of the old socialist orientation, none of the tasks we are facing can be solved. We also have a question of creating incentives for efficient and quality work, plus a question of awakening a sense of citizenship and dignity in people. What we are witnessing is not the organic revitalization of socialism but the withering away of forcibly imposed economic and political structures. During 70 years of socialist experimentation in Russia, not one major problem that the country was facing in 1917 has been solved. The general culture of labor has not improved. In productivity of labor, not only have we failed to catch up with Western Europe but we are lagging even further behind. We are also further behind in human rights and freedoms. The nationality question remains unsolved.

### Restoring Civil Society

Ours is, therefore, a question of a belated—at least by 60 years—restoration of the traditional structures of political and economic life. This task could have easily been solved in the 1920s or early 1930s, when all the necessary conditions were there—both the material prerequisites and the agents of restoration. Today, however, the task is extremely complicated. In any event, we must call things by their proper names and raise the issue of restoring severed economic and political connections. All we have to restore is what we rejected in 1917, the understanding that without the market, we are not going to build a normal, healthy economy. We understand that we have taken the wrong way and must now restore the Third Estate. Nor can we have, in our circumstances, the traditional agents of restoration. The paradox of history is that the Bolshevik party systematically and consistently eliminated over decades the organic structures of industry and social life and never allowed the remnants of a civil society to emerge in Russia, but now the Bolshevik party is forced to assume responsibility for restoring a world it once fought. Will it be capable of solving this task? Will it be able to restore the ground on which, essentially, there will be no room left for its rule?

We have yet to find a convincing answer to this key question. Nor has the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union answered it. The party reformers could not, after all, neutralize the

dogmatists' attempt at a rollback. It is beginning to look as if the Soviet Communist party itself is no longer capable of fully carrying out the reforms it started.

Also noteworthy are natural differences between the various segments of society and the spheres of social life in preparedness for restoring the traditional institutions and mechanisms of civil society. We must recognize the fact that some social institutions simply cannot be restored in this country. We cannot restore the traditional type of Russian craftsman or merchant. Many, many things have been irretrievably lost.

Many, many people in our country today are beginning to understand that it would have been better if the October Revolution had been avoided; that the Bolsheviks interrupted Russia's natural development; and that we need to return to a normal life, to private property, and to entrepreneurship. People are beginning to understand that not everything was bad in old Russia. However, things that can be imagined are sometimes impossible to carry out in real life. Mentally, we can go back in time. But in real life, it is infinitely more complicated. It has been relatively easy for us to restore the continuity of time in culture and in historical memory; we can easily return to the philosophical and literary values we rejected in 1917. It has been relatively easy for us to restore the trampled rights of Christianity and Islam. There is no doubt that in another year or two, thousands of churches will rise from the rubble.

Even the restoration of the multiparty system is probably possible in this country. Of course, until normal social structures are formed from social dust and until the specific interests of different classes and social groups are defined, we will be dealing, essentially, with a surrogate multiparty system. It was no accident that in Poland a new one-party monopoly has replaced the old one-party monopoly; all other political parties except Solidarity are incapable of exercising a tangible political influence.

It is evident that changes in consciousness and in the expectations of people—particularly of that portion of society that is actively involved in perestroika—are occurring much faster than changes in real life.

Even in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, where communism has suffered a complete political and ideological defeat, people must live with the same old economic realities; they must reconcile themselves to the old state socialism that has proved impossible to discard.

The experience of the latest economic reforms in Poland is especially characteristic in this regard. The population itself does not have the means for the privatization of state-owned means of produc-

tion. At the same time, Western businesspersons have no interest in acquiring enterprises with obsolete, ecologically unsound industrial equipment. Certainly, no one is showing much interest in the structurally backward Polish industry. The Balcerowicz plan does nothing to stimulate the economic recovery of large industrial enterprises that remain in a monopolistic position. That is why the so-called post-communist countries of Eastern Europe are—in essence, in their economic structures, and in the mentality of the vast majority of the working class—still communist.

There is no need to prove that this gap between the speed of the defeat of communism and communist ideology in the people's minds and the speed of their defeat in everyday economic life may very soon become a source of psychological tension. Such a belated restoration of civil society is an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of humankind. Therefore, we should be ready to solve social problems that no one ever had to solve before.

### The Paradigm of Restoration

Today, everyone is talking about the need to reject the communist Marxist legitimacy of our society. But can we, after 70 years of communist existence, return to the traditional and historical legitimacy of our state? No signs of such a transition can be anticipated so far.

All of this suggests the need for a global, broad, historical look at the processes occurring today in post-communist countries. It seems to me that the transition from the paradigm of reform to that of restoration can allow us to better understand what is happening to us and what tasks lie ahead.