


EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

THERE IS A REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE (TIARA)

Nothing better illustrates the power of ideological hegemony than the persistence of Maggie Thatcher’s “There Is No Alternative” (TINA). First, create conceptual filters that systematically eradicate any sense of class, property, power, privilege, structure — in a word, social relations — from that ultimate ideal construct, the “private sector,” wherein reside those reified atoms, “individuals.” Political alternatives are then compressed along the one-dimensional continuum, “government vs. private.” It is hardly surprising that mainstream thinking in capitalist countries is confined to this continuum, with libertarians (followers of von Mises, Hayek, Ayn Rand) at one end, and eclectic liberals (Keynesians, *et al.*) at the other. It is, however — frankly — a bit depressing to discover that many *socialists* around the world are also trapped there.

Current case in point: the flap around the recent presumed comment by Fidel Castro to a reporter for the *Atlantic*, Jeffrey Goldberg, to the effect that “the Cuban model doesn’t even work for us anymore.”¹ Leave to one side for now the dishonesty and stupidity of U. S. mainstream reporters, who don’t want to know the truth and wouldn’t recognize it if they saw it. Actually, some more-or-less balanced reports appeared in the British *Guardian* and *Financial Times*, concerning Castro’s remarks as conveyed by Goldberg, and also about announcements of major changes in the Cuban economy. But even left sources sympathetic to Cuban socialism, and Cuban authorities themselves, essentially see the problem as one of *diluting* socialism (seen as state-sector provisioning of job and income security) with just the *right dose* of private-sector efficiency (note the unquestioned pairing of “private sector” with “efficiency”). This is also the heart of Chinese “market socialism with Chinese characteristics”: finding an optimal balance between the advantages

¹ Note: this is being written in October 2010, and you are probably reading it six months later, as always given the S&S timeline. My guess is that the core issues under discussion will not have lost their currency.

of socialism and the advantages of “the market.” In this perspective, “reform” of Cuban socialism can only mean one thing: compromise with — in some sense, moving closer to — something that looks at least superficially like “capitalism” (although a central aspect of this one-dimensional straitjacket is the persistent confusion of markets as such with capitalism).

Now Cuba has suffered for 60 years from the unrelenting hostility of U. S. imperialist blockade, sabotage, terrorism, arm-twisting, threats, assassination attempts, and (on one occasion) outright invasion. It began with a relatively underdeveloped (read: over-exploited) economy. One possible take on the current situation, exacerbated by the continuing world economic crisis, is that the necessary foundations for socialist construction are still far from present, and that this dictates a more-or-less protracted period of temporary retreat and stasis — Lenin’s New Economic Policy, over a longer time frame than we have often imagined. Nevertheless, I want to argue that, with complete and appropriate attention to limitations imposed by historical circumstances, it is still possible to conceive of a *path of socialist development* for a country like Cuba. If this is so, then that development — however beset with necessary compromises and delays — is not *toward* spontaneous markets and privatization, but rather *away from* them.

I will illustrate my conception of this socialist path by means of a Figure (Figure 1). This exercise should be taken in the spirit intended: a suggestion for the sort of thinking that socialism might inspire, rather than a blueprint or “formula.” It should be clear that Cuba is being drawn upon for ways of thinking about socialism as such, and that nothing here is intended to “prescribe” specific policies from the outside. No one — not even a scholar or activist from within a given country and with long experience in that country, let alone someone writing from afar — can predict or deliver the precise details of that country’s social evolution.

Figure 1, and the surrounding discussion, are designed to illuminate the nature of *early socialist development*. Their *precondition* is the taking of power by the working class and the decisive (if not absolutely complete) removal of the old exploiting class and associated strata from power, and the entire history of struggle on which this outcome rests. Early socialism, in turn, is the *basis* for eventual later transformations — *e.g.*, supersession of age-old divisions between mental and manual labor and of money-constrained labor and consumption — which are not our object of attention here.

The Figure envisions a bicameral legislature. A Popular Assembly (the model may be taken to represent a national polity, or a regional or local subdivision) is supplemented by a second body, the “Core Economy Council.” The two houses of the legislature work closely together, and legislation originating in each is reconciled with that originating in the other, by some sort of conference procedure. The key difference between them is this: the Popular Assembly is formed by direct election of delegates on a territorial-

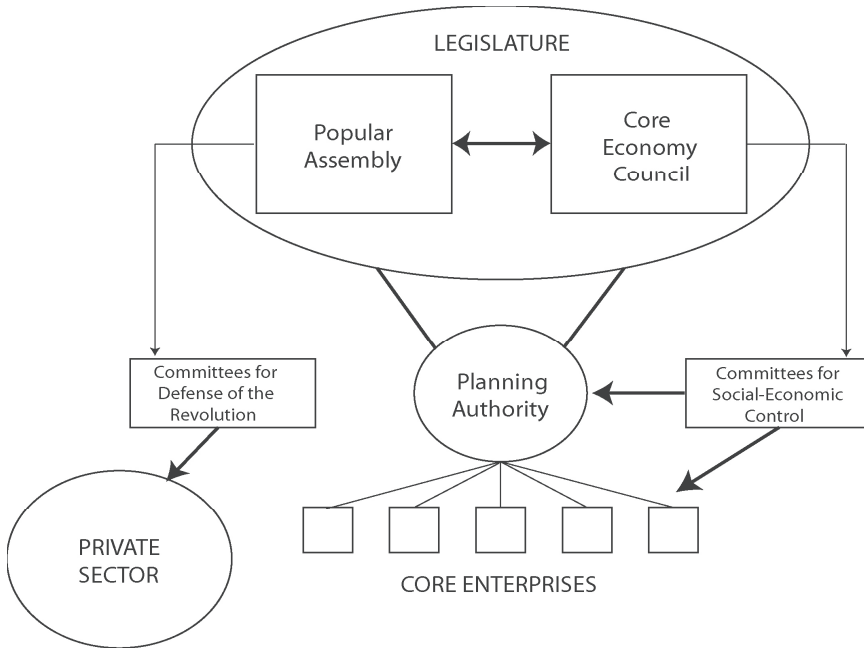


Figure 1. Hypothetical Organizational Structure for Early Socialist Development

residential basis, involving the entire adult population, whereas the Core Economy Council (CEC) is chosen by the working collectives of the Core enterprises only (see below). Large enterprises with Core status will elect CEC delegates, on a proportional basis. Small Core enterprises may be grouped into Inter-Enterprise Associations for this purpose. Workers who are members of Core enterprises in effect vote twice: once for delegates to the Popular Assembly on the basis of their residence, and once for CEC delegates on the basis of their workplace. Since a significant part of the population is either not in the workforce or works in the private (informal) sector, the CEC represents — this needs to be stated frankly — a sort of privileged element in the representational system, a privilege that however diminishes as the Core sector gradually increases in relative size.

How does an enterprise qualify for Core status? Perhaps, first, by having some minimum number of workers; the principle would be to encourage cooperation and economies of scale, without limiting the Core sector to large enterprises only. But the key requirement for Core status is participation in the Core economy: A Core enterprise is required to submit a *plan* (annual?

quarterly? long-term?) to the Planning Authority (which works under the control and mandate of the Legislature).

The plan has two broad components: a production plan, and a social plan. The first has the obvious elements: a budget, specified targets for output, quality control, productivity enhancement, product development, etc. The second refers to goals such as educational levels attained by the workforce, progress in overcoming racial and gender inequalities, enhancing worker participation in management, meeting ecological constraints and targets, and relating to the local community where the enterprise is sited. Ways of evaluating the enterprise's activity in all of these areas, and the weights assigned to each dimension of its work, must be worked out democratically, and this process will involve workers in the Core enterprises, the Planning Authority, and the Committees for Social-Economic Control — bodies that enlist the (voluntary? paid?) participation of many people, and that report to the CEC.

The Committees for Social-Economic Control serve a watchdog function, overseeing the work of the Core enterprises and helping to prevent abuses: concealment of reserves, tax evasion, misrepresentation, and failure to meet the stated goal of developing widespread participation in creation and execution of enterprise plans. Parallel to the Committees is another set of popularly constituted committees, which I call (drawing, obviously, from Cuban experience) Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. These report to the other side of the legislature, the Popular Assembly, and are responsible for relations with the Private sector. The Private sector is reasonably expected to obey laws, passed by the legislature, which establish minimum conditions for wages, worker health and safety, product safety, environmental impacts, and effective taxation.

The Core sector has the distinctive, and socialist, responsibility to formulate for itself an overall plan, which serves as a guiding framework for economic and social development over the given period and as a basis for evaluating and rewarding the work of the Core enterprises. The starting point for the Core plan is the plans of the Core enterprises, which, once announced, are aggregated, shaped for consistency, adjusted to meet wider social concerns articulated by the legislature, and subjected to various optimizing calculations. This socialist planning activity of the Planning Authority — carried out under the watchful eye of the legislature and the public — will require adjustments by Core enterprises to their original plans. An iterative process of repeated flows of plan proposals from enterprises to Authority, and counter-proposals or mandates from Authority to enterprises, results in convergence to a consistent plan.² Plan formation and execution are continu-

2 *In theory!* — but humans, unlike bees, erect their structures in their imagination before they erect them in reality; cf. Marx, *Capital* I, ch. 7, sec. 1.

ous, and simultaneous; it is a matter of constant adjustment to a constantly evolving known framework for economic activity, a quality that is of course absent from the spontaneous market behavior of the Private sector.

A Core enterprise's income is formed on the basis of *two* criteria: first, the ambitiousness of the plan that it announces; second, the degree to which it actually fulfills (neither under- nor over-fulfills) that plan. The Core enterprise is incentivized to be principled (make use of all of its potentials), *and* to provide accurate information to the Planning Authority (in the form of its announced plan), which in turn helps the Authority to create a realistic and stable macro framework for successful work of all of the Core enterprises.

It is important for Core enterprises to receive the income determined by the reward formula, and for enterprises that plan and work well to receive more than those that do not. This is an open social process involving assessment by the Planning Authority, with participation by the Committees for Social-Economic Control. This income is then distributed among the workers of the Core enterprise by a similar evaluation process.

If a Core enterprise delivers its output to other Core enterprises (production, wholesale, retail), then its income is provided out of state funds. If the Core enterprise sells its own output directly to the public and receives revenue from that sale, then a system of taxes or subsidies is applied to bring the actual income of the enterprise to the level determined by the evaluation process.

How detailed and sophisticated must the Core planning process be? *It doesn't matter!* At first (under relatively underdeveloped conditions) the production plan and the social plan may be very broadly stated, and evaluated using nothing more than a rating scale: say, a numerical scale from 0 to 10. How then does the Core sector achieve a match between the sources and uses of goods? Answer: *very inexactly* (just as happens now in practice), and by means of buffer stocks to even out unforeseeable shortages and surpluses. *That's good enough!* More experience, more education, more computers, and more insight than exist at present will eventually turn this rough-and-ready process into a high-level planning operation. But we may be far below the stage of development at which high-level matrix inversion (equation-solving) is possible. The public debate about the process, the formulation of social goals for enterprises, the (sometimes painful) evaluation process — all of this places the Core sector head-and-shoulders above the Private sector in terms of goods provisioning, social progress, and growth in socialist consciousness.

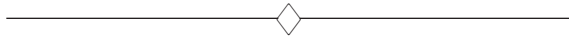
How large must the Core sector be? *Not very, initially!* It will still serve as a beacon, and a healthy counterweight to the Private sector, keeping the latter within socially beneficial bounds. Note: an early socialist economy may actually *promote* development of its Private sector, while paying attention to the *qualitative* characteristics of its (small) Core sector, which is then poised

for proportional quantitative advance at a later stage. Don't expect the Jeffrey Goldbergs of this world to understand what this is all about.

For a socialist dynamic to be in effect, the Core sector must serve as an attractor to workers, coops and business owners in the Private sector. What advantages does it offer? First, the opportunity to elect members of the CEC. Second (perhaps), access to technical, organizational and educational support from the Planning Authority. Third, Private-sector workers may press their employers to apply for Core sector membership because of the empowerment that this opens up for them. Finally, as the Core socialist economy matures, higher levels of productivity in the Core sector provide that sector's workers with higher (and more secure) incomes and living standards.

Where does this model come from? There are strong elements from the *actual* experience of the Soviet economy, and, to a lesser extent, the experiences of other socialist countries (I can't prove all this here, but I think I can prove it). The ideas that the Cuban economy in the 20th century was forced to adopt the "Soviet model," and that the Cubans committed "errors" by relying on Soviet advice (some of the Cubans themselves may believe this), are, in this light, way off base. Other elements, such as the Popular Assembly and the CDRs, come directly from Cuban experience. Again, my purpose here is not to write "recipes for the cookshops of the future," but to nail down the distinctive principle of early socialist development *away from* capitalism and spontaneous markets.

This is, in fact, the absolutely necessary alternative to TINA! No country at any level of development, and certainly not Cuba, needs to think that the *only* available option is privatization and spontaneous markets. *There Is a Revolutionary Alternative!* TIARA! The socialist vision captured by a model of the sort proposed can help post-revolutionary societies to grasp that alternative, without imposing a preconceived time frame on outcomes or attempting to nail down details that can only emerge from each's country's unique experience.



IN THIS ISSUE

Articles in this issue fairly span the disciplinary spectrum — a heartening precursor to the *transdisciplinarity* that S&S projects as general guidepost, or goal.

John Arena's "Bringing in the Black Working Class" surveys the terrain from the standpoint of sociology: "underclass" conceptions, black urban

regime theory, the new urban politics literature. The point is to build a structure of theory that foregrounds the black working class, without either reducing that rich entity to the “working class” as such, or drowning it in cultural particularities or elite-focused inquiries. We need, Arena argues, a retreat from the retreat-from-class of a special kind: a black urban regime theory that is able “to envision an alternative to the current morass of racist, neoliberal capitalism.”

Economics is represented by Devin Penner’s study, “Monopoly and Crisis in the Era of the ‘Giant Corporation’: Neo-Marxist versus Radical Institutionalist Approaches.” Penner compares the institutionalist school, associated with the work of Thorstein Veblen, with the “neo-Marxist” position — his name for the Monopoly Capital school of Paul Sweezy and Paul Baran. The differences between these schools bring to light ways in which they in fact converge, in their rejection of core aspects of Marx’s theory: his method, and his theory of value. The case in point is the theory of crisis, and the danger of generalizing from momentary events. With obvious applications to the problems of the present, study of the two U. S.-based schools of radical thought helps us to proceed from the value-theoretic foundations laid down by Marx to grasp both particularity and continuity in the current crisis. This, of course, resonates well with the problematic of the Arena paper on theorizing the black working class.

Historical–literary studies always provide dimensions not encountered in the social science disciplines, and we are glad to have Robbie Lieberman’s new examination of the legacy of Lorraine Hansberry (“‘Measure Them Right’: Lorraine Hansberry and the Struggle for Peace”). A remarkable African American writer and political figure, Hansberry had a complex and multi-sided political understanding, informing both her play-writing and her activism. Lieberman convincingly shows that the record refutes all attempts to reduce that understanding to black nationalism, “socialism” (in some simplistic conception of that doctrine), general human reconciliation, etc. In particular, Hansberry was deeply involved with the peace movement (an aspect often ignored or minimized in other treatments), and saw the struggle for peace as integral to the liberation of the African American people, as well as to social advance and human solidarity.

Justin Holt, in his “The Limits of an Egalitarian Ethos: G. A. Cohen’s Critique of Rawlsian Liberalism,” provides a useful summary and critique of two interventions in political philosophy that non-philosophers among us might otherwise have difficulty acquiring: John Rawls’ now-classic *A Theory of Justice*, and the late G. A. Cohen’s critique of that work. Holt, however, moves beyond exegesis to argue that Cohen’s critique, while important and innovative, ultimately falls short, by accepting the abstracted framework of his target’s argument and failing to base his defense of equality soundly on

an understanding of the dynamics of capital accumulation. Without that grounding, Holt insists, Cohen ultimately lets Rawls off the hook: the Difference Principle winds up justifying the kinds and degrees of inequality that result from (and support) capitalist surplus extraction.

Finally, we present Arthur DiQuattro's review article on Ricardo Bellofiore and Roberto Fineschi's *Re-reading Marx: New Perspectives after the Critical Edition*. The "critical edition" is the new complete collected works, known as MEGA². This admirable project in Marx-scholarship has, in DiQuattro's view, also created some tendencies requiring critical attention: "philology" taken to excess and divorcing theory from politics; distancing Marx from Engels and reducing Marx's political economy to the study of capitalism alone (*i.e.*, confounding capitalist relations with commodity relations *tout court*); and a certain excessive infiltration of Hegel into Marxist inquiry. Are the "critical" Marxists turning over too much of "standard" social scientific method to the capitalist mainstream, rather than following Marx in recuperating that legacy for the revolutionary working-class project? One thing is sure, however: the MEGA² materials — all of the unpublished works, drafts, comments, etc. — are a now-indispensable prerequisite for the task of answering these, and related, questions.

D. L.