

CHAPTER 22

AN UTOPIAN CONCLUSION

We are now in a position to conclude this book. Through its various chapters, we have seen that modern industrial society is defined by an apparently triumphant technobureaucratic capitalism - that contradictorily believes that the times of liberal capitalism is back - and by the crisis of the statist social formations. We have seen that it is impossible to understand contemporary capitalism, that I call "technobureaucratic capitalism", without understanding the concepts and roles of: (1) the large bureaucratic corporations, (2) the modern state, (3) the state or technobureaucratic mode of production, and (4) the technobureaucratic class. These are new, or relatively new, elements that, together with the concepts of capital, market, the bourgeoisie and the working class, define contemporary capitalism.

On the other hand, statism proved to be an effective strategy for industrialization, but each statist country, after setting up heavy industry, failed to maintain the levels of growth required and the flexibility needed for the development of the consumption, the service and high technology industries. The state proved to be inefficient allocator of resources and a hindrance to creativity and innovation. Moreover, statism was not able to coexist with democracy. On the other hand, the technobureaucratic class did not prove able to be a ruling class. It played this role for some time in developing countries and in the statist, Soviet type, social formations, but the present crisis of statism is a consequence of the limitations of the technobureaucratic organization and of state intervention.

The modern world is the world of technobureaucratic capitalism is the contradictory world of capital and organization, of entrepreneurship and technical/managerial expertise, of the small business firm and the large corporation, of the market and the state, of the capitalist, the working, and technobureaucratic classes, and of liberal individualism and technobureaucratic efficientism. Furthermore, and also contradictorily, the modern world is not only the world of capitalism and technobureaucratism, but also the world of democracy. Democracy has made enormous advances in the last two centuries.

1. A Pessimistic View

Actually, technobureaucratic capitalism expresses the contradictions of the democratic and rationalist ideals of modern industrial society. It is possible to be

very pessimistic about it, like Herbert Marcuse, who believed that modern industrial society was totalitarian:

"By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For 'totalitarian' is not only a terrorist political coordination of society, but also a non-terrorist economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests". (1964: 3)

This manipulation is carried out by the propagation of an ideology of consumerism which equates consumption with happiness and through the use of a variety of techniques, ranging from mass communication, advertising and public relations, to personal and group adjustment, such as human relations, group therapy and psychoanalysis. Though these can often be instruments for liberation, in the context of technobureaucratic capitalism these techniques can easily become instruments for adaptation and conformism.

This view is very pessimistic, but certainly even worse crimes are committed in contemporary capitalist and in statist social formations in the name of rationalism, efficiency, security, order and well-being. In the name of these values, capitalist and technobureaucratic societies have developed arms in previously unknown proportions and carried out the bloodiest wars in history: atomic bombs, chemical and bacterial warfare and genocide. They impose their will as much through technological persuasion and economic pressure as through tanks and napalm bombs. They make wastefulness a norm and pollute the environment to a degree never before imagined, producing a society that is tense and neurotic.

In other words, modern societies practice irrationality in the name of rationality. Or, in Marcuse's words:

"We could say that the rationality of society lies in its own madness, and that the madness of society is rational to the extent that it is efficient and delivers commodities" (1968a: 136).

Two other representatives of the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer and Adorno, also address this question:

"A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself. Automobiles, bombs, and movies keep the whole things together until their leveling elements shows its strength in the very wrong which is furthered" (1944: 121).

According to another somber observation of Marcuse, one of the most perplexing aspects of developed industrial civilization is the "rational nature of its irrationality" (1964: 9). The utilitarian economic rationalism which has dominated western civilization since the end of the feudal period reached its zenith in technobureaucratic capitalism and in the statist social formations. When Bentham identified the rational as the useful, he was simply expressing

the utilitarian ideology of capitalism and was opening the way for the reign of efficiency measured in terms of production. In Daniel Bell's words:

"Utilitarianism furnished a new definition of rationality: not the rule of reason, but the rule of measurement" (1956: 1).

In other words, the technobureaucratic society has become a system of repressive domination as it alienates itself in keeping with a utilitarian concept of rationality. This process of alienation has already taken form in the capitalist system. Marx analyzed it very clearly. With the development of capitalism, society was organized to produce commodities. What is now relevant is the exchange value of commodities, instead of their use value. Commodity production has become so important that it now dominates all social relations. Reification or "objectification" occurs in social relations. Social relations are carried out impersonally in the market place. Commodities and their exchange have become more important than people. The exchange value of commodities has become the dominant factor in human life. Labor itself has been transformed into a commodity, to be exchanged in the market like any other. Thus human life has not only become dominated by commodity production, but has also been transformed into a commodity.

Within this perspective, commodities acquire the nature of a fetish. In Marx's terms:

"A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious trivial thing, understood as a reality unto itself. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties (...) It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things (1867: 163-165).

According to Fritz Pappenheim's (1959) observations, this analysis of Marx powerfully influenced the work of Tönnies and his theory of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. In historic terms, society tends to change from *Gemeinschaft*, that is, a type of natural society in which social relations are not deliberate, to a type of contractual, individualistic and rationalistic society, *Gesellschaft*, in which people live separated from each other, each one isolated, resulting in a profound tension.

Tönnies' vision helps us to understand the modern world, but it is only by using Marx's original theory as a tool that we can come to understand the new character of alienation in technobureaucratic capitalism and statism. Under classical capitalism, people were alienated in relation to commodities, by means of the reification of social relations, the transformation of labor into a

commodity and the attribution of commodities with the mysterious characteristics of fetishes. With technobureaucratism, this alienation has become more refined. Besides alienation in respect to commodities, people have also become alienated in respect to technical expertise and organization, that is, to the method of commodity production. Technical expertise has become reified, attributed with intrinsic mass and value to which one must submit.

Through this reification and absolute valorization of technical skill and organization, which also acquire the nature of a fetish, the contemporary societies have become alienated. A utilitarian rationalistic ideology, which equates rational with useful and efficient, subordinates all other human values - liberty, love, beauty, justice, equality of opportunity - to the greater values of efficiency and technical expertise. Within this process of alienation and material progress, the full range of technical and scientific advancement do not contribute to self-realization, but rather generate anguish and uncertainty.

This is a pessimistic picture. The rationalist optimism of the second half of the nineteenth century has died. War, genocide, ideological confusion, anguish and the uncertainty of a world inherently alienated by technical expertise have put an end to this optimism. In the introduction to his autobiography, Bertrand Russell summed up this transformation:

"The last half of my life has been lived in one of those painful epochs of human history during which the world is getting worse, and past victories which seemed to be definitive have turned out to be only temporary. When I was young, Victorian optimism was taken for granted. It was thought that freedom and prosperity would spread gradually throughout the world by an orderly method and it was hoped that cruelty, tyranny and injustice would continually diminish" (1969: 221).

2. An Optimistic View

If pessimism has taken the place of optimism in the modern world, this does not mean that modern humanity has fatalistically given itself up to its fate as an alienated object with respect to technical expertise and utilitarian rationalism. It is also possible to have an optimistic view of the modern world when we see that standards of living are continuously improving (in spite of misery and the famine that are still the life of so many), differences in wealth and income slowly tend to be reduced, and democracy is advancing everywhere, usually at a faster rate than economic and social progress.

It is true that the utopias are in crisis. The socialist utopia is in crisis, but it is very far from being defeated. It is just in a process of reformulation. The countercultural revolution of the 1960s (Roszak, 1969) has faded out, but its

critique of contemporary capitalism and technobureaucratism is still alive. This revolution exploded in the 1960s and then disappeared with the conservative wave of the 1970s and 1980s. It was the revolution of students, hippies and the new left, the revolution of the underground and of the Beatles, the feminist revolution, the sexual revolution, the black revolution in the U.S., and the political revolution of the Catholic Church. Initially, it was a revolution of the beatniks in the United States and of the existentialists in France. It has disappeared, but it left a powerful heritage.

Today, at the end of the 1990s, we have a new revolution: the democratic revolution in the statist countries. We have also the danger of an authoritarian counter-revolution in the Latin American countries beleaguered by the debt crisis. The technobureaucratic capitalist countries are rich and quiet. Only the ecological or green movement touches the minds and the hearts of the young. The conservative wave is still ideologically dominant, but we may already see signs that it is already fading out. It has been said that after the "the triumph of the West", after "the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism... what we may be witnessing is... the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama, 1989a: 3-4). This is non-sense. A conservative non-sense with a Hegelian flavor, given that the author accuses his critics of "the persistent failure to comprehend or accept Hegel's use of the word 'history'" (Fukuyama, 1989b: 21). Statism as an ideology is dead, not democratic socialism. Democracy is triumphant, the market proved its superiority over the state, but the debate on the required degree of state intervention is very far from its end. Technobureaucratic capitalism, that Fukuyama calls "Western economic and political liberalism" is the best demonstration that the neo-liberal ideology of the minimum state is as unrealistic as the communist project of a totally state commanded economy.

Actually history is just beginning, as it is accelerating. As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. noted:

"Humans have lived on earth for possibly eight hundred lifetimes, most of which in caves... The last two lifetimes have seen more scientific and technological achievements than the first 798 put together... The acceleration of change compels us to perceive life as motion, not as order; the universe not as complete but as unfinished" (1986: X-XI).

Thus chances for liberation are increasing, not decreasing. It was not by chance that existentialist philosophy, which views men and women as being intrinsically free and responsible for their actions, arose in this century. It is founded in abstract philosophy, in that it is based on the preeminence of

existence over essence, on existence prior to definition and the basic gratuitous nature of human life. Yet it is clearly situated in a given historical moment: the twentieth century, a time when faith in rationalism has suffered a crisis, but also when the development of education and of systems of mass communication have amplified ideological debate in a way never before imagined.

For long time we have seen the world dominated either by individualistic philosophies, oriented to the legitimation of the existing system of domination, or by determinist philosophies, such as Marxism, that proposed revolution. Apparently neither of these views offered a real solution for in contemporary capitalism. Existentialism arose at this moment. Sartre in particular, though basically accepting the material conditioning of human life in the terms set out by Marxists, postulated the existential freedom of men and women:

"What does it mean to say that existence precedes essence? It means that man first exists, discovers himself, appears in the world, and only afterwards defines himself. Therefore there is no human nature, seeing as how there is no God to imagine it. Man is not only how he imagines himself, but also how he would like to be, how he imagines himself after existence, how he wants to be after his impulse for existence. Man is nothing more than what he does". (1946: 242)

It is from this type of modern thinking that freedom and responsibility originate. Freedom and responsibility as seen from a historical perspective, continually increase, as education develops, the means of communication grow and the sciences, especially the social sciences, enable us to better understand the conditioning of our social life. After Marx, Freud, Weber, Keynes and Sartre, among many others, it is evident that we have improved our understanding of the social and psychological processes to which we are submitted. Technological development and economic growth have meant augmented control over nature. All this means that modern men and women are potentially able to be free and responsible.

3. A Utopian Revolution

The question of the future of statist social formations, now in deep crisis, and of technobureaucratic capitalism, now triumphant, has no simple solution. There is a powerful trend in the direction of the convergence of both social formations on the basis of common technological end organizational progress, but these societies will retain different characteristics for a long time. On the other hand, we have to consider the newly industrialized countries, mostly in Asia and Latin America, the industrialized but underdeveloped ones where

economic and social differences are still so great, and the definitely underdeveloped countries that dominate the African scene. For these countries the road to democracy will be long, and that to socialism, longer.

One fact is certain: socialism will not come automatically from capitalism or from statism. Actually socialism is based on different principles from capitalism or statism. If we take the ideal "social orders" proposed by Streeck and Schmitter (1985b) - community, market, state and association - as reference there is no place for socialism. Actually capitalism is based on capital, statism on state organization and socialism on community. Capitalism means coordination by the market; statism, coordination by managers who are responsible for state planning; socialism means self-management and permanent negotiation. Pure capitalism corresponds to political liberalism; pure technobureaucratism to authoritarian control of society; socialism to democracy.

Democracy is indeed contradictory to technobureaucratism, but it is a mistake to confuse it with liberalism. As Bowles and Gintis reminds us, "capitalism and democracy are not complementary systems" (1986: 3). Economic and political liberalism - the idea that every person should be free to pursue his or her own interests - has been always the basic belief of capitalism. The same cannot be said of democracy. During the nineteenth century, democracy was considered a dangerous egalitarian ideology by the dominant bourgeoisie. The history of universal voting rights, of the secret ballot and of the vote for women has been long. The idea of democracy was finally accepted by the bourgeoisie, but only after a process of cooptation that in part neutralized it. It is not just "formal democracy", as the authoritarian left has long alleged, but it is also not full democracy, that is only possible in more egalitarian societies, in basically socialist societies.

Therborn (1977) demonstrated that the existing parliamentary democracy is not a gift from the bourgeoisie but the result of a long struggle by the working class and the left. More recently, in the last twenty years, the conflict between liberalism and democracy has emerged again, as the capitalist system is feeling threatened by increasing social demands. As Norberto Bobbio puts it:

"Though democracy has, for the last century at least, been considered the natural progression from liberalism, the two ideologies prove to be no longer compatible at all once democracy has taken to its logical extreme as mass democracy, or rather as a democracy, of mass parties, so as to produce the Welfare State" (1981: 129).

The struggle for democracy, like the fight for socialism, has not ended. First, democracy is more dangerous to technobureaucratism than to capitalism. Statist social formations will disappear or will have a much larger capitalist

component when they become democratic, whereas technobureaucratic capitalism is able to coexist with democracy. Second, predominantly statist and the predominantly capitalist social formations existing today are quite distant from socialism, as pure socialism, just as pure democracy, are part of the utopia of humanity.

It is common to hear that we are living at the time of "the end of utopias". I do not believe this is true. Utopias are changing, but not ending. Democracy and socialism remain the two basic utopias of humanity. They are utopias that, through ups and downs, are becoming realities. The degree of egalitarianism existing in some statist societies and the degree of freedom and egalitarianism existing today in some capitalist countries is already considerable. As humanity increases its knowledge of and its control over science and technology, over the economy and society, economic determinism and individualist pessimism lose ground, and utopia turns more and more into a real possibility.

After the crisis of the technobureaucratic class and of the statist social formations, what is left of the ideals of left? Can we speak of a new and an old socialism? Has the socialist ideal died with the democratic revolution in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe or is it being enhanced by it? The answers to these questions, are not easy. In this book, I tried to offer these questions, not definite answers. I definitely did not write a normative book. This is a book of critical analysis, not of moral propositions. I cannot resist, however, finishing with some utopian thinking. After all, hope and utopia are essential for the progress of humanity.

The naive belief that socialism will be achieved simply by doing away with the private ownership of the means of production is obviously dead. Socialization of the means of production continues to be a premise of socialism, but it is neither the most important nor the most urgent of the transformations. It certainly cannot be confused with nationalization that has proven to be inefficient and to lead to authoritarian, if not totalitarian, political regimes.

If the socialization of the means of production does not imply nationalization, it has to signify a change in the form of ownership. There are many forms of ownership between, or besides, private and state ownership. Technobureaucratic capitalism represents a transition to "quasi-collective property form" (McDermott, 1988). Actually we can see in contemporary capitalist and statist social formations innumerable forms of ownership. Adam Przerworski identified recently eleven forms of property.⁸¹ Several forms of

⁸¹ Forms of property: (1) the state firm centrally controlled; (2) the administratively but not financially autonomous state firm; (3) the financially

collective property and of self-management will define democratic socialism. A process of economic decentralization, in which market mechanisms are allied to planning in the control of the economy, will be essential. Socialism will have to be market oriented. And the basic content of socialism will be democracy rather than the abolition of private property.⁸²

Labor relations will necessarily change. They are already changing in Japan, in the Scandinavian countries. In a first phase we will have improved forms of worker's participation, in a second, self-management. The Taylorist forms of organization of labor, that define technobureaucratic capitalism, show themselves each time more inefficient given the increasing resistance of workers. Giving up old left prejudices, modern unions are increasingly understanding that workers participation, besides leading to the increase of productivity and of wages, is a basic form of desalienation of labor. The form of solving unemployment is not yet clear, since the right to lay out employees is essential for the competitiveness of enterprises. But the problem of mass unemployment will have to be in some way solved through several forms of job flexibilization and the increase of free time. Profits will remain a basic incentive, but the required rate of profit - that assures the continuation of investment - for the large business enterprises will tend to be smaller, whereas the wage and salary share increases. On the other hand, the wage and salary differential will tend to be reduced.

What is essential to this revolution however, is not the reduction of income and wealth differential, nor the transformation of the relations of production or of the forms of property. If a utopian revolution, in the form of a gradual but effective transformation, changes the course of history, if it will

autonomous firm, that thus can go bankrupt; (4) the "cross-owned" corporations, owned by one another; (5) the "public-bodies" corporation controlled by other organizations and associations of civil society; (6) the "social" corporation, controlled by a board including representatives of the employees, the government and the public; (7) the closed cooperative of employees; (8) the cooperative which employs non-members; (9) the open cooperative, where not only employees are members; (10) the private, privately held, firm; (11) the private, public held, firm (Przeworski, 1989: 11-12).

⁸² A classical contribution towards a market oriented socialism is present in Oscar Lange's, *On the Economic Theory of Socialism* (1938). See also Ota Sik (1972), Mihaly Vajda (1981), Alec Nove (1983), J. Elster and K. Moene, eds. (1989), Adam Przeworski (1989). On the democratic content of socialism see, among others, Francisco Weffort (1984), John Keane (1988) and Alain Lipietz (1989).

limit the power of the capitalists and technobureaucrats, it will demand increasingly the exercise of liberty and responsibility, it will have to be a revolution of consciousness - a profoundly ideological revolution.

In the first place, it will be a critical revolution. It will start with a radical criticism of the existing capitalist and technobureaucratic society. It will have to direct all its weapons against the principle enemy: utilitarian and efficientist rationalism and individualism. Within rationalism alternatives to utilitarianism and individualism do exist. A new conceptualization of rationalism will be necessary.

Rationalism, in the first place, is a philosophy which believes in human reason. The new rationalism will also put its faith in human reason as the main source of knowledge. But it will not be as optimistic as the old rationalists, for the simple reason that today we know that technical and scientific developments can be used to establish a system of domination more rigid and authoritarian than those which came before it. The new rationalism believes in reason, but not without qualification. Reason is not a virtue in itself; it can be good or bad, depending on the way it is used, the objectives established and the means adopted.

Rationalism establishes objectives for social action and looks for the most adequate means to reach these objectives. The old utilitarian rationalism identifies the economic objectives as social objectives: higher profits and wages and increased production. All other objectives were subordinated to or made dependent upon these economic objectives. The new rationalism rejects this false hierarchy. It does not belittle economic objectives and economic efficiency, but considers them as only a few among many others. The old individualism is pessimistic about the possibility of human solidarity. The new rationalism sees solidarity as real possibility as long as the economic and political powers of citizens are relatively balanced.

The basic goal to be attained is that of freedom, of democracy. Not only political and economic freedom, but also each individual's internal freedom. It will be a freedom which has its origins and its only limit in the freedom of others. It is liberty in communion, freedom within a community of friends and companions, liberty based on mutual respect and responsibility, within a legal scheme in which human rights will be solidly assured. Freedom in this sense will not be in contradiction to a reasonable degree of equality, but it will work for it.

Adopting freedom or democracy as its primary objective, the new rationalism will have to define which means are the most consistent for reaching this goal. The sacrifice of today's freedom in the name of efficiency and

economic growth is excluded, because once lost, freedom is only regained at great cost. In the same way, the new rationalism will give other objectives at least as much validity as economic ones: justice, beauty, truth, love, equal opportunity. These are objectives that have an intrinsic validity for the new rationalism and cannot be replaced by any others. They are objectives which, together with freedom and a certain minimum level of economic well-being, guarantee the self-realization of every member of society.

Consequently, this will have to be a profound, a utopian revolution, which will not only transform relations of production, but also and most importantly, transform each member's consciousness. Without a revolution of consciousness, there will be no revolution of any kind. The name of the new regime to be established could be socialism, despite the abuses to which this term has been subjected, by the old left, that confused it with statism, or by the capitalist organic intellectuals, that profited from the confusion. More important than the name, however, is the direction of this revolution. As with any other revolution, its direction is eminently utopian. The transformation of consciousness, or the interior liberation of humanity are not easily obtainable goals. They cannot be attained by a coup d'etat, or an armed revolution. The use of war to establish peace, of terrorism and violence to impose freedom, and of hate to create love, only achieve success with great difficulty. Once politically victorious, the new rulers will tend to impose war rather than peace, totalitarianism rather than freedom and hate rather than love.

This revolution will probably be a slow one, with many stumbling blocks. It will demand patience, dedication, love and confidence. In any case, its success is not guaranteed. It is still only a road to be followed, with a generous and daring youth to blaze the trail.