

1968 AND THE IDEA OF SOCIALISM

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“In every country in the world a huge tribe of party-hacks and sleek little professors are busy ‘proving’ that Socialism means no more than a planned state-capitalism with the grab-motive left intact. But fortunately there also exists a vision of Socialism quite different from this. The thing that attracts ordinary men to Socialism and makes them willing to risk their skins for it, the ‘mystique’ of Socialism, is the idea of equality; to the vast majority of people Socialism means a classless society, or it means nothing.”

George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, London 1938, p.104

The attention being paid at present to the events of 1968 is enough to indicate the importance of that year in shaping our understanding of how humanity has navigated the past forty years. Since memory is always constructed from the present, and continually reconstructed as time goes by, we are now necessarily remembering 1968 from 2008, and doing so in ways that suit our own particular needs and purposes. My own underlying purpose in 2008 is the development of a socialist politics that can address the manifold problems of war, poverty, oppression, inequality and environmental degradation that now confront us.

I will argue that, whatever we may find to celebrate in 1968 as a year of awakening and rebellion, the collective memory that has evolved since then has entailed also a forgetting – namely, forgetting the idea of socialism, and more specifically socialism in relation to the self-activity of the working class, and socialism as the classless society envisaged by Orwell. I will explain this by examining the development of socialist politics in the twentieth century, and argue that we need to break once and for all with the failed trajectories of revolutionary socialism.

The left in 1968 and today

The *prima facie* evidence that socialism, as a movement of and for the working class, has been written out of 1968 can be found readily enough in the contemporary written and broadcast media in Britain. The Tet offensive is remembered as the moment when the USA began to understand that it faced defeat in Vietnam, rather than as the dawn of victory for the people of that country. In the recollection of Enoch Powell’s speech on immigration, we remember the workers who marched in support of Powell, but not the simultaneous opposition to capitalism within organised labour, and especially the then-influential shop stewards’ movement. The May events in France are now seen simply as a student rebellion on the Left Bank, forgetting the millions of workers all over the country who occupied their factories, initially in solidarity with the students but rapidly formulating their own demands. The Prague spring is likewise seen as primarily a movement of intellectuals and artists pressing for political change within the Czechoslovak Communist Party, while the vital role of factory-based committees, in supporting reform and later in defending its leaders, is pushed aside. And if some of the most-cited events of 1968, like the assassinations of King and Kennedy, the Democratic Party convention in Chicago, and the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City, had less direct connection to workplace and union politics, they too encouraged

many radical students to look for such connections with a view to broadening the base of their opposition to those in power.

For some of us who were involved in radical student politics at the time, this was not just a matter of identifying romantically with an idealised and reified working class. Rather, the sheer variety of events and their global range impelled us to inquire much more broadly into their historical origins, and thereby towards a renewed interest in socialist political ideas. However, this renewal took place in a very specific context, that of the Cold War. The international relationship between capitalism and communism – West and East – always contained elements of accommodation as well as confrontation, especially in the context of ‘mutually assured destruction’ by nuclear weapons. Equally, the domestic struggle in the West against communism was based not exclusively on aggressive opposition (as envisaged by the theory of totalitarianism), but also on the more subtle arguments of convergence theory, which included the theses of industrialism, technological determinism and the end of ideology. As for the working class, by 1968 it was widely argued among progressive liberal intellectuals that it had become ‘embourgeoisified’ by consumerism and the security provided by the welfare state.

In this context, when we as students protested against injustices within the West, or perpetrated in our name by Western leaders, the mass media labelled us either spoilt children, or communists. The ‘spoilt children’ label of course had some justification: we had grown up in a period of unparalleled and uninterrupted prosperity that embraced the vast majority of those attending university. Remember that only 10-15% of our age group in Britain undertook higher education of any kind, although a greater proportion of students at that time were from families headed by manual workers compared to the present day. Remember too that we were pretty much guaranteed admittance to a professional or managerial career. However, the Robbins Report, which paved the way for the new universities of the 1960s, had drawn its rationale from the general philosophy of the postwar welfare state: higher education was an entitlement, not a privilege, and one which did not require, and could not any more enforce, social and ideological conformity.

As for communism, since 1956 the ‘Moscow line’ had lost any serious influence on the left in most Western countries, and the great majority of 1968ers regarded the Soviet system as capitalism’s evil twin. Instead, we burrowed into the history of socialist ideas and practice in search of a renewal of purpose, trying to reconstruct collective memories of past struggles and rescue them from the ossified mantras of Marxism-Leninism and social democracy alike. We also responded creatively to the increased prominence of areas of struggle less obviously related to production, especially those of gender and race. In addition, the realisation that postcolonial independence had by no means ended imperialist domination of the Third World served to expand our political horizons, and to revive the tradition of internationalism that had been so compromised by the Cold War (actually hot, in many parts of the third world).

In Britain, most student activists were drawn towards one of three political organisations that saw themselves as promoting the interests of workers: the Communist Party, the International Socialism group (precursor to the present Socialist Workers’ Party), and the Labour Party. The CP had by 1968 recovered some of its vitality since the débacle of 1956, and the influx of new student members contributed substantially to the process of renewal that led to a ‘Eurocommunism’ that increasingly distanced itself from the USSR. The IS at that time was a relatively open and democratic group, which had escaped from the

suffocating conspiratorialism of the tiny Trotskyist tradition: it recruited many students with more libertarian tendencies, although they mostly left during or after the purges that preceded the creation of the SWP in the mid-1970s. In the Labour Party, the left was emerging from the stultifying anticommunism that is one of the forgotten legacies of the so-called golden age of Attlee, and Labour students could link up with a new generation of more radical trade union leaders, as well as the parliamentary left around the weekly *Tribune*. In addition to this range of more conventional opportunities for political engagement, radical students could also discover the delights of anarchism, syndicalism, situationism, Maoism, Trotskyism (all 57 varieties, as we used to say), or indeed any number of ‘Eastern’ or otherwise esoteric mysticisms, with or without illegal substances. Even if we were not spoiled, we were certainly spoiled for choice.

Forty years on, what is left (in both senses) of all this? It is easy enough to look back to 1968, and across to the students of 2008, and conclude that the answer is: very little indeed. In London, Paris, Rome, Berlin, we may have struggled, but we evidently did not win. However, that would be to short-change ourselves. In rejecting the ossified polarities of the Cold War, we were able to shape a new political agenda for the 1970s, centred on (in no particular order) equality, human rights, international peace and disarmament, and the protection of the environment. It was precisely the challenges from below around these issues that led the ruling elites, of West, East and South alike, towards the liberal revival that went from strength to strength from 1979 to 1991 and beyond.

The important question is why neoliberalism succeeded. One answer is that offered by those who have abandoned their past socialist views and embraced the new right, nearly always some variant of the hoary old ‘human nature’ argument. The working classes rejected our idealism because they are naturally lazy, racist, sexist and above all interested only in material advancement – usually in directions despised by the intelligentsia, who can therefore happily enjoy their vastly greater wealth and autonomy with a clear conscience. A second answer is to go on holding faithfully to the same political agenda, regardless of the passing years, in the continuing hope that eventually the masses will see the light: hence the continued survival of the tattered remnants of communism, Trotskyism, and the Labour left. A third is to embrace ‘social movement’ politics and the cognate ideas of post-modernism: this is based on rejecting the old ‘class conflict’ politics as reductionist. Workers, it is argued, are lots of other things as well – citizens, parents, consumers – and wearing those alternative hats, we can define a progressive political agenda.

Many 1968ers are, however, neither apostates, nor diehards, nor postmodern revisionists: we may often be cynical and world-weary, but we are still guided by our old socialist ideals when faced with egregious wickedness from our rulers, and we still see capitalism as a divided and unjust form of society. We are however realistic enough to know that there is no point repeating supposedly revolutionary mantras that have fallen on deaf ears for forty years. Some of us still tend to look elsewhere for inspiration and hope: *New Left Review* continues as ever to bring us the latest radical intellectual ideas from around the world, and we all cheer when any remotely progressive government takes office in Brazil or Spain or Nepal. Some of us even take some comfort from the idea that our key mistake was over timing: with a nod to the much-despised Russian Mensheviks, we may think that 1917 was hopelessly premature, and that capitalism has not yet completed its world-historical mission. But still, we want to do more than wait around until the situation has ‘matured’.

The failures of twentieth-century socialism

For those still looking to replace capitalism with an authentic and popular socialism, the starting-point has surely got to be a reckoning with the abject failure of all socialist movements in the twentieth century. A hundred years ago, there were of course many different visions of socialism on offer, and as many paths being followed towards them. But a minimal common understanding existed, that the gulf between rulers and ruled in capitalist society centres on their relation to the means of production. Capitalists are the owners of the means of production, and draw their livelihood from the exploitation of wage-labour; this turn is provided by the great majority of the society, through the sale of their labour-power. Socialism was envisaged as a form of society in which this division no longer existed: instead, the free association of producers would determine the deployment of available resources, natural and human, to meet the needs of all.

In Europe, the period from the defeat of the Paris Commune to the outbreak of World War I saw the emergence of organised political parties with overtly socialist objectives, based for the most part on two new features in the socio-economics of capitalism: mass trade unions and nascent welfare states. These provided respectively the brawn and the brains for the new parties.

The unions brought together countless millions of workers, especially in the manufacturing industries, around their shared positions in the labour market and in the workplace. Workers paid the price exacted by the cyclical rhythms of capital, drawn into employment in the boom and discarded in the bust. Structural changes in the longer term destroyed whole communities and built up new ones as industries rose and fell. Within the workplace, ‘scientific’ management watched and measured, intensifying the pace of work and constantly seeking to reduce or subvert the skills upon which workers relied in bargaining for a living wage. But on the highly practical basis of struggling to resist these tendencies, wider perspectives were constructed: in fighting against unemployment or appalling working conditions, the unions agitated in the streets and in the press, and pursued legislation that would further their collective interests.

The beginnings of the welfare state may be seen in large part as a considered response by the ruling classes, designed to meet demands from below without compromising the structures of economic and political power. But it also resulted in a substantial growth in the ranks of the urban intelligentsia. This was fuelled by the expansion in state apparatuses to meet the needs of education, housing, public health, colonial administration and war, which meant that the activities and the outlook of the professional, technical and managerial strata were increasingly shaped by public rather than just private interests.

Socialist politics thus drew in not only activists and leaders from the unions, but also ‘public’ intellectuals from the professions – lawyers, doctors, engineers and teachers. It was the latter who provided the leadership cadres, as this politics increasingly took the form of membership-based political parties. Parties, as opposed to loose alliances of elected representatives, were a recent political phenomenon; much like the welfare state, they could be regarded as a means of channelling, and thus controlling, potentially dangerous impulses from ‘below’. Both the unions and the professions prided themselves on having complex internal structures that educated their memberships, established norms of behaviour and shaped their agendas. Such an approach could readily be transferred to explicitly political parties, with their executives, committees, local representative bodies, conferences, electoral

candidates and publications. While workers might through periodic eruptions formulate demands for justice, the purpose of the political party was to transform those demands and bring them into the electoral and legislative arenas of the state.

By the mid-1920s, socialist politics was irremediably divided into two wings, those of reform and revolution. The reformist wing – eventually typically dubbed ‘social democratic’ – espoused a gradualist agenda, centred on the pursuit of electoral success followed by legislation within the overall framework of liberal-capitalist governance. The revolutionary wing – eventually for the most part ‘communist’ – advocated the overthrow of the capitalist state, and the radical transformation of the economic order as well, to one based on state or social ownership: for revolutionaries, participation in conventional bourgeois politics was in essence a tactical question, and took second place to agitation in factories and working-class communities.

To cut a long story short, by the end of the 20th century both wings had utterly failed to achieve their original objectives. The reformist social-democratic parties had long given up any eventual socialist purpose: in the context of the triumph of neoliberalism, they were everywhere content merely to mitigate the social and environmental depredations of capitalism. In some countries, such as Britain, this has entailed a conscious and deliberate ideological turn towards economic liberalism, while in others the shift was more pragmatic or even reluctant. The social-democratic segment of the political elite is now drawn naturally from university-educated professionals in law, management, education, health, even on occasion science and engineering. Since the same is true of senior union officials and top business executives as well, the political elite as a whole is now overwhelmingly what is called ‘middle-class’ (a term to which we will return later). The main achievement of social democracy, the welfare state, has meanwhile mutated from the postwar model of social justice and universal entitlement, to one of selective and limited redistribution and social provision, all geared increasingly to the demands of capital for employable labour. In parallel with this trajectory in advanced capitalism, the non-aligned movement which dominated the postcolonial world for some thirty years was cowed by the global debt crisis of the 1980s and submitted willingly or not to neoliberalism.

As for the supposedly revolutionary wing, all that is left of communism as it actually existed in the Soviet Union and its progeny are the impoverished and embattled remnants of North Korea and Cuba. Neoliberalism holds sway in Eastern Europe, robber barons in Russia and much of the former USSR, and authoritarian state capitalism in China and Vietnam. The Communist Party of Italy has managed to go from 30% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies in 1948 – when the right was lavishly supported by US money – to a handful of seats in a centre-left coalition in 2008, defeated for a third time by a third-rate populist charlatan.

There remains the question of why. I am not so concerned here with why social democracy failed, for its functioning was explicitly shaped first by a rejection of revolutionary change, and later by the rejection of socialism by any means. But why did the revolutionary wing fail? To answer this, we have to look at how the revolutionaries understood capitalism, and how that helped to shape their actions.

That understanding of capitalism developed explicitly on the basis of Marx’s critique of political economy. The singular success of the international communist movement in Russia in 1917 stamped Lenin, in particular, as the fount of all wisdom, and ensured that the

understanding of Marxism developed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would dominate the theoretical formulations of the revolutionary left. The first key element of the resulting orthodoxy concerned the nature and trajectory of the capitalist economic system, centred on the evolutionary sequence from competitive to monopoly to state monopoly capitalism, and on the theory of imperialism. These theories, elaborated by Hilferding, Bukharin and Lenin, were constructed by applying an economistic reading of Marx to the empirical studies of the German historical school of political economy, and their British counterpart Hobson. Since the most important conclusion of the orthodoxy was that capitalism was by then a decaying system in which the forces of production had outgrown the relations of production, the robust revival of capitalism after 1945 and the moderation of its tendency to periodic crisis dealt these theories a severe blow. Attempts were made to update communist economic theory, mostly by merging it with progressive Keynesian thinking on the basis of a shared focus on capitalism's tendency to stagnation, but this proved a dead end once mainstream Keynesianism crumbled beneath the monetarist assault of the 1970s.

The second key feature of communist orthodoxy was the role of the revolutionary party as the necessary agent of revolution. Some communists (e.g. Luxemburg and for a time Gramsci) proposed that workers might make their own revolution, but after the Kronstadt uprising in 1921, this leftist 'infantile disorder' (as Lenin termed it) was confined to the dissident fringes of communism: indeed, the two main opposition movements within world communism, first Trotskyism and later Maoism, were no less authoritarian and undemocratic than the CPSU. One-party rule under 'democratic centralism' led directly to Stalin's purges and the *gulag*, and the revisionism that followed Khrushchev's secret speech never addressed the underlying issue of the relation between party and class - that is, democracy.

In any case, with the Soviet invasions of Hungary in November 1956 and Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the world communist movement had entered its own ineluctable process of decay, rejecting all opportunities for a real democratic reform that could appeal to ordinary working people living under the Soviet system, or for that matter those living under capitalism.

What is to be undone?

The key problem remains that most of those who have not abandoned all hope of revolutionary change remain trapped in Lenin's legacy. Hence the repeated efforts to establish a 'new' socialist party, each group believing that it can come up with a programme that will galvanise the working class into action. Given the self-evident failure of all such efforts thus far, is it not time, once and for all, to bury not just poor Lenin's mummified corpse, but the entire corpus of Leninist thought? Instead, let us look to some of the many alternative challenges to capitalism over the last two centuries, challenges that one way or another start from the self-activity of ordinary people, and their own articulation of social needs that capitalism has been unable to meet, whether through the market or through the state.

Here 1968 can again provide a way in. A common principle of our politics in 1968 was that all forms of authority needed to be permanently questioned. This is what attracted us to the Chinese cultural revolution, although it took some of us a very long time to wake up to its brutal realities and to the cynical manipulation of youthful idealism by the Chinese party élite. Closer to home we students questioned authority in the university: we wanted our

teachers to address the issues of the day, to respect our right to hold our opinions and to question their own, and to let us participate in university decision-making and management. But we also connected this to other arenas in which power was being contested, whether it was the power of management over workers, of men over women, of dictators over citizens in Southern Europe, or of colonial and postcolonial rulers over the Third World. The idea of *autonomy* fundamentally challenged all the cant with which the powerful tried to justify the grotesque inequalities of wealth and power which we saw all around us.

The drive to question everything took us into the hidden histories of resistance. We asked why the promise of gender equality had not progressed beyond the formal sphere of legal and political rights, and uncovered a history of economic, social and cultural struggle that inspired the women's movements of the 1970s. In direct response to the civil rights and black power movements in the USA and to Powellism in Britain, we read Fanon and Cleaver and Rodney, linking the fight of ethnic minorities for recognition and empowerment to our national history of slavery and colonial exploitation. The strikes and factory occupations that spread across the centres of industrial capitalism during that time were, we realised, as much in defiance of the unions' established routines of class compromise as against the employers' drive for profits: we found that the issue of workers' control had been repeatedly if fleetingly raised in the global history of capitalism. Even university occupations could lead not merely to much-derided nonsense about 'red bases', but to the meticulous analysis of creeping corporate control over higher education (and how right we were about that).

For the subsequent ten years or so, the political establishments of East and West responded defensively to these challenges from below. The postwar settlements on either side had been struck on terms dictated by the disasters of 1914-45, and centred on the provision of a substantial measure of economic security through active economic management and the universal welfare state. Ideologically, economic liberalism had apparently been replaced by a depoliticised 'industrialism', in which an enlightened state worked with a new professional managerial élite in industry to maximise employment, growth and innovation. Yet, as *The Times* had famously predicted in 1944, once the stick of unemployment was removed, capital lost its most basic source of power over labour. At the same time, the confidence of citizens in their new social rights undermined the old deference towards their rulers, the forelock-tugging and the cultural cringeing. A parallel story can be told in the East, of how once the instrument of universal terror was foresworn in 1956, communist rule came to depend on the ability of the party-state to meet the ever-increasing demands of workers for not only material welfare, but also democracy and human rights.

In this perspective, the resurgence of the old economic liberalism, dated variously between 1976 and 1982 (from Healey's IMF moment to Mitterand's capitulation to global finance), should be seen as indicating not the weakness, but the *strength* of the challenge that 1968 posed. Of course we can see that in the economic Golden Age of 1945-76, liberalism was always there under the surface: for example, in the West German model of the 'social market economy', the social was always subordinated to the market (the Bundesbank got its independence in 1957, not 1997 like the Bank of England). But the threat posed by our attempts to push forward the boundaries of equality and redistribution was a very real one, because there was no automatic mechanism in the postwar Western capitalist order that could set any limit to our challenges. In place of the rule of the market, the law of value, capital had to rely directly on *political* rule – and in the 1970s it became abundantly clear that, short of putting an end to liberal democracy as such, in favour of some form of fascism, this simply

did not work. For capitalism has yet to produce a social theory that can reliably and acceptably justify the *direct* appropriation of society's wealth and power by a ruling élite.

The restoration of economic liberalism has resolved this problem by reinstating capitalism's most fundamental premise: the enforced separation of economics and politics, and the concomitant supremacy of property rights over human rights. The result has been, in the economic sphere, a return to the pre-war order. Limits to the redistributive purposes of democratic government are now openly set by the masters of global finance, just as Keynes had feared. Trade unions have seen their legal rights removed, while the public sector is parcelled up and sold off to the highest bidder. But political democracy too has been transformed. Political parties have become groups of professionals who compete with each other for the right to manage society for business: as Anthony Downs argued in the US case already 50 years ago, party programmes are constructed by compiling an agenda in which enough 'interest groups' get their demands included to give the party an electoral majority. This is of course combined with the buying of all significant political parties by the super-rich, and the complacency of a prostituted mass media.

Back to basics

There is no shortage of pundits who chart this process of economic and political degradation. But what has gone completely, from academia and the mass media alike, is any underlying and unifying political concept from which to build an alternative. Indeed, the currently dominant approach among the intelligentsia holds that 'unifying political concepts' are the problem, the inevitable outcome being totalitarianism. Perhaps it is time to suggest that we could benefit from a return to some straightforward social theory.

The concept of the working class, as elaborated by Marx especially in *Capital*, is not difficult to grasp. It consists of those who rely for their livelihood on the sale of their labour-power. It is a relational concept, and its correlative is the capitalist class, those who own sufficient property to be able to live off the returns that it yields. What a worker produces – whether it is the piston-rings that go into the making of a petrol engine, or the legal documents that are required to complete the sale of a house – matters not a jot. The conventional idea of 'working-class' and 'middle-class', distinguished until recently as blue-versus white-collar and now largely by educational attainment, is based upon an occupational classification related to what is produced, rather than the social organisation of production: it is really a division *within* the working class as just defined. The fact that many workers apparently own a stake in their pension fund, which is in turn invested in shares, bonds or other forms of tradable property, in no way makes them into capitalists. Indeed, the function of pension funds, as with all forms of workers' savings, is fundamentally to provide a pool of money capital which can be by various mostly legal means expropriated by capitalists for their own purposes. As for the 'professional and managerial classes' (some 25% of UK workers, going by job titles), they provide a pool of relatively more educated workers from whose ranks the capitalist class can renew itself, when the hereditary principle is insufficient to keep up its numbers.

Workers in higher education provide a suitable case study. The apparently autonomous professional teacher has been subordinated to a 'new managerialism' which, like the old managerialism, amounts to the unfettered rule of those in authority. In Britain, our workplaces may not have been legally privatised, but organisationally and culturally, and

above all in our minds, we have no more autonomy than a clerk or a factory worker. Across all the supposedly ‘higher’ professions – law, accountancy, medicine, engineering, even management itself – a relentless process of differentiation has taken place, in which the great majority have become workers, while a tiny minority are now able to generate sufficient wealth to be able, when leveraged by external finance, to aspire to becoming capitalists.

Among the possible sources of opposition to neoliberalism, the social movements whose origins are so often attributed to 1968 have never generated a united and singular movement. Of course they can count some significant successes, for example with regard to gay rights and environmental awareness. But from a capitalist standpoint, their greatest success has been to *conceal* as a potential foundation of opposition the one really universal condition of humanity under capitalism – wage labour. The responsibility for this lies precisely with the intellectuals of 1968. We sit and wring our hands about gang culture and TV reality shows and the egregious crimes of corporations and states alike, but we have forgotten the one possible way out of it all, namely to recognise our own selves for what we are – a section of the working class that has been not merely complicit, but active in perpetuating the conditions of poverty and dependence that most of the world’s workers endure. We prattle on about equality of opportunity, because it means that we can pretend that grotesque inequalities of wealth and power are down to human nature or ‘effort’ or just chance.

But they are not: they result from political choices that we make. We can instead begin from basic principles of social justice – equality, solidarity and the freedom of *all* individuals rather than the propertied alone. We can hold that every human life has equal value, and that this gives to all the right not to mere subsistence, but to a fully developed social existence, an equal share of society’s material resources and equal participation in all of society’s mechanisms of decision-making and administration. This implies a radical transformation of education so that it produces citizens broadly equal in their capacity for mental as well as manual labour, confident to express their opinions and eager to discover new and better ways to fulfil their own need for creative expression, as well as for the consumption of goods and services. In an egalitarian approach to education, resources would be distributed in inverse rather than direct proportion to achievement – as health resources were to be distributed under the founding principles of Britain’s National Health Service. Furthermore, this radical egalitarianism is necessarily global in character: my solidarity does not stop at the borders of Britain or the European Union.

In proposing such a vision of socialist politics, the place to start is not in special political spaces, in elections and governments and parties, but in our day-to-day social existence, and first and foremost in the workplace. For there, in what Marx called the hidden abode of production, we do all work together for a common purpose, and in pursuit of self-fulfilment as well as a livelihood. For all that the new managerialism commands, prescribes, monitors and rewards from above, employers cannot escape the need for their workers to collaborate freely and creatively across the divisions of occupation, skill and status. But precisely because capitalism places such a barrier between the workplace and the wider world, between ‘economics’ and ‘politics’, we do not realise that our capacity for creative communication and the reconciliation of different interests and opinions could be deployed for purposes now deemed ‘political’.

In the twentieth century it was precisely at moments of the most acute societal breakdown that collective action of this kind emerged – and invariably it emerged not from

self-proclaimed political parties created by and for intellectuals, but from ordinary people in their factories, farms, offices and communities. In the collapse of Tsarism, it was such self-activity that created the dynamic and sweeping changes that the Bolsheviks corralled, after 1921, into their grotesque parody of socialism. In Barcelona in 1936, in the liberated areas of Europe and Asia after World War II, in Budapest in 1956, in French factories in 1968 and Polish ones in 1970, 1976 and 1980, we find the same story, one of people impelled by circumstances to work together to meet social needs. In the history of the left, the movements of guild socialism, syndicalism and council communism placed the self-activity of workers in their workplaces at the centre of their theory and practice, drawing inspiration also from the Levellers and the Diggers of the English Civil War, and from the cooperatives and the utopian communities of the mid-19th century. In this history, perhaps, lie the foundations for a renewal of the sort of socialism that Orwell envisaged.

Version 6, 25 August 2008

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