

# Revolutionary Socialist Development in the Third World



**Edited by  
Gordon White, Robin Murray  
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# REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST DEVELOPMENT IN THE THIRD WORLD

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**In memory of Ruth First, socialist scholar and activist, who dedicated her life to the political and intellectual struggle for socialism in Southern Africa.**

## EDITORS' PREFACE

This book grows out of work by the Socialist Development Group at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University. The group's main aim is to expand the comparative analysis of Third World development which has hitherto been heavily oriented towards various forms of capitalist development. A large percentage of the world's population live in countries which have rejected, more or less comprehensively, capitalist modes of development and adopted various forms of socialist development strategy. The experiences of these countries are very diverse; in its work, the group attempts to comprehend this diversity, to investigate the dynamics characteristic of socialist modes of development, assess their developmental achievements and problems, and generate ideas which may be useful for people involved in socialist movements in North, East and South.<sup>1</sup>

The book contains six case-studies of socialist transformation and development in the Third World, each accompanied by statistical and chronological reference material. Given our particular interest in understanding the dynamics of social transformation, we have concentrated on countries which have adopted a *revolutionary* programme of socialist transition in accordance with Marxist or Marxist-Leninist principles. This does not imply that we regard only these countries as examples of 'genuine' socialism, nor does it imply a lack of interest in the many other forms of non-Marxist evolutionary socialist development current in both North and South. For example, 'social democracy' in its various forms remains a crucial historical phenomenon which is poorly understood; a good deal more work also needs to be done on the specific nature and dynamics of 'intermediate régimes' in the Third World.<sup>2</sup> From an analytical point of view, however, it is more rigorous to examine the revolutionary variant before comparing it with evolutionary alternatives (the most obvious

example being Tanzania).<sup>3</sup> Even with this narrower focus, the diversity of socialist forms and processes is very wide.

The case-studies fall into two categories. The first two countries – South Yemen and Mozambique – embarked upon the process of socialist transformation and construction relatively recently, and are thus unfamiliar to both general and specialist readers. In both cases, the authors were asked to provide a general overview of the countries' experience of socialist transition, with particular reference to a set of common issues which emerged from group discussions at our Institute. The most important themes were the following: (i) the particular mode of revolutionary transition to state power, notably the character of mass mobilisation; (ii) the nature of social, economic and political transformation immediately after the success of the revolutionary movement; (iii) the basic strategy of socialist development adopted, and the major constraints and problems encountered in the process of realising it; (iv) the nature of the new social formation, notably the character and role of the state, the general constellation of social classes and political forces, the nature of the labour process and the quality of democratic life; (v) a general evaluation of the 'success' of each particular experience in terms of both socialist and developmental goals.

The next four cases – North Korea, China, Cuba and Vietnam – are longer established. Their experiences have received considerable attention, and overall accounts should be more easily available to our readers. During the past decade, however, these countries have undergone important shifts in ideological orientation and development strategy: North Korea with its economic opening to the West and Japan in the early 1970s, China after the death of Mao and the arrest of the Shanghai radical group in late 1976, Cuba after the failure of the 1970 sugar mobilisation, and Vietnam after the watershed Sixth Plenum in 1979. The causes and impact of these changes pose serious analytical problems. In each case, we asked the authors to describe and explain the shifts, and where possible draw conclusions about their implications for understanding the dynamics of established Third World socialist régimes.

Though these questions and themes have provided some common ground for all six case-studies, each country has its

own key dimensions and each author his/her own points of emphasis – the result is a considerable diversity of approach and argument.

Gordon White  
Robin Murray  
Christine White

## Acknowledgements

Though many people have contributed to the typing of this manuscript, the editors would particularly like to thank Helen Miller, Julia Broomfield and Marguerite Cooke. We would also like to thank Magdalena Reid for preparing the country profiles.

## Notes

- 1 For examples of previous work by members of the Group, see Jack Gray and Gordon White (eds), *China's New Development Strategy*, London, Academic Press, 1982; and Christine White and Gordon White (eds), 'Agriculture, the peasantry and socialist development', *IDS Bulletin* vol. 13, no. 4, 1982 (whole issue).
- 2 For the idea of 'intermediate régimes', see M. Kalecki, 'Observations on social and economic aspects of intermediate régimes', in his *Essays on Developing Countries*, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1976, pp. 30–9; K. P. Jameson, 'An intermediate régime in historical context: the case of Guyana', *Development and Change*, vol. 11, 1980, pp. 77–95.
- 3 James Mittelman has written an interesting comparative study of 'transitional' socialism in Mozambique and 'non-transitional' socialism in Tanzania: *Underdevelopment and the Transition to Socialism: Mozambique and Tanzania*, London, Academic Press, 1981.

## Methodological Note Concerning References in the Country Profiles

Letters refer to the source list following the profile; numerals refer to the general bibliography in Appendix A; Roman numerals are note references, listed at the end of the profile. For sources and definitions not specified, see Appendix B.

# REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST DEVELOPMENT IN THE THIRD WORLD: AN OVERVIEW

Gordon White

## The Definitional Dilemma

'Socialism' is a protean concept describing an even more protean reality. The debate about the nature of 'socialist societies' and 'socialist transition' is complex, and I would prefer to avoid entanglement. In a book of this type, however, it is important to be clear at the outset about how one is using the term socialist given the vast amount of ambiguity and contention surrounding it. Though the editors and contributors do not share a common view, one can approach the problem by making a distinction between 'socialist society' as a current reality and as a desired end-state. To varying degrees, the societies analysed in this book share certain basic structural characteristics which may be termed socialist.<sup>1</sup> First, they have broken—in most cases decisively—the autonomous power of private capital over politics, production and distribution, abrogated the dominance of the law of value in its capitalist form, and embarked upon a development path which does not rely on the dynamic of private ownership and entrepreneurship. Second, they have brought about (or are bringing about) certain fundamental transformations—in the economic, political and social realms—which reflect the long-standing aspirations of revolutionary socialist movements everywhere, and the basic principles of the founding fathers of 'scientific socialism': most notably, the nationalisation of industry, socialisation of agriculture, abolition or limitation of markets, and the establishment of a comprehensive planning structure and a politico-ideological system bent on the transition to an ultimate communist society.



## 2 *Revolutionary Socialist Development in the Third World*

On the other hand, many key features of this type of society, as the following case-studies should document vividly, clash with basic socialist values. As an historically-specific type, these 'actually existing socialisms', to use Bahro's term,<sup>2</sup> must be distinguished from a hypothetical 'higher' stage of 'full' socialism marked by an absence of classes and the state, political democracy and conscious control of the social economy by the associated producers. If the latter stage is fully socialist, then the realities of 'actually existing socialisms' fall short of the name.

How then should we describe them? A plethora of terms is available. 'Socialist societies' is too blandly approving, though one tends to lapse into it for reasons of brevity; 'state capitalist' is unconvincingly damning, and 'revisionist' seldom more than a term of abuse.<sup>3</sup> 'Post-capitalist' is historically inaccurate for the cases we are considering, while 'non-capitalist' is too vague; 'transitional societies' begs the question of whether they are in fact in transition to anything. Perhaps more satisfactory would be 'proto-socialist', implying that only certain initial steps have been taken, or 'state socialist' implying that this form of socialism is highly *étatisé*. Whatever label one adopts, however, it is important to avoid two common tendencies: on the one hand, to overestimate the 'socialist' nature of such societies and view 'full' socialism as merely a future extrapolation of current realities; on the other hand, to minimise the difficulties involved in realising socialist goals in current Third World conditions and engage in critiques which are empty because unrealistic. To declare the present as Utopia (as the Kim Il Song régime does with its insistence on North Korea as a 'paradise on earth'), or to damn the present because it falls short of an abstract view of 'real' socialism, both seem equally unreasonable. At the same time, however, the link between actual 'proto-socialist' societies and a future 'fully socialist' ideal is crucial in evaluating the political nature and potential of such societies. The logic of socialist development surely requires that the future should be a guide to action in the present in both theory and reality. Thus proto-socialist societies could be said to be genuinely engaged in 'the transition to socialism' to the extent that efforts are made and institutions designed in such a way as to pre-figure or increasingly to embody the eventual forms

of 'full socialism'. Without this dynamic, 'socialist society' calcifies into a static 'mode of production' which imposes structural and institutional constraints on progressive change.

## **Context and Constraints**

The cases in this volume were chosen and written with three basic purposes in mind. First, we want to probe the problems involved in realising a revolutionary socialist programme in contemporary Third World conditions, both domestic and international, analysing the interaction of socialist theory and praxis in the tortuous process of converting Marx's *obiter dicta* about socialist transformation into coherent programmes and effective institutions. Second, from a more conventional 'development studies' perspective, we wish to evaluate the developmental performance of these six countries in terms of their own aspirations and in the light of developmental performance elsewhere in the Third World. Certain basic problems emerge as characteristic features of socialist development, common to otherwise diverse countries. Third, we wish to develop a deeper understanding of the fundamental dynamics of state socialist societies. Let us address the first of these issues in this section.

It is by now a cliché to state that, in historical terms, revolutionary socialism has 'turned Marx on his head' by succeeding in relatively backward and peripheral contexts. In consequence, rather than being an historical successor to capitalism, socialism has become an historical substitute. Rather than a force for international working-class solidarity among the advanced capitalist nations, it has become a vehicle for radical nationalism in non-industrial societies. Rather than being built on the cultural and economic foundations of advanced capitalism, revolutionary socialism has, in Senghaas's words, become 'the basis and motive of accelerated, delayed development under adverse internal and international conditions'.<sup>4</sup> Rather than basing its political strength on the child of modern industry – the proletariat – revolutionary socialism has relied on classes and strata deemed secondary to the classic socialist project, notably the peasantry and various sections of the petty bourgeoisie.

With the exception of the Soviet Union and (partially) Yugoslavia, successful socialist revolutions have been confined to that socio-politically diffuse yet historically specific entity called the 'Third World': in countries which were peripheral to the centres of world capitalism and subordinated to them through colonialism or various forms of imperialist or 'neo-colonial' control and penetration, and where indigenous capitalism was weakly developed. Thus to understand the basic features and dynamics of Third World socialism, it is crucial to view it as a radical response to both international subordination and dependence on the one hand, and internal backwardness and social oppression on the other. This specific conjuncture, and the aspirations and institutions it has engendered, has left a deep imprint on the face of post-revolutionary societies.

All of the régimes covered in this volume came to power after a period of anti-imperialist, politico-military struggle, either directly against imperial powers (Japan in China and Korea, France in Vietnam, Portugal in Mozambique, Britain in South Yemen) and/or against régimes supported by imperialist powers (United States *vis à vis* the Kuomintang régime in China, and Batista in Cuba). The political origins and class dynamics of these successful revolutions—still a relatively rare historical phenomenon—have been subjected to a good deal of scrutiny by scholars, socialist theorists and political practitioners alike. All of the countries covered here—and particularly the case-studies of Mozambique and South Yemen—make an important contribution to our understanding of the dynamics of revolution. They illustrate the contradictory impact of imperialism as a matrix of revolution: imposing a context of domination and exploitation which produces various forms of radical counteraction, while at the same time incubating the very social forces and political forms which provide the basis of its own overthrow. The more violent the process of decolonisation, it would seem, the more revolutionary the outcome, the radicalising logic of political persecution and military suppression contributing more to the strength of revolutionary politics than a mere sociological head-count of different classes and strata.

South Yemen, and to a considerable extent Mozambique, follow what Fred Halliday calls the 'Cuban path' to revolu-

tionary power, *viz.* the transition from a radical nationalist movement bent on expelling the occupying power to a revolutionary socialist régime bent on internal class transformation. In both cases this transition involved changes in ideological orientation, organisational forms and class alignments. In South Yemen, the National Liberation Front came to represent the small peasant farmers of the hinterland in their guerrilla struggle against local landowners and tribal authorities. In Mozambique, Wield argues, Frelimo came to express more directly the aspirations of the poor peasantry *vis à vis* richer farmers and the conventional authority of chiefs and elders. Both cases illustrate the familiar phenomenon of collaboration between progressive urban working-class or petty bourgeois elements and the poorer sections of the peasantry, a pattern already familiar from the classic revolutionary cases of China, Vietnam and Cuba.

The experience of revolutionary struggle and the social composition of the revolutionary movement exert a powerful influence over the organisational and developmental orientation of the post-revolutionary régime. Institutions and attitudes forged in the heat of politico-military struggle and nurtured in liberated zones, as in Vietnam, Cuba, China and Mozambique, influenced the nature of the new régimes in distinctive ways, particularly in the immediate post-revolutionary period. 'Revolutionary' methods tend to be applied to developmental purposes: for example, the influence of 'Maoism' in China and Vietnam, the Guevaraist period in Cuba, the *grupos dinamizadores* in Mozambique. As I shall argue later, this heritage of the period of revolutionary struggle and the problems it encounters in the post-revolutionary era of 'socialist construction' constitute part of the basic dynamics of such societies.

The link between revolutionary socialism and national liberation struggles also help explain basic features of the post-revolutionary scene. Without exception, socialist ideology is merged with a fervent nationalism. This is clearly a positive force in so far as it bolsters national sovereignty against external threats and penetration. Nationalism is also a potent force for mobilising the population for developmental efforts, development being seen, quite reasonably, as a question of redistributing politico-economic power between

nations. As Ellman points out, socialism thus becomes a powerful tool used by backward nations to 'catch up'—the Soviet Union being the first successful example.<sup>5</sup> However, nationalism of this intensity sometimes degenerates into chauvinism (Pol Pot's Kampuchea being the most severe example) and exclusionism (for example, in North Korea). The pre- (and post-) revolutionary context of military threat and conflict also contributes to a pervasive militarisation of society, ideologically and institutionally, a heavy security consciousness which tends to retain its strength when the actual level of threat has succeeded. The heavily statist nature of Third World socialist societies both reflects and reinforces these tendencies, a fact which helps to explain the weakness of 'socialist internationalism' and the frequency of wars *between* socialist countries over the past decade.

Turning to the post-revolutionary environment, it has hardly been conducive to a speedy and thorough-going implementation of revolutionary socialist goals. Externally, new socialist countries have faced political hostility and sometimes military aggression from imperialist powers, both capitalist and socialist. Economically, small Third World socialist countries often face the same constraints as many of their non-socialist counterparts: dependence on exports of one or two primary products and vulnerability to the structure and dynamics of international markets. Even where a country is sufficiently large and well-endowed to limit these pressures, the need for participation in international markets remains, and this may pose severe constraints on governments' internal freedom of manoeuvre. Edward Friedman, for example, argues (in the way of Wallerstein) that the nature of the international political economy makes 'true' socialism impossible, since the imperatives of the world market 'force state power-holders to act in a capitalist manner, i.e. to organise their society for competition in world exchange'.<sup>6</sup>

The international scene also offers opportunities, as we shall see later. Dependence and vulnerability can be reduced to some degree by exploiting competition between industrial powers, both capitalist and socialist; certain countries can realise advantages deriving from natural resources or strategic location. Inimical political and economic pressures from the

capitalist world can to some extent be counter-balanced by aid from and trade with developed socialist countries, notably the Soviet Union—and, in certain circumstances, vice versa.

Internal constraints are no less formidable, as Fred Halliday argues in his analysis of South Yemen which dramatically demonstrates, in his words, that 'if socialist revolution is an attempt to expand and consolidate the realm of freedom, . . . such revolutions take place overwhelmingly in the realm of necessity'. Material scarcity exerts a stifling grip—the parameters of innovation are narrow. 'True' socialism, it appears, must await the economic millennium. The problems are familiar to students of the Third World: narrow and poorly-integrated economic bases, low levels of technology, widespread illiteracy and lack of trained personnel for development programmes. In the socio-political realm, nascent régimes in countries where national traditions were weak, such as South Yemen and Mozambique, must deal with social conflict based on religious, cultural, tribal or ethnic schisms; where national traditions were strong, as in China, Vietnam and Korea, the dead hand of a bureaucratic and authoritarian past claws at those who would seek a revolutionary break. More immediately, fledgling socialist governments face opposition and subversion from defeated political forces and those social strata threatened by revolutionary redistribution.

The crushing weights imposed by 'the realm of necessity', domestic and international, have raised serious questions about the viability of socialism in Third World conditions. Opinions among western socialists analysing the Third World are diverse, with two influential positions at each pole. On the one side, there is the idea of '*premature socialism*' of which Warren was the primary exponent. This argument draws on classical Marxian analysis of the progressive historical function of capitalism and its role as creator of the true social base of socialist revolution, the industrial proletariat.

As Third World capitalism grows, imperialism as a system of domination. . . declines, as Third World capitalism develops, the working class is destined to play the classic revolutionary role.<sup>7</sup>

Separated from its economic matrix and class base, Third

World 'socialism' is thus by definition either an historical mistake, an 'ultra-leftist' perversion, or a political fraud, a prettified populism fronting for petty bourgeois nationalism, statism or militarism.

On the other side of the debate are people working within various neo-Marxist or 'dependencia' frameworks, who see revolutionary socialism as saviour of the Third World. In this paradigm, capitalist development at the periphery tends to be seen as a subordinate expression of world capitalism which operates as a rapacious and destructive form of imperialism inimical to real national development, including capitalist. Revolutionary socialism thus provides the *Marx-ex-machina* which solves the problem of 'under-development', a combination of backwardness and dependence. In the words of Dieter Senghaas, 'it devolves upon socialism to save peripheralised societies from further peripheralisation ... socialism becomes a development policy without alternatives under conditions under which capitalism failed'.<sup>8</sup>

The first position is salutary, in that it highlights the dubious nature of various self-styled 'socialisms'. It is also a useful counter to the 'voluntaristic' currents common in newly-established socialist countries, which overestimate the extent to which 'objective' realities must yield to political mobilisation and institutional change. Christine White pinpoints this problem in her study of Vietnamese development policy, while Fred Halliday emphasises the obverse point when he cites South Yemen as a 'harsh reminder of the objective, material and cultural, preconditions for any full transition'. Yet the 'premature socialism' position is itself over-optimistic, nay starry-eyed, about the prospects for generalised indigenous capitalist development in the Third World, minimises its harmful social effects, and condemns political radicals to a passive waiting game. Moreover, the failure of revolutionary socialism to emerge from advanced capitalism in the West hardly augurs well for this historical scenario. Indeed, the particular form of social fragmentation and reintegration which capitalism introduces, both internally and externally, may make the construction of alternative co-operative forms more difficult—this is the nub of Mao's idea of a 'poor and blank' society on which new words can be inscribed, and it also lies behind the argument for national self-reliance and

'disengagement' as an essential precondition for socialist transformation.

On the other hand, any extreme view to the effect that revolutionary socialism is the *only* path to successful national development would have to be rejected, or at least heavily qualified, given the experience of the so-called 'newly industrialising countries' over the past two decades. While it is easy to puncture the superficial propaganda surrounding alleged South Korean, Taiwanese or Brazilian 'miracles', point to the inequalities, instabilities and dependencies embodied in such modes of development, and question their generalisability, development in material and cultural terms has still been impressive in some cases, not least in the eyes of their socialist competitors (for example, many contemporary Chinese economists regard Taiwanese economic progress as superior to the mainland's).

In my own view, 'proto-socialist' development in Third World countries is neither historically inappropriate, nor is it the only path to development. The experience of Third World socialist countries suggests, on the contrary, that they constitute a *distinctive* and *viable* mode of development, in terms of certain key social, economic and political indices, and—though this may be true to greater or lesser degrees—*preferable* to hypothetical capitalist alternatives in so far as the interests of the mass of the population are concerned. These judgements require more attention to the actual developmental performance of Third World socialism and we turn to this in the next section.

## **Revolutionary Socialist Developmental Performance**

The basic argument of this section is that revolutionary socialism has many developmental achievements to its credit, but that it embodies many basic problems, more or less common to its various national expressions, which are 'internal' to this specific mode of development, and which cannot be attributed to objective constraints or external pressures. In making such judgements, however, it is important to avoid a static kind of cost-benefit analysis—the



contradictory performance of revolutionary socialism is rooted in its historical origins, as we have seen, but also in the specific structure and dynamics characteristic of state socialist social formations, as we shall make clear in the last section.

Overall judgements on the developmental performance of 'socialist' Third World countries are hard to arrive at given the plethora of 'socialist' régimes, and the absence of precise criteria for differentiation. Jameson and Wilber, the editors of a recent compendium which included a wider range of 'socialist' countries than those covered in this volume (including Burma, Iraq, Syria and Tanzania) concluded that there has been a 'rough comparability in [per capita] growth rates' between 1960 and 1974, with thirteen 'Marxian socialist' countries (apparently including eastern Europe) growing at 3.68 percent p.a. and non-socialist Third World countries, including OPEC, growing at 3.06 percent.<sup>9</sup> They also tend to agree that socialist countries do better in terms of economic equality and provision for basic human needs, notably health and education. One could also add that socialist countries seem to have tackled the problems of unemployment and inflation more successfully than their capitalist counterparts. For Jameson and Wilber, the main black mark was the relative absence of 'human rights', especially but not exclusively when defined in conventional liberal terms.

It is, of course, hard to generalise from the small number of case-studies in this volume, but each provides evidence of solid achievement across a wide range of indices, as a perusal of the country profiles would reveal. Many of the most signal accomplishments, moreover, are hard to measure and do not show up in the statistics: enhanced national identity and pride, greater cultural self-confidence, abolition or reduction of previously exploitative or oppressive social relationships, the spread of 'modern' or secular attitudes towards nature and society, and the political mobilisation of previously inert strata.

At the same time, however, benefits conceal, indeed often entail, serious costs—the trade-offs are a familiar theme of political and academic discourse: equality v. liberty, collectivism v. individual initiative, redistribution/incentives, planning/market, political centralisation/political repression,

political unification/conformity, self-reliance/insularity, mass mobilisation/the role of experts, positive/negative freedom, and so on. Some of these costs appear particularly stark in certain cases, notably North Korea, where remarkable social and economic progress has gone side by side with political stultification. These trade-offs are a basic element of the development process, common to all types of strategy; some of them, however, are particularly salient in socialist contexts.

Some of these dilemmas, and their developmental consequences, have been the object of reassessment in relatively mature socialist countries over the past decade—our case-studies of China, Vietnam and Cuba focus on this process which seems characteristic of a certain stage of socialist development. The ‘models’ of the 1960s, notably Guevarism and Maoism, have been adapted or rejected in Cuba and China; a critical review of Kim Il Song’s *juche* is long overdue in Korea.

Let us briefly review the main areas of debate and reassessment within socialist countries.

### (i) *Development Strategy*

All state socialist societies are bent on eventual, and hopefully rapid, industrialisation for a mixture of economic, social and political reasons. Industrialisation is seen not merely as the establishment of conventionally defined industries, but a comprehensive process of both social and technical change throughout the whole economy. Industrialisation is seen as providing the only effective means of dissolving the ties of dependence and defending against hostile international pressures—military, political and economic. Domestically, it is seen as the essential basis for increased material and cultural standards, for transforming the realm of necessity into one of freedom. Politically, as Carciofi argues in the Cuban case, it is seen as laying the foundation for ‘true’ socialism resting on an industrial working class.

The Soviet precedent of crash industrialisation, with priority to producer-good sectors, has exerted a beguiling influence. For a considerable period, this strategy was virtually equated with ‘socialist development’ imposing a framework of priorities for state action—heavy over light

industry, industry over agriculture, import substitution over international integration, investment (both productive and social) over consumption, speed over proportionality—which was, to varying degrees, incompatible with domestic factor endowments and social needs. Much of the policy dynamics of Third World socialist régimes revolves around the need to devise new strategic conceptions of ‘socialist development’ harmonious with national ecological potential and socio-political needs/demands. For relatively small, malproportioned and dependent economies such as Cuba, Mozambique and South Yemen, this pattern is clearly inappropriate, yet the Cuban leadership did make an abortive *lunge towards crash industrialisation in the early 1960s* before reverting to a strategy resting on comparative advantage in agriculture (predominantly sugar). Development strategy in Mozambique is still in an embryonic stage, resting on the principle (akin to the Maoist slogan) of ‘Agriculture as base, industry as leading factor and motive force’. Though it embodies some of the ambiguity of its Maoist predecessor and is the subject of heated debate, it lays heavy stress on agriculture, and attempts to orient industry towards infrastructure and those industries ‘that provide the people’s basic needs’. Even in a large country with a relatively comprehensive resource base such as China, where the Soviet precedent seems to have more *prima facie* relevance, different factor endowments and a more rural-oriented political leadership have brought pressures for reorientation towards agriculture and light industry, beginning with Mao Tse Tung’s re-evaluation, in the mid-1950s, in his speech ‘On the Ten Great Relationships’, through the stress on ‘agriculture as the foundation’ of national development from 1960 onwards, to the strategic ‘readjustment’ in favour of agriculture and light industry introduced by the Dengist leadership of the late 1970s. In the Vietnam case, the dynamic of development debates has been distorted by the exigencies of war, but *Christine White’s analysis of the late 1970s points to comparable rethinking and strategic readjustment prompted by changes in the international environment and stubbornly sluggish performance in agriculture*. On the other hand, the North Korea case is a very distinctive one where a Soviet-style strategy was applied with apparently considerable success

on *both* industrial and agricultural fronts and maintained, with relatively marginal adjustments, until the present. To the extent that one assesses this experience positively, North Korea can be cited to support an argument that, at least for medium-sized Third World countries with a relatively favourable resource base and geo-political position, a determined leadership and a relatively homogeneous population, the Soviet model cannot be discounted as a strategic option. The number of hypothetical conditions is large, however, and the range of application will be correspondingly narrow.

The Chinese and perhaps the Cuban cases demonstrate another dimension of changing development strategies which can also be seen in the evolution of eastern European economies. Strategic reorientation should not merely be analysed in static terms as a matching of strategic priorities to given economic conditions and socio-political demands. There is a *dynamic* element which reflects the basic movement of state socialist societies under endogenous and exogenous pressures. Focusing for the moment on internal pressures, there is only a limited amount of historical space in which a 'big push/high-accumulation' strategy can be pushed without unacceptably high economic cost, social tension and political conflict. Jam tomorrow must sooner or later be followed by jam today, and strategy must be oriented towards current consumption – social and individual – for the mass of the population. I shall expand my analysis of these dynamic processes in the conclusion.

#### (ii) *The International Dimension*

The case-studies in this book deal with the pressures exerted, and opportunities offered, by the international political economy, both socialist and capitalist. At the economic level, a basic decision must be taken on what kind of relationship a socialist country can and should adopt, at any given time, towards the international economy, especially the industrialised capitalist countries. The last decade has seen a trend towards growing interdependence between socialist countries in eastern Europe and the Third World on the one hand and capitalist countries and international markets on the other.

The pressure of 'the international law of value', of economic and technological advance among the industrialised capitalist countries, has been inexorable. To catch up with, or even to survive as, a socialist country in this changing environment, particularly in the absence of a comparable dynamic in industrialised socialist countries, requires that an industrialising socialist country must participate in international markets. The opportunities offered by the international political economy have changed over time. One can discern three broad stages: the first 'cold war' stage was eroding in the 1960s, and had evaporated to a considerable extent by the early 1970s with the end of the Vietnam War, the Shanghai communiqué, and the weakening of the US embargo against Cuba; the second stage, the early 1970s, seemed to offer an environment favourable to socialist leaderships who wished to participate more extensively in international financial and commodity markets; the third stage, from the mid-1970s on, was one of accelerating inflation and recession in most of the industrialised capitalist countries, instability and growing crisis in international trade and finance which, for those socialist countries already heavily committed outside, were disruptive and in some cases (e.g. Poland) traumatic, and which offered a far more treacherous environment for any socialist country newly seeking to reap the benefits of comparative advantage.

For all Third World socialist countries – and particularly for smaller countries for whom the prospect of self-reliance is chimerical, or for a larger country such as Vietnam, whose economy is prostrate after decades of devastation – international relationships are a crucial component of national development. If we focus on the smaller and/or weaker countries covered in this volume, each faces politico-economic threats from countries wishing to limit their developmental prospects and undermine their social system where possible: South Yemen from conservative Middle Eastern states, Mozambique from South Africa, Cuba from the United States and Vietnam from China and the United States. Each country has tried in distinctive ways to expand the positive developmental impact of external liaisons without a corresponding loss of sovereignty. This involves certain choices, between the industrialised capitalist and socialist economies

and within each group. Each case provides a different pattern: Cuba, though heavily dependent on Soviet military and economic aid and political support, and a full member of CMEA with a high level of trade with the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, has been able to diversify its trading ties with capitalist countries during the 1970s. Though the latter trade was in deficit in the late 1970s, overall balance was rectified to some extent by an improvement of terms of trade with the Soviet Union, notably through agreements on the prices of sugar exports and oil imports. Vietnam, after heavy dependence on Soviet and Chinese aid during the war, made a serious effort to diversify foreign economic ties with capitalist countries in the late 1970s, but was unsuccessful, partly because of the lamentable state of the economy and conflict with China and Kampuchea, but partly because the United States exerted pressure to discourage foreign investment and political accommodation. In the Vietnam case, the eventual decision to join CMEA seems to have been taken as the only available option in a situation of economic crisis, military threat and virtual political blockade. Mozambique, on the other hand, though inheriting a colonial economy damaged by flight of capital and personnel after Independence, has enjoyed significantly more freedom of action, South Africa notwithstanding. Aid and investment have been forthcoming not only from socialist countries, but also from Europe and Japan and the degree of western political hostility to the Mozambiquan revolution has been relatively restrained given ambivalence about South Africa and the need to combat increased Soviet influence in the area. South Yemen has also been successful in attracting aid, trade and investment from both socialist and non-socialist countries and has benefitted from tensions between competing Arab powers. Most distinctively, it has received a major financial fillip from large numbers of emigrant workers to the tune of about £60 million per year.

Without pursuing details any further, certain general conclusions can be drawn on the basis of these cases. Third World socialist countries face many of the same external constraints as their non-socialist counterparts: distorted post-colonial economies, a weak base of available resources, dependence on a few commodities, chronic

balance of payments deficits, etc. On the other hand, their capacity for internal socio-political mobilisation and their ability to establish strong states aid them in their attempt to make the best of the options available. And options there are, notably in the sphere of economic diversification and political non-alignment: the strategy of securing the developmental advantages offered by both capitalist and socialist industrialised powers by utilising the economic and political competition within and between each of these two groups. It is now not unusual to see countries such as Vietnam, South Yemen, Mozambique, which are full, associate or aspirant members of international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank on the one hand, and the CMEA on the other – North Korean isolation is now the exception. There is now virtual consensus among the leadership of socialist countries – even including the North Koreans, who opened the door to joint ventures in 1981 – that there are considerable economic advantages to be gained from expanding the range of ties with the capitalist world and its international institutions, particularly in securing scarce developmental capital and much needed technology. Former radical versions of ‘self-reliance’ are no longer in vogue, particularly after the demise of the Maoist variant and the embarrassment of the Kim Il Songist variant.

The Soviet bloc also provides certain advantages: as a political and military counterweight to western pressures and as an economic partner, inside or outside CMEA, with certain inherent advantages: the opportunity for more stable and predictable trade relationships; for barter agreements and trading in ‘soft’ goods; for certain types of advanced technology and limited capital inflows. The Soviet connection is also crucial as a haven for countries under severe international pressure, the best examples being Cuba and Vietnam. It is worth remembering, moreover, that two cases of successful and relatively self-reliant industrialisation – China and North Korea – were heavily dependent on the Soviet Union in their early years.

Yet the availability of international opportunities positive to socialist development should not blind us to the fact that – with significant exceptions, notably China in recent years – the international environment for socialist Third

World countries has in general been less benevolent than for their non-socialist counterparts. Finance is less forthcoming and terms often tougher, private capital is more cautious about investment, hostile political pressures are stronger, and the technical and economic capacities of the industrialised socialist countries (not to mention their political will) are insufficient for the developmental needs of their poorer counterparts.

Analytically speaking, however, it is inadequate to deal with international alignments in terms of options to be chosen by national leaderships. The developmental implications of alternative choices are more fundamental than the policy choice paradigm can comprehend. To probe these deeper processes, we need a longer historical perspective. To this end, it is important to look at the two cases in this volume – China and North Korea – which are relatively long-established, and in which an initial stage of import-substitution industrialisation was successful, in both cases with Soviet help. The long-term impact of a period of Soviet tutelage has not as yet received a great deal of analytical attention. An initial judgement suggests the following hypothesis: that the major long-term impact of the Soviet Union on Third World socialist countries is not so much through economic relationships (which can be controlled or abrogated), or direct political intervention (which can be countered internally and internationally), but through a process of institutional *Gleichschaltung*, the imprinting of Soviet-type patterns of behaviour and attitude in the crucial genetic years of new socialist régimes. For all their Maoist and Kim Il Songist bluster, China and North Korea are still ‘Sovietised’ in their basic structures. As the case-studies by Carciofi and Wield suggest, moreover, Soviet institutional practices are contesting with indigenous patterns of democratisation in Cuba and Mozambique. The nature of Sovietisation and effective countermeasures need more systematic study.

In assessing the impact of growing ties with capitalist economies, we are on firmer empirical ground. In the Chinese and Korean cases – as in the case of small eastern European socialist countries such as Hungary and Rumania – their increasingly sophisticated economic structures have demanded greater participation in the international capitalist economy:



the need for raw materials, wider markets for finished products, or imports of advanced technology. One can detect two broad patterns of increased participation here: an *'introverted'* one in which foreign financial or trade ties are sought to improve domestic economic performance within a still largely *'self-reliant'* import-substituting framework (for example, North Korea in the early 1970s and China from 1977-9), or even to solve fundamental politico-economic contradictions (for example, Poland's spending spree in the early-mid 1970s), and an *'extraverted'* pattern whereby international market participation, financial and commercial, is seen in more classical Ricardian terms as a stimulus to the domestic economy through competitive pressures and international specialisation (this resembles the Hungarian experience more closely and, to a more limited degree, Chinese policy since 1979).

In expanding relations with the international capitalist economy, a socialist country faces a Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, as its economy grows more complex, its requirements more differentiated and its productive capacity over-spills the boundaries of national markets, and if its leadership wishes to absorb the technology necessary to increase labour productivity decisively and compete in sophisticated international markets, the need to expand international economic ties becomes economically (and politically) inexorable. As the North Korean and Chinese cases demonstrate, however, *'re-linking'* of a previously self-reliant economy may prove difficult, with many unforeseen costs: the North Koreans' optimism about markets for their exports proved faulty, and they were forced to default on foreign commercial debts; the Chinese avoided large-scale debt, but made poor import decisions, leading to wastefully inadequate absorption of expensive technology, and, perhaps of greater concern to the leadership, suffered substantial social and political *'contamination'* from an irrationally precipitous expansion of foreign contacts. More fundamentally, one could argue that the greater the extent that a socialist country participates in the international capitalist division of labour, and endeavours to remain competitive therein, not only is its economy more vulnerable to uncertainty, instability and inflation, posing threats to socialist goals such as full employment and price

stability, but it may also be forced to reorganise production relations in ways incompatible with a socialist transition. To beat capitalism, it seems, one must join it; if one joins it, there is the danger of internal restructuring and eventual absorption.

(iii) *Economic Management*

All the countries covered here have established some version of a central planning system to define developmental priorities and manage the economy. In Mozambique, this system is still in a relatively embryonic stage, state interventions in the economy still appear, from Wield's account, to have an *ad hoc*, incremental character and socialisation of the economy is still far from complete. In South Yemen, the planning system is more firmly established and the level of socialisation more advanced, but achievement of planning targets has been frustrated by uncertainty about external finance and imported inflation. In both cases, the planning process is highly vulnerable to external fluctuations; internally, they are both mixed economies, and thus face the familiar problems of securing plan discipline across socialised and private sectors. The other four countries surveyed have far higher levels of socialisation, thus alleviating problems of coordination and control between public and private, but moving to a new plane of problems characteristic of 'developed' systems of central planning, already familiar from eastern European experience in the 1960s and 1970s. These problems have been discussed widely elsewhere and do not need elaboration here:<sup>10</sup> the basic point is that, though a highly centralised system of directive planning may be effective in the initial stages of socialist transformation, as the economic structure stabilises and becomes more complex, traditional methods of planning become increasingly ineffective in managing the economy in an efficient, flexible and dynamic way. At a certain point in the evolution of most of the mature socialist economies, therefore, 'reform' projects have arisen with a critical diagnosis of traditional planning and a programme proposing a switch towards parametric planning, administrative decentralisation, and expansion of market mechanisms. Of the four relatively well-established countries covered,

three – Vietnam, Cuba and China – have followed this pattern to varying degrees. The lack of reform in the North Korea case perhaps owes more to a sclerotic political system than to an economy without problems.

Though reform programmes are a response to systemic defects, however, they have themselves proven problematic in both conception and realisation – the Chinese case illustrates this well. The reform project is rooted in the idea of complementarity between plan and market: planning will still be the dominant principle of economic action but can be combined with market processes in mutually beneficial ways. But the relationship between them is also contradictory and, without a well-conceived programme of policy reform, the results may be the worst rather than the best of both worlds – an unproductive co-existence of inaccurate planning with ‘anarchic’ markets. If we focus on non-economic factors, moreover, reform programmes appear even more problematic. From a *political* point of view, ‘planning’ and ‘markets’ are systems of social power, each with its own structure of interests and ideological predispositions. ‘Marketisation’ opens up new opportunities for those in charge of and/or working in basic level production units, and diminishes the power of the former agencies of administrative control – the relationship between ‘plan’ and ‘market’ thus becomes a political battleground. Marketisation can, in theory, be defended on various social grounds (weakening of bureaucratic privilege, expanding the range of individual choice, linking material rewards more closely with effort, etc.) but in practice – particularly in situations of excess demand and financial disequilibrium – expansion of markets can bring price instability, inflation, profiteering and speculation, over-production, unemployment and increasing wage differentiation which release new wells of social discontent.<sup>11</sup> After two years of attempted economic reform in China, the new General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, remarked that ‘our present domestic problems are like a pile of dry kindling. A single match could start a blaze’.<sup>12</sup> This is one of the major reasons why the reform experiment was brought to a screeching halt in China in early 1981.

(iv) *Relations of production*

Several of our contributors deal with debates over the organisation of production relations in both industry and agriculture. Debates both inside and outside state socialist countries revolve around the question of how to establish a system of production relations which combine socialist goals of co-operation, self-management and collective commitment on the one hand with micro-economic efficiency on the other. This general question has led to specific policy debates about worker participation, management methods and incentive systems. The classic Soviet model of organisation in state industrial enterprises – in fact, if not always in theory – has tended to be authoritarian, with clear authority designated to managers and a limited role for worker participation or trade union power. The use of hierarchical chains of command and differentiated division of labour in complex organisations has led to comparisons with capitalist production processes and allegations of class exploitation and subordination.<sup>13</sup> In the Marxian tradition since social relations within basic production units are the source of class relations in society as a whole, they are the crucial context for evaluating progress towards the ‘classlessness’ of full socialism.

Of the countries covered in this book, some accepted Soviet institutional forms, sometimes wholesale, in their initial stage of socialist transformation, later attempting to adapt them in line with specific national conditions and political traditions: Maoism is the best example of (ultimately unsuccessful) adaptation. In other countries, such as Cuba, there was an attempt to create new forms in the initial period (notably the Cuban stress on *conciencia* in the 1960s).

In general, there have been two main concerns: democratisation and micro-economic efficiency. Experience of attempts to democratise industrial enterprises in state socialist countries suggests that, if the initial pattern of production relations adopted was in the authoritarian Soviet tradition, it hardens into habits of command and subordination and is perpetuated by the material and political differentials inherent in unequal authority. This pattern is reinforced by a legiti-

mating logic which emphasises (i) the need for control of the workforce to promote accumulation in a context of scarcity; (ii) the need for a precise division of labour and a corresponding system of coordination to meet the growing complexity of technical conditions of production; (iii) the need for labour regulations and hierarchical controls to discipline an immature workforce still unequal to the challenge of self-management. This situation effectively resists later attempts to democratise, such as the Maoist.

These considerations add weight to Wield's stress on analysing debates about and changes in relations of production in state-owned enterprises in Mozambique's crucial genetic phase of institution-building. He focuses on the crucial role of the *grupos dinamizadores* (GDs) or 'dynamising groups', organised in both residential and work units, during the difficult period of transition after the departure of the Portuguese, and the later establishment of workers' councils in basic level units of production and service. The latter organisations are designed as weapons of worker power against any resurrection of pre-revolutionary relations of production and the encroachment of bureaucracy. But Wield points to the constraints on their influence: from workers' lack of technical knowledge and generally low level of education, and from growing managerial power and prerogatives apparently supported by President Machel on grounds of efficiency and class conciliation. The progress of these nascent mass organisations has been uneven and their future is uncertain; given the expansion and consolidation of the Party apparatus, government bureaucracy and managerial authority, it would not be surprising if they were reduced to a relatively marginal role characteristic of Soviet-style trade unions. As Wield's account suggests, however, the issue is still undecided, and the struggle for democratic control of the workplace continues.

Similar processes of workplace democratisation have also occurred in Cuba, though the historical rhythm is different. During the 1960s, massive mass mobilisation was not accompanied by a development of effective institutions for democratic participation and control among the workers—it was participation without power, involvement without real responsibility. Partly because of the adverse socio-economic

consequences of this strategy, and partly as a result of the Cuban leadership commitment to mass participation, in principle, and as a counterweight to burgeoning bureaucracy. The 1970s brought certain institutional changes favourable to workplace democratisation, notably a significant increase in the role of trade unions as a check and balance within the planning system.

As Carciofi argues, however, the mere shift towards formally more democratic institutions in Cuba does not mean that they have a firm political foundation. In fact, the political logic of such 'sponsored' democratisation—as in Cuba or post-Mao attempts to establish 'workers' congresses' in Chinese enterprises—is decidedly problematic. Common sense would suggest that effective mass institutions are created by a strong impetus from below—otherwise, as Carciofi argues in the Cuban case, formally new institutions may be subordinated to the structural logic of the old system.

In dealing with changes in relations of production, we have so far emphasised the issue of democratisation. Efficiency questions, variously defined, have also been of paramount concern to socialist leaderships bent, in the official terminology, on 'harmonising the relations of production with the development of the productive forces'. Given the cardinal role of agriculture in most Third World countries, and its consequently vital role as the basis for eventual socialist industrialisation, there has been considerable concern about agricultural performance and increasing emphasis on readjusting rural production units in ways calculated to boost output and productivity. This has involved broad-ranging debates about the advisability of agricultural collectivisation (*vis à vis* state farms or peasant holdings), the precise pacing of collectivisation, different forms of co-operative/collective units and relations between collective units and the residual private sector. Since two of the editors have addressed this question in detail elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> I shall only refer here to the specific issues raised by the cases in this volume. First, the difficulties involved in mapping out a clear and consistent strategy of socialist agricultural development are highlighted by the case of Mozambique: policies have been ambiguous on the relative importance of socialised v. peasant agriculture and state farms and co-operatives. The resultant uncertainly

has been unfavourable for *all* sectors. Second, turning to forms of socialised agriculture, Mozambique also illustrates the difficulties involved in setting up and running efficiently a system of state farms, owing to managerial, financial and technical inadequacies. The Cuban case, on the other hand, presents a more positive picture of the capacity of state farms, in the crucial sugar sector, to raise average yields and promote technical transformation, a case argued in more detail elsewhere by Pollit.<sup>15</sup>

Third, the cases throw light on the evolution and performance of collective agriculture. In the established socialist countries of East Asia, where most agriculture is collectivised, the collectivisation process was aided considerably by previous patterns of communal ownership (in Vietnam) and nucleated village settlement. In the East African context, however, progress towards co-operatives or collectives is impeded by scattered settlement patterns. Thus concentration of population is an essential precondition for communal production, and this is a socio-economically disruptive and politically divisive process. Where collective agriculture is well-established, there are continuing problems of sluggish growth in output, and productivity which impose constraints on national aspirations for industrialisation. The North Korean case seems a counter-example, but apparent progress may conceal serious and intensifying problems. In other countries—notably China and Vietnam—these problems have led governments to a wideranging reassessment of institutional forms in agriculture and to certain basic policy changes: a rethinking of the traditional Marxist-Leninist emphasis on the ultimate aim of introducing large-scale, industrialised production units in agriculture, caution about pushing the transition from small to larger-scale collectives, and emphasis on various ways of decentralising the production process within existing collective units. Particularly important in the Vietnamese and Chinese cases has been the recently increased recognition of the economic importance of the household economy—both as a separate sector producing and exchanging certain key food-stuffs and generating a considerable proportion of rural cash incomes, and as a specific form of production organisation which can be incorporated, on a contractual basis, into the

framework of collective production. The recent moves towards subcontracting to households in Vietnam and household-based responsibility systems in China are important examples of this reorientation.<sup>16</sup> While the economic results of the reforms seem initially encouraging in terms of raising productivity and incomes, these policy changes also have economic drawbacks (for example, weakening rural infrastructural construction and local accumulation generally) and socio-political costs (increasing inter-household inequalities, weakening collective welfare services and collective political institutions) which make further re-evaluation and policy readjustment necessary in future. Though socialist agriculture remains a problematic area, however, such examples of ideological creativity and organisational flexibility give scope for optimism. Certainly, one should be sceptical about sweeping claims about the superiority of agriculture in non-socialist contexts, rooted in simple notions of allegedly 'individualistic' peasants, or superficial contrasts between collective and private, socialist and capitalist production. The depressing realities of rural life in many non-socialist Third World countries should also give pause to such judgements.

(v) *Social issues*

While the countries under scrutiny appear to have performed well in terms of basic social indices— notably economic redistribution and provision of education and basic welfare services— the areas of gender relations and female liberation remain problematic, a point to which several of our contributors refer. In most of the state socialist countries of which this author has some knowledge, considerable headway has been made in improving the social status of women, as compared both with their pre-revolutionary position, and their situation in non-socialist countries with similar cultural backgrounds and/or economic levels. Fred Halliday argues, for example, that 'the PDRY has gone further than any other Peninsula society towards ensuring the equality of men and women'. Though Jon Halliday paints a less favourable picture of North Korea, it may appear better when compared with certain aspects of the position of women in South Korean



'society, such as exploitation of cheap female labour, widespread prostitution and 'sexual tourism'.

This progress has certain basic dimensions: significant improvements in the legal position of women, through laws on family, marriage, divorce and economic status; greater female participation in political activities and organisations, and access to positions of political and administrative authority; improvement in the social freedom of women (for example, erosion of the *sheidor* in South Yemen) and the social resources to which they have access, notably education, health and childcare facilities; greater opportunities for remunerated employment outside the home and some limited headway in breaking down male occupational preserves, including skilled manual industrial and technical-professional labour.

These gains seem particularly dramatic in the immediate post-revolutionary period when the memory of the 'old society' is still fresh. If one analyses the experiences of longer-established socialist régimes, one is struck by a certain slowing down of female emancipation—there is a tendency for established socialist régimes to claim that the 'women question' is basically solved, and then shunt it into a political siding. This is not merely a feature of Third World socialism; in their comparative study of the Soviet Union and China, Salaff and Merkle argue that

[the] oppression of women [has] remained culturally, politically and economically institutionalised: the traditional image of women, the subordination of women in the family, and the economic and political inequality of women were not eliminated by the revolution.<sup>17</sup>

How valid is this kind of judgement for Third World socialism in general? I do not have the information necessary to make sweeping comparative judgements—the following remarks are based on a detailed examination of the Chinese case, and would also seem to have some application to the other Asian socialist societies (Korea and Vietnam), but should not be extended to other contexts without further research.

The general picture in the Chinese case is that, in spite of significant progress towards gender equality, women still lag behind in many areas of life, and in some—notably the

political—lag far behind. First, in terms of strategic policy priorities, the separate question of women's emancipation is low. Women have in effect been asked to subordinate their sectional interests to the exigencies of industrialisation and/or the higher imperatives of 'class struggle'. Second, in the economy, the sexual division of labour remains pronounced—women's role in production has been far greater in light industry and agriculture than in heavy industry, in the collective rather than the state sectors, household rather than socialised sectors. Since these distinctions correspond to differences in income, prestige and, ultimately, political influence, they serve to perpetuate female inferiority in society at large. Third, serious attempts to change the distribution of work *within* the household are rare (Cuba may be an exception here). Since low levels of development limit the extent to which household tasks can be socialised, the vast bulk of domestic labour still rests on women's shoulders, creating a double burden if women also work outside the home. Fourth, there has been scant scope for independent women's organisations—official women's associations, like other 'mass organisations', are usually tame toe-ers of the official line and, while helping to improve the everyday life of women in various ways, do not raise the 'big issues'. This political weakness is reinforced by gross under-representation of women in the major state institutions—Party, government and army.

How do we account for these persistent inequalities? Though the influence of pre-revolutionary 'hangovers' and continued resistance from less progressive sectors of society are crucial factors, they do not constitute a full explanation. There is a strong argument to suggest that the post-revolutionary society itself still embodies a distinct realm of dominance and inequality rooted in gender relations, ultimately founded on power relations within the family. To the extent that socialist institutions reflect this pattern of male dominance, the logic of dissimilar interest will blunt the redistributive impact of policies designed to improve women's lot, declaratory good intentions and good faith notwithstanding. This kind of analysis would seem to lead inexorably to the conclusion that the pace of female emancipation and gender equalisation can only be accelerated by the formation

of relatively autonomous women's organisations, to exert greater political pressure on gender issues, and provide a more critical perspective on official definitions of socialist development, sexual equality and women's liberation.

(vi) *The problem of the state*

The question of the state—its economic, political and social role—is perhaps the central question of socialist development. 'Actually existing socialism', in its eastern European and Third World forms (with the partial exception of Yugoslavia), has taken a strongly 'statist' form. To be specific, the state apparatus has played a dominant role in steering the development process in all its aspects; the Party, as the nucleus of the state, makes all major decisions, imposes ideological orthodoxy, monopolises channels of political influence and communication, and penetrates all major socio-economic institutions.

In analysing the role of the state, it is important to avoid slipping into *easy* positions: kneejerk liberalism, ahistorical anarchism, or simple notions of the allegedly Machiavellian machinations of evil 'statists' or totalitarians'. It is also important to discount for negative propaganda, a distressingly common feature of western media, which sometimes rival their eastern counterparts in one-dimensionality. Serious criticism can and must be sustained, but it should be situated in a careful historical analysis of Third World realities. Particularly in their crucial 'bootstrap' stages, revolutionary socialist societies require strong states. Internally, enemies of the revolution often retain their influence; the centrifugal force of tribal, regional, ethnic or cultural fragmentation may threaten national unity; there is need for a strong hand to mobilise and coordinate resources, material and human, in the struggle for development. Externally, powerful international hostility to nascent socialist societies includes economic blockade and sabotage, political subversion, military threat and terrorist violence. As I am writing this introduction in August 1982, Ruth First, a revolutionary socialist scholar and activist and a long-time opponent of apartheid, has just been murdered at her research institute

in the Mozambiquan capital Maputo, by a letter-bomb—presumably sent by South African agents. In such conditions, the case for a strong and vigilant state is compelling. This said, however, to endorse the actions of socialist states uncritically would be to give succour to the forces of authoritarianism embedded therein. Even given the pressures listed above, there is significant scope for experimentation and change. But progressive change is impeded by the very nature of the revolutionary socialist state itself. It is an ambiguous entity best described by a series of oppositions: transformative/conservative, participatory/authoritarian, organisational/bureaucratic, liberationist/oppressive, mass-oriented/sectionally-oriented, mobilisational/militaristic, vigilant/paranoid, and so on. Historical experience suggests that, while the first (positive) terms are dominant during the early years of socialist transformation, as régimes become established the second (negative) terms gradually gain strength, for reasons to be explored in the last section.

To move towards the goals of 'full' socialism requires several basic processes: 'de-bureaucratising' social and economic life; questioning the vaunted infallibility of 'scientific socialism', and encouraging a more diverse intellectual and cultural life. The key to these and other necessary changes is thorough-going democratisation in at least three senses: (i) the democratic rights of *individuals vis à vis* the group, organisation, collective or state, to be strengthened and protected by an effective and autonomous legal system and by institutionalised channels of defence against bureaucratic or political injustice. The language here is liberal, but individual rights are surely human rights which cannot be dismissed as 'bourgeois', but must be incorporated into a truly humane socialism. (ii) the democratic rights of individuals or collectives as *producers* or members of the workplace. We have discussed this earlier, and the principle of self-management, already realised to some extent in Yugoslav institutions, is crucially important here. (iii) the democratic rights of individuals or groups as *citizens*, able to influence the direction of society as a whole through electoral processes, representative institutions and sectional associations.

A sceptic might retort that such talk of democratisation is utopian, adding that the room for political manoeuvre is

small, that democratisation is incompatible with the basic assumptions and institutions of revolutionary socialism, and that recent experiences of democratisation, such as the Cultural Revolution and the Democracy Movement in China, were notably unsuccessful. The weight of vested interest within the state apparatus is enormous. To echo Stalin's words 'cadres [still] decide everything'; whether they be politocratic, bureaucratic or technocratic, they still have much to lose from genuine democratisation in terms of concrete interests and are ideologically armed to resist it, whether in terms of 'Party leadership', the supremacy of the state or the 'neutral' requirements of rapid modernisation.

However, a strong counter-argument can be made to the effect that democratisation in its various forms is not merely desirable but also inexorable. By its very success in the initial phase of development, state socialism creates the preconditions for its own dissolution and supersession. Whether one uses the analytical language of structural-functionalism or Marxism, the same case recommends itself. The main question is whether democratisation will make or break revolutionary socialism. Two broad scenarios are possible: in the first, established régimes try to ignore or suppress intensifying contradictions; this exacerbates the situation, either making progressive change conflictual or violent, or driving an aroused population to espouse anti-socialist causes. The Polish case is instructive here. In the second, more optimistic scenario, a coalition is forged between a progressive sector of the Party-state élite and democratic forces in society to sustain the momentum of change and push through an ultimately radical series of reforms.

## **The Dynamics of Socialist Transition**

Though the experience of revolutionary socialist countries in the Third World is very diverse, there are strikingly common elements on which we can base some tentative judgements about their dynamics as a specific developmental genus. This task requires some historical depth, so I shall focus on longer-established cases, such as Cuba, China, Korea and Vietnam, with comparative reference to the state

socialist nations of eastern Europe. The basic thesis is that state socialist countries undergo certain characteristic transitions and stages of development which reflect the influence of structural changes in society and state, historical conditions and ecological constraints (both internal and external) and certain basic problematic features of 'planned' economies and 'Partycratic' polities.

Each major transition manifests itself in specific policy changes but these are the tip of the iceberg. The key determining factors in each phase are first, the strategic context—domestic and international, economic and political, technical and social; second, the evolving nature of the social structure, notably the emergence and consolidation of new class forces; third, the nature of the state both as an agent of class formation and a matrix of political relations. At each stage, these conditions and pressures shape, and are shaped by the specific mix of institutional alternatives characteristic of socialism—state intervention, markets and mass participation—and the specific policy agenda of the period.

Using this broad analytical framework, one can distinguish three key phases and transitions in revolutionary socialist development: (i) *revolutionary voluntarism and its limits*: this involves the classic problem of transition from a revolutionary era of fierce politico-military struggle to the post-revolutionary stage of socialist construction. In the initial post-revolutionary period, the nascent state is dominated by radical elements representing the political aspirations of the revolutionary mass coalition; the social structure is in turmoil and transformation; and internal and external politico-economic conditions are threatening. Institutionally, state-building combines with mass mobilisation; markets are seen as matrices of antagonistic class power and subjected to increasing controls. The policy agenda calls for rapid social and institutional transformation. In this context, the methodological heritage of the revolutionary period is appropriate; as conditions change, however, its applicability is brought into question.

(ii) *Bureaucratic voluntarism and its limits*: To the extent that the strategic tasks of the immediate post-revolutionary period are achieved, the revolutionary model of social mobilisation is undermined. The burgeoning state apparatus is

increasingly manned by people without revolutionary experience, a reorganised social structure is taking shape with institutionalised patterns of social mobility and a strategic role for educated, primarily urban, strata; as the state is consolidated, it manages to marginalise domestic counter-revolutionary opposition and establish a *modus vivendi* with the external world. The strategic task of the era becomes rapid economic development and the state takes on the key role in steering the social economy in the prescribed direction through a network of increasingly complex bureaucratic organisations. This is the era of bureaucratic voluntarism. In Weberian terminology, the revolution is being institutionalised; from the perspective of many former revolutionaries, 'revisionism' and 'degeneration' are setting in. Thus the transition between stages is usually marked by political conflict and ideological disagreement among the Party leadership. The 'revolutionaries' may maintain their influence for some considerable time (in Vietnam revolutionary methods were prolonged by the war; Chinese Maoists of different varieties lasted till 1978; and in Korea former guerrilla leader Kim Il Song still clings to power aided by the military confrontation with South Korea). However, the new phase of bureaucratic voluntarism also digs its own historical grave (but is remarkably resistant to being lowered into it).

(iii) *Reformism and market socialism*: In a transitional process much analysed in socialist countries and abroad, bureaucratic voluntarism becomes increasingly irrational economically and increasingly unacceptable politically. The new state apparatus has bred 'new men', reared in a post-revolutionary environment, who develop interests which are increasingly incompatible with those of the politico-administrative élite and press them by technocratic means. The population wearies of postponed consumption, and increased social differentiation leads to proliferating sectional interests and demands which beat on the doors of Party hegemony. The traditional methods of directive planning become more and more ineffective as the economic structure becomes more complex and social demands diversify. There are thus moves to change the institutional mix, with more scope for markets, greater political pluralism and cultural diversity.

The policy agenda focuses on economic efficiency and productivity, intensive rather than extensive development.

This three-stage transition is, of course, an ideal type, and sits uneasily with some cases. The uniformity of Kim Il Songist rule in North Korea is an apparent counter-example but, I would argue, one which has postponed rather than avoided these critical contradictions—when the dam breaks, the flood may be devastating. Looking to the future, moreover, the newer socialist countries, such as Mozambique and South Yemen, may not approximate this path, due to different historical contexts and political traditions. For the longer-established régimes, moreover, the transition between stages is not clear-cut, each new stage maintaining essential elements of the one preceding. The fit between 'objective' socio-economic requirements and the pattern of political demands on the one hand, and embedded socio-political structures on the other, is not a neat one; institutions stay up way past their historical bedtime.

It is important for socialists to confront these contradictory realities and not smother them in propaganda, antagonistic or approving. However, one should bear in mind that the revolutionary socialist mode of development has succeeded in establishing itself as an alternative to global capitalism, and has made enormous strides over the past three decades. Admirers of capitalist alternatives hardly have grounds for complacency at a time when the international system is moving into deepening crisis and clear cases of developmental success are few. Revolutionary socialism may have its problems, but it also has its own characteristic promise. There is a future to be won, but the struggle will be a hard and long one.

## Notes

- 1 For an attempt to define the nature of a 'socialist economy', see W. Brus, *The Market in a Socialist Economy*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, p. 3.
- 2 Rudolf Bahro, 'The alternative in Eastern Europe', *New Left Review*, 106, November–December 1977, pp. 3–38.
- 3 For an interesting, though not wholly convincing critique of 'state capitalist' analysis of the Soviet Union, see David Laibman, 'The "State Capita-



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- list" and "Bureaucratic-Exploitative" interpretations of the Soviet social formation: a critique', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 24–34.
- 4 Dieter Senghaas, 'Socialism in historical and developmental perspective', *Economics*, Tübingen, vol. 23, 1981, p. 95.
  - 5 Michael Ellman views Marxist-Leninism as 'ideologies of state-directed industrialisation in backward countries', in his *Socialist Planning*, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 274.
  - 6 Edward Friedman, 'On Maoist conceptualizations of the capitalist world system', *China Quarterly* 80, December 1979, p. 806.
  - 7 John Sender, in his introduction to Bill Warren, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*, London, NLB, 1980, p. xiii.
  - 8 Senghaas, *op. cit.* p. 99. For other examples of this type of approach, see Samir Amin, 'Accumulation and development: a theoretical model', *Review of African Political Economy*, 1, August–November 1974, pp. 9–26; and Clive Thomas, *Dependence and Transformation. The Economics of Transition to Socialism*, New York: MR Press, 1974.
  - 9 Kenneth P. Jameson and Charles K. Wilber, 'Socialism and development: editors' introduction', *World Development* vol. 9, nos. 9/10, September–October 1981, p. 804.
  - 10 For interesting discussions of this process, see W. Brus, *The Market in a Socialist Economy*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972; D. M. Nuti, 'The contradictions of socialist economies: a Marxist interpretation', in R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds), *The Socialist Register*, 1979; Ota Sik, 'The economic costs of Stalinism', *Problems of Communism* XX, 3, May–June 1971.
  - 11 Compare W. Brus's analysis of the fate of eastern European reforms, in 'The East European reforms: what happened to them?', *Soviet Studies*, XXXI, 2, April 1979, 257–67.
  - 12 Cited in Lowell Dittmer, 'China in 1981: reform, readjustment, rectification', *Asian Survey*, XXII, I, January 1982, p. 33.
  - 13 For example, see Bob Arnot, 'Soviet labour productivity and the failure of the Shchekino experiment', *Critique* 15, 1981, pp. 31–56.
  - 14 Christine White and Gordon White (eds), 'Agriculture, the peasantry and socialist development', issue of *IDS Bulletin* vol. 13, no. 4, 1982.
  - 15 Brian H. Pollit, 'The transition to socialist agriculture in Cuba: some salient features', in White and White (eds), *op. cit.*
  - 16 See the articles by Christine White, Barbara Hazard and Jack Gray in this same issue.
  - 17 Janet W. Salaff and J. Merkle, 'Women and revolution: the lessons of the Soviet Union and China', in M. B. Young (ed.), *Women in China: Studies in Social Change and Feminism*, University of Michigan, 1973, pp. 145–77.