

0941

● FRANCE: Ideology

22 March 1971

GARAUDY: RECONQUEST OF HOPE

Summary: In his latest book, Reconquête de l'espoir, French Marxist ideologist Roger Garaudy has launched an appeal for a critical reappraisal of contemporary socialism. At the same time, he outlines briefly the path he would suggest be taken to the construction of socialism in a developed society. Garaudy focuses on the weak points of the Soviet "model" and repeatedly stresses its inapplicability in other countries.

The hope of mankind lies in the realization of socialism, but of socialism quite different from the political and economic system whose backbone is the "stalino-brezhnevist ideology" of the Soviet Union. Proceeding from this premise, the French Marxist ideologist Roger Garaudy has launched what he calls an "appeal," (1) for a reappraisal of contemporary socialism, for "an elaboration of a real perspective of struggle against capitalism and the elaboration of a model of socialist democracy." The appeal is entitled Reconquête de l'espoir (Reconquest of Hope), a slim volume containing three frank and compelling essays of which the first two will be discussed here: "That Is Not Socialism!" and "The Alternative." (2) An accessible book brimming with concrete examples of its theoretical assumptions, Reconquête de l'espoir clearly ascribes the crisis of contemporary communism to the mistakes which the Soviet Union has made in attempting to proselytize its friends and foes with "the Soviet model" of socialist construction.

That Is Not Socialism!

The first essay, which serves to introduce the book's purpose, points out the necessity of thorough reflection when dealing with a system which has produced such "crimes" as the "savage repression" of Polish workers in late 1970, the Leningrad trials, and the anti-Solzhenitsyn campaign. Garaudy wastes no time in differentiating between what he considers the positive value of socialism per se and the negative nature of its Soviet version and the export of the latter to other countries. Not only is an economic system which is not a system (but rather a "theorization of empirical practice") being forceably implemented in the USSR and its sphere of influence, but the Soviet Union's political errors as well are being thrust on other socialist states. The greatest of these errors is "the absence of democracy, not of bourgeois democracy but of socialist democracy. This is manifest in such cases as the trampling of human rights in the Soviet Union, the persecution of Soviet writers, and the anti-semitic treatment of Soviet Jews. The December unrest in Poland was likewise in Garaudy's view a result of the absence of socialist democracy:

Concerning the workers' revolt in Poland, the misdeeds of importing the Soviet model appeared resoundingly. . . . The fundamental demand was that for workers' self-management and self-government against bureaucratic centralism. (p. 31)

In Garaudy's opinion, these historic mistakes are to be compounded at the up-coming 24th Congress of the CPSU, which is preparing to sanctify the petrification of ideology, to produce a dogmatic reaffirmation of bureaucratic centralism with all its consequences, all wrapped up in a few "revolutionary phrases in radical contradiction to real practice."

The question of what to do about these conditions is, Garaudy suggests, a matter of life and death for all communist parties. A "simple criticism of the dogmatic model" will no longer suffice; instead it is necessary to reflect critically on what is, project what might be, and above all to have the courage to counter Soviet attempts to absolutize a socialist model with the direct public statement: that is not socialism!

The Alternative

The second section of the book begins with an appeal for a modern definition of what Garaudy calls the principal enemy, namely capitalism. Pointing to the numerous qualitative and quantitative changes which capitalist society has undergone since Marx' and Lenin's definitions were formulated, he concludes:

If one relies in defining capitalism on outdated outlines, those which were valid in the 19th century context and which unfortunately are still being used today by importing them from a country where capitalism, a backward capitalism, was abolished in 1917, one passes over the real problems. (p. 47)

Garaudy regards these problems generically in a Marxist sense -- concentrating on the term "alienation" -- but stresses that in the specific they are the result of new contradictions within the system and must thus be approached in a new manner.

Garaudy's postulation of the social forces to be engaged in the struggle against this principal enemy sets his hypotheses apart from those of the Soviet -- or French -- communist party. Borrowing from Gramsci, he calls for a "new historical bloc." As modern science and technology have changed society, they have also changed class relationships to the extent that the old ideas of who performs "productive work" and who does not (i.e., who is sufficiently proletarian and who is not) have changed radically. Special reference is made here to "employed intellectuals," the number and historical importance of whom are growing congruently with the development of modern society.

Likewise, the concept of the revolution itself must, in Garaudy's view, be reexamined. He reflects on the course of the October Revolution, concluding that it led to the following "dangerous slippage":

. . . the party spoke in the name of the class, then the apparat in the name of the party, the directorate in the name of the apparat. In the end, a single man is speaking in the name of the directorate.

Incidentally, Garaudy feels that the application of the word "Stalinist" to this phenomenon can be misleading, as "Stalin and his personal defects were not the cause of this perversion of socialism, but on the contrary an effect." (p. 62 - original emphasis).

Garaudy's conclusion is that experience has revealed the Soviet concept of revolution to be undesirable, and thus inapplicable, for example, in France. Ironically, he asserts that the Paris Commune was the "first form of socialist democracy" and "contrary to this direct democracy, contemporary Soviet power has gone back to the former bourgeois dualism."

Thus, the problem becomes one of postulating the revolution in terms both of a true socialist democracy and of the developed society in which it is to be rooted. The following guideline of the three major tasks involved in this process is then drawn up:

- 1st. Destroy a certain number of illusions which mask the true nature of the socialist revolution.
- 2nd. Conceive correctly what the socialist revolution is.
- 3rd. Define its strategy and stages. (p. 69)

The rest of the second portion of the book is devoted to Garaudy's specific implementation of these guidelines for France (he does not, however, claim to have found the way and the truth with his observations, but wishes rather to present one possibility).

The "illusions" against which he pleads are: 1) that of the possibility of introducing socialism by means of a parliamentary victory on the party level (real power in the sophisticated state, he asserts, is centered outside of both the parliament and the political parties); and 2) that of the tenability of revolution from the barrel of a gun (real power is economic, not paramilitary, and the revolution can't be accomplished in one blow, anyway). In sum, "a revolution is essentially a radical change in the production relationships and the whole of the social relationships tied to them." (p. 74).

Pointing to the necessity of an intelligent mobilization of the masses, Garaudy then moves on to a concrete description of the pattern by which socialism could be effected in France. Based on the sine qua non of direct democracy, his "system" starts at the level of personnel assemblies in the plants, progresses to workers councils, through a transitory period of dualism of power and workers' control, to the ultimate goal of self-managing socialism. Proceeding in this manner, Garaudy claims, bureaucracy and authoritarianism will be avoided. In a short excursion on the topic of the May 1968 "revolution," Garaudy notes that it was above all:

a movement of refusal, and that was fine, but this refusal was not followed by a perspective for the future, by positive objectives which alone could have given cohesion and strength to the movement. (p. 92)

However, he stresses that the implementation of his pattern for revolution will pose a greater challenge than would the simple formation of a new party or a faction within a party. It will be a matter of

bringing each trade union and each party to live a new life thanks to the initiatives of each manual or intellectual worker, to go beyond the old dualism of "leaders" and the "base" (the last residue of class dualisms, which implied this structure of dualist bureaucracy), to unite to constitute a single revolutionary force. (p. 100)

The bearers of the revolution will not be an exclusive elite nor will change be propagated for its own sake: the achievements of prior systems will be maintained if worthy of retention.

This anti-dogmatic approach is summed up at the close of this essay on the alternative in Garaudy's definition of the direct democracy which will thus be maintained:

. . . when at every level the leaders do not present to the lower level prefabricated solutions to which they must respond with yes or no . . . when the base can at any moment show the consequences of decisions made and step in effectively next to the most elevated levels . . . when each citizen or each militant possesses complete information to make his choice and take his decision . . . when [there is] a permanent and operating dialogue between the base and the top . . . (p. 102 f.)

These are the prospects which "call on us to begin the long march toward a true self-managing socialism, this Long March toward the reconquest of hope."

-
- (1) See Garaudy's article in France-Soir, 7/8 March 1971
 - (2) The third essay, "Human Significance of Socialism (Marxism and Christianity)", focuses on the specific question of the Christian/Marxist dialogue. - Editions Bernard Grasset, Paris 1971.