

SUMMARIES

Sosialism and Systems Thinking

by Ilmari Susiluoto

The development of the idea of socialism from utopia to science, as Engels put it, and the new discoveries by the natural sciences concerning matter and energy at the end of the 19:th century gave an impetus for social energetics and early formulations of systems theory which were close to Marxist thinking.

In Finland Yrjö Ruutu formulated his state socialism on energetical terms already in the beginning of the 1920's. At the same time Alexandr Bogdanov and Nikolai Bukharin were developing in Soviet Russia the first versions of systems theory. For Bogdanov the point of departure was organization theory, which was to develop to a mathematics of complexes. For Bukharin the task was to reinterpret Hegel so as to find the material counterparts of his idealistic notions. These were different states of an abstract concept — system. Hegelian dialectics was thus replaced by an equilibrium theory of material systems. Applications of these early system theoretical endeavours to the societal field were, however, in contradiction with the philosophical line of Lenin and later with that of Stalin.

It was in the middle of the 1950's when systems thinking, now in the form of cybernetics, re-emerged in the Soviet Union. An incarnation of the new cybernetic interpretation of Marxism was an East German philosopher Georg Klaus, who understood the socialist planning system as »a multistable cybernetic system» which was able, automatically, to correct its course. Cybernetics can also be used against Marxism-Leninism. This is clearly seen in a recent Finnish socio-cybernetics by Yrjö Ahmavaara. He regards marxism as a pre-cybernetic theory and creates an independent cybernetic theory of society on the basis of moderate socialism.

The latter part of the article concentrates on the discussion of the place systems theory and cybernetics have and should have in the present-day socialist societies, especially in the Soviet Union. Cybernetic principles are studied in connection with Marxist-Leninist principles of social management on the one hand and with the empirical sociology on the other. This system of relations is evaluated from the point of view of the real control processes taking place in the socialist society. The abstract, or academic, disputes on the scope of cybernetics and that of empirical sociology can then be seen as disputes of a political nature, too.

The scientific management of society, a concept which has been vigorously put forward by a Soviet scholar V. G. Afanasyev, is from this perspective, an attempt to apply cybernetic and sociological approaches to management and

at the same time take into account the Marxist-Leninist principles of leadership and societal guidance. This concept adds certain rationalistic elements to the traditional definition of socialism which has emphasized class-struggle and the leading role of the communist party as central elements of a socialist society.

The article concludes with a methodological comment. Utopian socialist systems can be criticized by the experience of the existent socialist systems, and vice versa, the existent systems must be measured by the yardstick of utopia.

This principle can be discerned even in Norbert Wiener's cybernetics. He did not emphasize — he needed not — that his theories were verified by the existence of the Computer, but human self-realization, insisting that the right questions must be asked if one expects reasonable answers.

The new Soviet constitution

by Göran von Bonsdorff

The Supreme Council of the Soviet Union approved on October 7th 1977 a new constitution for the country, which generally has been regarded as the beginning of a new era in its political history. The background of the reform is the changing internal structure of the society and also the new international position of the state. The nature of the Soviet society has been described as »mature socialism».

The constitutions of socialist countries and western democracies differ from each other in at least four respects. Firstly the constitution is a political document containing guidelines for action, secondly it is not based on any separation of power, thirdly the position of the communist party is central and fourthly social and economic rights have been included among the rights of the citizens.

In the new constitution the interests of the whole people, all citizens, have been emphasized at the expense of the interests of the workers and peasants. It is also possible to take a referendum on important political issues. In addition to the communist party the trade unions and employees in enterprises are mentioned as participants in the political and social decisions.

In connection with the economic system the property of the trade unions and other associations is now characterized as a separate form of property in addition to the property of the state or collective institutions. Measures have also to be taken for protection of the environment. The aim is to eliminate the differences between the cities and the countryside and to diminish manual labour through automation.

In a new chapter about the foreign policy world socialism and national liberation are mentioned among the goals of the state, but also disarmament and peaceful coexistence between countries with different social and economic systems.

The human rights have been enlarged in the social and cultural fields, but at the same time the obligation to be useful for the state is strongly emphasized.

As a whole the new Soviet constitution is an interesting document, which deserves to be carefully analysed. It reflects the changes in both the technological and social evolution of the society and also the contemporary international position of the Soviet state. Some innovations are based on experiences from other socialist countries, other seem to be relevant for modern societies irrespective of their economic and social structure. The usefulness of the constitution will of course depend on the implementation in practise of its provisions, but the moral obligation of a new law is always an important factor.