WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

Modern socialism, as projected by Marx and Engels, is the inheritor and extension of the Enlightenment. Its direct antecedents are the Peasant Wars, the slave and colonial uprisings, the English, American and French Revolutions and the great upheavals rocking the world from the beginning of the 19th century to the Paris Commune.

It is an effort to create a society marked by egalitarianism, sufficiency, literacy; a compassionate rather than combative existence.

It sees the root of social evil and disharmony in an exploitative and oppressive relationship between those who possess the means of production and those who do not; between owners and workers. The latter produce all value and the former appropriate it.

Thus a recent study of corporate America by Claurice Zeitzer (Rutgers) finds that one percent of the families in the U.S. own 43% of all wealth and the bottom 50% own 3%. On a world scale this disproportion in wealth is even more marked--i.e. the Third World as contrasted with the dominators of the First.

Collective ownership of the means of production is projected as the solution to this--such ownership, cooperatively managed and democratically administered, is socialism.

The history of the past 200 years is an effort to move toward such humanization of society. Reforms of the more obnoxious features of classical capitalism--social security, legalization of unions, etc.--have been related to this and so too have been the anti-racist and anti-colonialist movement and more recently the women's liberation movement and the ecological movement as well as the movements for disarmament and against war.

The socialist effort posits a very high estimate of human capacity and nature. If it is wrong on this, it is wrong.

We think it is not wrong, despite all setbacks, catastrophes and disasters. If the world is to survive (a big "If"), the system of production for profit, the system of labor's exploitation, the system of the looting of the vast majority of humanity, the third world must end. Its end will bring a world of essential harmony, a world of cleanliness, sufficiency and peace.

Such a world will be a socialist one with differences reflected in material and cultural differences. To enhance human well-being is the purpose of Marxism. Where this is forgotten or put aside, one has fanaticism, not Marxism.

Capitalist production must yield to socialist organization; if not, human survival is in extreme peril; most probably it is doomed to relatively quick extermination.

The only viable alternative is socialist organization--democratic, collective, humane, peaceful, egalitarian and ecologically aware.

There is, Marxists believe; no viable alternative.