

Back to the Future

Imagining the Future in a post-revolutionary world

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Editors' Note:

Much of our time as revolutionaries is spent on the routine of organising in the here and now – building a campaign, organising for a demonstration, planning for a trade union meeting.... Too often we don't manage to take time to step back from the here and now and imagine or envisage what it's all about. But without dreaming, without imagining a future the daily humdrum can seem dispiriting.

To really build for a new society, we need to try to paint a picture of what that society might look like. And we need to be able to suspend reality and dream of the sort of future that might be out there. This article is the first of what we hope will be a series which will attempt to look into a post-revolutionary future and imagine what such a society might look like.

Read and dream....

As an anarchist, it's not difficult for me to envision life after revolution. The idea of a world which is free from authority, exploitation, enslavement and brutality is the dynamo in my soul which powers me through this life, and inspires me to attempt to build this future.

Recently my mother, who is nearly 80, went into a psychiatric hospital and again it reminded me of how our society is so poorly equipped to deal with basic needs. The right to treatment when you are slowly slipping into insanity is a basic need. Yet, the fact that she has private health care meant that she was admitted after waiting one week, instead of the standard two months, to gain entry to the hospital. The other day a nurse asked me for €150 to ensure that she could have a CT (Cat) Scan. No money no scan. Due to this scan not being done, it led to a delay in a treatment which might bring some relief to this elderly woman who is tortured with paranoid delusions. So as I write this article she sits in a closed psychiatric ward, rocking back and forth believing terrible things are happening to her, to her family, to her children, and her grandchildren.

“From each according to his ability, to each according to his need (or needs)”: Marx

‘I think it is going to be difficult for me to explain how society works now to someone who grew up or only knew society as it was in the early 21st Century’. That's what I said to my tutor when he assigned me this essay. He said, ‘pick someone from your past, someone who was alive back in the early part of this century and write to them about how life is now’. This made it easier for me, as I knew that my Great Grandmother was around then. She was born in 2010.

One of the things that she said to my grandfather about that time was, “*We finally all came to the conclusion that people had needs, all over the world, that were not being met by the system. That's when it was decided that it (the system) had to change. That's what started this all off.*” When she said this, there was a wave of changes in various nations where people pushed for democracy where there was none. Then they got this and realised it wasn't fulfilling their needs so they pushed for the next thing. People also realised, thanks to the continuing series of ecological disasters like melt-downs from the old energy system called nuclear and from the heavy cost of extraction of fossil fuels, that the planet could not take much more of the system which was called Capitalism then.

But this is all social history, and I haven't decided to take Social History and my great grandmother would probably be more interested in how life is now, in the year 2085.

The essay is for Social Humanities, which is a course which we all sit for the first 18 months when we come to University. As we leave school at 17, no one is certain what to do, so you spend a year working with your local district volunteer committee and then you can come to University. It was decided by some ancient referendum that all people should do this 18 month course prior to deciding what to do in college. In the time we do SocHum we also can drop into lectures on any other subject and see what we think of it.

Accommodation

I live in an apartment with 3 other friends near to the University. Probably the most important thing is that I don't have to pay money for this, the apartment or the University. All citizens are given the option of going to college. Some people choose to just go straight into jobs for training in electronics, but they still sit the course on SocHum. Before I moved into the apartment, I was living at home with my folks, in another apartment on the North side of the city. I am linked into that district from the point of view of voting in the local assemblies every month on local issues. Obviously on the all island votes, I can vote via the web.

I suppose this attitude towards property is something that has changed. People don't feel the need to own stuff as much as they used to. My folks have lived in that district all their lives, and they put themselves down for an apartment there, and I may well return there if I don't go abroad after college. Accommodation was one of those issues that people had in the early part of this century. We, the local district, or City build the houses for their citizens because they need people to live and work in the city to make society function. But people then live there, and they can move to other districts as their job or life takes them. No one pays rent. For the most part, families have strong connections to certain districts and tend to stay in those districts.

In order to understand how society is now, you need to understand something about the great changes which happened. First there were the revolutions which changed where power resided. As my great grandmother said – "When power resides at the top, you find people's needs not being met at the bottom." So power in society was broken down at the time of the revolutions.

Assemblies

Decisions that directly affect local communities started at that time to be taken by groups of people from that community. It made sense. These became more formalised over time, and are now called district assemblies. From each of these there are elected recallable delegates who go and make representations at a regional level. This leads to a series of proposals which all people get to vote on regularly, when proposals are agreed amongst the four regions on the island.

That's how decisions are made, and we make use of our extensive information network on the web to keep ourselves updated and informed on what is taking place in our society.

This decision making system didn't come about overnight. Many of the changes happened after the revolution and in the time of the Great Transformation. This was my grandfather's time. Thousands of jobs disappeared once we built a system based on the needs of humanity, and

not on the need for profit or satisfying the markets.

But in the efforts to build a new society, everyone was able to make a contribution. There is some video footage in the family digital archive of my great grandmother sitting on a committee to re-allocate workers after the revolution. Some young Banker sits in front of a table containing my great grandmother and two other young earnest men. She growled at him “In a few years we’ll have done away with money – your foolish ways of accumulation, tax avoidance, and making the rich richer will not be needed. What way can you contribute to our new society?”

Calmly he responded “Being a Banker has taught me about the allocation of scarce resources – How to manage them and how to maximise the return from them! I feel that I can make use of these skills and I wish to work in the Transport area, comrade” They all used this old Russian word back then. Anyway that banker went on to create the clean transport system that we have today.

Unlocked Potential

The Great Transformation really came about because a huge amount of potential was unlocked when society no longer had to make profits or answer to the speculative wishes of market investors. The resources were put into finding solutions to problems faced by all humanity. Useless jobs were eliminated and this unleashed a huge wave of people’s hours which they now put to better use. People were inspired to leave behind the old system, to free themselves of the old ways, of doing tasks of work in offices for which they felt no pleasure or could not see the value in.

Many of those working in media and advertising went into setting up our information network for informed debates, so that people can make good decisions about where we are going to go from here. It also freed up the total number of hours that people had to work. People went from being accountants to being educators, from being van drivers, to landscape gardeners. No one was unemployed; they were inspired because they saw the possibility for real change and grasped it.

Huge investments were made between all the post-revolution countries in seeking a new form of alternative energy. After years of co-operation on findings, scientists came up with a new way of generating electricity which did not entail environmental damage. 50% of our energy needs are met by this new way and the other 50% is made up of the advances we made in wave and wind.¹

Now, all transport is electric, flights are made via electronic planes, the train and tram system is upgraded so that you can get from London to Paris in less than an hour, and most of our travel in Europe is via this high speed train network.

Scientific Advances

Advances have also been made in medicine, where we’ve found a cure for cancer and a way of killing immune attacking viruses. The exchange of information and the pooling of resources take place across all the post-revolutionary societies. Australia benefited due to our work in geological engineering meaning we were able to save cities from desertification.

¹ In 2008 – Denmark had 27% of its energy supplied by Wind

I almost forgot to mention it, but most disease, hunger, and early mortality were all eliminated within 5 years of the revolution.

I think the big difference which would be hard for my great great grandmother to understand is that almost everything is collectively owned and managed for people. A citizens' card gets you use of the 10,000² electro bikes that are set in stands throughout the city. You can also get use of an eco-electro car if you wish to travel out into the countryside with your friends or family using this card. You can walk into any hospital and be given a bed and the greatest medical care with this card.

When society moved away from the ideas of profit and accumulation, almost all crime was eliminated. Most of the crime had arisen out of poverty, or addiction. Now, there are still people who are mad and ill but they are treated and not punished and incarcerated like before. There is only a need to ensure that they're not allowed to interrupt or destroy the harmony that exists in our society. So we use the advances in medicine and refine their treatment so that they can be fully integrated back into society.

Justice

If someone commits a crime, or does something that damages society, or infringes on individual liberty, then some of the privileges of collective living are removed from them for a time. This is decided by their fellow citizens. There is no such thing as Judges anymore. People atone for their crimes and are forgiven and move on with their lives. But there is precious little of anything like this anymore.

At the end of this college course in SocHums I go back and volunteer onto the district volunteer committee, and that means that I spend that time doing some of the work that no-one wants to do full time. It could mean fixing a drain, it could mean refuse collection, it could mean sweeping a road, or ensuring the water supply is working in the local district allotment. On these crews, as one of the younger ones who are there, I get to use some of the new fancy machinery for some of the jobs.

Last time in my work on the DVC I actually got to drive the community ambulance that picked up people and drove them down to the local day care clinic. One of the old women that I met when doing that, Lucy, reminded me of my great great grandmother. She said she remembered meeting her once during the days of 'The Great Transformation.'

² There are 3,000 bicycles in Lyon – a city with the same population as Dublin, yet we have 452 bikes.

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