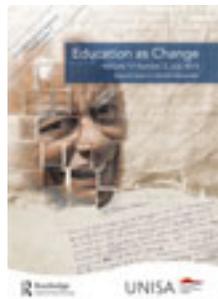


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Unbounded organisation and the future of socialism

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Unbounded organisation and the future of socialism

Howard Richards

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Abstract

This article starts with the question whether the socialism Neville Alexander advocated is a thing of the past or a prospect for the future. It considers two forms of 20th-century socialism, the centrally planned economy and social democracy, in the light of Marx's concept of accumulation. 'Accumulation' names both the logic of capitalism and the dynamic that drives it. A focus on the need to deal with the probability that the accumulation dynamic will falter in the process of moving from capitalism to socialism helps to explain socialism's decline. 'Unbounded organisation' is introduced as a broader concept that includes the 'bounded' social organisation that frames capitalism and its accumulation dynamic as a special case. It helps to both explain the decline of socialism and to suggest how to reverse that decline. It is suggested that the socialism of the future can best be defined not as a certain form of social organisation, but rather as the power of the people to choose the set of economic and other institutions that works best for them. Three of Alexander's contributions to building an unbounded socialism are found in his proposals for grass-roots organising at the neighbourhood level, in his promotion of multilingualism, and in his advocacy of alternative education.

Keywords: accumulation, Alexander, central planning, Marxism, social democracy, socialism

Introduction

In the late 1980s, as apartheid neared its end, Alexander (1990:110) called on educators to 'shape consciousness in ways that are looking forward, in ways that are preparing people for a liberated, non-racial, democratic, and socialist South Africa'. On 13 May 2010, in his Strini Moodley Memorial Lecture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal he said, 'There ought to be no doubt in anyone's mind ... that ... the bourgeoisie, the self-same capitalist class of yesterday, is in command of all the strategic positions, no matter what the "democratic" posturing of the politicians might be' (Alexander 2010). As of the date of his death, 27 August 2012, the socialism he had desired and advocated, and in some periods of his life had perhaps expected, have not come to pass. Did he die then in the terms of Thomas Kuhn as one of the old men who still believed in the old paradigm, who had to die before the new paradigm of triumphant capitalism could fully occupy the intellectual terrain?¹ Or did he die at a time when, in the words of Jean-Paul Sartre, Marxism was still in its infancy; when any pretended 'refutation' of Marxism could only be a return to pre-Marxist ideas or the rediscovery of an idea already contained in the philosophy 'refuted'?²

Is Alexander's life's work a contribution to a revolution that is still happening? My answers to these questions will turn on the concept of 'accumulation'. Marx wrote, 'With the accumulation of capital there develops the specifically capitalist mode of production, and with the specifically capitalist form of production there develops the accumulation of capital Each accumulation becomes a means for making a new accumulation.'³

Armed with Marx's concept of accumulation I will offer an explanation of why, at this point in history, socialism appears to many to be a lost cause. I will offer definitions of capitalism and of socialism. Then I will explain why socialism (so defined), while apparently perhaps a lost cause, is nevertheless so necessary that if humanity has a future at all it is a socialist future. With all of this preparation I will be in a position to answer the questions posed above. Yes, Neville Alexander was an adherent of an old paradigm,⁴ but the new paradigm is not triumphant capitalism. It is unbounded organisation⁵ and at least one aspect of it is expressed in Alexander's thought, although he did not use the phrase. Yes, Marxism is still in its infancy, but in its maturity it will not remain within the limits of the heritage bequeathed by its Ricardian ancestry. In its maturity Marxism will blend with more recent economic history and substantive anthropology: Yes, Alexander did contribute to a never-ending revolution that Paulo Freire (1970) called 'cultural action' and 'humanisation'.

Central planning as a lost cause

Shortly after Lenin and the Bolsheviks seized state power in Russia, ushering in the era of 'really existing socialism', Ludwig von Mises published his famous proof that a centrally planned economy is impossible.⁶ Von Mises identified socialism with rational central planning. Consequently, for him, if rational central planning was impossible then socialism was impossible.

The crux of Von Mises' argument is that it is impossible to make a rational choice among alternative uses of scarce resources, without numerical measures of the expected costs and benefits of each option considered. He maintains that it is impossible to measure costs and benefits without the numerical measures provided by prices. There are for him no 'real' prices without markets. In his view, under socialism (by definition) markets in producers goods are not allowed to operate freely enough to establish the real prices needed to ground rational choices.

Impossible though it might have been in some sense of the word 'impossible' Soviet central planning existed for more than half a century.⁷ But Von Mises and his allies did not consider themselves refuted by the phenomenon of a large, formerly very poor country industrialising under a series of five-year plans. In their eyes Soviet planners were chronically and inevitably bungling. The Soviet Union existed, but 'socialism' in what they took to be the true sense of the word did not exist. Socialism (if it were possible) would be rational central planning.

In his 1992 book, Francis Fukuyama adds a new twist to ongoing debates about the feasibility and merits of central planning. Fukuyama was willing to concede that socialism had existed. Socialism, in his view, achieved the basic industrialisation of Russia and several other countries, but now no longer exists. 'History', defined as competition among economic systems, was 'now' (in 1992) over. The United States' model of capitalism plus democracy was now the universal ideal and the irreversible trend, give or take a few pockets of resistance which were slow to join the consensus. In the future, socialism would be a non-starter. Fukuyama argues that clumsy bureaucratic central planning managed to bungle and coerce some of the backward peoples of the world as far forward as the level of basic industrialisation, but from here on into the future humanity would live in 'knowledge societies' provisioned by 'knowledge economies'. In tomorrow's knowledge-driven fast-paced economies, capitalism will be the only game in town.

The most compelling reason for viewing central planning as a lost cause is that Communist parties in power appear to have been persuaded by liberal economics in general and by the doctrine that real prices require free markets in particular. Well before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, its *nomenklatura* had been convinced that free-market reforms were necessary and had started to implement them (Hewett and Winston 1991). Chinese reformists, led by Deng Xiaoping, abandoned central planning in 1978 in

favour of what in China is called ‘the responsibility system’ (Harvey 2005; Qian 2000). Fidel Castro’s younger brother and successor, Raul, with the support of Cuba’s technocratic elite, has embraced markets and private business (LeoGrande 2008), as have governing Communist parties in Vietnam (see Thayer 2007:381–397) and in the Indian states of Kerala and West Bengal.⁸

Some common arguments against social democracy

Social democracy, broadly conceived as any attempt to introduce elements of socialism into a basically capitalist economy, is commonly attacked on the following grounds: It is said that any increase in the power of Leviathan (the state), even when it is for benevolent purposes, is a step towards tyranny. This is the argument of Friedrich von Hayek (1944) in his classic anti-socialist polemic *The road to serfdom*. (Although he was of course an anti-Communist, and although he criticised central planning, for the most part he considered that his mentor and teacher Ludwig von Mises had already refuted the arguments for central planning. Von Hayek was mainly concerned with attacking the moderate social democrats, by arguing that contrary to their own best intentions the measures they were advocating could only lead to tyranny.)

It is said that acting on good intentions often has unintended bad consequences. In principle this is not an objection to social democracy – it is an admonition to temper democracy with strong doses of social science. In practice, the good intentions in question are usually those typical of social democracies, such as to raise wages, strengthen trade unions, build a welfare state, ensure safety on the job and minimise environmental damage. In practice, the unintended consequences in question are typically capital flight, slow (or no) growth, mounting debt, inflation and/or rising unemployment (Richards and Swanger 2006).⁹

Let us now look at the same dynamic in reverse. Instead of focusing on the unintended consequences of the well-meant Robinhoodism of the social democrats, let us focus on the observed real-world results of the incentives for investors of the neoliberals. Now we see that it is easy for neoliberals to amass empirical evidence confirming their beliefs, because some of their beliefs are true. It is true that incentives attract investment. It is true that investment spurs growth. Standard research designs following standard notions of scientific method produce proof after specious proof (Little 1982).

Left-leaning politicians are commonly called ‘populists’ or even ‘demagogues’. The insinuation is that they make promises they cannot keep. They generate mass movements that make greater demands on the state than the state can satisfy (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991). Frequently the upshot is that a combination of the disappointed anger of the masses and the economic realism of the elite leads to an authoritarian crackdown. A muted version of this argument knits together Norberto Bobbio’s book, *The future of democracy* (1987). Bobbio believes the viable democracies of the future will be those that do not attempt the redistribution of wealth or structural change.

Lastly, on this short list of arguments against social democracy it is argued that socialistic practices destroy the one thing needful: the confidence of financial markets. Even talk envisioning socialistic practices that might or might not materialise can destroy the confidence of financial markets. Nelson Mandela echoed many when he said to his staff shortly after being elected president of South Africa, ‘Chaps, we have to choose. We either keep nationalization and get no investment, or we modify our own attitude and get investment’ (see Sampson 1999:429). However Simon-pure social democrats may be in their commitment to non-violence, and however impeccable their credentials as authentic democrats may be, when they take or advocate steps towards socialism they are commonly found guilty of shattering confidence. When they back off they are praised for improving confidence. ‘Confidence’ here means, in the first instance, the expectations of investors that their investments will be profitable. From there the

idea of 'confidence' goes on to embrace the attitudes of the consumers and the other classes of actors whose thoughts and feelings either set the economy humming forward or jerk it into reverse.

Accumulation as an explanatory concept

Although history is so complex and so varied that it is perilous to attribute any given effect to any definite cause, Marx's concept of accumulation can be deployed with considerable verisimilitude to explain the causes of the setbacks of socialism in the 20th century. Or, at least, so I claim, and therefore I will now briefly seek to demonstrate. To repeat, Marx wrote in *Das Kapital*, 'With the accumulation of capital there develops the specifically capitalist mode of production, and with the specifically capitalist form of production there develops the accumulation of capital Each accumulation becomes a means for making a new accumulation.'¹⁰ Later, in the posthumously published second volume of the same work, Marx illustrated accumulation with diagrams that can be simplified as follows:

$$M > C > \dots\dots P \dots\dots > C' > M'$$

The diagram shows that the capitalist begins with M, Money.

With the money (M) he purchases the commodities (C) necessary for production, most notably the peculiar commodity that is the labour power of the workers. (Marx's German word, here translated as C 'commodities', is *Waren*, a cognate of the English 'wares' – things made to be bought and sold. The word 'wares' was famously employed by the innocent Simple Simon who said to the pieman, 'Let me taste your wares', unaware that in a mercantile economy the possession of money is a prerequisite to eating – a point later developed more profoundly albeit less poignantly by Amartya Sen in his study of famines.)

Next in the diagram, the owner of the commodities purchased causes the process of production to ensue (P). At the end of production the same capitalist owner has become the owner of other wares. Now they have become commodities with a greater value, designated as C'. Finally comes the sale of C' resulting in M'. The quantity of Money (M') earned by the sale of the commodities produced is greater than M, the quantity of money initially invested. The difference between M' and M is what Marx calls surplus value (*Mehrwert*).¹¹

The diagram shows the germ of the idea of accumulation. Extended accumulation comes from repeating the cycle. M' can be invested again to produce M'', which can be invested again to produce M''' and so on. Accumulation continues indefinitely, motivating investment, providing criteria for business decisions, and generating ever greater wealth.

The French regulationist school of economists, followed by cultural critics like David Harvey and Fredric Jameson, has extended the idea of accumulation found in Marx and other classical economists beyond the sphere of market exchange (see Jameson 1991). They refer to a 'regime' of accumulation comprehending all the institutions of society: politics, education, culture, family, religion (and in Jameson even the subconscious mind). Everything must be compatible with and geared to accumulation. If it is not – if some element or dimension of society brakes accumulation – the system does not function. Translated into Keynesian terms (Keynes 1936:147–164) the whole world depends for its daily bread on the 'confidence' of investors. The system cannot function without confidence, that is to say confidence that M' will exceed M.

The setbacks of socialism in the 20th century

Although the analytic emphasis here is on failure, I do not mean to eclipse or to fail to celebrate success.

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Surely if it had not been for the heroic efforts in the 20th century of the socialists and the social democrats (some of whom are, by an odd quirk of language, called 'liberals' in the States) the levels of longevity, health, freedom and security of the world's masses would be lower than they are now in the 21st century.¹²

To some considerable extent (ignoring for the moment the continuing importance of non-capitalist material practices in the world), the point of departure for a transition to socialism is a system whose mainspring is accumulation.

The unintended consequences, the disappointments of populism, and the destruction of investor confidence that have plagued social democracy can be readily understood as the unravelling of regimes of accumulation.¹³ Where everyone's livelihood depends on capitalists making profits, falling profits mean failing livelihoods. Uncertain profits mean uncertain livelihoods. For this reason, social democrats elected to public office have to walk a tightrope. They have to manage capitalism successfully enough not only to prevent its collapse, but also to keep it from slowing down so much that they are blamed for poor economic performance and voted out of office. At the same time, while they must manage (or attempt to manage) the system, they are committed to transforming it (Matthijs 2010; Richards and Swanger 2006).

It is perhaps less obvious how the concept of accumulation sheds light on the influential argument of Von Hayek (and his allies) that every step towards a welfare state is a step towards tyranny. His argument is, in any event, something of a groundless bogey, albeit still an influential groundless bogey, because since 1944 when he composed it no welfare states have degenerated into totalitarian tyranny. Von Hayek makes some interesting points regarding Hitler and Stalin, but neither Sweden's Hjalmar Branting or the United Kingdom's Clement Atlee, nor any other social democratic leader who has led his people down what Von Hayek called 'the road to serfdom' has, in fact, led them to or toward serfdom. Nevertheless, even though his empirical case in his most famous book rests mainly on a biased sample of two, Von Hayek does make a conceptual case that links the increasing role of government in the economy with political tyranny. That case is better understood if one takes into account that accumulation is the mainspring (according to Marx, the invariable accompaniment and virtually the definition) of capitalism. Von Hayek chimes in with the argument that demagogues make promises they fail to keep (here, an understanding of the concept of accumulation comes in, since it illuminates why they fail to keep them; they weaken and tend to dismantle the regime of accumulation) and adds that their very failure motivates them to seize still more economic and political power. He sees the slide into tyranny as an iterative process in which successive waves of tribal sentiment and misplaced faith in planning feed an ever more overgrown Leviathan. This undermines and eventually destroys the legal framework of liberty (Von Hayek 1988).

Accumulation, because it is a two-sided concept, also contributes to explaining the failures of central planning. Capital accumulation is both a dynamic and a logic. It is a dynamic that motivates human action, namely the pursuit of profit. It is a logic that defines rational decision-making, namely optimising profits by maximising revenue from sales while minimising costs. Central planning is a logic, not a dynamic. It proposes a series of methodologies for deciding where to commit resources and what to do with them. The adequacy of central planning techniques as a logic for decision-making remains a large subject on which much has been said, and much remains to be said (Li and Yang 2005). I, for one, believe that the best societies of the future will be neither completely planned nor completely unplanned. In any event, whatever its status may be as a logic, central planning is not a dynamic. It does not shed light on how to motivate people to do what in some sense(s) of 'rational' and/or 'ethical' they should do.¹⁴ It does not propose methodologies for cultural transformation. To build an alternative to capitalism it would be necessary to do both, that is to say to build a mixed economy with some kind and degree of planning and to practise some form(s) of what Paulo Freire calls 'cultural action'. People would have to be socialised to play roles in a society of 'liberty, equality, and fraternity'¹⁵ and they would have to find pleasure and personal fulfilment in playing those roles.

Definitions of capitalism and of socialism

The arguments against socialism, as mounted by Von Mises, Von Hayek and Fukuyama, depend on tendentious definitions. Capitalism has been defined as a system where resources are allocated by competitive free markets. The real prices that capitalism allegedly has and socialism allegedly lacks are, by definition, the prices generated by such markets. Socialism has been defined as central planning. The definition of capitalism is not realistic. The definition of socialism is not fair.

Historically, as distinguished historians such as Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein have shown, capitalism has never been a system of competitive free markets.¹⁶ Capitalism has always been a struggle (and frequently an armed struggle) to capture privileged niches that yield (for their incumbents) sustainable rents (in the economic sense of 'rent' derived from the Ricardian tradition). Real capitalists seek and find refuge from the intense competition postulated by classical economics textbooks.¹⁷ Further, as Joseph Schumpeter (1955) wryly notes, the mythical system – where resources are allocated by competitive free markets – that serves as an ideology justifying capitalism is not even a possible ideal. If such an ideal were ever to be implemented, it would drive down profits to so close to zero that the system would cease to function.

I propose to define capitalism as production for the purpose of sale, where sale is for the purpose of profit, thus more briefly as production for the purpose of profit. I do not make the exploitation of labour (in a pejorative sense of the term 'exploitation') part of the essence of capitalism expressed in its definition, but I do acknowledge the exploitation of labour to be a fact characteristic of much of the real-world history of capitalism. My definition does not imply that the capitalist epoch of history will necessarily be followed by a socialist epoch, but I do believe (for reasons given below) that for the human species to become a sustainable species it must liberate itself from its domination by capitalism. For the most part, except for making exploitation a contingent fact and not part of the definition I track the usage of the man who coined the term – Karl Marx.¹⁸ Marx begins *Das Kapital* by stating that his book will be about that form of society whose wealth consists of a vast collection of *Waren*, that is, of things made to be sold.

I propose to define socialism as the continuing power of the people to create and select the institutions that work best for them. Alexander often identified socialism with the power of the people; for example in the Strini Moodley Lecture (cited above) he identified it with 'change in the fundamental power relations at the level of the economy and in the management of the repressive apparatuses of the state'. Similarly, in *South Africa: Which road to freedom?* he argues that for the country to have real democracy it is necessary 'to ensure that the Black workers, the urban and the rural poor, will be the main actors in the democratization of South Africa. Only if this happens will the democracy that comes about in a free Azania be a real democracy, i.e. a situation in which power belongs to the people.' To my knowledge, Alexander (1994) never once identified socialism with central planning.

Above I identified socialism with the 'continuing' power of the people for the same reason that Alexander says socialism is a 'process', not an 'event'. Socialism is not a universal and eternal system chosen by people-power once and for all; it is a never-ending democratic process.¹⁹ Defined as democratic power, and given the above definition of capitalism, socialism is likely to mean (in practice) a mixed economy where capitalism's famous productivity and innovation are preserved, while in Amartya Sen's phrase they are 'restrained and complemented'.²⁰ Given the power to create and to choose what works best for them, I do not think it likely that any democratic populace will ever decide to eliminate private business for profit altogether. So defined socialism is equivalent to what John Dewey (1910, 1920, 1922) calls an 'experimental society' in which every institution is a hypothesis to be judged by its results. The people are the judges. This way of conceiving 'socialism' tracks the etymology of the word and the usage of those who first coined it. The word was invented in France in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, along with 'social', 'society' and 'sociology', in each case drawing on the Latin *socius* ('partner')(Williams

1976). Tradition says the first lips and tongues that hissed the 's' and rounded the 'o' and sequenced its 'cialisme' were those of Pierre Leroux,²¹ Marie Roch Louis Reybaud, and in England, Robert Owen. The early socialists delighted in designing imaginary utopias. In some cases (as in the case of the cooperatives established by Owen) they experimented with turning their utopias into realities. I draw from them their underlying message and premise – a premise with which Marx agreed, and with which, to the best of my knowledge, all who call themselves socialists agree – that human social institutions are not made once and for all by God or by Nature. They are constructed by human beings. Human beings can reconstruct them. If we think of ourselves as partners, we will reconstruct them together for the common good.

The concept of accumulation shows why socialism so defined does not yet exist. It shows why capitalism as it now exists dominates governments. It dominates the people who elect the governments. The domination is systemic; it is not domination by the power of a class of people called 'the capitalists'. It is systemic because the way a system of accumulation works makes it necessary to establish and/or maintain one or another regime of accumulation. Wherever such a system dominates, whatever else a government does, whatever else a society does, it must foster confidence that investments will be profitable. Whenever that overriding economic necessity clashes with any other necessity, for example with the ecological necessity established by the laws of physics, chemistry and biology, the overriding economic necessity wins a pyrrhic victory. The victory is pyrrhic because the socially constructed imperatives of accumulation win at the expense of physical reality. In terms used by Antonio Gramsci, culture fails to perform its physical functions.²²

This last point alone is sufficient to show that humanity must free itself from the systemic imperatives of regimes of accumulation to survive. To make the transition to a green economy compatible with a sustainable biosphere, humanity must be free to do what it physically must do. In José Luis Corragio's (2004) terminology, we must resignify markets so that we have 'economies with markets' but not 'a market economy'. Here Corragio means by a 'market economy' a 'market-dominated economy'. It is an economy that requires one or another regime of accumulation. It enslaves its prisoners, the human beings who live it. They must obey its imperatives because the daily bread of all depends on the accumulation of profits by some.

The contributions of Alexander

The general conclusions I want to draw are that building the socialism of the future requires contextualising Marx's critique of political economy in the context of the wider history of human organisation, and that to build socialism we should think in terms of unbounded organisation. Organisation (or organising) is said to be 'unbounded' when it is oriented to an increasingly wider context and links increasing numbers of organisations. Science (or thinking) is said to be unbounded when it transcends the historically given constitutive rules of the here and now. Management is unbounded when its objectives are aligned with the needs of 'the societal enterprise', that is, those of society (Andersson pending; Andersson and Richards 2012).

In their commentary on *Das Kapital*, Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar (1970) emphasise that the book deliberately makes simplifying assumptions, then analyses the consequences that flow from those assumptions. This is perfectly legitimate for a critique of political economy. That is to say, it is perfectly legitimate in critiquing a body of thought to assume its assumptions and denounce where they lead. But building socialism is different. It requires imagination. It requires creativity. It requires openness to the cultural resources of non-Western and non-modern societies. It requires learning from experience.

Marx and Engels themselves were pioneers in putting the cultural and legal assumptions of classical political economy in historical and anthropological context. For example, the author most cited in the

footnotes of Volume One of *Das Kapital* is Aristotle, cited not to move forward the argument of the book, but rather to show that in another culture (a precursor of modern Europe different from modern Europe) things were different. Marx notes, for example, that Aristotle would consider a process such as

$M > C > \dots\dots P \dots\dots > C' > M'$

to be unnatural and improper. This accumulation process begins with 'buying in order to sell', while for Aristotle proper and natural exchange is 'selling in order to buy'. But today we need not rely just on Marx and Engels to put the constitutive rules of capitalism in historical and anthropological context. In theory we need unbounded social science that moves beyond the narrow frame of the rules of the game of capitalism as it is played at present.²³ In practice, we need unbounded action to defang capital flight; more generally we need to defang what Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1986) call 'the exit power of capital'. In searching for ways to build green and diverse people's economies we can find valuable guidance in the works of many authors who have enriched economic history and economic anthropology since the time of Marx.²⁴

I will briefly consider three of Alexander's contributions in the light of the principle that unbounded organisation can and must free us from regimes of accumulation. That is to say, it can and must free us from the necessity to submit to one regime of accumulation or another. An example – David Harvey's example (1987) – of the necessity-we-need-to-be-liberated-from to replace one regime with another would be the 'necessary' replacement of the post World War II Keynesian/Fordist regime when it broke down around 1980 with a neoliberal/postmodern regime of accumulation. Similarly, as the neoliberal regime of accumulation breaks down perhaps practices sometimes called those of 'the developmental state' are 'necessarily'²⁵ stepping in to continue to guarantee the social prerequisites of capital accumulation.

The three contributions of Neville Alexander to liberation which I will briefly mention are: His proposals for neighbourhood organising, for multilingualism and for alternative education.

Neighbourhood organising

Organising at the grassroots level is a recurring theme in Alexander's writings. In the Strini Moodley Memorial Lecture (2010) he asserted:

We have to rebuild our communities and our neighbourhoods by means of establishing, as far as possible on a voluntary basis, all manner of community projects which bring visible short-term benefit to the people and which initiate at the same time the trajectories of fundamental social transformation, which I have been referring to. These could range from relatively simple programmes such as keeping the streets and the public toilets clean, preferably in liaison with the local authority, whether or not it is "delivering" at this level, to more complex programmes such as bulk buying clubs, community reading clubs, enrichment programmes for students preparing for exams, teachers' resource groups at local level, and, of course, sports activities on a more convivial basis, etc.

He envisioned:

There are already many of these initiatives and programmes in existence. They will, if they are conducted with integrity and not for party-political gain, inevitably gravitate towards one another, converge and network. In this way, the fabric of civil society non-government organisations that was the real matrix of the anti-apartheid movement will be refreshed and we will once again have that sense of a safety net of communities inspired by the spirit and the real practices of ubuntu, the 'counter-society' ... (ibid.)

He asked: 'How can such a programme be connected to and informed by the essential task of rebuilding

our communities and our neighbourhoods on the basis of cooperativist and collectivist values of *ubuntu*, of sharing and caring?’ (ibid.)

In these words I have quoted, Alexander is talking about unbounded organisation, about blending the categories of political economy into the wider categories of community, about liberation from domination by capitalism, by building people power. He is talking about concrete steps towards economic democracy. He is talking about laying the groundwork for a society capable of governing what Marx called ‘gifts of nature’ and ‘gifts of history’. As an intermediate stage, before a stage is reached when it can truly be said that capital is socialised to the point where the private appropriation of the social product is no more and no less than the people decide it should be (because that level of autonomous private capital, in diverse institutional forms, works best for them and serves their interests), he is talking about making it possible for society to negotiate with capital from a position of strength – in contrast to today’s situation where gaining the confidence of financial markets trumps everything else.

Alexander’s proposals can be compared with what in Argentina is called ABC *Abastecimiento Básico Comunitario* (INTI 2012). In Argentina, where almost every neighbourhood already has a soccer pitch and some place(s) to dance the tango and sip *yerba mate*, Enrique Martinez (23 April 2010, pers. comm.), the head of Argentina’s National Industrial Technology Institute, proposes that in every *barrio* every Argentine should have food security, housing and primary healthcare. This would be people power. It would mean that whatever might be happening in the global economy, whatever threat there might be of capital flight, of default in paying international obligations, of investors speculating against the peso or against the rand, of capital exercising its exit power to close factories and lay off workers; however much stock markets might plummet, however insolvent banks might be, the people could still fight back and defend their interests. This would be the end of a world where the people must concede whatever capital demands, because they have no alternative.

Multilingualism

More than once Alexander affirmed the study of African languages as a way to preserve and enhance cooperative forms of action as opposed to a universally assumed instinct towards individual aggrandisement and gratification. Such a universally assumed instinct is nothing other than the dynamic of individual aggrandisement and gratification, assumed and required by the social norms that constitute today’s pervasive and dominant regimes of accumulation. Alexander (2012a:6) writes:

The ultimate question, for those of us who are convinced of the need to plot an alternative route for the human species is what we, as language specialists and practitioners, can do in order to strengthen those social and historical forces which are running counter to the apparently unstoppable logic of globalisation.

We can rephrase this dimension of Alexander’s advocacy of multilingualism in terms of ‘bounded’ and ‘unbounded’. We are ‘bounded’ when our worldview is limited by the assumptions about human nature that are built into political economy. Without using the term ‘unbounded’, Alexander reiterates with variations the theme that strengthening a language is strengthening a way of life. Strengthening African languages is a path to opening the minds and hearts of youth to the indigenous values movements such as the African Renaissance and the Black Consciousness Movement have sought to enhance, while at the same time it is a path to enabling the underprivileged to compete in today’s economy. For example, when today schools teach languages whose vocabularies and syntax are inseparable from the authority of the wisdom of the elders and inseparable from the principle that the community includes the ancestors and the not-yet-born as well as the living, they are crossing boundaries. They are orienting young minds to an increasingly wider temporal and cultural context. They are opening them to possibilities unknown

and invisible to *homo economicus*. They are relativising the constitutive rules that dominate here and now. By the very practice of teaching languages in which cooperative forms of action are assumed and embodied, such schools are aligning the minds of young people with the societal need to preserve for our descendants the common heritage our ancestors bequeathed to us.

None of this is meant to suggest that Alexander was anti-modern. No one insisted more than he on the need to modernise and 'intellectualise' African languages, and on the need to translate the great works of global civilisation into them (Alexander 2012b). The author of *One Azania, one nation* never thought in terms of a narrow 'either/or' that would replace one 'bounded' parochialism with another parochialism equally 'bounded'.

Alternative education

In *Education and the struggle for national liberation in South Africa*, a collection of his speeches and essays from the late 1980s published in 1990, Alexander (1990:166) advocated 'using alternative methods for an alternative society'. Blending his own humanising ideas with those of Paulo Freire, Alexander reported that even though the apartheid state had banned Freire's books, starting in the early 1970s hundreds of copied versions of his *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (2005) were clandestinely distributed at black universities and eagerly studied by the young activists of the black consciousness movement. The book spoke to the condition of young women and men from ghettos and homelands where conditions were similar to those of north-east Brazil.

Freire tells his readers at the beginning of *Pedagogy* that the key problem of all times is 'humanisation', while for us in our times a crucial issue is its opposite, 'dehumanisation', not as a philosophical possibility, but as a concrete historical reality. A problem-posing, dialogic, humanising education is one that calls forth the human ontological vocation to join with others in changing the world, in creating culture. It is consciousness-raising (*conscientização*). The core meaning of *conscientização* is people leaving behind the status of objects and becoming subjects engaged in creating a transformed society. The currently dominant social order is a cultural construction that can be deconstructed and reconstructed.

Alternative educational methods for a never-ending revolution drawing on Freire's unbounded pedagogy became an integral part of many of the myriad episodes and components of South Africa's liberation struggle, only to be shunted aside in the negotiated transition and in the subsequent formulation of educational policy for the new democracy.²⁶ The new *idéés forces* bore names such as 'qualifications', 'economic growth', 'human resource development', 'international competitiveness', 'productivity and profitability', 'lifelong adaptation to the needs of the global economy', 'certified expertise'. Alexander's (1990:166) 'using alternative methods for an alternative society' was crowded off centre-stage, although – and surely this is among his most significant contributions – he had been among those who kept alternative education alive and was preparing for a comeback during its eclipse. Bounded thinking proliferated. It was bounded in the precise sense that its horizons were those of political economy. It was bounded in the precise sense that it thought inside the historically given constitutive rules of the here and now.

Notes

1. In Kuhn's *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1962), a paradigm shift requires acceptance of the new paradigm by a community of scientists, and this may happen partly because of the weight of the evidence favouring the new paradigm and partly because the identity of the members of the community changes over time.
2. See Sartre's *Questions de Méthode* (1960:12, my translation).

3. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (1867) Book One, Chapter 23, Section ii (my translation). I take accumulation to be the central concept of Marxism. See also Rosa Luxemburg, *The accumulation of capital* (2003 [first German edition 1913]), Samir Amin's *Accumulation on a world scale* (1970), Maria Mies' *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale* (1986). The regulationist school coined the phrase 'regime of accumulation' to describe how under capitalism everything about society – including politics and culture – must conform to a 'regime' favouring the accumulation of capital. See Michel Aglietta, *A theory of capitalist regulation* (1976) and David Harvey, *The condition of postmodernity* (1987).
4. In the Strini Moodley Memorial Lecture cited above, Alexander calls Marxism a 'paradigm'.
5. *Unbounded organization: Embracing the societal enterprise* is the title of a new book by Gavin Andersson, forthcoming from Unisa Press. Andersson means several things by the phrase, one of which is thinking and acting outside the bounds of the constitutive rules of the dominant system.
6. Ludwig von Mises (1981, German original 1922) identifies capitalism with free-market exchange. His book provoked replies from Oskar Lange (summed up in Oskar Lange and Fred Taylor's *On the economic theory of socialism* [1964]). The debate continues to this day and is, in my view, misconceived because socialism is not central planning and capitalism is not free-market exchange.
7. See Maurice Dobb, *Soviet economic development since 1917* (1948); Alec Nove, *The soviet economic system* (1986).
8. See Stephen Howes et al (eds.) *State level reforms in India* (2003). No Indian state ever had central planning. However, it is worth noting that where Communist parties participate in or control state governments they do not now press for it.
9. Jurgen Habermas called the social democratic government of a capitalist economy 'steering' and doubted it could successfully deliver the goods it promised in his *The legitimation crisis* (1975, German original 1973).
10. *Das Kapital Erstes Buch*, Chapter 23, part II, paragraphs 7–8 (my translation). See further Rosa Luxemburg (1951, original German 1913); Patrick Bond, Horman Chitonge and Arndt Hopfmann (eds.) *The accumulation of capital in southern Africa* (2006); Samir Amin, *Accumulation on a world scale* (1974); Maria Mies (1986).
11. This is Marx's simplest definition of *Mehrwert*, the one he gives in *Das Kapital Erstes Buch*, Chapter 4, part I. I do not discuss the question whether his derivation of *Mehrwert* from the exploitation of labour makes exploitation an essential part of its definition, as distinct from exploitation being the explanation of its source but not part of its definition.
12. The latest UNDP *Human development report* available at the time of writing, that for 2011, calculates the ten countries with the highest levels of human development to be Norway, Australia, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Germany and Sweden – all countries whose history has been marked by strong social democratic and labour movements. More systematically, in their book *The spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009) provide abundant evidence that more equal societies tend to do better on measures of physical health, mental health, drug abuse, education, imprisonment, obesity, social mobility, trust and community life, violence, teenage pregnancies and child wellbeing.
13. The concept of regime of accumulation was developed by the Grenoble school of regulationist economists. A regime of accumulation is a political, economic and cultural dispensation that creates conditions for the accumulation of capital. When one (for example, the Fordist/Keynesian regime of the mid-20th century) no longer favours capital accumulation, it is replaced by another (for example, neoliberalism, which itself may be succeeded by the developmentalist state). See Michel Aglietta (1979, French original 1976); David Harvey (1987).
14. The weaknesses of centrally planned economies with respect to motivation have encouraged opponents of central planning to label them pejoratively 'command economies'. See, for example,

- John Clark and Aaron Wildavsky (1990). Gavin Andersson (in the work cited above), following the Brazilian educator Clodomir de Moraes, suggests another alternative, namely 'alignment with the societal enterprise'.
15. I cite this slogan from the French Revolution, widely identified with socialist ideals, while believing that at least the third term of this trinity exempts it from being fully identified with the European 18th-century Enlightenment and welcomes the best of non-modern and non-European ethics as in Julius Nyerere (1970) and, of course, in Neville Alexander's works.
 16. Fernand Braudel (1973), 'The profitability of [businesses] depends to an important degree on their relative monopolization. That is to say, if a box contains the conditions of perfect competition – multiple small sellers and multiple small buyers, with perfect information – then the rate of profit must inevitably be minimal ...,' says Immanuel Wallerstein (2000:8).
 17. This is reflected in mainstream management literature, as distinct from mainstream economics literature. See, for example, Paul J.H. Schoemaker (1990:1178–1192). Michael Porter (2002) in his books on business strategy openly acknowledges that the whole point is to find a privileged niche where aggressively competitive pricing is avoided.
 18. For a detailed discussion of what Marx meant by 'capitalism', see Gerald Cohen's *Karl Marx's theory of history: A defense* (1978).
 19. Ibid, in the Strini Moodley Lecture cited and throughout Alexander's works.
 20. Sen remarks that capitalism leads to mean streets and stunted lives, unless it is restrained and complemented by other institutions. My suggestion is that Alexander's 'change in the fundamental power relations' would lead to the mix Sen (2003) suggests, because a democratic polity would realise that its welfare is better served by controlling private enterprise and making it work for the common good (while complementing it with a strong public sector and in other ways) rather than by abolishing production for sale and sale for profit altogether.
 21. The word *socialisme* first appeared on 13 February 1832 in *Le Globe*, a newspaper belonging to Pierre Leroux. The entry for 'socialism' appeared in *A new English dictionary on historical principles* (1888), published by Clarendon Press in Oxford. The other points made here can be researched, starting with the Wikipedia articles 'Socialism' and 'History of socialism'.
 22. I believe Antonio Gramsci once remarked that the role of the intellectual was to adjust culture to its physical functions. I have been unable to find the source.
 23. Howard Richards and Joanna Swanger (2006) argue that social democracy is inevitably frustrated within the confines of 'the basic cultural structures of the modern world'. To fulfil the ideals of democracy and of socialism it is necessary to tap diverse 'cultural resources', to practise 'direct' cooperation and to be guided by other logics including 'the logic of love'.
 24. A short list of such authors would include Rosa Luxemburg, Peter Kropotkin, Fernand Braudel, Immanuel Wallerstein, Karl Polanyi, Marcel Mauss, Marshall Sahlins, Maria Mies, Jared Diamond, Jacob Bronowski, Stephen Gudeman and Genevieve Vaughan.
 25. 'Necessarily' is in quote marks because while from a bounded viewpoint it is necessary that there must be if not one regime of accumulation then another one, from an unbounded viewpoint there is no such necessity.
 26. This unfortunate history is documented by Salim Vally (2007:39–56).

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