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GENERAL THEMES

M.N. Mezhevich & B.M. Firsov

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, THE SOCIALIST CITY AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Introduction

It is difficult to imagine modern society without mass communication (MC). Man's everyday life, his upbringing, his activities, his ideals - all of these are more and more influenced by MC. The man of the last third of the 20th century is thus obviously living in a world of dynamic socio-economic change, scientific and technological revolution, and radical transformation of his environment. The needs of production and of culture are two of the most general - and most important - stimuli urging the development of MC. In turn, MC influences the development of both production and culture.

The goals, character and results of MC activities are mediated by the socio-economic conditions in society and, first of all, by the type of social relations: information as such and the technology involved in MC represent not only an instrument for the integration of people and elevation of man, but also serve as a tool for people's disconnection, the humiliation and suppression of man, the oppression and destruction of his nature and powers. This is why the Marxist conception of MC takes three theses to be of central importance. First, it underlines the "secondary" character of MC, i.e. its dependence on the nature of society (considering the latter both as the way of integration of people and the type of culture), and its subordination to the goals of societal development. Second, it stresses the humanistic orientation of MC, which is by no means of formal but perfectly real: in socialism, in spite of the existence of classes and social groups with specific interests,

common interests dominate - there are no antagonistic interests. The third thesis is the acknowledgement of the active role and significance of MC in realizing social policy. It suffices not to say that the role of MC will gain in importance with the development of society: this process is "unlinear". Under socialism, there is no fundamental contradiction between the interests of man as the "subjective" reflection of reality and reality itself. For this reason, the subjective factor (i.e. ideas, outlooks, opinions and, therefore, the very content of MC), being a "matrix of actions" in accordance with the apprehended objective laws of development, becomes a determinant of this development.

Our main task in this paper is to ground the thesis according to which MC is not only a part of social development but also its real factor. In addition, the introduction of the category "socialist city" into the analysis is of a double loading: First, it is stipulated by the general trend of our seminar. Second, the objective tendencies of urbanization reconstructing man's living environment and his activities demand a clear idea as to how MC functions in the city.

1. Social development: Basic concepts

The concept of "social development" is in this paper defined as changes in social relations. For all this, people integrating in classes, social groups and other communities, including socio-territorial ones, are subjects of certain social relations. The type and trend of social development are determined by the relations of production. Social relations, "beginning" in production, cover all the spheres of the life of society - politics, ideology, family, etc. And they reproduce

in all these spheres, with some variation, the structure of the relations formed in social production. This is how a certain social structure of a society is shaped.

General trends of social development under socialism (the type of social development) are mainly preconditioned and determined by the character of social relations, i.e. by the absence of private property and of the domination and subjection it involves. In socialism, social development is determined by the facts that all the classes, social groups and communities hold an objectively similar position: none of these social formations have a monopoly on the means of production. On the contrary, all of them are co-owners and participants of social activities. Therefore, in the main, the interests of all the links of social structure in society coincide. And for this reason their relations are relations of cooperation and collectivism.

Accordingly, the main trend of social development under socialism is the further rapprochement of classes and social groups; overcoming remaining social differentiation; providing social equality, which the founders of Marxism defined as the abolition of all the privileges of property and consumption, and the creation of equal social opportunities for man to develop freely his faculties and satisfy his needs according to the variety of individual characteristics and tastes.¹

This thesis is of a principal character. The point is that socialism is only the first stage of a communist socioeconomic formation. The insufficient level of development of the productive forces in socialism, implies objective inequality in the system of social production; in the level of income and culture; and in the level of consciousness. In comparison with

 1 Marx K., Engels F., Soch., t.3, s. 542.

the general integrating all the links of the socialist social structure, these distinctions are of secondary character. Nevertheless, they are real; social differentiation does exist, complete social equality is still to be achieved. Naturally, this means that, in socialism, different social groups have different socio-economic interests. Along with common ones - this is part of the social reality of our society. It is therefore indispensable that socialist social policy pays sufficient attention to them. Orientation towards the widening of the sphere of coincidence of these interests is the criterion of their consideration which, in turn, implies the necessity of management and planning of social development towards gradual overcoming of the disparities in the life conditions of all socio-class groups.

People's activities in all spheres of life of society as well as the functioning and development of all social institutions are submitted to the above criterion. It also concerns MC in full measure. It is necessary that these theses be taken into account in analysing the peculiarities of MC in city conditions. The above explains that the development from agrarian to urbanized society is only one of the moments of the evolution of a socium. By itself, it does not answer the question as to what kind of changes are connected with a given line of development in people's social position. It may be understood only by comparing urbanization and the type of social development.

Urbanization ultimately determined by the development of production cannot but have common features in countries with different socio-economic systems. A similar level of economic development inevitably determines a similar level of urbanization, including the extent to which natural environment is

replaced by an artificial one ("second nature"), the growth of the urban population, etc. It is natural that the city, having become the dominating form of man's environment of habitation, considerably reconstructed many aspects of our way of life. This process has provided the objective basis for the evolution of MC in the hierarchy of social phenomena by elevating it to one of the leading places. As a consequence, the triad "urbanization-information-intercourse" turned out to be almost the main indicator of the transition to "urbanized" society and to its subject - "urbanized" man.

We by no means dispute the objectiveness of the development from village to city and from agrarian society (in which, as K. Marx said, "natural predesignation", i.e. deep dependence of society on the conditions of nature and on geographical environment dominates"²) to industrial society where the actions of factors are called forth by society itself. In this connection, urbanization as the result of the concentration of large masses of population in a few city centres proved to spur an unprecedented development of MC. Nevertheless, the connection between the historical fate of MC and societal development do not confine themselves to all that.

2. The city and social development

The role of MC in the city is, as we see it, mostly determined by the place of the latter in the system of the social whole. The city exists at a given stage of production and settlement as a direct environment of man's activities. The localization of man in a social space means that his everyday needs are satisfied to an extent allowed by the conditions of a

² Marx K., Engels F., Soch., t.46, gl.I, s. 478.

given area. Therefore the real conditions of a given city which it uses for the satisfaction of people's needs and the development of their faculties become the concrete manifestation of social conditions which are really given, i.e. available to its population. There are of course always needs the satisfaction of which requires breaking loose from the bounds of a given city. But everyday needs must be fulfilled on the spot.

However, spatial localization is only part of the problem. Broad differences persist in socialism between rural and urban areas, as well as between cities of different types. The habitation in such socio-heterogeneous conditions differentiates the population according to their real possibilities to develop and fulfill all their needs. The spatial division of the environment influences us only insofar as it entails social differentiation: the population of one city (in comparison with that of another) ceases to be only a demographic group and becomes a specific social formation - a socio-territorial community or a community in settlement.

As a direct environment of our life activities, the city thus becomes a concrete manifestation of society. Besides, the city is also a factor of social differentiation, since belonging to it means occupying certain social positions in production, in socio-political life, in cultural life, etc., all of which are distinct from the relevant positions in another settlement. And, finally, it must be borne in mind that the population of a city, being a community in settlement, is formed by representatives of different socio-class groups, i.e., it is internally differentiated - even as concerns the expression and furthering of their interests.

This is the essence of the state of a city in social development. It imposes certain requirements on the system of

MC from the point of view of both content and organization. Evidently, analysis of this group of problems should in some way be structured. Only the main problems are raised here.

3. Intensification of city development and MC

The development of large cities as agents of urbanization cannot be understood on the basis of the idea of their "self-development". A proper historical perspective can only be outlined if we scrutinize the city in the context of the development of society as a whole and of a region surrounding the city.

Today, large cities offer all the necessary conditions for highly effective production, for the progress of science and creative work, for further growth of culture and self-education. Social progress is in this case guaranteed by the consistent economic and social policy of the CPSU, aiming at further improvement of social planning and the strengthening of the role and initiative of local administrative bodies. But full use of the conditions mentioned for the harmonious and all-round development of large cities and the strengthening of their role as centres of scientific and technological progress faces a serious obstacle. This obstacle is the extensive character of the growth of large cities.

The substitution of intensive development for extensive development - planned and approved as a principle of social policy - also signifies a quite definite remaking of the structure, trends and other socially significant characteristics of mass information processes in the city. These processes must facilitate in full measure key trends of intensive city development and correspond in full to the principal interests

of production and the needs of the population.

The transition to intensive development of MC processes assumes, in particular, the following:

- increase in the number of radio and TV programmes and publications in the press
- full coverage of population with all MC media
- more even regional distribution of the flows of information
- widening the basis of MC addressees
- widening the functional scope of mass media systems
- stimulation and development of all forms of participation in the production of mass information.

The above trends in information processes are integrated in the idea that city development must be accompanied with the development of information systems with due consideration to the peculiarities of the educational background, the worldview, and the moral and psychological characteristics of the groups of urban population in all their diversity. The aims of the creation of such systems are fully determined by the necessity to improve constantly the information activities within a city (region) in accordance with changes in the social (socio-occupational) structure of its population; complication of social organization and constant widening of the sphere of self-determination of townsman's personality.

For this reason one should distinguish the managing aspect of information policy. The rhythmic circulation of social information will be provided within the limits of a city (region) in the regime of a dialogue in all the following directions:

- in vertical "from up to down" (the enactments of administrative bodies, the appeals to population, normative

acts, instructions, etc.)

- in vertical "from down to up" (the flows of written and verbal appeals of working people, including suggestions, criticism, inquiries and responses to different social events of a city and the country)

- in horizontal "contours", covering different groups of urban population (public discussions on actual problems and the problems of socio-economic development, party and state initiatives, national-economic issues; the expression of public opinion, etc.)

Constant widening of informational rights in the developing socialist city, aiming at the growth of regional self-management, must be based on the realization of this kind of perspectives. The harmonious combination of centralized (on the country scale) and decentralized (on the city scale) informational policy will have a positive effect upon the informational relations between different groups of population.

This, then, means that a number of different obstacles to the dissemination and use of socio-cultural information must be removed. Among these obstacles are:

(1) the barriers of common availability, presently regulating the level of involvement into the channels of mass informing (the conditions of the physical dissemination of radio-television signals; circulations of newspapers and magazines; the availability of radio- and teletsets, as well as of various everyday electronic equipment, etc.);

(2) social barriers (the cost of tele- and radiosets and of certain kinds of mass-printed production); factors creating the distinctions in the opportunity to obtain radio, television, and printed information; the negative effect of the conditions and regime of labour; lack of leisure time, etc.;

(3) gnosiological barriers (greater intellectual experience and knowledge of the audience; narrower distinctions in educational and cultural levels, as well as in socio-cultural mobility);

(4) disfunctional barriers (increased urgency, operative-ness and objectiveness of information; the depth and completeness of reporting of social reality, etc.).

Particular measures will be called forth for the dissemination of new media of mass communication. As known, it takes some 10 to 20 years for an innovation in the sphere of MC to reach most of the population. This period will be reduced by the speeding up of the innovative processes.

The development of transmission and reception technology will bring extended two-way mass information services. This will not only improve the availability of basic knowledge, but also enable the satisfaction of socio-cultural needs of wide strata.

4. Contours of MC activities in a large city

The position of the city as a specific autonomous organism within the limits of a given society demands a rather strict specification of two "contours" in MC activities.

First, the population of a city, being a socio-territorial community, is part of the population of the country. It is natural that the information filling the channels of mass media is stipulated by this circumstance. This is where the first and the main "contour" of MC is shaped.

Another contour, which we call a city contour, is objectively stipulated by the fact that the specificity of the conditions of life activities in a city calls forth a specific

structure of communication and socio-informational needs: First, the needs of a townsman for everyday information necessary for his normal life activities as an "urban" man. Second, the more fundamental needs of the city population, determined by their social position. It is clear that both of them cannot be satisfied from one centre. The local origin of these needs calls forth the necessity of a local source for their realization.

The correlation between these contours of MC activities is not a simple problem. With such a number of factors influencing each other, it can in most cases only be determined on the basis of applied sociological research. Nevertheless, one thing is obvious: the more evident the specificity of a given settlement and the more complicated it is, the more evident and, perhaps, the wider should be a local contour of MC.

Such a differentiation of the work of media and bodies of MC is not, of course, absolute, the allotment of the socio-territorial community from the social structure of society is not, by itself, something given. There can be "local" in the full sense of a word, concrete material, an argument or setting a problem. But as a whole, the conceptual side of MC messages will also be in this case of universally socialist and national character.

5. MC as a city clock

The problem of two "contours" of MC in a more or less localized environment of man's life activities necessitates a kind of a "city status" in all MC activities, i.e. orientation to full consideration of the specificity of local conditions. This means, first, from the point of view of organizational

structure, the existence of local MC institutions - the press, television, radio; second, strict differentiation of the tasks of these channels. The very form of mass media dictates a certain specificity of their work. But maintaining cooperation between them and establishing a division of labour is of greater importance.

Ideally, the city status of MC demands the relevant media to be "inscribed" to all spheres of economic, political and cultural life of a given settlement: the MC system of a city must be "loaded" with information concerning the problems of the life of a given settlement. But if the mass media of a given city aim at solving the problems of its development, of the life and activities of its population, this is by no means to say that the problems of the whole society are neglected. On the contrary: just in this case MC loses its informative character and begins to influence people's social behaviour and their way of life directly.

Indeed, the content of MC represents in most cases the direct involvement of the city population into the life of society as a whole. But here we should add the frequent cases where the population of a city perceives the content of the programmes of central radio, television and the central press (if, of course, the question does not concern a specific city) mainly as information, as facts and phenomena beyond a given environment of habitation. The connection between the behaviour of the population of a given city and its activities, on the one hand, and changes in the development of the country on the other, is seen as mediated - this is the result of the localization of a settlement and its relative territorial autonomy. But when mass media present national problems through the prism of the tendencies in development of a given city, they are

inevitably perceived from another point of view, namely from that of the direct connection with labour, everyday life, education - in short, with the life activities of the population of a given city and their changes.

The city status of MC is thus based on the fact that within the limits of a given city there is a constant transition from the activities organized in a given place to those reshaping society. For this reason the city status of MC is none other than a form of the realization of its general social status. The concreteness of setting any social problem, the possibility of revealing the connection between the development of every man and the social conditions of his life (including the activities of other people and relations with them) - this is the true sense of the city status of MC. The completeness of this status indicates the degree of involvement of a given community in the life of society. Besides the volume of information (or the duration of the transmission) concerning the life of the community, the "translation" of it into the language of the problems of a given community shows the connections between the development of the whole and its constituent parts.

Let us clarify our position by the following example.

One of the most interesting problems is the rhythmic character of the townsman's life, of which there is ample evidence. The industrial organization of life has created the models of rational behaviour for everyday life, for recreation, and for the consumption of culture and information. The all-round rhythmization of the main spheres of life of the townsman does not mean the unification of his life. We can here see not one but at least three variants of the rhythm of everyday life, considerably influencing the way of life of the city public.

The first variant is based on the assumption that man lives by an "endogenous" clock, i.e., according to the rules of his internal synchronization system. Having excluded the idea of absolute endogeneity from consideration, we can note that certain strata (for example, those in creative professions, scientists, pensioners) have more alternatives to choose from in the sphere of work and recreation: Their way of life is characterized by a great number of freely streaming rhythms.

The second variant is an alternative to the first one. According to this point of view, people's life activities are almost exclusively manipulated by external synchronization (hypothesis of an exogenous clock). The reality of this point of view is based on the dependence of man's behaviour on social development and his social needs. In this case, alternatives in the sphere of work and leisure are rather few. It is a known fact that much of the working population still lives according to an "exogenous" clock (for instance, assembly-line workers).

The third variant is a compromise of the above points of view: here, different diapasons of biological rhythms are prescribed to the action of the mechanisms of regulation. The higher the frequency of biorhythm, the greater the probability of it being managed by the organism itself; the lower the frequency, the greater the probability that the rhythm is managed from outside.

Conclusions, then, are somewhat difficult to draw. But it seems obvious that the freedom of choice in work and leisure considerably affects the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the townsman's information activities, as well as his involvement in the spheres of art and culture.

The classification of social rhythms shows that the mass media have not, in full extent, taken all of them into account.

The traditional orientation to the daily rhythms of life activities is not sufficient. Research data indicates that the mass media have not yet established informational contacts within relatively small groups of population and in short periods of time. What we are referring to is the information necessary not only for weekly and monthly orientation, but also for per hour and daily orientation in the typical frequently changing situation of a modern large city. This information is not of a general character, and is not needed at every given moment for the whole public. The structure and content of such information are determined by the increasing complexity of the townsman's social relations and by the necessity to make ever more decisions concerning everyday life.

6. From MC to townsmen's consciousness

It is necessary to underline, in particular, the specificity of mass media activities in the city. In our opinion, if we compare different cities, the very content of MC is determined not only by its adequacy in relation to the level of socio-political and socio-cultural development of some or another social group of a given city, or in relation to the level of socio-territorial communities. The content of communication should, as it were, go beyond the "achieved" level of socio-cultural development. Such a requirement is conditioned by two phenomena.

First, the consciousness of different strata and groups of population, determined by their way of life may, in a sense, lag behind the latter. (This is where we see the relative independence of ideology.) Second, as we mentioned, the differentiation in the status of social groups is retained

under socialism, and for this reason the differentiation of their interests is also retained.

The favourable conditions for man's social development prevalent in our society do not, in other words, as such solve all the problems of the upbringing and education of man. MC is addressed to a diversity of people, to certain strata and social groups of population, but its content is always perceived by a concrete man.

Dynamic changes in social structure, the widening of the sphere of individual self-determination result in further development of personality. But one has only to "slow down" the process of the enrichment of the content of MC when it becomes apparent both in the relations of media themselves and in different groups of population.

Accordingly, the present orientation to the advanced strata of urban population should turn to normative informational and cultural policy. The ever higher level of education among the urban population results in greater requirements towards the content of MC.

The very idea of orientation to the advanced groups is not a sociological or a socio-cultural revelation. Soviet researchers, in analysing many aspects of the socialist way of life and the standards of material consumption, have long orientated themselves to a number of outstripping tendencies and to the normatives of socio-desirable matters connected with these tendencies. We believe there will be a time of a more resolute search for those strata and those needs to which MC should be more orientated.

The above thesis needs some specifications. There should be several levels of availability. Complicated language undoubtedly means that people may refuse to follow serious

radio and TV programmes. Moreover, substantial differences between the content of MC and the needs of the audience may lead to superficial adoption of the content of MC. Nevertheless, in defining information policy, one should start out from the fact that the educational background of the audience will continue to increase.

This conclusion does not contradict the tendencies of scientific and technological progress under which conditions for a universal information service and for the satisfaction of cultural, aesthetic and informational needs are created; the needs of not only the whole city public, but also of relatively small strata and groups. The multi-step system of socio-cultural information consumption must constitute the core of the informational infrastructure of the socialist city.

This is why the content of MC has to outstrip the existing level of consciousness of the city people. This requirement has nothing to do with the "manipulation of consciousness" typical of society based on private property. A kind of the outstripping of the content of MC does not mean the imposition of the life which disagree with real interests of people. On the contrary, insofar as the interests of different groups of the socialist city coincide (and insofar as the city's contribution to the development of society is the condition of their realization), the "forestalling" of MC activities objectively expresses the priority of the general over particular. This is why orientation to the most advanced social groups, whose level of consciousness is mostly brought nearer to ideal (in given historical conditions), must be the basic purpose of MC in the city.