

## MIDTERM PAPER

ARDEN RASMUSSEN

OCTOBER 9, 2019

Throughout science fiction, the depiction of science and technology can play a critical role in the development of the underlying themes, and arguments of the author. In the novel *Red Star* by Alexander Bogdanov technology is used many times to support Bogdanov's sociological theories and opinions about socialism. Specifically, his depictions of technology develop the importance of global unity for the establishment of a successful communist society. Throughout the novel, Bogdanov depicts the importance of having society be united globally for his depiction of communism to be successful. He then utilizes the depiction of technology throughout the novel to advance this idea, and reinforce the argument for the global unification of society as a prerequisite for a successful communist utopia.

One point when the unity of the Martians is exemplified, and is used to demonstrate its necessity for the development of an idealized communist society is on the space ship during the trip to Mars. At the beginning of the trip, Menni explains to Leonid how the crew of the space ship work together. When Leonid asks if Menni is the captain he responds by saying

But that doesn't mean that I have the power of a commanding officer. It simply means that I have the most experience flying spaceships and my orders are accepted, the same way that I accept the astronomical calculations which Sterni makes, or as we accept Netti's medical advice because we want to retain our health and strength.

Here Menni explains that there is no hierarchy on the space ship, and that everyone works together and trusts the knowledge and experience of the others. If the crew of the space ship was not completely unified and agreed on the common goals, then this structure would not function properly. If there was any disagreement between crewmembers, then a hierarchy would be necessary to make decisions as to what actions should be taken. It is only when every member of the crew considers the experience of the others, and agrees to accept the knowledge of the most experience among them that this hierarchyless social structure can function. This mirrors the social structure of the entirety of Mars, there is no clearly defined social hierarchy, and that is only possible through the unity of the population, and their desire to work for the greater good of the planet. In this case, the space ship would only function if all members of the crew work together as a single team, the same reasoning extends towards the entire society of Mars. It can only function in this idealized socialist society if everyone works together as a single nation.

A second major point when the use of technology is used to advance Bogdanov's sociological ideas is in the depiction of the workforce on Mars. The organization of industry and production on Mars is handled by the Institute of Statistics. The Institute of Statistics keeps statistics on the surplus and shortage of products from

all of the industries on the planet. The Institute of Statistics and the social structure that it represents is only possible if everyone in society has been unified globally. Menni explains this process to Leonid “The tables are meant to affect the distribution of labor”, he then goes on to explain “The Institute then computes the difference between the existing and the desired situation for each vocational area and communicates the result to all places of employment. Equilibrium is soon established by a stream of volunteers”. This entire process which demonstrates the technological advancements for the distribution of labor, is entirely reliant on the martians large population such that any erroneous statistics will become normalized. Bogdanovs depiction of the Institution of Statistics, and the underlying distributed workforce of mars, is entirely reliant on the population of mars volunteering to where the work is needed. The only case where the martians will openly volunteer for the required jobs is when they are working for the greater good of the planet, and where there are enough people such that the labor can be in excess. If only a single continent on earth were to adopt this system of labor distribution, it would not function, because a lack of population, and the different production of different regions. This system only works on mars, because everyone across the planet is part of the system and is willing to work for the greater good of society.

A third point where the importance of global unity is emphasized by technology is in the construction of the Grand Canals on mars. These grand canals required many generations of labor and planning, and large numbers of workers to dedicate themselves to the construction project. Prior to the grand canals only the large corporations were able to utilize the land for farming “Thus all cultivated land was transferred to a few thousand powerful agricultural capitalists”. With the construction of the grand canals it became possible for any farmer to make use of the land. This clearly demonstrates a communication of the society, converting it from having a few large corporations to many small farmers. As Bogdanov describes “The epoch of the digging of the canals was a time of great prosperity in all areas of industry and a period of profound calm in the class struggle”. When the martians became united to work on a global project that would benefit the entirety of society there was a social peace, and once the project was completed a revolution occurred to socialize the society so that the global unity that occurred during the construction would continue indefinitely. If the society on mars had been primarily focused on monetary gains, as society on Earth frequently is, then a project such as this would never be able to take place. However, since the martians are globally unified and work for the benefit of the entire society and not for individual gains, then the construction of the grand canals was able to take place. The martians realized that the construction of the canals would benefit the society as a whole, although at the detriment of the corporations that currently possessed a monopoly on the land. The existence of the technology of the grand canals exemplifies the societal importance on the global unity and primary focus on working for the greater good of the community.

These three depictions of technology in Bogdanovs *Red Star* demonstrate the importance of the global unity of the society. None of these pieces of technology would function properly if the martians were not totally unified into a single culture. If martian society had not been unified globally, then the construction of the grand canals would not have been possible, and the management of the spaceship and the workforce would not function properly.

The fact that these technological advancements are primarily dependent on the structure of the society in which they exist, then it could be argued that those are the primary limitations for the development of this type of technology. Despite the fact that much of the society on Mars has developed into a perfect society, but many of these advancements in the Martian technology is primarily based upon the societal unity. This would indicate that if this form of societal unity can be developed on the Earth, then it could indicate that this form of technology and society could be possible on the earth.

Bogdanov's argument is that for his vision of a perfect society as it has been depicted on Mars, to have the potential to exist on Earth humanity must first become more unified in order to proceed. He has demonstrated this through the construction of a great technological advancement of the Grand Canals, and the through the management of the societal structure both on the spaceship and in the Institute of Statistics.