

# Has Socialism a Future ?

## Tragedy of the Labor Movement

A HUNDRED YEARS have gone by since the publication of "The Communist Manifesto." A hundred years is but a second if viewed from the background of the evolution of society. But it is a long time for the man in the street.

If we could put ourselves outside the Socialist movement for a moment, and view that movement from the point of view of a detached spectator, we might be able to survey the events of the past century and arrive at conclusions which are not colored by our own bias, which do not partake of our hopes and apprehensions. But this is impossible. We, just as all other movements, have created our own illusions. We think that the Socialist approach is less biased than any other—but we do not claim that it is "unbiased." The only unbiased men are dead men.

But, recognizing this, we can all the same attempt to glance at the last hundred years and try to work out what exactly has happened to what is known as the "Labor Movement". By realising that one is prejudiced, one can help to partly overcome those prejudices.

### DIVISIONS.

There have been four main tendencies in the "Left" during the past century: First in historical importance and in strength of numbers come the Social Democratic and Labor Parties. Secondly, running them a close rival, may be counted the Communist Parties which claim 18 million members at present. Thirdly, a number of groups which could be labelled "Anarcho-Syndicalist" have played an important part. They have not, in comparison with the first two groups, been very strong, yet were able to attract considerable numbers of workers in the heyday of the IWW, of Sorel, and of the Spanish Anarchists. Fourth, numerically never very significant and with little influence on the theories of the mass parties, we may group what is usually called the "Ultra Lefts". This would include the Spartacist movement, the German Communist Workers' Party (K.A.P.D.) and a large number of different groups in Holland, France, Italy, and the USA. (Rosa Luxemburg occupies a special position and can't be "labelled.") As for ourselves, and our companion parties, we occupy a rather peculiar position in the sense that we cannot be fitted in any of the main divisions. As far as our theories are concerned, they can, in the main, be traced directly to Marx and Engels, but we have added much that is our own and cannot be found in any of Marx's works. With the Social Democrats of the 1920's we have in common the insistence that the Russian revolution was not a Socialist, but a

bourgeois one. Sections of the Social Democrats used to emphasize the importance of Democracy. Especially we can find this in the work of Kautsky. In that respect we agree with his theories, but reject this reformism and false conception of Socialism. With the Communist Parties, and their mates out of a job, the Trotskyites, we have nothing at all in common. While we agree with the Anarchists and the Ultra-Lefts on the importance of "control from below", we reject their suicidal tactics and their Utopian belief that all the evils of humanity can be traced to the existence of the State. Some Anarchists, though not all of the more recent ones, have advocated theories very close to Bolshevism and totalitarianism. As for the Ultra Left groups, which are being revived in Europe today, many of them agree with us that the emancipation of the workers, if it is ever to be achieved, must be done by the workers themselves. While some of them fancy themselves as new "vanguards", others agree with us that no small group of clever leaders can drag behind them a mass of unenlightened followers and thus achieve Socialism. Most of the Ultra-Lefts reject Parliamentary methods and rely on a mysterious "spontaneity" of the masses. Such tactics can only lead to new illusions and consequent failure.

### ROLE OF LP AND CP.

As far as success can be measured by numbers, and by the achievement of power, it is the Labor and Communist Parties which have been successful. The Labor Parties believe that the present system can be run for the benefit of the workers without altering radically the basis of the system and abolishing the relations of wage labor and capital. By piecemeal reforms they hope to remove poverty, exploitation and war. Though nominally democratic, they are, when in power, forced to adopt more and more undemocratic attitudes, because, in reality, they aim at a State Capitalist economy. We shall come back to this point in a moment.

The Communist Parties, on the other hand, while they also support

# SOCIALIST COMMENT

## Socialist Party of Australia

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moves to reform capitalism when it suits their "line"; fundamentally aim at the overthrow of the present ruling class by whatever means expediency demands. **BUT THEY DO NOT AIM AT SOCIALISM OR COMMUNISM, THEY DO NOT AIM TO ESTABLISH A CLASSLESS SOCIETY.** Rather do they fancy themselves as the new ruling class of the future. Both their aims and their methods are completely undemocratic and they are little more than the mouthpiece of the Russian exploiting class.

Wherever Labor Parties have achieved power, they have been incapable of making any changes in the capitalist system which would have abolished the status of the workers as an exploited class, a class that has no real control of society. What they have achieved, however, is to hasten the process towards what we call, for want of a better name, "State Capitalism".

Wherever the Communist Parties have come to power, they have done the same thing, only much more violently. In both cases, the social composition of the ruling class have been changed, and the means by which it controls the ruled class have been modernised.

In both cases the workers, the ruled class, have found that they are as badly off, if not worse off, than before. They have been told again and again that their leaders will look after them, that there is no need for them to exercise their own judgment, that everything will be lovely in the garden, if only they trust their leaders. And just as regularly, they have listened and have been fooled.

### "STATE CAPITALISM"

In fact, it is by now abundantly clear, that the past 100 years have been a century which showed more and more the trend towards State Capitalism. State Capitalism means that the individual capitalist is no longer free to act as he likes. His interests are subordinated to the interests of the capitalist system as a whole. He is told where he can invest, and what, he is told which industries are regarded as essential and which are not. Through the control

"In the long run men hit only what they aim at, therefore though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high."—Thoreau.

of private investment by the State through the manipulation of credit by a national banking system through the control of priorities and permits, through the conscription of labor, by all these means a desperate attempt is made to make capitalism behave uncapitalistically. It is hoped that booms and slumps can thus be prevented, or, at least, controlled.

But, if and when the State controls the individual capitalist, it is also forced to control the workers, and the workers' organizations in so far as they try to exert pressure on the State. It must attack the Trade Unions and turn them into agents of the State. Secondly, it will be forced to tell the workers where and how long they should work. Thirdly, in the long run, it will be forced to attempt to suppress any organization which challenges its supremacy.

The most perfect example of State Capitalism today exists, of course, in Russia. In that country, not only is there not the slightest trace of Socialism, but, on the contrary, we have there a MOST HIGHLY DEVELOPED FORM OF CAPITALISM. Neither through Trade Unions nor through their own parties, do the workers have any real pressure on the ruling class. Hence, they have less say in the control of society than they have in any orthodox capitalist country.

In the countries ruled by Labor Governments, the evolution has not yet gone so far. Russia, which was a semi-federal country at the time of the revolution, has gone through a hot house process which compressed the history of about 200 years into 30. Hence, when passing judgment on Russia, we must always remember that the horrors of the evolution of capitalism were compressed there as well as the evolution of capitalism itself.

In the more advanced countries, with a long democratic history behind them, State capitalism does not, in the opinion of this writer, mean that democracy will disappear overnight. But it is certain to mean a weakening of democracy.

Whether that weakening must eventually result in a 100 per cent totalitarian regime is a question which would require a book to answer.

#### WHO IS GUILTY?

If the above is true, does the hope of the workers lie in siding with the sections of the capitalists who oppose this trend? It is Menzies and Churchill who are the real defenders of freedom. The answer is "No." The evolution of State Capitalism is something which has taken place, true enough, with the assistance of the Labor Movement. In that sense, it is correct to claim that the workers have helped to forge their own chains. From that point of view it is the working class who are guilty.

But this evolution would have taken place even without the active assistance of the Labor and Communist parties. In fact, the Conservatives have forced the capitalists, who have been PROMISED quite against their will to help in this evolution. They had to actually regulate the anarchy of capitalist production against their own will. We may compare the capitalist

today to a man who has mounted a tiger without knowing it. He may imagine that he controls the course of the tiger and its speed. In reality the tiger controls him.

#### MONOPOLY.

If it is true that much can be explained by looking at the economic plain of society, we can find the key to this phenomenon in economics. Briefly put, we may say that the trend towards economic monopoly is inherent in capitalism itself, has given rise to a trend towards political monopoly. This trend could have halted and even reversed if the workers had understood it, and the workers had decided to overthrow capitalism and abolish ALL exploitative relations. It could not have been stopped by the capitalists. If all the Labor Governments disappeared overnight and Conservative ones took their place, they would be forced to put into practice much the same policies as their predecessors.

Why then do Menzies and Co. scream at the Labor party? Why, if there is no real difference between the Liberals and the Labor party, do they fight each other? Some would maintain that this can be explained by the fact that people often do not see their own interests, and that the Liberals fight because they mistakenly believe that State Capitalism is a menace to them. Such an explanation is inadequate, though it has an element of truth in it. The real reason, we suggest, is that State Capitalism means also a new ruling class — a ruling class whose social composition differs from the older one. The question of precise definition is a very complicated one. It is certain that no simple and attractive formula, such as the "Managerial Revolution" will fit it. It is certain, also, that power is passing from the hands of the individual capitalists—but into whose hands?

However, even if we cannot undertake to answer this in a short article, we can say that as far as the workers are concerned, this is a secondary issue. IF THERE IS A CHANGE OF MASTERS THE UNDERDOGS HAVE NO INTEREST IN HELPING EITHER TO PRESERVE THE OLD MASTERS OR HELPING TO USHER IN THE NEW ONES.

#### THE BRICK WALL.

It is clear, then, that the aim of the Socialist—a society where power is equally distributed, where the main decisions to be arrived at arise from the active participation of the whole of society, where the means of life are controlled and democratically administered by the whole of society, where there is no exploiting nor an exploited class, where production is geared to needs and the wages system abolished—is a long, long way off. No sane purpose served by denying ourselves to be arrived at by the slings of a mass movement towards such a society anywhere in the world.

There are, of course, quite a few Socialists who believe that "History", with a capital "H", is the force which they tell us that "in the long run" the workers MUST learn. Maybe so, but this belief, which sees a "purpose"

in "History" seems to many others nothing but a religious belief without any scientific basis. By betting that "long run" can be heliostically long.

At present, the situation is quite simple. Only those who do not believe without blinkers refuse to see it. It is this: The overwhelming mass of the workers support either the present system of capitalist capitalism, i.e. belong to "the Right", or, if they belong to "the Left" and are in the Labor movement, they support a movement which is actively helping in the establishment of capitalist society. State Capitalism, they believe, will give them "security." The experience of the depression has seared its impression on the minds of millions and millions and "security" is their primary aim. Quite apart from the question whether State Capitalism CAN guarantee security, which, to say the least, is very doubtful, such "security" would be that of the slave. Further, if economic insecurity were to be diminished in an economy planned from above, political security would be gone.

Can we comfort ourselves with the knowledge that we have always pointed out that "Nationalization" merely means a change of masters? Can we pride ourselves on the fact that we have always insisted that a movement for Socialism must be built up on knowledge and self reliance, not on reformist activities and blind faith? Can we be proud of the fact that we analysed the Russian Revolution from its very beginning as a bourgeois revolution, and pointed out that it must lead to State Capitalism? Can we beat our chests and remind you that we have from the beginning seen that the ideas of the Bolsheviks ("professional revolutionaries"—control by an elite—no free discussion) coupled with the backwardness of Russia, must lead to a ruthless dictatorship?

We cannot do any of these things, for, just as consistently as we have been proved to have been to the same degree unsuccessful.

We are in a position today, where, a hundred years after the "Manifesto" there is not yet even the beginning of a real mass movement for Socialism as we conceived it. We continue to speak, and write, and respond, as compared to the mass parties, is nil. We are beating our heads against a brickwall of illusions, myths and spathy in the hope that the wall may fall one day.

#### THE FUTURE.

Today, we can do nothing at all but continue with the same arguments which have proved singularly unsuccessful. Everything else—the idea of barricades, or infiltration, or lovely sounding manifestos—is madness and self deception.

If Socialist propaganda during the last 50 years has had no success, the first thing to try to do is to try and find out why. There have been many answers to this, which can be reduced to six: Either there is something radically wrong with the whole concept of the workers as a revolutionary class; or the workers can't understand Socialism; or else we present

our propaganda wrongly. Alternatively, it is claimed that Socialists have seriously, and badly, underestimated the maturity and adaptability of Capitalism, which, for those who hold this view, has yet a great future before it in its State controlled form. Finally, none of the above may be the reason, it may be the case that the "time lag" between economic developments and ideas is simply much greater than Marx believed and is influenced by factors which cannot be traced to economics at all.

The immediate task, then would be to either show that the failure of Socialist propaganda can be traced to all the old reasons usually given (control of opinion industry by the capitalists, etc., etc.) or if this theory should no longer prove satisfactory, we must investigate all other alternatives.

We agree with Lucien Laurat who wrote: "Marxism is not a dogma at all; it is a method of investigation. Seeing that the conditions of our day differ considerably from those studied by Marx, what are the new problems which contemporary Marxism has to solve? They certainly cannot be solved by reeling off a few quotations by heart."

And, again: "A Marxist cannot be orthodox unless he continually questions even the truths he has already acquired, including the words of Marx himself." ("Marxism and Democracy," pp. 10, 48).

For our little group in Australia, then, the immediate job would be to try and re-examine all our assumptions and see if they are sound.

But what about the Labor Movement? What of the mass parties?

If they carry on as now, which seems reasonably certain, they help to usher in a society planned FROM ABOVE by a small and ruthless elite. In such a society the ruled, the workers, will have little freedom, not even the "accidental freedom" they have now.

If that is to be the future of the Labor Movement we could say that instead of overthrowing exploitation in all shapes and forms, that movement has been a strong factor in continuing and strengthening exploitation.

If so, instead of breaking their chains, the workers will have rivetted them ever firmer — by their own actions.

FRANK ROYDON.

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## Cuttings and Comments

#### THOSE 'INCONVENIENT' STRIKES.

We had written an article on the Transport Strike, Direct Action and the Powers Bill, but could not fit it in because of lack of space. It will appear next month. In the meantime just one point: It is true that the public, or rather a large section of it, suffered discomfort and inconvenience, from having to walk or hitchhike to work. We say "a section" because there's the workers and the capitalists — together they are the public. It is true that the capitalists are not DIRECTLY hit by a transport strike. They've got cars. The worker usually hasn't, and gets it in the neck.

But, it must be remembered that the employers DO get hurt—they suffer loss of business, absenteeism, etc. Further, the trammies were not only striking for themselves, but for all those who haven't yet got a 5-day week. Finally, we repeat what we have often pointed out: Strikes ARE displays of organized force, they are effective to the degree that they are inconvenient either (a) to the employers, (b) to the non-striking workers who then force the Government to try and settle the strike. In a class society there will be strikes and consequent suffering. We didn't invent the class struggle. We don't like it.

We conceive of a society where it won't exist. But we can't do anything about it till the majority of workers understand its causes and its cure.

SALESMANSHIP.

"Within a few years there will be so many slot machines in the USA that salesmanship will consist only of having a well-polished machine. . . . Americans, who can already extract from slot machines a variety of things ranging from ping-pong balls to insurance policies, will soon use a flood of new highly scientific gadgets that will mix credits, sell books and clean shoes. . . . The year comes when machines will gold 100,000,000 dol. worth of goods. By 1950, say the experts, they will be selling five times that total." ("Age" 7-14-48).

Now all we need is a machine that writes out "services no longer required" notice and hands it to the salesman.

R.Y.

#### MATES.

"W. S. Robinson has made more trips abroad in the past 8 years than any other Australian. Although an extremely well-to-do man (Collins House group, Melb.), and very much the Rightwing capitalist, the Labor boys consult him constantly, and the Doc wouldn't sit out of Australia during the war without W.S. at his elbow." ("Sydney Telegraph" 5-1-48).

"Collins House Group" is a group of 13 companies with a total capital of over £14 million. The companies are: Metal Manufacturers, Zinc Corporation, Imp. Smelting Corp., B.H.

Ass. Smelters, Electrolyte Refining & Smelting, New B.H. Consolidated, Broken Hill South, Australian Aluminium, Zinc Industries, Associated Pulp and Paper, Taramaki (N.Z.) Oil. Six of the above again interlock with 19 other companies. Virtual control is in the hands of an inner ring of six" — Sir C. Fraser, Sir A. Stewart, Sir W. Massey, Sir G. B. Stewart and Mr. W. S. Robinson. Sir C. Fraser died in March 1944, and we don't know what happened to his share in control (See "Monopoly" (1941, p. 15)). The "Doc" referred to above was of course Dr. Evatt. He once wrote "There had to be compromise, even with mammon; but occasions were multiplied, there came

. . . the gradual day  
Weakening the light  
Leaking the brightness away.  
The lack of good to touch  
The fading of body and soul  
Like smoke before the wind  
Corrupt, unsubstantial.  
("Aust. Labor Leader" p.673).

#### SLIGHT GAP.

A New York investigation recently showed that a typical family of four needs £20/10/- a week to live in New York (modest but not by any means a bourgeois family, where the husband is a clerk in a Federal Dept. and where there are two children, finds it needs £8/10/- a week "just to live"). Necessary to get a few extra pounds on top of this amount and leave no margin for holidays or expenses for serious illness. ("Herald" 13-12-47).

The interesting thing about this family is that it is part of what is often described as the "middle class." They are trying to buy a house on the instalment system, and own a small car. The husband has a war pension of £12/6 and they get 7/6 from child endowment (weekly). Now, what this shows is that as a man's job gets somewhat better paid — and especially in the case of "white collar" workers—so do his ideas of a "minimum standard" rise. Hence, though he gets more money, his needs always increase more than proportionately.

We can imagine what sort of "luxuries" a basic wage earner, on £5/8/- (minus tax), a week could afford!

#### THEY DIED IN TWO WARS : HOW MANY NEXT?

First authoritative statement of what the Second World war cost, in lives of "Military personnel" only, has been given by United States Secretary of State George C. Marshall in an article for the Encyclopedia Britannica.

It was roughly twice as great as that of the First World War. First World War Dead: 20,000,000. Second World War—Dead: 15,000,000. How many were wounded. Mr. Marshall doesn't say. In the First World War, 19,000,000 were total. It could have been twice as high in the Second World War, and might well have been many more.

But no one has tried to give any sort of an estimate of the death and suffering of "non-military." When we remember that 100,000 were killed in one fire-raid on Tokio; that millions

died in forced mass migrations, in labour camps, in extermination chambers, it would probably not be over-stating to put the war's total of military and non-military deaths at 40,000,000.

And, if we remember Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where 120,000 were killed by two bombs, we will get a picture of what will be the death roll in the Third World War, towards which we are drifting in a state of hopelessness.

From "Peacemaker" Jan. 43.

#### THE PRICE WAGE SPIRAL.

(Letter in Age 22/1/43).

The plea for increased production made by Sir George Wales is not likely to convince many workers. He states that "the present 4/- rise would be swallowed up, and workers would receive no actual benefit."

In the first place, your leading article admits that the worker "is constantly behind in the impossible task of catching up with living costs." Surely this is an admission that what we have is a price-wage spiral, and not vice-versa. The 4/- increase is supposed to compensate for price increases which have already taken place. It is therefore not retrospective.

Secondly, President Truman recently stated that U.S. production had risen by 76 per cent. as compared with the 1935-9 average. Yet American prices are still soaring and real wages are declining. How, then, can increased production be a remedy for high prices?

Thirdly, a report put out by the American Labor Research Association shows that while the real wages of the American workers had risen by 72 per cent. in the period from 1899-1946, their relative wages (i.e. real wages divided by their output) had declined by 31 per cent. in the same period. In other words, the more they produce the worse they were off in relation to their production.

**CORRECTION:** A printer's error in the front page quote of the January issue, turned the working class from an "oppressed" into an "oppressor" class.

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2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the

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## S.P.N.Z.

monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interest of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

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