

SOCIALIST MELBOURNE



by Ralph Gibson

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MELBOURNE

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Socialist Melbourne

By RALPH GIBSON M.A.

You will all have heard the old Communist motto, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." That is the ideal we see ahead of us and the ideal that we shall one day reach. One day it will be possible for all to help freely in producing a great common store of goods and for each to take freely from this store.

But that will not come all at once. It will come only over a long period of change in men's minds and habits of living. And I expect you will be interested mainly in what is likely to happen during your lifetime. I will, therefore, give you the picture of the first stage of Communist society, the stage we call Socialism.

To make the picture a vivid one, I shall paint it, not as applied to Russia or any other foreign country, but as applied to our own Commonwealth of Australia. I want you to go for a walk with me through the streets of the new Melbourne and into the new suburbs and new countryside. What would we see?

EXIT THE MILLIONAIRE

Let us suppose we approach Melbourne from the sea. Near the mouth of the Yarra, we would see before us the Commonwealth Aircraft factory, owned in past times by Broken Hill Proprietary and by General Motors-Holdens, two of Australia's wealthiest companies, whose profits were about a million a year each. Such was the greed of these companies that, before the first plane could be turned out of the factory, the engineers had to come out on strike to prevent men on low wages being brought in to perform skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

But now the factory was in new hands. No longer did it yield rent, interest and profit to private owners. It was owned by the Government of the country. Larger incomes were paid to the skilled than to the unskilled, larger incomes still to managers and expert technicians; but those largest of all incomes that had once gone to the people who were outside the factory and did not help in its work were paid no more.

FREE WORKERS

To go inside the factory was a new and wonderful experience. One felt as if one had walked into a club rather than a factory. Many of the workers seemed able to leave their jobs and talk to you when they wanted to. They showed you their factory-newspaper hung on the walls of the factory; and there, in the full light of day, one could read the opinions of the workers themselves on all questions, including

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the question of the manager and the way in which he managed the factory. Next they showed us a fine, large dining-room in which five hundred workers could get an excellent three-course meal at the cost price of sixpence a time. Hurried tea-and-sandwich meals in the "mess room" and on the floor of the factory were a thing of the past. Attached to the factory were a surgery, a first aid station, a rest room and a library. The factory, under the control of the elected factory committee, had become a centre of social life as well as a work place.

Speed-up was unknown. One worker said, "We would speed up of our own accord if it were needed. Even now we write slackers up in our wall-paper. But our machines in Australia are so good, and our workers are so efficient, that there has been no need to plan faster work."

THE PEOPLE'S RAILWAYS

Or suppose we arrive in Melbourne by rail. We would alight on a new and splendid station, which we would never suspect of being Spencer Street. On inquiring how such a new station came to be built, we would find that the answer was very simple.

At the time when the new system was introduced, the debts of the railways were wiped out of existence. In the old days, the railways had paid out about £500 each year on every mile of railway in the country. But with the new system these debts had been cancelled. A court had been set up to deal with the claims of small bondholders who might have suffered from loss of their interest money and to award them compensation, but in the case of the large bondholders the view had been taken—and quite rightly taken—that they had compensated themselves more than enough already.

The result was that wages could be raised, fares reduced, and Spencer Street rebuilt at the same time.

The railways became the people's property, in fact as well as in name.

BANKING UNDER THE HAMMER AND SICKLE

Walking along Collins Street, we would arrive before long at the Commonwealth Bank.

In the old days this had been a very remarkable place. On its Board of Directors had sat, as the law had required, a representative of the owners of industry, a representative of the owners of sheep stations, a representative of commercial firms and other such people. On at least one occasion these directors had proved themselves to be the real government of the country. They had drawn up a plan which went down into history as the "Premiers' Plan," but which was really their plan and nobody else's. It was they who drew

plan, it was they who pointed the gun at those premiers who were at first unwilling to accept it, threatening them with bankruptcy, and made them put up their hands one by one.

Now, however, there was a big change. At the table of the Board of Directors you could see new faces—faces of banking experts, faces of workers—and they acted in accordance with the general plan for the whole of the national economy. It was now the people who dictated to the banks, and not the banks to the people.

As the outward sign of this change, the swastikas which had adorned the floor of the Commonwealth Bank were replaced by the hammer and sickle, the emblem of the power of the toilers of the town and the country.

SHOPKEEPERS WITH A FUTURE

A little way further on we would arrive at the main shopping centre. Here we would see a good deal of variety. The big stores would have been taken over by the State. The great days of Cole's and Woolworth's, with their hundred stores, their two and a half millions capital and their 12½ per cent. dividends, were gone, never to return. Some of the smaller stores would also be State or co-operative stores. But others would belong to those private shopkeepers who were still plying their trade.

If we were to ask of these how they were getting on under the new system, we would probably get the reply that they were having a good deal of difficulty competing with the State and co-operative stores; but we would also find that while in the old days they were being driven to the wall by Cole's and Woolworth's, and left with nothing, now they knew they could at any rate find useful work in the new State and co-operative stores, very likely as managers of the same shops in which they now carried on their trade.

FREE WORSHIP

But let us go a bit further. We would see next on the left hand side three big churches—the Baptist Church, the Scots Church, and the Independent Church. These churches would still be open, and if we passed at the right time on a Sunday morning, congregations would be streaming in or out of their doors. The lie that Communism means religious persecution would have been answered by the facts of real life.

As far as Communists were concerned, they would be going in and out among the people, as it would be their duty to do, pointing out that our real work was to build a better life on this earth, and it was only by man's will and man's effort that this could be done. But those who wanted to worship could worship freely.

The churches would not own property, and they would not own schools, but they would still be open and people of all denominations would be free to worship in them in their own way.

SOVIET CONGRESS

By this time we would have become very curious to know how this new country was governed, and so, without further delay, we would go to the top of Collins Street and turn the corner to Parliament House.

On the top of Parliament House would fly the Red Flag—not, as some think, the symbol of a desire to shed blood, but the symbol of the blood that runs in common through the veins of all humanity, the symbol since time immemorial of oppressed peoples struggling to be free. But the big change would be inside.

We would see before us a Soviet Congress. Every man and woman in that Congress would not only be democratically elected, but could be democratically recalled at any time.

Every man and woman in that Congress would be bound by the rule that Soviet members could not get any fancy sum for their services, but an ordinary working class income and no more.

Probably the members of this Congress would have been elected by the whole of the people. Possibly, if the landlords and big capitalists had stirred up too much trouble against the new system, they would have been deprived of the vote, as they were after a time in Russia; but, even then, all could vote who could prove that they performed any sort of useful work whatever, whether by hand or by brain, in the town or country.

Possibly, even, the Congress would have been elected, not directly by the people, but by the local Soviets, or local people's councils, but these would also be democratically elected bodies. They would be elected in a new way, with representatives from each factory in the area, from each big office or shop, from the teachers in the area, from the housewives in the area, and so on, so as to give the best possible representation to each section of the people.

REAL DEMOCRACY

Behind Parliament House we would find the Government buildings. It had been fitting in the old days that these buildings should have been behind Parliament House and hidden from the view of the people in the city, for they were a "real power behind the scenes."

.....Many and many a time had some highly placed civil servant sitting in those quarters, some man with a lifetime knowledge of the affairs of his department, taken hold of a Cabinet Minister (not particularly distinguished for his knowledge of anything), and told him what he should do.

There is a story told of Lord Randolph Churchill, when he became Chancellor of the Exchequer in Great Britain, that, on the first morning when he entered the Treasury, he was shown a list of figures on which

there were a number of decimal points, and his only comment was "What on earth is the meaning of those damned dots?" Such a man would be very soft clay in the hands of his Treasury chiefs.

But under the new system all this was changed. For now the administration of the country was in the hands of the mass of the people living in that country.

They not only decided how the country should be governed, but they themselves did the work of governing. In fact, most of the time of a Soviet member was taken up, not with talking about the work of government, but with actually carrying it out. This is REAL democracy as opposed to sham democracy.

It is what the Greeks, who first invented the word "democracy", meant by it. In ancient Athens, it was estimated that, including all types of State and local public work, the average citizen devoted to public work no less than three whole years of his life. Under the Soviet system, the same type of democracy had been brought about, but instead of being confined, as in Athens, to a charmed circle of about 100,000 citizens, ruling over about four times as many slaves, it was extended to all the people, so that they should all be drawn into active participation in the real government of the country.

TRADES HALL

Let us now circle round to the Trades Hall. The Melbourne Trades Hall is one of the finest union buildings in the world. And the Australian Trade Union Movement is one of the most strongly organised in the world. But it is not one-tenth as strong now as it will be in the days of Soviet rule.

The Trades Hall we would see, after five years of this rule, would be the headquarters of an enormously strengthened working class democracy.

Its representatives would sit on every important public body in the land. The economic plan for the year could never be made final without its consent. At the same time, there would be a steady change over from small craft unions to larger unions embracing as far as possible the whole of the workers in one industry. The workers in one factory, being of one union, would join in electing the one factory committee, and this committee would not only take up all questions of the work in the factory with the manager appointed by the Soviets, but it would also see that the workers played the fullest part in the running of the union as a whole.

Within the Socialist democracy would spring up a trade union democracy finer than has yet been known in this country.

UNIVERSITY

The journey from the Trades Hall to the University was no longer a journey from one class of society to another. The University was owned and controlled by a real people's government. One could no longer become a University Chancellor by being a famous general or a wealthy gas company director, and the finances of the university no longer depended on the goodwill of Myer's, or the Broken Hill Pro-Longer, or the result was that the doors were opened wide to workers' prietary. The result was that the doors were opened wide to workers' sons and daughters who would previously have had to leave school at the age of fourteen to help the family income. Students paid no fees, and were paid the same amounts in wages as they would have earned in industry. The idea of students who paid was regarded as a huge joke.

It was not yet possible to take all the thousands of young men and women now clamoring for entry. Students had still to be selected. But they were selected only by their own ability, and not by their parents' income.

MAKING NEW CITIZENS

A school stood near by in Carlton. Here were some children who had hardly known the old society at all. Here were the men and women of the new society in the making.

A playground surrounded the school. In the playground were garden plots in which the children were taught their first points in agriculture. Attached to the school were workshops in which they spent several hours a week learning the first points about industry. All were taught manual work as well as mental, country work as well as town work, in order that the child might grow up a many-sided human being instead of a cog in a social wheel.

Children had their rights. They elected their representatives to the school committees to sit with the representatives of the parents and teachers. They could not be punished. If the teacher thrashed them, they could bring him to court. A free society must teach freedom from the child's earliest years, just as a Fascist slave society must teach slavery. Those who think Fascism and Communism are alike should look at their schools.

THE BASTILLE STORMED

A short drive would take us to the place where Pentridge had once stood. But what had happened to it? What had happened to the great prison with its unhealthy cells, its high-walled yards, its clanging locks, its armed sentry ready to shoot, its senseless stone-breaking, its penny-a-day and fourpence-a-day wages, its eternal round of bread, porridge, potato and ill-tasting tea?

It had gone. There is no other way to express it. Pentridge had vanished. There was not a trace left of the old walls and buildings, or of the old penal discipline. Nothing remained of Pentridge except the soil.

In its place was a small township. It had streets, houses, and a few factories. It was a new suburb of Melbourne, different from other suburbs in that it was very small, and in that the residents were

men and women who had been sentenced in the courts, and who were only allowed to leave the suburb for short periods. They were paid award wages for their work, they ate in their factory dining rooms (which were up to the standard of those elsewhere), and had schools in which they received very good adult education free of charge. As one entered this new "prison" there were no guards to be seen. Visitors were admitted freely, and were escorted by men who a short time before had been pickpockets and burglars.

One thing alone had made this change possible. That was the coming of economic security. In the old days hunger or fear of hunger had driven many to petty theft (the main thing that had filled every prison), and had also made any security, even the security of jail, seem not so unattractive to some people. With the ending of economic insecurity this had changed. The need for punishment had gone because the social causes at the root of nearly every crime had gone also. The new suburb was only needed at all because some had got so much into the habit of crime under the old system that it took them some years to get out of it.

DOCTORS WITHOUT FEES

Returning we would see the former site of the Melbourne Hospital. I say the "former" site because, under the new rule, the hospital was moved out into the suburbs, probably to take the form, like the new Moscow hospitals, of a network of two-storied houses scattered through gardens; and on the old site was built a "polyclinic," also similar to those in Moscow, a collection of clinics where you could go at any hour of the day and receive free of charge any treatment, including X-ray and dental treatment, which did not require staying in hospital.

We would have noticed, while passing down Collins Street, the absence of many of those brass plates that used to adorn the entrances to the doctor's apartments, and now we find out the reason.

More and more the doctors had gone out of private practice and become salaried servants in the greatly improved hospitals or in polyclinics such as these.

All the social services had been improved, but none so much as the vital medical services which are responsible for maintaining the life and health of the people.

THE PEOPLE'S ARMY

But behold a new spectacle! A long line of uniformed men marching down Swanston Street! At their head a banner bearing the words: "The People's Army. To Protect Socialism and the Brotherhood of Peoples."

They sang as they marched. People hurried from all sides to see them pass, and cheered them loudly as they would cheer heroes or friends. They showed a real love and respect for their comrades in the ranks. When the first halt was called soldiers and citizens ex-

changed greetings. One began to realise what was meant by "a people's army." One felt sure it would never fire on the people.

One began to realise also what the social change had meant to the health and strength of the people. The splendid physical condition of the men as they marched was perhaps the finest of all tributes to the new society.

One might have expected that in the new society there would be no army. Rifles and bayonets seemed out of place amid so much freedom and good feeling. But there were still powerful countries in which the great private owners of wealth continued to hold sway, and an attack by these countries was always possible. Indeed, the only thing that held them back was a firm, common agreement between the Soviet states and advanced democratic states to treat an attack on one as an attack on all.

Also there were still a few in Australia—only a few—who had had great riches and wide influence in the old society, and who were prepared to wreck anything and everything to regain their old possessions rather than become partners in the new common life. These also might require the attention of a "People's Army."

SOCIALISM MEANS PEACE

The army was in truth to "protect socialism." It was not to attack anybody. Communist society even in its first stage could not be aggressive. The planned economic system ensured that enough wages and other incomes should be distributed to buy all the consumable goods produced for sale. It therefore made any struggle for foreign markets unnecessary. Foreign trade went on, but the need to struggle for markets abroad, the need to force goods on those markets at almost any cost, had passed away. The struggle of great private owners to invest their capital in other countries had disappeared at the same time. In its place had come the struggle to build up standards of living within the country. And this required, above everything, peace. Peace proved as necessary for socialism as war had been for capitalism.

HERALD OR "WORKERS' VOICE"

Our next port of call, a short way further on, would be the "Herald" building.

The "Herald" would be the "Herald" no longer. Gone were the days of that "freedom of the press" which Lenin once described as "the freedom of those who could afford to own a newspaper to debauch the minds of those who could only afford to buy it." The Press instead of being controlled by great private owners, was now in the hands of the State, or of some trade union, or other organisation of the people.

The "Herald" building, one would like to believe, would be the new and magnificent home of our Communist paper, the "Worker's Voice."

At any rate the whole machinery of the "Herald" would be placed freely at the disposal of some people's organisation, and it would be a far truer account of the world's news that would go into the homes of the people each day. Truth had conquered wealth.

SIXPENNY SEATS

Near the "Herald" we would see the State Theatre. This theatre, with its 5,000 seats, was thronged even on week-nights. For not only did people have more money, but workers were able to get, through their factories, cheap tickets (sixpence each) which entitled them to the best seats in the theatre.

Inside the theatre we would see pictures of all kinds—comics, romances and other pictures, which would appear to be very much like the pictures of the old days. But we would soon notice a very great difference. We would miss the millionaire heroes, their exclusive hotels, their splendidly dressed wives and mistresses. The scenes would be scenes from the lives of ordinary men and women. THEIR STRUGGLES, THEIR SUCCESSES and failures would be portrayed in films of the finest and most up to date technique.

SPECTATORS BECOME PLAYERS

Moving out of the city, we would pass the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The sight of this ground on a Saturday afternoon would remove any fear that interest in sport might wane in the new society. The crowd inside was not perhaps as large as the record crowds that used to gather on big occasions. But the interest in the game was keener than ever. And the reason why the crowd was not larger would soon appear as we continued our drive through the suburbs. Games were in progress everywhere—on old sports grounds, on new sports grounds, on every corner of land that would fit the purpose. Many factories had their own sports grounds under the control of their own workers' clubs. The reason why there were not more spectators was that there were so many players. Everywhere young men and young women were turning their increased leisure and health and strength into sporting channels. There was no professional sport left. All teams were voluntary teams, and they were numbered in thousands.

RICHMOND AND TOORAK

We must now imagine ourselves out of the city, on the Punt Road bridge over the Yarra.

I choose this place, because it was from here, in Capitalist times, that you could see most clearly the contrast in the living conditions of different sections of the people. On the one hand lay Richmond, with its small crowded ugly homes, under the shadow of factory walls; while on the other lay the fashionable mansions of Toorak, rising up to the hill of Toorak, on which incomes rise in proportion to the height above sea level.

Here a double transformation would await our eyes. For, on the one hand, with the coming of the new system, it was decided that many

of the houses and gardens in Toorak were too large for one family to use, and they had either been divided up among families from the other side of the river, or they had been turned into rest homes where workers could have a well-earned spell from hard toil (though generally the country houses of the Toorak gentlemen would be more suitable for this purpose).

Meanwhile, some of the houses on the other side had been cleared away as unhealthy. Some remained. Rome wasn't built in a day, and Richmond couldn't be rebuilt in a day. But many of the old houses went, and in their place arose new houses of two types—first, decent bungalows with gardens, of the type that the worker who has been able to afford it has so far preferred, and, secondly, communal homes of a new kind, in which the woman could have her own rooms and her own family life, and yet be spared from breaking her back sweeping, cooking and washing half of the day, because there would be communal kitchens and dining rooms, communal laundries and other facilities, all looked after by professionally trained people.

If we inquired, we would probably find out that in the early period the workers preferred the new bungalows, but later they came to prefer the new communal homes, which did away with the woman's household drudgery. But whoever preferred the bungalow was still welcome to make his own choice.

THE FARMER SHAKES OFF HIS BURDENS

Let us now drive a short way into the country. Let us go among the dairy farmers, the fruit growers, and the potato growers of West Gippsland.

The main thing to be noticed about this area, in former days, was that most of the farmers were overwhelmed with debt. In 1934, the chairman of the Wheat Commission of Inquiry, Sir Herbert Gepp, estimated that probably the Australian wheat farmers alone owed about £280,000,000. At 5 per cent. interest on this sum alone would be £14,000,000 a year, about one-half of the average value of the whole year's wheat harvest in Australia. In other words, of every penny the farmer earned, a half-penny was mortgaged in interest.

But now, the debt to the banks and the big business concerns, the greater part of the farmers' total debt, had been wiped out of existence.

Solon, the great democrat of ancient Athens, started his career by a measure called the "Seisachtheia," or "shaking off of burdens," by which all the debts of the agricultural population were cancelled (the history books praise him to the skies for doing so). And just as this measure had been the foundation stone of the old democracy of Athens, so it proved to be the foundation stone of the new socialist democracy of the Australian countryside.

In going past the farms, we would notice that many of them were of the same size and under the same management as before. In Soviet Russia, even now, twenty years after the Revolution, some of the

farmers continue to till their old private farms (they are at perfect liberty to do so). But we would also see that in some areas collective farms had been set up, farms owned and worked in common by the farmers in a certain area. And if we inquired, we would be sure to find that this new socialist method of farming was the more efficient.

It had been a dry season. But drought was no longer the menace it had been in days gone by. Schemes of irrigation and water conservation had been greatly extended, so that more water was now stored and more reached the crops. The farmer no longer had to overstock and to overcultivate the land by any and every method in order to meet interest payments, and could therefore use water less wastefully. Also the State in years of abundance created on the farmer's behalf great stores of grain which could be sold, and therefore could provide him with an income, in the years of shortage.

In the Soviet Ukraine the use of scientific methods to combat droughts lead to the harvesting in 1938 of a record crop on top of severe drought conditions. And what could not be done by more advanced scientific methods in Socialist Victoria?

CAN WE "AFFORD" IT?

Now we must finish our journey. But in finishing it, let us deal with one further question. Can we AFFORD such a number of great reforms in such a short space of time?

Whoever asks this question ignores the triumphs of modern science.

Between 1835 and 1935 the industrial machine power of the world increased six hundred times. The machines of 1935 could produce 600 times as much as the machines of a century before.

The late Commonwealth Statistician, the famous scientist, Sir George Knibbs, said some years ago that with our present machinery and resources the world could easily provide for 8,000 million people—four times the world's present population. That was some years ago, and since then scientists have gone on inventing new ways of producing more and more and more.

Once get this economic system into our own hands and plan it from top to bottom to meet the needs of the whole people, and there will hardly be any limit to what we can provide.

LEISURE FOR ALL

Not only could much more be produced, but it could be produced in a much shorter time.

It was not long ago that Sir David Rivett, the chairman of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, expressed his amazement that with the great advance of science more had not been done to lighten the burden of human toil.

Under Socialism in Russia hours of work have been reduced from ten or twelve hours per day before the Revolution to six and seven per day. Here, with many advantages the Russians did not have in 1917, they should be reduced even more quickly. Machines would serve, as they should serve in any reasonable society, not only to increase the supply of the world's goods, but to shorten the working day.

FREEDOM EXCEPT FOR DESTROYERS OF FREEDOM

But there is one further objection we may meet with. Very nearly at the end of our day's journey we would meet some old fellow, someone with his mind back in the capitalist days, who would tell us that the new system was all very well, but that it put an end to human liberty.

We would probably stare at him in blank surprise. We might even ask the old fellow to repeat himself, thinking that we had heard him wrongly. We would have fresh in our minds the images of that day's journey—images of a land in which all were free from economic worry, in which the load of debt had been shaken off.

We would remember that Soviet Congress, free from the shackles that a small wealthy class had been able to impose its will on the Parliaments of old days; and we would have marvelled at the extent to which the people were being drawn into the actual work of governing the country. We would think of the extra leisure and of the new freedom that this had brought into people's lives—freedom for sport, freedom for reading, freedom for hobbies, freedom for family life, and for meeting and talking with one's fellow men. And we would reply to our old dreamer that surely here there was freedom such as had never been known before.

Only one sort of freedom had been taken away. That was the freedom to plot to overthrow the new society and to bring back the old. Whoever tried in any way to bring back the old freedom-destroying system of capitalism was treated as an enemy of freedom, and the full force of the law was brought into play against him.

At first some of the landlords and capitalists who had lost their possessions DID try to bring the old system back, but as time went on this happened less and less, till the state of affairs came to pass which Rev. John Lewis saw when he went to Russia, and which he described in these words, "The people are not conscious of any restrictions because they are free to do all that they want to do. They do not want to destroy socialism."

The only thing people were not allowed to do in the new society was the thing they didn't want to do. Could there be greater freedom than that?

We have painted the picture of a new Melbourne very different from the Melbourne that we know. An unreal picture, you will say?

No. It will not be long before the Melbourne we have described will be the real Melbourne, while the Melbourne of to-day will be unreal and impossible.

LIVES RUINED

In the Melbourne of to-day poverty ruins the lives of thousands upon thousands of people.

What do our doctors say? The City Health Officer, Dr. Dale, states that the main cause of bodily ill-health in Melbourne is poverty, and that the main cause of mental ill-health is economic insecurity. Dr. Hilda Bull found a little while ago that, of a group of 1,000 Melbourne children, no fewer than 430 were under-nourished. Dr. Monahan Lewis, chairman of the Health Committee of the City Council, tells us that out of 20,500 houses in the city area, 8,000 are unfit for human beings to live in. And this in the midst of the greatest abundance of everything we could require!

WORSE COMING

Worse lies ahead. For we are moving again into a time of what is called "economic crisis," when more machines than ever will be idle, more workers than ever will be thrown out of employment, more goods will be heaped up in the warehouses and shop windows, and more people will starve outside.

Since 1820, when the present capitalist system became the main system in the world, there have been economic crises every eight or ten years—every eight or ten years with only one exception (that was the exception due to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914). At the present moment a new crisis is due.

This crisis will be worse than the crisis of 1929—just as that was worse than the crisis of 1920, which, in turn, was worse than any that had occurred before.

Such a crisis must compel even the most conservative among us to wonder whether it is possible for the present system to continue any longer.

WOULD COMMUNISM WORK?

But what will take its place? Can it be such a system as we have described in these pages? Would it work?

To see that it would work we need only turn to that great country in which the first stage of Communist society has already existed for many years—Soviet Russia.

Let me quote what was said about Soviet Russia in a recent book by two very great students of social questions, Beatrice and Sidney Webb.

Beatrice and Sidney Webb have a world-wide reputation as research students. They are recognised by economists to have worked out the finest method of research yet known. They have spent their lives writing one huge book after another about trade unions, the poor law, and so on, and it would be a bold person who would question any of the facts in this vast library. The Webbs, moreover, are not Communists, but life-long followers of the "Fabian" school to whom Communism is anathema. What do they say?

SOVIET RUSSIA SUMMED UP

"The Soviet Union has quite obviously grown richer in the very years in which most, if not all, other countries have grown poorer." "In 1935 there is vastly greater plenty, in the cities and in the villages, than there has been at any previous time in Russian history." "There has been since 1930 no mass of able-bodied men or women wishing to obtain employment and unable to find an employer willing to engage them at wages." There is "a system of unlimited and universal security to the entire wage-earning population."

But is there the great democracy which we described in our picture of Soviet Melbourne? On this point the Webbs are emphatic.

"It would, we think, be difficult for any candid student to maintain that the U.S.S.R. is, at any point, governed by the will of a single person—that is to say, by a dictator."

Or is it a dictatorship of the Communist Party? "It is, as we have seen, THE PEOPLE THEMSELVES, AND NOT ONLY THE PARTY MEMBERS, who are incessantly called upon to participate personally in the discussions, not merely by expressing opinions about them at the innumerable popular meetings, not merely by voting for or against their exponents at the recurring elections, but by actually sharing individually in their operations," that is, by individually taking part in the government of their country.

WHY WERE THEY SHOT?

It is asked, "How can Russia be a democratic country when numbers of people in leading positions have lately been shot?" The answer must take the form of another question, "Why were they shot?" They were shot because they had killed Kirov and plotted to kill Stalin and other Soviet leaders, because they had sabotaged the work of great factories and caused the wrecking of hundreds of trains, because they had given away army secrets to German and Japanese generals, and threatened to bring about Russia's defeat in a war. They were shot for crimes for which the normal penalty in other countries would be death. They themselves, under pressure of the overwhelming weight of evidence against them, admitted these crimes in public trials at which people from all over Moscow and all over the world were present.

Democracy must sometimes defend itself arms in hand against those who would destroy it. So it has been in Russia.

THE MAJORITY WILL DECIDE

There remains the question of how the new society will be brought into existence.

It will NOT be brought into existence by a minority of the people. A small minority may lead a riot or even upset a government, but only a big majority can change the whole social system under which we live. If in Russia, in 1917, it had not been that the overwhelming majority of the people wanted bread, land and peace, the revolution could never have been won. The majority will decide the path to socialism when the majority is ready for socialism.

We stand for democracy. We stand for the right of the people to decide their own affairs in a far greater measure than is now permitted them. Our great leader Lenin said, "There is no other road to socialism but the road through democracy—through political liberty."

WE START NO VIOLENCE

Will the democratic majority need to use violence? One of the best answers to this question was given by Marx's colleague, Engels, in 1847. Engels asked whether the present system could be abolished peacefully, and declared, "It were to be wished that this could happen, and the Communists would certainly be the last to take exception thereto. . . . They also see, however, that the development of the working class in all civilised lands is forcibly suppressed, and that in this way the opponents of the Communists are making with all their might for a revolution. Should the oppressed working class be, in this way, driven finally to a revolution, then we Communists will defend the cause of the workers just as well with deeds as we now do with words."

In other words, whatever violence may occur will not be of our making. It will occur through the "forcible suppression" of the people—the denial of the right to govern their own lives freely.

Thus the question of violence depends mainly on how far democracy can be saved and extended. And to-day Australian democracy is threatened. It is threatened from without and from within.

DEMOCRACY IN DANGER

From without, it is threatened by the raging of the Fascist Powers. These powers have already more than doubled their empires by black-mail and butchery. They never cease making war somewhere. Wherever they go, any existing liberty is stamped out. Mussolini spoke the mind of all Fascism when he described liberty as a "putrid corpse."

They are now nearing Australia. A Japanese army has been landed at Canton, the nearest of the great Chinese cities to the Australian coast. Hitler demands back the former German New Guinea. Representatives of the Japanese ruling class control the pearling industry

of the north coast of Australia. The safety of our country is in the balance.

From within, democracy is threatened by the actions of the Lyons Government. This Government has attacked the liberties of the people right and left. We in the Communist Party who have twice faced the Government's threat to declare us illegal, are perhaps more conscious of this fact than most people are. But it is not only our liberty that is threatened, it is the liberty of all.

War registration of civilians, a standing army, garrisons in industrial towns and compulsory military training, all planned by the Lyons Government, point towards military and industrial conscription for Australia. The Transport Workers' Act, already used against the seamen and the waterside workers, is in itself a form of the industrial conscription in that it invokes the law to compel the worker to perform a certain job. Already members of the armed forces (an ever-growing number) have been forbidden to express any political views. Book bans, film bans and radio bans help to complete the picture.

Democracy is not attacked openly. It is attacked sideways through appeals for "national unity" and "efficiency." But the attack is real and serious.

UNITE FOR DEMOCRACY!

If we lose democracy we leave the gateway to war wide open. If we lose democracy our rulers can, in the coming economic crisis, attack our standards of living with every advantage on their side. If we lose democracy we condemn ourselves to tread a much more violent path to the new social order.

The struggle for democracy is dear to the hearts of millions of people who are not Communists. With these millions we are prepared to co-operate loyally in a common cause. In the cause of democracy many thousands of our Communist brothers in Spain and China have given their lives freely.

On this great issue we help to create everywhere a "united front" of the whole working class and a great "people's front" of the workers, the farmers and the middle-class of the towns.

Nor do we try to turn the common struggle to our own ends. No democracy, no peace-lover, no trade unionist, will find better and truer friends anywhere than the Communists and their Party.

We believe that the will of the people, if freely expressed, will in the end, declare for communism. Others believe not, but desire equally that the will of the people should be freely expressed. Let them unite with us to defend our common democratic heritage!

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