SOCIALISM REARMED

the socialist programme

No. 2

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WHAT IS SOCIALISM? Why is this question anathema in the 'socialist' movement today?

All trends, be they Gaitskell's Frognal Set, Moscow's sycophants in King Street or Healy's clique at Clapham shun this question. Like their political forefather Bernstein they consider the ultimate objective secondary and the 'movement everything'.

These self-interested saviours of humanity all have a contempt for the working class. The form the 'new' society will take is in their opinion not a matter for workers and rank-and-file party members to concern themselves with. They believe that socialism will be ushered in from above, by professional politicians.

Social Democrats, Stalinists and Trotskyists alike worship hierarchical organization and each is mesmerised by the philosophy of consumption. To Gaitskell the grinding inhumanity of a smoothly running capitalist assembly line is one of the objectives of Welfare State planning. Stalinists extol the pace-setting and stop watch techniques of Stakhanovism. Trotsky saw the militarisation of labour as the answer to Russia's production problems. Each 'solution' represents an attempt to increase the exploitation of labour, by capitalist or bureaucrat. Each perpetuates the alienation of the working masses.

Post-war Social Democracy conducted terrorism against the peoples of Malaya and shot down striking workers on the Gold Coast. Stalinism destroyed the Hungarian Revolution. Trotskyism justified the Kronstadt massacre and the imprisonment of the Workers' Opposition.

This document is an attempt to break from such politics. It tries to set forth the tasks of the socialist revolution and aims at illuminating the road which the working class will take when it ends for all time the exploitation of man by man.

1910

THE SOCIALIST PROGRAMME.

1. Why a restatement is necessary.

It has become imperative to state once again the fundamentals of any socialist programme. This is necessay both to assist the development of consciously revolutionary tendencies and in order to help bring about a profound renewal of basic political ideas, likely to influence large sections of the working class movement. This restatement moreover must be a lot more precise and detailed than in the past.

By a socialist programme we mean those measures of radical social change that the working class will have to institute, in order to advance towards its objective of a communist, classless society. We have described elsewhere our analysis of how the class struggle develops within the framework of capitalist society, and our attitude to the numerous new problems of consciousness and organization that the material conditions of the struggle give rise to today. Our whole conceptions on these aspects of the struggle are intimately linked with the objectives of the struggle itself. This necessitates a restatement of these socialist objectives in quite unambiguous terms.

Why is such a restatement so necessary? Because the traditional statements of socialist objectives have largely been overtaken by historical development. The traditional aims (overthrow of the bourgeoisie, nationalisation of the means of production, planning) are largely undistinguishable from their stalinist caricature.

Why should the restatement be in unambiguous terms? Precisely because the stalinist school of mystification has taken advantage of the rather general and abstract aims of the traditional marxist programme, in order all the better to camouflage bureaucratic exploitation under a 'socialist' mask.

The stalinist counter-revolution has repeatedly been able to make use of the traditional socialist programme for its own bureaucratic ends. Two of the essential parts of the socialist programme (on the one hand nationalisation of the economy and planning - on the other, rule of the Party as a concrete expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat) have proved themselves, in the context of contemporary developments, the real basis not of socialism but of bureaucratic capitalism.

Unless one denies this empirical observation or unless one repudiates the need for a socialist programme for the working class, it is clearly impossible for revolutionary socialists to remain grounded any longer on the traditional programmatic demands

of the movement. Without a fundamentally new programme the advanced section of the class will never be able, in its aims and conceptions, basically to differentiate itself from Stalinism. The whole lamentable experience of world Trotskyism has shown this quite clearly.

This utilisation by stalinism of the traditional marxist programme in no way implies that the real nature of Marxism has come to fruition in Stalinism, as some have proclaimed, either gleefully or in sorrow. What it does mean is that abstract notions like nationalisation and the dictatorship of the proletariat have taken on a substance very different from what had originally been anticipated. For Marx nationalisation implied the abolition of bourgeois exploitation (incidentally, the concept has not lost this original meaning as far as the stalinists are concerned - for them it has merely acquired, en passant, another meaning... the setting up on the ruins of the bourgeois order of a new system of bureaucratic exploitation). Does this mean that the successes of Stalinism find their roots in the rather vague and abstract formulations of the traditional programme? It would be very superficial to formulate the problem in this way. The rather vague and abstract formulation of the traditional programme itself reflected a certain inevitable immaturity of the working class movements, or rather of their most advanced sections. It is this historical immaturity of the class itself, taken in its widest sense (i.e. including ideology, political perspectives and forms of organization) which permitted the development of the bureaucracy. On the other hand the 'bureaucratic experience' the class has gone through, the fulfilment by the bureaucracy, albeit in a distorted manner, of the traditional marxist programme, will both help the working class movement to achieve a higher maturity and allow it to formulate its programmatic aims in a more concrete manner.

For marxists to formulate the socialist programme with more precision than hitherto in no way implies a reversion to Utopian Socialism. The struggle of Marxism against Utopian Socialism developed along two lines: the essential feature of Utopian Socialism was not its emphasis on the description of the society of the future but its attempts to depict this society, down to its minutest details, on a logical model, without a detailed examination of the real social forces that drive society towards a higher form of organization. This type of approach was in fact impossible before Marx had started to analyse modern society. The conclusions of this analysis permitted Marx to lay the basis of the socialist programme. The continuation of such an analysis today, taking into account the infinitely rich experience accumulated in the last century of historical development, in particular the emergence of the Labour and Stalinist bureaucracies and the increasing fusion of monopoly capitalism with the State, should permit one to advance much further in the formulation of a genuine socialist programme adapted to the requirements of today. The very method of Marxism demands such a reformulation.

The second essential characteristic of Utopian Socialism was that it concerned itself solely with ideal plans for the re-organization of society at a time when such plans, whether good or bad, had little relevance to the practical development of the real workers' movement. The Utopians were not fundamentally concerned with this development. Marx was quite right to proclaim, in opposing such an attitude, that a single practical step was worth more than a hundred programmes. But today conditions are very different. One of the major parts of the revolutionary struggle is the struggle for ideological clarity, the struggle for the retention of the socialist objectives, or, in practical terms, the struggle against Stalinist and reformist mystifications, both of which present to the working class new variants of exploitation under the guise of 'socialism'. Such a struggle for ideological clarification is only possible in terms of a new struggle for programme.

Marxism voluntarily imposed itself certain limits in the formulation of the socialist programme. This reluctance to 'crystal-gaze' into the future was really a corollary to the notion according to which the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist class and of its State would give free rein for the building of Socialism. Both theoretical consideration and historical experience show that this notion is an ambiguous one. If it is true, as Trotsky said, that 'socialism, as opposed to capitalism, is built consciously' in other words that the conscious activity of the masses is the essential condition for socialist development - then one must draw <u>all</u> the necessary conclusions. And the most important of these is that the conscious edification of socialism presupposes a clear idea of what socialism is all about.

The spirit impregnating Marx's relative empiricism in these matters is still quite valid. It is a severe warning against any kind of dessicated dogmatism which would tend to subordinate a living analysis of the historical process to ready made schemata. It is also a corrective against any tendency to substitute the activities of a sect to the creative activity of the masses themselves. No valid programmatic elaboration is possible which does not take into account the real development of the proletariat and in particular the development of its consciousness as a class.

The programme of the revolution, as formulated by the most advanced sections of the class, is but an anticipated statement of the tasks which will flow from the objective situation and which will express the consciousness of the class during a revolutionary period. On the other hand the propaganda for such a programme and its popularisation now is one of the preconditions for the development of precisely such a consciousness amongst the working class.

2. Communism and the transitional society.

We have called the revolutionary programme a socialist programme to indicate that it is not a programme pertaining to communist society itself, but a programme relating to the whole transitional historical period which precedes the establishment of communism. A 'Socialist' society is not a permanent or rigid social form but essentially a transitional form of society, a society in evolution. Over the past 40 years much confusion has developed (and sometimes been deliberately fostered) in relation to these basic questions of 'socialism' and 'communism'. This confusion must be rigorously fought if we are to avoid the pitfalls of the past. We must have a very clear idea of where we are going.

Marx established one fundamental distinction between the two phases of post-revolutionary society (which he termed the lower and higher phases of communism). This distinction has a very definite economic and social basis. The 'lower phase of communism' (also called 'socialism' or the 'transitional society') corresponds to an economy which is not yet an economy of abundance, in which material plenty has not yet been realised and in which human potentialities have not as yet been developed to the full. These economic and human limitations are reflected, on the political plane, by the retention of the State. This State, however, is a state which is completely different, both in form and content, from all previous states. It is a workers' state. It reflects the economic and political dictatorship of the proletariat ('the rule of the immense majority', 'real democracy').

The transitional society must, it is true, inevitably bear the hallmark of the society from which it has just emerged. This will be particularly important in two respects - namely the relatively low level of economic development it has inherited and the resulting technical and cultural limitations which such backwardness imposes on human beings. The transitional society must however differ radically from all previous societies in that it must immediately abolish exploitation. Trotsky's ambiguities on the question of 'socialism' and of the 'workers' state' have tended to obscure certain essential facts in the minds of revolutionaries. The most important of these is that whereas economic insufficiency may justify distribution according to work done rather than according to need, under no circumstances can it justify the persistence of exploitation. If exploitation persisted the transition to communism would be impossible. The building of communism must of necessity proceed from conditions of relative scarcity. If such scarcity made exploitation inevitable - or if it in any way justified it - a new type of class society would inevitably result... certainly not Communism.

Communist society ('the higher phase of communism) is characterised by economic abundance ('to each according to his needs'), by the complete withering away of the State ('the administration of men being superceded by the administration of things') and by the full

fruition of all human potentialities ('the human or total man' of Marx). Socialist society, on the other hand, is a passing historical form which has significance only in terms of its objective, which is the building of communism.

As scarcity lessens and as human capacities develop, there should be seen side by side, both a gradual withering away of organized coercion (i.e. the State) and a gradual disappearance of the domination of economy over man. Marx proclaimed that only Communist society would be a truly human society, that it would be the 'realm of liberty'. The road to such a society does not entail the immediate and total suppression of the 'realm of necessity' (typified by economic constraints) but must imply the progressive reduction of such constraints and certainly their total subordination to the needs (both technological and cultural) of human development. Material sufficiency and the reduction of the working day are the prime conditions for such a development.

The whole orientation of the transitional society must therefore be determined first and foremost by its objective - the building of communism. The building of communism presupposes the abolition of exploitation, the rapid development of the productive forces and the total fulfilment of human aptitudes and abilities. This development of man himself is both the most general expression of the objectives of transitional society... and also the essential means for achieving this objective. In practical terms this development will express itself in terms of the free and conscious activity of the working class. This in turn will find expression in the abolition of exploitation ('the emancipation of the working class must be the task of the working class itself'), in the development of the productive forces ('of all the productive forces of society the most important is the revolutionary class itself') and in the radically new form of State power ('the power of the armed masses').

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One of the fundamental tendencies of contemporary capitalism is the tendency to an ever increasing concentration of the productive forces. As this tendency develops it is associated with the gradual abolition of private property as the essential economic basis for exploitation, as the one and only juridical form allowing the possibility of such exploitation.* This tendency towards total

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* These developments were analysed in some detail in the pamphlet 'Socialism Re-affirmed'.

concentration makes of the management of production the social function which increasingly separates members of society into exploiters and exploited. As part and parcel of this development the administrative cadre of the economy, the state bureaucracy and the 'intelligentsia' tend to fuse organically. (Total exploitation is impossible without a direct link-up of the apparatus of coercion and the apparatus for ideological mystification.)

The abolition of exploitation can therefore only be achieved if the abolition of the exploiting class is accompanied by the abolition of the contemporary conditions for the existence of such a class. These 'contemporary conditions' take less and less the traditional form of 'private property', (which tends to be transcended by the development of capitalism itself) and more and more the form of the monopolisation of social and political life and of the management of the economy by a bureaucratic social stratum exerting an entirely parasitic rule in the process of production. In other words, the real basis of exploitation in modern society can only be abolished to the extent that the producers themselves organize and manage production. And as management of the economy is intimately kinked with the question of political power, workers management means, in practical terms, the dictatorship of the organizations of the class (Soviets, Workers' Councils, factory Committees), at all levels of economic and political life.

Can the antagonism between those who manage and decide and those who merely execute orders be abolished in the field of economic life while it is allowed to persist in the field of politics (under the disguise of the dictatorship of the Party)? Certainly not! This is a reactionary mystification subscribed to, in varying degrees, by Stalinists and Trotskyists alike. Such a contradiction would rapidly lead to a new conflict between the workers, as producers, and the political bureaucracy. But there is little serious risk of this, provided there is genuine workers' management of production. The management of the economy by the working class is both an essential and a sufficient condition for the rapid evolution of the transitional society in a communist direction. The term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' will express the fundamental nature of transitional society only to the extent that it fulfils the essential conditions just outlined.

3. Socialist economy.

Two fundamental economic problems confront the transitional society: firstly the abolition of exploitation and secondly the rapid development of the productive forces.

1916

a) the abolition of exploitation.

Exploitation itself presents two forms. On the one hand it presents itself as exploitation in the factory, as the alienation of the producer from the productive process. Exploitation transforms man into a mere cog of the machine, into an impersonal fragment of the productive apparatus; it reduces the producer into a mere executor of instructions, a mere performer of activities of which he cannot seize the total significance, nor how they fit into the sum total of the productive process. This particular aspect of exploitation, the most important one of all, will only be suppressed by raising the producers to the role of managers of the economy. It will only be abolished when the workers are in a position to determine themselves the tempo of production and the duration of the working day, when they themselves decide what their relations with their machines and with other workers will be, and when they themselves will take the crucial decisions relating to the objectives of production and to the means of achieving them.

But exploitation also expresses itself in an indirect manner, through the distribution of the social product. It expresses itself, in this field, by inequalities in the ratios of income to work performed. The transitional society will not be able immediately to abolish inequality in general (this inequality will only be abolished under communism - and this not necessarily in the form of an arithmetically equal income to all, but in the form of the complete satisfaction of all human needs). The transitional society must abolish however the appropriation of income not based on productive work, or not corresponding to the quantity of work given to society. Socialist society must therefore immediately abolish inequalities in the ratios between income and the quantity of work performed.

We do not wish to provide here and now a 'solution' to these difficulties or even to attempt a detailed analysis of the whole problem of the remuneration of productive labour under socialism. It is clear however that this society will have to aim, from the very beginning, towards as great an equality as possible. The 'advantages' of inequality are very debatable and secondary when seen in relation to the important and clear-cut disadvantages such inequality would entail (the distortion of social demand, the satisfaction of secondary needs by some at a time when others cannot satisfy elementary needs, and the psychological and political effects that would inevitably ensue).

The justification for higher pay for skilled labour on the grounds of its higher 'costs of production' (costs of training, i.e. of the months or years of non-productive labour) falls to the ground as soon as society itself undertakes to pay these costs. One can at best accept that the 'price' of such labour would be higher (corresponding to its 'value' or 'cost of production'). It is quite unacceptable however that the personal revenue of such a skilled worker should reflect this difference. The idea that a higher rate of remune-

ration is necessary to attract individuals towards highly qualified jobs is quite absurd. The attraction of such jobs lies in the nature of the job itself. Once social oppression has been abolished the main task will in fact probably be to get people to do the more menial and less interesting jobs.

There are two other problems which will be less easy to solve. As long as scarcity persists it may be necessary for the transitional society, in order to obtain a maximum of productive effort, to link the remuneration of labour to the quantity of work performed (as measured by labour time) or even to its intensity (i.e. to the number of objects produced or acts performed). But the importance of this problem will diminish as industrialisation proceeds. Mass production will gradually relegate individual effort to a subsidiary role, by integrating it in the productive activity of a whole group of workers. This group activity will have its own tempo, which the tempo of work of a particular individual cannot usefully surpass (production line work as opposed to piece work). Within this framework the essential point is that the group of producers themselves determines its optimum tempo of work and not that each person increases his own tempo in a completely inco-ordinated way. The problem must be solved at the level of a group of workers forming a technical or productive unit.

Another problem is that it may prove necessary to obtain, for short periods, a certain mobility of the labour force. If this cannot be obtained by persuasion it may prove necessary to resort to wage differentials. But the social importance of these geographical differentials will be negligible, as the experience of capitalism itself has abundantly proved.

b) the development of the productive forces.

The rapid development of social wealth implies on the one hand the rational development of the existing productive forces, on the other hand the development of new productive forces.

There are several aspects to the question of rationally organising the productive forces. The most important is undoubtedly the institution of workers' management. Only the producers themselves, taken as an organic whole, have a complete awareness of the problems of production, particularly in its most important aspect (namely the concrete execution of the acts of production). They alone can organize this act on a truly rational basis. Management by an exploiting class is always intrinsically irrational, because it is always external to productive activity itself. An exploiting class can at best only have an incomplete and fragmentary knowledge of the real conditions in which production takes place and of the full implications for human beings of the production targets or objectives it has chosen.

1918

The problem of increasing the productive forces has hitherto been presented as an allegedly insurmountable contradiction between accumulation (an increase of fixed capital) and the production of consumer goods, in other words an increase in the standard of living. This 'contradiction' on which the mystifiers in the service of the bureaucracy lay such stress, is a false one. It only serves to conceal the real nature of the problem.

The 'opposition' between the requirements of accumulation and those of consumption can be resolved quite simply. The solution lies in the concept of the productivity of human labour. The development of the productive forces means, in the last analysis, the development of the productive capacity of labour. An enhanced productivity of labour, in its turn, depends partly on the changes in the 'objective conditions of production' (essentially the growth of fixed capital, bigger and better machinery, new equipment, etc.) but also on the development of the productive capacity of living labour. This is very much a question of the full development of every individual's potentialities (in other words: workers' management) and of an increased material well-being among the workers, of their cultural development as human beings and of course of the reduction of their working day.

This aspect of productivity, what one might call 'subjective productivity' depends, in more general terms, on the total, conscious and voluntary participation of the producers in the productive process, which they no longer feel as something alien to themselves. There is therefore an objective relationship between the accumulation of fixed capital and the extension of consumption (in the widest sense of the term.)

Just as production might be increased by an actual diminution of the working day, similarly an increase of material well-being might increase productivity more than an increase of equipment. But by its very nature an exploiting class or a stratum of managers can only see one side of this problem: in its eyes an increase in fixed capital is the only means of increasing production. It is only when one looks at things through the eyes of the producers that one can resolve the dilemma.

In the absence of the producers themselves moreover such a synthesis can only be quite abstract, because their conscious, active participation in the productive process is the essential precondition for the maximum development of productivity. Such an active participation will only be possible to the extent that the producers feel that the solutions advocated are not only solutions in their own interests, but solutions which they have themselves discussed, evaluated and chosen, which they themselves know and feel to be in their own interests.

c) Prices in the socialist economy.

As long as a scarcity of goods prevails socialist

society will be obliged to ration consumption. The most reasonable way of doing this will be to put a price on each product turned out. The consumer will then decide for himself how he wishes to spend his earnings. In the short run society will be able to confront exceptional shortages or inequalities in the development of different sectors of production by putting off the satisfaction of less important needs through control of the price mechanism. Once the inequality of incomes has been eliminated, the relative demand for various products and the extent of real social needs will be adequately ascertained by the amount consumers will be prepared to pay to obtain the product in question. Variations in the available stocks of such products will give a useful indication for an increase or decrease in the tempo of production of this particular commodity.

The problem of general economic equilibrium in terms of value is now fairly simple. It is only necessary for the total of distributed incomes - i.e. the wage total - to be equal to the value of consumer goods produced. As there must be some accumulation the prices of commodities will have to be slightly higher than their production costs - but prices will have to be proportional to production costs.

Prices will have to be higher than production costs because some of the producers, while earning wages, will not be producing consumer goods but will be producing means of production (which will not be on sale to the general public!). But it is rational that prices of products should be proportional to their production costs, because it is only under these conditions that the act of buying this product rather than another really measures the extent of subjective need - that it means, in other words, that society confirms, by its pattern of consumption, its initial decision to devote so many man-hours to the production of a particular commodity.

4. The dictatorship of the proletariat.

Confronted with a recrudescence of 'democratic' petty-bourgeois illusions provoked by the totalitarian degeneration of the Russian revolution, it is more than ever necessary to reaffirm the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The consolidation of working class power will require the violent crushing of all political tendencies aiming at the preservation or the re-institution of exploitation. Proletarian democracy means democracy for the working class, but it also implies the unlimited dictatorship which the proletariat will have to exert against all those strata which are hostile to it.

These elementary notions must now be made more concrete, in the light of our analysis of contemporary society. As long as the

basis of class rule was the private ownership of the means of production it was possible to give a 'constitutional form' to the legality of the proletarian dictatorship. This traditionally took the form of denying political rights to all who lived off the labour of others and of illegalising such political parties as proclaimed or worked for the restauration of private property.

The diminishing significance of the traditional type of private property in contemporary society and the recent development of the exploiting bureaucracy basing themselves on collectivised property remove much of the significance of the old formal criteria. Among the most dangerous and reactionary currents against which the proletarian dictatorship will have to struggle will be not only the bourgeois, restaurationist currents, but also the bureaucratic ones. These latter currents will undoubtedly have to be opposed in the Soviets, to assist the workers to understand their aims and the social interests they represent. This implies a terrific task of ideological clarification which must be undertaken now by all revolutionary socialists. The task entails a thorough explanation of the real character of these tendencies, an explanation which it will not be possible to base on any formal considerations, such as the 'ownership of property' but which will have to be based on an analysis of bureaucratic capitalism and its objectives.

The revolutionary party will have to make these basic considerations appear very concrete. It will have to propose and struggle for the exclusion from the Soviets of all currents and tendencies which are opposed, whether openly or not, to workers' management of production and to the total exercise of power (at all levels of the economy and of social life) by the organizations of the working class. On the other hand the widest freedom must be given to working class tendencies which defend these fundamental ideas, irrespective of any disagreements on other issues, however important they may appear. The final decision on this question, as on all others, must be left in the hands of the organs of proletarian power, in the hands of the armed workers.

The holding of complete political and economic power by these organs is but one expression of the socialist objective, namely the abolition of the opposition between those who decide and those who merely execute. The abolition of this antagonism and the success of the revolution are however by no means inevitable. They will depend on a constant and sharp struggle between the conscious socialist tendencies in the workers' movement and tendencies aiming at restauring a society based on exploitation (in whatever form). The degeneration of the organs of working class power is by no means excluded. Socialist development is intimately linked up with the practical content of the conscious activity of the proletariat, with the whole problem of the revolutionary

- 1921

consciousness of the working class. The workers' council (Soviet) form of political power is the one which offers the ideal conditions for the creative initiative of the masses. In this sense revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary organization in workers' councils are intimately interlinked.

Quite the opposite pertains regarding the dictatorship of the 'revolutionary Party'. This type of dictatorship (of which Stalinists approve and on which Trotskyists equivocate) is based on a monopolisation of the function of leadership by a particular category or social group. To us it matters not how proletarian or revolutionary or tested or experienced such a cadre may be. To the extent that this monopolisation of power consolidates itself, it becomes an absolute impediment to the development of the creative initiative of the masses. It thereby also becomes one of the important factors likely to contribute, however 'superhuman' its advocates and members, to the degeneration of the revolutionary power.

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Further copies of this document can be obtained from:
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If you are interested in the ideas outlined in this document you can, by sending 1/10 to the above address, obtain a copy of 'SOCIALISM RE-AFFIRMED', an analysis of contemporary society.

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