

# Two Points of View on: Finding the American Road to Socialism

## JOHN GATES: 'We must build a popular, anti-monopoly alliance'

John Gates is editor of *The Daily Worker*, a member of the Communist Party's national committee. We print excerpts from speeches by Gates and Joseph Starobin in a recent symposium:

SOCIALISM is the public ownership of the great industries of our country under a government of the people, led by American labor.

It would mean a great expansion of our present democracy, superior in every respect to what we have today, truly corresponding to the abolition of exploitation of man by man which socialism accomplishes. It would mean bringing to an end the roots of war, injustice and inequality so characteristic of capitalism.



The difference between those who preach socialism in the abstract and scientific socialists is that the latter maintains that socialism is impossible without the working class and independently of the working class. Engels often wrote to Americans and tried to advise them that you cannot skip stages in the fight for socialism, that socialist minded people must become part of the labor movement, that they must advance with the labor movement, and

ahead of it—but not too far ahead of it. And that socialists, to be successful, could not and must not ignore the level of development of the labor movement at any particular time. In other words, the socialists could not ignore reality.

To the extent that my organization, the Communist Party has lost sight of reality, together with other mistakes that we have made, such as doctrinaire and dogmatic approach toward life in our country, we too have declined. Only to the extent that we improve ourselves in this respect, and other socialist-minded groups likewise, can we expect to flourish. A truism we have learned over the course of many years, as the result of many painful experiences—I should say we are still trying to learn—is that each country in the world is different, even though they all may be capitalist. And each country must travel its own road to socialism.

It came in one way in the Soviet Union, quite a different way in China, still another way in Poland, and still a different way in Yugoslavia or Bulgaria or Czechoslovakia. And it will also come differently in the United States, because this is a different country, with a different tradition, different circumstances, and these are different times. While we socialist-minded Americans must learn from every other country—we have much to learn from every revolution in world history, and especially from socialist revolu-

tions—in the last analysis, and the main analysis, we American socialists must do our own thinking, must chart our own path for America. I should like to outline some of the specific features for an American road to socialism.

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FIRST AND FOREMOST is the need to help build a great, popular anti-monopoly alliance. As all of us know, a few giant trusts, a handful of powerful banks, run and control our country. The task of America at this stage is, first, to weaken the grip of these monopolies on the economy and politics of our country as the prerequisite for the final destruction of the power of that monopoly. Without this weakening of monopoly, without this anti-monopoly alliance, the achievement of socialism which means the abolition of capitalism, is impossible.

In order to achieve that, we must help bring about a political realignment in our country, the formation of a mass political party which will express the interests and the unity of the anti-monopoly alliance. We can say at this point how this new political party will come into being, whether it will come into being as a result of the transformation of the Democratic party, through the struggles of labor and the Negro people and their allies, or whether in the course of time, an altogether new mass party will come into being—we cannot say, except that it is the historic goal of the present stage of American de-

velopment and the necessary prerequisite for any advance toward socialism.

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THE SECOND FEATURE of the American road to socialism is the need to speed the democratic revolution in the South. This is on the order of the day in our country, so as to remove the main obstacle to further progress of the nation, whether it be the economic progress, the further strengthening of the labor movement through the unionization of the South, or the social progress of the country, or the passage of social legislation in Congress. This, too, is the prerequisite for the building of the anti-monopoly alliance itself and in order to clear the road for socialist advance.

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THE THIRD FEATURE with respect to an American road to socialism is that we now have the possibility for achieving a peaceful and constitutional transition, which has been made possible as a result of the new relationship of forces that came into being after the defeat of Hitlerism in World War II, the tremendous advance of socialism, the coming into being of a family of socialist countries, the liberation of some of the largest countries on earth from colonial oppression, and the enormous growth of the working class movements in all countries, and together with that, the corresponding weakening of world capitalism. All of this means that there has already begun to develop a new era, the beginning of an era of peaceful co-existence, and for the first time

in history, the practical and realizable possibility of eliminating the danger of world war forever.

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What we are witnessing is the fight to transform the present unstable peace, the present armed truce, the stalemate between the capitalist and socialist worlds into a lasting peace. Of course a lasting peace will not and cannot be obtained without struggle. Nothing is going to be handed to the peoples of the world on a silver platter, for nothing. Struggle is the law of life. But it is not enough just to struggle. All of us have learned from bitter experience that there is "struggle" and "struggle." You can struggle in a right way and you can struggle in a wrong way.

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For us, the most important thing to grasp is that the forces of peace are today stronger than the forces of war. This basic fact does not do away with the need for struggle, but it means that if we struggle correctly, we now are strong enough to win that struggle.

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LASTLY, I THINK against this background, it is necessary in order to advance all these things of which I have spoken that there be a strong socialist Left in this country, which strives to give perspective, leadership, to the growing movement against monopoly and the eventual movement toward socialism.

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For this Left to become strong, it must first of all unite. There are many differences among the forces on the Left, serious and important. In the (Continued on Page 11)

## JOSEPH STAROBIN: 'We Are Living in Pre-History of Socialism'

Joseph Starobin, author, journalist and free-lance magazine contributor, is a former Communist Party member and one-time foreign editor of *The Daily Worker*. His present political position is outlined in his remarks below.

DISCUSSING the American road to Socialism, I will assume that most of us agree that we have in mind a society of material abundance, such that all the wants of all our people can be satisfied in proportion to their useful contributions by hand and brain.



We mean a society which is in command of itself, no longer buffeted about by the tides of warfare and economic anarchy; one which is able to take the helm of its own history, and guide it consciously and wisely. We have in mind a social order controlled and operated democratically. This means the maximum participation by the producers of all good things in the management, not only of industry, agriculture, science and the arts, but of whatever form of government they find most suitable.

We mean a Socialism in which both planning and freedom go hand in hand, a society with the habit of dissent, realized in continual and constructive criticism by which men argue in order to grow wiser, and outmoded policies are quickly spotted and replaced, and where leaders, coming from the people, are subject to popular vigilance and recall. We are talking about a society which has solidarity—that strength of a common cause in which people overcome their

racial and religious differences, and liberate their individual talents for great cooperative purposes.

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MY VIEW is that we are living in an age which is the pre-history of Socialism. Only as we realize this can we understand where we are, and take a hopeful view of the future. I am not one of those who thinks his past quarter of a century has been wasted. Once we make peace with the fact that this has been a century of birth, with all its sweat and pain and blood—not of perfection and maturity—can we understand ourselves, and cease being the victims of our own illusions.

Those countries and those peoples abroad who have been accomplishing their modernization, cleaning out the Augean stables of feudalism, and accelerating their industrial development, on a cash-program basis, have also been and are today in the pre-history of Socialism. When they unfurled the banners of Socialism, it was really in anticipation of something yet to be brought about. There is no doubt that those peoples are better off than they used to be. But they are NOT models for American Socialist development, since ours is going to be based on very different technological, historical and political conditions. Most of their strategy and tactics should never have been taken to have a universal validity.

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Taking into account the hard, cruel realities of Socialist performance and failures in other countries, I believe that no Socialist movement here can be built in association with such movements as are operating elsewhere—whether it be the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, whether it be Poland or China, Italy or India. To say this flatly makes no concession to American reactionaries; it is a truth which, if we

can implement it, will help to defeat them.

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IN ARGUING for such a dissociation, I want to lift the matter from the level of whether one criticizes Russia once a week, or once a month. Nor am I denying that the countries building Socialism are factors of great weight in influencing our future. For the very reason of the world-wide rise of centrally-planned economies, for the very reason that a powerful Left does exist in Europe and Asia, for the very reason that the colonial peoples are destroying the imperialist system—for these reasons, genuine prospects of an American Socialist development do arise, and really, for the first time.

Such prospects are enhanced, NOT to the degree that we try to imitate others but because others—dissociated as we must be from them—create new factors in world relations. Those American problems which were not solved for half a century are now going to become solvable.

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For the first time in human history, there is a prospect of reducing the dangers of war. World war between the great atomic powers is now recognized as mutually very dangerous. This forces Americans to find ways of maintaining their economy without being able to rely on periodic wars—on which so much of the relative success of American capitalism has been based. World history has worked in such a way that instead of being able to inherit the positions of its imperial rivals; American capitalism is being compelled—contrary to deep tendencies within it—to enter into a new relationship with independent peoples who will be planning their future on semi-Socialist principles.

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For the first time, American society is confronted with the competition of a rival social order which has two essential characteristics—that it is capable of

planned economic growth, and that it proposes to develop more and more democratically.

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The fact that this rival society—tragically inadequate as it is from the viewpoint of civil liberties—nevertheless claims to be a form of democracy, and is compelled for the sake of its own growth to become more democratic, is also of very great importance. The intercourse and rivalry of systems is bound to influence American development at the very point where great battles to sustain and expand our democratic institutions still lie ahead.

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But the first fruits of a new world relationship are already evident. We see its impact on racial segregation in South and North. This problem which remained unsolved for a century is yielding not only to the struggle of Negroes and whites for the Constitution and its guarantees, not only to the growth of industrialization but also to the impact of the world rivalry of differing systems and cultures.

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We are on the eve of great disputes in American governing circles on the rate and scope of foreign and domestic economic development. Strong, important voices are being heard to the effect that for the sake of competition with a rival society, it is essential to counter those tendencies otherwise inherent in capitalism which restrict and confine economic development for the sake of the immediate, narrow profit interests of Big Business.

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THE American Left will grow, and the road to Socialism in this country will be disclosed to the extent that programs are put forward and movements developed in the heat and the framework of this peaceful competition. For it is in this context, and not by abstract argument or by oversimplified evidence about other countries, that American capital-

ism will either be drastically modified, or will show itself to be the obstacle to the national and popular interest. The American road to Socialism will be found through competition with Socialist countries.

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Peaceful transition or stormy ones—I do not try to predict such matters in advance. It is obviously to our whole nation's interest, and for the first time real possibilities do exist, for the transition from one social order to another to be relatively peaceful. Such matters of the future need hardly be the dividing issue on the Left today.

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It would be presumptuous to outline or blueprint the organizational forms of an American Socialist revival. I did not leave the American Communist Party for the sake of joining any other party, equally unrepresentative of the ideas and the people necessary to rebuild the American Left. Neither did I leave it to sit about and lament the past and all its wasted opportunities, or to try to re-live the past; nor do I propose to increase the area of recrimination on the Left.

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THE CHALLENGE today is whether all of us can change—both in ideas and in behavior. I am convinced that the single most useful thing at this moment is for diverse forces to come together, to discuss not only their past but their understanding of present events—to argue, to debate, to listen, to revise judgments, to learn to live with each other intellectually and politically.

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Therefore, I agree with Dalton Trumbo's call, as printed in *The National Guardian* for Nov. 26, 1956, for a sort of "general amnesty" on the Left, a new look at the realities. This in itself will not solve everything. But whoever cannot function in this spirit, ought in all fairness to everyone else, step aside. In proportion as we do function in this spirit, we will make a good beginning in the only possible direction.



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first place, we need to discuss these differences with each other, argue things out; we must also strive to work together and act together on those things about which we can agree, and in these discussions together, working together, acting together. We will be able to achieve—finally — organizational unity on a socialist program.

In this unity of the Left, it is my opinion that the American Communist Party has a vital role to play, and an essential contribution to make.

We are conscious of the contributions we have made to America and we are proud of those contributions. We are also highly conscious of our weaknesses. We wish that others—our friends and our opponents as well—were as conscious of their mistakes as we are of ours. One thing we want to eliminate is a certain arrogance and conceit that sometimes characterizes us and especially in our relations with other people, the lack of respect for others—and here I would like to say we are engaged in quite a discussion within our own ranks, and we are finding it not so simple to debate differences even within our own ranks.

But if we cannot learn to respect the differences within our ranks in the Communist party, we will never learn to respect the opinions of others, outside our ranks. Furthermore, we wish to end the practice that we had sometimes indulged in of interfering with the democratic functioning of other organizations. We have no desire and no wish to impose our will on the functioning of any other organization, nor to interfere with their democratic processes, but to contribute through our general policies, publicly expressed, to American life.

We no longer insist, at least some of us, that we are "God's chosen children" and that only we can lead the American people to socialism.

Yet we believe that we have something that an American socialist movement needs. We believe that an American socialist movement will not be successful without us. So despite the wishes of many of our friends and some of our opponents, we are not going to liquidate the Communist Party. We are going to change many of the things about our program and methods so that we can become a more influential and effective force for socialism in America. We want to change our organization so that we may become, finally, an American organization, an independent organization which does its own thinking and makes its own decisions, learning from everybody, one which works together with and respects all other forces in our country also working for progressive ends.