

Civil Liberties and Socialism

The following is text of a speech delivered at a Jefferson School forum May 23 and does not represent the views of the Daily Worker editors.

By JAMES ALLEN

MARXISTS have always said that democratic rights are never developed to their full potential under capitalism. In fact, the older capitalism gets, the more drastically the monopolists try to restrict them. This is shown again by the severe onslaught upon the Constitutional rights of the people in our own country today. It is shown especially in the Smith Act trials, based on the false accusation that Communists advocate force and violence, at any time, now or in the future.

Marxists have also held that popular democratic rights would be greatly extended, deepened and enriched under socialism, with the abolition of exploitation and the guarantee of full economic security for the people.

Recent revelations in the Soviet Union of many serious abuses of state power during the Stalin era, in violation of Socialist democracy, and the self-correction now under way, emphasize the point that great care needs to be taken under socialism to safeguard the rights of the citizen. It is therefore entirely fitting for Marxists in America today to proclaim as their aim the fullest guarantee of popular democratic rights under a Socialist government in this country, with safeguards against the abuse of state power.

HOWEVER, I find myself in basic disagreement with the position advanced by the Editors of Political Affairs and by Max Weiss.

They state categorically that in a Socialist America there should not be any curtailment of the civil liberties of anti-socialist individuals or groups as long as they do not practice, actively plan, or incite violence. More specifically, Max Weiss holds that opposition political parties, which stand for a restoration of capitalism, will be granted full freedom to carry on their agitation.

In my opinion, this position fails to make the basic distinction between civil liberties under capitalism and civil liberties under socialism. This distinction has nothing to do with a counter-revolutionary threat from the outside, on the specific conditions of the socialist transition. It arises from the basic difference between capitalist and socialist societies.

Socialism should expand and enrich those civil liberties which enhance the rights and status of the people. It should restrict or abolish those civil liberties which interfere with the freedom and well-being of the people. Specifically, it should severely curtail and eventually abolish the right of capitalist private property—the civil liberty which has been most highly developed and most assiduously nourished by capitalist government. Based on this right is the entire legal system that expresses and protects the capitalist system of exploitation. Socialism will abolish exploitation of man by man. Accordingly, capitalist private property will be transformed into socialist state property, which is the very essence of the transition to socialism.

After the Civil War of 1861-65, the abolition of chattel slavery was written into our Constitution, thus abolishing one form of private property rights. Thereby, all efforts by propaganda or otherwise, to restore the slave system, were rendered illegal.

WHEN THE PEOPLE of this country take the road to socialism, having established a government for this purpose, the

Constitution and laws of the land will reflect the new social system. It is highly unlikely that such a government, even in the most favorable international conditions, will grant full freedom to any party agitating for a return to capitalism, no matter how high the level of Socialist democracy.

By taking the position they do, the editors of Political Affairs and Max Weiss, in effect, abandon the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat without as much as a by-your-leave. This long established Marxist-Leninist principle has been confirmed by the experiences of all the countries which have taken the road to socialism.

Some have called this a clumsy term in the English language, one that is too easily misunderstood. That may be so, and perhaps some creative American Marxist will find a better way of expressing it. But the essence of the term is very clear. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the form of government associated with socialist society in its early stage. Such a government is led by the working class, in association with its people's allies, and is devoted to the building of socialism. The "dictatorship" part of the term refers to the role of such a government in preventing a capitalist restoration, by repressing the efforts of the former ruling classes or their remnants to regain power.

THE FORM of such a government is not set for all time, nor does it follow a single model. In actual life, it varies greatly—from the Soviet form to the people's type in Eastern Europe, and still another transitional type in China. The repressive actions of such a regime have been severe, as during the hard years in Russia, or have assumed milder forms, as in other Socialist countries. That depends upon many specific circumstances of history and current conditions.

It did, in Marx's term, "smash the old state machinery" almost at one blow, as in the Russian Revolution. Or it reconstituted the old state machinery, fusing it with the new, in a more gradual process, retaining some of the bourgeois parliamentary features, as in Eastern Europe.

Nor is the form, once adopted, fixed for all time within any specific country. Thus, during the recent period, we have witnessed a marked liberalization, perhaps long overdue, of many governmental practices in the Socialist world. Marxists envision the eventual "withering away" of the state altogether, under communism, which is the higher form of socialist security.

In the future, the forms of Socialist government will no doubt show a much greater variety. It is to be expected that when countries like ours, with a high economic development, and with long established democratic institutions, take the road to socialism, their form of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" will exhibit many new features.

Be that as it may, no Marxist-Leninist individual or party can or should abandon this central concept of socialist government, merely on the basis of a set of assumptions about the future which are still to be achieved in life. Such an approach is schematic, divorced from the actual historic process, and it is therefore Utopian.

(To Be Concluded)

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