

Worker Unity viewpoint

SOCIALISM AND FREEDOM



The main thing most Americans know about socialism is that they don't like it. Socialism is ridiculed as impractical, or feared as evil.

This is disturbing. Socialism is dismissed mainly because of the biased or non-existent accounts of it in the press and other media. Yet socialism is a world-wide movement--more than one-third of the earth's population lives under it. Millions feel allegiance to socialism as an economic system and principles of living that meets their needs.

Further, socialism acts in the name of working people. Its theory--and in part its practice around the world--is to put the working class in control of the economies and social structures constructed by their own labor. Should we then dismiss socialism simply on the basis of accounts put out by spokesmen for the same people who break our strike lines, tax us unmercifully, and drive us to the unemployment offices?

In Issue#19, Worker Unity Organization gave some of the reasons we believe socialism is the economic system of the future for the U.S. and the world. Basically, we view capitalism, progressive in its time, to be outdated.

Where once the free enterprise system stirred millions of people to exploit and develop the world's resources and productive abilities, today's capitalist monopolies--over ripe and complacent--stifle competition, shut down productive machinery and fix prices--all to maintain their dominance and profits. Unemployment, periodic recession and depression, war, are the result.

In this issue, we will take up the question of freedom under socialism--and under capitalism. America's people are proud of their freedom to speak, believe and write what they wish--with little government interference. It is the fear of dictatorship and autocracy that the capitalist press plays on most in condemning socialism.

Here we raise questions often asked about socialism, and give a brief response.

AREN'T SOCIALISTS IN FAVOR OF TAKING AWAY PEOPLE'S PRIVATE PROPERTY?

No. Socialists want more people to have more private property than ever before.

There are two kinds of private property. One is personal property used for private enjoyment--consumer goods, clothing, your home. The second kind of private property is ownership of the means of production--factories and the like. This second kind of property is not used for private enjoyment, but

produces the goods which are.

Socialism doesn't take away the first kind of private property--it tries to produce more. Socialism means the putting of the means of production in the hands of the working people so that there can be rational economic planning to produce all the goods people need. It means *using* the wealth which is produced by our own labor that is now taken away from us in the form of profits and irrational investments.

DOESN'T SOCIALISM MEAN AN END TO A PERSON'S OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE ECONOMICALLY?

No. In the first place, differences in pay scales--though smaller than in capitalist days--are a reality and recognized necessity in all socialist countries today.

The skilled worker gets more than the unskilled, the farmer who produces 4,000 bushels gets more than the farmer who produces 3,000. People are paid according to the quality and quantity of their work. But though there is inequality of pay, there is equality of opportunity. Unskilled workers have easy access to the training necessary to become skilled and thereby earn skilled workers' pay--and so on.

The important principle is that a person *only* receives income if it is earned through work--not by ownership. Ownership of the means of production--necessary in order to live off the fruits of others' work--cannot be bought in a socialist society because it isn't for sale. A person advances economically on the basis of merit and need--not because of family connections or wealth.

In the second place, socialism means *general* economic advance for everyone. No one who wants to work is denied work--the purpose of production is to meet society's needs rather than to make profit, so jobs for all is one of the economy's goals. Further, basic needs such as housing, food and decent health care are made available to all, regardless of income.

ISN'T "SOCIALISM" JUST A FANCY TERM TO DISGUISE THE REALITY OF IRON-FISTED ECONOMIC CONTROL BY A HANDFUL OF GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRATS?

In Akron, Ohio, there are now thousands of jobless rubber workers--people with great skill, out of work. Families losing their homes, the opportunity to send children to college, their health--everything.

This suffering is due to the pronouncements of a dictatorship--the large rubber companies. They decided to relocate many of their plants in

other sections of the country where labor is "cheaper." The decision was not made by elected officials, nor democratically arrived at. The dictators didn't consider the welfare of the citizens of Akron, the decision was arrived at entirely on the basis of the companies' economic motives.

Was it in the interests of the U.S. people as a whole to relocate? This was of no concern to the rubber companies. Can there be any greater "iron-fisted economic control" than this?

Decision of like kind affecting millions of people are made all the time by the handful of people--less than 3% of the population--who own and manage the facilities of monopoly capitalism.

The Tennessee Valley Authority for decades has existed as conclusive proof that centralized construction, planning and management produces electricity more cheaply and with greater efficiency than privately owned utility monopolies. Yet the economic dictators--through their hired political servants--beat back every effort to extend the TVA or introduce more government control over utilities.

"Hands off the free enterprise system," they scream. So the status quo with all its inefficiencies--is maintained, because the profits and power of capitalists are at stake.

But it's a different story when a capitalist gets in trouble. At that point, those who have opposed federal interferences as "creeping socialism" suddenly begin to lobby for "government aid." Thus Lockheed Aircraft gets multi-million dollar federal advances and gifts to keep it from bankruptcy. Penn Central railroad gets the same.

In other words, the capitalist class which rules economically also rules politically. Seldom is a politician nominated, let alone elected, who doesn't meet the approval of those who put up money for the parties. And it is the capitalists who foot most of the campaign bills--for both the Democrats and the Republicans--so it is the capitalists who control the elective and governmental machinery.

Socialists propose to break up this economic and political dictatorship--the tyranny of private property. In its place, we want to substitute collective ownership of the means of production by the entire society. This means a planned economy--decisions about what and how much to produce, where to build factories and similar issues affect all the people, thus these decisions should be made on the basis of people's needs. This requires planning.



Planning however does not have to mean control by a handful of bureaucrats. It is the goal of socialists to involve everyone in planning: people in every factory, every workplace, every institution are asked: What did you produce last year? What can you produce next year? What are your needs? What kinds of production should our society put a priority on?

The role of planning is to gauge people's needs, and develop programs to meet those needs. To accomplish these tasks obviously requires some dependence on people with special training or experience, but this need not mean an uncontrollable bureaucracy.

A socialist goal is to make central planning officials answerable to the people they serve, to institute the power and control of the working class throughout the government and society. The degree to which this is accomplished measures the amount of control people will have over their government and officials.

WOULDN'T PERSONAL FREEDOMS BE SUPPRESSED UNDER A SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT?

No. The vast majority of Americans would have more freedom under socialism.

Freedom has many meanings, and means different things to different people. One freedom is the right to do and say what one wishes without government interference, so long as it causes others no harm. This includes the right to criticize the government itself.

Without a doubt, Americans enjoy this kind of freedom more than almost any people in the world. Socialists want to preserve and extend this kind of freedom, because it is absolutely essential to maintaining a society actually controlled by the people.

On the other hand, Watergate and revelations about secret FBI and CIA files on millions of citizens show that potential repression lurks beneath the surface of apparent freedom. Many a union activists has been blackballed from holding a job in industry because of his or her political views. Many a person advances quickly up the ladder of success because they have the "right" attitude--namely, support of capitalism. Government efforts to persecute and frame political opponents abound--witness recent trials against members of the American Indian Movement and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, fortunately all quickly dismissed by juries of average Americans who saw through the lies of federal prosecutors.

Freedom of the press is another valued liberty. We could not publish ON THE LINE without it (although if history is a guide, the government will attempt to suppress us as soon



as capitalist power comes under serious challenge by the American people).

Yet for most people, freedom of the press is a right that cannot be exercised. Freedom of the press belongs to the *owner* of the press--he publishes what he wishes. How many working Americans--unless they pool their resources like members of Worker Unity in order to publish ON THE LINE--are financially able to enjoy freedom of the press?

In fact, all large-circulation daily papers throughout the country are owned and operated by capitalists. Though these papers often print conflicting views, they all agree on one thing--the merit of capitalism. To print otherwise, or to seriously question capitalism, would mean financial disaster--the large advertisers on whom the papers rely for revenue would not stand for it.

So far we have talked about freedom as absence from government restraint. There is another, more important kind of freedom--the freedom of job security, decent housing and health care, adequate leisure time and the guaranteed opportunity for your children to the best possible education without regard to their income or social class.

How free are those of us who have to work 52 hours and more a week just to stay even with our bills? How free is the black person systematically denied access to better jobs and housing? Or the divorced woman unable to hold a job because she can't find or can't afford daycare for her children? Or the unemployed person who can't find a job? Or the retired pensioner faced with a major operation beyond his financial means?

This kind of freedom--freedom from want and fear--can only be achieved by running the economy in the interests of people instead of profit, by replacing capitalism with its irrationality, depressions and war, with socialism and a planned economy.

It is opposition to *this* kind of freedom that causes the capitalist to scream, "there is no freedom under socialism." What he means is, he will no longer be free to exploit and profit from the labors of others.

The capitalist is right. Socialists do propose to do away with this kind of "freedom." To allow him to "freely" conduct his enterprise means trampling on the economic security and freedom of millions of the rest of us.

DOESN'T LIFE IN COUNTRIES LIKE RUSSIA CONTRADICT WHAT YOU ARE SAYING ABOUT FREEDOM UNDER SOCIALISM?

A complete answer to this question is lengthy and many-sided, but our brief answer is no. We will only out-



line our views now--a detailed discussion will follow in Issue 21.

--In several socialist countries, particularly the Soviet Union, there are considerable government restrictions on the freedom to speak and write critically of the government. These restrictions, however, in our opinion, are not so extreme or tyrannical as the capitalist press--which has an economic interest in spreading falsehoods about socialism and working peoples' struggles in general--makes them out to be.

On the other hand, in the sense of freedom from want or fear of economic survival, the citizens of the Soviet Union are among the most free and secure people in the world.

--Restrictions on individual freedoms of the general population are not a part of socialist theory, nor are they inevitable in the practice of a socialist government.

On the contrary, historically, restrictions begin and are justified by new socialist governments as necessary responses to conditions threatening their very existence. For example, immediately following the Russian revolution, the new government was faced with civil war begun by ousted aristocracy and capitalist class, famine, and industrial capacity devastated by World War I. This is not to say that the threatening conditions always justified the restrictions on individual freedom (in many cases we think they did, but it is impossible for people not facing the actual conditions to judge with any finality.)

Nor would we argue that restrictions on freedom are justified once the threat to the existence of the socialist state is past--clearly the case in the Soviet Union. To the contrary, there is a great deal of evidence that the Soviet government is no longer controlled by or representative of the Russian people, and restrictions are used by the bureaucracy in control of the state as an instrument to maintain their power.

--In an economically developed country like the U.S.--unchallenged by the threat of foreign intervention, untouched by the devastation of war--the possibilities for individual freedom are limitless.

The sole exception is the freedom of the capitalist class and those who ally themselves with it. These forces cannot be allowed the unlimited freedom to raise and finance armies or other illegitimate forces to take by force or sabotage people's new government. The military coup in Chile is only the latest of numerous examples of how the capitalists subvert the will of the majority whenever allowed to do so.