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A NEW SOCIALIST PROGRAM
by G.D.H. Cole

(This article has been reproduced from the NATION, 333 sixth Avenue, New York 14, N.Y. . Editors:)

When I turned Socialist in my school days socialism appeared to be essentially an international movement. There were many kinds of Socialists, but all or almost all of them had the sense of forming part of a growing international force that was destined before very long to conquer the world. Jaures, Lenin, Kautsky and Keir Hardie, Eugene Debbs and Victor Berger, Sidney Webb and Ramsay MacDonald were all members of one and the same Socialist International. Only the Anarchists and the remote Labor parties of Australasia were outside it. Socialism was then in practice mainly European, but its outlook and its ambitions were world wide, and up to about 1912 it seemed to be growing quite fast in the United States. When I joined the Socialist movement in England, it never occurred to me to doubt that I was accepting an international obligation and a loyalty that transcended national frontiers. My task, as I saw it, was to play my small part in a great crusade for human brotherhood that would make an end of the exploitation of man by man and of country by country, destroying capitalism and imperialism together and putting in their place a world society set free from war and hatred to devote its energies and vast resources to banishing poverty and slavery from every country.

I do not mean that so huge a task seemed easy: I do mean that the nature of the task was not in doubt and that it was felt to demand a concerted international effort. Where are that task and that effort now? Ever since 1917 there has been no common movement. There have been rather two sharply antagonistic movements, each claiming to be the torchbearer of the true socialism but at bitter conflict about the means of advancing toward their goal and even about the goal itself. Communism and democratic socialism have spent their energies in fighting each other; and in the process communism has turned into totalitarian tyranny, while democratic socialism has renounced its old ambition of world revolution and has shrunk into a number of separate national movements for the furtherance of the welfare state. Communism, as a world revolutionary force, has not hesitated to repress all liberty of thought and action outside the dictates of a single ruling party; democratic socialism has surrendered its major aspirations in order to meet the requirements of parliamentary success and in wooing the "marginal" voter has diluted its faith till it is prepared, instead of fighting capitalism against the "Communist enemy."

I have never been able to accept as final this sharp cleavage in what I still think of as fundamentally a single world-wide movement against oppression. I am no Communist, for I detest the suppression of all free thinking which Communists not only regard as needful but seem positively to admire. I hate cruelty, centralization, rigid discipline, and the vindictive mistrust which the Communist philosophy appears to involve. I cannot, however, for that reason consent to regard the peoples of the Communist countries, or the Communists of my own or other countries, as enemies with whom I have nothing in common. I have much in common with them. I share their wish to help all the subject peoples of the world to emancipate themselves from foreign imperialist rule; I admire their planned economies and their vast achievements in economic construction; and I see them, on one condition, as advancing, however deviously, toward a classless society and an expansion of freedom for the ordinary man and woman in the affairs of everyday living. The one condition is, of course, that they escape from the ever-present

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peril of utterly destructive world war, fear of which poisons their behaviour and forbids them the luxuries of common honesty and decent tolerance.

I am assuredly no Communist. But no more am I a Democratic Socialist if this means renouncing the Socialist revolution and reducing socialism to a set of independent national electoral movements designed to gain parliamentary majorities with the support of non-Socialist voters. I do not deny the need for parliamentary action, but I do deny that socialism means no more than a number of national endeavours to advance gradually and constitutionally toward the welfare state. Even where nominally Socialist parties have gained majority support, they have never attempted to establish socialism; even their attempts to further welfare have shown signs of petering out after their initial success, owing to the difficulty of advancing further without disturbing the smooth working of the capitalist structure - to which they are supposed to be hostile - and the fear that by attacking it they will alienate marginal support. This seems to be the position in the Scandinavian countries, as well as in Great Britain.

The situation is much worse wherever communism has emerged to win a substantial body of support. In France and Italy the Democratic Socialists are today no more than impotent parliamentary factions with no prospect of winning political power. Moreover, in countries which are rulers of dependent empires, the Socialist parties have been quite unable to take wholeheartedly the side of the dependent peoples and have acquiesced in or even abetted the holding down of colonial nationalism by imperialist force. I admit that the British had the sense to renounce their rule in India before they were driven out by force, but they are still, with Socialist acquiescence, holding down Malaya and Kenya. The Dutch had to be driven out of Indonesia, as the French are being driven out of Indo-China, by force majeure; and in neither country have the Socialists dared to side unequivocally with the colonial nationalists. It has been left to the Communists, from whatever motive, to appear as the champions of the oppressed peoples of the world.

Add to this that in Europe the Democratic Socialist parties, in their fear of Communist aggression, seem to be prepared to acquiesce in the rearmament of West Germany under conditions that will make German unification impracticable without war, and also in the arming of their countries' forces with atomic weapons and in the manufacture of hydrogen bombs on the plea that they will serve as a "deterrent" to aggression. I shall not believe without more evidence than there has been so far that these policies are in fact approved by a majority of those who vote Socialist in elections, and I feel sure they are not supported by a majority of active party workers. They are being forced on the Socialist parties by a reactionary leadership that has come to be more anti-Communist than pro-Socialist and sees nothing amiss in turning to capitalist America as its ally against the Communists.

In these circumstances old Socialists such as I am - internationalists and non-Communists - find ourselves in a terribly difficult position. We are adjured, in the name of unity and of loyalty to our parties, to renounce our opposition to policies which we feel are disastrous and amount to a betrayal of socialism; and we are threatened with expulsion and ostracism unless we toe the line. I for one cannot do this without violating my fundamental beliefs; and I am led accordingly to question the entire assumption that my party has the right to my final loyalty. This loyalty I owe, not to any party or to any merely national movement, but to socialism as an essentially international cause. I know there are others in Great Britain who share this sentiment, and I feel there must

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be many in other countries too. The question is: What can those who find themselves in this predicament do, not so much in order to escape from it personally as to rescue socialism from the condition that have brought it about?

This predicament could not, I think, have arisen were there not something badly amiss with socialism itself - or rather with the development of Socialist thought in fact of the vast change in the problems mankind must face in order to progress, or even to survive. In my own country the Labor Party, though it reckons on returning before very long to political power, has no such clear vision of what it means, or even wants, to do next as it had in 1945. Its recent programs have been quite remarkably ineffective and even trivial. They have not proposed any substantial further step toward the supersession of capitalism or toward a classless society at home; and in international affairs they have put forward nothing even remotely of a Socialist character. So far as I can see, the situation is much the same elsewhere. The Socialist vision has faded, and the idealism with it, leaving no more behind than a mild desire to soften the asperities of capitalism and social inequality, without any frontal attack on either. It is as if full employment and a gradual development of the social-security services were enough, without any change in fundamental class relations or in the status of the worker in his employment.

What, then, is to be done? The socialism to which I was converted in my youth was the fruit of long, hard and passionate thinking, subsequently translated into policies, not for the full establishment of a Socialist way of life, but for the first steps toward it. Socialists have been too long content to live by using up the intellectual capital they accumulated in the nineteenth century. They have stopped thinking, and have let the world situation march on a great distance without adapting themselves to its changes. What is needed is new intellectual capital, which can be only a product of fresh concerted thinking. It is evident, also, that this will not be provided by the various national Socialist parties, which are too much pre-occupied with electioneering and too much dominated by America-based anti-communism to be capable of clear thinking or of looking ahead. Besides, mass parties cannot think; they can only be influenced by the thinking of individuals or small groups of people who are prepared to think for them.

With these ideas in mind I have come to the conclusion that an attempt should be made to establish internationally a small society, or order, of Socialists who would pledge themselves to do their best to restate the essentials of their Socialist faith in terms applicable to the present world situation, and not to be deterred from following where their thoughts lead them by fear of being called "disloyal" to their national parties or of being disciplined or excluded from them. The immediate task of this group would be not to act but to think together and to plan to restate Socialist principles in relation to the most pressing contemporary problems, and to base on these principles a broad program of action in which the various national movements could be called upon to play their part. Each member of the group, or order, would publicize its ideas in his own country and try to induce the national leaders to take them up. All this would need time before it could produce a significant effect, but the longer it would take the sooner it should be begun.

The principles and policies that would emerge from such a process cannot be laid down in advance. They would be the outcome of a real interchange of ideas. All that I can usefully say about them is that they would have to include at least four things: first, a clearly defined attitude toward the making and potential use of atomic weapons; second, a well-thought-out plan of campaign for a "war upon want" designed to equalize, as early as possible, conditions of living in all countries; third, plans for a world economic structure that will avoid the evils both of capitalism and of bureaucratic centralization and will open up for the workers in every country rapidly increasing opportunities for democratic, responsible self-government in their working lives; and fourth, the complete ending of imperialist domination, both political and economic, and the extension of self-governing independence to all peoples.

Collection Number: AD1812

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

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