Terms and Terminological Inexactitudes

All of the opponents of the S.P.G.B. have at some time or other twitted us with being hidebound to terms. What we insist—as we invariably do—that Capitalism and Socialism are different and distinct systems of society, both of which have predominant features that can be defined and described, we are told that because certain feudal remnants remain in Capitalism or because the capitalist state imposes restrictions on the freedom of action of the capitalist, therefore complete definition is impossible, and all definition should be abandoned. Where such looseness of thought has led can be seen in the depressing spectacle of social reformers who year after year hopefully propose new modifications of Capitalism believing that it will some day cease to be itself and become its opposite. They can only cherish such vain hope because they do not know how to recognise what are the basic, unchanging, features of the Capitalist system of society.

There are others whose inaccurate use of terms is due to indifference rather than ignorance; they change their terms to suit their policy. Thus, during the past few years, as policy has changed the same persons have been able to describe Russia as Socialist and as Capitalist (the Express newspaper is a case in point); others have looked round Europe and have been able to discern democracy in this or that country where earlier and later they could see only dictatorship. Hitler and Mussolini have been much to the fore in this verbal juggling. Both have claimed at times to be upholders of revolution and at others to be guardians of tradition. Both have pretended in some places and at some times that they stand for Socialism and working-class interests against Capitalism and the "pluto-democracies." Hitler, after years of hostility to Bolshevism, chose last year to discover close affinities between the Nazi and Bolshevist systems. Mussolini, likewise, while building warships for the Russians, declared that Fascism is a bulwark against Bolshevist encroachments on Christian civilisation. On the other hand, he has at times denounced Bolshevism, not for being anti-Capitalist, but for being "State super-Capitalism carried to its most ferocious expression" (The Times, November 2, 1936). All of which brings us to a point which needs no labouring in the utter confusion of thought which clouds political discussion at the present time, that there can be no progress towards the goal of a better social system without a clear perception of the nature and laws of the system now in being.

The S.P.G.B.'s insistence on the value of definition of terms and clarity of thought has never been more necessary than it is at the present critical juncture.

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