

Letters

Dear Editors,

There are three questions that I would like to put to you concerning the operations of a future socialist state.

1. Whenever I talk to others about the abolition of the wages system, free housing, and communal use of the means of production they react strongly. They think that under such a system no-one would work and that chaos would ensue. Lenin's assurances to the Soviet Communists was that one in every ten idlers would be shot! How would the Socialist Party deal with this problem to generate national productivity?
2. I do agree that the wages system should be abolished, but envisage much resistance to it. It is possible that there will be a need for a voucher system in the initial phase (which is not revolutionary). What I would like to know more of, is how the shops and distribution centres will distribute the goods to the people under socialism. What system of organisation do you think will be required for fair and equal distribution? What kind of demands will determine the scale of the operation?
3. How would you prevent anarchy and crime - including theft which might be carried out by syndicates springing up as opportunists and creating a black market under socialism?

I look forward to your reply.

GARY CUBBAGE, Bolton, Lancs

Reply: Let's clear up one misunderstanding straightaway. You seem to be under the impression that the Socialist Party is like other parties and that, one day, it will "come to power" and run things. This is not our view. We do not see our role as to do things for people. Rather we see the future mass socialist party as the organisation that people will form to do things for themselves, in particular to win control of political power. So it's not the Socialist Party that will come to power; it will be the socialist-minded majority who will be assuming the power to change and run society. What happens will be their responsibility, to be decided democratically. In fact, once the wage and salary working class has won political control, the socialist political party they will have formed to do this has no further role and will be dissolved.

1. So, to rephrase your question, how would socialist society deal with what used to be called "the lazy man"? Certainly not by shooting one in ten of them (did Lenin really advocate that? If so, he was worse than we thought). For a start, we don't think there will be that many. Remember, socialism will not have been established unless a clear majority wanted it and understood what it involved. We would think that in the early stages people would be motivated by a desire to clear up as soon as possible the mess left by capitalism and to build a decent society, and that they'd be prepared to make sacrifices in order to do so. Later, when socialism was up and running, we would expect people to want to work at doing something useful and creative and to meet and co-operate with other people. Very few would want to stay at home and contribute nothing. People don't like "work" today essentially because it is "employment", i.e. working for someone else, and not interesting, nor often obviously useful and sometimes downright dangerous. But these same people are prepared to exercise themselves - i.e. to work - quite hard in their free time, digging their gardens, repairing their cars, doing up their homes, i.e. on something they consider useful and beneficial. So it's not work - exercising their mental and physical energies - as such that is regarded as the problem but the conditions under which it is exercised. Socialism should be able to remedy that.

2. As to the distribution of things once they've been produced, you're quite right to say that a

permanent voucher system would not be revolutionary and not very different from using money today. Although in the very early stages of socialism there might have to be some very temporary rationing of some goods, the aim will be to move as rapidly as possible to “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”. This should be possible because (a) people's needs are not limitless, and (b) a lot more useful things can be produced than today, once the waste (e.g., arms, the whole buying and selling system) and artificial scarcity (imposed by the economic law of “no profit, no production”) of capitalism have been eliminated. Socialist society will be capable of producing enough to go over to free distribution and free access to what people need.

3. How to prevent crime and the emergence of a black market? First, about 95 percent of all crime is property-related and so would disappear in a socialist society: why steal what you can have for nothing? It's the same with a black market: why buy something you can have for free? As to the remaining 5 percent of crimes, i.e. crimes against people, much of this too could be expected to die out as the frustrations and psychological problems caused by money worries that lead to much of it will disappear too. Any remaining violence or other non-social behaviour will be a medical problem, to be treated as such, i.e. not by punishing people but by treating them, if necessary for the protection of the rest of the community in a confined place. For a more developed argument about crime, did you read the lead article in the May Socialist Standard?—**Editors**.

Dear Editors,

Of course you are correct: ultimately workers have no state. However, until that reality is widely appreciated, it is surely necessary to rely upon workers' identification with their (familiar) place of nurture, and “natural” abhorrence to the occupation of “their” land by an invading force – e.g. as in WWII, when many were happy, and proud, to enlist under the Union Jack.

There is, surely, every distinction to be drawn between patriotism and bigotry; the first can incorporate pride in, e.g., Shakespeare, whilst the second may involve the idea that no other nation or country could have “produced” Shakespeare or his equivalent.

Your principles include that “the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party”. Yet you must surely acknowledge that organised workers (trade unions) formed the Labour Party (including Clause 4) precisely because the Liberal MPs vacillated in the degree to which their policies fostered the welfare of the working class/es?

Do you maintain that Labour's occasional landslide votes had nothing to do with the perception that political support should not be squandered on dilettante, fair-weather or eclectic “supporters” of ordinary people's interest?

Do you maintain that the election of Labour governments did not directly result in better conditions, social welfare, trade union legality, a minimum wage, the NHS, compulsory free primary and secondary education?

D. SHEPHERD, London NW4

Reply: 1. We can see why the ruling class in the various different capitalist states into which the world is divided find it necessary to rely on “workers' identification with their (familiar) place of nurture and 'natural' abhorrence to the occupation of 'their' land by invading forces” – it helps them build up popular support for their rule and their foreign policy aimed at protecting their interests abroad. But we can't see why Socialists need to. On the contrary, political nationalism is something we need to combat as it is an obstacle to the understanding that the problems faced by workers all over the world cannot be solved within a national framework but only on a world scale, on the basis of a world without frontiers where the resources of the whole planet have become the common heritage of all humanity.

We can see why, too, ruling classes prefer moderate nationalism to bigotry – yesterday's enemy can become today's ally. Thus, the “Huns” and “Japs” of yesterday are now our rulers' allies and workers who continue to believe what they were told when these countries were our rulers' enemies are an embarrassment.

Socialist opposition to political nationalism does not challenge cultural diversity. English speakers can appreciate Shakespeare, Dickens, etc without thereby ceasing to be socialists. Again, people living on the big island off the north-west coast of the Eurasian land mass can like warm beer, and fish and chips, pork pies and roast beef, without being nationalists. Maybe they'll still like these things in Socialism.

2. Yes, we do acknowledge that the Labour Party was originally set up by the trade unions as a parliamentary pressure group to try to get a better deal within capitalism for trade unionists and workers generally. In other words, its aim was not to seek working class emancipation from capitalist exploitation but merely to lessen that exploitation a little. While not of course being opposed to exploitation being lessened, we regarded this as a mistaken political (as opposed to trade-union) aim and so opposed the Labour Party and this reformist tactic from the start. It is true that in 1918 the Labour Party did adopt Clause 4 (nationalisation) as its policy, but this was still not socialism, merely state-run capitalism.

The experience of the last century has confirmed the soundness of the position we took then. Far from gradually changing capitalism, the experience of governing capitalism changed the Labour Party into a party that merely seeks to administer capitalism, into in fact the modern equivalent of the old Liberal Party that used to alternate with the Tories in governing capitalism and which the unions set up Labour to replace.

In fact, we are not sure whether your description “dilettante, fair-weather or eclectic 'supporters' of ordinary people's interest” is meant to apply to the modern Labour Party or the old Liberal Party since it would seem to apply to both.

Nationalisation has been and gone without making much difference to the workers affected.

Some measures, such as trade union legality and free education and health care, can benefit workers under capitalism even if they were introduced for other reasons (such as ensuring capitalist employers with a trained and healthy workforce). And, yes, some such measures were introduced under some Labour governments (though others were introduced under Liberal or Tory ones). However, these governments by no means governed in the interest of the workers. They were governments of capitalism and had to run capitalism in the only way it can be – at a profit – making system in the interests of those who live off profits rather than those who work for wages. So the 1929 Labour government reduced civil servants' wages and fell over a proposal to reduce unemployment pay. The 1945 Attlee government kept the wartime ban on strikes and used troops to break them. The Wilson and Callaghan governments of the 60s and 70s also imposed wage restraint and clashed with strikers. And we all know about the Blair government elected in 1997—**Editors**

Correction

Dear Editors,

I am disappointed you misprinted a key word in my letter and therefore undermined the logic and argument I was trying to present. Sentence three of paragraph three, should have read:

“If they do find Weapons of Mass Destruction . . .”

The important political point is that Blair, Reid and Straw will use the apparent discovery of WOMD to “justify” the war on Iraq. My point was that even if Saddam had WOMD, the fact he did not use them destroys the case he presented an immediate threat to his neighbours or the West.

ANDREW NORTHALL

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