

FOREWORD to the 2006 edition

This pamphlet is intended to be an introduction to the socialist view of how modern society operates and why we think socialism is necessary as a means of organising the world more effectively.

For such a society to be established, it is necessary first for a majority of the world's people to have a working knowledge of how the system we live

under – which we call capitalism – operates, and to understand what the change to socialism will mean. The aim of this pamphlet, therefore, is to contrast the present way of life with what a future socialist world would bring, and then to suggest what kind of political action can be taken to bring socialism about.

Chapter 1 looks at the lifestyle of a typical person in today's world. Chapter 2 traces human development in its different social stages, including the latest stage – capitalism – which there is no reason to consider the final one. Chapter 3 deals with the “nature” of the human animal and we have to be adapted to cope with the demands made on us by the changing material basis of society. Chapter 4 gives a view of what kind of society socialism would be and discusses the possible organisation of work in it compared with what work is like at present. Chapter 5 shows how once socialists are in the majority, we can democratically establish socialism.

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1. The Way We Live



What happens when we wake up in the morning? Most of us must get up and go to work. We may decide that we would rather lie in for an hour or so and dream of going on a world cruise. But the dictatorship of the alarm clock reminds us that dreaming will not pay the bills. Ideas of world cruises must give way to the reality of getting to work.

If we go to work by bus or train, we must buy a ticket. No money for the ticket and there will be no ride to work, even if the bus or train is half empty. Millions of workers set out by car. The roads are congested at the beginning of the working day with anxious men and women who cannot afford to be late. Very often there is one person in a car which could provide transport for four. Driving to work through the big city produces tense, angry, frustrated people, many of whom do not want to go where they are going, most of whom cannot afford not to.

We arrive at work. Some of us are employed to do useful work: farming, manufacturing essential goods, attending to the sick, performing music, driving buses and trains, teaching children how to read. Others of us do useless, destructive or antisocial work for our wage or salary. Soldiers are employed for the purpose of killing other human beings in time of war. Munitions workers are employed to build weapons of destruction. Sales promoters are employed to persuade people to buy what they may not really need or be able to afford. Servants are employed to look after people who are quite fit and capable of looking after themselves. None of these jobs is necessary to the smooth running of a sane society. We could all live without them.

For very many people the working day is something to be got through as quickly as possible, it is not that they are lazy, but the jobs that they are doing give them little or no personal satisfaction. Even potentially interesting jobs are often unpleasant because of the way in which it is necessary to be deferential to a boss or to skimp on quality work so that your employer can get as much as possible from you for the wage he is paying. Many people go home from their employment to work very hard on pursuits they find interesting and useful. It is not the work they dislike, but employment.

On the way home from work we may buy an evening paper. It will contain all sorts of trivia to take our minds off the stress of employment. But we may also read certain facts about the world we live in. We may read that food is being destroyed due to “overproduction” while millions are starving because they lack the money to buy that food. We may read that scientific advance now makes it possible to transport organs such as hearts and kidneys but that most technological research is devoted to the design of new weapons. We may read on the one hand of politicians saying that workers are not being productive enough, and on the other hand of economists saying that unemployment is necessary because the factories are producing more goods than there is a market for. Many of us conclude that we are living in a society that needs to be changed. But most people believe that it is best left to politicians to make the changes.

In the pub or social club at the weekend we can hear all kinds of ideas being expressed, many of them picked up from the newspapers or television. We can listen to the nationalist who announces that he is proud to be British. Yet 80 per cent of people in Britain own less wealth between them than the richest one per cent. Those who speak of “our country” usually have little more than a rent book or a mortgage to show for it. Then we can listen to racists who will blame problems on blacks or Asians or Eastern European immigrants. Their racism arises from fear that someone else is competing with them for housing or jobs. We can meet sexists who believe that a “woman’s place is in the home” or that men are inherently aggressive. We

can meet men and women who believe that their lives are being manipulated by an invisible god who lives above the clouds. We can meet people who talk about socialism and then point to China or the former Soviet dictatorship in Russia as examples. All these views are very common indeed. Those who oppose them are often called cranks or utopians.

It is hardly surprising that many people cannot cope with the tensions of this society without turning to drink, drugs or suicide. Others suffer in silence. Most fear crime, and the possibility of losing their job. They must always reach deep into their pockets to pay for the basic necessities of life. One in a million wins the Lottery and escapes from the treadmill of being a worker. Most of us do not. We must either work for an employer for a wage of a salary or beg from the state. We are wage slaves.

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2. A Highly Adaptable Animal

Compared with a lion, a gorilla, or even a horse, the human animal is weak, slow and defenceless. And yet *homo sapiens* has become the dominant species of the planet. Our species developed none of the specialist attributes that have fitted other creatures so perfectly for their environments.

Physiologically, we have hardly evolved at all since we became a distinct species. Whereas other species have evolved to fit their environments and the available food supplies, human beings have remained unspecialised, but very adaptable. Instead of their bodies altering to suit their environments humans have altered their environments to suit themselves.

Human beings spread across the surface of the planet, occupying tropical rain forests, deserts, temperate regions and even Arctic ice. They lived upon virtually every type of food possible, from seal fat to tropical fruits and desert insects. And from this variety of life-patterns arose wide differences in knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and behaviour. Almost every conceivable kind of belief and behaviour has been adopted by some human beings at some time somewhere. Although we are one species, from the jungle of New Guinea to the streets of New York, the inhabitants of different places may think and act in quite dissimilar ways. And yet a baby, carried across the world from New Guinea to New York and brought up there, could become a complete New Yorker, with the accent, the food preferences, the personal habits, the love of baseball and the Stars and Stripes and the average tendency towards obesity, heart disease, divorce and crime. The basic animal is the same, but all key behaviour patterns are shaped by the society in which the child is brought up.

Making a Living

But if societies mould individuals, different types of society are themselves shaped by a number of external factors, as well as by the activities of individuals and classes of people within them. The basic needs of the human animal are, like those of any other mammal, food, drink, warmth and sex; but these needs have not been easily met. For most of human existence the lives of the great majority have been dominated by scarcity. The methods of making a living from the land and sea have therefore been the major influences upon the sorts of lives people have led, the types of society that have been formed, and the attitudes and behaviour of the members of those societies.

The development of gathering roots and fruits, organised hunting and fishing, the growth of herding with its nomadic pattern of life, the emergence of agriculture, encouraging settlements, and the growth of towns and cities – all this has repeatedly modified

relationships within societies. It has modified the material conditions of life and led to the accumulation of riches for some and poverty for others. The discovery and utilisation of metals, and the development of more and more complex tools and machines have often gone hand in hand with progress in methods of making a living, increasing the amount of wealth produced per head of the population many times over; but the benefits of these improvements have not been shared by all members of society.

After the rise of settled townships on an agricultural base in Mesopotamia, trade between localities developed; for the first time the product of hands and brains took on an alien life as commodities to be bartered, and then bought with that abstract commodity, money. Property, realised at the boundaries between tribes, began to impinge within. Laws of inheritance were formulated and the first property society developed when people came to be bought and sold as slaves. Chattel slavery gave way to feudalism with its lords and serfs, and then feudalism to capitalism; and still all the land and factories and mines and transport are owned by a small minority of the population, who make the laws to protect their wealth, and employ the majority to work for them.

Employers and Employees

The fundamental division between workers and employers in the structure of modern society affects all the relationships within it. It affects feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and has a fundamental effect upon the personality of every individual. The child brought up in a family owning a few million shares, a few thousand acres, and four or five houses to live in has a completely different outlook on life from that of the child brought up in the average factory or office worker's semi-detached house on a housing estate. The children born into a family with adequate capital realise as they grow up that they are part of an elite with the freedom to choose how they occupy their lives. They may also realise that, although they will not necessarily do the hiring and firing themselves when they grow up, and may never even see the mines, factories and offices where their wealth is made, their inheritance of capital will make them employers of other human beings. The vast majority of children, on the other hand, become aware that their future depends upon being able to find someone to employ them. If they want to succeed in this endeavour, not only their education but their dress, their manners, their attitude to authority, even their political opinions must conform to the standards laid down by employers.

The employment they must seek is a fundamental part of a society in which the market, the price mechanism and the profit motive have come to dominate almost every aspect of life. There is a tendency for all relationships to be reduced to that of buyer and seller. And the interests of buyer and seller are opposed to one another. Good business consists of getting the better of someone. Competition means winning by fair means if possible, by foul means if necessary. The fictional heroes are gangsters, ruthless tycoons, spies "licensed to kill", or policemen using the same kind of unconventional methods.

Contradictory Values

This, therefore, is the atmosphere in which most children grow up. We are born essentially the same living beings as our ancestors of thousands of years ago; but we learn to think and feel and act from what goes on around us at an early age. From school, the newspapers and television, we take in the knowledge of the world's hunger and disease. At other times we learn that "butter mountains" are being piled up, milk poured down quarries, wheat burned, or crops ploughed back into the ground. We may not bring these facts together in our mind to raise questions about the system by which society is run – indeed we are actually discouraged

by the schools and the media from doing so. Instead we are persuaded to believe that the present organisation of society is eternal – even divinely ordained – and that it is ordinary people like ourselves with our selfishness, laziness and greed, who are to blame. And so, unresolved, these contradictions remain at the back of our mind, causing confusion, frustration, and a vague sense of guilty helplessness.

At school and at home we are repeatedly told that kindness, co-operation and constructiveness are the guidelines of good social behaviour; but the films about war, robbery and violent crime that form one of television's staple diets teach very different lessons: there are always "baddies" against whom violence is not only justified but necessary and even enjoyable – terrorists, Nazis, Apaches, criminals, mad scientists, Martians, agitators, Russian spies, and so on.

We are taught that hard work and thrift are the recipe for success in our future "career"; and then occasionally we see members of society's owning class in the news, who never do a day's proper work in their lives and spend money like water, playing at foxhunting on their ten thousand acre estates, or racing ocean-going yachts, or shooting grouse on their Scottish moors, while our hard-working, thrifty parents get worn out before our eyes with years of work and worry. Our potential for behaving with affection, generosity, trust and creativity is made to seem naive and ridiculous up against the power of wealth in a society of ruthless competition.

There are many different reactions to the disillusionment (sometimes called "maturity") that this causes, and none of them is good for the individual. The commonest, because it avoids conflict with authority and the forces of law and order, is an almost complete refusal to be concerned with the problems of society. Workers who take this line silently or openly admit that they cannot make sense of what goes on: and they absorb themselves energetically in their darts team or football supporters club, hobby or garden, trying to remain unaffected by the drudgery of their daily job, or the threats of unemployment or nuclear war. Others look for scapegoats to blame: black people (if they are white), white people (if they are black), men (if they are women), Asians, Jews, atheists, trade unionists, and so on. The fashions change from time to time.

Still others become completely cynical, turning to crime or something close to it, in an attempt to beat the system and to get hold of the only thing which seems to have any value – money. The use of anti-depressants and tranquillisers is widespread and the number of people who receive psychiatric treatment at some time in their lives has risen rapidly. We behave like this because we are forced to live under conflicting pressures which, as individuals, we do not have the power to resolve.

All of us, whether we remain relatively sane or not, are inevitably contaminated by the social values that provide the real motive power of capitalist society. In many ways the urgent, relentless drive to make profits, which can be reinvested as capital to make yet more profit, regardless of human need or suffering, is the essence of avarice or greed, yet it is the essence of modern society. The very structure of capitalism, in which the minority own and control all the means of producing and distributing wealth – and employ all the powers of the state to preserve their monopoly – has placed insecurity and self-interest at the very foundations of society. None of us can fail to be affected by it.

Yet, adaptable as we are, we cannot completely fit the pattern that modern capitalism demands, because it is inconsistent and, at times, directly contradictory. Articles and advertisements regularly appear in magazines and newspapers explaining how we can

become rich by setting up in business and applying “hard-headed business principles. But when workers, especially those organised in trade unions, apply such principles in wage negotiations there is a chorus of condemnation from the press. We hear, only too often, that “there is no sentiment in business”; but as workers we are exhorted equally often to be “loyal” to the company we work for. Modern wars are fought over power and wealth – as becomes only too clear when the truth comes out afterwards – but they are always presented to the working class as fights for freedom of one sort or another, in order to persuade us to risk our lives in killing workers from other countries.

This inconsistency is inevitable. Capitalist society is not a collection of individuals with common interests and a common set of guiding principles. It is a society deeply divided, at odds with itself. Class conflict was built into its foundations and shows up every day in its workings. To criticise workers as being selfish, greedy, uncooperative, deceitful, violent, when these are the main characteristics of the nations and the businesses with which we are compelled to be involved all our lives, is to add insult to two hundred years of injury. Certainly, these are anti-social forms of behaviour; but then this is an inhuman social system. If we, its working-class majority, allow it to continue, we can expect nothing better.

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3. Class In Society

It is common for people to think that society has always been organised in much the same way as it is now. Throughout history people have looked at the past and seen it in terms of the present. The features of our present system of society, therefore, are seen by many as being “natural” things have always been this way and they always will be. But the one constant of history is that everything changes. We live as we do today as a result of a long process of social evolution. Yesterday’s norms are today’s anachronisms.

Earlier Systems of Society

We do not know exactly how long-ago human beings evolved from other species. But the evidence suggests that modern man appeared some 40-60,000 years ago. For most of that time people lived communally, through hunting and gathering. For many thousands of years there was no private property, no money, no working for wages, no stock exchange and no class divisions. People lived with and for one another. It was a system of what has often been termed ‘primitive communism’.

Private property emerged as human beings increased their control over the environment. With the development of agriculture and the production of surpluses came the concept of ownership. The state then came about to defend private property, conferring legal rights of ownership upon individuals and giving them the power to defend their rights by the use of force. Along with the emergence of property came the division of society into classes too. The first class to achieve dominance was the slave-owning class. Men and women were captured in tribal battles and then put to work as the possessions of particular individuals. Slavery, at the time, was considered natural and inevitable.

Feudalism was then strengthened and expanded in Britain with the 11th century Norman Conquest. In the feudal economy all land was nominally owned by the King. The King granted lands to his tenants-in-chief, the aristocracy, and they in return had to give military service to him and pay customary dues which comprised a percentage of their wealth. Not

only did the feudal aristocracy and the church own most of the land, but they controlled the men and women who lived and worked on it. The landlords had their own courts, they levied taxes and exacted services from their serfs, and, in times of war, they ordered their subjects to fight their battles. The power of the feudal lord depended on the amount of land he owned and the number of peasants he could control. Peasants had feudal obligations to their landlords: they either had to work on his land for a certain length of time each week or else they had to give him a portion of their produce in return for living on his land. Either way, the landlord received his wealth without having to work, while the toilers received just about enough to keep themselves and their families alive.

Every feudal manor had common land which the peasants had access to in order to provide for their own needs. Capitalist social relations emerged with the expropriation of this common land by the aristocracy in the 15th and 16th centuries. The lands were enclosed to be used for sheep farming rather than arable cultivation. One reason for this was that the new Flemish woollen industry made sheep more profitable tenants than peasants. Enclosure destroyed the lives of thousands of peasant families, turning them into propertyless vagabonds. In his famous work *Capital*, dealing with the “primitive accumulation of capital”, Karl Marx wrote:

The fathers of the present working class were chastised for their enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers. Legislation treated them as “voluntary” criminals and assumed that it depended on their own goodwill to go on working under the old conditions that no longer existed.

Deprived of their land, their homes, their traditional surroundings and the protection of the law, the expropriated peasantry were left to sell the one thing they still possessed – their ability to work. The introduction of wage labour was the starting point of capitalism.

The Capitalist System

The historical transitions from slavery to feudalism and then from feudalism to capitalism were changes from one social system to another. A social system is a network of relationships: in slave society men and women were owned; under feudalism they were compelled to give up a proportion of what they produced; under capitalism they are hired and are given, in the form of wages and salaries, less than they produce in value. All these systems are based upon a division between those who own and control the means of producing and distributing wealth, and those who do not. Under the present system, capitalism, the means of producing and distributing wealth are owned and controlled by a minority group within society – the capitalist class. Capitalists are men and women who are characterised by owning sufficient capital (wealth invested to gain more wealth) to enable them to live without having to work. The productive and distributive resources of capitalism do not belong to everyone in society, but to those who possess the right of ownership. In Western-type capitalism – sometimes called ‘private enterprise capitalism’ or ‘the market economy’, this ownership takes the legal form of written titles and deeds. In the state-run capitalism of countries like China, Cuba, and formerly Russia, ownership is officially vested in the whole population, but in practice the minority class of bureaucrats who control the political system there control production and distribution, and by virtue of that control they also effectively enjoy the right of ownership and reap the benefits from this.

Such a right, whether in a private enterprise-type capitalism, or in state capitalism, is not obtained by merit, or virtue or hard work. Indeed, many capitalists have never been inside the

factories or offices that they own. And they do not need to, for they live off the surplus derived from exploiting wage labour without ever having to do work themselves.

Exploitation means that workers receive in the form of wages or salaries less than the value of the goods and services they produce. It is this unpaid labour of the working class which, taking a monetary form, is the source of the wealth and privileged income of the capitalist class. In the private enterprise economy this income takes the form of rent, interest and profit, while under state-run capitalism it tends to take the form of hugely bloated “salaries”, bonuses, special privileges such as imported luxuries, and a whole variety of payments in kind. In both varieties of capitalism the essential features are the same: a class monopoly of the means of producing wealth, the operation of a wages system, production of goods and services for sale and profit, and the further accumulation of capital out of this profit.

Production for profit in capitalism means that human needs will invariably come second to the need to obtain a profit. If food cannot be produced with an expectation of profit it will not be produced at all or, if it is produced and then cannot be sold at a profit, it will be stockpiled, dumped or destroyed. In India, where millions are perpetually hungry, soldiers are employed to guard grain mountains of many millions of tons. Starving people, with no money to spend, do not constitute “effective demand” under capitalism. If you lack money you are denied access to the basic necessities of life. You may have ideas or initiative or desires, but if you are broke you must go without. Capitalists have money to buy what they need because workers produce their rents, their bank interest and their dividends for them. Most workers, even in Britain, rarely have enough money to satisfy more than their everyday needs.

Class Struggle

Capitalism also generates conflict. It makes workers compete against one another and often divides them into competing groups. But the main conflict in capitalist society is between the class interests of the capitalists and the class interests of the workers. These interests are essentially antagonistic. The capitalists, who directly or indirectly control the media, the education system and the major political parties, try to camouflage this conflict. They pretend that there are no classes, that we are all one national family, that we are all in our rightful places, that buying and selling, working for wages and production for profit are as natural as the sun and the moon. Many people believe them, but experience does not support this belief, for historically workers have had to respond to their class condition by forming trade unions to negotiate with their employers over the price of the mental and physical energies they sell. This is a necessary defensive measure, but a severely limited one. To leave all the productive machinery in the hands of the capitalist class and then to demand higher wages and better conditions of employment from that class is to negotiate from a position of permanent weakness. It is to negotiate about the terms of exploitation rather than to strive to end it.

The class struggle is not a romantic battle which is entered into by heroic warriors, as self-styled “left-wingers” like to imagine. In fact, we are all in the class struggle whether we like it or not. Every time we moan in the pub about unemployment going up, complain to our neighbours that the mortgage payments or rent have increased, or we decide to go on strike or hold a public meeting to air a grievance, we are responding to our class condition. Every time a politician or industrialist calls for greater productivity or repressive laws designed to maintain ‘order’; they too are participating in the class struggle – on the other side.

Not only is there a battle between classes however. There is also one within classes. And it is not only workers who are often disunited and weakened as a class. Capitalists are divided too

– into nation states, economic blocs and military alliances. And their competition over markets, raw materials and strategic positions often breaks out into open and bloody battle. International warfare is one of the most horrific and tragic consequences of capitalism and capitalism today has become a system of permanent warfare. These wars are not fought over pious ideals like justice, nationhood, democracy or religion. They are fought over power and control related to the need of capitalists for markets, sources of raw materials, investment outlets, trade routes and the strategic positions to defend all these. Workers have no interest in such objectives, yet in this century alone millions of lives have been lost fighting for them.

Scarcity or Abundance?

All this may seem unduly critical of the capitalist system. After all, has it not been responsible for building up technology to the point where we now have a potential abundance of wealth? But, for the working class, in the present age of potential plenty, rationing by the money system is an outdated way of distributing goods. In an age when we could produce for use without anyone going short, producing for sale and profit is an obstacle to the real satisfaction of human needs and desires.

Compared with the natural scarcity of previous ages, the scarcity that exists in the 21st century is artificial. Advances in agriculture, science and technology have made it quite possible to produce enough – indeed an abundance – for every man, woman and child on the planet. And yet millions of people are starving, and the majority of the world’s population lives in varying degrees of poverty. Meanwhile the production of food is often cut back; produce is stockpiled or destroyed, farmers are paid to stop producing, but almost nothing is done for the millions who are starving. This is not because the capitalists who own the food are wicked, selfish people (though some of them may be), so it is pointless for religious and other moralists to keep calling for a change of heart. It is because the present world economic system is incapable of feeding those who cannot afford to pay.

If food were to be given away in large quantities, prices would collapse. There is therefore no possibility of solving such problems while capitalism lasts, The only basis on which the powers of production developed under capitalism can be used for the benefit of all is if the means of producing for our needs become the common property of the whole community, under democratic control. Since capitalism is already a world system, so must socialism be. Socialism thus entails the free association of the world’s people. This global community will make arrangements to use the world’s resources to produce wealth solely and directly to satisfy needs and desires. This will mean an end to wage labour (that is, selling one’s ability to work in order to gain some access to wealth), an end to separate countries and separate “firms”, an end to money and all forms of exchange. Instead people will have free access to all available goods and services according to their own self-defined needs.

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4. Socialism As We See It

The comic cartoon idea of the cave man with his club displaying aggression towards everyone is a typical fiction of modern capitalism. It has no foundation in fact. Such an individual would not have lasted a week in the world of prehistory. Human beings have survived and prospered on this planet because they are adaptable and because they have co-operated with one another. Long before there were private property societies with their class divisions and exploitation, small hunter-gatherer communities relied for their existence upon all members of the clan playing their part. This co-operation lasted for many tens of

thousands of years, and the remnants of it can still be seen in surviving primitive communities such as the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert, the pygmies of the Congo rain forests, Australian aborigines, and South American Indians. The patterns of behaviour and thought associated with such social living are therefore deeply embedded in our languages and culture.

In comparison with this enormous length of time, the last six or seven thousand years of private property are only a small fraction of human existence. Based upon conflict and the exploitation of the majority by ruling elites, they have worked in opposition to long-standing human values and behaviour, causing a growth and spread of mental distress and deep antagonisms within society. Nevertheless, even class-divided societies such as our present system of capitalism rely upon the human tendency to co-operate. Although all sorts of persuasion, pressure, and even coercion are used to direct the activities of the working class into profit-making forms of work and unprotesting forms of leisure, coercion alone is quite inadequate. A working class which unanimously decided not to co-operate would bring the running of society to a halt. No force would be effective. It is just because of the certainty of daily co-operation by human beings, however badly they may be treated, that exploitative, repressive social regimes like our own have managed – and are managing – to survive.

In modern society workers operate the production and distribution of wealth and the administration of the capitalist system largely against their own interests. The ideology of capitalism insists that individualism and ruthless competition are the only worthwhile guides to behaviour, and money the only worthwhile prize. Indeed, its ideology is as cheap and shoddy as so many of its products. Many workers believe in it, but it is so alien and artificial, especially in personal relationships, that many suffer great stress and insecurity.

A Truly Human Society

The next stage of society, socialism, will come as a welcome relief. It will bring comparative harmony to human relationships. Far from needing a special sort of behaviour from people, socialism will run on the patterns of action, thought and feeling that have been the norms throughout most of human existence. Human beings will not become any more “good” or “kind” or “helpful” or “gentle”; but the pressures which now prevent them being all of these things at different times will have gone – shortage of money, fear of unemployment, fear of lawbreakers, fear of the law itself, fear of war, fear of the boss, even fear of the trade union, and so on. All these pressures arise directly out of the capitalist organisation of society. When we finish with capitalism, we shall have removed these influences upon the thoughts and actions of every member of the working class.

The pressures which remain – those of social living, of coping with the environment, of wrestling with all the problems of production and distribution, these pressures will still be considerable. The difference is that these are practical problems, not economic ones forced upon us by a useless ruling class and their repressive state machine, and an uncontrollable society that pits people against one another as a matter of course. Real pressures and problems can be seen for what they are. They do not provoke neurotic responses and frustrated violence. Practical problems are what calls human co-operation into action. The land will be ours, the factories and offices and roads and railways and offices and ships and aircraft will be everybody’s, and so we shall have a personal interest in keeping them working, keeping them up to standard and improving them. The whole of society will benefit from every constructive act or useful piece of work we do – not just some company’s profit and loss account, some multi-millionaire’s annual dividend.

Technology in Capitalism and Socialism

Socialist society will function quite differently from capitalist society, although initially at least it will have to use mainly the same equipment. The difference that will be most noticeable will be the simplicity once the cumbersome paraphernalia of capitalism has been removed. Many people today, especially the so-called expert economists and political theorists, are completely engrossed in the ramifications of present capitalist society. They are so conditioned by the impossible job of trying to make capitalism work effectively that they find it difficult to imagine how a real alternative to it could function.

Also, complication and mystification form a smokescreen behind which the real workings of capitalism can remain obscure or hidden. And so, the ordinary worker feels that he or she cannot possibly understand, let alone influence, the running of society. Another difficulty is that modern science and technology have developed with capitalism. This makes it seem at times that there are good scientific and technical reasons for the complexity of life and work in the modern capitalist state. Capitalist propaganda takes advantage of this and often tries to turn the frustration and anger that workers feel on to scientific and technical workers, as though they were the ones who decided to make the obscene weapons of modern war, thalidomide, battery farms or polluted rivers. Of course, it is capitalist business and the capitalist state that decide what workers shall produce or what experiments and research they will fund.

The demands of profitability, competition and international rivalry determines the lines along which scientific and technological development shall generally take place. Computers are a good example of this. Their main uses at present are in handling and storing the vast quantities of financial transactions and data that are essential to the money system (wages and deductions, income tax returns, bank statements, mail order accounts, files of bad debtors, etc), and in recording the increasing amount of information on individuals that has become necessary for the state to keep control of. They are also, however, used to perform complex scientific calculations such as the prodigious mathematics of space flights and the ballistics of intercontinental missiles. Therefore they could be used to help organise large production processes, to forecast trends and developments of many kinds, to designing engineering components and systems, to search out and assemble information, and to carry out many other tasks which are almost impossible for human beings because of the immense length of time they would take. Such socially useful applications of computers have been much slower in development and employment because of their marginal profitability. When people complain, as they often do, that computers are “taking over”, what they are complaining about is the fact that instead of simplifying life and work as they should do, computers in capitalism have been used to complicate it. In socialism, linked by communication satellites across the world, they could monitor people’s wants, assist in the organisation of production to keep pace with them, and help dispatch the goods to go where they were needed.

How Socialism Will Solve Problems

When we are young, we often see problems that need solving, and we think, “why don’t they do so and so?” As we get older, we gradually learn the reasons: because it would not be profitable; because no-one will invest the capital; because there is too much competition from other sources; because some firm has a virtual monopoly in that field and will buy up or force out new ideas; because there are patents protecting the device; because it would cause political problems; and so on. At our place of work, in the area where we live, even with world-wide problems, we can often see better ways of doing things, and yet they rarely get

done. If we take the trouble to find out how capitalism works we realise that many of these common sense things, like using “surplus” food to prevent people starving in the world, simply cannot be done within the current system on any regular basis.

In a socialist world, the claims of any one proposal will have to be balanced against the claims of many others. And it will not be “they” who make the decisions and carry out the work; it will be “we”. There will be a great deal of discussion, small-scale and large-scale, and the process of decision-making will be democratic. Television, which is at present taken up for the greater part of its time with what currently passes for “entertainment”, could become a forum for much of the large-scale discussion and decision-making, providing us with vivid, well researched information and covering many points of view. Telephone conferencing, the internet and other growing means of telecommunication could unite groups scattered round the world so that they could discuss projects, share information and reach decisions on a democratic basis. Such means could also be used for ascertaining the level of demand for many goods and services.

The primary task of socialism will be to produce enough of all the things that people need and to get them to the right places at the right times. This will require a large part of the administrative organisation already built up within capitalism; but it will require more. Firstly, in the world as a whole, not enough of the most useful things is ever produced. It is a system of artificial scarcity. In socialism we shall need to produce much more, so that everyone can have enough. And it will be quite possible to do this.

One example of how this can happen compared to what happens now relates to the way in which periodically, world-wide capitalism enters severe slumps because too much has been produced for available markets. Goods pile up, unable to be sold, and enterprises shut down. When this occurs the production of goods and services falls hugely below its potential. The number of unemployed workers runs into tens of millions. Factories, machines and offices, ships and lorries, buildings and land stand idle because they cannot be used profitably. The productive potential of all these is enormous; but it is by no means the whole story. Many of the factories and farms, mines and ships that remain working are typically on short time and a large proportion of the production that is still being carried on will be in weapons, equipment or services for making war, rather than production of things that are genuinely useful.

More noticeable than any of this in capitalism, however – whether in slump or boom – is the number of workers and the plant and equipment devoted to running and protecting the system of capitalism itself. Apart from all the forces of law and order, much of whose work we rarely see, the financial system itself is a coercive apparatus that we tend to take for granted. It is totally useless to a free society, but in capitalism a large number of the working population spend their lives in its service. Although the following lists are far from complete, they give some idea of the social costs of running the capitalist system:

PRODUCTS CONCERNED WITH MONEY

- account books and computer files
- armoured vehicles
- bank books
- bank notes
- bank statements
- bills
- billfolds
- books on finance

cash cards
cash points
cash registers
change machines
cheques
cheque cards
coin boxes
deposit and withdrawal slips
excise and duty stamps
football coupons
gambling machines
guarantees
insurance certificates
insurance policies
invoices
licences for:
export & import
marriage
motor vehicles
selling alcohol firearms
tobacco
television sets
meters for:
electricity
gas
parking
telephones
water
money orders and postal orders
mortgage agreements
night safes
overdrafts
overtime payments
parking tickets
pension books
postage stamps
raffle tickets
rates demands
receipts
rents and rent books
safes
saving certificates
share certificates
slot machines
stock markets
strong rooms
tax returns: income tax corporation
tax VAT
tickets for: cinemas, theatres, buses, trains, etc
ticket offices

ticket machines
travellers' cheques
turnstiles
TV give-away shows
wages slips
wallets
Wills

MONEY OCCUPATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS

accountants
advertising agencies
auctioneers
auditors
banking
bailiffs
bookkeepers
bookmakers
building societies
buyers
capitalists
cashiers
casinos
charities
christmas clubs
consumer protection
credit card agencies
credit worthiness investigators
debt collectors
economists
estate agents
excise officers
financial advisers
finance houses
friendly societies
football pools
fundraisers
grant awarding trusts
health finance schemes
hire purchase firms
holding companies
income tax officers
inspectors of weights and measures
insurance brokers
insurance companies
investment consultants
licensing officers
loan companies
luncheon voucher schemes
management consultants
market analysts

mints
money lenders
mortgage brokers
national health insurance
patents offices and copyright
enforcement
pension funds
post offices
public relations officers
raffles
rate-fixers for piecework
rates offices receivers
rent collectors
salesmen and saleswomen
security firms
social security offices
stock brokers and jobbers
stock exchanges
superannuation schemes
tax consultants
ticket sellers, collectors and inspectors
totes
trade unions treasurers
underwriters
unemployment benefit offices
unit trusts
valuers
wages clerks
work study engineers

In the moneyless world of socialism, where private property will not exist, the people currently involved in such occupations will be able to choose more rewarding and useful kinds of work. But this is only the beginning: restrictive practices and regulations that exist in capitalism, whether initiated by employers, governments, or trading-blocs such as the European Union, or even the defensive practices of trade unions, deliberately curtail a great deal of production. And the possibilities of automation, which the capitalist system can only introduce in bits and pieces, are, as yet, largely unrealised. Tedious, dirty or dangerous jobs that at present constitute a miserable working life for so many millions of workers across the world could be automated in socialist society. We have developed a technology so sophisticated that it can send machines to the surface of the planet Mars, scrape up soil samples and analyse them. This suggests that there is no existing social problem that we cannot solve. The science and technology are already established to create a world of abundance for everyone; but only socialism can turn it into a reality.

To support the whole process of production and distribution, socialist society will need a highly sophisticated system of information: about what people want, in what quantities; and about what is being produced all over the world. Capitalism has already developed technology and techniques which could make such a world-wide system extremely fast, comprehensive and accurate. But because of competition and the secrecy that goes with it; because of the market and its fluctuations; above all because the main aim of capitalism is to

produce profit, not goods, capitalism cannot develop a really sensible and workable information system. For a socialist world it will be vital.

Democratic Choice

A socialist world will, of course, be what we all make it. Everyone's ideas and efforts will contribute. Everyone will, if they choose to, have an equal voice in the democratic decisions that are taken. Perhaps this is one thing about socialist society that most of us today would find strikingly different – the amount of discussion that will take place about what things are to be made and built. There will be no market forces offering a quick profit in plastic handbags or causing a shutdown in shipping. There will be no governments imposing taxes, preparing for germ warfare, tapping telephones or closing hospitals. Roadbuilding, shipping, agriculture, manufacturing, distribution, services, entertainment – these things will be everybody's concern. And these things – not crimes or wars – will be news. The whole pattern of production and distribution will become a conscious social process.

It is this that will be in such marked contrast with capitalism, where the process as a whole is outside the control, not only of individuals, but of governments and even international agencies. This is because everything is dominated by the movements of money capital, the operation of the price system and the unpredictable fluctuations of the market. This capitalist system can be tampered with but it can never be brought under social control. The step forward into socialism will dispense with the anarchy of this market mechanism completely. From then onwards society will have to decide whether or not to irrigate a desert, or how great the demand is for galvanised roofing nails. The only way in which such decisions can be made is by increased information and discussion-by making open and conscious all those fluctuations and individual decisions which in capitalism are hidden and unconscious. But, of course, socialism will be much less complicated than capitalism; and the information needed will be simpler, consisting of straightforward material factors without the complexities of market economics. There will be no capitalist class, competing amongst themselves with secrecy and skulduggery, and exploiting the majority of the population, the working class, for the maximum possible growth in capital. Needs will be the spur to production in the socialist world, not profit.

Socialism is only possible because capitalism has preceded it. Capitalism has developed techniques of production potentially capable of producing an abundance; it has developed a world-wide working class which runs every aspect of modern society; and it is rapidly developing information technology making world-wide communication simpler and more direct. But at the same time capitalism frustrates all the developments because of the workings of capital itself and the interests of the capitalist class. The same sort of pattern can be seen in detail. Supermarkets, for example, are a highly efficient method of putting a wide range of consumer goods within the reach of a large number of people. The trouble with supermarkets is the bottleneck at the cash desk. Because money will be useless in a socialist world, so will the cash desks. "Supermarkets" will then be able to function at full efficiency. Their shelves will be kept full by the removal of all the financial and trading restrictions that now cause butter mountains, wine lakes, and often ruin for farmers.

Work in Socialism

Work will also undergo a complete change as socialist society develops. We have noted the fact that capitalist society is extremely wasteful of human labour in many ways and only introduces labour-saving automation when profitable. At present levels of production, therefore, the actual amount of work needed of one person could be much less than it is now.

Even with the increased output needed for a developed socialist world it will probably not be necessary for most people to work as long or as hard as they do today. But this is not the most important of the changes that will take place. The really noticeable change, right from the beginning, will be in the status and the conditions of work.

In capitalism, because the places where we work are owned by another class, we have no say in what we produce, how it is produced, or where it goes to; and we have very little control over where we work, the conditions we work in, the tools and machines we work with, or the raw materials we handle. Moreover, the existing system of education and training, with its ladder of examinations and certificates, means that we get channelled into certain types of jobs, and it becomes harder and harder to change as we grow older, so become “a teacher”, “a machine operator”, “a nurse” for the rest of our working lives. With the establishment of socialism, we shall cease to be a working class. The labour market will have gone.

Living in a society of equality we shall have a direct influence upon whatever work we do. The workplace, the tools, the organisation, the quality and quantity of the goods or services we provide will be our concern and under our democratic control; and we shall no doubt be interested in who uses our products and for what. Those working in factories, warehouses, transport, and so on will be able to review the machines, the tools, the buildings, and decide that certain improvements are necessary. Although they will co-ordinate their proposals with other related groups in the network of production and distribution, the final control over their conditions of work will be theirs. Society will be unable to compel anyone to work in conditions they find unacceptable. This means that only those jobs which people are prepared to do will be done. If no-one will go down coal mines, even for the sake of the admiration and gratitude of the community, we shall either manage without coal or develop other forms of technology.

This freedom from compulsion will eventually give rise to a completely different pattern of work for the individual, and a completely different attitude towards it. Only a few dedicated enthusiasts will want to do the same job every day throughout their lives. Most of us will want variety. We shall want to develop whatever skills we have and use all of them at one time or another. So, some people may settle down to doing two or three different jobs on different days of the week or times of the year. Others may devote themselves exclusively to one interest for four or five years until they have satisfied themselves, and then move on to something else. It may even become necessary to “book” a job, as we now book a holiday or an hour on a tennis court. And we may well see traditions develop where certain types of work are done by young people because they require a lot of energy and physical fitness. Patterns will probably vary in different parts of the world.

The essentials of a socialist world are that society’s means of producing and distributing what it needs will be owned by everyone and democratically controlled by everyone. It is from this change that all the other changes will follow. What society and the individuals within it will do with the freedom and co-operation that it makes possible we can guess at, but we cannot lay down in advance. Nevertheless, there is no reason why we should not discuss the possibilities now, if only to keep clear in our minds the important fact that socialism will not be capitalism with minor reforms, but a totally different social system. We may begin with the equipment taken over from capitalism, but we shall adapt it for quite a new way of life that will develop further and further away from the pattern imposed upon us by capitalism.

5 How To Achieve Socialism – No Minorities

Socialism can only be established when a great majority of workers understand and want it. It would be absurd for a minority of conscious socialists today to try to take over and impose the new system on an unwilling majority. Such a strategy would certainly fail, with the armed forces, controlled by the majority-backed government, being used to defeat the rebels. The idea is heroic fantasy at best and would lead to a bloody tragedy at worst. And even if such a method of ‘revolution’ were successful – if a determined minority should seize political power in an attempt to introduce socialism on behalf of the working class – there would be no prospect of it resulting in a socialist society.

It would not be possible to run a society in which everybody contributed co-operatively according to their abilities and took freely according to their needs unless the great majority of people understood the arrangement and wanted it. It would not be possible to establish and maintain a society based upon conscious democratic control unless the great majority were prepared to exert that democratic control. If the population did not want to participate in social decision-making and were prepared to leave it to a particular minority, that minority would be forced to become the exclusive decision makers themselves and would eventually become a new ruling class. But in the final analysis, the very fact that a minority wanted it would show that they did not understand the full implications of socialism themselves, and so were not really socialists.

A look at the various theories of minority, or minority-led, action to establish ‘socialism’ – essentially Lenin’s Bolshevism and its various offshoots, Stalinism, Trotskyism, Maoism, Castroism, etc confirms that in practice these have been the ideologies of would-be national ruling classes aiming to industrialise economically backward parts of the world through a policy of state capitalism misleadingly called ‘socialism’. Their tactics – a vanguard party of professional revolutionaries, violent insurrection, ruthless measures against the old rulers and all opponents – are thus quite irrelevant for a genuine socialist movement, though superficially attractive to those who want radical social change, yet despair of ever winning over a currently indifferent or conservative-minded working class. In the unlikely event of them being successful in some highly industrialised country the outcome would be some form of state capitalism, certainly not socialism.

The Power of the State

The establishment of socialism must be the work of a socialist-minded, democratically organised working-class majority. The socialist revolution, in other words, must be a majority revolution. This is because of the power of the state in capitalism. Throughout history, the state has been the machinery that exists for the defence of minority ownership by a ruling class, and also that class’s instrument for administering the entire system that allows them their minority ownership in the first place – this being in today’s society, the system of capitalism. It follows therefore that before capitalism can be abolished and socialism established the state must be taken over, firstly to prevent it being used to forcibly resist the change, and secondly so as to utilise its administrative facilities within the new system. Any attempt to establish socialism while leaving coercive power in the hands of the capitalist state would meet with brutal resistance. The idea entertained by some that capitalism can be ‘brought to its knees’ by workers organising a general strike through their trade unions but not taking over the state is quite untenable. Trade unions, which are sectional organisations, are no substitute for a political party which has as its clear aim the conquest of state power.

Socialism will not come therefore from minority action aimed at disrupting society and then taking advantage of the resulting social and political instability to seize government power in an armed uprising. Nor will it come from ignoring or trying to bypass the state. Socialism will come from a majority revolution which undertakes the task of gaining control of state power.

Where does the state's power come from? The power to form a government is invested in the votes of the electorate, where there is an electoral system. In countries like Britain the vast majority of the electorate are members of the working class. It would be impossible for the capitalist minority to appoint a government of its choice within the electoral system unless they persuade a significant number of workers to vote for such a government. It is true that different sections of the capitalist class favour different styles of government and therefore huge funds are invested by them to influence workers into voting for one party rather than another. But many capitalists are aware that the only real differences between the parties are their marginally different policies for running the system. The whole of the capitalist class, however, has an interest in ensuring that working-class support for capitalism continues, as it is through this support – in the tangible form of votes – that the capitalist class maintains its position of power.

The Learning Process

Many workers clearly see the vast gulf between the pampered minority who own the world and the rest of us, the propertyless producers, but what can be done about it? Most think the way out is merely through their own individual advancement, not a social revolution. There is nothing particularly wrong with a person wishing to move up within capitalism: it is inevitable that workers will want to do so. But rags to riches stories are rare; that is why they make headlines. Under feudalism the ambition of the early capitalists was to become feudal lords themselves, and some did. But eventually the interests of the capitalists became so much opposed to feudalism that they had to destroy it.

In the same way the modern working class will learn – and is learning – that any progress they may make within the confines of capitalism leaves the roots of their problems untouched, and often creates new problems.

Capitalism itself causes workers to learn. It increasingly demands healthy, well-educated wage-slaves, trained to think clearly and critically to cope with the technical nature of modern industry and the ever more complex nature of modern society. In many countries, including Britain, it has suited the ruling class to yield to working class pressure for the vote. This means that the democratic machinery for putting an end to capitalism is available to us when we, as a united working class, decide to use it. At present the working class in this country, as in other countries, votes repeatedly for capitalism run by one party or another. Most workers have not yet realised how deeply entrenched are the causes of their problems, and how futile are the patches and tinkering and minor adjustments to capitalism. As more of them do so the number becoming socialists will increase at a faster rate. This in turn will increase the ability to propagate socialist ideas and information, and more socialist parties will be formed in other countries. During this period there is bound to be a growing amount of discussion about the working of the future socialist society. Not only will there be private conversations and public meetings, but newspapers, radio and television will find the topic impossible to ignore. More and more people will become clear about what is at stake and what are the steps necessary to make the change from capitalism. Socialists may well be organising planning conferences so that all the problems of expanding production and

distribution to cater for everybody can be foreseen and dealt with as soon as society is free to do it.

This is probably also the period when governments will make strenuous efforts to maintain support for the existing social structure. Large numbers of workers will have become able to resist appeals to illusions such as 'the national interest' or 'our traditional way of life' because they will have seen through them. Governments will think twice about using repressive measures because these can arouse stronger and more determined opposition. It is more likely that they will begin to offer reforms which would be thought impossible today, in an attempt to fob off the working class. The capitalist parties may at this point decide to sink their differences and work closely together, much as religions are doing today in the face of the growing number of unbelievers. They will perhaps try to manipulate capitalism to provide a batch of free services (gas, electricity, transport, etc.) with the claim that this heralds the 'beginning' of the free society. But socialists will not be so easily deceived.

The Socialist Majority

With a majority of socialists and large socialist parties in all the main countries, we shall be in a position to establish socialism. In the unlikely event of there being a country without some form of political democracy at this time, socialists could apply pressure from all over the world to insist upon its introduction. The parties formed by socialists will be thoroughly democratic: their policy and all their activities will be under the active control of their members; they will have no leaders. In this they will be completely different from existing parliamentary parties or Leninist 'vanguard' parties. Being the actual movement of the working class to establish socialism they will reflect, as far as is possible under capitalism, the organisational forms of socialism, namely democratic control and popular participation. And far from being parties which seek to lead workers with attractive slogans, they will merely be the instrument workers can use to win political power once a majority of them have become socialists. Such parties will of course have to elect candidates to contest the elections for public offices. But those appointed will simply be mandated delegates from the working-class socialist majority. The position will be the exact reverse of that in existing parliamentary parties. Instead of the party outside parliament being essentially vote-catchers for the parliamentary leadership, socialist MPs and councillors will merely be the messengers of the socialist working class outside parliament, democratically organised in their socialist political parties and economic organisations. And, naturally, the aim of sending socialist delegates to parliament will not be to form a 'socialist government' (a contradiction in terms) but to abolish capitalism as smoothly and peacefully as possible.

The task of socialist delegates, when elected in every country, will be: firstly, to take over the state machine in the name of the great majority of the population, the working class; secondly, to enact legislation making the means of production and distribution the common property of the whole community under the democratic control of all the people; and thirdly, and as a consequence, to abolish the state itself along with those coercive powers and agencies necessary to the maintenance of class society but superfluous in socialism. The remaining administrative institutions (such as health services, education, communications and state-run industries) may be temporarily maintained in their existing form, but fully democratised, as will be the case with the entire organisation of production and distribution. All useful regulations will also be maintained and adapted to the requirements of socialist society.

Some political theorists think it possible that the police and armed forces would be used to resist such a democratic socialist revolution. In practice it is extremely unlikely, since those who make up these forces of repression are workers, not capitalists. When socialist understanding is widespread among the working class they cannot fail to be influenced by it. Once they see which way the social wind is blowing, not very many of them are likely to want to risk their lives for their masters' wealth, power and privileges. And, in the final analysis, the police and armed forces are supported, supplied, housed and fed by society as a whole. They cannot continue as organised bodies if society decides they shall not.

Useful Production

Once socialism is established, there will be a rapid growth in the amount and quality of useful goods produced. As there will no longer be any patents or industrial secrets, all productive units will have access to the most advanced technical processes. There will no longer be any banks, stock exchanges, wages offices, advertising agencies, and although some of the workers previously in these fields may continue to be concerned with statistics relating to production and distribution, many millions of them will be released to involve themselves in socially useful activities such as house building, food production, telecommunications and other rapidly expanding sectors.

It is reasonable to suppose that, since the revolution will not take anyone by surprise, many workers will have been, within capitalism, preparing themselves for new occupations in socialism. Trade unions and other workers' organisations will probably have been adapting themselves to help the growing socialist movement to prepare for the future running society based on production for use. Resources and manpower invested in armaments production will be switched to the satisfying of human needs. Onslaughts will be made on any centres of backwardness and destitution. These will not be given the kind of Cinderella treatment now awarded to 'community development' but instead the top priority now enjoyed by 'defence'. In fact, since socialism will grow directly out of capitalism, the present organisational machinery of the armed forces could be used for this end, since they are the most efficient means capitalism has developed for moving men and materials fast. Think of the implications for famine victims in, say, Ethiopia, or the Sudan, if the full system of communications, transport and services available for military purposes were available for the distribution of relief supplies.

The socialist revolution will be unlike all previous revolutions because, instead of one minority seizing power from another, it will be the majority taking power to establish a classless, stateless, moneyless, democratic society. And it will be a society consciously organised directly for human need, in which planning will play an important part – but in a completely different way from the so-called 'planned' economies of the formerly state capitalist countries – Russia, Poland, Albania, etc. Production and distribution will be planned because the vast majority of men and women will be actively and democratically co-operating to provide themselves with what they want, where and when they want it. This will put an end to the anarchy of production and haphazard distribution – 'domination of the product over the producer' – which exists in capitalism.

The World Socialist Movement

The revolutionary task of the movement for world socialism is therefore twofold: it is firstly to persuade our fellow members of the working class to reject capitalism and to aim for nothing less than socialism; and secondly to engage in political action for the purpose of

measuring the growth of the socialist movement and, when the majority join us, of achieving our objective of bringing into being a new, exciting stage of human existence.

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