

THEIR SOCIALISM AND OURS

At a time when huge masses are manifesting their unease about what lies ahead for society and when each individual's happiness is forever being postponed due to the storm of events, ideas and words are losing their meanings, merely adding to the confusion in the minds of men. This, no doubt about it, is a blatant sign of the disorder that prevails among the ruling or privileged classes for whom clear thinking would be suicidal and, having some foresight, they are trying to cover up their selfishness with brand new theories. But that such a change of doctrinal clothes and aims should be coming from the drivers of the workers' movement is less understandable. In their case, we are not dealing with an ignorance due to their education, nor a spirit of social conservatism, but with intellectual dishonesty.

When the Labour Party's Attlee talks about wanting to respect the rights of the Egyptian people and announces that British troops will be pulled out of the Nile Valley, he knows for a fact that this is only a spectacular ploy designed to keep the fates of 14 million "fellahs" and workers who make up that Arab nation tied to the fate of the British Empire. When Thorez urges French workers to step up productivity more and more "so that we can have a better life", he is not unaware that that slogan has no real value other than as a rejection of American aid and as a help to Russian pressure in matters of international policy. When Prestes, the Brazilian communist leader, having denounced Colonel Peron as an Axis agent, then goes on to introduce him as an imperialist element, one cannot but suspect that he is kidding himself.

The representatives of official socialism distort the meaning of words in that they represent regimes in their death throes, whereas the times we are passing through may be either tragic or filled with hope, depending on whether the people is deceived by or prey to blind events, or wakes up to reality, gains the upper hand and transforms it.

The organizational methodology, propaganda and the information media have attained such a degree of technical perfection that there is no longer a sentiment or aspiration that is not instantly grabbed, funnelled and exploited for domestic or international political ascendancy. The terms 'socialism', and 'freedom', 'revolution', having been so frequently manipulated, adapted and transformed end up having no meaning left in them, nor do they pose any threat, whereas initially they were the equivalents of social high explosives.

These days, the masses do intervene in the life of society, but they do so in disciplined ranks behind the old banners, always the red flags of revolt and a sense of justice but brandished by skilful hands, and no longer anything more than brightly-coloured rags designed to gee up their populace.

The system reaches its peak when the state commands and handles the stage management. We have seen the examples of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy and we can see the Soviet Russian and Anglo-Saxon powers' offerings. The importance of the social question is no longer denied as once it was; it is not merely acknowledged but exploited. From a barbarian horde, the workers' movement has turned into a font of energy used to assist the rise of a new class or for the purposes of imperialist expansion. Socialism is no longer a catastrophic prospect but a propaganda tool.

Obviously, the spirit of inquiry cannot be tolerated either by totalitarian states or by parties which aspire to ensconce their own dominance. On the pretext of discipline, intellectual restlessness is damned as a heresy and only "brains trusts" are authorised to inquire into the

truth of the day scheduled to be spoken of and spread. The surprising thing is that many artists and men of learning, whose works would be inconceivable without a context of complete freedom, have been induced to believe that, in political and social affairs, there are such things as revealed truths. We see fervent free-thinkers insisting upon state education, on the pretext of stripping the Church of its role in education. A splendid solution: jumping into the water in order to escape from the rain! And Professor Langevin, after having announced a few years back that doubt is the driving force behind science, can, with a straight face, swallow the abracadabra explanations of Vishinsky regarding the Moscow Trials.

So, right across the board, we are witnessing the metamorphosis of a socialism that is slowly being drained of its contents, with only the phraseology and the watchwords left behind.

When, under the weight of slanders from Stalinist gents, the TB-ridden Panaït Istrati, friendless and without support, washed his hands of humanity and went off to live in Rumania, François Mauriac wrote to him and asked him to join Christ's church. And the old wandering Jew picked up his pen to answer in pretty much these terms: "If you like, Monsieur Mauriac, we two shall set out on the road and go around the world spreading the word of Christ. You will see how long we are left free to do so." Those words could be taken up today and all who wrap themselves up in their socialist ideals and who have ensconced themselves in power thanks to proletarian struggles need to be asked: "How long will our freedom last in all the countries ruled by socialists if we peddle the principles of freedom and sing all the verses of the *Internationale* that you have turned into a chant?"

Just like the Church hides its corruption and its cosyng-up to the powerful behind the words of the apostles, so the administrative and repressive machinery of socialist governments invokes the principles of the earliest revolutionaries as their justification. Faith has been supplanted by religion, martyrs by the canonised and living thought has been turned into catechism. Aragon the priest answered one young intellectual who had embraced communism and who had asked him why the party no longer reprinted Lenin's books: "We have no further need of that literature. *L'Humanité* is all we require". And the name of Louise Michel has been bestowed upon a metro station in Paris. The VIPs attending the ceremony invoked the memory of "that great French patriot". For the reasons behind this overall inversion we should look, first of all, to the many deviations that centralised authoritarian parties carry, in germ, within themselves. It is increasingly obvious that organisations that aim to conquer power followed a developmental process of their own that endowed their internal structures with all the attributes and all the blemishes of the state machinery that they were hoping to replace. Some made their peace with the old regime and tried to worm their way into it; others imposed themselves, but none of them were serving the class they should have been representing. The socialist movements identifying themselves with nations that were captive to historical and geographic circumstances lost their revolutionary character and absorbed the legacy of preceding regimes.

The pontiffs of the official workers' movement are not the only ones to have lost touch with the reality of being a worker. Among the many opposition marxist theorists, the critical mind and the penchant for analysis have also evaporated. Captives of watchwords born of specific, circumstantial times, they are out at all costs to apply these to brand-new situations. The Trotskyists call for soviets and a party to lead them, no matter the country or circumstances, no matter the degree of the proletariat's development or its forms of organisation. In France, they call for – harking back to the days of Kerensky – a Communist-Socialist-CGT coalition government, even as they know deep inside that the Communist Party will run policies that

suit Russia's interests, that the Socialist Party will lash out at Anglo-Saxon capitalism and that the CGT, that huge bureaucracy enslaved to the Stalinists, will have no role to play. But the watchword sounds good: pity about the reality ...

Those theorists, even though they might be possessed of a "scientific research tool" – their description – still believe in the absolute value of technical progress and the inevitability of a socialism that will supplant capitalism and in the soviet regime's "worker" character, separated from authentic communism merely by some "deviations".

Do we find signs of the same affliction among anarchists? Our answer has to be yes. In pre-war France, in pre-war Spain during the revolution there and pretty well everywhere during the hostilities, some militants reckoned "exceptional" circumstances could justify certain concessions. And so we have had "anarchist ministers", Churchill anarchists and Gaullist anarchists. But it also has to be acknowledged that they were the exceptions. The vast majority of the Spanish movement remained opposed to government, the French movement frequently denounced the chauvinism of the resistance, the Italian movement rejected electoral methods. The libertarian current managed to get through those times without deviating from its doctrine, thanks to its deeply embedded internationalism and its solidarity with the betrayed masses.

Not that that makes its mission any the less tough. It faces two important problems. First: where the workers' movement lines up vis a vis the two imperialist blocs struggling for hegemony. Second: the disappearance from within the movement of the democratic forms of organisation whose spread made it possible to replace the capitalist state machine.

If Spain or Italy were, tomorrow, to be plunged into a social crisis whereby revolutionary forces were to gain the upper hand, what are the means and methods whereby other countries' proletariats are going to be able to demonstrate their solidarity in active, practical terms? Furthermore, if a revolutionary situation were to come to pass in France or in England, how might the workers' wishes find expression if the trade union bureaucracy is in thrall to the imperialists and makes the workers' economic agencies unusable?

The working class lacks democratic organisational forms appropriate to the times and through which struggle and construction might be feasible.

The anarchist movement was not created and did not grow for the purpose of substituting itself for and exercising a monopoly over the workers' movement. Its role is investigation, propaganda, agitation and action. Thus, it is not a matter of some national Anarchist Federation's offering itself as a candidate to run or organise some region or country. But its educational mission would fall short unless complemented by day-to-day action on the part of its members inside every popular agency whose very existence and growth might have a bearing on a new social structure. Without such a bond with the labouring masses, without that sort of engagement with the life of the society, any propaganda effort would be in danger of remaining sterile.

It is not enough for anarchists to strive to raise the consciousness of the workers' movement; each and every one of them has to take a hand in the workers' organisation so as to lead the fight for demands so as to live up to the economic tasks of production, distribution and protection in the future. Whilst the anarchist ministers in Barcelona left no traces behind, the farming collectives in Alcoy, the trade unions in Catalonia and the workers' militias are enduring examples. Whilst the Kronstadt sailors left us no theorist, their Commune

nevertheless us shows us the way. And whereas the Makhnovist movement produced only a few theses, its influence fills the minds of millions of peasants in Ukraine to this very day.

S. PARANE

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