

An International Socialists pamphlet

FREEDOM!

Questions & Answers
about Socialism



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**by Ken Morgan
Cover Design: Paul Broz
Production: Carlo Bumini**

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INTRODUCTION

I'm a socialist.

“Those words freeze the heart—oh no! Not a socialist! Christ, is the phone tapped? I didn't know I was getting into anything like this. Agitators, always trying to use other people's troubles for their own ulterior motives. Now you know who pays for those leaflets: the Kremlin.

“But wait—maybe he's not that kind of socialist. Maybe one of those reasonable ones, like in Sweden or England, or George McGovern. Free medical care, law and order, ecology. Ballots, not bullets. Vote the socialists into office.”

In most of the world today, every crook and fraud who wants support from working people has to pretend he is a socialist. In America, socialism has a bad rep. Even if you agree with everything someone has said, even if you think the whole system is rotten to the core and needs to be replaced from top to bottom, even though you believe in freedom, and justice, and dignity, and that people ought to come before profits—even if you agree with all that and more: even so, you're

not likely to come to the conclusion that you're a socialist. Certainly not a revolutionary socialist.

There are a hundred reasons for this, and none of them holds water. The purpose of this pamphlet is to explain what socialism is—and what it isn't—what capitalism is, and how we think you should join us in getting from one to the other. This pamphlet will try to take up the kinds of questions that we had to deal with ourselves when we decided we were revolutionary socialists, the kinds of questions we have to answer at work and to our families and our friends. We think our answers make sense, that they're not wishful thinking or hopeless idealism. We think socialism is practical and necessary. We think it is the only way people can be free. We think it is something worth fighting for, and something that we have to convince others about.

We are not interested in giving anyone a snow job. Some of what we say here will probably not convince you—at least not right away. But we're not trying to evade any of the tough questions and doubts that people have. We're trying to convince you to join us, so we owe you the most honest, straight-forward explanation we can give.

The pamphlet is arranged in questions and answers. Sometimes the questions are not in the

order you might have asked them, or the answer to one of your questions is in two different places. And some of the questions you might have asked may not be here at all. If that's the case, tell us about it; that's what we want.

In any case, we thought we'd start at the beginning—

What is socialism?

Socialism is a system where working people own and control all the wealth of a society. They control the government and decide, democratically, what will be produced, how, and for what purpose.

In a socialist society, decisions depend on human needs and desires, not on the need for profits. For example, if people need housing, and the physical resources exist to do it, then housing is built. The decision doesn't depend on whether a bank, land speculator, or contractor can make money on it.

Russia is supposed to be socialist. Are you saying that's the way things are run there?

The Russian system is not socialist in any way. The workers have no control over the country.

It's not a capitalist system either, because the factories, natural resources, and so on, are not privately owned. They are owned by the government. But that doesn't make it socialist. When the government owns everything, you have to ask who "owns" the government.

The only way that workers can "own" the government is democratically. It's pretty obvious that's not the case in Russia (or in China, Cuba, or any other country that claims to be socialist today). All the decisions are made by a small elite—the Communist Party—which rules society in its own interest. They amount to a ruling class, just as the capitalists are the ruling class in the United States.

Do you mean that these countries are "communist," not socialist?

Originally, the terms often meant the same thing. Today, "communism" is so strongly associated with the Russian or Chinese system that it's pointless to use the word in some other way. In fact, these countries are not "communist" in any real sense.

"Socialism" is also often misunderstood in this country to refer to some "milder" form of government, with a lot of social welfare programs, like Sweden or England. Those countries are capitalist, plain and simple. The working class in no way runs these societies.

Sometimes, because of these associations, we use the term

“workers’ power” to mean socialism, or we call it “revolutionary socialism.” But when we use the word “socialist” here, we mean the kind of society we described before.

Well, Russia may not be socialist or communist, but isn’t that what they tried to get? And look where they ended up.

The working class of Russia did take over the country in 1917. And for several years, there was a form of workers’ power there. But they were faced with incredible hardships. They had to fight a civil war against the old rulers, who were aided by the invasion of 14 countries—including the United States—and they were blockaded economically. Even food could not get through.

Russia was very poor to begin with (and all this took place immediately after the devastation of World War I) and famines and epidemics swept the country.

Most of all, the Russian workers were cut off from the help of the working classes of the industrialized countries—Germany, Britain, the United States. The revolution in Germany was defeated, and the Russian Revolution was left alone.

In those circumstances, they could not possibly build socialism, and it became almost impossible for them to even stay in power. Many of the best worker leaders were killed in the fighting. Much of the working class left the cities to seek some meager food in the countryside.

The Russian workers were unable to keep their hold on the government. A new ruling class—led by Stalin—developed, took over all the workers’ organizations, and wiped out the old revolutionaries who remained.

There was isolation and scarcity—and dividing up poverty isn’t socialism.

What makes you think the same thing wouldn’t happen here?

The situation is completely different. The United States, and the world as a whole, is far richer today. The working class is the vast majority in this country (in Russia, the majority were still peasants living off the land). Foreign intervention against the American working class wouldn’t be likely. It’s just the opposite: it’s American money, arms, advisors, and the CIA which help keep many of these

foreign capitalist governments in power in the first place. It’s hard to imagine how long those governments could hold off their own workers if the United States had a workers’ government.

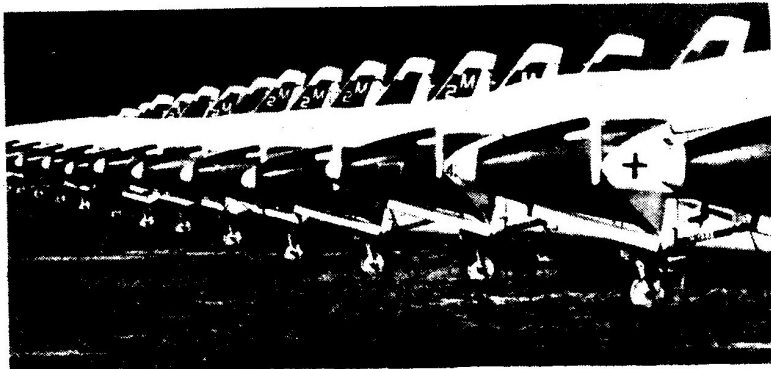
In fact, it’s very likely that workers will come to power in other countries before they do in America. In southern Africa, in Portugal, Spain, and Italy, in Britain, the capitalist system is falling apart. The whole world is on the brink of a new period of workers’ revolutions. Then it will be up to the American workers’ movement to prevent the U.S. government from destroying those revolutions.



A factory meeting in Russia, 1917. For the first time in history, the workers took over a country and began to run it democratically, in the interests of the majority.

Okay, maybe no one would invade us, and we are richer than Russia was. But there’s still not enough for everyone in the world to have everything. And you said that dividing up poverty couldn’t be socialism.

The world today is capable of producing enough to clothe, shelter, and feed every person alive—and a lot more.



Capitalism is a waste—a waste of money and a waste of lives.
 (Top) A line of no longer used jets—the “defense” budget we pay for.
 (Bottom) Clairton Coke Works, near Pittsburgh—U.S. Steel poisons its workers, poisons us all.



them help you, isn't that what you do? Isn't that why people built unions—because they understood that the only way for them to improve their conditions was to improve the conditions of everyone? As long as we need to fight others to get ahead, we do it. But when we see a need to work together, we act differently.

Sure, I understand that, which is why I fight in my union for everyone to work together against the boss. But believe me, most people just don't understand it.

What makes you so different? You weren't born knowing it, and neither were we. We all learned it, and usually we learned through bitter experience. Just like some racists finally learn that you can't let the foreman play racial favorites without weakening the union, without weakening themselves.

Well, there's a good example. How in hell do you think you can get Blacks and whites together?

Racism doesn't fall out of the sky either. No one is born a racist. They learn it. They learn it, because a lot of people need racism.

The capitalists need it to keep us divided, and to always have people who are forced to accept the worst jobs for the least pay.

The politicians need it to get elected, shouting “law and order.”

The cops need it to have a scapegoat, someone they can blame for the whole society coming to pieces.

The American capitalist system needs racism all around. So they push it in a thousand ways, in the schools and on TV. Sometimes they push it straight out; at other times they use code words like “neighborhood schools” or “law and order.”

Fine, that's all true, but you didn't answer my question. How are you going to get Blacks and whites together?

We're trying to say that, while racism actually benefits some people—the ruling class—it doesn't benefit the working class, although a lot of working class people think it does. A lot of white people—working class people—think they need to fight Blacks for jobs, for example. If they keep the jobs lily-white, they think they'll be more secure. In reality they're just cutting their own throats. They

would be a lot more secure, a lot better off, if they could get together and fight for more jobs for everyone. They wouldn't be constantly set against one another.

If there are a thousand guys on the street hoping to get your job, it's a lot harder to get a big wage increase. That's obvious.

If it's so easy and obvious, how come most people don't see it that way?

No one said it was easy. In fact it's very hard to break through all the old crap we've been taught. It's a lot easier for a white person to blame Blacks for everything that's going wrong than it is to actually do something about the real causes.

And it's easier for a Black person to say: "These people are racists, you can't work with them, you can't trust them. They'll use us and then forget about us. It's happened every time." There's a lot of truth in that, and it isn't easy for a Black person to have much confidence in whites, even if they work at the same job and have the same problems, the same enemy.

You're just admitting that I'm right. How are you going to get everyone to work together?

That's where people like us come in. Just as we learned it, we can show others. That means standing up, being out front, taking some chances. It means fighting together on issues that affect all of us.

But it also means insisting on fighting for the kinds of special issues that Black people need to move towards equality. We don't think that real Black liberation can come in this society. Like we said, the system needs racism, needs discrimination. But that doesn't mean that Blacks ought to wait, that their struggle has to be put off until the revolution.

Just the opposite. We believe that Black workers will be in the forefront of the fight for socialism in America. The fight for Black liberation has to go on now, today. Blacks have to fight for their rights, whether or not the "average" white worker is ready to go along.

So, it's not only that you can't let the foreman play favorites according to color. It's also that when something happens outside the workplace—like when the police gun down a Black child, or when a Black person's home is fire-bombed for moving into a white neigh-

borhood, it's up to the revolutionaries to bring those issues onto the shop floor, into the union hall. You can't have equality that stops at five o'clock, at the plant gate.

For Blacks it means insisting that those "outside" issues, issues like the way American companies keep South Africa in power, are part of everybody's struggle. We think that Black workers can convince white workers about the need to fight racism; our own members have proven it.

Like in so many things, people learn and change through experience. That first step is the hardest. And people like us, members of the International Socialists, see that as one of our most important jobs: getting that first step taken, and drawing the lessons from it.



Out front—members of the Red Tide, youth group of the International Socialists, march to free Gary Tyler, framed for murder by an all-white jury in Louisiana.

You're saying that everyone ought to be united, but at the same time that Black people have special kinds of demands, that don't apply to everyone?

Exactly, and we think it's by fighting for those special demands that Black workers will help move the whole working class forward. And that white workers will also fight for those issues. In fact, we think that's the **only** way to unite everyone.

cutting our own. We're for unions co-operating world-wide against the multi-national corporations, not for supporting General Motors against Toyota.

Whenever you hear about the "national interest"—beware! Whose interest, whose nation? Is it our "fellow countrymen" the bosses? That's not our nation; our "nation" has no borders, no tariffs, no bloody wars for profits.

The working class of every country is our ally, our brothers and sisters in the fight for a democratic, international socialist system.

You said that socialism was democratic. But in a socialist system, people would be able to vote to take away my private property. That may be democracy according to you, but I worked hard to afford a house, and my car, and I don't believe anyone has the right to take them away.

Socialism would abolish the private ownership of social property, not of individual possessions. Textile mills and garment factories would be owned by society—that's not the same as taking the shirt off your back.

There's a big step between owning the house you live in and being a slumlord, who lives off other people. There's nothing in common between owning a car to go to work, or on vacation—and owning General Motors. And there's a big difference between owning your own truck—and owning a fleet of them, hiring drivers and warehousemen to do the work, while you pay them a wage and collect the profits they produce.

Don't you think capitalists are entitled to what they have? Didn't they have to work for them too?

Not usually. It was mostly their parents or grandparents who "worked" for it.

Well, even so, somebody worked for it; why shouldn't they get the benefits? Why should someone have the right to just take it away from them?

We don't believe they have any "right" to own those things. Let's take an example. Let's say a company makes a ten percent profit a

year. Profit, remember, only exists when all other items of production are paid for. The workers—by their labor—must create enough wealth to pay for certain items before there's a profit. They must pay for the cost of raw materials, the wear and tear of machinery, buildings, etc. (depreciation of capital), the wages of supervision, their own wages, and some to be left over as a reserve fund. After all these have been paid for by their labor, whatever is left is profit. In this case, this amounted to only ten percent a year. What does this mean? It means that in only ten years the workers in the industry have created enough profit to buy the whole industry from the present owners. It means that after paying all the expenses of the factory, including their own wages, they created enough profit to buy the whole building—from basement to roof—all the offices and agencies, and everything else, all the capital. **IN TEN YEARS!**

And after they have bought it this way from the capitalists, why it still belongs to the capitalists! It means that if a capitalist had invested a million dollars in that industry, in ten years he would draw out a million, and still have a million lying there untouched. In twenty years it would be two million, in thirty three million. And still the original million would be lying there, as pure as ever.

This has been going on of course since the capitalist system came into being; all the capital in the world has been paid for by the working class over and over, and we are still creating it, and re-creating. And the more often we buy it, the less it belongs to us.

The capital of the ruling class is not their property; it is the unpaid labor of the working class.

Well the owners take risks. It's not as easy as it sounds.

Now you don't really believe that, do you? Do you really take pity on the poor boss, who has to worry about whether the Riviera is still "in" this year, and where to find reliable servants, who makes the supreme sacrifice of giving up hard work—to make sure that you yourself get plenty of it.

But what if I start with just one truck, like you said, and drive it myself. And I work hard, and maybe I get some breaks, and I become successful. Then I buy another truck, and I hire someone to drive it.



But you want everyone to be alike, like in the army. Wear the same clothes, make the same amount of money, live in barracks. We've still got a lot of freedoms in this country, and I don't want to give it up.

Who said anything about barracks, or wearing the same clothes? You've been seeing too many FBI movies. Socialism is all about freedom: you can't be free if you're hungry, and you can't be free if some corporation can decide whether you live or die—by "giving" you a job.

What about everybody getting the same money?

Are you in some kind of contest? At first, even with the workers in control, it wouldn't be possible for everyone to earn the same amount, although the huge differences—the kind of money corporation presidents "earn"—would be eliminated. It would be: from each according to his abilities, to each according to his abilities.

In other words, an end to cheating you of most of your labor, an end to parasites getting all the benefits out of life, while the rest of us earn it for them. You think that means less freedom?

And yes, eventually a system without wages or money: from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs. Now there's slavery for you! An end to all your cherished freedoms: the freedom to worry that if you get sick your children won't get an education. The freedom for you and your neighbor to compete over one job. The freedom to be drafted for wars you never voted for, didn't want, and never understood. The freedom to be spit upon, angry, and afraid.

What about things like freedom of speech, and the press?

In fact, those freedoms are much more limited today than if workers controlled society. Today, some people are "more equal than others." Freedom of the press doesn't mean very much if you don't own a printing press or a TV station. Usually—but not always—you have the right to print things like this pamphlet. But our ideas—pro-socialist ideas—don't get the same treatment as Walter Cronkite's ideas, for example. Not unless we say what CBS wants us to.

In a socialist society, every pro-working class point of view would have an equal right to be heard.

Are you saying that in a socialist system I could argue for pro-capitalist ideas, without being arrested?

Well, we don't think you'd make much progress with those ideas. But aside from that, it would be up to the working class itself, through its own councils, to decide what would be allowed. We don't pretend that there would be no coercion, no limitations on freedom, as soon as society was ruled by workers. We would want to restrict the rights of the capitalists and those who supported them: we would want to prevent them from sabotaging the new society, of overthrowing it.

A workers' government would still be a government. It would rule in the interest of its own class, the working class. It would take the workers' side in every dispute, it would limit the rights of its opponents, it might even jail the capitalists if they became dangerous.

That sounds like what we've got now. Whatever happened to freedom?

It may sound the same, but it isn't. Think about it. The government today is democratic in form, but it is a **class dictatorship**. It is the government of the capitalist class, installed to maintain the capitalist system against all enemies. That is what the police, the army, the bureaucracy are all about. It may have to make concessions to other classes, but that too is part of its job of preserving the system. And whenever our rights—free speech, assembly, religion—have begun to threaten the system, the government has limited or abolished those rights.

A workers' government, at the beginning, would also be a class dictatorship. It would be the dictatorship of the majority, the working class, against its enemies. It would use its strength to maintain the working class in power, and the workers would still have unions, would still have the right to strike. Like every government in history it would be the dictatorship of one class over the others, but with two differences: it would be a **majority** government, for the first time; and it would be the **last** class dictatorship, the last government.

What do you mean, the last government?

As the old forms of society were replaced, the need for force, in whatever form, to keep the old ruling class in line would disappear. There would be no more capitalist class. In fact, class differences of all kinds would begin to disappear. And without classes, the need for the government—the organized “executive committee of the ruling class” would also disappear.

There would still be a need to administer things, to organize, but the idea of the “authorities,” everything we mean by “the government” would not exist.

Marx called that the end of “pre-history,” and the beginning of “human history.” He meant that humanity would no longer be enslaved by the brute forces of having to survive—that human beings for the first time, would be free to **choose** their own futures.

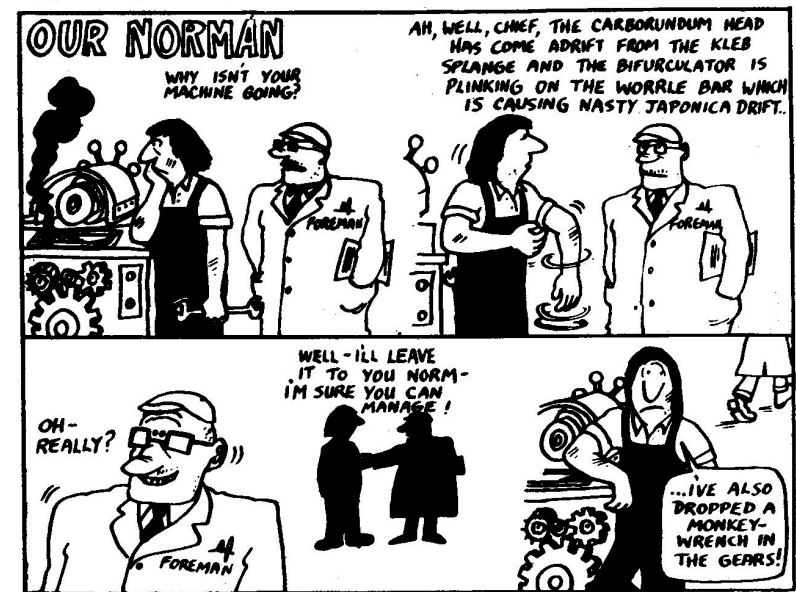
You're saying that there'd be no bosses, no foremen, right? Do you really believe that people will work without foremen?

Production would still have to be organized, and in many cases, probably someone would be “in charge” of the job. That person would be elected. But that's very different from having a foreman.

Anyone who's worked on a job for any length of time knows that there's usually one person, or a couple of them, that you turn to for advice about how to do the job. Usually they're people with a lot of experience, people who know their way around. It's very rare that it's the foreman. Sometimes it's even the shop steward, or just an older worker.

So usually the foreman isn't there to do the necessary organizing of the job, to decide who should do which part of the work, in what order it ought to be done, and so forth. The major part of the foreman's job is controlling you: making sure you don't come in late, or leave early. Making sure you produce **more**, and all the rest of it.

In other words, most supervisors aren't necessary for production, only to **capitalist** production.



But why would people work hard, with no foreman?

In other words, why would people work without the threat of being fired—because that's what it amounts to.

Well, first people wouldn't have to work as hard, or as long, if technology were used for human benefit. We already went into that.

And second, if people freely decided what was necessary, if they controlled what was going on, a lot of attitudes would change.

Think of auto workers on the line, hating every minute of it, getting stoned, doing the work automatically, almost numb—and then going home and working on their own cars for hours, and happy about it. Doesn't that tell you something about what work is, and what it could be?

In this society, a job is something you have in order to live. Your "real" life is after work, on weekends, vacations, when you retire. Capitalism has taken all the pride out of work, all the control; it has made it dirty, monotonous, unsafe.

Well there'll still be dirty jobs, even with socialism. Who would pick up the garbage?

Well most jobs won't be as dirty, and they certainly won't be unsafe. Maybe garbage collection would be rotated among everyone. Or maybe sanitation workers would receive some extra benefits: like more time off. Or yes, maybe machines could be developed to do a lot of that kind of work. It doesn't seem like an impossible problem to solve, not compared to the problems we have today.

Okay, there are a lot of problems in this country, but we still have the highest standard of living in the world. Doesn't that prove something?

Even if it were true—which it isn't anymore—no, we don't believe it would mean very much, for three reasons.

First, the price we have to pay for that standard of living: the wars, the racism and the ghettos, the boredom of the assembly line, the destruction of every beautiful thing around us. The fact that the corruption of this dog-eat-dog system corrupts every human relationship we might have—with our husbands or wives, with our children, and with the people we grew up with and the people we work with. Watergate, Lockheed, ITT, FBI, and CIA—scandal after scandal. The rivalries, the tensions, the lying and cheating, all that is part of the price.

Second, although we may be living better than our grandparents, that's not much of an argument. What if our grandparents had thought the same way? We'd still be working fourteen hours a day,

and living in tenements. You can't compare what we have today to what we had in the distant past, or to what some equally rotten system has. You have to compare it to what is possible: not a Garden of Eden, but what is **actually** possible. And by that standard, this system ought to have been replaced a long time ago.

And third, you're assuming that things will just get better. That's the biggest myth of all, the one we were all raised on. We were always told that **America was special, not like the rest of the world.** We would be able to lead better lives than our parents, and certainly our children would lead better lives than us. Things might be tough occasionally, but overall there would be continual progress. It was the Great American Myth: work hard, keep your nose clean, and things will keep getting better.



The Great American Myth explodes: Watts, 1965. "If you work hard, and keep your nose clean, you'll get ahead." It was a lie.

And for a whole generation, there seemed to be a lot of truth to it. Plenty of people, especially Black people, never benefitted from it, but from World War II until the late sixties the standard of living for most Americans **did** go up, the average American worker **was** better off. We were told—if we thought of asking—that the system had solved its basic problems, that there would never again be a

depression like the 'thirties. They told us there were no classes in America, like they have in Europe. Almost everyone was "middle class."

It was a lie. American prosperity was based on the almost total destruction of every other industrial nation in the Second World War. It was based on a giant war economy that kept right on going when the war ended. It was built on borrowed time.

Thirty million dead seems like a high price to pay for around a quarter-century of prosperity: that seems to be the going rate.

But the war economy can't do its tricks anymore. The inflation it caused caught up. The fact that prosperity was based on producing waste, meant that the deterioration of the cities couldn't be stopped. And as the rest of the world re-built, the old trade rivalries, the old cut-throat competition, the old wars began to return. America, it turned out, was not so different from the rest of the world.

Today, American workers' real wages are back to the level of 1967. Today, the old boom and bust cycle is back—only the booms don't last as long and aren't as big. And the busts get deeper and deeper. There may not be breadlines yet—and while you read this, a "recovery" may be in progress—but the old spiral is back: and it's pointed downwards.

If things are getting worse, why can't we change that, without a revolution? Why can't we improve the system? Look at the changes when Kennedy and Johnson were in—don't you think Carter might make a difference too?

We're saying that the problems are built into the system. You can make some progress, get some reforms—and they are important. But even mild reforms require a lot of pushing. Back in the 'thirties, when it looked like the working class might tear up the whole system, that's when a lot of the big reforms came. That's when Roosevelt and the Democrats "gave" us the right to have unions.

When there was a mass civil-rights movement, that's when Johnson passed the civil-rights laws. And when the anti-war movement kept on growing, when it threatened to rip the country apart, that was a big part of the reason why the U.S. finally had to get out of Viet Nam.

Even if all you care about is reforms, you've still got to scare the hell out of the system—and that goes whether the Democrats or Republicans are in office.



Johnson's war—the Marines land near Da Dang, 1965. Like every Democratic president in this century, LBJ went to war.

Okay, but those reforms did happen, and without a revolution.

Yes, but that was also when the system had a good deal of fat, and during the Viet Nam War. Companies could afford to give up higher wages—though even in the fifties they demanded a high price in return. They wanted to get more control of working conditions, cut the unions' day-to-day power, and they wanted the ability to automate. So that if people were making a decent wage, there were less of them working.

The government could afford aid to education, more public housing, and things like that.

Now the companies still want the same concessions, but they can't afford to buy them with big wage increases, with greater benefits. So the companies are on the attack. For the past few years, there's been an **employers' offensive**. We call it that because we want to indicate that it's different from the "normal" kind of resistance that every boss puts up to every demand. We're saying that the capitalist class

has launched an attack against the working class—above and beyond normal. They are trying to push back every gain we've made in the past thirty years. They are trying it all over the world—but they've been most successful here. Look at real wages today. Look at the inflation. Look at the anti-labor decisions coming from the courts. Look at our whole standard of living—public services cut back in city after city: hospitals, parks, libraries. Sanitation, fire protection, public transportation (where it exists at all). Cut back and more expensive. Look at what happened in New York City the past couple of years, and that's only the most famous example. Teachers laid off while classrooms get more and more crowded. Cutback after cutback, taxes going up, the city beginning to fall apart.

And look at the gains that Blacks and women made: the ruling class and their government are pushing them back, harder and harder.

The capitalists won't give up anything they don't have to. Not because it's right, or fair, or because people need it. They'll give something up only when it's the only way to prevent even bigger changes. You have to put a gun to their head to win anything—or at least let them know that you're armed, and that it won't stay in your pocket forever.

Do you still think it's revolution that's impossible, that reforms are "realistic"?

So you don't think there's any way to vote the changes in?

Not the basic changes, because if normal democratic rights really began to threaten the system those rights would be abolished.

The Democrats—like the Republicans—are a party of capitalism. The two parties often disagree on the best way to make capitalism work—the best way to get profits. But they agree completely on preserving the system itself.

Every social movement for reforms in this country that has tried to work through the Democratic Party has been sucked in and destroyed. In a very real way, that's what the Democrats are there for.

But the capitalists can't be voted out. They'll never say: "We bow to the will of the majority, which has decided that this vicious, anti-human, corrupt system has got to end. We will now give up all our privileges and get a job like everyone else."

No, what the capitalists would do is very different. They would

plant police spies and agents. They would frame people for various "crimes." They would intimidate people, tap their phones, open their mail, harass them, and try to get them fired. They would murder revolutionaries in cold blood. That much **has** happened here, and recently.

But they would go a lot further if they had to. They would organize and finance right-wing groups, to break up workers' meetings, to disrupt and physically assault left-wing activities. They would use them to try to divide the working class, probably using racism as their big tool. That's how it worked in Italy, in Germany, in a dozen countries in the thirties.

The army officers would secretly back these right-wing groups, like the Nazis, and they would receive lots of untraceable cash. They would come to power and **abolish democracy**: the same democracy they brag about. They would abolish freedom of the press, of speech, of assembly. They would ban all political parties that even somewhat represented workers. They would ban trade unions and the right to strike and to bargain collectively. They would arrest all the leaders of the workers' movement, and every shop-floor militant would be in danger of being sent to a concentration camp.

That was the way it happened in Nazi Germany: that is very similar to what happened in Chile only recently. It may not be an immediate danger in the United States, but don't dream for a minute that the ruling class would hesitate to bring in a fascist dictatorship to preserve their system. They never hesitated to send thousands to their deaths in wars to protect their investments. They never hesitated to sell thalidomide to pregnant women, or to let miners slowly choke to death from black lung. They are murderers: in pin-stripe suits, with quiet reasonable voices that never seem to get angry: but murderers nonetheless, murderers for profit, for capitalism.

It sounds like you're saying that it's hopeless. That even if a majority agrees with you, the capitalists will never let it happen. Where does that leave you?

Obviously, we don't believe it's hopeless, or we wouldn't be doing it.

We're just saying that socialism—workers' power—isn't going to happen just by voting it in.



The face of capitalist democracy: soldiers of the fascist government in Chile burn books. And don't those uniforms look familiar?

Which means what? Planting bombs in the Pentagon, or going into the Rocky Mountains with a guerilla band and some rifles? Sounds pretty foolish to me.

Sounds pretty foolish to us too. Socialism will not be brought by some savior, or by a small group of saviors. It will happen only when the working class as a whole wants it. It will happen when the workers' organizations—the trade unions, the political party that represents workers, the factory committees and workers' councils that will be built—when those organizations are led by revolutionaries supported by the majority of workers.

We don't know what the actual "revolution" will look like. But it would have to include some things that have happened in the past: that the army was affected by the general revolutionary spirit, so that

the troops would refuse to put down the workers (that's what happened in Russia in 1917).

It would mean that all the basic industry, transportation, and communications systems were controlled by workers who refused to follow capitalist orders, who could not only paralyze the system, but could turn the resources of the system against the "owners" of the system.

And yes, it would probably mean street fighting and bloodshed. But the stronger the revolutionary movement, the more organized and unified the working class, the less violence would occur.

But none of this is some kind of plot. It's not like we have a blueprint for what the socialist society would look like in every detail. It won't happen by people secretly plotting and then suddenly rushing out to build barricades.

It will take years of building, organizing, convincing. It will take a revolutionary party—made up of the most militant, the most capable and daring, the best leaders of the working class.

Wait a minute! A revolutionary party? The best leaders? In other words, a minority? I thought you said that socialism would mean decisions made by the majority, in the interests of all. Now we're back to a minority of leaders, who make the decisions.

We're not against leaders. Not every worker will reach the same conclusions at the same time: someone has to be first. Not every person will be as dedicated, as willing to sacrifice as every other. We think the most advanced workers—and we're not afraid to call them that—belong in a party, and that they should be trying to convince their fellow workers about their views. We think members of that party ought to be leading every fight for better conditions—on the job and in the unions, in the communities, against the courts and the police; every struggle that there is. And the other way around: we want every leader of those struggles to be part of building that revolutionary party.

But it's not the party that will dictate to the working class. It's the working class—the leading part of the working class—that will shape the party. The party will always have to prove itself to the working class. It will have to be able to bring the people who aren't as clear on what has to be done, the ones who are a little more timid—it will have to win their confidence and bring them into the struggle.

Any group can claim that it is **the working class party**, or that it will become so. We think the working class will decide that in a thousand factories and neighborhoods.

The revolutionary movement won't succeed until the working class develops its own forms of government, too. Like workers' councils, where elected and **immediately** removable representatives argue out the day-to-day decisions. In these councils every workers' organization would argue its case, win members, attempt to convince the majority. That's exactly the way the Bolshevik Party did it in Russia in 1917. They convinced a majority of the workers' representatives of their policies.

Well, they may have had these workers' councils then, but I don't exactly see too many of them in America. How are they going to happen?

And you won't see it for a long time yet. For workers' councils to take the place of the "regular" authorities, for factory committees to replace management, workers' defense guards to replace the police—those things happen when the working class is ready to replace all the "normal" organizations of society, when it has no confidence in the old system, and has enough **self-confidence** to build an alternative.

And when and how is that going to happen?

Well, like we said, we don't have a blueprint. But we do have a strategy, a general direction which we think is the right road.

Today there is really only one kind of workers' organization in the United States, **the unions**. So we put much of our emphasis there. Many union members, probably most, agree with us that the unions aren't doing their job: protecting the members, fighting the companies; that they aren't democratic, that the leaders are either bought off or so sympathetic to the companies that they might as well be management.

But usually only a minority of union members (though it is a very large number, all told) is willing to actively do something about it. That's what union reform movements are all about. That's why members of the International Socialists are active in those move-

ments, why we have started some of them, and built them as hard as we could. Like the Teamsters for a Democratic Union. We want to turn the unions into real weapons against the bosses, we want the unions to be democratic and work in the members' interests.

We think that **class consciousness**, the understanding that workers are a separate class with nothing in common with the capitalists—we think that most people arrive at that through their own real-life experiences, not by having someone just preach to them. When you fight to make your union into a weapon in the class struggle (even if you don't ever use that term) you come face to face with a lot of lessons. You learn something about the police (ever been on strike?) if you didn't already know it. And about the capitalist legal system—injunctions, fines, etc.—they always seem to be against the rank and file. And you learn how fair and neutral the news media is—fair to the bosses, that is. And you probably get a good whiff of how much politicians are willing to help.

The same is true with other struggles: whether it's to keep Gary Tyler, a 16-year-old Black, out of the electric chair for a crime he didn't commit, or against the racist organizers in Louisville and Detroit during busing, or the fight of women to have decent child care and the right to decide for themselves about abortion, and the right to equal jobs, and equal pay for doing them—in all these issues and many others, we try to build the movements. And in doing this, we think that people become open to our ideas. That's how most of us came to have those ideas ourselves.

You've got kind of an ulterior motive, then?

In a way. But we're not hiding anything. We are genuinely trying to build those movements, to win those reforms and improvements for their own sake. But we also believe that to **really** win, you have to have a socialist revolution. We don't say "if you don't agree with us on everything, we won't work with you for this improvement." Just the opposite. We will work together with anyone who agrees on that particular issue: whether it's how to win this strike, or how to get this by-law passed, or anything at all that's valuable.

But we do believe, and we say so, that if you follow it out, if you are willing to go all the way in the interests of the working class, then you'll come to agree with us.



Teamsters Local 299 in Detroit, stronghold of Teamsters for a Democratic Union. Members of the International Socialists help build the movements to make the unions fighting, democratic weapons against the bosses.

It's no accident that socialists were in the forefront of every movement for change in this country, like organizing the big industrial unions in the thirties. It's because being a socialist makes you clearer about who your enemy is, about how to fight. It means that you never "see the boss's side" of things.

You're saying that if I try to fight the company, or change my union, then I'll turn into a socialist?

Not automatically, no. There's too much stacked against that—all our education, the press, religion, the influence of our families, our friends.

We are saying that it will open people to socialist ideas. Then it's usually up to people who are already socialists to help draw the lessons, to help overcome those other influences. That's what we're doing and that's why you should join us and be doing the same.

You don't think someone can be a socialist on their own?

It's a lot harder, without other people there to help. So you don't have to repeat every single mistake that anyone has ever made before you. So you can learn from history. For example, we don't have to wait for the Nazis or the KKK to be successful to see how we feel about them. We've learned that they have to be smashed before they get a chance to do their dirty work.

The revolutionary party serves as a kind of school for the working class, in a thousand ways. We learn from the successes, as well as the failures, of our comrades in other industries, or in the same industries in other cities. We learn from other times, and from other countries.

We argue out questions, come to a decision, and then all carry it out. If the decision turns out to be wrong, then we learn from that. But we aren't a debating society. We believe in action. We believe in real democracy: the right of the majority to have its ideas tested in action.

That's part of the reason that—even though we are so small compared to the forces that we are fighting—that we're able to have an influence far beyond our numbers.

But you ARE so small. Why isn't everyone flocking to join up, if what you're saying makes so much sense?

Well, you know the answers to that as well as we do. Sometimes it's easier to just keep hoping that things will get better. Or to wait for someone else to do it for you. But to build the kind of society that we want, we will have to do it ourselves. No other class, no elite, no band of heroes, will build workers' power. Only the working class will do that.

And then there's that other reason, the one we run up against all the time. Someone's got to be first. Somebody has to join before the others. To risk ridicule or bewilderment from friends and family. To maybe risk your job, or at some point, your freedom or your life. And there are no guarantees of success.

But one thing is sure. Unless you take those risks, unless you make that big commitment, no one will do it for you. And this society will guarantee you some things:

That you will never really be free.

That you will never have dignity.

That you and your children will never have a chance to live up to the potential that's inside every human being.

It seems like a risk worth taking.

In a lot of ways, I'm with you. But I'm not really an organizer type. I'll be there when the time comes, but I don't think I could help much in the meantime.

The time will never come, unless people like you do something about it. You're not an organizer? Then you'll learn, the same as the rest of us. Or you'll play some other role: writing, speaking, or just talking to others one-to-one.

You have to look at what your actions mean to others, what it means for you to get active. The more working-class people become socialists, the easier it is for the rest. The more people like you hesitate, the harder it will be for those who stand behind you, watching, waiting to see what you will do.

It's people like us—like you and me—who will decide whether socialism has a chance. We need each other. It's as simple as that. □



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