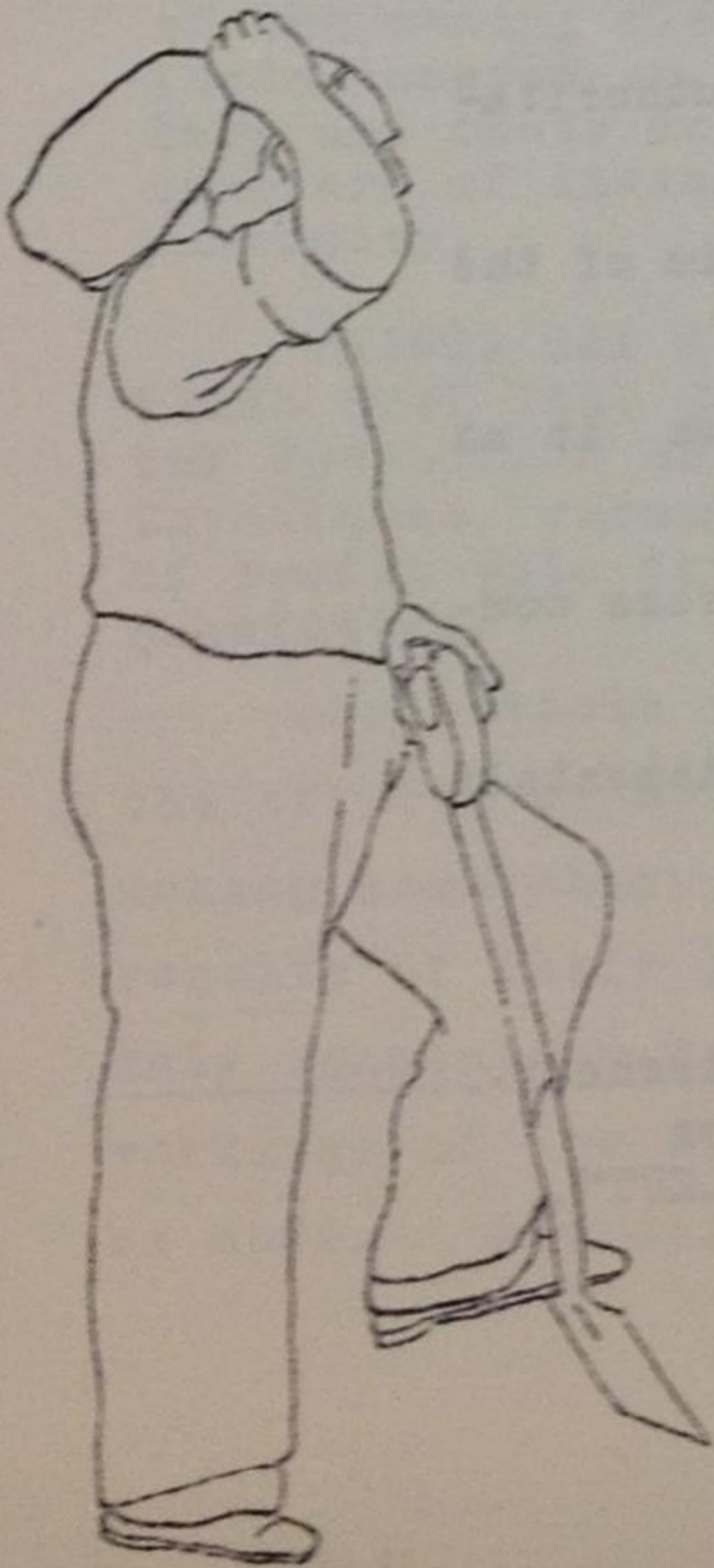
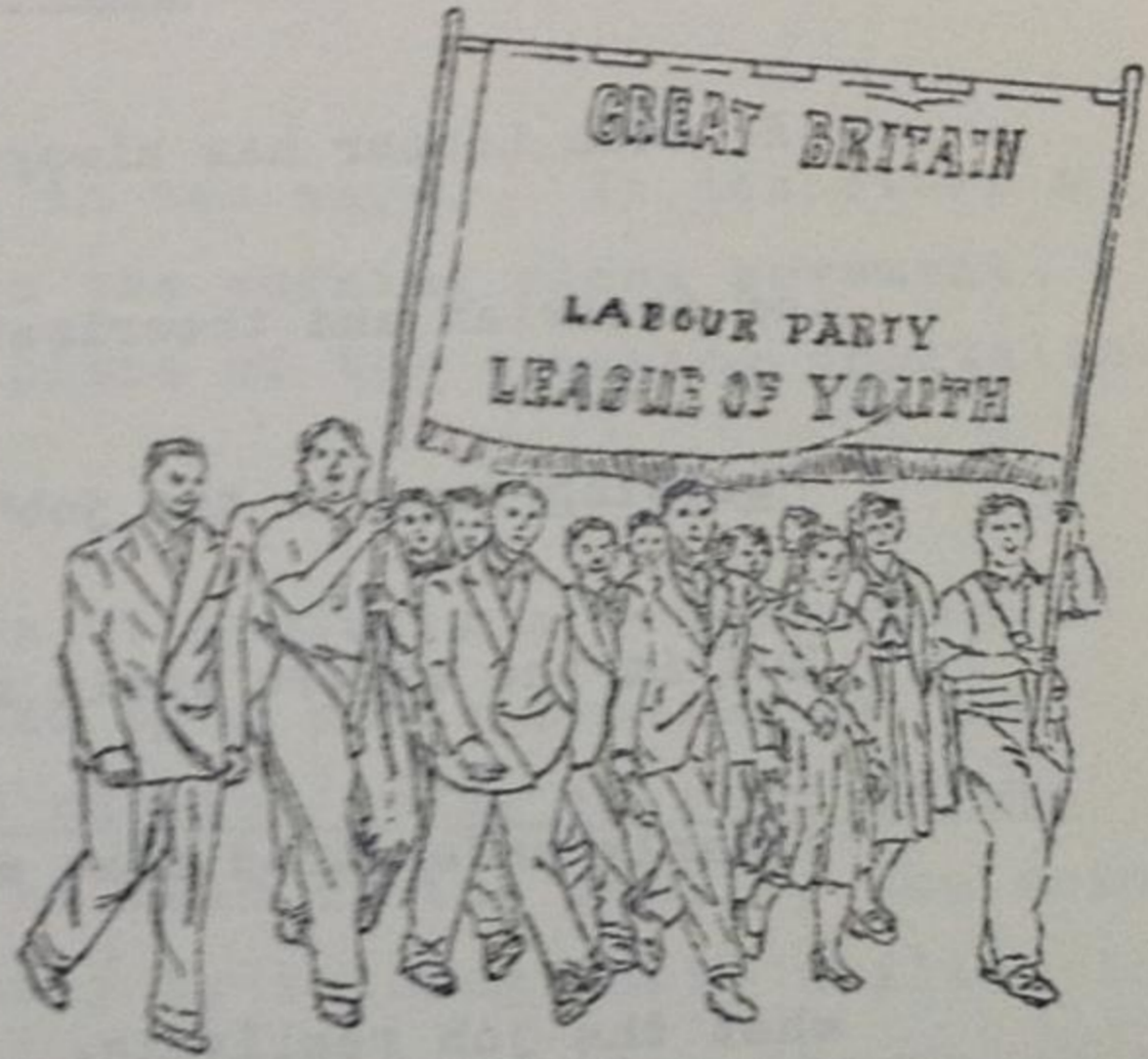
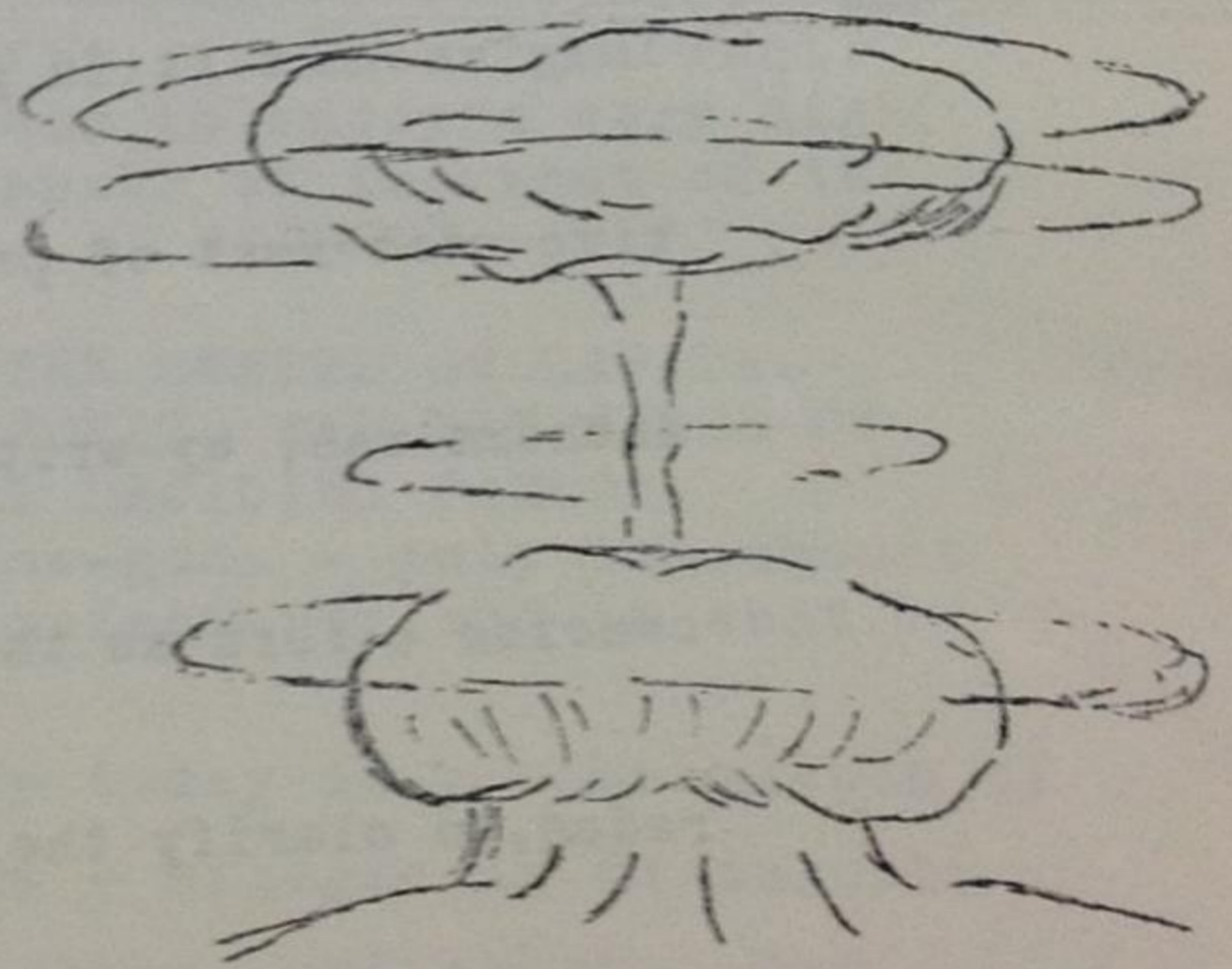


A **KEEP LEFT** PUBLICATION

WHAT



IS



SOCIALISM?

"PRICE 3d."

F O R E W O R D

British Labour has always had a healthy suspicion of theories and theorists, and usually preferred "getting on with the job" to talking about it.

But in the modern world it becomes more and more clearly understood that we must first find out what the job really is.

In publishing this pamphlet, "KEEP LEFT" does not imagine that it is putting forward an authoritative statement of principles. The sole aim of the authors was, by writing down their views in as concise a form as they could, to help some comrades, to clarify their ideas on the fundamentals of Socialism.

Bertha Newbery.
Editor
"KEEP LEFT".

WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

The word Socialism is used in two ways. It describes a future form of society, and also the working class movement which tries to establish it in place of the existing capitalist order.

WHAT IS CAPITALISM?

Under capitalism, the means of production - factories, mines, railways, etc. - are owned by a small section of the community. (Half of Britain's capital today is held by one per cent of the population.) The mass of the people, the actual producers of wealth, can live only by selling their ability to work, at a price (wages) which is always less than the value of what they produce.

The part left over is divided between the various sections of the owning class: industrialists, bankers, landlords and their hangers-on, in the form of profit, interest and rent. They and their dependants are thus able to enjoy a very high standard of living by stealing the labour of the rest of the community.

THINGS ARE MADE IF AND ONLY IF THE OWNERS OF CAPITAL THINK THAT THEY CAN SELL THEM AT A PROFIT, AND THE NEEDS OF THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE ARE NOT THE DECIDING FACTOR. Cornflakes, vacuum cleaners or machine-guns - only the amount of profit will determine which is manufactured and in what quantities.

Any article produced by industry today is a combination of the efforts of many groups of workers - engaged in transport, making machinery, producing raw materials, and so on. The results of their labour are bought and sold, and this is the only connection between the various groups. Only the haphazard workings of the market decide how much of any commodity is to be made. And so, while within a single factory the various

stages of manufacture are centrally organized, in the capitalist economy as a whole, no such plan could work.

Competition between firms, forces them constantly to introduce more expensive machinery and new production methods. Most of the capitalist's profit (only a small part of which he can consume personally, however hard he tries!) is accumulated, i.e. used to expand industry and keep it up-to-date.

HOW DOES THIS WORK OUT?

The accumulation of capital, which in effect becomes the chief aim of the capitalist, has two important results. First of all, it provides a limit to the wage-packets of the workers, and therefore, to the market for the goods they have produced. At the same time, it leads to the manufacture of more and more of these goods. THE RESULT IS THAT, PERIODICALLY, THERE APPEARS TO BE A SURPLUS OF FINISHED GOODS, MACHINERY, RAW MATERIALS AND HUMAN BEINGS. MASS UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY ARE SEEN SIDE BY SIDE WITH BULGING WAREHOUSES AND IDLE FACTORIES.

This tendency, which gets worse as time goes on, cannot be eliminated within the framework of capitalism. That is why, we say, the system has entered a period of decline. That is why the past forty years have brought war, hunger, tyranny and insecurity to the majority of mankind.

BECAUSE CAPITALISM CANNOT COPE WITH THE ABUNDANCE OF WEALTH IT HAS MADE POSSIBLE, IT LEADS TO IMPERIALISM, WAR AND FASCISM.

HOW?

The big capitalists try to restrict production and reduce competition, to safeguard their profits. For instance, they suppress new inventions which might reduce the demand for a commodity they are already making. (Everybody knows the case of the everlasting match.)

The cartels and monopolies they form are gigantic organizations wielding enormous power. They use the state machinery to secure new markets, sources of raw materials and openings for investment in undeveloped areas of the world and to protect themselves against foreign competition. (For example, the whole continent of Africa was split up at the end of the last century between a few of the European powers, Britain getting the lion's share.) The imperialists enslave the colonial people and use them as a source of cheap labour.

These attempts to remove (profitably, of course) the surplus which keeps on piling up behind them, can only succeed for a time. The more backward countries start up new industries

on their own, and become competitors instead of markets. (This happened with America and Germany in the Nineteenth Century, and Japan in the Twentieth.)

Soon all the suitable areas are claimed, and further capitalist expansion leads to world war for the redivision of the globe. Despite their claims to defend "national independence", "democracy", or some other abstract principle, the capitalist powers are really only robbers fighting over their loot.

To make things still harder, the conquered people of the colonies begin to struggle for their freedom, and thus the exploited area tends to shrink.

Finally the bosses have to make up for their falling profits by driving down wages. This may involve smashing the Labour Movement and suppressing all political and personal liberty. Democracy becomes a luxury which capitalism can no longer afford. (This happened in Germany and Italy.) But in the long run the effect is to reduce the demand for goods still further, and so make things worse.

War, with its armament programmes, its wholesale destruction of goods of all kinds, and the possibility of winning larger sections of the world market, becomes the only 'solution' for this lunatic system.

MASS UNEMPLOYMENT OR MASS SLAUGHTER - THESE ARE THE ULTIMATE ALTERNATIVES FACING CAPITALIST 'CIVILISATION'.

HAS CAPITALISM EVER BEEN USEFUL?

The capitalist system, which is a comparatively recent growth, played a revolutionary part in its early days. Its development involved terrible misery for the ordinary people, but it was progressive in that it swept away the remains of decaying Feudalism. While the industrial revolution brought child labour and inhuman working conditions, it also made possible the building up of modern industry and the establishment of the world market.

By creating huge centres of industry with enormous productive power, capitalism has laid the foundations for a higher form of society. An in the modern working class, it has brought forth the people who can build on this foundation.

WHY CAN'T ALL CLASSES WORK TOGETHER?

Since the time when primitive tribal society gave way to slavery, humanity has been divided into sections having different standards of living and opposing economic interests. Whether it was slave and slave-owner, serf and baron, or wage-labourer and capitalist, there has been a battle between the producers of wealth and the owners of property. Each oppressed class fought for a larger share of the result of the labour of society, and then tried to change the social order.

With capitalism this takes the form of an attempt by the workers to get higher wages, shorter hours, etc., but this leads them to struggle against capitalism itself. Socialists cannot be neutral in this struggle: we are on the side of the exploited against the exploiters. But at the same time we look forward to a classless society where this conflict, with all the waste of human energy it involves, will have disappeared. The class struggle will come to an end, but only with the victory of the working class.

ARE THERE "MIDDLE-CLASSES"?

There is no hard and fast separation between the classes, and there are many groups which are not completely in any one of them. In industrial countries there are small business-men, and workers, like managers and technicians, whose occupations tend to divorce them from the mass of the wage-earners. In agricultural countries, peasants and small tenant-farmers, who are exploited as well as being owners, may form the majority of the population.

All these people tend to swing backwards and forwards between the two main classes in modern society. Some of them get a small share in the surplus taken from the workers and the colonies. This makes them afraid of altering the system, but as capitalism declines their privileges slip away. The small capitalists are squeezed harder and harder by their big brothers, and begin to see the need of joining with the workers to fight the monopolies and change society. More and more of them break with snobbery, which is the expression of their dependence upon the ruling class.

But if the Labour Movement is too weak or too timid to show them a way out of their difficulties, they switch their support to the other extreme. (In Britain, large sections of the middle-class voted Labour in 1945, but supported the Tories in 1950 and 1951.) In some cases they are taken in by fascist demagoguery, which can be described as the dictatorship of monopoly-capital, disguised as anti-capitalism.

WHAT WILL A SOCIALIST SOCIETY BE LIKE?

Socialism means a classless society based on the common ownership of the means of production.

The economy of today should be planned in the interests of the whole community, and to achieve this the workers must take industry out of the hands of private individuals. Only when the means of production are collectively owned by the whole population shall we have production for use and not for profit.

The use of the labour and resources of society in different ways, and in particular, how much goes into goods for direct consumption, and how much is used for industrial expansion, will be decided democratically. The carrying out of the plan in each industry will be arranged by the workers themselves.

Socially owned industry will be able to use modern science for the benefit of the people, in a way which is impossible under capitalism. The planned production and distribution of wealth will lead to vast improvements in living standards and working conditions, for, with present day scientific knowledge, only the anarchy of capitalism prevents the production of plenty for everyone. The application of atomic energy and the methods of automatic control (now being developed for guided missiles) open up enormous possibilities.

The high productivity of labour will mean more leisure and the raising of standards of education for all. Art, science and government will cease to be the monopoly of a small minority.

AFTER THE ENDING OF COMPETITION BETWEEN NATIONAL CAPITALIST GROUPS, IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO BEGIN THE REMOVAL OF OUT-OF-DATE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN COUNTRIES, WITH THE PLANNING OF INDUSTRY ON A WORLD SCALE.

The danger of a world famine which faces us today can only be averted by world Socialist planning of agriculture, and the ending of the present unequal distribution of the world's food resources.

ARE YOU AGAINST PRIVATE PROPERTY?

We don't want to nationalise personal property, things like clothes or furniture; in fact one of our main criticisms of capitalism is that it prevents most people from having enough of this sort of property. We don't even want to take over small shops and private businesses, although we hope they will voluntarily come into the plan at a later stage.

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WHAT WE ARE AGAINST IS PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF THINGS UPON WHICH SOCIETY DEPENDS. WE CAN CALL THIS SOCIAL PROPERTY, BECAUSE IT AFFECTS THE LIVES OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY. THE INSTRUMENTS WITH WHICH THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE ARE MADE MUST BE TAKEN AWAY FROM THEIR PRESENT OWNERS AND TURNED INTO PUBLIC PROPERTY.

ISN'T THIS STEALING?

The means of production were not made by the employers themselves, but by the workers. The capital which paid for them was accumulated from the stolen labour of other workers. Long ago, industry was not controlled by a small minority as it is today, but was largely in the hands of small independent producers. Capitalism changed all that by shutting out the little men - a process which is still going on.

Most shareholders never even see the factories which enable them to live without working, and industry is mainly run by paid managers and technicians. In taking over the instruments of production, society is only recovering what really belongs to it.

WILL THERE BE COMPLETE EQUALITY UNDER SOCIALISM?

All men are not equal, for no two of them have the same needs or abilities. That is why it is impossible to think up a complete "just" system of distribution if there is not enough to go round. Only when the planned use of industry has eliminated all shortages will it be possible to satisfy people's needs without worrying whether someone is getting more or less than his 'fair share'. (Think of the way water is distributed, and imagine all commodities being produced as plentifully - not a technical impossibility.)

But this cannot come about at once. Although the basic inequality due to the private ownership of industry will be ended, many other relics of capitalism will remain for some time. Special wages for skilled workers and technicians, and payment for overtime and dirty or dangerous work will continue. These things will gradually disappear as the necessities of life become more and more plentiful. In the meantime, all we can do is to see that everybody gets a share in what is going. Differences in living standards must be kept as narrow as possible, and the growth of new privileged sections of the community must be prevented.

WHY SHOULD ANYONE WORK UNDER SOCIALISM?

It is true that, in a class society, nobody works unless he has to. Labour is forced labour. But work is really the natural occupation of human beings. (Look at the hobbies people take up voluntarily - gardening or knitting or the pools - things which take a lot of physical or mental effort.)

Socialism will end the system whereby people must sell their labour-power, i.e. themselves, in order to live. Under capitalism the most objectionable tasks are usually the worst paid. If profit is not the sole aim, jobs which are dirty or dangerous can be eliminated, and, in a properly organized society, industry could be run so that the monotony and irksomeness of labour would disappear. Moreover, when workers know that they are running industry themselves, and that their efforts are not just going to increase the wealth of some idle shareholder, they will have a completely different attitude to work.

WON'T INDIVIDUALITY BE STIFLED BY TOO MUCH STATE CONTROL?

Of course, someone's individuality can be very effectively stifled if he has to live on the dole or die in a war! However, the real problem here is: what is the State?

The capitalist state is not just the civil service but also the army, police force, prisons and law courts. It is used to maintain capitalism and arrange for its smooth working and it is run and controlled by members of the upper class. That is why even the most democratic capitalist state is separate from the mass of the people. Red-tape is a direct result of this.

THE OVERTHROW OF CAPITALISM WILL MEAN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A WORKERS' STATE, RUN BY THE PEOPLE AND USED TO PROTECT THEIR INTERESTS AGAINST THE DISPOSSESSED EXPLOITERS. AS THE CLASSLESS SOCIETY TAKES SHAPE THE JOB OF THE GOVERNMENT WILL BECOME MORE ONE OF ADMINISTRATION AND LESS OF REPRESSION.

Far from stifling individuality, the socialist state will give most people their first chance of participating in the running of national and international affairs, and the enjoyment of the cultural heritage of mankind.

WHAT ABOUT HUMAN NATURE?

Man's thoughts, feelings, needs and desires are moulded by his conditions of life, and under capitalism they are largely passive reflections of these conditions. In a socialist society, Man's ideas will become the master of economic forces, which in turn will shape the new men of the new world. Changed conditions produce changed men.

But, although human nature is the most malleable thing in existence, the alteration is neither immediate nor automatic. In the capitalist jungle it is impossible to survive without grabbing all you can for yourself and your family. When socialism is established people will have to learn how to cooperate in the interests of the community.

The abolition of capitalism will release a wealth of human ability and energy which has never had a chance to develop; the Newton working in the coal-mine, the Voltaire behind the shop counter, the Monard at the factory bench. Working men and women will cease to be mere 'factors of production,' kept alive only to produce a profit for an employing class, and will be free to apply their talents to the enormous problems which socialism will raise

IS SOCIALISM INTERNATIONAL?

Socialists are completely international in outlook. Although people in different countries have different habits and ways of living, we think that the chopping up of the world into compartments is now unnecessary and a hinderance to economic development. The growth of capitalism has brought about these national divisions, and also the international economy which makes their existence an anachronism: two world wars have indicated just how outdated these national barriers are. BUT THEY CAN ONLY BE ABOLISHED WHEN SOCIALISM MAKES REAL CO-OPERATION BETWEEN PEOPLES AN ECONOMIC POSSIBILITY

Meanwhile, the fight for socialism must be an international one. The bosses try to confuse the workers with all kinds of national and racial prejudice, especially in wartime. They set Jew against Gentile, black against white, Catholic against Protestant. Socialists fight against all this and try to show the workers that they have the same interests all the world over.

In particular, we are completely on the side of the people of the colonies in their fight for national liberation; their Nationalism and our internationalism are part of the same struggle against the imperialists.

It would be impossible for socialism to be perfected in one place, in isolation from the rest of the world. When socialism is begun in one country, the capitalists remaining in power in other parts of the globe will try to smash the first socialist state and, if this fails, to hinder it in every way. Its survival would depend on the support of workers throughout the world and, in the long run, on the international victory of socialism.

IS SOCIALISM A WORKER'S MOVEMENT ONLY?

Because of their position in capitalist society, the workers are the mainspring of the movement to change that society. Brought together in industry in large numbers, they learn that they can only improve their conditions by united action as a class.

But in leading the movement for Socialism, the working class is putting an end to all oppression. Socialism will mean the emancipation of the colonial people, of women, of youth. All kinds of people are drawn into the struggle for all kinds of reasons. While it depends for its leadership and its main support upon the industrial workers, Socialism is "the movement of the immense majority in the interests of that majority."

SHOULD SOCIALISTS WORK FOR REFORMS UNDER CAPITALISM?

We are in favour of anything which really benefits the working class. While remaining uncompromisingly opposed to the capitalist system, socialists are in the forefront of every struggle to obtain concessions within that system. But we know that these struggles can succeed only if they look forward to a new society, for the capitalists will give something only if they are in danger of losing everything.

In fighting for reforms - higher wages, better housing, a free health service, democratic rights - the workers train themselves for Socialism. They build organisations like Trade Unions and Labour Parties which are stepping stones to the organisation of society itself.

"REFORMS ARE THE BY-PRODUCT OF THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM."

The decline of capitalism means that the ruling class will not be able to grant concessions indefinitely. What distinguishes socialists from liberal reformers is that they do not restrict their demands to those which are "practicable" under capitalism. Ultimately reforms will burst the framework of the capitalist system.

IS THE LABOUR PARTY SOCIALIST?

The Labour Party was built by and for the British workers, and, whatever else can be said about it, this is its great merit in socialist eyes. Although it has a socialist constitution and most British socialists are to be found amongst its members, many of its leaders think only in terms of patching up bankrupt capitalism in Britain.

The 1945 Government achieved many things of great importance to the working class, but it did not really touch the capitalist foundations of British society. For example, in nationalizing certain industries, most of which were bankrupt anyway, it gave very generous compensation and also left many of the old bosses in charge.

It would not be correct to call the Labour Party a socialist party but, sooner or later, it must either become socialist - or fall to pieces.

IS RUSSIA SOCIALIST?

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was the breaking of imperialism at its weakest link. Taking advantage of the breakdown due to the world war, the workers and peasants overthrew Czarism and capitalism, and began the building of a socialist society. But the leaders of the movement knew that in a backward country with a largely peasant population, socialism must rely on the assistance of the workers of more advanced countries.

THE SUCCESS OF THE REVOLUTION DEPENDED ON THE INTERNATIONAL STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITALISM.

The Labour Movements of the world were able to prevent the victory of imperialism in the Wars of Intervention, but for a variety of reasons, the world overthrow of capitalism did not take place. Instead, the Soviet Union was left to solve enormous social and economic problems isolated in a hostile capitalist world.

The result was the growth of a ruling caste of managers and officials who exterminated the leaders of October 1917, stamped out the spark of workers' democracy and gained enormous power and privilege for themselves.

It is quite wrong to present the U.S.S.R. today as a picture of what socialism will be like. The bureaucratic dictatorship and the terrific inequalities of living standards are the very opposite of socialism. Nevertheless, the unprecedented economic advances which have been made (despite the absence of democracy) are a proof of the superiority of a planned economy over private ownership.

CAN CAPITALISM STABILIZE ITSELF?

Liberals and reformers have long dreamed of a peaceful capitalism, in which the smooth development of the economy would lead to a steady rise in the living standards of the people. This pleasant illusion has been fostered by the situation in Western Europe and North America, where sections of the working class have been bought over by concessions granted on the basis of profits squeezed out of the colonies. A few crumbs from the imperialist table have created the impression that capitalism need not be so bad, after all.

The capitalist system changes and adapts itself to new conditions. The old "free enterprise" disappears, and the state intervenes and tries to plan the new monopolistic economy. This attempt to apply "socialist" methods in a capitalist framework does iron out some of the minor flaws in the system but only by intensifying the difficulties in other directions. So long as the basic conflict remains between wages and the accumulation of capital, recurrent crises will continue to appear with ever increasing violence.

IS SOCIALISM INEVITABLE?

Capitalism is declining, that is to say, it is unable to solve the problems of war and economic crises which confront it. But it will never collapse of its own accord, for society is not a machine and history is made by living men and women.

Socialism can only come about if people actively work for it. Socialists are the most advanced section of the working class. They strive to strengthen the trade unions, the Labour Party and other organizations of the working people. They seek to understand the workers' problems and try patiently to explain to the people the Socialist solution.

Even if they were able to win a majority for Socialism, and if capitalism were overthrown, many difficulties would still have to be overcome before a socialist society could be built. The workers must learn how to run the economy and to organise the government. The ex-colonial territories - freed from the dead-weight of imperial exploitation - will need help from the industrial countries which once lived on their backs, which means providing technical aid and diverting some of our own capital investment. And the greatest job of all will be to break the resistance of the capitalists to the will of the majority, for they may be willing to resort to arms,

as they did in Spain, in order to regain their power and property. These obstacles can only be overcome if the people really understand what is going on.

Socialism is not inevitable. The alternative is a decaying civilisation, continually racked by economic crisis and world war. Which road will humanity take? Upward to socialism, to a higher form of society, to the conscious control of Man's environment; or downward, along the path of anarchy and destruction?

THE ANSWER IS IN THE HANDS OF THE ORDINARY PEOPLE OF THE WORLD. ONLY YOU CAN DECIDE.

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BOOKS TO READ

Every book ever written is relevant, in some way, to the fight for Socialism. However, here are a few suggestions for anyone beginning to read about some of the questions raised in this pamphlet.

- FREDERICK ENGELS - Socialism, Utopian and Scientific
- JOHN STRACHEY - Why You Should Be a Socialist
- LEO HUBERMAN - Man's Worldly Goods
- JOHN STRACHEY - The Nature of Capitalist Crisis
- G.D.H. COLE - A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement
- JOHN REED - Ten Days That Shook the World
- EVELYN ANDERSON - Hammer or Anvil?

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