WHAT IS SOCIALISM

Socialism is a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interests of society as a whole.

Now that we have defined Socialism as a system of society, further explanation of our definition is in order. Once it has become clear exactly what we mean, two things will become apparent: first, that the concept of Socialism held by the World Socialist Party and its Companion Parties is the only sound one; and second, that we are the only organization of all of those professing socialism or communism as their goal to hold this viewpoint.

Systems of Society

The first point to clarify is the phrase "system of society." Wherever there is a group of people living together in some form of organization and entering into various relationships with one another in the course of earning a living, there we have a *society*. In America and the rest of the industrialized world there exists one type of society. In other "civilized" but industrially backward areas of the world there exists a different type of society. There are still different societies to be found among the most primitive people such as Brazilian and Australian aborigines.

All of the relationships added together among the inhabitants of any area constitutes the *particular* system of society. Some Brazilian and Australian aborigines and some South Sea Islanders still live under relationships of primitive tribal communism. There is no buying and selling and the necessities of life are shared in common. In actual numbers, those living in this type of society are of course relatively very few.

Much of the Arab world, on the other hand, still carries on in a society which embraces a mixture of Feudalism and Chattel Slavery with a dab of incipient Capitalism thrown in. Most of the population in this area still live in a condition of serfdom and a traffic in kidnaping, buying and selling of humans into chattel slavery flourishes.

In the recently advancing nations such as India and China, capitalism is rapidly becoming the order of the day even though vast numbers of the populations are as yet quite untouched by it, while the industrially advanced nations such as America, Britain, Russia, France and the Germanys carry on in a total commodity or capitalist system of society. In all of the capitalist world we find on the one hand a vast majority of the population compelled to work for wages, salaries or their equivalents in order to live, while on the other hand, a relatively small minority is able, by virtue of ownership of property to live comfortably and luxuriously, without the need to labor.

This system of society, notwithstanding the aliases frequently used or the type of government is capitalism and historically it has taken various forms running all the way from prevalent laissez-faire or privately controlled capitalism, through corporations and cartels to partial and total state capitalism. On the other hand, the forms of government have varied and still vary and take such forms as Republics, Constitutional Monarchies, One Party Dictatorships and so forth. But whether the worker receives his wages from an employer whom he can call by name, a corporation or a government department or whether he is governed by a Parliament, a Congress, a President or a Dictator, he is still exploited — still lives under the relationships of wage-labor and capital.

Socialism, of course, when it has been introduced will also be a system of society, but one quite different from anything that has ever existed before. Unlike the remaining primitive communal societies it will be based upon a flowing abundance, a veritable cornucopia of wealth rather than on scarcity and primitive conditions. On the other hand, people will no longer deal with one another in the relationships of buyer to seller, wage-laborer to employer, lender to borrower and so forth. The relationships will be those of free men and women, all sharing in a sane system of society based upon common ownership of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth.

Common Ownership

Let us take a look at common ownership. Unfortunately there exists such a thing as a poverty of language, and confusion sometimes arises from this fact. We still speak, for example, of blood relationships long after it has been scientifically established that physical characteristics are not inherited through the blood stream but through the genes. On the other hand, socialists usually use the expression common *ownership* to designate socialism even though we understand that ownership of any kind in the present meaning of the word will be absent.

By common ownership we do not mean such phenomena as "public ownership" (utilities) or "government ownership" such as exists preponderately in Soviet Russia and to a large extent in all capitalist nations. "Public" and "government ownership" can only exist in a class society in which the so-called "public" and the government is made up of members and representatives of the ruling or owning class. Since the working class works for wages and salaries that can only be based upon the cost of producing and reproducing their labor-power, the workers as a class can not participate in ownership.

The only way that the term "common ownership" can have any real meaning then is to equate it with the free right of access to all that is produced by every man, woman and child in the society. This means that production will be carried on only for use and not at all for sale on the market. There will be no buying and selling, no wages, prices, profits or money of any kind. There will be no more division of society into capitalists and workers. Socialism will be a society in which everyone will give according to their abilities and receive according to their needs.

Democracy Unlimited

For this reason there can not be any kind of control other than genuine democratic control of these means and instruments of production and distribution, not the spurious sort of democracy which exists under capitalism, which is based upon economic slavery.

The capitalist class continues and will continue to own and control the political state with all of its legal and coercive power, as long as the workers support this arrangement. When the working class, organized for socialism, has finally stripped the capitalists of this political control, government over peoples will become administration over affairs, class society will vanish and democracy — genuine democracy — will finally triumph.

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