

2. Socialism: Historical and General

The history of the growth and development of socialism could be likened to the biblical account of the birth and growth of the human race. It is largely a tale of the emergence of a utopian ideal and its gradual dissipation and fragmentation the result of conflicting elements fighting for supremacy. So that today, as in the human race conflict is still the supreme characteristic of human relations, so in the world of socialist theory we have reached the stage of a veritable Tower of Babel, with as many variations on the original theme as, in mankind, there are radical and national differences.

So far has this process gone that the original ideas have been virtually lost sight of and socialist theory is now confused with theories of democracy, political theory and even modifications of the antithesis, 'capitalism' as witness the recent development in Australia of 'workers' Capitalism' in the acquisition of trading enterprises, such as the taking over of a Melbourne department store by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, and its entering of other 'capitalist' fields of activity.

Whereas the inspired thinkers who founded the modern movement called socialism, Robert Owen in Britain, Fourier in France, saw the human situation of their day as one of actual bondage which could, however, be transformed into the co-operative society by encouraging the flowering of man's essential 'humanity', once its potential for harmonious living was realised — a theory largely influenced by the basic doctrine of Christianity — there soon arose as the ranks of socialists grew those who denied the essential unity of ideas of the 'co-operators' by expressing strongly individual lines of theory, ranging from St. Simon's 'technological revolution' to Godwins's anarchism, embracing such variants as Christian Socialism, Guild Socialism, the Social Democrats and the Communists, to mention only the main lines of deviation.

Marx, of course, was the most uncompromising disrupter of the vision splendid of those who relied on man's natural instincts for the achievement of the co-operative commonwealth. Flailing the visionaries contemptuously as 'utopians', he expounded his own theory of 'the materialist conception of history', stressed the inevitableness of the class war and described his own doctrine as 'scientific socialism' with a sort of 'war to end war' finality. Marx's aggressive logic was more attuned to the harsher conditions of the workers of the rest of Europe than to those in Gt. Britain where the idealism of the Owenites remained the dominant influence and where reforms were having their effect, however limited in scope, introduced often by the very 'enemies' of the Marxist dogma, such as aristocrats like Shaftsbury.

The falsity of the premise on which the Marxist logic was based was devastatingly exposed by such analysts as Henry George, Max Hirsch and others, in spite of which varying forms of Marxism, or derivatives of it, still persist throughout the world, largely it is clear, because of man's primary response to an appeal to his emotions rather than to his reason. For how anyone with normal ability to follow logical argument can continue to accept the sophistries of modern Marxist socialism after reading such a comprehensive analysis of its basic assumptions as that of Hirsch in his *Democracy versus Socialism* is beyond understanding.¹

However, it remains a matter of plain fact that, despite such exposure, and despite the fragmentation, the disputation and general confusion of socialist thought over the past half-century or more, there is scarcely a country of the western, or indeed of the Asian, world — apart altogether from those which are securely locked within the authoritarian prison regimes mis-called 'communist' — which has not absorbed into its political and economic environment to a greater or lesser degree some form of socialist doctrine. The almost universal picture is describable as 'welfarism', a stage in the progression towards the total bureaucratisation of society, in which a losing battle is being fought against the steadily rising tide of inflation which could, unless checked, bring about the ultimate goal of socialist theory by default rather than intent. For it is obvious that, whatever country, whether of the extreme right, as in some South American countries, or of a so-called liberal character, their policies reflect the gradual drift towards the authoritarian state, despite the lip-service paid to 'democracy'.

One of the alleged goals of socialism has always been 'freedom'. Listen to any socialist, or quasi-socialist politician today and, sooner or later, he will come through with a slogan about 'freedom', like 'the liberty of the subject', 'the right of self-determination', 'free speech, opinion and assembly', et al; even leaders of the 'iron curtain countries' have been known to utter such phrases for international consumption. One has, of course, only to check such sloganising against the relentless suppression of tendencies towards such 'freedoms' everywhere today, even in those countries of reputedly democratic governments, such as the U.S.A., Gt. Britain, Australia and New Zealand, to be aware of the irony, or at worst cynicism, they reflect. Whereas in the worst situations the suppression takes the form of actual physical violence and deprivation, in even the most 'open' countries human rights are constantly under attack by those whose fanaticism drives them to use the forms and numbers of parliament to foist on a helpless electorate their tax policies or controls of one kind and another, to increase the powers of their bureaucracies, to tighten their grip on the money machine, to increase privilege and monopoly — all in the name of 'the public interest'.

By this test alone, then, socialism, explicit or incipient, is self-exposed as, at the least, anachronistic, at the worst a hollow and brutal sham. But it is on examination of its basic doctrine, 'the socialisation of the means of

production, distribution and exchange', that its essential falsity is laid bare. Admittedly, this famous slogan is little heard of in political utterances today, but this is simply evidence of a concession to the modern trend of image-making, the hypocrisy of propagandists in the interest of suppression of the truth. It may be actually removed from a Labor Party platform under the pretext that it is 'out of date'; more correctly it is because of its damaging effect on the current 'image' of democratic economic management. It does no more than lull the unsuspecting into acquiescence in the soft approach to their ultimate enslavement. Ask any ardent socialist, any active member of a Labor Party, anywhere, what he understands, for instance, by nationalisation of any or all industry and he will give you the socialist concept of public ownership of the means of production 'in the interests of the whole society'; if pressed for a reason for the 'necessary' act, he will tell you that it is essential to cut out the evil of private profit and the exploitation of the workers by the capitalist owners of industry. Ten to one he will add that it is only when the industry is state-controlled that there can be industrial peace, despite the frequency of strikes in nationalised industries throughout the non-communist world. He may offer the extreme left-wing argument that workers' control is the only sure guarantee of both industrial peace and the end of capitalist exploitation, but advocates of this system are usually hardline communists, either Maoist, Soviet or Australian style, hooked on Marxist theory as on an hallucinatory drug. The right of the individual to choose his own employment and on what terms is as alien to them as the 'divine right of kings'.

NOTES ON CHAPTER 2

1. MAX HIRSCH:

Democracy versus Socialism, MacMillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1901, The MacMillan Company, New York; *Socialism the Slave State*: The Henry George School of Social Science, New York 1939.