

Socialism and the Principles of the International Working Men's Association

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The development of the labor movement in most of the countries following the dissolution of the First International places into sharp relief the baneful influence – tactical and political – which authoritarian socialism – whether reformist or pseudo-revolutionist – exercised over the proletarian movement. Taking part in the politics of the bourgeois state has not brought the working class one inch nearer to true socialism, but on the contrary, it lost in dynamic power and importance because of it. The old saying, “he who dines with the Pope dies from it,” has been fully confirmed in this case. One who is drawn in by the gear of the state machinery is destroyed by it, parliamentary activity having gradually undermined the labor and the socialist movement, destroying in the first place its faith in the necessity of creative and independent action, and imbuing it with the belief that its salvation may come from above. The consequences of this delusion have become clear more than ever since the war, especially in Germany, where it struck deep roots. So that even a bourgeois paper like the *Frankfurter Zeitung* could write with reason that until now no revolution was so poverty-stricken in its ideas as the November revolution of Germany. There was not the slightest tinge of any great ideas – economic or political; it was a collapse of a labor movement in spite of the millions of workers organized politically and in the trade unions, and the slow but ceaseless process of sliding down toward the present Fascism, against which it did not even make an attempt to defend itself. The engrafting of the labor movement upon the state and its sinking to the position of a mere tool of the latter could not but lead to these results.

One of the main causes of the prevailing confusion of ideas is this fallacious conception of the relative value of the State, a conception which leads people to ignore the role of the political factors of state power in history. Under the influence of the Marxist dogma about the decisive importance of the given conditions of production, there has come to prevail the view which considers the various forms of the state and its apparatus as the political and legal complements of a certain economic structure, a view according to which the economic structure “gives the key to all social phenomena.” But in reality each chapter of history gives us a thousand examples how because of certain forms of state power the economic evolution may be turned backwards or imprisoned in certain retrograde forms for several centuries.

And do we not now see how the State completely closes the way out of the present crisis and delivers the future of great countries to generals, politicians and adventurers. Another proof is given us by Bolshevist Russia in which a party drunk with power has to the last moment blocked economic rebuilding upon the basis of true socialism, and has thrown the country into a state of slavery, chaining it to a state capitalism, whose far-reaching consequences for the future of Europe have hardly been realized by the proletariat. Two distinct conceptions of socialism manifest themselves in the aspirations of the working class. They played a great role in the past, but in the near future they will have a more decisive importance. Economic equality is not identical with social enfranchisement. Even in monasteries, prisons and barracks, there is a certain degree of economic equality: dwellings, uniforms, food, equal service. The old Inca state and the Jesuitic state of Paraguay succeeded in establishing a regimented equality for all the inhabitants of the country, in spite of which there reigned the worst of despotism, the individual being but an automaton obedient to the superior will. That is why socialism without liberty would be the worst slavery imaginable. "The impulses of social justice will assert themselves fully if rooted in the libertarian sentiment of humanity. That is, "socialism will be free, or there will be none". The right to exist on the part of the I. W. M. A. finds its deepest justification in the fact that it acknowledged and accepted all those principles. The struggle developed between the Socialists and the Bolsheviks, despite its seemingly violent nature, is of no basic importance, and this will continue to be so in so far as the Russian government will see in the foreign Communist parties a fit instrument of its foreign policy. Socialists and Communists hold the same position and their tactical methods differ but little. Both rely heavily upon the state apparatus and both aspire to a form of society which could be called State Capitalism. The declaration made by the leaders of the Austrian Social-Democracy confirm this opinion. That is why we should not be misled by the clamorous, superficial and purely fraternal struggle. Even the fight between the Lassaleans and the Marxists was not carried on without white gloves. The question is whether they have any common basis for fusion, and as to this, there can be no doubt.

But less than ever does such a common basis exist now for the I. W. M. A. For never did Libertarian Socialism have so much moral significance as now, when the whole world is swept by a furious reaction which finds its support not only in governmental circles, but which permeates deeply the broad masses of the population. The most terrible evil of our age is not the political reaction menacing society in the form of fascism; the greatest danger is the spiritual reaction due to which men become imbued with the principles of fascism. That is why the slightest concession made to fascist nationalism and to Russian State Capitalism means that true socialism is losing ground; that is why it becomes a betrayal of human liberty a stab in the back to the revolution of the future.

While the I. W. M. A. remains true to this anti-authoritarian conception of socialism, its existence is more than justified, is of the most urgent necessity, whether the number of its adherents be small or large as compared with the other movements and tendencies. The spirit of an organization is of greater importance than members; what is of importance above all is that which signalizes the future, which arouses all the despised and humiliated to the realization that it is by their own efforts that they will be able to enter upon the road leading to free socialism.

The I. W. M. A. does not promise the poor of the earth any paradise, the doors of which will open without any struggle. Rights do not fall down like over-ripe fruits; they are won after a long struggle, by tireless work, by aiming firmly at the ultimate goal of our aspirations. And just as the organization of a new society can be done by workers themselves only, no state being equal

to this task, so can there be only one effective method of struggle against economic and political oppression: *direct action*.

These methods are not secondary in their nature, something to be determined by circumstances only. The latter may decide the external forms of these methods, but not its character in itself. The methods of a movement always flow from its aims and principles. The one that considers political power as the necessary premise for the realization of socialism cannot but be drawn into the every-day political life of the state. But he who understands that the ultimate aim of socialism cannot be the conquest, but the elimination of all authority from the life of society, he must follow other roads in his struggle for daily bread and for every shred of liberty, since he knows that all rights attained are wrested in the struggle and not given as state charity. What is important for the worker is not the seizure of the state, but the seizure of the land and factories, building up a society in which there will be no exploitation, no oppression of man by man. This is the ultimate goal, this is the road followed by the I. W. M. A., an organization which does not serve a party or the state. It is not the instrument of a new dictatorship which cannot but lead to the establishment of a new caste and placing new obstacles on the road of the workers' emancipation.

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