MAY DAY & SOCIALISM

May Day is supposed to be a celebration of the strength, power and solidarity of the international workers' movement. It is now also a celebration of the power of the Russian and Chinese States, of bureaucratic power over the proletariat. There is very little in common between the libertarian socialism of the Chicago anarchists whose execution in Haymarket Square on May 1st last century is marked by May Day, and the totalitarianism of the bureaucratic class societies of the so-called socialist bloc which are renowned for the suppression and execution of their own dissidents.

This degeneration of May Day from a revolutionary festival to a demonstration of the durability of class society symbolises the fate of the interational workers' movement. The classical period of the workers' movement, which began with the Paris Commune, was brought to an end by the Second World War and the world-wide counter-revolution represented both by fascism and Stalinism. During this period, Marxism, which originally proclaimed the revolutionary abolition of class society, was transformed into the political agency and ideological expression of a new ruling class in Russia on the one hand, and into a reformist force for capitalist integration in Germany and Western Europe generally on the other. Significantly, the last and perhaps the most meaningful proletarian upsurge of this period, the struggle for socialism during the Spanish Civil War, was carried out by a revolutionary proletariat which was avowedly anarchist and which had to fight, in addition to Franco, the two standard-bearers of Marxism in Spain, the Spanish Socialist and Communist Parties.

The fate of the classical workers' movement is a practical confirmation, in our opinion, of the views of Bakunin, Marx's great antagonist in the 1st International. Bakunin warned that one of the chief dangers to the workers' movement was bureaucratization. Marxism, he argued, contained tendencies which would, if realised in a revolutionary situation, result in 'Red Bureaucracy' and the establishment of a new ruling class.

"They will concentrate all the powers of government in strong hands.... . They will create a single state bank, concentrating in its hands all the commercial, industrial, agricultural and even scientific production; and they will divide the mass of people into two armies - industrial and agricultural armies under the direct command of the State engineers who will constitute the new privileged scientific - political class." Alternatively, Bakunin argued, Marxism would also engender the rise of mass bureaucratic Socialist parties which refused to go beyond the framework of bourgeois democracy and would act simply as parliamentary parties seeking peaceful social reform.

Bakunin's critical insights articulated in the early 1870's were echoed in this century by the other notable therists of libertarian socialism, the dissident marxists Karl Korsh and Anton Pannekoek and the French, Italian, American and Spanish syndicalists, revolutionaries who were confronted with the realisation of Bakunin's predictions in the form of Russian Bolshevism and German Social Democracy. For them, and for modern libertarian socialists, the basic strategico-political conception which fosters such developments is state socialism, the position which postulates the institutional means for achieving socialism to be a centralised party and state and which equates socialism with the nationalisation of the economy and its administration by an elaborate state-appointed managerial hierarchy. No matter how democratically-constituted the State is, the workers will still be confronted with an unelected, alien economic administration in the workplaces and industries. It is this conception which was common to both Bolshevism and classical European Social Democracy and which continues to be the basis of Soviet and Maoist ideology, of Eurocommunism and the various radical third world nationalist movements, and of the A.L.P. and the competing Lenino-Trotskyist sects in this country.

Since the decline of the classical workers' movement, there have been many significant developments. In Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland worker-student rebellions have attempted to find a meaningful alternative to the prevailing state socialism. In Britain, America, Australia and the rest of the capitalist west the concept of worker's control is being popularized in opposition to both the corporate and nationalised sectors of the economy. Movements have arisen aiming for the abolition of patriarchy, the establishment and extension of the power and rights of residents, the protection of the environment and the utilisation of socially useful technologies, the democratization of education, for rank and file controlled militant unionism and so on. The dynamic of these developments and movements is towards self-management in particular spheres of social life and in society as a whole. The increased awareness amongst the participants in these movements about the dangers of hierarchy, authority, and the centralisation of power contrasts sharply with the economism and authoritarianism of the state socialist organisations. The achievement of libertarian socialism, of generalised self-management and participatory democracy institutionally expressed through federations of worker-community councils which regulate production and social life on the basis of a recognition of the importance of autonomy, decentralisation of power and individual and collective freedom, remains a real possibility.

"SOCIALISM, both in its ends and in its means, is a struggle to realise freedom".

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