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The Joy of Socialism, the Heartbreak of Capitalism

It is important to develop a vision of a more humane society than the one we live in. We believe that the new society must be *socialist*, and that the nature of that socialism is something we and our readers should be discussing.

Tsuris, Tsuris, Everywhere

Read the papers, watch the news. All around us there are two kinds of crimes being committed. The first, crimes that relatively powerless people commit among themselves including rape, murder and theft. The second, crimes committed against us by powerful people and interests including war, pollution, inflation (a reduction in everyone's wages), and unemployment. All these crimes make people begin to think about the "system" as a whole.

We have found that the problems, whether they are violence, unemployment, or political corruption, relate in one way or another to the economic system: capitalism. Not all of the problems are caused solely by capitalism, and they would not automatically be solved were capitalism to disappear. Yet capitalism is an important factor in the ills of our society.

Many problems are inherent in capitalism because of the profit motive. The capitalist economy is based on an exploitative relationship between the workers and the owners. The owner employs workers to make a profit, or what is sometimes called "surplus value."

We've never been able to challenge the owner's right to profits because of the power that wealthy people have in our society.

On a day-to-day level we can see that power and status in this society depend on individual wealth. The doorman in a hotel shows deference to the big businessman, and ignores the working person. If you're a secretary, you learn to get results by saying, "I'm calling for Mr. Crown," rather than saying, "I'm Ms. Cohn and I'd like to know if . . ." Under capitalism, your worth as an individual (and your power) is primarily dependent on the amount of money you have or control.

Companies care about their financial costs, not

about social costs (the costs paid by all the people) of their industry. They build plants that pollute and disrupt people's lives, based on financial profit projections. Companies automate to increase profit, not to make workers' jobs easier. Meanwhile, unemployment caused by automation becomes a social cost since workers turn to food stamps and welfare when they can't find new jobs. Corporate owners avoid the taxes that support these programs by taking advantage of the loopholes provided by sympathetic politicians.

Many myths are offered in defense of profit and capitalism. One myth is that under capitalism the company that serves the needs of people prospers while those companies which don't fail. As a result, profit is greatly dependent on *creating* needs through advertising, not on serving already existing, real needs. TV ads teach us to hate our bodies so we'll buy products that change the way we look, feel, and smell. A good example is "feminine hygiene" deodorant spray. The companies decided not to make sprays *until* they were sure they could advertise them on TV. They knew that no one would buy the sprays unless they could be convinced they needed them. People's real needs are not being met because there is no profit in meeting them.

There is a real need for child care in this country, but capitalists aren't interested in meeting this need because most of the people who need child care can't pay what is needed to make it profitable.

Another myth of capitalism is that only the best product survives in the marketplace, and thus consumers get the best for their money. Actually, the product that sells best is usually the one that is distributed and advertised best. Often the advertising budget for a new product is far greater than the amount of money spent on product development and research.

Under capitalism, waste and duplication thrive as long as each company gets its share of the profits. We have many brands of soap that differ only in wrapping, and several major brands of aspirin that are different in name only. Since by federal regulations they

are chemically identical, a large part of the price we pay for aspirin is money the competing companies spend on advertising to convince us to buy their product.

Income and wealth studies show that the people who benefit most from capitalism are a small percentage (one percent of the people in this country own one-third of the total wealth and two-thirds of the corporate stock). Their power and wealth grows as large companies and conglomerates buy up smaller ones.

This is appropriate under capitalism, as capitalism is based on the "right" of one person or company to prey on the next. When this kind of competition is the basis for social interaction it's almost inevitable that tension between individuals and groups (e.g. between minorities) will increase, especially during slumps in the economy.

What We Want

Capitalism does not serve the needs or interests of the people in this country, who work for the owners of the major corporations—whether directly as employees or indirectly as consumers. We believe that it should be replaced by socialism, which would mean cooperation with everyone working for the benefit of all.

Under socialism both raw materials and the major means of production (oil companies, utilities, agribusiness, etc.) are publicly owned. No one makes money off the exploitation of another person's labor. The owners of the major means of production, the Mellons, Rockefellers, DuPonts, etc., would not be compensated for "their" property. It is the labor of generations of workers and consumers that created their wealth. Personal property like homes, cars, and appliances do not become publicly owned, a fear people have when they hear the word socialism.

Socialism would mean an economy based on human welfare and social needs, not financial profit. If people's needs were to be met, rather than those of a self-serving bureaucracy, there would need to be decentralized planning and control. Technology would be used to improve everyone's lives.

People would have control of their working lives. Organizations would be collectively run with decisions made by all. There would be no bosses as such—but when a "supervisor" would be needed that position could be rotated, and the supervisor would be responsible to the workers.

A socialist society is based on the principle that

the working people are the country's most valuable resource. Thus society will take care of their needs, whether they be food, shelter, or living a useful old age. There would be free medical care, both preventive (emphasis on keeping people healthy through education and other means) and demystified (people would be told why something was being done to them in terms they could understand).

Political System

So far we've only discussed the economic benefits that socialism would bring. People have fears and misconceptions about the political system that would follow a socialist revolution; so we'd like to describe the political system that we're advocating to accompany this socialist society.

In a socialist society economic freedom has the *potential* of leading to great political and social freedom. Some leftists believe this potential will be immediately realized, and that anti-semitism, sexism, and racism will disappear. Unfortunately, they're wrong. These societal ills did not originate with capitalism, and their deep-grained influences may remain in our culture long after any economic basis is removed. Therefore there would have to be extensive self-determination for Jews and other minorities, and a real pluralism, where each group could develop and be proud of its identity without being forced to assimilate into the larger society. This might include a school voucher system with funds available to set up schools that teach pride, history, and culture to minorities with bilingual or trilingual public facilities as needed. Each group would have public media time designated for special programs, and all general programming would reflect America's diversity by portraying positive images of Jews, Blacks, women, gays, and all other people.

Institutional forms of sexism and racism would be abolished; non-sexist and non-racist books, educational materials and toys would be developed. Child care would be available to all. There would be no discrimination based on sexual preferences and no prohibition on the private activity of consenting adults.

In reading about existing socialist political systems, people compare them to ours in the United States, when it would be more appropriate to compare those present political systems to how these countries were prior to socialism. Some people don't realize that those countries have made great political advances over the past. For example, under the

leadership of Mao and the Communist Party, the Chinese people are literate and healthy for the first time in their history. They have more input into local decision-making than they had before.

We believe that socialism in the United States could lead to better living conditions, more respect shown to people, and increased citizen input.

It will take a revolution in the institutions of our society to reach the type of humane life about which we are talking. Will this revolution be a sudden upheaval, or take place through a slow evolutionary process? We would like to see a peaceful transition to socialism, but history provides us with few examples of capitalists allowing the people to redistribute wealth by democratic process.

We can look around the world and see the failures and successes of both the vanguard-Leninist model and the democratic-socialist model for socialism.

Countries controlled by parties that call themselves Leninist have greatly improved the economic lot of their people. Yet the economic change has not resulted in the other freedoms and wonderful society envisioned by early socialists like Engels and Marx. Often anti-semitism, oppression of women, repression of gays, and economic unrest still exist. The wealth of these countries is frequently controlled by a bureaucratic elite that allows for little or no political dissent. This restriction of the political process leads to a sharp detour in the journey towards socialism and freedom. The clearest examples are the USSR and its East European satellites.

Democratic socialism has been strongest in countries where there are more civil liberties and more advanced capitalist economies, such as Scandinavia, and to some extent, Great Britain. Where democratic socialists have attained some measure of power they have established welfare reforms and extensive social services. But they have been limited in their struggles by capitalists in their nations and capital flees these countries to be invested elsewhere. Only those industries that are economic failures as a result of deliberate capitalist decision to let them fail, e.g. the railroads, are nationalized. They become a burden on the people rather than an opportunity to improve their lot. In general, the democratic socialist parties have failed to transform their countries into socialist societies because they have been unable to expropriate the basic means of production.

In the last twenty years some democratic socialists have moved to the right and become liberals, losing sight of any real struggle for socialism. Others have

pursued anti-communism to the extent that they have become willing allies of the CIA.

In those countries where democratic socialists steered a more radical course, they have not been able to stay in power. The Allende government in Chile, which did embark on a program of land re-distribution and nationalization of industry, was ultimately toppled by a right-wing coup after suffering through several years of an international economic embargo. We do not believe that the Allende government fell because it had been democratically elected, but rather because it was the victim of a capitalist economic conspiracy. Chilean socialism was not strong enough to resist an international trade boycott, and, significantly, the so-called social democracies of Western Europe did little to help until after the fact.

We believe there is a need for a socialist movement that reflects the diversity of our society and provides for self-determination for Jews and other minorities. People committed to socialism must learn from the experience of other peoples and other socialist parties.

We know that during these times of economic trouble and social unrest, persecution of Jews and minorities will increase. We recognize the vital need for a strong Jewish left movement that will face that persecution and work within the Jewish community for solutions to our common problems. Such a movement will have to strongly defend our right to self-determination when working with other left groups.

The struggle for socialism must be accompanied by a struggle for more freedom and democracy. As an old Jewish Labor Bund slogan states: "Democracy without socialism is not democracy. Socialism without democracy is not socialism."