

# What Is OUR Road to Socialism?

(The following is an excerpt based on a speech delivered at the Jefferson School, March 21, as part of a course on new problems of Marxism.)

By MILTON HOWARD

IS IT UTOPIAN to advocate Socialism in the United States now?

This question will be discussed, I see, in a forum sponsored by the Socialist Monthly Review edited by Paul Sweezy and Leo Huberman. It is a very pertinent issue.

Some people think that "Socialism is not on the order of the day in America now." They are quite right of course if by this is meant that the American people today see no necessity for a Socialist solution of their, or the nation's, problems. When it is argued, from this, that Marxists have to

participate in the very midst of the labor movement, farmers, middle classes, etc., to help provide wise answers to the tactical problems which face all these groups in their desire for immediate benefits, I agree fully. I try to advocate this point of view among all Socialist-minded Americans.

On the other hand, the advocacy of Socialism is a constant and basic obligation of all Socialism-minded Americans. Such advocacy, of course, has its tactical problems — the time, the place, the manner all have to be taken into account so that the necessity of Socialism can be best understood.

But this means that the advocacy of Socialism must be based not on some generalized, vague Socialist ideal, though I would be the last one to belittle the creative power of the Socialist ideal even in the abstract. On the contrary, the unfolding of the beauty and humanistic morality of the Socialist ideal amid the jungle ethics of present-day society is a creative and constant duty of Socialists. This was no small part of the creative influence of the peerless Socialist

advocate, Eugene Victor Debs.

NEVERTHELES, it is still true that the actual course of Socialist development, or rather development toward Socialism in the USA, is bound to arise mainly on the basis of the real, material course of the national development, on the actual conditions, traditions, and needs of the majority of the people in this country, especially of that majority which must sell its muscles and brains to some one else, to the big corporations and billion-dollar trust.

This means that American Marxism must work out a convincing theory of America's national development.

This would show, on the basis of what has happened, that Socialism will be the next stage of this national development. And this will be true not only because some people will wish it; the majority will wish it because the actual economic and social situation will compel them to wish it. The work of Socialist advocacy is indispensable to speed up this process of the popular, conscious realization of the national need for Socialism.

On such a basis—and it is the classic basis of Marxian Social-

ism—the idea that American Socialism can ever be a "subversive conspiracy" is either a clownish or a malicious absurdity. For it is of the essence of the evolution of the American nation toward Socialism that this evolution is continuous with what has gone before no less than it is bound to be different from it both economically (new property relations) and socially (more democracy, greater dignity and worth of the individual).

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AMERICAN advocates of Socialism have gone through a number of different conceptions of the development of the American nation. They have all been one-sided thus far, experience shows. There was a prolonged period of debunking of America's national development. Angered at the silky, suave propaganda that America's history was a sort of divine adventure free of class struggle, many advocates of Socialism concentrated on a debunking of this slick legend. But in their hands, the course of American history was distorted "on the other side."

These writers did good service in digging up the sordid facts of corruption, waste, cruelty, plunder which have inevitably marked the building of the American nation on a capitalist basis. A highly valuable literature of "muck-raking" and exposure resulted, and helped to produce popular movements of vitally needed reform.

Obviously, the constant exposure of what goes on behind the scenes in the monopolies, in government, is an unquestioned necessity for Marxists, progressives, and honest men generally.

But this was not the whole matter. Even under this form of the national development (for which the newest propagandists want to give Big Business "Robber Barons" the credit), there also took place the creative genius of American labor, science, and technology. The debunking theory of American history could not adequately grasp this. Therefore, the entire matter of national pride, of patriotic pride in one's country's achievements was handed over to the cunning pirates of the corporations.

SIMILARLY, with regard to the two tremendous American social advances, the American Revolution of 1776 and the Civil War of the 1860's were debunk-

ed from this one-sided standpoint. Yet it is impossible for America to go forward without an understanding of the enduring democratic stamp which these events placed on the national development despite the very strong elements of democracy-hating reaction, violence, and racism which have waged war against the democratic evolution of American society at every step of the way, and still do. (Corrections of these errors are seen in the essay of Herbert Aptheker on the American Constitution in "Looking Forward" and in James Allen's essay in Masses and Mainstream, 1955).

There was the error of Earl Browder when, as leader of the American Marxists, he wrongly attributed to the billion-dollar capitalists of contemporary America the same democratic role which they had played earlier. This simply was not true. Between debunking and this approach a correct approach must be found.

Surely new national and world developments compel new evaluations of the relationship of Marxian Socialism and the traditions of national democracy, especially as these relate to the growing possibility of a peaceful transition to Socialism.

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BOTH EUGENE DENNIS and John Gates, Communist Party secretary and Daily Worker editor, sounded just these ideas in the historic Carnegie Hall meeting in January. When Gates flatly asserted that "we are Constitutional Communists" and Dennis asserted the necessity for an American path to Socialism with American forms based on the national development, they were stating at least the beginnings of a new stage in American Marxism. Why?

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FIRST, it means that the transition to Socialism is seen more clearly than ever as a social development tightly linked to the Marxist appreciation of the revolutionary-progressive role of the American Constitution, to the defense of the Constitution which is proving today that it is a bone in the throat of the reactionaries and racists.

SECOND, despite the lie of the reactionaries that the Constitution and Marxian Socialism are polar opposites, they are seen more clearly than ever as part of

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## World's Finest Shoemakers Wore Cloth Slippers, Until—

By GEORGE LOHR

GOTTWALDOV, Czechoslovakia.—It will be two years in April, if my memory serves me right, since the Kohler workers out in Wisconsin first hit the bricks. I have often told the story here in Czechoslovakia of this drawn-out strike and of the company town

that is ruled with an iron hand by Herbert Kohler, the bathtub baron. The old-timers not knowingly because they remember their own company towns, and it was mostly at their prodding that I went to visit a city now called Gottwaldov where once an industrial monarch had his court.

The name of this king was Jan Bata, and his royal standard was emblazoned with a pair of shoes. He didn't make shoes himself, but his subjects did, millions of them, and when they didn't work hard enough to please his majesty, they quickly found themselves outside the gates of the royal domain. Unions and strikes were, of course,

erned by the workers.

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BATA was adverse to interviews with "red" journalists, and Ilya Ehrenburg was turned down flat when he wanted to talk to "the boss" sometime back in the thirties. It's different now, and I had a long chat, right in Bata's former office, with Karel Krajca, one of the top managers.

Krajca started to work for Bata back in 1919 as an apprentice, and so he knew what I was talking about when I told him about our company towns like Kohler Vil-

fortable two-room, kitchen, bath and balcony flats, and Mrs. Vlasta Behalek told me that she seldom cooks anything but breakfast. She and her husband Edmund had only recently gotten married, but they had both been working at the shoe factory for a long time. Both best workers now, they earn together 2,800 crowns a month. The rent, utilities and all, is exactly 150 crowns, or just a little more than five percent of their income.

Of course, not all the workers in the factory have as yet apartments like the Behaleks. But they're on their way, because there is no more King Bata getting a rake-off on their labor.

# Ways to Socialism

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the same camp of social progress, in that Socialism, under Constitutional democracy, can become a national decision of the people.

**THIRD**, this is because the arrival of Socialism in the United States will obviously take place only after many other nations will already have become Socialist. This is a fundamental difference from the conditions prevailing in the first Socialist country the USSR, which had its own very peculiar forms of development.

For, it follows from this fact that Socialism in America will not face any danger and actual presence of outside military intervention which the first Socialist state had to face. There will be no such peril of a forceful cancellation of the American people's decision for Socialism, or a restoration of capitalism by undemocratic means.

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**FROM THIS** it follows that far from growing dimmer, the possibility of a peaceful, Constitutional transition to American Socialism is bound to grow.

The Bill of Rights is now seen more clearly than ever as a permanent part of American society, with Marxism in fact presenting itself as the most intransigent defender of it before and after Socialism in the United States.

The right to advocate a return

too. Let's be ready to answer ALL questions with clear, objective historical evidence.

AMERICAN COMMUNIST.

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## Criticism of Stalin Help to Capitalism

NEW YORK.

Dear Editor:

I believe that this criticism of Stalin is the most terrible instrument in the hands of the capitalists, and that it is causing a split in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and in Communist Parties all over the world. Where was Khrushchev when all those "crimes" were committed? If the present Soviet leaders wanted to say that the time had come when dictatorship was no longer necessary, they could have done that without making such terrible criticism of such a great man as Stalin, without whom there would not be today a Soviet Union. In my opinion it is a terrible mistake to destroy the tremendous sacrifices of a great man like Stalin.

S. O. S.

to capitalism, or the right to present criticism of or political opposition to the new Socialist system, or any of its decisions, must be guaranteed by the Socialist-defended Bill of Rights. Incidentally, despite many assertions to the contrary, one-party government was never a principle of Marxism.

There is another thought—that is, that the inevitable desire of the monopolistic, racist, reactionary minority to frustrate the democratic national will shall become more difficult, in all probability, to carry out.

My thinking on this is as follows: The economic and social results of the contradiction between the private monopoly of the industries and the real needs of the American worker-farmer-middle class majority will be so palpable to so many millions of Americans that reaction will find it extremely difficult to carry out a fascist-style suppression of the democratic evolution toward a Socialist decision. Certainly, they will probably not be in a position to do this for any length of time, given the democratic tradition of the nation, the acute social needs of the people, and the influence of the powerful and peaceful Socialist economies in the rest of the world.

Undoubtedly, there have been simplifications in this sketchy presentation, and many acute problems have not been touched on (the two-party system, etc.) But, it has been my intention to indicate what is clearer than ever, that the American working class and its millions of fellow-Americans will surely find their own special, national path to Socialism which will bear little or no resemblance to what has gone before in other lands. We are now at the foothills of a collective study of these problems out of which, I feel, a new unity of all Socialist-thinking Americans will arise.

*In Memory*

of

**MORRIS**

*Died March 12, 1953*

—FRIENDS