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COMMUNISM

By

EDEN AND
CEDAR PAUL

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COMMUNISM

COMMUNISM to-day signifies an organised attempt to overthrow the existing social order and to replace it by a better. Underlying this attempt are five main convictions:

First, that the capitalist system, though it has been a necessary stage in world civilisation, cannot possibly be the foundation of true civilisation.

Secondly, that the capitalist system is to-day in a state of extremely unstable equilibrium, that capitalism has become incapable of conducting its own affairs, that chaos is imminent—if it has not already begun.

Thirdly, that social stability, the possibility of order and progress, can only be regained by the establishment of communism through the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Fourthly, that the change must be revolutionary, that it will involve the seizure of power by unconstitutional means, that it will necessitate the forcible suppression of the counter-revolution.

Fifthly, that the overthrow of capitalism must be world-wide, that local revolutions will not suffice, that communism can be achieved in no other way than through realising the programme of the world revolution.

There are many additional implications, and most of them will be outlined in the sequel. But these five will do for a beginning, since they are the most vital characteristics of contemporary communism, and they are points upon which all who now call themselves communists are agreed. They serve at the outset to indicate an important feature of the communist revolution as contrasted with every previous revolution involving extensive changes in social structure, to wit, its fully conscious character. The passage from primitive communism to a slave-holding system was not brought about by a "slavist" movement. The change from slave-holding civilisation to feudalism was not consummated by a "feudalist" party. Only to an infinitesimal extent can the guild system of the medieval cities be regarded as the result of "guildism." To a quite minor degree it might be true to say that the bourgeois revolution resulted from a deliberate "capitalist movement." But in communism, for the first time in the world's history, we see a profound social transformation in progress as the outcome of the creative revolutionary forces of the human mind. And the imagination which is thus realising itself in action, is not common to humanity at large. The creative force is the imagination of a class, the imagination of the revolutionary proletariat.

Primitive Communism

In the remote perspectives of history, the epochs of civilisation based upon ownership rule will probably be regarded as the outcome of temporary mental aberration. Not, of course, by profound students of the philosophy of history; but by the average man, to whom communism will seem to have been always the pre-eminently "natural" social order. Production has invariably been social; only in respect of distribution has civilised man departed from the simplicity of early days. Originally men lived in small self-sufficing hordes or clans. Whether the clan consisted of hunters, fishers, or agriculturists, mattered not; its members were practising communists. As communists, many savage and semi-savage tribes have continued to exist down to recent days, and their hospitality has always been a marvel to civilised travellers. They share their poverty and their riches, even with strangers. The inhabitants of Easter Island invited Captain Cook's companions to share their scanty meal. Darwin reports that the Fuegians, when given a piece of cloth, practised the somewhat unthrifty method of tearing it into small pieces and sharing it out, so that no man might be richer than his neighbour. Livingstone records the universal hospitality of the African tribes in his day. The like communism, among themselves and towards strangers, is met with in out-of-the-way parts of many capitalist countries. The present writers have enjoyed its fruits even since the war, on tramp in the north-west of Scotland, in the Welsh mountains, and among the cottars and small farmers of Devon and Cornwall. Man is not "naturally" the arch-individualist of the bourgeois economists. He has his egoistic impulses, doubtless; but he is likewise "naturally" a communist, and the communist trend has continually been manifesting itself in all regions and throughout the history of civilisation.

Communist Utopias

One notable instance of the communist trend has been the reiterated writing of communist utopias. Some of the greatest books in the history of literature have been works of this kind. Men of all nations have contributed their quota, placing their imaginary commonwealth, now in some inaccessible or fictitious part of the earth's surface, now upon a sister planet. The first and with one exception the most famous book of this character was Plato's *Republic*. The exception, of course, is More's *Utopia*, which gives its name to the whole series. The work of an Englishman, it was penned in Latin, but is available in nearly all European languages. Neither of these celebrated books, though both are well worth reading, really touches the more thorny problems which confront the modern builder of an imaginary society. Four noted recent specimens of the utopian romance were written in the English tongue: Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1887); William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1891); W. D. Howell's *A Traveller from Altruria* (1894); and H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905). Interesting though all these books are,

they have little bearing upon the problems with which the latter-day communist is concerned. They are mentioned only to show how persistently communist solutions of the social problem have attracted the attention of imaginative minds.

Communist Commonwealths and Communist Risings

The vitality of the communist impulse has also been again and again displayed by communist risings, and by peaceful attempts to form communist commonwealths within and yet apart from the existing order. According to *The Acts of the Apostles*, the early Christians "had all things in common," and it is a generally accepted fact that there were Essene communist commonwealths in Judæa fully two thousand years ago. Agricultural production has exhibited extremely tenacious communal forms, of which the Russian mir, the Serbian zadruga, and the village communities of Hindustan, are among the best known. Farming was communal in various parts of Britain down to the dawn of the capitalist era.

Communist in spirit were many of the jacqueries or folk risings of the Middle Ages. John Ball, hanged as one of the leaders in Wat Tyler's rebellion (1360), declared that things would never go well in England so long as goods were not in common. Cade (1450) is described by Shakespeare as saying "all the realm shall be in common." The German anabaptists, who in 1553 attempted to establish the Kingdom of God in the Westphalian city of Münster, were communists. So, likewise, were the "levellers" and the "diggers" who were dispersed by Cromwell's Ironsides. Such disturbers of feudalist or capitalist law and order have arisen in every age and in all the countries of Europe. Nor have scruples regarding the employment of "terrorist methods" disturbed the minds of the established authorities. "The only good communist is a dead communist" has ever been the maxim of the master class.

It is not recorded that any sixteenth-century readers of More's romance set sail in search of the Island of Utopia or the City of Amaurote. But modern utopists have been directly or indirectly responsible for numerous attempts to realise communist ideals. The American continent, in particular, is littered with the wreckage of "Icarias" and similar communities. Hertzka's *Freeland* (the English translation by Arthur Ransome was published in 1891) led to an attempt to found a real Freeland upon a Central African tableland. Hope springs eternal in the utopian breast, and in 1918 we filed a letter from a good comrade whose heart had been sickened by the war and by the brutalisation of the public spirit, and who begged us to join him and others in founding a co-operative commonwealth upon "some unsuspected isle in far-off seas." We replied that we would rather work for the realisation of communism nearer home; and that if our correspondent had a longing for adventure, there was plenty of scope in Soviet Russia! For practical purposes, his South Sea Island was as remote from useful communist endeavour as the planet Mars.

Anarchist Communism

Robert Owen (1771–1858) is regarded as the leading figure in the early history of British socialism. His doctrines and methods, however, belonged rather to the school of anarchist communism, the school of which Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) was the most widely known exemplar. A Welshman by birth, Owen became a cotton manufacturer on the Clyde, and subsequently founded a number of utopian communities in America. The establishment of "New Harmony" in Indiana, and of the various other Owenite communities, brings him in line with the utopists considered in the last section. But his educational work at New Lanark, his freethought and determinist propaganda, and his libertarian ideas, connect him no less closely with the philosophic anarchists and the anarchising socialists. His views were expounded in numerous writings, of which two only need be mentioned, *A New View of Society* (1813), and *The Revolution in the Mind and Practice of the Human Race* (1849), In a somewhat nebulous way, he was a forerunner as regards two of Marx's leading contributions to communist thought: the labour theory of value; and the materialist conception of history. As regards the former, he was connected with an attempt to establish a "labour note" currency, based upon the idea of "average social labour time" as the measure of value. (Owen himself understood well enough that the socialisation of production would be an indispensable preliminary to the adoption of a "labour note" currency. It was the impatience of his disciples which led to an ill-grounded and premature attempt to inaugurate the system within the framework of the capitalist economy.) As regards the latter, his determinism took the form of a conviction that character is moulded by circumstance, and that human beings can be profoundly modified by altering the economic and other conditions environing their lives. Being a libertarian he was fundamentally opposed, not only to punishment as an educational method, but to the use of force or constraint in any form. This anarchist doctrine is in absolute conflict with the modern communist view; for communists hold that force, exercised through the dictatorship of the revolutionary workers, will be essential during the period of transition to a freer state of society.

Owen's general plan of social reorganisation was that the new society was to consist of small self-governing groups, numbering about two thousand persons in each, scattered all over the country. The idea of close integration, as necessary to a highly organised and complex productive community, was no less foreign to his temperament than it was to that of Kropotkin. Liberty, as he understood it, seemed impossible in so large and centralised a community. The individual would wither, and the State would grow more and more. In fact, like all anarchists, not only did he overstress the individualist trends in human character at the expense of the communist trends; but, recognising the oppressive character of the bourgeois State, he desired to get rid of it alto-

gether. So do all communists; but the communists who are not anarchists are convinced that the powers of the bourgeois State must be wrested from the hands of the capitalist class and used by the proletariat throughout a long period of transition while the new society is being upbuilded. Not merely has the centralised organism of ergatocracy or workers' rule to suppress the attempts of the counter-revolution, to suppress the attempts of the feudalists or the "democrats" to regain supremacy; but the ergatocrats have to use all the educational machinery in the hands of the State in order to mould the mentality of the masses and to refit them for communism. In Britain, for example, the work of generations of training in bourgeois individualism will have to be undone. The workers' organisations—the trade unions and the co-operatives—spontaneous growths of the proletarian genius, are already communist in trend; but extensive educational work will have to be undertaken before the evil effects of bourgeois ideology have been eradicated, and before the natural forces making for communist stabilisation have been released. A decentralisation more or less closely resembling that sketched by the anarchist communists may perhaps ultimately ensue, but it will not be achieved the day after the social revolution. Some thinkers wish to apply the term "socialism" to the integrating and highly centralised stage of transition; and to reserve the name "communism" for the subsequent decentralisation, when, as they think, libertarian ideals will be dominant. A sharp distinction between socialism and communism is, indeed, arising to-day; but the distinction is on different lines from those suggested by the above argument.

From Utopia to Science

A comprehensive generalisation was needed, to establish socialist or communist doctrine upon a firm scientific basis. It was supplied by Karl Marx (1818–1883), with the lifelong collaboration of Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). As we have seen, there are still utopists. But Marx showed that communism must be established as a revolutionary change of the *whole* of capitalist society, that it could not possibly arise through the endeavours of little groups of enthusiasts and idealists whose aim it was to "contract out" of the life of the bourgeois State, The form of society, and the character of the individuals who compose that society, are mainly determined by the dominant type of social production. This, the famous "materialist conception of history," was one of Marx's three main contributions to socialist thought. The two others were the labour theory of value, and the doctrine and tactic of the class struggle. Ever since Marx wrote, the ideas of the utopian socialists have been more than a trifle absurd. The changes wrought by Marx in social science were as overwhelming as those wrought by Darwin in biology, or by Newton in physical science. The work of these thinkers may be supplemented, it may be corrected in points of detail; new developments may render reconsideration necessary; fresh

discoveries, no less revolutionary, may be made in other fields of thought. But the centenary of Marx's birth found the tower of "scientific socialism" standing foursquare to all the winds that blow; and found in being the first workers' republic the world had ever known.

By this time the need for two supplements to or modifications in the teaching of Marx and Engels had, however, become apparent. Though both these writers had again and again emphasised the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat, it seems improbable that either of them had realised that the forms of parliamentary democracy were destined to become entirely obsolete. That recognition was reserved for twentieth-century communists. The other modification concerns the doctrine of the world revolution. Marx's and Engels' conception of revolution was based upon the power of the working class, integrally united across all national barriers. They were among the founders of the International Working-men's Association, or First International (1864). Yet it seems probable that they conceived of socialism as being established nationally at various times in various countries, while the other countries, non-socialist, kept the noiseless tenor of their way. The development of capitalist imperialism, the growth of armaments, the struggle for raw materials, the intensity of the competition for markets, which were to make the next great war a world war, were but dimly foreshadowed when Marx died in 1883. It is the world-staging of the duel between imperialism and communism which has led to the present extraordinary position of Soviet Russia confronted by a capitalist world in arms; and it is this, following upon the shipwreck of social democracy against the rock of "social patriotism" at the outset of the war, which has rendered it necessary for us to dismiss the old words "socialism" and "social democracy," and to revise our conception of the meaning of the term communism.

The Communist Manifesto of 1848

The famous *Manifesto of the Communist Party* was drafted by Marx and Engels as the platform of the Communist League. This was a working-men's association, at first exclusively German, and subsequently international. Under the political conditions then prevailing on the Continent, it was necessarily a secret organisation. The writing of the programme was entrusted to the authors at a meeting held in London during November, 1847, and the German original was sent to the printer a few weeks before the Paris revolution of February 24, 1848. The first English translation appeared in 1850. Writing a preface to the English edition of 1888, Engels uses words which seem strangely apposite to-day. The manifesto is, he declares, a communist manifesto. "We could not have called it a socialist manifesto. By 'socialists,' in 1847, were understood . . . men outside the working-class movement, and looking rather to the 'educated' classes for support. Whatever portion of the working class had become

convinced of the insufficiency of a mere political revolution, and had proclaimed the necessity of a total social change, that portion, then, called itself 'communist.' . . . Socialism was, in 1847, a middle-class movement; communism a working-class movement. Socialism was, on the Continent at least, 'respectable'; communism was the very opposite. And as our notion, from the beginning, was that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself,' there could be no doubt as to which of the two names we must take."

In this preface, Engels restates the materialist conception of history, the fundamental proposition which forms the nucleus of the Manifesto. The essence of the theory is that the prevailing mode of production and exchange determines the prevailing type of social organisation. The political and intellectual history of any epoch is built up upon an economic foundation, and can only be understood in reference to that foundation. So long as production and distribution were communist, there were no classes, and consequently there was no class struggle. Since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, when land was held in common ownership, the methods of production and distribution—successively based upon slave-owning, feudalism, guildism, and capitalism—have always involved the separation of society into exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed, classes. Thus from the days of primitive communism to our own, the whole history of mankind has been a history of class struggles. To-day a stage of social evolution has been reached wherein the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) cannot achieve emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class (the bourgeoisie) without at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinctions, and class struggles. Such will be the result of the return to communism upon a higher plane.

In the joint preface to the German edition of 1872, Marx and Engels had written (influenced by the recent defeat of the Paris Commune, by the conflict with Bakunin and the other anarchists, by the impending collapse of the International, and by the "constitutional" trend of the organised labour movement): "However much the state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in the Manifesto, are, on the whole, as correct to-day as ever. . . . The practical application of the principles will depend . . . on the historical conditions for the time being existing, and for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section II. That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded to-day. In view of the gigantic strides of modern industry since 1848, and of the accompanying improved and extended organisation of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February revolution [Paris, 1848], and then, still more, in the Paris Commune [1871], where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some details become antiquated. One thing especially was

proved by the Commune, viz., that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wield it for its own purposes."

What were these revolutionary measures, which had in some details become antiquated in 1888, when Engels endorsed the opinion expressed by Marx and himself in 1872 ? A few of them may be omitted, but we will enumerate seven out of the ten. The proletariat organised as the ruling class was to wrest capital from the bourgeoisie and to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the workers' State. "Of course, in the beginning, this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production ; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which in the course of the movement outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production. . . . In the most advanced countries the following measures will pretty generally be applicable :—

1. Abolition of property in land. . . .
3. Abolition of all right of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all refugees and rebels.
5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State. . . .
8. Equal liability of all to labour. . . .
10. Free education for all children in public schools."

Now the most interesting point about this programme—the preamble no less than the numbered items—is that, with trifling changes in wording, the communist programme of 1848 would serve for a statement of the revolutionary measures whereby the communist government of Russia secured itself in power seventy years later. Yet in the interval Marx and Engels had seemed, from time to time at any rate, more interested in what we should now term "social democracy" than in what Russia is realising in the form of "revolutionary communism." In 1895, only a few months before his death, Engels wrote a preface to a reprint of Marx's *Class Struggles in France from* 1848 *to* 1850. Herein Engels expresses his jubilation at the steady growth of the socialist vote in the elections to the German Reichstag, and anticipates at no distant date the entirely peaceful conquest of political power by the Social Democratic Party. In a speech made only a few days before her murder, Rosa Luxemburg declared that this endorsement of bourgeois parliamentarism as against revolutionary communism was made against Engels' better judgment. Perhaps this is true, but the fact remains that the endorsement was made. What became of revolutionary communism between 1871 and 1914? That is the problem we have now to consider.

The whole movement was sidetracked into the safe paths of socialism and respectability. What the Commune of Paris proved, and what the Russian revolution of 1917 has confirmed, is that the seizure of the State by the workers can only be effected when the capitalist system of government is profoundly disorganised. Furthermore, the former proved negatively, the latter positively, that the seizure of power by the workers must not be half-hearted. There must be no deference to bourgeois standards as to the sanctity of bank deposits or of debts incurred by bourgeois governments and municipalities. The expropriation of the expropriators, the suppression of the counter-revolution must be as ruthless as the methods of the "restorers" would be did they return to power. The Reds need not be, probably will not be, as barbarous as the Whites. They will not massacre the vanquished as the French bourgeoisie massacred thirty thousand Communards in 1871. But there will be no half measures. The motto of the revolution, no less than of the reaction, must be: Thorough.

Now during the period from 1871 to 1914, capitalism was apparently consolidating its power. The fatal contradictions of the capitalist system, the contradictions which the genius of Marx had discovered, were working out to their logical issue; but on the surface the fabric was more imposing than ever, and seemed too stable to be overthrown by any revolutionary onslaught. It is probable that during the last ten years of his life, after the collapse of the First International, Marx realised that a considerable period must intervene before the revolutionary imagination and the revolutionary will could come into effective play, could fulfil their creative task—beginning with the destruction which, as Bakunin wrote eighty years ago, is itself also a creative act. Hence Marx withdrew from active participation in the movement, and devoted himself to theoretical researches; while Engels, who survived Marx by twelve years, tried to content his soul with admiring the growth of the "constitutional" socialist and labour movement.

In theory, on the Continent, that movement continued to use the phraseology of Marxist internationalism and socialism. But in practice, while repeating Marxist shibboleths, it pursued a policy based on the conception of social solidarity and corrupted by the ideology of bourgeois nationalism. In Germany, after the withdrawal of the Anti-Socialist Law (1890) and the adoption of large measures of "state socialism" by the government, the Social Democratic Party was wholly given over to legalist courses, and was concerned only with its swelling membership of democrats" who called themselves "socialists" and with its ever-increasing vote at the parliamentary elections. In France, when under Jaurès' leadership the factions were welded into the Unified Socialist Party (1905), the attention of socialists was likewise concentrated upon successes in the arena of bourgeois parliamentarism. In Britain, where the class war was frankly

repudiated by the Fabians and the Independent Labour Party; in Britain, where prior to the turn of the century socialism seemed to be almost entirely proof against Marxist influences, while organised labour thought of the campaign for shorter hours and higher wages as an end in itself; those who were interested in the political struggle envisaged that struggle entirely from the viewpoint of parliamentary democracy. In short, bourgeois ideology was dominant throughout the socialist and labour world. Perhaps the greatest triumph, during this epoch, of what Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto contemptuously termed "petty bourgeois socialism," was in Australia. Here "labour" was dominant for decades, leaving capitalism enthroned in the economic field, and giving the world as its finest fruit, William Morris Hughes for premier, and unending levies in support of the imperialist war.

The Revival of Revolutionary Marxism

It would be impossible, within the space of this pamphlet, to discuss the theoretical grounds for the abandonment of parliamentary methods of achieving the overthrow of capitalism, and for a return to the revolutionary conceptions which filled the minds of Marx and Engels in 1848. We aim merely at giving a historical summary which shall explain the origins of the new communism, and shall thus make its methods and aims more intelligible. The failure of petty-bourgeois socialism is writ large across the history of the last seven years; and although, as recent by-elections show, the labour electorate can still be hypnotised by the suggestions of the old leaders, the revolutionary workers have their eyes fixed on Soviet Russia. To the siren song of the labour parliamentarians, "The parliamentary method has never had a chance; put us in power and we will clear up the mess without anything so unpleasant as a revolution," the communists reply, "We know your methods and we know your record. We know what, under capitalist sufferance, labourists and petty-bourgeois socialists have been able to achieve in Australasia and in Central Europe. The Macdonaldites will probably have their innings here, as the Kerenskyites had their innings in Russia, and as the Kautskyites are having their innings in Germany; but we expect nothing from the attempt which they, with the aid of their 'advanced liberal' friends, will make to restabilise the tottering system and to clear up the mess left by the capitalists' war. As Trotsky says: the essential movement of contemporary history has been simplified to the extreme; it has been reduced to a duel between imperialism and communism. Despite your honeyed phrases about 'democratic control,' *you* are on the side of imperialism, but *we* are on the side of communism."

Even before the war, there were many signs of a Marxist revival, of a revolt against petty-bourgeois socialism, of a return to revolutionary communism. The syndicalist movement in France and Britain, the formation of the I.W.W. (Industiral Workers of the World) in the U.S., the activities of the Socialist

Labour Party, and the growth of the movement for Independent Working-Class Education, were among these signs. The defect of the syndicalist movement, and of the I.W.W. movement, was a lack of political theory. Rejecting parliamentarism, the syndicalists and the "wobblies" rejected the whole theory of the State. The victory of the workers was to be achieved by the general strike, and then—oh, well, time would show. But how, by the general strike, the bourgeoisie was to be starved out before the workers, how the power of the Whites was to be broken except by the seizure of the State machine by the Reds, was left unexplained. As regards the need for an organisation by which the workers could carry on production in the new order, the syndicalists, the I.W.W.'s, and the industrial unionists, were on the alert. But in their hatred of "politics" they were as unpractical as their arch-enemies the parliamentary socialists, who believed that a Dubb electorate could be enlightened before the revolution, and that the capitalists could be peacefully voted out of their economic power, and peacefully deprived, not only of their ownership of the means of production, but of their control of the material forces of the capitalist State.

The most notable indications of a thought trend are often to be found in the field of imaginative literature. An instance of this is Jack London's novel, *The Iron Heel*, published in 1907. As far as theory is concerned, the U.S. socialist movement has always been more Marxist than that of Britain; but in the field of practice, despite the revolutionary ideas of the I.W.W. and the American Socialist Labour Party, American Marxism was predominantly reformist. *The Iron Heel*, however, was a remarkable contribution to the modern theory of revolutionary socialism. It purports to be the reprint of a manuscript discovered about A.D. 2600, three hundred years after the social revolution. In a certain sense, therefore, it is a utopian romance. But it attempts no description of the future communist commonwealth, and is in a quite different category from ordinary utopian literature. In the form of historical reminiscences by a prominent actor in the drama, it is a forecast of the history of the class war in the States during the years immediately following that in which it was written and published. In this country it had a wide circulation, and unquestionably, with its clear-cut Marxist philosophy, exercised considerable influence in intensifying the revolutionary impetus and in clarifying revolutionary thought.

"No quarter!" says Everhart, the spokesman of the workers, debating with a representative of the plutocrats. "We want all that you possess. We shall be content with nothing less than all that you possess. We want in our hands the reins of power and the destinies of mankind. Here are our hands. They are strong hands. We are going to take your government, your palaces, and all your purpled ease away from you, and in that day you shall work for your bread even as the peasant in the field or the starved and runty clerk in your metropolises. Here are our hands. They are strong hands!"

"We are in power," answers the plutocrat. "By virtue of

that power we shall remain in power. We have no words to waste on you. In roar of shell and shrapnel and in whine of machine guns will our answer be couched."

The Iron Heel was the dictatorship of the capitalist oligarchy after democratic forms had been abandoned. It was supported by the assistance of a Favoured Labour Caste, and maintained by the bayonets and rifles of White Guards. It was to endure for three hundred years, and was ultimately to be overthrown by a revolutionary conspiracy—the last of many—among the oppressed masses. Such was the novelist's vision, seven years before the great war and ten years before the Russian revolution. The White Guards we know. We know, too, how much respect the Iron Heel has for democratic forms. There have been occasional attempts to establish a Favoured Labour Caste. But communists to-day do not expect to wait three hundred years for the world revolution!

From Science to Practice

Capitalism had entered its imperialistic phase. The pacifist and free-trade doctrines of the Manchester School gave place to the blood and iron theories of nations organised in competing capitalist leagues, and engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the raw materials required by profit-making industry. The war of 1914–18 was the climax of this era, and rang up the curtain upon the world revolution. Had it lasted a little longer, we should probably be living in a communist world to-day; but the armistice came a year too soon. The economic and social collapse of the ruling class occurred in Russia during 1917; but in western Europe capitalism had not yet bled itself to death when "peace" began in the end of the year 1918. The Russian communists were given a great opportunity, and made the most of it.

At the congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party held in London during the year 1903, there was a split over the questions of revolutionary tactics and party organisation. The bolsheviks or majoritarians, also well named the "hards," were for rigid centralisation; the mensheviks or "softs" were in favour of a party consisting of loosely associated self-governing groups. The mensheviks held that the education of the masses in the broad principles of socialism was the indispensable preliminary to any revolutionary change; the bolsheviks believed in the concentration of revolutionary energy in the hands of a comparatively small group, prepared to seize power and to declare the dictatorship of the proletariat when the propitious moment arrived. They had faith in the imminent possibility of a definitive revolution. Thus the difference between the bolsheviks and the mensheviks in 1903 closely corresponds to the difference to-day between the Reds and the Pinks, the communists and the socialists, the Third International and the Second. From 1914 onwards, the bolshevik group of refugees and escaped administrative exiles was actively at work in Switzerland. They believed that the war was to prove a great quickener of the revolutionary movement, and that the revolutionary crisis might come before it was over. The con-

ferences of Zimmerwald and Kienthal, wrongly regarded as "pacifist" when not contemptuously ignored, were mainly inspired by their energies. These conferences issued a defiant proclamation. "The capitalists' war is not our war. The only war that matters is the class war. We shall wage the class war whenever opportunity arises, without regard to the interests of either of the belligerent capitalist groups." Thus the bolshevik agitators, returning to Russia in the early summer of 1917, were a thorn in the side of the compromise administration throughout the stormy interval between the two revolutions of that year. They did not "make" the revolution of November; no group of agitators can make a revolution. But they actively fomented it. They were on the spot when the hour came. Their slogan, "All power to the soviets!" proved a successful counterblast to the "democracy" of those who were attempting to limit the change to a bourgeois revolution. Their influence was dominant in the soviets, and after they had seized the State machine they were able, amid unparalleled difficulties, to begin the realisation of communism, to pass from science to practice.

The New Communist Manifesto

When the Soviet Republic had been in existence rather more than a year, it issued a call for an international conference in Moscow. In view of the blockade and the widespread unsettlement that characterised the capitalist "peace," it was impossible that this gathering should be largely attended. Moreover, the unification of left-wing forces was to come about only as a result of the conference. The communists in various lands, who did not as yet realise their own mission, could not unite to send duly accredited representatives. Nevertheless, a fairly representative body assemble din Moscow during the first week of March, 1919; and here was founded the Third International. It issued what is known as the New Communist Manifesto. In this document, the main points which will guide the communists in their advance are summarised as follows:—

(1) The world crisis can be solved in one way only, through the dictatorship of the proletariat.
(2) The only possible league of nations is a world-wide federation of workers' republics.
(3) There must, in contradistinction to imperialist theories, be genuine self-government for all colonies.
(4) The rule of the proletariat cannot be established through the methods of bourgeois democracy. The proletariat must create its own political machinery. The workers' councils, the soviets, constitute this apparatus, the most powerful weapon in the hands of the proletariat to-day.
(5) Civil war is forced upon the working class by its mortal enemy. The workers must return blow for blow. It is necessary to disarm the bourgeoisie and to arm the proletariat. The workers' army is indispensable to the workers' State.

(6) The distinctive doctrine of the Third International is its advocacy of direct action on the part of the revolutionary proletariat.

Disintegration and Integration

The manifesto, and the subsequent activities of the Third International, above all, the issue of a further manifesto (*The Capitalist World and The Communist International*) and of the famous Theses and Statutes adopted by the Second Congress of the Third International at Moscow in August, 1920, have driven a wedge everywhere between the communists and the socialists or social democrats. Were the Soviet Republic adopting its name in 1921 instead of in 1917, it would almost certainly call itself the Russian Communist Federative Soviet Republic, for the name Socialist begins to carry with it a flavour of reaction. The issue is joined between communism and imperialism. Whoever is not on the side of the communists is, consciously or unconsciously, fighting on the side of capitalist imperialism. In great crises, there is no place for moderates. Now, if ever, is justified the extremist's cry: he who is not for me is against me. Believing this, the communists are quite unconcerned at the accusation that their propaganda exercises a disintegrating influence. The disintegration is deliberately planned, for they wish to know their friends from their foes. Nationally disintegrating, through the touchstone of the unqualified acceptance of the principles of revolutionary communism, the policy of the extremists is internationally integrating, as the events of the last two years have amply shown. Everywhere the cleavage between the communists and the socialists, between the ergatocrats and the democrats, is becoming wider; the communists form more efficient nuclei in their respective lands; they unite more effectively under the red banner of the Third International. Nor is this union confined to the political field. Industrially, the communists are unifying their forces in the Red Trade Union International. It remains only to form an International for Independent Working-Class Education, a Red Proletcult International. Then communists will be ready for a combined forward movement along all three lines of advance.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

In addition to the tactic of the class war and the belief in the imminence and the necessity of the world revolution, the insistence upon the dictatorship of the proletariat and the advocacy of a political and industrial system based upon soviets or occupational groups, are the most distinctive features of the new communism.

"The dictatorship of the proletariat," wrote Lenin in the summer of 1917, "is the organisation of the advance-guard of the oppressed as the ruling class, for the purpose of crushing the oppressors." The word "advance-guard" must be noted. The dictatorship will not be exercised here, any more than it has been

exercised in Russia, by the masses. It will be exercised by an oligarchy, by a revolutionary élite. The larger the numbers of this class-conscious proletarian élite, the better. But from the very nature of the system in which the revolutionary change has to be effected, it is impossible to expect that, prior to the revolution, the majority even of those who are proletarian by status can be made to grasp the real meaning of capitalist imperialism, and to voice an imperative and effective demand for its overthrow. The revolution will come when the contradictions of capitalism have culminated in a situation so disastrous that the masses have been rendered desperate, and have become eager for any change ; and when there is a sufficiently large revolutionary minority ready to seize power when the tocsin sounds.

Having seized power, they must hold it while the remoulding of social institutions is producing a quasi-universal communist mentality. The new political organism cannot at first be " broad-based upon the people's will " ; but it must be broad-based upon proletarian ideology ; it must harmonise with instinctively felt proletarian needs ; and it must in large measure be a spontaneous outgrowth of creative evolution and creative revolution. That is where the soviet system comes in. The demand for all-power to the workers' councils arises spontaneously wherever the situation grows truly revolutionary. Then, through the workers' councils, the revolutionary drive of the masses secures effective expression. The revolutionary élite wrests the powers of the State from the grip of the capitalist class, and establishes the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The circumstances in which the seizure of power will occur, and the means by which it will be effected, will vary from country to country, and will depend on the precise nature of the conditions which have resulted in a breakdown of the capitalist economic and political machine. Any attempt to forecast the details would be utopian. But as regards the dictatorship, once established, its stringency will gradually relax as popular ideology is modified by the new conditions. The co-ordinations of the workers, when they realise that at last the government is their own government, will come more and more to resemble the harmonious self-discipline of an orchestra or a choir ; while the dictatorship in its turn will become more like the guiding will and inspiration of a competent orchestral conductor or choirmaster.

But always there will be guidance. Never will men and women engaged in social production be able to dispense with a self-imposed discipline. Discipline is the first element in the fighting strength of the Communist Party. Labour discipline was one of the first demands of the bolsheviks after the shouting was over and when the revolution had to settle down to the urgent task of production. Factory committees are an essential part of communist productive work. When at work, individuals have to obey the discipline of the working community. This was recognised long ago by William Morris. We quote his words from *Communism* (Fabian Tract No. 113), a reprint from his MS. draft of a lecture delivered in 1893 : " An anti-socialist will say, How

will you sail a ship in a socialist condition ? How ? Why with a captain and mates and sailing master and engineer (if it be a steamer) and A.B.s and stokers and so on and so on. Only there will be no first, second, and third class among the passengers ; the sailors and stokers will be as well fed and lodged as the captain and passengers ; and the captain and the stoker will have the same pay."

The Economic Revolution

The economic side of the revolution is in reality far more important than are the political perturbations, the strikes and lock-outs, the gun-shots and the bayonet thrusts, the hunger, the suffering, and the discomfort, that will attend the passing of the old order and the coming of the new. It is from the economic outlook that Marxists have been proclaiming for more than two generations that the revolution is at once an administrative and a technical necessity. And at the present pass, in the extant duel between communism and imperialism, the revolution is the only thing that will save civilisation from foundering in the shipwreck of capitalism.

The revolution in Russia has been essentially an economic process. It was the economic collapse which rendered the revolution possible ; just as the economic collapse of Western and Central Europe, following upon the war and upon the peace conditions imposed at Versailles, seems likely to speed the coming of the world revolution. In Russia, complete communism is far from having been achieved, for the necessities of continued defence against foreign and internal foes have greatly hindered progress. Nevertheless, the inherent contradiction of capitalism has been solved. Production for use has replaced production for profit ; a product economy has been substituted for a monetary economy.

Alfons Goldschmidt, a German economist who recently visited Soviet Russia, declares that centralist absolutism, enforced by the necessities of the transition stage and by the peculiarities of the world situation, will yield, nay, is already yielding, to control from beneath. For some sociologists, the distinction between socialism and communism lies in the difference between the fields of production and distribution. A socialist commonwealth is one in which production is socialised ; a communist commonwealth is one in which distribution is communalised. For others, the distinction lies in political forms. Socialism is democratic, whereas communism is ergatocratic. For Goldschmidt, socialism is the inevitable stage of highly centralised organisation ; communism is the decentralised world-order in which socialism will culminate. However that may be, here and now communism is a political method based upon the dictatorship of the proletariat, the soviet system, and a belief in the imminent necessity of the world revolution. It is on account of the last-named article of faith that critics of bolshevist theory compare the communists to the chiliasts or millenarians, to those who eagerly expect that Christ will come again to reign on earth for a thousand years.

But there is a difference between a belief based upon old wives' tales (or old men's tales), and a belief based upon the inductions of proletarian science.

The Goal

Modern communism, however, has not only a method; it has also an aim. Lecturing in February, 1921, upon "Communism and Guild Socialism," G. D. H. Cole declared that the main distinction between the communists and the revolutionary wing of the guild socialists was that the communists tended to concentrate upon the immediate objective of revolution, whereas the guild socialists wanted to have a clear picture of the future society which the revolution would rebuild. The section of guildsmen to which he belonged, now the majority, was ready to turn to the left; but whereas the communists were prepared to rush in a body round the first leftward turning that offered, the guildsmen were inclined to think it might be better to wait for the second or third turning.

It is perfectly true that a revolution cannot be "made" when the historic conditions are not yet ripe. Those who try to "make" a revolution prematurely will achieve nothing more than a "Putsch" or ineffective revolt, and will be shot down in their blind alley. Revolutionary economic conditions and a revolutionary mass psychology must be the foundations of a successful revolution. But to the mensheviks, the Kerenskyites, the Kautskyites, the Macdonaldites, the historic conditions are *never* ripe for revolution! You cannot be certain beforehand that your revolution will come off. You may stand eternally hesitant, letting I dare not wait upon I would. Had the bolsheviks been thus hesitant in November, 1917, there would have been no Soviet Revolution. The revolutionist's faith is not passive like that of the millenarian who awaits Christ's coming at the hour chosen by divine will. The communist's faith is active; it is a faith in creative revolution.

As to aim, the communists, while perforce cautious in picturing the details of the new society, have none the less a sufficiently clear mental image of the community they hope to rebuild. As far as the immediate future is concerned the conditions of the class struggle, and the mentality which life in the bourgeois State has engendered in the average human being, will necessitate the use of force. "We are not utopians," writes Lenin; "we do not indulge in dreams of how best to do away immediately with all management, with all subordination; these are anarchist dreams based upon a want of understanding of the tasks of proletarian dictatorship. . . . There must be submission to the armed vanguard of all the exploited and labouring classes—to the proletariat." But, with Lenin, the communists look beyond, to an integrated society wherein "there will vanish all need for force, for the subjection of one man to another, of one section of society to another, since people will grow accustomed to observing the elementary conditions of social existence without force and without subjection."

Stated in the terms of modern psychology this means that man has a group self as well as an individual self, and that freedom cannot be secured for the individual self alone. The new society will be based, not upon the specious freedom of the "individual voter," the freedom envisaged by formal democracy; but upon the freedom of self-governing occupational groups or soviets—self-governing in so far as is consistent with the needs of the whole of communist society. This soviet idea is the most characteristic feature of twentieth-century communism. It may be that the largest kinds of occupational groups under communism will be the great industrial unions which play so important a part in the guild conception of society. Certainly the "professional unions" are at this stage coming to bulk more and more largely in the organisation of Soviet Russia. But to the communists the guild scheme seems a premature and utopian attempt at the detailed formulation of methods that will have to be worked out in actual practice.

Enough to say that through the dictatorship of the proletariat, through the economic revolution, and through the educational policy of the ergatocratic commonwealth, we shall ultimately achieve a social order wherein people will do spontaneously what they do under coercion to-day; wherein each will learn to adapt himself to the harmonious development of the whole; wherein the voluntary association of labour will replace the coercion to associated labour. Freedom through self-discipline is the goal of communism: the remoter goal.

The immediate objective is the social revolution. First things first. Destruction is the revolutionist's first task. He cannot begin to build until the ground is clear, and the ground is still encumbered with the fortresses of capitalist imperialism. "The imposing edifice of society above my head holds no delights for me," wrote Jack London in 1905 (*Revolution and other Essays*, pp. 250, 251). "It is the foundation . . . that interests me. There I am content to labour, crowbar in hand, shoulder to shoulder with intellectuals, idealists, and class-conscious working men, getting a solid pry now and again and setting the whole structure rocking. Some day, when we get a few more hands and crowbars to work, we'll topple it over, along with all its rotten life and unburied dead, its monstrous selfishness and sodden materialism. Then we'll cleanse the cellar and build a new habitation for mankind, in which there will be no parlour floor, in which all the rooms will be bright and airy, and where the air that is breathed will be clear, noble, and alive."

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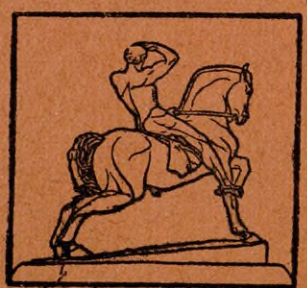

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