

CHAPTER XXI

A GLIMPSE OF SOVIET AMERICA

QUESTIONS are frequently put to us asking, in one form or another, what a Soviet America would look like. There is a great temptation to answer with an imaginative picture of the glories of an America released from capitalist sabotage. But the imagination is staggered by the first approach to this task. And, after all, there is more value in the sober examination of those objective facts of the already achieved productive forces, to see what can be done by simply the full utilization of the present technical achievements, which would be but the first steps of a workers' government.

To what extent can we take the experience of the Soviet Union as a forecast of what a Soviet America would look like?

In certain respects it gives us an accurate forecast; in other respects the question in America will be placed quite differently. The principles upon which a Soviet America would be organized would be the same, in every respect, as those which guided the Soviet Union. But in our case these principles would be applied, not to the most backward but to the most advanced capitalist country. This makes tremendous differences in the details of birth and growth of the new society.

In Russia the actual seizure of power and establishment of the Soviet Government were relatively easy and almost bloodless; only afterward came the imperialist intervention, prolonged civil war and capitalist-inspired wrecking which, added to the ruin the World War inflicted upon a backward coun-

try, left the Soviet Government with the task of building from the ground up in the midst of a hostile world.

In America most of our difficulties lie precisely in the achievement of power for the working class, in the establishment of the Soviet Government. After that has been accomplished, the American capitalists will have no great powerful allies from abroad to help them continue the struggle. It will already be clear that world capitalism has received its death-blow. The Soviet Government of America will take over a society already technically prepared for communism. Where in Russia it was necessary to go through the prolonged period of War Communism, the N.E.P., the First and Second Five-Year Plans, in America we will start economically at a stage even further advanced, at about the point which Russia will reach in her Fourth Five-Year Plan.

The only thing that could change this favorable perspective for a Soviet America would be a possible, but unpredictable, destruction of American economy by an imperialist war, carried out by agencies of destruction hitherto unknown.

The United States, in short, contains already all the prerequisites for a communist society except the one single factor of Soviet power. In Russia, Lenin said, several years after 1917, "The Soviet power, plus electrification, equals communism". In America the electrification already exists, so we can shorten Lenin's formula.

The question is, given the American working class in undisputed power, what would be the possible and probable course of development of the economic and social life of the country?

The new government would immediately take over and operate all the banks, railroads, water and air transport, mines and all major trustified industries. Minor industries, municipal public utilities and the distributive occupations would be re-

organized as functions of local government or as cooperatives, or, in some instances, as auxiliaries of major industries. Large-scale agriculture would be taken over and operated by the government, while the mass of small farmers would be encouraged and helped to combine into voluntary cooperatives for large-scale production with state aid.

All available man-power would be put to work immediately, first of all in the direct production of material wealth, second in its distribution, and third in the social services of health, education and entertainment.

Every able-bodied person would be required to go to work and for this receive wages according to a scale socially determined. Such a wage-scale in the beginning could range, for example, from a minimum of \$2,000 per year up to \$10,000 or higher, at present values. The average, according to the most conservative estimates of present potential national income, after making allowance for capital accumulation, would be about \$5,000 per year for each family in the United States. That can be taken as the immediate average standard of living under a Soviet Government in America.

In what form would this be made available to the population? Many questions have been raised, asking whether there would not be such regimentation, such monotonous uniformity, that, even with such high standards of income, it would take the salt out of life. Such doubters visualize the citizens of Soviet America living in uniform barracks, wearing uniform clothing prescribed by law, eating the same meals, reading the same books and newspapers, seeing the same entertainment, thinking the same thoughts, etc., etc. Such a picture of communist society is the bogey-man created by the propagandists for capitalism, but the closest that humanity will ever get to such a condition is the present moment under capitalism. These gentlemen would have us believe that com-

munism will merely take the worst feature of capitalism and make it the universal rule. Why we should do such a stupid thing, no one can explain!

The fact is, of course, that the communist reality would be quite different from this doleful picture. For the first time we could escape from the terrible housing of slum barracks imposed by capitalism and begin to get modern, decent homes for everybody. Even the first simple redistribution of existing housing would revolutionize this situation. We could smash the uniformity of clothing imposed by the combination of our own poverty and capitalist mass production. For the first time in our lives the majority could eat what their tastes dictate, because for the first time they could afford it. And for the first time, the human mind would be liberated from regimented mental slavery to Hollywood, Hearst & Co.

Why can we be sure that we would have all these desirable things? Because there would be nothing to prevent us from having them if we want them. We would have the power to form our lives the way we choose; we have every reason, therefore, to expect that the choice will not be the stupid, reactionary nonsense described by the enemies of communism.

The primary concern of the Soviet Government will be production; this will be highly centralized, to realize the benefits of the highest technical achievements. All means of production will be socialized, taken out of private control. But consumption will be socialized only upon a voluntary basis, with the greatest flexibility and freedom of choice for each individual. And the greater grows the flow of wealth production, the more complete will become the freedom of consumption, up to the point where all consumption will become absolutely free and unfettered.

Only under such a society can we expect to witness the full unfolding of the marvelous potentialities of the human

spirit, the development of human genius and individuality raised to the nth power because it is the power no longer of a few exceptional individuals but of the million masses of free men and women.

Many of our questioners have asked:

"But how can the industries be kept operating at capacity without the profit motive? Will not a bureaucratic apparatus grow up in control which will become a new ruling class? And do we not have again the seeds of the old profit motive in the unequal wages, etc., which even you admit will exist under socialism?"

We expect our socialist factories to produce at top speed, *because* the "profit motive" has been eliminated. That famous old profit motive, which used to open up factories in the youth of capitalism, operates in modern times mainly to close them down. The administrative apparatus of a socialist economy can never become a new ruling class because it lacks that private ownership, that monopoly of the means of life of the masses, which is the foundation of class divisions in society.

No, the old profit motive will not creep back into the socialist society through unequal wages, etc. The profit motive has nothing to do with wages, equal or unequal, notwithstanding Mr. Roosevelt's efforts in his message to Congress in January, 1935, to picture the whole population of the country as living on profits, and as depending upon increased profits for an increased standard of living. Such a conception of profits belongs not to the literature of economics, but that of bed-time stories for children. Profit is only that appropriation from the current production of society which is based upon, and justified by, the private ownership of the socially-used means of production. The profit motive is never anything else than that motive of a small group of owners, as owners, to allow their property to be used by the great mass of non-owners for pro-

duction, in the expectation of realizing an increasing proportion of the product as profit. The motive of those who do the producing never was, is not, and can never be, a "profit motive" but exists only in spite of profit and in constant antagonism to profit. The removal of profit under socialism releases the constructive human motives to labor from their greatest handicap.

What are the human motives to labor? The most primitive and almost the only ones under capitalism are the fear of hunger and want, the desire to escape poverty and starvation. Under capitalism, the highest development of this motive is the ambition to rise, by hard labor, out of the laboring class into the petty bourgeoisie. Under socialism, this most primitive motive will be applied mainly in the remaking of bourgeois elements into workers, as in the slogan "He who does not work, neither shall he eat". For the main mass of workers, socialism introduces new motives, social motives, the motives of social emulation, the honor and heroism of producers serving society and not private profit-takers.

Under socialism, labor becomes more and more of a privilege instead of a burden; it carries with it its own rewards, of which the material aspect becomes less and less important, the aspect of social recognition becomes more and more dominant.

And what a gigantic motive power for society is this new motive of socialist labor! What an expansion of the human powers is brought about by it! Already the Soviet Union has given us a few glimpses into the profound revolution in human nature that is brought about by the operation of this new motive in human activity.

Socialism is not only a revolution in economic life. It makes an entirely new human race. It takes this man who has been brutalized and degraded through the ages by the violence and

oppression of class societies, frees him from his woeful heritage, carries over from the past only the achievements of the human mind and not its crimes and stupidities, and remakes man, molding him in the heat of socialist labor into a new social being.

The rising socialist system in the Soviet Union has, for years now, demonstrated that in the expansion of material production it outdistances capitalism in the period of its youth by seven or eight-fold. In the production of superior types of human beings, the superiority of socialism is demonstrated a thousand times more decisively. Capitalism, even in decay, can still produce material wealth, even though the amount becomes smaller; but in producing higher types of men and raising the social level of the population as a whole, the capitalist system has completely lost what power it had in its youth. Today it is corrupting and degrading whole populations, and poisons and stultifies its own geniuses.

Today it has become clear that all human progress is possible only in struggle against the capitalist system and its agents, only in the fight for socialism as the next stage in the historical march of humanity toward the classless, communist society.