

THE DRIFT FROM A TRADITIONAL
TOWARD AN ALIEN PHILOSOPHY

"It is the little rift within the lute
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all."

Tennyson

For reasons of security and the continuity of progress, since even prehistoric times people have realized the need for control of society -- self control within the individual, and control of all by designated representatives of society organized as governments, all for the sake of a reliable orderliness in the life of people.

The degree to which the management of affairs is either left to the choice or discretion of individuals, or is turned over to or assumed by governments, is seen to differ greatly among different countries.

Growth of population, economic change, and the spread of ideas, and other elements of progress, coupled with adherence to age-old customs of doing business, of holding property, and of confining peoples within old boundaries, have all created, especially in this century, great strains, problems and conflicts.

In many countries there is a growing questioning of traditions, forms of social and economic organization, and of the validity of human rights. In all countries the general trend seems to be away from individual management of affairs and toward the greater scope of government or collective management. There seems always to be the question -- and bitter debate upon it -- as to whether that general trend is truly what the people want or need. The issue is greatly beclouded by selfishness and human frailty. Government is constantly being discredited by self-seeking, conniving, public officers of bad judgment and bad faith, and by its growth into burdensome ineffectuality; on the other hand, individuals constantly abuse freedom.

In competition "for the minds of men", there have long been, as I see it, two different ideas -- differing in kind, not just in degree -- regarding what "order of society" or what economic and social regime, would be the best: one characterized by personal liberty and "free enterprise" in the field of production, as we have tried to practice these in America, or socialism.

Looking about the world today, most Americans are moved to thankfulness for living in what they like to call "a free country". Many, returning from foreign travel, express a new appreciation of our traditional liberties.

Our way of life came about partly as the natural result of all our circumstances on this continent, and partly through our early determination to avoid the evil conditions of the old world from which we came. That way has served us well in some respects, and badly in others.

Americans would never consciously make a deliberate choice to abandon our traditional way of life, yet inadvertently they may drift away from it through a deterioration of the bases of their ideals, and through their own ignorance and indolence.

Freedom, as a major characteristic of our society -- personal liberty for the individual, and, in the productive field, "free enterprise", run as a private venture and for self-interest -- has always been considered a basic right.

Any person could choose his work, live where and as he saw fit, making all decent allowances for the equally valid rights and feelings of others, consistent with whatever degree of concentration of society in which he chose to live, be that in country or city, far out or close in, in field or factory, working for himself or others, single or married. In order to encompass all members of society, this philosophy must include as a corollary the individual's duty to meet all consequences of his own acts and way of living, with no right to burden others with them, and most specifically including the duty to do his share of the world's work as measured by his own demands.

Private parties, on their own initiative, could engage in any productive endeavor they thought would pay, in competition with others in the same fields, using any land and capital they could get, hiring any others willing to work for them, paying any wages and offering any other conditions they had to in order to secure and retain help, and charging for their products and services whatever they could get in a market regulated by the natural laws of supply, demand, and price. It was assumed that anyone not wishing to work for a particular employer did not have to; neither party was beholden to the other.

Man is naturally a social animal. So, as well as desiring material things, he also desires the acceptance, approbation, and company of his kind. Most men, instead of exercising personal freedom to the point of being anti-social, do attain maturity in this respect, and under normal conditions of maximum constructive opportunity and minimum opportunity for selfish gain at the expense of others, come to adhere habitually to the laws of Nature, one of which is that the greatest degree of security, peace, and satisfaction in life results from a reasonable and fair attitude toward the rights of others and of all society.

In connection with this philosophy of economic enterprise, the functions of government are relatively few and simple: the mainte-

nance of law and order and equal rights; the management of various services thought best managed as public enterprises or services, such as highways, some utilities, etc. these, in addition to its other functions in other fields, such as education, research, and public defense.

To our combination of publicly and privately managed enterprise, as well as to our great natural resources, we attribute our world-renowned, wealth-producing power.

But not all has gone well.

The problems and conditions outlined in Chapter III indicate a large measure of failure of our way of life to bring a fair distribution of wealth and good living conditions.

We are conscious of being scrutinized as a nation that has claimed certain ideals which might also be useful to a world in turmoil but which appear to have failed us to a significant degree. Those of us still faithful to the alleged "American way" feel compelled to search for the reasons for the disarray of our economy and society and to answer our country's critics.

It is claimed by some, both here and abroad, that our way of life -- our ideology -- is basically at fault and that socialism would be a better way -- indeed the way.

Regimes of varying degrees of socialism have been established or are being worked toward, in many countries, large and small.

How well these are working -- whether stable and here to stay, or about to be overthrown; whether popular, or held in effect by force; whether effective or not in bringing about high production and good living conditions -- is not easy for us to know. Writers and travelers bring back conflicting reports and impressions. No doubt in some cases such people would accuse each other of having seen conditions as they wanted to see them, or as their guides wanted them to.

Some people claim that this country, with its steady growth of government functions, with the constant interference with the natural laws of the distribution of wealth, and with the diminishing dominion of the individual over his own affairs, is already approaching socialism by gradual stages. Whether such changes can accurately be described as steps in that direction is a question. As things are going, we might be adopting some of the substance of the doctrine without intending to accept it wholly or in name.

The answer to this may possibly appear when a definition of that doctrine is attempted.

(The first edition of this book described socialism according to the way most reports -- read along and between the lines -- seemed to indicate that it has worked out in practice, mainly in Russia and China, whose leaders make the greatest claims to its understanding. That description now seems to have unjustly overlooked the aspirations of those adherents who see it as the embodiment of popular rule; democracy in government and industry; personal freedom, dignity, and equality; voluntary cooperation; and a unified, peaceful society. Accordingly, this edition attempts a more comprehensive and analytical view.)

Socialism seems to be many things to many people -- the idea of a general orientation of human affairs for the well-being of all people.

As an ideal, it is the dream of a better, more just, peaceable, and rewarding order of society than has generally existed in the past.

As a critique of present conditions, it holds that society is now divided into two classes of people having mutually-antagonistic interests:

1. Capitalists -- those who own the "means of production"-land and capital -- and who manage industry and dictate conditions;

2. Proletarians -- those who do the work of production, able to bring to the process only their own abilities of hand and mind.

It holds that injustice, poverty, waste, and war naturally result from the inevitable and endless struggle between these two classes.

As a doctrine of reform, it urges the elimination of the capitalist class and the establishment of collective ownership of the means of production by the workers and the management of industry by them and their representatives, with the objectives of production of goods and services for use, not for profit, and their distribution according to the work or needs of individuals, and the establishment of a classless hence peaceful and democratic society. Competition would be replaced by co-operation; the action of what we now call the "free market" would be replaced by comprehensive planning of production and distribution and by the setting of prices, wages, work "norms", conditions of employment, etc., by the people themselves, or their representatives, or their government.

As a world-wide mission, it holds that, since transportation and commerce have so promoted the interdependence of the economies of all nations, socialism must be made a world order.

Recognizing that those with power and privilege never give up their special advantages voluntarily, socialists envision, with varying attitudes, a considerable struggle; some, of pacific

tures, think of a gradual evolution, while others, of greater militancy, think a more violent revolution will be inevitable in bringing about the socialist order.

Conceptions of the features that should be embodied, or in what degree possible or desirable, seem to vary in regard to the degree of centralization of the planning authority, the comprehensiveness of the regime in encompassing all workers and all productive property in the common economy, the degree of democracy possible in management, incentives to productive effort, the place of competition, the scales of remuneration for different classes of work, and in many other respects.

Such differences of opinion or emphasis are not unnatural. But since all affairs are seen as then in the hands of the people -- all with equal rights -- the solution of every problem and the establishment of every good and desirable thing should be possible in ordering affairs in the interest of all the people, who, thus in control, could introduce the best features of welfarism, cooperation, industrial democracy, and comradely relationships.

Commenting on socialism as I have thus far been able to grasp it, certainly the good of all people and their equal rights, a sense of brotherhood among them in all nations, and peace and security are among the most desirable and important objectives conceivable. The division of society into those of wealth and power and those of poverty and degradation, the waste of natural resources with its desecration of the face of the earth, the general fear of industrial and international warfare -- certainly these and all other unjustifiable, unnecessary, archaic, man-made evils should be abolished. The present general order of society, called "free enterprise", has not, even in America where it has had the best chance to succeed, solved those problems, or abolished those evils.

But in regard to the most deeply underlying causes of evil in economic society and hence what should be done about them, I think some of what seem to be the most basic conceptions of socialists are not valid.

The opportunity of some, as private enterprisers, to employ others, especially in great numbers, is seen as inevitably leading to the exploitation of the employees and the unjustifiably great remuneration and domination of the employers. In thinking that the ownership of land and capital is the basis of that exploitation, little if any distinction is made between these two basic factors of production as to their origin, their durability, their replaceability, or their susceptibility to monopoly. And yet even Karl Marx, making the proper distinction for once, saw, and so stated in the final chapter of his work, Capital, that the ownership of capital conferred upon its owners no power to exploit labor except as labor was first denied the free access to land; but his follow-

ers seem not to have appreciated the importance of that great truth any more than he did.

Socialists seem to assume that under socialism public officers, administrators, business managers, and others will naturally and spontaneously act in the best interests of all workers and of the whole of society, but that their counterparts in private industry and affairs will act only in the selfish interests of themselves and their private groups. The significant truth is that every man usually thinks primarily of his own interest; how personally selfish or generous he is while doing so, or whether he does or does not practice the Golden Rule toward all others, all depend on many other factors, such as his early life and bringing up, how he feels he has been treated, the moral conduct of those around him, whether he feels trapped and enslaved in a system that cares nothing for him as a person, and his general intelligence and honesty. It depends on the sense of "community" that is possible or that he feels among his associates or toward the ultimate consumers of the products or services he is helping to produce, and upon whether or not he feels a reasonable degree of personal dominion over his own life and destiny in a democratic atmosphere.

Neither in the employment of a private enterpriser or a public agency is there necessarily any assurance that the best qualities in a man, whether in a position of authority or not, will be brought out so completely that he will throw himself wholeheartedly into the work of his position with the best interests of everyone in mind. As Jesus of Nazareth wisely said, "He who would find himself must first lose himself", but he certainly never thought of this as being implemented by any particular economic or political dispensation.

Socialism seems to assume a solidarity of interest and mutual loyalty among all members of the so-called "working class", and yet the competitive relationship between various individuals and groups is well known; those in trucking may abolish the jobs and way of life of those in railroading; those in plastics do the same to those in steel and wood; members of unions, even for merely alleged injustices or trivial offenses, will strike, regardless of great resultant hardships to other innocent workers and the whole general public, thus adversely affecting other people many times their own number.

Private enterprisers' desires for profits seem usually thought of as selfish and evil as compared to the desire of so-called "workers" for wages. It is true that many profits of industry or commerce are actually the proceeds of natural monopoly and should of course be curbed; but ordinary profits are, as correctly defined in economics, the legitimate "wages" of initiative, risk-taking, and management -- elements of human endeavor indispensable to production, whose compensation would have to come out of the proceeds of industry under any system.

Overall planning is held as the means by which antagonisms of interest and imbalances of a whole national economy -- or even that of the world -- would be replaced by harmonious relationships, balanced production, and fair distribution of wealth and progressive management of affairs, setting aside the chaos presumed to result from the unrestrained action of people in the "free market" economy now prevailing. Such faith in socialist planning has been likened -- and, I believe, with considerable validity -- to that of a man who might think that he could, by his own conscious mind, direct and control all the hundreds of physiological processes in the infinite number of parts and places in his own body, doing this more wisely, efficiently, and scientifically than Nature already does it for him automatically with every local part expressing its own needs directly to the intimately close, life-bearing streams.

Socialism, in the minds of its devotees, is thought of as being highly democratic, with the will and wisdom of the people being brought to bear on all affairs. However, much administration, management, and policy-making, in production and government, would certainly have to be delegated to men given authority to act and direct, occupying elective or appointive positions. But what assurance could there be that such officials, managers, or political leaders would necessarily act intelligently, unselfishly, and in the general interest any more than do our political leaders now -- though they are supposed to be elected by free and democratic processes -- just because they were members of a collectivist rather than of an individualistic regime?

Some power and authority in leadership and management is always necessary in human affairs. But since people are not yet incorruptible, they often get into positions for which they are neither mentally nor morally qualified, and do much harm to society, their status going to their heads, making it all too often true, that "Power Corrupts"; this is a constant danger under any system.

One of socialism's main principles, ultimately to be reached, in the field of peoples' production and consumption, has always been: "To each according to his need, from each according to his ability". (That is expected to characterize communism, socialism's most idealistic form and final evolutionary stage; in the meantime people are to be compensated not according to need but according to work done or services rendered.) But where collectivist planning, with its official fixing of prices, wages, "work norms", plans, and quotas, is to replace the action of the free market as the regulator of the economy, what assurance could there be that fairness and wisdom would prevail or that the economy could be so perfectly managed that all people thus bound into an interdependent economic totality would so completely trust the regime and its leaders and would feel such inward and outward security that they could relax personal vigilance and self-concern and play a completely cooperative and selfless part?

I do not think any such a thing is possible.

Nor is it even desirable. To set aside personal planning and to accept the inevitable parentalism of authoritative direction and collectivist planning would, I believe, shrivel the growth and powers of its subjects. The "official mind" (whether abroad or in America) sees "home" as being roof, floor, four walls, and heat -- most efficiently produced as "public housing" --- ; sustenance as food and drink; clothing as protective fabrics. This is an oversimplified concept of human needs. We do not live "by bread alone". Whether they know it or not, people need some measure of personal, private engagement with Nature, and with those of their fellows associated with them in mutual service, free from the intervention of any dominating regime and its officious representatives, where success depends on, and can be expected to result from, their own personal endeavors. Put in different words: there needs to be a broad, independently based, and healthy "private sector" to the economy, for personal and economic reasons.

Whether socialism could possibly allow for the many ways in which Man is more than just a producing and consuming animal is very doubtful. How it is working out where allegedly practiced is here left to the reader, impinged upon as we all are by those conflicting reports and impressions of people claiming to have seen and to know.

Two such reports, or books of observation and opinion, could well be cited as representative:

The Brave New World, by Helen and Scott Nearing, written in 1958 after their extensive tour and intimate study of the peoples and conditions in Russia and China during the winter of 1957-58. (Published by Social Science Institute, Harborside, Maine.)

The New Class, by Milovan Djilas, former vice-president of Yugoslavia. This is subtitled, An Analysis of the Communist System, and was written in 1957, based on ideas for which the author was imprisoned for five years. (Available in most book stores.)

Other reports, on the Scandinavian countries, taken more or less as a group, indicate a well developed mixture of freedom, socialism, welfarism, and private enterprise, all said to be very successful and humane. It is said, variously, that royalty is popular and lighthearted; the people happy and prosperous; slums practically non-existent; much living and architecture very modern; social legislation, drunkenness, and suicide very extensive; the health, vigor, and literacy of the people very high; agriculture sound and rewarding, the energy, thrift and resourcefulness of the people more than compensating for lands and climates relatively forbidding. What does any of this prove? Americans have always

believed that welfarism and socialism would lead to indolence and tyranny.

But are we called upon to decide if that is true in the case of other countries with histories and conditions far different from our own? Perhaps our basis and purpose of judgment should not be that of condemnation but rather the desire to learn what to avoid and what to apply to our own vast problems at home.

As a docile child I often felt under the domination of a very pious and noseey aunt, a frequent visitor in our house. As a young man I longed for a chance to "get the best of her," even if just for once, to show that it could be done, if indeed, it could. At last the long-awaited, golden opportunity seemed at hand. She had made a very mean remark about somebody, then turned to me and said, "Don't you agree with me, Heman?" This was too good to be true!-- as indeed it was to prove in another instant. With every ounce of superior righteousness I could proudly affect -- with my father, long a victim of her officiousness, looking on -- I said, "No, Aunt Edith, I shall obey the bible, which says 'Judge not'". But her swift comeback taught me never to tangle with anyone in a field he has made specially his own -- a lesson I have not forgotten -- and was to be the last word: "Ah, but it also says, 'Judge rightly that ye shall know the truth!'"

That admonition is a good one, for Americans or for peoples everywhere. Judging should be for learning more than for criticizing. The so-called "Rift within the Socialist World", so loudly acclaimed at this time, takes much attention that would be better directed to that within our own traditional institutions of liberty and democracy. Most of the avid interest Americans take in mere politics, in the circus-like, election-year scramble for public office, would be better spent trying to understand the underlying essentials of economic life. After all, liberty and equality in the political field are secondary considerations as compared to those rights in the economic field, the first being but partial means for attaining the second.

The ideas of freedom and socialism have been discussed here at length for very good reasons. Although most Americans would say they were opposed to socialism, yet their failure to meet economic problems in fundamental ways and the tendency for governmental agencies to take over management in areas of human affairs affected by those problems are together certainly causing a drift toward the substance of a regime -- embodying a collectivized, managed economy, public ownership of the "means of production" and other property, the nationalization of industry, "public housing", regulation, subsidization, and so on -- whose philosophy, in name, they would reject as un-American.

The centralization of management of affairs in the hands of public agencies and huge, aggressive corporations, growing, by small, imperceptible but cumulative steps, upon the indolence and helplessness of the great mass of the people, is an "ever widening", insidious control, seeming to "silence all" effective protest against the allegedly inexorable laws of progress, narrowing the field of individual rights, initiative, and responsibility.

Those of us here who still adhere firmly to liberty are to feel that we are somehow placed in an awkward, defensive position. Our critics, and the opportunistic enemies of our faith are quick to point out our every failure to assure, to all, freedom, equality and prosperity, and our paradoxical poverty and riches and idle resources. And indeed we know in our own mind that our country is far from being as perfect a demonstration of the validity of its alleged principles as it should be. This is especially unfortunate now, at a time when so many of the people of the whole world stand in such tragic need of a perfect and practical example of an order of human life which we possess in theory but can display only in part.

As Americans, we should resolve to remain no longer in a bewildered, defensive position regarding the way of life we cherish and how to preserve it in a world of shrinking liberties.

In the following chapters, I will outline as clearly as possible the basis for the free, self-supporting society and for the establishment of public and private rights.