Motive-Patterns of Socialism

by Max Eastman

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I.

In the old days of faith and propaganda, socialism seemed a wonderful idea because it offered to solve so many problems at once. I would put an end to wage-slavery and make all men genuinely free-and-equal. By substituting cooperation fro competition, it would also make human solidarity real; even the Christian ideal of universal brotherhood, and of losing oneself in order to find it in the common good would cease to be merely a theme for Sabbath day sermons. It would also relieve us of the "anarchy" of capitalist production, and make possible a planned and scientific efficiency in the important business of keeping alive. And then, almost incidentally, it would put an end to wars, which are, you see, just a by-product of this unfree-and-unequal, unbrotherly-united, unplanned and inefficient way of doing things.

Because it offered to solve all these various problems, socialism appealed to people with widely differing patterns of volition. Without pretending to be exhaustive, we can divide them into three main groups: first, the rebels against tyranny and oppression, in whose motivation the concept of human freedom formed the axis; second, those yearning with the mixture of religious mysticism and animal gregariousness for human solidarity — the united-brotherhood pattern; third, those anxious about efficiency and intelligent organization — a cerebral anxiety capable of rising in times of crisis to a veritable passion for a plan. The anti-war motive entered, with differing colors, into all three patterns. And each of them, of course, usually contained as a subordinate factor the motive that was central in the other two.

This versatility of socialism that seemed so wonderful in the days of ideal propaganda is the principal cause, I think, of the confusion prevailing among socialists now that they are confronted with results. The Marxian promise was that all three patterns would attain their "closure" when the dictatorship of the proletariat had expropriated the private capitalists, and society as a whole began to conduct the business of production. Stalin's regime of totalitarian state ownership frustrates the central motive of the first pattern, shatters it completely. To libertarian socialists, therefore, no matter how monolithic it may become, nor how much industrial planning and solving of unemployment problems it may do, Stalin's Russia is a counterrevolutionary state. To the gregarian or human-solidarity socialists, on the other hand, the Soviet Union, notwithstanding prison camps and the massacre of dissenters — notwithstanding the intensified exploitation of the workers — is now, as never under Lenin's restive leadership, the promised land. To those primarily concerned about businesslike organization, while not a promised, Russia seems at least a promising land. Particularly to the disillusioned liberals, brought over to the socialist idea by the crisis in capitalism and yearning above all things for a plan, a "solution of the economic problem," an island of order in the mounting waves of change, Stalin's Russia has a master fascination. It carries to an extreme that very putting away of childish things like

justice and the rights of man and going in for realistic hard sense about economics, with which they themselves are trying to fill the empty spaces in their hearts. Although the repressed forces upon which it rests are ominous, and its regimentation of opinion bodes ill even for the Planning Commission, it is a region at least to be apologized for in other lands — certainly not denounced from the standpoint of a mad dream like "emancipation of the workers and therewith all mankind."

II.

In those who built the Marxian movement, and those who organized its victory in Russia, that mad dream was the central motive. They were, as some are prone now to forget, extreme rebels against oppression. Lenin will perhaps stand out, when the commotion about his ideas subsides, as the greatest rebel in history. His major passion was to set man free. Ignazio Silone has expressed the opinion that "in every Marxist worker the strongest basis for his socialist faith is the sentiment of justice, as a social aim.† Equality of rights and privileges is justice, and if any are free, it is just that all should be. Nevertheless, if a single concept must be chosen to summarize the goal of the class struggle as defined in Marxian writings, and especially the writings of Lenin, *human freedom* is the name for it. Time and again during the spring and summer of 1917, in speeches and articles tense with excitement and carrying the whole weight of his personality, Lenin reiterated this essential aim and purpose:

> Do not allow the police to be reestablished;
>
> Do not allow the reestablishment of the all-powerful officialdom which is in reality not subject to recall and belongs to the class of landowners and capitalists;
>
> Do not allow the reestablishment of a standing army separated from the people, serving as a perpetual incentive for various attempts to crush liberty and revive the monarchy.
>
> Teach the people, down to its lowest strata, the art of administration, not through books but through actual practice to be begun immediately and everywhere, through the utilization of the experience of the masses.
>
> Democracy from below, democracy without an officialdom, without police, without a standing army; discharge of social duty by a *militia* comprising a universally armed people — this will insure the kind of freedom which no tsars, no pompous generals, and no capitalists will take away.

In his deliberated program-pamphlet, published on the eve of the seizure of power, the same motive is more studiously spoken:

> Only in Communist Society, when the resistance of the capitalists has finally been broken, when the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no longer any classes... *only then* "does the state disappear and one can speak of freedom." Only then will be possible and will be realized a really full democracy, a democracy without exceptions. And only then will democracy itself begin to wither away in virtue of the simple fact that, freed from capitalist slavery, from the innumerable horrors, savagery, absurdities, and infamies of capitalist exploitation, people will gradually *become accustomed* to the observation of the elementary rules of social life, known for centuries, repeated for thousands of years in all sermons. They will become accustomed to their observance without force, without constraint, without subjection, without the *special apparatus* for compulsion which is called the state.

These sayings reveal the central motive in most proletarian revolutionists who come from the "educated classes." And the feeling in the proletarians themselves who become consciously revolutionary, although at times more filled with hatred for the oppressor, is not often very different. It is in both cases a fighting passion, and the thing fought for is liberation. The thought that by expropriating the oppressors a victorious proletariat can remove the "absurdities" of capitalist production and introduce an orderly economy is incidental. It is not a reason for the change, but a guarantee that it will be permanent, since it satisfies good sense as well as revolutionary passion. The fraternal solidarity idea, too, is spectral in the revolutionary's mind. He has no real distaste for competition, as his neglect of the cooperatives, except as auxiliaries in the class war, plainly shows. Even his hatred of international war is not pacifist. It is a hatred more of military regimentation than of fighting. The *standing army* is what Lenin fulminates against. That is his pacifism. He wants the whole population armed! And why? Because it will "ensure the kind of freedom that no tsars, no generals, no capitalists can take away."

Lenin was a man of intense personal reserve, but after his death, at a memorial meeting of the Soviet in

†- As Edouard Heiman says in his important book, *Communism, Fascism, or Democracy:* "There is no justice without liberty, and no liberty without justice." [—M.E.]

the great Moscow Opera House, his widow spoke frankly about his motives:

> Comrades, during these days that I have stood by the body of Vladimir Ilich I have been thinking his whole life over, and this is what I want to say to you. His heart beat with a burning love for all the toilers, all the oppressed. He never said this himself — no, and I should not say it at a less solemn moment. I speak of it because he inherited this feeling from our heroic Russian revolutionary movement. This feeling is what impelled him to seek fervently, passionately for an answer to the question: "What is to be the path of liberation for the toilers?"

III.

Lenin did not find the path of liberation for the toilers. He led them with the red flag flying, down the road to a more bloody tyranny than he or they had dreamed of. He died, saddened by the first intimations of his tragedy and with a warning against the tyrant on his lips. All his close disciples, all those imbued with his deep passion for human freedom, have been killed as irreconcilable enemies by the tyrant. It is a part of our confusion, however, that some of them died equivocal deaths. Some of them died confessing that they, not Stalin, were the counterrevolutionists, the traitors to the new socialist society. Their confessions, of course, were not meant to be believed in detail, but such confessions could not have been forced from such men had they not been bewildered about the real issue. Like so many socialists elsewhere, they could not quite make up their minds whether Stalinism was the counterrevolution or not. Their philosophy had taught them that a confiscation of private capital would lead with historic necessity to the free society, even though it had to pass through an apparently opposite regime; perhaps it was still on the way. That was one source of their confusion. But their philosophy had also taught them to expect other things besides freedom in that ideal society — a new kind of human solidarity, a mystic state of things in which all arts and activities, even thought itself, would become "collective," and therewith a planned economy and an end of international war. Russia was anti-war, and was planning her economy, and was — albeit with the help of the OGPU — manifesting a supernatural solidarity. Maybe they were after all unconscious traitors, John the Baptists would could not recognize the coming of what they themselves had prophesied. Maybe their concern for freedom was too impatient. Maybe it was excessive. Maybe it was selfish.

Something like this passed in the hearts of those Old Bolsheviks who died uttering the confessions of treachery dictated to them by Stalin. In their socialism the freedom motive had doubtless always been less central than in those who died behind closed doors with "Long live the workers' revolution!" on their lips.

It is certain, at any rate, that this motive has proven in general less organic, less universal than was anticipated by those champions of human freedom who laid the foundations of socialism. The unity or solidarity motive has proven more organic. It has proven strong enough to permit in the name of socialist brotherhood those same deeds of blood and torture which made Christian brotherhood a curse to Europe.

So many yes-men and clamoring lickspittles flock around as soon as power is won that it is difficult to distinguish the sincere idealists of united brotherhood, but they are still present. There is no hypocrisy, for instance, in Michael Gold's devotion to Stalin's totalitarianism. Misrepresenting Stalin's enemies is one way of expressing his devotion, but in the devotion itself there is no lie. All through life this Jew Without Money had been seeking for submersion in a Totality, seeking to lose himself in the bosom of a substitute for God. A similar thing is true of Mikhail Kalinin, who has discovered such amazing survival-value in the storms that swept down Lenin's following. It is true of Harry F. Ward, whose testimony before the Dies Committee regarding the League for Peace and Democracy, of which he is Chairman, was so shocking to those acquainted with the facts. This Christian minister, too, as his book, *The Profit Motive,* shows, is actuated by the thirst for cooperative emotion, for the sense of membership in a Totality. It is that organic passion which leads them, not only to excuse the lies and crimes of totalitarianism in Russia, but himself to participate in a totalitarian attempt against public enlightenment in the United States.

Undoubtedly the fraternal passion — for that, strangely perhaps, is the name of it — formed a part of the original motive-pattern of socialism. And the fact that it finds satisfaction in a totalitarian state-capitalism of Stalin, where human freedom is a dead idea, is a principal cause of the interminable confusion, the

no man's land, the welter of divided minds and split libidos, bequeathed to us by the Russian revolution in the place of a world socialist movement.

IV.

Another element of confusion is introduced by those bourgeois liberals and Fabians who have taken up the job of apologizing for Stalin out of an anxious interest in orderly and planned economy. Four or five years ago in *The New Republic,* Edmund Wilson made the suggestion that the liberals should "take communism away from the Communists." It seemed at the time almost a nonsensical remark, but it is exactly what the liberals (minus Edmund Wilson) have done. Despairing of the old faith in democracy and education, and shocked by the crisis of capitalism into a sense of their own futility, they have, on the whole with surprising explicitness, adopted not only the program of socialization, but the name and, in a manner peculiar to themselves, the general attitude of Marxism. Since they executed this maneuver in a kind of flight from the old principles of liberalism, it is evident that Marx's extreme concept of liberty would have small place in the pattern of their socialism. They are definitely not interested in the emancipation of the working class. The brotherly union concept is somewhat less alien to them because it is a part of the respectable tradition of Christianity. But the focal thing in their mind and motivation, when they make bold to call themselves socialists and even appeal to the authority of Karl Marx, in his extreme solution of the economic problem. For the sake of that, they are prepared to forego, or kid themselves about, everything else that they ever believed in. In this way it has happened that the "strongholds of American liberalism," *The Nation* and *The New Republic,* duly became apologists for the most unliberal, unprincipled, and bigoted and bloody tyranny in modern history.

V.

To my mind these neo-Marxian ex-liberals are at present a greater menace than the Stalinists to the cause of freedom in America. Their intellectual hunger for the solution of a problem brings them into a position similar to that of the thoughtless unemployed and dispossessed, whose hunger is more urgent. They not only apologize for totalitarianism in Russia, but they help to camouflage its propaganda-stratagems and pressure-plots in this country. By abandoning their faith in popular intelligence, lending their pages to the manipulation as well as the enlightenment of public opinion, condoning political immoralism, adopting an attitude of *realpolitik* wherever such antique concepts as the Rights of Man are in question, and in general outdoing Marx in being hard-boiled on all questions except that of proletarian power, they are, while professing themselves friends, giving aid and comfort to the enemies of democracy. They are doing exactly what the same groups did in Germany before 1933 — breaking the faith in the republic of those who should be its firm defenders, destroying the mental and social habits which make democratic institutions successful, easing us into the Totalitarian State of Mind.

A typical illustration, indeed a perfect epitome of this, is George Soule's little volume called *The Future of Liberty,* but which should be entitled *Preface to American Totalitarianism.* Mr. Soule begins his book by expressing his fervent affection for the words to be found in our Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights. He has, he tells us, "an ineradicable confidence that somehow or other such words are valid; that they provide, if properly defined and applied, an indispensable frame of reference and standard of value." Taking "liberty" as the nuclear word in these documents, he demonstrates his newly acquired "Marxism" by explaining that the group who first employed it, and most of those who have employed it since, were not expressing a love of freedom for mankind at large, but were seeking a free field for their own special interests. At this point his Marxism recedes, and instead of going on to show that the freedom fought for by the working class must in the nature of the case be freedom for everybody, he imagines a suspension of all special interests, and takes up the problem of the future of liberty under state ownership, no matter how it might be introduced, or who might own the state.

Although remote from Marxism in its original form, this is a real problem, and one very much needing to be solved. A real effort to solve it would begin, it seems obvious, by recognizing that liberty means absence of governmental restraint, and would proceed

to inquire whether, within what spheres, and to what extent, people who might be described as sane and not criminal could enjoy this blessing under a system of industry owned, planned, and controlled by government. It would then further inquire by what means their enjoyment of such liberty could be established and guaranteed.

Instead of solving, or even confronting, this hard problem, Mr. Soule eludes it by the simple process of "redefining" liberty. And the process is simple indeed, for it consists of calling liberty the exact opposite of what it is. Liberty, Mr. Soule assures us, is to mean "subordination"! This astounding announcement, which would probably not stand up on a page of type by itself, he makes plausibly by adding "to a common purpose," that fits in well enough with Christian lore and tribal instincts of solidarity to lull our logic to sleep. After enlarging for a while upon the value to be achieved by transferring the name of liberty to a condition of subordination to common purpose *as such,* or *any* common purpose, Mr. Soule lets it out almost incidentally — although at just the moment when our logical faculties were beginning to revive — that the common purpose he has in mind is not war, glory, territory, or any of those common purposes with which history has made us so familiar, but "an equitably shared abundance." This again sounds noble, almost as noble as the Declaration of Independence, and again lulls us into imagining that something has been said about The Future of Liberty.

That Mr. Soule is merely preparing the ideological path for an American totalitarianism is evident in his bland ignoring of the question *how this is new and quite unusual purpose is to be made "common,"* and the still more obvious question — to one objectively concerned about liberty — *what is to be done with those who fail to fall in with it, or who have dissenting views about how it is achieved?* On these objective questions what Mr. Soule is really saying, I hope unconsciously, is that people who will not fall in line are going to be jailed, shot, sandbagged, herded into concentration camps, or otherwise put out of the way, but that instead of being done in the name of Subordination to a Totalitarian State or Monolithic Party, this is going to be done in the name of Liberty, the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence — redefined.

Mr. Soule's book concludes quite naturally in a word of praise for the totalitarian regime set up on the ruins of the dream of Lenin, and rationalized into the substance of the "society of the free and equal" by similar "redefinitions" of the language of the revolutionary fathers — and by shooting the fathers. Even the deliberate swindle of the masses perpetrated by Stalin in his "democratic" constitution Mr. Soule finds courage to describe as a "significant aspiration." Why is Stalin's phoney constitution a "significant aspiration," while Hitler's phoney plebiscites are a travesty of popular government, when, in fact, they are both foul cheats and insults to civilization?

The reason is that in the motive-pattern of Mr. Soule's socialism, the focal thing is a solution of the economic problem. Surrounding this, and like a Christian halo sanctifying it, is the sentiment of surrender to a social whole. Only in the outer fringe there lingers, wistfully, a ritual affection for the phraseology of freedom. To put *more* meaning, an economic as well as a political meaning, into that phraseology of the democratic revolution, was the central motive of Marx, and certainly of Lenin. Mr. Soule's "Marxism" impels him to take all the real meaning out.

Yet this is not a trick. It is not a crass process of betrayal. It is an instinctive shift of elements in the too opulent pattern of social motivation.

VI.

The sole way out of the confusion is to distinguish the three patterns, and make more discriminating declarations of allegiances. There can be no truce between libertarians and those whom the fraternal or gregarious impulse renders tolerant of totalitarianism. This does not mean that human freedom as a political concept excludes a moral attitude, or even an evangel, of universal friendliness. The wish to extend free life to all mankind is not certainly an unfriendly wish. They will have to decide whether by socialism they meant individualism generalized and made accessible to all, or whether they meant a general surrender to some authoritative concept of the collective good.

The decision is easy in my case, for I have not the glimmer of a desire to lose my identity in a collection, nor would I wish this loss upon a single workingman. The essential meaning of the revolution to me was the liberation of individuality, the extension

of my privilege of individuality to the masses of mankind. I endorse absolutely the words of Lenin, published just before the revolution: "The more initiative, variety, daring, creativeness are brought into play by the masses, the better." And the words of Trotsky published shortly after: "The revolution is, first of all, an awakening of human personality in those masses heretofore assumed to be without it."

To the sharing these aims, and yet lacking the faith of Lenin and Trotsky in a benign evolution of the very forces of production, the solution of the economic problem has, of course, and absolute importance. We cannot move toward this more real and universal freedom — nor even perhaps preserve the freedoms we have — unless we find out how to distribute goods and still continue to produce them. Marx was wholly right in declaring that men must first keep alive before they can occupy themselves with higher values. But that is very far from subordinating freedom to effi-ciency, or postponing it, or reducing it to a spoken ritual. Those who take this line, and bless it with a little thought of brotherhood, are also marching, however little conscious of it, toward the totalitarian state. The terms "right" and "left" have lost all meaning in this new division of motives. The question is whether you are seeking primarily, and at any cost, a solution of the economic problem, or whether you are seeking a solution which will preserve the liberties that came with capitalism and foster their extension in the future. Between these two positions also there can be no truce between a civilized community and a herd stampeded into an up-to-date corral. The concept of human freedom, with its corollaries, justice and equality, remains the axis of the motive-pattern of all who can be called radicals.

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