THE WORLD TODAY: THE SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVE

Declaration of the Socialist International endorsed
at the Council Conference held in Oslo on 2-4 June 1962

The Socialist International reafirms the principles of the Frankfurt Declaration of 1951 on the ‘Aims and Tasks of Democratic Socialism’.

In the ‘fifties, it became apparent that the many new scientific discoveries, if applied for peaceful purposes, made possible for the first time in history the elimination of hunger and poverty from the face of the earth. The same discoveries, used for military purposes, could cause the end of our civilisation.

There are few decades in history which have produced such vast and varied changes. The work which Socialist governments began in responding to the urge for independence among colonial peoples was carried forward. By 1960, most countries of Asia and Africa had won their independence and joined the concert of free nations. Thus, for the first time in history, peoples of all continents meet together freed from alien domination. The Socialist International greets the thousand million people of the new states and welcomes their participation in the common quest for justice, equality and peace for all mankind.

Nevertheless, colonisation still survives. It is significantly entrenched in countries where no Socialist movement has been allowed to exist and where democracy itself has been suppressed. The Socialist International finds no moral justification for the continued existence of colonialism and condemns it in all its forms.

In many democratic countries in the past decade, economic expansion enabled striking progress to be made towards the welfare society, and consequently the age-old insecurities of their citizens were substantially reduced. Yet at the same time, the gap in the standard of living between rich and poor nations has widened still further. Hundreds of millions still suffer from hunger and poverty.

In the ‘fifties, the will of the human spirit for freedom and dignity was repeatedly asserted. In many countries of Latin America, dictatorships were overthrown. In some parts of the Communist world, the iron grip of Stalinism was weakened. Stalin himself was condemned. The proclamation of desalinisation was prompted by popular pressure to break with the detested past and to initiate new policies. But the brutal repression of freedom in the Communist world and the ceaseless efforts of Communism to extend its sphere of influence continue.

In the decade that is over, the world faced many crises. In some parts of the world, armed conflict broke out. However, the deep-seated hostility to war that characterises peoples everywhere helped to avert world war.

SOCIALISM AND INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES

The most dynamic impulse towards social change has come in countries where democratic Socialist parties have been able to exert effective influence. History has not confirmed the doctrine of the increasing misery of the proletariat. The worst excesses of capitalism have been corrected through the constant activity of the Socialist parties, the trade unions, and the cooperative societies. New forms of ownership and control of production have emerged. Mass unemployment has been eliminated, social security extended, working hours have been reduced and educational and vocational opportunities widened.

Even where democratic Socialists have been in opposition, their opponents have often been obliged by
Despite these improvements, serious problems continue to plague industrialised societies. We believe that they cannot be solved without the application of the principles of democratic Socialism.

Permanent control by the state and public institutions over the economy undoubtedly diminishes the danger of the recurrence of economic crises. Nevertheless, recessions, which interrupt steady economic expansion, still continue.

The increasing concentration of economic power and the growth of monopoly when not controlled also create serious problems. The increasing size of industrial undertakings has brought into being a new class of managers, who enjoy great power without being responsible to the community for the manner in which they exercise it. A task facing Socialism is to make this group aware of its social responsibilities.

In many countries, the level of investment, though higher than it was, is still far below what could be achieved in a properly planned economy. Investment is, moreover, frequently wasteful. Too often, it is directed towards immediate capitalist profit, instead of strengthening in a planned fashion the basis of the economy or meeting urgent social and cultural needs.

Notwithstanding the considerable improvement in the standard of living of the mass of the people, gross inequalities in the distribution of wealth and income remain. The greater part of the privately-owned wealth is still in the hands of very few. Tax evasion and the immense appreciation of capital values perpetuate this evil. Society is still divided into social classes with differences in status and living standards, based on the accident of birth and inheritance, and resulting in differences in opportunities for education and training. Exaggerated emphasis on purely materialist aims is increased by modern business advertising and by the commercialisation of cultural activity, imposing a trend towards drab conformity.

Democratic Socialism has achieved much, but greater tasks still lie ahead. There is no single method to remedy the evils of present-day society. To achieve a fair distribution of wealth, we require an extension of public ownership and control and other legislation to curb private monopolies, to effect a radical reform of the tax system and to protect consumers.

State action, authorised by democratic decisions, is essential to provide for a rapid rate of economic expansion, a sufficiently high level of investment and the swift application of modern scientific techniques. This involves economic and social planning as a central government responsibility.

In democracy, a framework must be created within which the workers can effectively influence decisions and conditions in industry and the economy generally.

The democracies must improve and extend the techniques which will enable them to direct their economic resources so as to serve the long-term interests of the people and to facilitate a more substantial contribution to world economic development. They have yet to establish sufficiently close co-operation with one another to assist the steady development of international trade, unimpeded by high tariff barriers and undisturbed by exchange and currency crises. Economic planning outgrows the borders of national states. The establishment of regional economic organisations is a recognition of this fact.

The free development of the human personality can be ensured only by a reform of the existing social and economic structure. For those still living in poverty, improvement of conditions must be realised by a system of fair wages and of effective social security and family allowances and individual care and help. A basic requirement is the provision of a general system of education with a truly democratic character and ensuring genuine equality of opportunity for all. Education in citizenship, vital to democracy, should be promoted both by the state, and by voluntary organisations, such as political parties, trade unions cooperatives and educational associations.

Democracy can hope for survival only if it can base itself on the keen interest and active participation of citizens in its functioning. The democratic process can be extended and deepened through territorial decentralisation and industrial democracy. Press, radio and television, free from undemocratic controls and pressures, should provide ample opportunities for free, responsible debates on political issues.
The challenge of the generation that inherited the changed society of the sixties is to find the ways and means of completing the task begun. To meet its challenge, this generation must direct its ingenuity and energy to the world as a whole.

SOCIALISM AND EMERGENT NATIONS

The emergent nations, with their hundreds of millions of people, have a heavy burden of poverty to overcome. Their difficult task is an exciting one because independence has released great reservoirs of vitality. There should be available to the new states the whole stock of science, technology and political experience that has been accumulated by the developed countries.

The new states have the opportunity of escaping the evils of capitalism and Communism alike. The capitalist methods of ruthless exploitation of the workers, involving the uprooting of the peasants and driving them into urban slums, are not only obnoxious, but also unnecessary. The Communist method is equally obnoxious, consisting as it does of abstracting surplus value through terror and undertaking break-neck industrialisation by the sacrifice of the needs of the people and more particularly at the cost of agricultural development.

The future belongs no more to Communism than to capitalism. Communism and capitalism point back to an age where human beings were treated as raw materials and not as the source and objective of all efforts. The Socialist International greets with satisfaction the fact that so many of the new states, striving to plan their economic future, are inspired by the ideas of democracy and Socialism.

The new states have the opportunity to plan their economy, combining agriculture with industry, reviving agriculture through improved peasant farming and cooperative organisation. Better distribution of industries and decentralisation of the productive process can obviate the growth of new urban conglomerations. The new states, which began their industrial journey not with steam power but with electricity, have greater freedom to plan their development.

The emergent nations, with the co-operation of the developed countries, can avoid many conflicts such as those between urban and rural populations. The new nations suffer from stagnant economic conditions and an ossified social structure. Balanced development depends on releasing and coordinating the forces of individual and economic initiative, without allowing private enterprise to reap the profits for the enrichment of a small minority. Fair play and fair shares must now become the basis of their policy.

These possibilities can be fully realised only if the new states pay due attention to the spread of education, for children as well as adults, to the diffusion of skills and general knowledge among the people and to helping families to plan their growth.

The future of emergent nations in this age of transition depends on the efforts of Socialists and other democratic progressive forces in new nations and on aid from the developed countries. The need is greatest in training, in the provision of skilled technicians and in the accumulation of investment capital. Industrialised countries should provide at least 1 per cent of their national income for grant aid programmes. It should be the consistent policy of the Socialist International to unite the Socialist forces of all countries in the great endeavour of accelerating the progress of the new states.

The Socialist International recognises the right of all nations to self-determination. Nationalism has often been a liberating and uplifting force, but when it is taken to extremes, it can threaten human freedom and progress. The dangers of nationalistic excesses, where the welfare of the Socialists in the richer countries succeed in raising the sights of their people above their national needs, and, on the other hand, Socialists in the new countries develop their economy in such a way that the yardstick is human welfare and not national prestige.

There is the danger that the people of new states will be lured by the false perspectives of authoritarianism. Recent experiences in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America show how barren this repudiation of democracy can be.

The countries of Latin America, although long free from colonial rule, share some of the problems of emergent nations. Here, scores of millions of people also present democratic Socialism with the insistent problems of hunger, illiteracy and disease.

The developing countries face a tremendous task of transformation involving basic reorientation of the
rhythms of life and work of their people. The Socialist International recognises that these far-ranging changes in patterns of thought and behaviour among hundreds of millions of people cannot be brought about unless the developed countries also undertake some fundamental adjustments in their patterns of thought and action. To that pioneering task of social innovation and adjustment, the Socialist International will dedicate its main efforts.

SOCIALISM AND THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

Substantial economic expansion in the Soviet Union has led to improved living standards but, above all, to greater military potential. In China, industrialisation is advancing. The fact that the formidable power of a state containing 600 million people is subject to totalitarian rule and severe discipline cannot be ignored. It presents a threat to other Asian countries. Industrialisation and modernisation at the tempo at which they are realised in the Communist sphere are maintained only at the cost either of preventing the essential freedoms from developing or destroying them where they are already in existence.

In the case of Russia this was accompanied, especially in the earlier part of the decade, by ruthless exploitation of the countries of Eastern Europe. The rising of the people in East Germany, Poland and Hungary, who showed such dauntless courage against overwhelming odds, were in part provoked by these policies. Although the revolts were suppressed, they forced the Soviet leaders to make concessions. However, the Soviet Union strives to retain political control over the countries of Eastern Europe. The ban on the activities of the Socialist parties in these countries has continued, though their ideals and traditions have been kept alive in the minds and hearts of countless supporters.

The Communist world is no longer led from one centre of power. The Russian and Chinese leaders differ on essential issues of policy. Their divergent interests lead to a clash of ideology. This is the most important open breach so far in the structure of the Communist bloc.

Despite opposition from the Chinese Communists, the Soviet leaders abandoned the theory of an inevitable war between capitalism and Communism. As a consequence, they now claim to base their foreign policy on the principle of peaceful co-existence. In practice, however, this is only a change of tactics, and the struggle against the non-Communist world is continued in a different form. The Communists admit that the conflict is not diminished, but the emphasis merely shifted from the purely political to the economic, social and ideological fields.

Communism is not merely a social, political and economic system, but a set of doctrines, which its advocates claim to be infallible, and which they strive to extend all over the world.

Rivalries in the Communist sphere between different centres of Communist power and currents of opinion concerning Communism, make it manifest that Communist pretensions to totalitarian control over the individual, the nation and the development of society, are incompatible with the nature of man, the role of the nation and the evolution of human society.

For Communists, the end justifies the means, and there is a permanent contradiction between what they say and do.

Although the Communist countries claim to be peace-loving, the way in which they have used their military power has aggravated tension in the world. Although they encourage the non-aligned countries when they can exploit the attitude of the latter in their own favour, they condemn them when they cannot.

Although the Communist countries use the strongest anti-colonial language, they have enslaved scores of millions of people.

Misusing the word Socialism, their one-party dictatorships represent in fact tyranny, denying those freedoms of speech, religion, criticism, voluntary organisation and contacts with the outside world which are the essence of a democratic society.

SOCIALISM AND WORLD PEACE

The ultimate objective of the parties of the Socialist International is nothing less than world government. As a first step towards it, they seek to strengthen the United Nations so that it may become more and
more effective as an instrument for maintaining peace. Nations should settle their disputes peacefully, without resort to force. The Charter of the United Nations and the decisions based on it should be respected by all. Its constitution and structure must reflect the increasingly important role which the new countries play on the world scene. Membership of the United Nations must be made universal, so that all nations, including China, may be represented by their governments in power.

We deny that the world is forever destined to be polarised into blocs. Our constant endeavour is to put an end to the Cold War. East-West rivalry has largely been imposed upon an unwilling world by the Communist leaders. In Asia tensions have been aggravated by Chinese actions in North India and elsewhere, but also by some aspects of American policy. This rivalry is dangerous. It diverts energies from constructive tasks. To democratic Socialists co-existence is not enough. International co-operation is the need for our time.

The Socialist International stands for complete disarmament both in nuclear and conventional weapons, including all countries and subject to truly effective controls. We shall never give up the patient search for practical solutions to outstanding disputes between nations.

Democratic Socialists seek nothing but lasting peace, but they will firmly defend their liberties. They therefore reject the idea that democracies should disarm unilaterally. The power of defence in the event of attack must therefore be preserved as a deterrent to aggression.

The United Nations has often helped to resolve disputes between nations. However, it is, in its present form, not in the position to grant protection to a country which is the victim of aggression and to guarantee the security of every country. In these circumstances, each nation must accept responsibility for its own security. Some consider that a non-alignment foreign policy serves the security and the political stability in their own area in the best way. The International respects the desire of nations to be free to pursue their destiny without commitment in power relations of the world. Most of the Western democracies have joined to form the NATO Alliance. The democratic Socialist parties in the countries of the Alliance consider this a powerful bulwark of peace and declare their firm determination to uphold it.

While it is vital that the uncommitted countries should not fall under Communist control, no attempt should be made to draw them against their will into the Western Alliance. Nor must the opposition to Communism be allowed to develop into support for Fascist, reactionary and feudal régimes. On the contrary, pressure should be continually maintained for the restoration of liberties and for social and economic reforms.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

In 1951, we declared in Frankfurt:

‘Socialists work for a world of peace and freedom, for a world in which the exploitation and enslavement of men by men and peoples by peoples is unknown, for a world in which the development of the individual personality is the basis for the fruitful development of mankind.’

These words sum up our faith.

We now stand at a great divide in history. Man, through his mastery over nature and the maturing of feeling for justice and equality, is struggling to shed the old moulds of work and thought.

We democratic Socialists proclaim our conviction that the ultimate aim of political activity is the fullest development of every human personality, that liberty and democratic self-government are precious rights which must not be surrendered; that every individual is entitled to equal status, consideration and opportunity; that discrimination on grounds of race, colour, nationality, creed or sex must be opposed; that the community must ensure that material resources are used for the common good rather than the enrichment of the few; above all, that freedom and equality and prosperity are not alternatives between which the people must choose but ideals which can be achieved and enjoyed together.

We are determined to build peace not by conquest but by understanding.

We repudiate alike the soulless tyranny of Communism and the wasteful injustice of capitalism.
To us, both freedom and equality are precious and essential to human happiness. They are the twin pillars upon which the ideal of human brotherhood rests.

In proclaiming once again our faith in that ideal, we know that we speak for humanity everywhere.

The Socialist International calls upon the people of the world, and youth in particular, to seize the opportunities that the efforts of earlier generations have at long last opened up for all, and to continue the struggle for a better world.