

Is Socialism the United Order?

by Elder Marion G. Romney. General Conference. April 1966

What I am going to give you now is a statement I have prepared in answer to the question, "Is Socialism the United Order?" Some of you may have already heard it. This is the first time I have ever attempted to give a talk a second time. My excuse is that the Brethren have asked me to give this talk here tonight.

I suppose the best way to start a comparison of socialism and the United Order is with a definition of the terms. Webster defines socialism as:

Socialism defined

"A political and economic theory of social organization based on collective or governmental ownership and democratic management of the essential means for the production and distribution of goods; also, a policy or practice based on this theory." (Webster's New International Dictionary, 2nd ed. unabridged, 1951.)

George Bernard Shaw, the noted Fabian Socialist, said that:

"Socialism, reduced to its simplest legal and practical expression, means the complete discarding of the institution of private property by transforming it into public property and the division of the resultant income equally and indiscriminately among the entire population." (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1946 ed., Vol. 20, p. 895.)

George Douglas Howard Cole, M.A. noted author and university reader in economics at Oxford, who treats socialism for the Encyclopedia Britannica, says that because of the shifting sense in which the word has been used, "a short and comprehensive definition is impossible. We can only say," he concludes, "that Socialism is essentially a doctrine and a movement aiming at the collective organization of the community in the interest of the mass of the people by means of the common ownership and collective control of the means of production and exchange." (Ibid., p. 888.)

Socialism arose "out of the economic division in society." During the nineteenth century its growth was accelerated as a protest against "the appalling conditions prevailing in the workshops and factories and the unchristian spirit of the spreading industrial system."

Communism, starting point

The "Communist Manifesto" drafted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels for the Communist League in 1848 is generally regarded as the starting point of modern socialism. (Ibid., p. 890.)

The distinction between socialism, as represented by the various Socialist and Labour parties of Europe and the New World, and Communism, as represented by the Russians, is one of tactics and strategy rather than of objective. Communism is indeed only socialism pursued by revolutionary means and making its revolutionary method a canon of faith. Communists like other socialists, (1) believe in the collective control and ownership of the vital means of production and (2) seek to achieve through state action the coordinated control of the economic forces of society. They (the Communists) differ from other socialists in believing that this control can be secured, and its use in the interests of the workers ensured, only by revolutionary action leading to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the creation of a new proletarian state as the instrument of change. (Ibid.)

German Socialism

A major rift between so-called orthodox socialism and communist socialism occurred in 1875 when the German Social Democratic party set forth its objective of winning power by taking over control of the bourgeois state, rather than by overthrowing it. In effect, the German Social Democratic party became a parliamentary party, aiming at the assumption of political power by constitutional means.

Fabian Society

In the 1880's a small group of intellectuals set up in England the Fabian Society, which has had a major influence on the development of modern orthodox socialism. Fabianism stands "for the evolutionary conception of socialism . . . endeavoring by progressive reforms and the nationalization of industries, to turn the existing state into a 'welfare state.'" Somewhat on the order of the German Social Democrats Fabians aim "at permeating the existing parties with socialistic ideas [rather] than at creating a definitely socialistic party." They appeal "to the electorate not as revolutionaries but as constitutional reformers seeking a peaceful transformation of the system." (Ibid.)

Forms and policies of socialism

The differences in forms and policies of socialism occur principally in the manner in which they seek to implement their theories.

They all advocate:

- (1) That private ownership of the vital means of production be abolished and that all such property "pass under some form of coordinated public control."
- (2) That the power of the state be used to achieve their aims.
- (3) "That with a change in the control of industry will go a change in the motives which operate in the industrial system. . . ." (Ibid.)

So much now for the definition of socialism. I have given you these statements in the words of socialists and scholars, not my words, so they have had their hearing.

The United Order

Now as to the United Order, and here I will give the words of the Lord and not my words. The United Order the Lord's program for eliminating the inequalities among men, is based upon the underlying concept that the earth and all things therein belong to the Lord and that men hold earthly possessions as stewards accountable to God.

On January 2, 1831, the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith that the Church was under obligation to care for the poor. (See D&C 38.) Later he said:

"I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, . . . and all things therein are mine.

"And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine.

"But it must needs be done in mine own way. . . ." (D&C 104:14-16.)

Consecration and stewardship

On February 9, 1831, the Lord revealed to the Prophet what his way was. (See D&C 42.) In his way there were two cardinal principles: (1) consecration and (2) stewardship.

To enter the United Order, when it was being tried, one consecrated all his possessions to the Church by a "covenant and a deed which" could not "be broken." (D&C 42:30.) That is, he completely divested himself of all of his property by conveying it to the Church.

Having thus voluntarily divested himself of title to all his property, the consecrator received from the Church a stewardship by a like conveyance. This stewardship could be more or less than his original consecration, the object being to make “every man equal according to his family, according to his circumstances and his wants and needs.” (D&C 51:3.)

This procedure preserved in every man the right to private ownership and management of his property. At his own option he could alienate it or keep and operate it and pass it on to his heirs.

The intent was, however, for him to so operate his property as to produce a living for himself and his dependents. So long as he remained in the order, he consecrated to the Church the surplus he produced above the needs and wants of his family. This surplus went into a storehouse from which stewardships were given to others and from which the needs of the poor were supplied.

These divine principles are very simple and easily understood. A comparison of them with the underlying principles of socialism reveal similarities and basic differences.

Comparisons and contrasts: Similarities

The following are similarities: Both

- (1) deal with production and distribution of goods;
- (2) aim to promote the well-being of men by eliminating their economic inequalities;
- (3) envision the elimination of the selfish motives in our private capitalistic industrial system.

Differences

Now the differences:

- (1) The cornerstone of the United Order is belief in God and acceptance of him as Lord of the earth and the author of the United Order.

Socialism, wholly materialistic, is founded in the wisdom of men and not of God. Although all socialists may not be atheists, none of them in theory or practice seek the Lord to establish his righteousness.

- (2) The United Order is implemented by the voluntary free-will actions of men, evidenced by a consecration of all their property to the Church of God.

One time the Prophet Joseph Smith asked a question by the brethren about the inventories they were taking. His answer was to the effect, “You don’t need to be concerned about the inventories. Unless a man is willing to consecrate everything he has, he doesn’t come into the United Order.” (Documentary History of the Church, Vol. 7, pp. 412-13.) On the other hand, socialism is implemented by external force, the power of the state.

- (3) In harmony with church belief, as set forth in the Doctrine and Covenants, “that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property” (D&C 134:2), the United Order is operated upon the principle of private ownership and individual management.

God-given agency preserved in United Order

Thus in both implementation and ownership and management of property, the United Order preserves to men their God-given agency, while socialism deprives them of it.

- (4) The United Order is non-political.

Socialism is political, both in theory and practice. It is thus exposed to, and riddled by, the corruption that plagues and finally destroys all political governments that undertake to abridge man’s agency.

- (5) A righteous people is a prerequisite to the United Order.

Socialism argues that it as a system will eliminate the evils of the profit motive.

The United Order exalts the poor and humbles the rich. In the process both are sanctified. The poor, released from the bondage and humiliating limitations of poverty, are enabled as free men to rise to their full potential, both temporally and spiritually. The rich, by consecration and by imparting of their surplus for the benefit of the poor, not by constraint but willingly as an act of free will, evidence that charity for their fellowmen characterized by Mormon as “the pure love of Christ.” (Moro. 7:47.)

Socialism not United Order

No, brethren, socialism is not the United Order. However, notwithstanding my abhorrence of it, I am persuaded that socialism is the wave of the present and of the foreseeable future. It has already taken over or is contending for control in most nations.

“At the end of the year [1964] parties affiliated with the [Socialist] International were in control of the governments of Great Britain, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Israel, and the Malagasy Republic. They had representatives in coalition cabinets in Austria, Belgium, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, and Switzerland, constituted the chief opposition in France, India, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand and West Germany; and were significant political forces in numerous other countries. Many parties dominant in governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America announced that their aim was a socialist society.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1965 Book of the Year, p. 736.)

United States has adopted much socialism

We here in the United States, in converting our government into a social welfare state, have ourselves adopted much of socialism. Specifically, we have to an alarming degree adopted the use of the power of the state in the control and distribution of the fruits of industry. We are on notice according to the words of the President, that we are going much further, for he is quoted as saying:

“We’re going to take all the money we think is unnecessarily being spent and take it from the ‘haves’ and give it to the ‘have nots.’” (1964 Congressional Record, p. 6142, Remarks of the President to a Group of Leaders of Organizations of Senior Citizens in the Fish Room, March 24, 1964.)

Socialism takes: United Order gives

That is the spirit of socialism: We’re going to take. The spirit of the United Order is: We’re going to give.

We have also gone a long way on the road to public ownership and management of the vital means of production. In both of these areas the free agency of Americans has been greatly abridged. Some argue that we have voluntarily surrendered this power to government. Be this as it may, the fact remains that the loss of freedom with the consent of the enslaved, or even at their request, is nonetheless slavery.

As to the fruits of socialism, we all have our own opinions. I myself have watched its growth in our own country and observed it in operation in many other lands. But I have yet to see or hear of its freeing the hearts of men of selfishness and greed or of its bringing peace, plenty, or freedom. These things it will never bring, nor will it do away with idleness and promote “industry, thrift and self-respect,” for it is founded, in theory and in practice, on force, the principle of the evil one.

As to the fruits of the United Order I suggest you read Moses 7:16-18 and 4 Nephi 2:-3, 15-16. If we had time we could review the history, what little we know, of Zion in the days of Enoch and

about what happened among the Nephites under those principles of the United Order in the first two centuries following the time of the Savior.

What can we do?

Now what can we do about it?

As I recently reminded my wife of the moratorium on the United Order, which the Lord placed in 1834 (D&C 105:34), that socialism is taking over in the nations and that its expressed aims will surely fail, she spiritedly put to me the question: "Well, then, what would you suggest, that we just sit on our hands in despair and do nothing?" Perhaps similar questions have occurred to you. The answer is, "No, by no means!" We have much to do, and fortunately for us the Lord has definitely prescribed the course we should follow with respect to socialism and the United Order.

Constitution God-inspired

He has told us that in preparation for the restoration of the gospel, he himself established the Constitution of the United States, and he has plainly told us why he established it. I hope I can get this point over to you. He said he established the Constitution to preserve to men their free agency, because the whole gospel of Jesus Christ presupposes man's untrammelled exercise of free agency. Man is in the earth to be tested. The issue as to whether he succeeds or fails will be determined by how he uses his agency. His whole future, through all eternity, is at stake. Abridge man's agency, and the whole purpose of his mortality is thwarted. Without it, the Lord says, there is no existence. (See D&C 93:30.) The Lord so valued our agency that he designed and dictated "the laws and constitution" required to guarantee it. This he explained in the revelation in which he instructed the Prophet Joseph Smith to appeal for help,

Just and holy principles

"According to the laws and constitution of the people, which I have suffered to be established, and should be maintained for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles;

"That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.

"And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose. . . ." (D&C 101:77-78, 80.)

Sustain Constitutional law

Previously he had said:

"And now, verily I say unto you concerning the laws of the land, it is my will that my people should observe to do all things whatsoever I command them.

"And that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind and is justifiable before me.

"Therefore, I, the Lord, justify you, and your brethren of my church, in befriending that law which is the constitutional law of the land [the test of its constitutionality in the words of the Lord here is whether it preserves man's agency];

"And as pertaining to law of man, whatsoever is more or less than this cometh of evil.

"I, the Lord God, make you free therefore ye are free indeed; and the law [that is, constitutional law] also maketh you free.

"Nevertheless, when the wicked rule the people mourn.

"Wherefore, honest men and wise men should be sought for diligently, and good men and wise men ye should observe to

uphold; otherwise whatsoever is less than these cometh of evil." (D&C 98:4-10.)

These scriptures declare the Constitution to be a divine document. They tell us that "according to just and holy principles," the Constitution and the law of the land which supports the "principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before" God; that, "as pertaining to [the] law of man whatsoever is more or less than this, cometh of evil." They remind us that the Lord has made us free and that laws that are constitutional will also make us free.

"When the wicked rule, the people mourn"

Right at this point, almost as if he were warning us against what is happening today, the Lord said: "Nevertheless, when the wicked rule the people mourn." Then, that we might know with certainty what we should do about it, he concluded: "Wherefore, honest men and wise men should be sought for diligently, and good men and wise men ye should observe to uphold. . . ."

In its context this instruction, according to my interpretation, can only mean that we should seek diligently for and support men to represent us in government who are "wise" enough to understand freedom—as provided for in the Constitution and as implemented in the United Order—and who are honest enough and good enough to fight to preserve it.

". . . under no other government in the world could the Church have been established," said President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., and he continued:

". . . if we are to live as a Church, and progress, and have the right to worship as we are worshipping here today, we must have the great guarantees that are set up by our Constitution. There is no other way in which we can secure these guarantees." (Conference Report, October 1942, pp. 58-59.)

Now, not forgetting our duty to eschew socialism and support the just and holy principles of the Constitution, as directed by the Lord, I shall conclude these remarks with a few comments concerning what we should do about the United Order.

What to do about United Order

The final words of the Lord in suspending the order were: "And let those commandments which I have given concerning Zion and her law be executed and fulfilled, after her redemption." (D&C 105:34.)

Further implementation of the order must therefore await the redemption of Zion. Here Zion means Jackson County, Missouri. When Zion is redeemed, as it most certainly shall be, it will be redeemed under a government and by a people strictly observing those "just and holy principles" of the Constitution that accord to men their God-given moral agency, including the right to private property. If, in the meantime, socialism takes over in America, it will have to be displaced, if need be, by the power of God, because the United Order can never function under socialism or "the welfare state," for the good and sufficient reason that the principles upon which socialism and the United Order are conceived and operated are inimical.

In the meantime, while we await the redemption of Zion and the earth and the establishment of the United Order, we as bearers of the priesthood should live strictly by the principles of the United Order insofar as they are embodied in present church practices, such as the fast offering, tithing, and the welfare activities. Through these practices we could as individuals, if we were of a mind to do so, implement in our own lives all the basic principles of the United Order.

As you will recall, the principles underlying the United Order are consecration and stewardships and then the contribution of surpluses into the bishop's storehouse. When the law of tithing was instituted four years after the United Order experiment was suspended, the Lord required the people to put "all their surplus property . . . into the hands of the bishop" (D&C 119:1); thereafter they were to "pay one-tenth of all their interest annually. . . ." (D&C 119:4.) This law, still in force, implements to a degree at least the United Order principle of stewardships, for it leaves in the hands of each person the ownership and management of the property from which he produces the needs of himself and family. Furthermore to use again the words of President Clark:

" . . . in lieu of residues and surpluses which were accumulated and built up under the United Order, we, today, have our fast offerings, our Welfare donations, and our tithing all of which may be devoted to the care of the poor, as well as for the carrying on of the activities and business of the Church."

What prohibits us from giving as much in fast offerings as we would have given in surpluses under the United Order? Nothing but our own limitations.

Furthermore, we had under the United Order a bishop's storehouse in which were collected the materials from which to supply the needs and the wants of the poor. We have a bishop's storehouse under the Welfare Plan, used for the same purpose. . . .

"We have now under the Welfare Plan all over the Church, . . . land projects . . . farmed for the benefit of the poor. . . .

"Thus . . . in many of its great essentials, we have, [in] the Welfare Plan . . . the broad essentials of the United Order. Furthermore, having in mind the assistance which is being given from time to time . . . to help set people up in business or in farming, we have a plan which is not essentially unlike that which was in the United Order when the poor were given portions from the common fund."

It is thus apparent that when the principles of tithing and the fast are properly observed and the Welfare Plan gets fully developed and wholly into operation, "we shall not be so very far from carrying out the great fundamentals of the United Order." (Conference Report, October 1942, pp. 51-58.)

The only limitation on you and me is within ourselves.

A Prayer:

And now in line with these remarks for three things I pray:

(1) That the Lord will somehow quicken our understanding of the differences between socialism and the United Order and give us a vivid awareness of the awful portent of those differences.

(2) That we will develop the understanding, the desire, and the courage born of the Spirit, to eschew socialism and to support and sustain, in the manner revealed and as interpreted by the Lord, those just and holy principles embodied in the Constitution of the United States for the protection of all flesh, in the exercise of their God-given agency.

(3) That through faithful observance of the principles of tithing, the fast, and the welfare program, we will prepare ourselves to redeem Zion and ultimately live the United Order, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.