

Socialism and Sex

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THE GROWTH OF SOCIALISM in the United States has been hampered by the lack of imagination of the leaders of socialist thought. The appeal of the socialist has always been to the future, with a paradisiacal vision of economic plentitude and true democratic freedom. That is — the level of appeal has been a mixture of economic and social goods and leisure in a milieu of democratic-liberal sentiment. This has been good but not good enough.

In a time of comparative plentitude, or at least not economic deprivation, one cannot gain adherents as during a depression. The gaining of new people as potential socialists, as potential subscribers to the socialist program, has to be directed toward interests that are immediate and practical today. It has to be directed towards areas of circumscription of society that are vital to their individual happiness and which, if presented to them as political problems will give them an idea of the type of freedom that can be maintained in a free American socialist society.

The freedom of the legally of-age adult of both sexes to have sexual relations with whomever he or she wishes of the same or opposite sex, without fear of sanction is an important libertarian principle that is part of the law in many socialist and semi-socialist countries today, e.g., in Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, etc. It means, to the individual "deviant" that the fear of legal sanction, as well as illegal repression, blackmail, etc. are forever banished from his mind. It means an area of operational freedom that will enable the emancipated individual to work and think more effectively in his tasks of everyday life. It means the difference between health and sickness for thousands of people who are non-productive members of society today.

It can be argued that sexual deviancy is a mark of ill health in the first place, but it was also argued, with equal clarity and legality, at one time, that it was the mark of the devil — or at least the pagan gods. The point is this: whether we individually consider it right or wrong, healthy or unhealthy, to have a large or small vocabulary of libidinal expression, repression of such expression, or practice under fear, does not make for a whole, productive individual.

Propaganda aimed toward the sexual individualist should stress his importance as a political concern; it should point out his right to what the Declaration of Independence called the "pursuit of happiness." This soon will make more and more people aware of socialism as a constructive force in the transformation of America into a truly happy country where the individual rights of all its people (regardless of their departure from the Puritan "norm") are both observed and respected.

It may at first be considered jokingly but the principle is at the root of political effectiveness. Be concerned with what your people are concerned — that is, with real issues, not straw men — issues that hit at the very vitals of the people. Those who will see socialist literature on this level for the first time will be interested in the program as a whole, for they have already made the first step toward conversion. They have realized that their interests are our interests. Perhaps then more people shall consider what we have to offer.

Christopher Phelps, On Socialism and Sex: An Introduction

Footnotes