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V. I. LENIN

SOCIALISM AND RELIGION



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This translation of V. I. Lenin's *Socialism and Religion* has been made from Vol. 10 of V. I. Lenin's *Works* (4th Russian edition), prepared by the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin Institute of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

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Modern society is wholly built up on the exploitation of the vast masses of the working class by an insignificant minority of the population, the class of the landowners and that of the capitalists. It is a slave society, since the "free" workers who all their life work for the capitalists "are entitled" to only such means of subsistence as are essential for the maintenance of slaves who produce profit, for safeguarding and perpetuating capitalist slavery.

The economic oppression of the workers inevitably calls forth and engenders all forms of political oppression, social humiliation, the vulgarization and obscuration of the spiritual and moral life of the masses. The workers may secure more or less political liberty to fight for their economic emancipation, but no amount of liberty will rid them of poverty, unemployment, and oppression until the power of capital is overthrown. Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression, which everywhere is weighing heavily upon the popular masses, crushed by their perpetual work for others, by want and loneliness. The impotence of the exploited classes in their struggle with the exploiters inevitably

gives rise to the belief in a better hereafter, just as the impotence of the savage in his battle with Nature gives rise to the belief in gods, devils, miracles, and the like. Those who toil and live in want all their lives are taught by religion to be submissive and patient while here on earth and take comfort in the hope of being rewarded in heaven. But those who live by the labour of others are taught by religion to practise charity while on earth, thus offering them a very cheap way of justifying their entire existence as exploiters and selling them at a moderate price tickets to heavenly bliss. Religion is opium for the people. Religion is a sort of spiritual dope in which the slaves of capital drown the image of man, their demand for a life more or less worthy of human beings.

But a slave who becomes conscious of his servitude and rises to struggle for his emancipation has already half ceased to be a slave. The modern, class-conscious worker, reared by the factory system, large-scale production in industry, and enlightened by urban life, contemptuously casts aside religious prejudices, leaves heaven to the priests and bourgeois bigots and tries to win a better life for himself right here, on earth. The proletariat of today sides with socialism, which enlists science in the battle against the fog of religion, and frees the workers from their belief in a hereafter by welding them together to fight in the present for a better life on earth.

Religion must be declared a private affair. In these words Socialists usually express their attitude towards religion. But the meaning of these words must be accurately defined to prevent any misunderstanding. We demand that religion should be held a private affair as far as the state is concerned. But by no means can we consider religion a private affair as far as our Party is concerned. Religion must be of no concern to the state, and religious societies must have no connection with governmental authority. Everyone must be absolutely free to profess any or no religion whatever, that is, to be an atheist, and every Socialist usually is such. Discrimination among citizens on account of their religious convictions is wholly impermissible. Even the bare mention of a citizen's religion in official documents must be discontinued without fail. No subsidies may be granted to the established church nor state allowances to ecclesiastical and religious societies. These must become absolutely free associations of like-minded citizens, associations independent of the state. Only the complete fulfilment of these demands can put a definite end to the shameful and accursed past when the church lived in feudal dependence on the state and Russian citizens lived in feudal dependence on the established church, when mediaeval, inquisitorial laws (to this day remaining in our criminal codes and on our statute books) were in existence and applied, resulting in criminal prosecutions for

belief or disbelief, violating the consciences of men, and establishing a bond connecting cozy government berths and government-derived incomes with the dispensation of dope by the established church. Complete separation of church and state—is what the socialist proletariat demands of the modern state and the modern church.

The Russian revolution must realize this demand as a necessary constituent of political freedom. In this respect the Russian revolution is in a particularly favourable position, since the obnoxious red-tapism of the police-ridden feudal autocracy has called forth discontent, fermentation and indignation even among the clergy. However dull, however ignorant Russian Orthodox clergymen were, even they have now been awakened by the thunder of the downfall of the old, mediaeval order in Russia. Even they are joining in the demand for freedom, are protesting against red-tapism, the arbitrary conduct of the officials and the police spying foisted on the "servants of God." We Socialists must lend this movement our support, carrying the demands of honest and sincere members of the clergy to their conclusion, making them stick to their words about freedom, demanding that they should resolutely break all ties between religion and the police. Either you are sincere, in which case you must stand for the complete separation of church and state and of school and church, for declaring

religion wholly and unconditionally a private affair. Or you do not accept these consistent demands of freedom, in which case you evidently are still held captive by the traditions of the inquisition, in which case you evidently still hang on to your cozy government berths and government-derived incomes, in which case you evidently do not believe in the spiritual power of your weapon and continue to take bribes from state authorities—in which case the class-conscious workers of all Russia will declare merciless war against you.

As far as the Party of the socialist proletariat is concerned, religion is not a private affair. Our Party is an association of class-conscious, advanced fighters for the emancipation of the working class. Such an association cannot and must not be indifferent to lack of class-consciousness, ignorance or obscurantism in the shape of religious beliefs. We demand complete disestablishment of the church so as to be able to combat the religious fog with purely ideological and solely ideological weapons, by means of our press and by word of mouth. Incidentally, we founded our association, the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, precisely for such a struggle against stupefying the workers by means of religion. To us, indeed, ideological struggle is not a private affair but the affair of the whole party, the whole proletariat.

If that is so, why do we not declare in our programme that we are atheists? Why do we not

forbid Christians and other believers in God to join our Party?

The answer to this question will serve to explain the very important difference in the way the question of religion is presented by the bourgeois-democrats and the Social-Democrats.

Our programme is based entirely on the scientific and at that, the materialist world outlook. An explanation of our programme, therefore, necessarily includes an explanation of the true historical and economic roots of the religious fog. Our propaganda necessarily includes the propagation of atheism; the publication of suitable scientific literature, which the autocratic feudal government has hitherto strictly forbidden and prosecuted, must now form one of the branches of our Party work. We shall now probably have to follow the advice Engels once gave to the German Socialists: to translate and widely disseminate the eighteenth-century literature of the French Enlightenment and atheism.*

But under no circumstances ought we to fall into the error of posing the religious question abstractly, idealistically, taking "reason," outside the class struggle, as the starting-point, as is not infrequently done by the radical democrats from among the bourgeoisie. It would be absurd

* See the article "Emigrant literature. Programme of the Blanquist emigrants of the Commune," (*Der Volksstaat* No. 73 for 1874.)—*Ed.*

to think that in a society based on the endless oppression and vulgarization of the worker masses religious prejudices could be dispelled by sheer propaganda methods. It would be bourgeois narrow-mindedness to forget that the yoke of religion that weighs down upon mankind is merely a product and reflection of the economic yoke within society. No books and no preaching can enlighten the proletariat if it is not enlightened by its own struggle against the dark forces of capitalism. Unity in this really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for the creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven.

That is the reason why we do not and should not set forth our atheism in our programme; that is the reason why we do not and should not prohibit proletarians who still retain vestiges of their old prejudices from associating themselves with our Party. We shall always preach the scientific world outlook and it is necessary for us to combat the inconsistency of certain "Christians"; but that does not mean in the least that the religious question ought to be advanced to first place, where it does not belong at all, nor does it mean that the forces of really revolutionary, economic and political struggle should be allowed to be split up for the sake of third-rate opinions or senseless ideas, which are rapidly losing all political importance, are rapidly being swept out as rubbish by the very course of economic development.

Everywhere the reactionary bourgeoisie has made it its concern, and here is beginning to concern itself with the fomenting of religious strife in order thereby to divert the attention of the masses from the really important and fundamental economic and political problems, which are now receiving practical solution at the hands of the all-Russian proletariat uniting in revolutionary struggle. This reactionary policy of splitting up the proletarian forces, which today manifests itself mainly in Black-Hundred pogroms, may tomorrow be extended to more subtle reforms of one kind or another. We, at any rate, shall oppose it by calmly, consistently and patiently preaching proletarian solidarity and the scientific world outlook, which are opposed to the stirring up in any way of secondary differences.

The revolutionary proletariat will succeed in making religion a really private affair, as far as the state is concerned. And under this political system, cleansed of mediaeval mould, the proletariat will wage a broad and open struggle for the abolition of economic slavery, the true source of the religious stupefaction of mankind.

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December 3, 1905

Signed: *N. Lenin*

