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SOCIALISM WITHOUT BUREAUCRATS?

An Ingenious French Scheme

(By VOLNEY HURD, in the "Christian Science Monitor")

AMERICANS, after experimenting with the New Deal, have indicated strongly that the less Socialism of any sort, the better they like it. Thus it is with special interest that they view the strong shift to the left throughout Europe. The extreme Socialism of Russia in the early '20's is one thing,

The National Socialism of the Germans, used as a facade to cover German ambitions to conquer the world, is another.

But when we think of the rest of Europe, particularly France, which has for so long been a centre of free political concepts, then we can wonder what form the French swing towards Socialism will take. France certainly could not stomach the primitive forms of Russia, nor the suppression of the individual as in Germany. It would not accept the New Deal concepts tried here, for they are

not socialistic enough for the New Europe. How, then, will France go to the left, nationalise her major industries, and yet maintain the tremendous sense of the freedom of the individual which marks French history?

That is one of the liveliest questions of the day. And actually it has just been answered in part—but the answer was lost in the shuffle of much more temporary war and political news out of France. The French coal-mining industry is being nationalised and Paris reports the methods to be used.

First, the French want no bureaucratic management. And there we run up against the rub of the whole thing. How can the Government control a business without bureaucracy? What chance has the citizen for any voice under such a plan? The French answer is as follows:

A State company is to be formed, headed by a president or director to be chosen by whatever Cabinet Minister has charge of the coal mines, for the moment under Public Works. The Treasury will advance two billion francs as working capital at a nominal interest rate. The former private owners will be partially reimbursed from earnings until a complete settlement can be effected.

Actually running this State company will be an advisory council of 24 members, representing different interests as follows:

The State, 9; Employees, 8; Consumers, 5; Former Owners, 2; Total, 24.

This French concept of the proper division of interests is a new yardstick. Outstanding is the ease with which the State itself can be overruled. It has only nine representatives, while the workers themselves have eight. Let them get two more from either consumers or former owners and they can out-vote the State.

The consumers, with five votes—the general public, in other words—have a good, strong voice. They need only get five additional votes in order to out-vote the State. Since employees are consumers, the chance of winning over five of their eight votes would often be a good possibility.

The former owners have two votes; so are not forgotten. It is certainly wise that the mines should have the benefit of the long previous experience of the former owners, however small their voting power.

Distribution of Profits

Active management is in the hands of a smaller board of directors, stemming directly from this advisory council; two being chosen by the State; two by the workers in mines or offices, one by the foremen and one by the consumers. All financial and production plans must be submitted to the advisory council.

Distribution of profits tentatively has been planned to be divided among the entire personnel of the industry, the State, and the social services. One thing is underscored—at least as a purpose—no bureaucrats and no usual governmental red tape! It is to all intents and purposes a private company, but financed by the Government, operated by representative directors from all public interests, and in this way expected to give the efficiency and return of private operation with Government ownership.

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