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What is Reformism?

Albert Meltzer

Reformism is not the same as advocating or getting reforms. There is a hell of a lot in this society needs reforming. Reformism is the belief that all efforts should be directed at the bit that needs reforming (with the economic system, society, the State or a political party) to which all efforts should be directed. Someone who thinks an old banger of a machine is fundamentally sound and only needs a bit of tinkering to make it perfect is called a bodger. Someone who decides there's nothing wrong with a crap institution but a change of leadership, a reform of moral outlook, a few new laws, a ban here and a relaxation there, is called a reformist, though could equally well be called a bodger.

Certainly there is a lot about exploitation, the State and the ways of society that can and should be reformed. But all reforms granted by the State can be taken away by the State. There is no such thing as natural or God-given rights except those that people have taken for themselves and can be defended.

An example of the evils of reformism: Many months ago in Bangladesh a travelling US senator was horrified to find that local factories employed an overwhelming amount of child labour. The children worked from dawn until dusk, receiving no schooling,

and for ridiculously low pay used their supple hands and mobility to swell the profits of the bosses. Politicians love worthy causes that cost them nothing and the worthy Senator went home and protested loudly. He got Washington to threaten to cut investment (nowadays called 'aid').. Overnight child labour was abolished! The children could now go to school instead — if there was any, which there wasn't. What happened was they were sent out into the street to starve and to a life of begging and prostitution, while their places were taken by adults. To make up for the sacrifice, adult pay was cut from the pittance it was to their level. The children had not only failed to benefit, their livelihood had been sacrificed and their parents, if any, had even less chance of maintaining them than before.