

Teamwork is the key to the future

By John Soderlund

AS a socialist, and for more than 30 years an official of the Swedish trade unions, what I have seen here in Zimbabwe has given me hope.

I believe in democratic socialism. I have seen what it has done in my country. In my lifetime the conditions of the Swedish working class have been immeasurably improved. When I was young I lived with my parents and four brothers and sisters in one room and a kitchen. My father died of tuberculosis. Though there were not the vast famines of the last century, people still died of starvation in Sweden. Now we have one of the highest standards of living in the world.

Many forces combined to bring this about. But above all, I believe, it succeeded because the struggle was both for the framework of democratic socialism, especially the principle of one man, one vote, and for the spirit of solidarity and moral purpose that enlisted people from all classes.

The foundations of the struggle had been laid in the 1860s when the free churches won their fight to be allowed to work in Sweden. They gave the ordinary worker a dignity and purpose for his life, unlike the state church, which had feared giving the workers access to such a revolutionary document as the Bible.

CO-OPERATIVES

As people learnt to trust each other, they formed co-operatives, and thus were able to obtain goods and services more cheaply. At the same time the temperance movement made a big impact on Sweden. Drunkenness was then keeping many families in poverty — and this was not helped by the widespread practice of paying workers partly in alcoholic drink. The campaign to end this was led by the son of a university professor.

TALKING POINT

THE SUNDAY
MAIL, JULY 4/82
HARARE
ZIMBABWE,

Then came the trade unions, uniting the workers and improving conditions, and the Social Democratic Party, the labour movement's political arm.

A final significant point was the agreement drawn up in 1938 between management and unions, which laid a basis of good industrial relations on which Sweden's industries have grown.

Now the framework has been built. But we have a saying in Sweden: "If I have what I want, and a little more, then I forget about others."

And this is happening. We are not living up to the concept of our first socialist Prime Minister, Branting, who said that solidarity begins at home, goes out to the class, to the nation and to the world.

One of our socialist songs says: "The values we fight for are justice, freedom and bread." We need to see what this means in terms of our solidarity with a needy world.

● **Justice:** Life is not just. A person's start in life depends on whether he is born in Sweden or India, whether he is welcome or not, whether he is sick or healthy. Justice means that I have to do what I can, individually and collectively, to put right where nature has failed so that, regardless of where they were born, children have the same chance to have their needs satisfied.

If the parents cannot or will not give the children the care they need, then the rest of us in society, in the world, have to give this care, both material and spiritual.

● **Freedom:** Is it my freedom that concerns me, or that of others? Freedom for whom, and to do what? Freedom to take what I want? Freedom to hate people of other classes or races? Or freedom to do what in my heart I know is right — to defend the oppressed, to hate injustice, but strive to win the unjust person.

● **Bread:** For whom? For myself, who often has food to throw away? Do I care about those who have so little that they suffer, or even starve?

Justice, freedom and bread. They are all important, and in that order. For those of us whose basic needs have been satisfied, we reverse the order at our peril. If bread becomes the most important — as it has to many socialists — it is easy to want butter and jam too. A good house, a car, a summer house, a boat. Freedom then becomes the freedom to get all this. And justice becomes making sure I get what I think I deserve. Whether others can get it is up to them, not me.

Then we need to look at how we work for our socialist goals. A just society can only be built with just means and by just people. I know that I am a mixture of good and evil, and it can be difficult to be clear about my own motives. One place where my motives are shown clearly is in how I work with others.

Teamwork is a difficult art. Each of us is guided by our education, experience and ideas. Often we think differently, but we have to work together. We have to learn to trust each other, and that can only come from honesty — not the honesty that always points out the other person's faults, but the honesty which starts with myself.

Often, when I have found teamwork difficult, I have seen that I was being run by a wrong motive — ambition to get

A POSITION PROHIBITED

rather than the aims of a socialist. This has made me:

● Keep silent, when I should speak, because I think people in leadership might not like what I say.

● Stop showing appreciation for my colleagues' work, in case people think they are as capable as me.

● Constantly watch that the idea I had is attributed to me — which has sometimes become more important than putting the idea into practice.

● Hold back information from others, so that I could shine with my knowledge and be the first to reach the right conclusion.

This is where my visit to Zimbabwe has encouraged me. I have seen many examples of the inner spirit which makes socialism work. I met the deputy general secretary of one union. He had been the general secretary of a union before a merger took place.

"We asked ourselves whether we really wanted the best for the workers," he told me. "We felt that in our case a merger would be an advantage. That meant somebody had to step down — and I took that step."

Then I met an employee of a mining company. He had started a court case against another employee who had insulted him in front of the workers' committee.

But he was not happy with this. In his heart he searched for the right thing to do. As a result he withdrew the case, even though it seemed clear he would win it. In front of the workers' committee he said to his opponent: "I am sorry I have been bitter against you. I want to put the past behind." They are now working closely together.

RECONQUERED

The future of socialism in our countries depends on whether we have men and women like these — who unite, rather than divide, people who say yes to others' needs and no to their own, or their group's selfish interests; who cannot be bought or bullied.

This encourages me as daily I work at having more of the spirit of a social democrat, knowing I have a long way to go, but not letting that stop me working with others who have the same aim. Democratic socialism must be reconquered by every generation; yes, by every individual.

The people of Zimbabwe have a chance to show a new way for East and West that will open up a realistic dialogue between South and North, and so produce the new world order we long for.