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SOCIALISM

BY

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BY CHARLES S. DEVAS, M.A.¹



LIKE all others who speak of Socialism and wish to be clear, I must say at once whom I mean by Socialists—not the Anarchists who oppose all government, not the Communists who would have all things held in common, not the Extremists or Dynamiters who would use violence to attain their ends, not any of these whom there is no necessity to confute, but the scientific or moderate Socialists who would proceed by way of the ballot-box, with law and order; and would contrive that sooner or later all capital or means of production or sources of income should be transferred to the hand of the State, whether the central or the local Government.

SOCIALISM AND THE CHURCH.

Now, the first question that may occur to you is whether, after all, this moderate Socialism is an enemy, whether there is any need of fighting, whether at any rate in Great Britain we have any complaint against the Socialists. Are

¹ A paper read at the Catholic Conference at Blackburn, Sept. 27, 1905.

they less civil to us than is any other non-Catholic body? Why pick a quarrel?

But Great Britain is not the whole world, and looking outside, wherever the Catholic Church is a strong force and simultaneously the Socialists are a strong force, we see the two in violent antagonism. You have only to cross to Belgium to see them forming two political parties in daily hostility. At least half the blame of the cruel persecution of the Church in France falls on the shoulders of the Socialists. In Germany a strong Government left off persecuting the Church because in her they recognized the only force that could withstand Socialism successfully. In Italy a Government once bitterly anti-clerical is becoming eager for an alliance with the Church as a shield against the Socialists. The same antagonism is seen across the Atlantic. The two rapidly growing and spreading bodies in the United States are the Socialists, who already make up nearly half the voters, and over against them the Catholic Church. Within the last fourteen months two books have been published in the United States on the Catholic side, showing the true facts of the momentous case; the earliest by Father Gettelmann, S.J., being an enlarged and adapted translation of Father Cathrein's work on Socialism in its eighth edition; the later book is by the Right Rev. William Stang, Bishop of Fall River, entitled *Socialism and Christianity*; and in neither book is there any question of conciliation. "Little can be done," writes a Socialist American magazine, "until men and women face the two curses of our country and our time, the curses of capitalism and Christianity." "The real Socialists," writes Bishop Stang, "have done with God

and His eternal laws. . . . Real Socialism means rebellion against God and Society." And the Bishop writes from the long personal experience of his pastoral work. "Is there nothing in your way?" he asked a Socialist leader not long ago. "Yes, sir," the man answered slowly, "there is one thing in our way, and that one obstacle is the Catholic Church."

THREE MAIN PILLARS OF SOCIALISM.

And yet it seems a pity to be compelled to take up arms against a scheme and a school that gives us so fair a promise. Indeed, what could appear on the surface more reasonable than orderly Collectivism? Three principal arguments strike me as the pillars and props of the Socialist position. The first is the argument that it is just and fair for all men to start alike; and that if a man is to be poor and fill a low station, it is to be his own fault and own doing, and not due to the mere accident that he was born of poor parents, while another is in high station from no personal merit, but from the mere accident that he was born of rich parents. This may be called *the argument from justice*.

The second argument is from the immense saving to be worked by Collectivism with its joint and orderly system of production, and the avoidance of the incalculable waste of the competitive system, such as the vast sums spent on advertising or on the work of commercial travelers, a large body of the most intelligent men in the country using up their brains and their time chiefly to induce purchasers to buy from one commercial house rather than from another. Then there is the waste of things made that no one wants,

the waste of the spoilt or unsold goods, the waste of a dozen men doing what a couple could do if they only acted, in delivering goods, for example, in combination instead of competition, as letter delivery compared with milk delivery. Now all this waste is ended by Collectivism, which forms the logical conclusion to the great process you see around of producers, production and sale, even retail shops on the largest possible scale. What a vast fund will be in hand from all labor being usefully employed instead of some 25 per cent. being simply thrown away! This may be called *the argument from economy*.

The third argument is drawn from the evils that in most industrial countries are the lot of so many: ill-fed, ill-clad, ill-housed, over-worked, under-paid, unemployed, exposed from youth upwards to evil surroundings, moral and physical. A way out of these evils must be found. "We have found the way and the only way," is the glad tidings or gospel of Socialism. "Present conditions are intolerable: your deliverance a necessity: Collectivism the one answer to your most urgent need."

This argument may be called *the argument from necessity*; and backed up by its comrades, the arguments from justice and from economy, the three appear to offer a formidable front to all opponents; for like ethical considerations, monetary considerations and humane considerations appear to drive us to the Socialistic conclusion. But then appearance is not always the same as reality.

COLLECTIVISM AND EQUALITY.

Take the first argument: why should men start all on an equality? Tell a Brahmin he should start equal with a

Pariah and he will laugh in your face. Ah! but the Hindus are sadly behind the age. Perhaps; but then ask the modern Germans, who are certainly in the front, and many of their philosophers will tell you that the business or function of the great mass of the people—German, British, or any other—is to minister to the welfare, physical and intellectual, of an *élite*, of a small number of superior beings. Or ask our own men of science, and they will declare that mere nature knows nothing of this equality, that everywhere is inequality, struggle, survival of the individual best adapted for the cosmic process. And quite apart from any question of wealth, any one can see the utter inequality of individuals at the very start, inequalities of health and physical capacities, of moral and intellectual qualities, of their temper, their wits and their memory; so that merely to equalize money fortunes would be a very imperfect attempt at giving all men an equal start. Every unearned advantage in the race of life would have to be neutralized, every undeserved defect compensated; and so great would be the complication that it would require more than human power and impartiality to adjust the points of this universal handicap.

But, after all, does not Christianity preach equality? Undoubtedly; but not the Collectivist equality. One God indeed for all, one redemption, the same law, the same sacraments, the same conditions of salvation, the same human nature alike in the sad weakness from original sin and in the glorious possibilities from the action of grace. Hence master and slave, philosopher and road-mender, Roman and barbarian, white man and colored, were all brothers in Christ, all knelt at the same altars. The

essential dignity and rights of man and of woman were affirmed to good purpose by Christianity eighteen centuries before they were affirmed to little purpose by the French Revolution. But Christianity preached no leveling of ranks, no abolition of inequality of conditions; rather it taught that all inequality of rights and authority is from God, that all should be tempered by duty, that all obedience should have responsibility as its correlative or counterpart, that we should acquiesce in the diversity of all manner of gifts as providential, and no more rebel against a man being endowed from his very youth with superior power or superior wealth than against his being endowed with a delicate ear for music, or with keen eyesight, or with a beautiful voice, or with muscular strength and agility, or with powers of physical endurance, all superior to our own.

And notice as a particular point how Christianity, by the great emphasis it lays on family life, thereby emphasizes inequality; for the family is the main ground of inequality. To support wife and children and provide for them after death is the main ground of industry and frugality. Hereditary capacities alike and hereditary weakness are handed on from parent to child no less than hereditary property. Hence, although Collectivism may profess to do no injury to family life, it is in essential contradiction to it by removing its main ground, the devoted union of man and woman for the welfare and advancement of their children.

Let me add one more remark on this argument from justice. Not merely is equality impossible, but I doubt whether it is wanted. Do the Collectivists understand that

for the inhabitants of British India, namely, three-quarters of the population of the whole British Empire, the average yearly income per head is £2, according to an official and optimistic account, while other estimates bring it to less than £1 10s. a year, or a penny a day. This being so, if there are any Socialists in this prosperous city of Blackburn, are they prepared to throw in their lot with their fellow-subjects of India, and share and share alike, and equalize the scantiness of the one income with the relative abundance of the other? Or will the Socialists of America treat the ten million negroes in the States each as a man and a brother, and become the fellow-workmen of a common Collectivism? Or will the Australians welcome the Chinese to be as one with them on their almost vacant continent?

So much for the first great support of Collectivism, the argument from justice. The second argument from economy equally fails on examination. I well recognize indeed the waste under our present system, and believe half of it might be avoided. I fully approve of collective ownership and collective working within limits, in reason, up to a certain point, the exact point being a question of circumstances. The post, the telegraphs, the supply of water, gas and electricity, and tramways, seem to me in most places to be best in public, not private hands; and for India and Ireland the railways, waterways, and forests. In each case the limits of this Collectivism can be discussed; but in all cases its character is totally different from the omnivorous Collectivism that would swallow up every kind of capital, and leave the private man nothing at all. And observe particularly that Collectivism in moderation

is not the smallest step towards the Collectivism of the Socialists. You might as well say that to use butter as part of our diet is a step towards eating nothing else. Collective ownership as an ingredient of social diet is wholesome, but as the exclusive diet is fatal.

OBSTACLES TO COLLECTIVISM.

Now, briefly, for you can find the details in the excellent joint book of Fathers Cathrein and Gettelmann, there are five fatal difficulties in the way of this universal, all-absorbing Collectivism.

First is the difficulty of organization. Either all the productive property of Great Britain would be worked from one centre as one business, keeping work and wages uniform; and this plan would break down instantly by the pure overweight of clerk-work; or else local autonomy would be granted to parish, urban district, county or municipality; and then, though the work might possibly be within manageable proportions, there would be other difficulties. For gradually, according to local varieties of opportunity, talent and luck, inequalities of health would develop among the different localities, Blackburn, perhaps, be earning 25 per cent. more than Preston; and back comes the inequality that was supposed to have been banished. Nor can this be remedied by allowing labor to flow to where it was best paid. For to work the Collectivist plan at all, there must be some fixity in the numbers of the hands to work and the mouths to feed. To provide employment or to cater for ever-fluctuating numbers would be impossible. The present liberty of moving

about would in consequence have to be restricted. Even to migrate no further than from Manchester to Liverpool would require a special permit, and we should find ourselves chained to the soil or to the municipal workshop. This I call something like serfdom.

Secondly comes the difficulty of supply. Instead of a body of traders to cater for the public taste you would have as your providers a body of officials eager to get through their work and not be bothered by individual peculiarities. There must be barrack-room uniformity if the Collectivist scheme is to work, no genuine liberty of consumption, not for the men only, but even for their mothers and sisters, their wives and daughters. This I call something like despotism.

Thirdly comes the difficulty of employment. Who is to do what? It would in practice be impossible to allow freedom to choose or to change an employment. We should have to take what was given to us and stick to it. This I call something like slavery. Or if the attempt was made to be fair by causing all men to take turns at working in different trades, then the waste of human power by thus undoing the division of labor and the increase of annoyance and discomfort would far exceed all the losses and waste of the present competitive system.

Fourthly comes the difficulty of wages. Either all must receive alike, skilled and unskilled, physician and farm laborer, all ranks of workers in the iron, the cotton, or the building trades, to the utter discouragement of skill and intelligence; or else there must be discrimination, some receiving more, others less, with no standard to go by. A municipality now can pay according to current local

wages or trade union rates; but under Collectivism there would neither be trade unions or any outside wages with which to make a comparison. And thus we should have to do the very thing we should wish to avoid, and entrust our good fortune to the arbitrary decision of Government officials. This I call wages at Bumble's discretion.

Lastly comes the difficulty of motives, and a blow struck at industry, care and frugality. True that Socialists often argue from the natural goodness of man and his proneness to virtue from his youth up. But this appears a contradiction. If man is naturally so good and yet the world so full of injustice and oppression as the Socialists maintain, then the fact that they have allowed the world to drift into so bad a condition proves that mankind, however honest and well-meaning, is thoroughly incompetent, and quite unfit to be trusted with collective management. Let us then confine the argument to real historical man, who appears an idle, careless, and self-indulgent personage unless properly trained and given an adequate motive for action. Take away the stimulus of hope and fear, especially when ennobled and fortified by regard for others, for infirm parents, for invalid brethren, for wife and young children, to avert from them suffering and poverty, to procure for them comfort, health, education and ease—let their future be secure, no longer in any way in our hands, and what shall save those hands from being smitten with a paralyzing slackness?

So, then, these five difficulties in the way of Socialism—the difficulty of organizing business, of supplying wants, of assigning employment, of adjudicating reward, and of furnishing a motive for industry and frugality—

these five fatal difficulties pull down the second prop of Socialism, the argument from economy. There would no doubt be some saving in the waste of competition, but the losses would outbalance the saving more than a hundred-fold. This I call being penny wise and pound foolish.

SOCIAL REFORM, NOT SOCIALISM,
THE NECESSITY.

But there still remains the third prop of Socialism, the argument from necessity, that at all costs we must be freed from the evils of the present time, that anything is better than to leave things as they are. And most truly the evils are terrible and pressing: the miserable dwellings of so large a number of our people in town and country, the cruel advantage taken of weak, unorganized labor, the uncertainty of employment, the frequent triumph of dishonesty, the poverty-stricken old age that for so many is the dreary prospect ahead. But who recognized these evils more clearly than Pope Leo XIII? Who told us more clearly than he that we are not to leave these things as they are? What a fallacy then for the Socialists to say, Society is sick, and therefore the only remedy is Collectivism, as though there was no other alternative. But another alternative there is that involves no injury to the Church, no injury to the State, no injury to family life, another alternative that, unlike Collectivism, is free from the five fatal obstacles I have shown in the way of Collectivism; and this other alternative is Christian Social Reform.

AN ALTERNATIVE.

I have already mentioned Bishop Stang's volume on Socialism and Christianity, and will gladly follow his example of not meeting the new social gospel with mere negation, but with a positive programme of reform. I ask, therefore, and with the more confidence because I have an episcopal flag flying at my mast-head, whether in Great Britain we cannot unite our forces and follow social reform along the four lines of protected labor, of organized labor, of insured labor, and lastly of diffused ownership. This is not indeed all, but all that we need now consider.

LABOR REFORMS.

As to *protected labor* or factory legislation, we have only to go on with what has been so well begun, and extend, improve, complete and copy any salutary examples from abroad. Thus the laws might be imitated that demand guarantees for the moral character of foremen, separation of the sexes, consent of parents or guardians before those under age may be employed. Then the actual law might be better enforced, and evasions stopped like those in the dressmaking trade, brought to public knowledge in Mrs. Lyttelton's play. And legal protection should be extended to the helpless crowd of workers, mostly young women, in the match factories, jam-making, and cheap clothing trade.

Secondly, along the line of *organized labor*, let us aim at the spread, the elevation, and the legal incorporation of trade unions, so that as far as possible in all industries all bargaining about work and wages may be collective bargaining, masters and men both organized, all disputes

that conciliation cannot avert being conducted before a reasonable tribunal of arbitration; and an end made of the present scandalous uncertainty of the law regarding trade unions.

And here let me interpose a word suggested by what has already passed at this Conference. His Grace the Archbishop of Westminster alluded to a rumor that labor organizations were being abused to force their members to support non-religious education. If there is any truth—I hope there is not—in such a rumor, far from setting Catholics against trade unions, it should stimulate them to take such a friendly and sympathetic attitude towards them in the legitimate industrial sphere, as to be able to protest with good effect if they go beyond that sphere. And here precisely is a case to which the words of Father Gerard apply, delivered in this hall last night, on the responsibility of Catholic men; a case where the resolute protest of all Catholic trade-unionists against the organization of labor being thus turned from its proper purpose would have, on all concerned, the most beneficial effect.

Thirdly, along the line of *insured labor* we have an instalment in the Workman's Compensation Act of 1897. But this only touches accidents and not the other great branches of workmen's insurance, against sickness, against infirmity, and against unemployment. Our trade unions and our friendly societies, for a select portion of our people, serve as insurance against sickness and infirmity; but I confess to a feeling of envy at the magnificent system of triple insurance that is the boast of Germany. But neither in Germany nor elsewhere is the final branch of insurance, viz., that against unemployment, yet estab-

lished, though attempts have been made, the most conspicuous and practical for us being the great work of our English trade unions, who have spent on unemployed benefit in the twelve years ending 1903 considerably over four million pounds. And I agree with the suggestion in Mr. Percy Alden's recent admirable work (*The Unemployed*, pp. 64,65), that a Government contribution should be given in proportion to the sums thus voluntarily subscribed.

DIFFUSED OWNERSHIP.

Lastly, we come to the fourth line of true social reform, namely, diffused ownership, on which Leo XIII. laid such stress: that the majority of the people should not live merely from hand to mouth, but should have, each family its small capital, some partnership, shares, or stocks, but principally a small plot of mother earth, from the size of a garden to the size of a small farm, that no creditor could touch, that belonged to the family rather than the individual, that would be greatly eased of local and Imperial taxation and of legal charges (it is done in Belgium), that would serve as insurance against unemployment, that would solve (and alone solve) the problem of the exodus from country villages, and would allay the complaint of physical degeneration. And if I envy the Germans their insurance laws, I envy still more their millions of peasant proprietors, who, far from dwindling away, as the Socialists and some economists had prophesied, not only weathered the storm of low prices and agricultural depression, but have increased in recent years both absolutely and in the proportion of the cultivated

land which they hold. True, in this country we have special difficulties in the way of the endowment, or rather the re-endowment, of half our population with property; but with the will there is the way: the extension of allotments, the movement towards rural factories and garden cities, are movements in the right direction; and we are gradually shaking off the baleful superstition that the money lender, the company promoter, the credit draper, the army contractor, the drink seller, the slum owner, and others, have a sacred right to make what contracts they please, to pocket what profit they can, and devour the hard-earned savings of genuine labor.

But I have said enough for our purpose, that social reform along the lines of protected labor, organized labor, insured labor, and diffused ownership, sweeps away the only remaining defence and last prop of Socialism, its alleged necessity.

A FINAL WARNING.

Yet one word of caution in conclusion. I have spoken with great approval of many social reforms. But there is a corrosive poison that eats away the value of them all. This poison is irreligion, whether instilled by godless schools, or godless homes, or godless professors. Thus the very Germany that among the great countries of the world leads the vanguard of social reform, is herself afflicted with the gravest social discontent; and America, with all her wonderful resources, is beginning at last to recognize, let us hope before it is too late, that for modern nations even temporal welfare is bound up inseparably with Christian schools and Christian homes.

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