

CHAPTER IX

SOCIALISM IN THE MAKING

EXCEPT for many unhappy experiments of Utopian character, socialism until recent years has shown no trace of positive and constructive workmanship. It has been the critic of the existing industrial order. If it had rendered no other service, this activity of relentless censorship would justify it. Much of the best social legislation on the continent of Europe is traceable directly to social agitation. Bismarck was blamed for making the admission, "If there were no social democracy, and if many were not afraid of it, even the moderate progress which we have hitherto made in social reform would not have been brought about." The greater part of socialist energies is still critical, and in this sense negative. The days of the mere fault-finder are, however, numbered. This change marks an epoch in the history of the movement. So long as it played the part of caviller, it took no responsibilities, nor could its pretensions be tested.

Within the brief period of five or six years it has become possible to apply a new and far more searching criticism to socialism. So long as it was a mere dream, so long as men felt it only as a hope, so long as it remained in the realm of theory and speculation, the only weapons that could be turned against it

were as unsubstantial as any that socialists themselves used. The patronizing strictures of the practical man were as airy and doctrinaire as any claims put forth by Marx, Jules Guesde, or William Morris. A library of books and pamphlets has been written to show the limits of human nature, the limits of corporate capacity, the limits of what the city or the state may legitimately undertake. Time and events have not dealt kindly with these opinions. Corporations now perform hundreds of services that earlier writers thought altogether beyond their scope. States and cities organize and carry on enterprises so various that the older theories, "what the state can do and what it cannot do," are very queer reading.

As long as social innovators were making fancy sketches of a perfect society, criticism was scarcely less fanciful. When the dream period passes into experiment, the possibilities of critical observation first appear. A stage of socialistic development has now been reached, concerning which one may form as distinct a judgment as upon the results of the weather bureau or the sloyd system of education. Socialism now enters upon the formidable task of social reconstruction. One may roughly mark four stages in its growth. It was long Utopian, then under Lassalle's guidance it became political, passing thence into state and municipal activities that are strictly socialistic. This third stage is strangely enough nowhere the work of socialists, but of Tories, political liberals, or military governments. Its final form is to unite politics with coöperative business, as in Belgian cities.

At the point where socialism begins to show itself

a force to reckon with in politics, its positive influence begins. We can measure it by the compromises and concessions wrung from the party in power. The years immediately following the Franco-Prussian war mark the rise of its political influence in Germany. The law of 1884, which permits the trade unions to unite, marks it in France. In Belgium its extraordinary career had an even later beginning. Socialists now sit upon the councils of more than a hundred towns in France, and many of the communes are politically controlled by socialists, subject to the veto of the prefect. This veto represents the grip which an extremely centralized government has upon local administration. Although the suffrage is practically as free as in the United States, the limits are very narrow within which a town council can introduce a change of policy. I have tried in many cities to see what socialistic steps have actually been taken. With two socialists in the government and nearly a million votes, actual performance is singularly lacking. Here one finds a drug store taken by the city, "to be run not for the enrichment of the petit bourgeois, but for all the inhabitants." There it is the city printing, the elimination of the private contractor, or a pawnshop in exact imitation of those long existing in most of the French towns. Again, the city is bread maker or the supplier of milk.

Grenoble owns a restaurant which furnishes daily more than twelve hundred meals. The city owns the land and the nine buildings upon it. That the competition may not be unfair against private eating-houses, rent is paid to the city, but the element of profit to any individual is eliminated. If at the

year's close a profit has been made, it goes to the city treasury as a reserve fund to be used when the price of foods is exceptionally high. It is thus run strictly upon socialistic principles for social use and not for private profit. With the exception of the restaurant at Grenoble, all this is the result of socialist activity during the last fifteen years.

The first surprise is to find how different the experience has been in large towns, like Roubaix and Lille, from the calculated municipalization of German and English cities. A score of these show an extension of city functions far beyond all that has been done in French towns that have for years had socialist mayors and a socialist majority upon the town council. The government veto accounts for much of this backwardness; but the bourbon character of the French socialism, its abstract and uncompromising quality, accounts for more. The haughty disdain of the Latin collectivists to work for modest social improvements with any human being who is not of the true faith, still confines their activity to fields that bear at best a stunted fruit.

The most sober and restrained statement one could give of the party activity down to the last congress, would be largely the description of feuds and brawls of almost incredible character. The party led by Jaurès and Millerand, a member of the cabinet, has reached some steadiness of constructive purpose. It has learned that coöperation with other social agencies is a necessity. In this spirit, Millerand entered the Ministry of Waldeck-Rousseau. The storm at once broke over the *cas Millerand*. In this consent of a collectivist to work with a bourgeois government, the

other socialist parties see only a sinister attack upon the sacred principle of the class struggle. The discipline of events and the increasing influence of men like Jaurès will in time cure this doctrinaire folly; meanwhile we have to look to the humbler work within the commune to see the completed picture of socialism in the making.

In most towns I asked the mayor or his secretary what had been done to realize the socialist ideal. Many communities have had from eight to ten years' experience with collectivist administrators. The first and often the paramount occupation has been to vote larger budgets in favor of the poor. Sometimes the aged poor in almshouses are given new freedom with an extra stipend for pin money. Sometimes it is to build a new *crèche* or enlarge the older ones. If mothers had previously paid small sums, this indignity is omitted. Often a large sum is voted to feed school children. I never could find an instance in which it was even claimed that any considerable thought or care had been given to distinguish between those who could pay and those who could not. It appeared to be assumed that every workman who could pay for his children's food, would do it from native self-respect. It was invariably with an air of triumph that you were told, "The bourgeois spent only 50,000 francs on the poor, but we spent 150,000." In Roubaix the secretary said, "We have given ten times as many pieces of clothing to the poor as the bourgeois ever gave." This was considered final proof that the socialists were introducing a superior administration. The same pride was shown in raising the pensions of "socialist soldiers"; in paying the car fares of certain

city officials; in voting grants to the theatres and free medical attendance to a larger proportion of the poor. It was thought a disgrace that the needy should have to go themselves for their free bread. It was therefore voted to deliver the bread at the door. These are strictly fair illustrations of what has been attempted in a large number of communes. It is for the most part an extremely loose and promiscuous form of out-door relief.

The visitor is allowed to take copies of the weekly *Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, in which the acts and deliberations at the City Hall are given to the public. At St. Denis I was permitted to take an entire file of copies from the first issue on April 5, 1891. The single impression which these bulletins make upon the reader is that of a very raw attempt to catch the working-class vote by giving away the public money. If "Citoyen Oudin" has died, the vote of the city council, giving the widow 100 francs and a monthly pension, is printed. It is added: "Nothing of the old secrecy is now tolerated. In a democratic society all things must be open to the public eye." In two instances the socialists had organized a service for widows with small children that is a model of humane good sense. It was wisely assumed, unless the family was to be broken up, that all the mother's strength was due to the care of her little ones. She was thus allowed a monthly pension, which she could supplement by home work. It was distinctly understood that the widow was in no way classed with objects of charity, but received her pension as the soldier receives his, without loss of self-respect. "For cases of this kind," said my socialist informant, "we

do not propose to spoil the whole family by putting upon them the stigma of pauperism."

These rather startling attempts to cast out the whole charity tradition do not exhaust all that the French collectivists are undertaking, but they are by far the most important. Their rawness and imperfection are not to be concealed. It is for this reason that in many communes the socialists have been dislodged. No severer test of administrative ability could possibly be chosen than the care of the dependent poor. If human experience has proved one thing more clearly than another, it is that the whole class of those who need and claim assistance cannot be really helped without extreme caution and discrimination. If the mayor says, "We collectivists propose to aid all the poor and ask no questions," he begins forthwith to debauch the community, but far more to debauch those who are to receive his aid. The record of bourgeois society in dealing with the needy lacks dignity, as it miserably lacks effectiveness. It has shown a petty moral provincialism in its divisions between the "worthy" and the "unworthy" poor. It has nevertheless worked out, however clumsily, certain tests of great value. The work before us is to develop these so far that every community can satisfy itself whether those asking aid have (*a*) the *ability* to do any useful work, (*b*) whether they have the *will* to do it. If, being able, they refuse after fair chances are given them, they should straightway be put under prison constraint, preferably upon farm colonies.

One of the strong men among the collectivists who had struggled long with the dead beats among

the poor, told me: "We have got to go a good deal farther than the bourgeois dared to go. If a man can work and won't, we shall put him in the compulsory workshop where he can be taught, or, refusing that, he shall not be allowed to escape." I asked why his constituents made such bad work of it. "Oh, you know everybody is crazy, one way or the other, on that subject of caring for the poor; we have all got our lesson still to learn."

This chief effort in the collectivist communes has, thus far, been to reorganize "public assistance." Its lack of success is explained by the theoretic stage which still holds a large part of the French socialism. They approach this hardest of practical problems with sonorous sentences from Rousseau. Before the election they placard the town with sentences like these:—

La faim, c'est le crime public,
C'est l'immense assassin qui sort de nos ténèbres.

They announce that "girl mothers" shall be freed from all disgrace; that every badge and stigma of misfortune shall be removed; that "we do not care to know how the misfortune came, but only if it has come."

One need not deny that much nobility of motive is expressed in these sentences, but they should not mislead us into thinking that the actual work of social and individual reformation is even *begun* by such resonant paragraphs. Real performance is still before them. The socialists complain bitterly, and with much justification, that the veto power of the government is so used against them, that they are left with this hard-

est of all problems, as if the purpose were to discredit their work before public opinion. But the real weakness is in their own lack of political and business discipline. The spell of abstractions is still upon them to such extent that personal wrangling over "great and sacred principles" makes it almost impossible to get through a congress that brings the five parties together. A Belgian socialist, as successful in business as he was in parliament, once gave me letters of introduction to some of his friends in France. He added: "Our socialist brothers over there are still in the primary school. They are talking about the universe, when they have got to learn to manage a shop and a small town. They abuse us because we are at work at the small end with small things."

This brief account would lack both truth and justice, if it failed to note another high quality that is perhaps at present more useful to the cause in France than the best "municipal housekeeping." This is the socialist appeal to the national conscience to *begin* disarmament. Under the magnetic leadership of the scholarly Jaurès, thousands of Frenchmen are for the first time admitting the vast stupidity of the increasing military burdens of that people. In the name of the working classes, Jaurès cries halt to this criminal policy. With a sustained moral passion that reminds one of Mazzini, he calls upon his countrymen to rise above the petty provincialism "marked off by the surveyor's line," and "enter upon the ways that lead toward self-respect and brotherhood." His stinging utterances against the slowness and inactivity of the Church, in this effort toward an international morality,

has stirred multitudes of people in that country. "Is the work," he asks, "which the professed followers of Christ have so infamously neglected, to be done by socialists?"

In a great hall packed with students, I once heard a three hours' debate on this subject, between a priest and a socialist. It was the heavy task of the priest to argue, throughout, for the necessity of the army, "human nature being as it is." Every popular catchword about the flag and patriotism was brought into skilful use, in his apology for Christian nations in their elaborate preparations to carry slaughter and death among their fellow-Christians. Was not a great army and navy forsooth the best safeguard of peace?

The plea of the socialist was for a policy, every practical aim of which should lead toward fraternity, by throwing off the express signs and symbols of enmity. For a long future, he admitted the necessity of a "home militia" for possible self-defence, but asked that every youth be taught ethically that all preparation for offensive war is a crime against humanity and the last insult to the Christ tradition which stands (if it stands for anything) for peace and good will among men.

I came away from this debate with a professor in the local university. He said with much feeling, "To have that debate here once more, would unchurch every student in the university and make him a socialist, if it has not already done so."

It is in this spirit that socialists are uniting in a very noble attempt to sting Christian nations into some sense of moral shame because of this great

iniquity. In this holiest of all crusades Jaurès and his followers are at the front.

This "socialism in the making" will substitute work for phrases as heavier and more definite responsibilities are thrown upon it. The process which brings this safer and saner mind is seen at its best in the recent history of the German movement, to which we now turn.