
Socialism in America

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SOCIALISM IN AMERICA.

SOCIALISM is a vague expression, used to group together a multiplicity of ideas which have, nevertheless, this in common, that they contemplate the introduction of radical and thorough-going social reforms. Even more than this may be said. Socialism seeks such a reconstruction of society that the entire products of labor shall accrue to the laborer. It would extend the application of St. Paul's injunction—"If a man will not work neither shall he eat"—to all men impartially. Socialism aims, then, not to abolish capital—a folly which no sane man ever contemplated—but it desires to do away forever with a distinct class of capitalists.

Slavery was formerly defended because it established the union of capital and labor in the same hands, and Southerners used to argue that only through such a union could domestic peace be permanently preserved. Little heed was then given to these philosophic advocates of slavery, but the Socialist now comes forward and maintains the essential accuracy of their position; arguing, however, that labor and capital must be united in the hands of the working-man and not in the hands of a master. All the instruments of production must become the common property of the toilers, and to them must be transferred the product of labor without deduction of interest, rent and profits. Thus much may perhaps be said of all who are properly called Socialists, whether they

hold to anarchy, communism, voluntary coöperation, or state socialism. Socialism thus includes men of peace and revolutionists, advocates of dynamite and preachers of the Gospel of Christ, "the first Socialist," as He is often called.

The term is also applied to some to whom it does not belong in any unqualified sense. Professorial Socialists and Christian Socialists, as a rule, are not believers in any form of pure socialism, though there may be exceptions among them. Usually they are men who simply recognize the social side of man's nature and believe that men can perform certain economic functions in some kind of coöperation more advantageously than in any other manner; who, indeed, go still further and hold that many economic functions can be performed in no other manner. They would, however, often maintain that the performance of these functions was not advocated as an introduction to pure socialism but in order to further industrial initiative and activity in their own proper sphere. It may in general be said of these men that they lay stress on the doctrine of human brotherhood, and repudiate the idea that any human being or any class is exempt from social duties.

The earliest form of socialism to find introduction in America was what might be called village communism; that is, common production on the part of a small group of people and equal distribution of products. Two insignificant trials were made by the Virginians and the Massachusetts Pilgrims, in Jamestown and in New England towns, respectively. These experiments occurred early in the seventeenth century. A more serious attempt to establish the communistic life was made by the Shakers in the latter part of the following century. A small band followed "Mother" Ann Lee from England to this country in 1774, and settled in Watervliet, near Albany, in the year of the American Declaration of Independence. A few years later, they introduced communism as the only form of life befitting those in their religious and spiritual condition. "As, in the institution of the primitive Christian Church, all share one interest in spiritual and temporal blessings, according to individual needs; no rich no poor. The strong bear the infirmities of the weak and all are sustained, promoting each other in Christian fellowship, as one family of brethren and sisters in Christ."

The Shakers have been eminently successful, economically. They started with nothing and now have property valued at several millions; perhaps twelve is a moderate estimate, and it is said that

there has never been a failure among them. Their numbers seem never to have exceeded five thousand, and at present they would fall below that figure. The basis of their communism is celibacy and religion. The Shakers do not claim that their life is adapted to all, but regard it as suited to those choice spirits who wish to lead a higher life in retirement from the distractions of the world. They consider it an advance upon the convents of the Roman Catholics, inasmuch as they do not separate the sexes but live together as brothers and sisters in purity. One of them states their two chief objects somewhat as follows: "We furnish a place to which people can retire who desire to lead a higher life. Our life is a materialization of angelic possibilities. In the second place, it is a notice to the world, an advertisement, calling attention to such possibilities." The life of the Shakers is a progressive one, it must be borne in mind, for they hold that they are to pass through seven cycles, of which the first is scarcely completed. "We are advancing," says their leader, "from winter into spring." They look for a greater future and hold their gates open to welcome all honest men and women, rich and poor alike, who come to them desiring to lead their life. To all such they offer a home.

The Shakers are the most successful example of village communism, though there are several other noteworthy settlements. The Harmonists, at Economy, have amassed enormous wealth, and the Oneida Community, embracing more college-bred men and a larger number of representatives of distinguished families than any other community, accumulated what might be called a competence. Zoar, Ohio, and Amana, Iowa, both of which allow marriage and the family, have acquired wealth. Many communities were established about 1825, and a larger number about 1845, and it was once believed, by their friends, that these communities would spread and absorb all the inhabitants of the civilized world, and indeed of the globe. These hopes have been abandoned, but this early communism still lives and the world has valuable lessons yet to learn from this social experimentation conducted on American soil. If some features of this life could be adopted in the country districts of the United States, it would render rural life more diversified, agreeable and profitable, from every stand-point.

Modern socialism awaits a transformation of economic life on a larger national basis, and looks with comparative indifference on the early American communism just described. Its germs were

brought to this country by Germans after the revolution of 1848 in Europe, and since that time German and French emigrants have continued to import into this country the seeds of our present socialism. It grew slowly at first, and did not attain any considerable proportions much before 1878. It is stronger now than it ever has been before in American history.

Organized American socialism must be divided into two general classes : anarchy and state socialism, or socialism proper.

Anarchy is not socialism, in the strict sense of the term, but extreme individualism. Anarchists would abolish all government, for they believe that it is a needless evil. If that is the best government which governs least, then, say they :

“ The very best government of all
Is that which governs not at all.”

The anarchists hold, however, that the absence of authority will produce a natural and spontaneous order, and this order, they think, will be true socialism. Some of them call themselves communistic anarchists, because they believe anarchy and communism to be compatible. It is not easy to understand how the anarchists picture the future to themselves, but it is probable that they think of industry as organized and conducted by unions of artisans, and hold that these unions will be united in federations. Some evidently believe in government and what must amount to a state, although perhaps called by another name. When their ideas are analyzed, it will be found that it is simply the present state-forms to which objection is raised and not the state in itself. This is not true of all, however, for there are anarchists who believe that the social principle in man is a sufficient bond of unity, and will, without force, enable men to carry on coöperative production. It is only necessary in their opinion to abolish all iniquitous laws and institutions, particularly “the beast of private property,” in order to allow free course for the naturally good qualities in man.

There have been theoretical anarchists among us from the foundation of the Republic, and a great deal of our early political philosophy was, as some of our present political philosophy, inclined to anarchy. It has been a favorite theory among us that the state is an evil ; at best, a necessary evil ; and its gradual abolition has been contemplated with satisfaction. Among the abolitionists of slavery there was a faction, led by Garrison, who

were peaceful anarchists. A party of anarchists is, however, of recent date. Such a party is the International Working People's Association, with head-quarters at Chicago. This party, as distinct from the state socialists, appeared to have been formally organized in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the fall of 1883. They then adopted a manifesto, from which the following words are quoted: "What we would achieve is, therefore, plainly and simply: First: Destruction of the existing class-rule by all means, *i. e.* by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action. Second: Establishment of a free society based upon coöperative organization of production." As a rule, these internationalists also attack religion and the family in bitter terms, because these are pillars of existing society.

The members of this party regard the existing state as so utterly bad that reform within it is out of the question, and they counsel all adherents of their cause to abstain from the use of the ballot. Like the Russian Nihilists, by whom, indeed, they have been influenced, they believe that it is first of all necessary to destroy what exists, as reconstruction is not possible until our present institutions are completely demolished. Their remedies are gunpowder, petroleum and dynamite, and their cry is "Away with religion, away with the family, away with the state."

The number of adherents of this party can be estimated with difficulty. It has evidently grown rapidly during the past two years, but it may be doubted if its enrolled adherents exceed fifteen thousand. Yet there are doubtless two or three hundred thousand who accept their views. They form one branch of the Central Labor Union of Chicago, in which a large number of workingmen are represented, all of whom are willing to parade with them, and many of whom accept their extreme position. The Federative Union of Metal Workers of America also accept these views, and adherents may be found in other organizations which, as such, do not hold these views, or, indeed, hold quite opposite opinions. The chief danger to the country from this party seems to be this: in time of excitement and restlessness or open revolt, when men in a frenzy of anger are looking about for some one to lead them, those who have been trained in this party may step forward as leaders. At such a time, a few men who believe in violence and destruction, as a matter of principle, may do great damage.

The International Working People's Association has an active

and energetic press. Among their organs are the "Chicago Alarm" and the daily "Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung." Their Chicago papers claim a circulation of over twenty thousand copies, and they have newspapers in other cities. "Liberty," of Boston, is an advocate of anarchy, though its editor does not belong to this party, and Joseph Labadie advocates anarchy in the "Labor Leaf" of Detroit, although he repudiates the methods of the "Internationalists."

There is another party, composed chiefly of English-speaking laborers, called the "International Workmen's Association" and indicated by the letters I. W. A., not I. W. P. A. or International Working People's Association. The chief strength of this party is between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean. It is a secret society and said to be about as strong as the I. W. P. A. It likewise is violent and revolutionary, but its members appear generally to believe in state socialism. The third organized socialistic party is called the "Socialistic Labor Party," which advocates the establishment of state socialism by peaceful means, if possible. It repudiates violence as a means of agitation, but considers the ballot useful for purposes of propaganda. The members of this party seek reform from the existing state, and several of their demands must meet the approval of all right-minded people. Their official organ is the "Sozialist" of New York. The daily "Volkszeitung" of New York, and the daily "Tageblatt" of Philadelphia are widely circulated organs. Their views are presented in Groulund's "Co-operative Commonwealth."

The number of adherents of the party who are enrolled as members in their sections is small though rapidly increasing. It is doubtful if it is ten thousand. On the other hand, the number of those who accept their economic philosophy is large. A million believers may be a safe guess. Several trades unions are avowedly socialistic in this sense, as, for example, the Journeymen Bakers' Union, the International Furniture Workers' Union and the Cigar Makers' Progressive Union.

These ideas are advocated in some of the labor papers published in English, as, for example, in the New Haven "Workingman's Advocate," and the principles of the Knights of Labor, if carried to their logical outcome, undoubtedly mean socialism. Many thinking "Knights" might perhaps object to this classification somewhat in these words: Yes, our Declaration of Principles un-

doubtedly means socialism, but, after all, it is not fair to call us Socialists in the ordinary sense of the word. Like John Stuart Mill, we contemplate socialism only as a dim and distant ideal, and not as anything capable of realization in the present.

From socialism, as such, the American people, in the writer's opinion, have nothing to fear. So long as Socialists confine themselves to peaceful methods there is no reason why their right of free speech should be abridged or even feared. It were wiser to seek to learn anything from them, which they have to teach, than to become alarmed. It is the glory of America that she has faith to believe that only such institutions as rest upon sound common sense and approved experience will be supported by the people. It is to be hoped that we will never imitate the disastrous folly of older nations, and attempt the suppression of an idea by physical force.

The only real danger which can threaten the future of our country must proceed from private sin and public wrong. The true patriot, unmoved by frightened and angry denunciation, will close his ears to incendiary utterances, whether they be those of the poor and ignorant who would destroy wealth, or those of the rich and cultured who would shoot down working-men like dogs; for such an one will recognize the fact that righteousness is the only sure foundation for American institutions, and he will endeavor to plant them firmly on that rock.

RICHARD T. ELY.