

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SOCIALIST AIM.

**T**HE Socialists demand that the principal industries of the nation, the business of providing the necessaries of life, be conducted by the community for the benefit of its members.

The fundamental principle upon which society rests to-day is that wealth production is purely an individual function. Our industries are not organized by the people with a view to the needs of the community, but by individual capitalists for private profits. Our enterprising captains of industry care little for the social value of the goods they produce. They will manufacture Bibles or guns, medicine or poison, ploughs or flying-machines, all according to the prospects of gain.

The fact that ninety millions of their fellow-beings in this country need food, clothing, houses, furniture, heat, light, books, amusement and means of transportation and communication to maintain their health and comfort, means nothing to them in itself—it is merely their opportunity to extract profits.

Socialism would substitute the prevailing method of

private enterprise for individual profit by a system of social production for collective use.

We would not leave our political destinies in the hands of a self-constituted oligarchy with power to use the government of the United States for their individual ends without regard to the popular will or public needs, but that is precisely what we are doing with our more vital economic interests.

As democracy means political self-government, so Socialism calls for industrial self-government.

Stated in more concrete terms, the Socialist program requires the public or collective ownership and operation of the principal instruments and agencies for the production and distribution of wealth—the land, mines, railroads, steamboats, telegraph and telephone lines, mills, factories and modern machinery.

This is the main program and the ultimate aim of the whole Socialist movement and the political creed of all Socialists. It is the unflinching test of Socialist adherence, and admits of no limitation, extension or variation. Whoever accepts this program is a Socialist, whoever does not, is not.

Individual Socialists may differ in their general social conceptions. They may come to the Socialist ideal by various roads. They may disagree with each other on questions of methods. But they are all in accord on the main object of the movement. The common complaint about the "numerous varieties of Socialism" springs from a superficial knowledge of the Socialist philosophy. As a matter of fact, no

political party has ever advanced a social program as definite, consistent and uniform as that of international Socialism.

But simple as is the Socialist program, it signifies a revolution in our industrial life and social relations. It advocates a new order. Hence it is bound to be maligned by the beneficiaries of the present régime and misunderstood by the conservative multitude.

It is safe to assert that no other movement has ever been so grossly and persistently misinterpreted. A closer analysis of the program as here formulated will help to dispel some of the most common misconceptions.

As has been stated, Socialism demands the collective ownership of the instruments of wealth production. This demand is often translated by the critics of the movement into the unceremonious formula: "Socialism stands for a division of wealth." The chancellor of one of our metropolitan universities recently spent his well-earned vacation on the other side of the Atlantic, and on that occasion was received in audience by King Haakon, then just called to the newly created or vacated throne of Norway. On his return to this country the learned chancellor in a published interview expressed his admiration of the intelligence and sound common sense of the young ruler. As evidence of these commendable qualities, the professor related the following conversation between himself and his majesty (I quote from memory): "What progress is Socialism making in your country?" in-

quired the American savant. "Oh, it is growing some," observed the king, "but it is not a serious menace. Socialism is bound to fail because of the utter silliness of its program. Suppose we should today divide the wealth of Norway equally among all inhabitants. An hour after the process a new baby is born. What then? Should we proceed to a new redistribution, or should the baby be left entirely destitute?" Both his majesty and our chancellor agreed that Socialism put the baby, and the baby put Socialism into a most awkward predicament. By one simple hypothesis two great minds had once more destroyed a Socialist ghost of their own creation to the entire satisfaction of themselves.

Socialism, of course, does not advocate a division of wealth. The Socialist program does not deal with consumable wealth but with productive wealth; it does not assail wealth as a means of private enjoyment, but wealth as an instrument of social oppression and exploitation. The Socialists would socialize the tools of production, not the products.

They view with placid indifference the private ownership of dwelling houses and gowns, automobiles and yachts. They do not even covet the innocent individual tool, and do not reach out an avaricious hand for the artist's paint brush or the housewife's needle or sewing machine. What they object to is the individual ownership of *social* instruments of work, the sources or implements of general wealth, operated by the masses, producing goods for the "market," and

indispensable to the life and well-being of society as a whole.

And even within this restricted area the Socialist plan is not one of division or distribution, but, on the contrary, one of common and undivided ownership. The principle may be illustrated by comparison with the functions and character of our public streets. The streets are the common or public property of our cities. They are laid out, paved and repaired at public expense. They are maintained for our joint use and benefit. We all own them. But we do not divide up the cobblestones ratably among all citizens.

And similarly unfounded is the widespread notion that Socialism stands for equal reward of all labor. Socialism is opposed to the practice of allowing the idlers to appropriate part of the workers' product in the shape of profits. It demands that the total social product, after due allowance for social needs, go uncurtailed to all persons participating in the process of production by manual or mental labor. But it does not contemplate an equal distribution of the product among the individual workers. Socialism admits of reasonable variations in the scale of compensation based on the conventional distinctions of effort, skill and ability. The oft-expressed fear that a Socialist system of production would destroy personal ambition and deprive the individual of an incentive to put forth his best efforts, is based on a confusion between the crude communism which preaches community of

goods and equality of reward, and Socialism which has not the remotest kinship with it.

Another source of persistent misinterpretation lurks in the term "public" or "collective" ownership as used in the formulation of the Socialist program. The superficial critics of the Socialist philosophy invariably identify that expression with "government ownership," and thence jump at the conclusion that the Socialists contemplate a state of society in which all industries of the country, large and small, will be operated and directed from one great national center. This is the origin and foundation of the bugaboo of "Socialist paternalism and tyranny."

Not so long ago, Mr. David M. Parry, one time president of the National Manufacturers' Association, wrote a novel entitled "The Scarlet Empire," and mainly centering around a description of "the Socialist state" as the author conceived it. It was a horrible state. Governmental regulation was the rule in all private and public pursuits of the citizens. The government fixed the occupation of each person, prepared a uniform menu for all inhabitants from day to day, prescribed the fashion, cut and pattern of their dress, and regulated their routine of daily life, their religion, marriages and amusements. It was a reign of relentless tyranny, a life of insufferable uniformity and monotony. Mr. Parry had set himself the task of conjuring a picture of an order of society even more oppressive than our present régime, and he almost succeeded.

The book was intended as a satire on the Socialist ideal. If the genial author could only appreciate what a delightful satire he had unconsciously produced on the mental caliber of a certain class of critics of the Socialist philosophy!

Public ownership does not necessarily mean government ownership, and government ownership does not imply centralized administration. In the practical application of the Socialist scheme of industrial organization, it is quite conceivable that certain industries would be operated by the national government. Railroad systems, telegraph and telephone lines are inherently national in their functions, and many other industries are already organized on a country-wide scale and adjusted to centralized operations. To the latter class belong all great trustified industries. On the other hand, other important industries are purely local in their character, and can best be administered by local governmental agencies. Street railways, water and gas works for instance, must logically come within the purview of municipal governments, and numerous smaller industries may be conducted by local co-operative groups under appropriate rules and regulations. It is even conceivable that some callings may be continued to be exercised in a purely individual way under a Socialist régime. There is no reason why the state should interfere with the individual pursuits of arts and handicraft or with the farmer personally cultivating his farm. What Socialism opposes is industrial exploitation of one man by an-

other; what it advocates is social and democratic production rationally organized and conducted.

A very illuminating analogy of such a scheme of organization is offered by the political framework of the government of the United States. Our laws are made and administered by "the government," but does that mean that the political administration of the country in all its divisions and subdivisions is lodged in the hands of one central authority? By no means. We have our federal statutes, our state laws, municipal ordinances and rules and regulations of subordinate local bodies, such as health boards, fire and police departments, etc. Each class of laws operates within its own proper sphere, and is administered by executive bodies or individuals elected or appointed and classified and graded according to their functions and places in the general administrative scheme. The political functions of the country are not exercised by a power above the people and independent of them, nor are they regulated in all particulars and at all times by the direct action of all the people. Our government is neither a bureaucracy nor a system of mob rule. In its purest form it is a rational democracy, which allows its affairs to be administered by appropriate general and local agencies, deriving their powers from the people and exercising them in conformity with their will. Our official government furthermore is supplemented by a number of voluntary "quasi-official" institutions, philanthropic, educational, political, etc., whose powers and functions are

as a rule regulated by law. We do not allow such voluntary institutions to exercise vital political powers affecting the rights of the citizens, but we do not interfere with their self-imposed social tasks so long as they only concern those who choose to come within the sphere of their operations. The Socialists demand that our industrial affairs be reorganized on practically the same general principles as our political system.

It is quite conceivable and even probable that our present machinery of government, devised for purely political purposes, would prove inadequate for the discharge of large economic functions. In that case it would either gradually modify its forms to meet the requirements of the new tasks or be supplemented by a co-ordinate system of industrial administration.

"But then the industries of the country would be controlled by the politicians and infested with graft and corruption," objects the ever ready critic. The Socialists see no ground for such apprehension. The "professional politician," in the opprobrious sense of the term, as we know him to-day, is a person who seeks private economic advantages in public life, and uses his political office or influence for the promotion of his own pecuniary profits or those of certain business interests behind him. Graft and corruption are the only logical methods and the principal stock in trade of such "statesmen."

Socialized industries would exclude all large private business interests, and thus strike at the very root

of professional politics for private gain and the main fountain-head of wholesale graft and corruption.

The Socialist program is thus primarily one of economic reform. It is not directly concerned with religious or domestic institutions, moral conceptions or intellectual problems. It does not "threaten the home" or "attack religion," and is not hostile to true modern culture. It advocates a definite plan of industrial reorganization and is chargeable with all that is fairly inferable from that plan, but no more.

Socialism has for that reason sometimes been characterized as a grossly materialistic movement. It is anything but that. The Socialists appreciate very keenly all efficient political, social and moral reforms. But they expect such reforms to follow economic improvements as the effect follows the cause. The common ownership of the sources and instruments of wealth production would necessarily mean a more equitable distribution of wealth among the people and greater economic security for all human beings. It would thus do away with the mad competitive struggle for individual gain, and would remove the principal cause of civic and political corruption, crime, vice, brutality and ignorance. Just because the Socialist movement is based on a solid and sound economic foundation, it holds out a true social ideal.