

CHAPTER VII

THE POLITICAL CONCEPTION

SOCIALISM contemplates a state of society in which the incomes of all citizens are equal, and in which all citizens earn their incomes in the service of the State. Equality is one of its principal aims; merit the only claim for promotion to influential though not better paid positions. It follows that the socialistic State must aim at political equality as much as at economic equality, and that it cannot recognise any political privileges outside its own bureaucratic (superintending and organising) circle. Socialism, therefore, is democratic in the sense that it demands the abolition of political privileges and the extension of equality in the franchise to all adult persons of both sexes.

Practical considerations would have forced this attitude upon Socialism, even if it were not a necessary outcome of its distributive proposals.

The fundamental proposals of Socialism involve the expropriation of the possessing classes, who are also the incumbents of political privileges. Among these classes it cannot, therefore, expect to make more than an occasional convert. The nature of their proposals, therefore, compels socialists to rely mainly on the masses of the people who possess little or no property, and some of whom are as yet excluded from any or from an equal participation in the franchise.

The equalising tendency of Socialism also makes its existence incompatible with that of a hereditary aristocracy and of a monarchy. The abolition of private property in land puts an end to hereditary aristocracy, and the equal

distribution of the social income is irreconcilable with monarchical institutions. Hence Socialists are Republicans as well as Democrats.

Out of the industrial proposals of Socialism there arises also a tendency towards the decentralisation of the functions of government. The conduct of localised industries by local bodies presupposes the existence of such local bodies, and would considerably increase their functions and power. Moreover, while proposing to add enormously to the power and functions of the central government, socialists seem nevertheless to recognise to some slight extent that this extension of power and functions may foster despotic tendencies. They are, therefore, anxious to limit the power of the central government as far as is compatible with the due exercise of its industrial functions, and *pari passu* to extend the power of local governments.

The narrow limits within which the industrial functions of local governments are confined by the nature of industries has already been indicated. It is less easy to indicate the limit to their regulative functions outside of industrial matters. That some extension in this direction is possible may be granted, but in countries of advanced democratic type like the United Kingdom, the United States, and several British colonies, this extension cannot be far-reaching. Nay, it may even be that, in one respect, Socialism may prove a bar to the development of local government.

The local administration of schools and of education is everywhere one of the claims of democratic parties, and there can be little doubt that considerable progress in this direction will be made in the near future. But such local administration must, and is intended to, result in diversity. It may, therefore, lead to considerable difference in the educational advantages offered in different localities, an inequality of opportunity incompatible with the fundamental principles of Socialism. While it must be admitted that the desire for decentralisation exists among socialists, and that it is not opposed to the principles of Socialism, it nevertheless appears that the decentralisation possible in the socialistic State will by no means be of sufficient im-

portance to counteract the additional power which the assumption of industrial and distributive control will confer upon the central government.

On the other hand, Socialism necessarily tends to a further centralisation, that of internationalism. The ramifications of modern industry extend far beyond the limits of any State. No nation is or ever can again be industrially self-contained. The problem of achieving a balance between production and consumption cannot, therefore, be successfully solved by an authority which is confined to the limits of a single State. Hence, socialists aim, more or less consciously, at some international industrial federation, the executive of which shall regulate the conduct of all industries of international character.