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INTRODUCTION

A DEBATE ON
CAPITALISM vs. SOCIALISM

It seems to me that the function of a chairman of this debate ought to partake of the character of a refereeship. I believe that you would be most pleased if I were to simply make the debaters come forward, shake hands and then fall to, I standing by with my watch in hand to take the time. In fact, ,I really cannot see why the Chairman should say anything on this occasion. But I suppose I was chosen for this sporting event because I am a middle-of-the-roader between the two. I am not a Socialist, and yet I am not one who believes that Socialists are wild beasts to be excluded from polite society and legislatures because we do not like their point of view on matters economic and social.

I grew up in the tradition of the Manchester school of *laissez faire* and I still believe that if human nature were what it ought to be, the doctrines of this school would be the ones to be followed. But I am open-minded enough to see that, whether we like Socialism or do not, the experiment is going to be tried in large sections of the earth. I was very much struck by the fact that when I returned from Europe, a few months after the armistice, there were few people whom I met who would believe that I had seen the Red Flag flying over as many public buildings as I saw others that did not have it. It seemed to make Americans very angry to tell them that their troops had been the decisive factor in creating 23 Socialist Republics in Germany alone, to say nothing of the other Central European Republics. When I returned I found New York City forbidding the hoisting or carrying of the Red Flag, and, as you know, there exists the greatest confusion in the minds of public

men and editors in America as to what constitutes Socialism. To most of our leader-writers there is no difference whatever between the Socialism of the Right, the Socialism of the Left, Bolshevism, Communism and Anarchism. They are all anathema to the American business man, who lumps them together. Hence, any such occasion as this is heartily to be welcomed, not only for its educational value but because it indicates a return to our habitual American policy of talking things out on their merits, fairly and openly. Lately, the idea has been to lynch the Socialist first and discuss matters with him afterwards.

We are having additional evidence of this intolerance of new ideas in the refusal of the American Legion in Kansas to allow the Nonpartisan League's organizers to talk to the farmers of that state about their proposals for the farmers' economic freedom. How inconsistent we are in these matters appears further from the fact that at the very moment that the Socialist Legislators were being thrown out of the Legislature at Albany the then Governor of the State, Alfred Smith, solemnly proposed no less than nine ultra-radical or Socialistic laws, including such things as the ownership, development and operation of all water powers by the state, maternity insurance, the municipal operation of all public utilities, the taking over of the medical and nursing professions to the extent of supplying doctors and nurses to rural communities now destitute of such aid, the declaration that production and distribution of milk are a public utility subject to the control of the State in all details, and State-owned and operated grain elevators in three cities, precisely after the manner of the Nonpartisan League plans in North Dakota. I have long thought that "Al" Smith was a wonderful man, but I do not know of anything in his career that is more wonderful than the fact that he got away with these proposals without even being denounced as a Socialist by the New York *Times*. Of course, he did not get what he asked, but the point is that if the Governor of North Dakota were to come out tomorrow and demand these things, the New York *Times* would shriek with anger and declare that Bolshevising of America was at hand. The so-called Socialistic experiments of North Dakota can be paralleled in most every state in one field or another, as for instance, in the

cotton warehouses in New Orleans and the grain elevators now being erected in New York State. While North Dakota's proposal to issue bonds for home-building has led to the rejection of their 6½ million bond issue by New York and Boston bankers, many eminent and conservative Senators are feeling that here in the East, the States, and even the Federal Government, will have to go into the housing business.

All of which, I think, proves my case that the Socialistic experiment in greater or less degree is going to be undertaken by the world. In the ardent hope that it may produce a better world than we have been living in, my plea today is, as I have said, not for Socialism, but for a careful examination of this and all other proposals for the betterment of the race which is so badly off, that, for all we know, civilization may not recover from the shock of this war. I am sure that I cannot define the position which the non-Socialist public ought to take towards this question better than by reading to you an extract from an editorial which appeared about ten years ago in the columns of the New York *Nation* from the pen of its gifted and noble-spirited editor of that day—the late Hammond Lamont. It is as follows:

"Convinced though we are that the reasoning of the socialists is fallacious, we incline to the belief that a socialist agitation may in the long run prove beneficial to this country. We were opposed to the free coinage of silver, and yet we are convinced that the two great political campaigns in which that subject was treated so fully in the press and on the platform were extremely valuable in their educational effect. Thousands, nay, millions, of men and women who had grown up without the slightest notion of economics in general and finance in particular, became fairly well versed in the topic; they were made more intelligent and better citizens; and in the end they sustained the principle of sound money. In like manner Socialism may be the means of widening intellectual horizons; it may lay before Americans a new view of some of the larger questions of life—far larger than the petty tenets of trades-unionism. It may set us to thinking; and the salvation of a republic depends upon the efforts of its citizens to think seriously about its affairs. For one thing, Socialism is eminently a peace movement; it is steadily opposed to militarism; and it will

thus help us to see more clearly the silliness of the huge naval and military expenditures in which we seem bound to rival the groaning nations of Europe. And as for other questions—we cannot believe that error will permanently prevail over truth. We are confident that individualism, in its main features, is the policy which has formed and which must preserve our institutions. But if we conservatives are mistaken, we cannot but welcome a discussion which shall open our eyes and set us right. Our attitude toward this topic, as towards any other which touches the vitals of our nation, must be that of readiness to defend our faith in open forum, to meet and conquer with reason."