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The Social Philosophy of Mr. Bertrand Russell

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## THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF MR. BERTRAND RUSSELL

### I

Of one of Mr. Russell's ancestors it was said that he would undertake, with or without ten minutes notice, to perform an operation, build St. Peter's, or direct the channel fleet; and that no one would afterwards tell from his manner that the patient had died, the church collapsed, and the fleet been smashed to atoms. Sydney Smith, like some living authors, was apt to regard other people's reputations mainly as the raw material of his own; but the remark may be allowed to indicate a certain quality of intellect, ranging from plain courage to sheer temerity, that has frequently characterized the great Whig line from which Mr. Russell is descended; attaining in him a peculiar and significant phase.

It would be too much, perhaps, to suggest that he would be prepared, with or without ten minutes notice, to instruct his famous grandfather in the leading principles of action for this and all possible worlds. It is true, however, that the faith in human reason which was the mainspring of nineteenth-century reform has led Mr. Russell to claims on its behalf exceeding those of any contemporary. The scope and objectivity of its results in the sphere of thought have made him the protagonist of a metaphysical revolution to which the social revolution that he advocates is in some respects a natural corollary.

"Too often it is said," he writes in 1902, "that there is no absolute truth, but only opinion and private judgment. . . . Philosophers have commonly asserted that the laws of logic which underlie mathematics are laws of thought, laws regulating the operations of our minds." This position Mr. Russell has consistently disputed. Scientific thought, he claims, takes us "into the region of absolute necessity, to which not only the actual world, but every possible world, must conform." This is for Mr. Russell both an article of faith and a triumph of reason. It brings him, of course, to a direct issue with pragmatism, notwithstanding that certain aspects of his social ethics involve essentially pragmatic sanctions. Scientific philosophy "comes nearer to objectivity than any other human pursuit and gives us, therefore, the closest

<sup>1</sup>*Mysticism and Logic: essay on "The Study of Mathematics."*

contact and the most intimate relation with the outer world that it is possible to achieve."

The conception here implied of "contact" and "intimate relation" is significant as defining by exclusion Mr. Russell's attitude towards intuitional or mystical schools of thought. The roles he assigns to intuitive and intellectual processes appear as almost the exact reverse of Bergson's; and while in his ethical writings he frequently uses the term contemplation, it is clearly with a difference. In his essay, *A Free Man's Worship*—an essay that deserves to rank at least as high as Stevenson's *Pulvis et Umbra*—we read:

In action, in desire, we must submit perpetually to the tyranny of outside forces; but in thought, in aspiration, we are free, free from our fellow men, free from the petty planet on which our bodies impotently crawl, free even, while we live, from the tyranny of death. . . . But the possession of beauty is possible only to unfettered contemplation, to thoughts not weighted by the load of eager wishes; and thus Freedom comes only to those who no longer ask of life that it shall yield them any of those personal goods that are subject to the mutations of time.

The ethical attitude here implied obviously finds its highest values in the impersonality, detachment, and integrity of the scientific outlook; to which the spectacle of the objective universe becomes inspiring, not by its beneficence or teleology, but by its very vastness and superhuman order—even though that vastness be in a sense measurable and its order mechanistic: nay, even though it be hostile.<sup>2</sup>

It was perhaps natural that this reliance upon reason as a means to absolute truth should be accompanied by a faith—perhaps less supportable by evidence—in reason as a factor of social process. Mr. Russell avoids, it is true, the rationalist fallacy that has beset so many British radicals from Bentham to the Webbs. He is convinced that the sources of much mass action are, and must remain in impulse; which desires inadequately reflect, beliefs are made to fit, and motives devised to adorn. Sharing the modern distrust of the herd in politics, he insists none the less on the psychological importance of the life of instinct and the evils of excessive inhibition. But in line with the tradition of reform to which he belongs in more ways than one, he holds that "reason or the endeavor to discover truth has played a quite enormous part in the genesis of opinion, and that we must look to it, almost exclusively, for improvements in industrial civilization." "Nor," he adds, "shall we look always in vain."

Of the three sources of power that he distinguishes in society—military, economic, mental—he asserts that "mental power is the ulti-

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Algernon Cecil, in *Six Oxford Thinkers*: "There is no kind of reason for supposing that what is fittest to survive is therefore absolutely the best." (Essay on Newman.)

<sup>3</sup>*Prospects of Industrial Civilisation*, ch. 10.

mate source of the other two"; and that subject as it may be to the sublimation of impulse on the one hand and the subversion of propaganda on the other, in the long run its power is fundamental and enduring. The size and efficiency of the military unit are based on sentiment and capacity for organization. Economic power, in all its reactions on national destiny, turns on the fulcrum of credit, which Mr. Russell regards as inherently psychological. Mental power is the foundation of all other modes, and upon its guidance by pure reason all progress must depend. Whether this creed makes for optimism or pessimism depends perhaps on one's reading of history—especially of certain pages. It is at least evident that an optimism so founded will be, like the conclusions of classical economics, an optimism of the long run; and Mr. Russell is accordingly most optimistic where he is most abstract. But it would be asking much of any European that he should base his optimism on the concrete.

## II

On such a foundation as the foregoing it is obvious that no social philosophy can stand which has for apex the state or any other ultra-individual entity. Both the ethical and the intellectual values—the stern and lonely virtues of the life of science, as well as its amazing achievements—are individual matters; and Mr. Russell could hardly help becoming the opponent of all kinds of neo-Hegelianism, including those forms of it by which Marxians and Fabians have been seduced.

Here again we trace a consistency between his metaphysical and his social outlook. "In all things," he writes, "it is well to exalt the dignity of man by freeing him as far as possible from the tyranny of non-human Power. . . . If power is bad, as it seems to be, let us reject it from our hearts. In this lies man's true freedom." This attitude has its social consequence in a distrust of the sovereign state very similar to that of Mr. Laski. "The principal source of the harm done by the state is the fact that Power is its chief end." Organizations and social forces which tend, even at the risk of law-and-order, towards minimizing such power have ipso facto, to Mr. Russell, something to commend them. He does not deny the present necessity of force in internal and external affairs, though he points out that the mere maintenance of law "renders possible various forms of injustice which would otherwise be prevented by the anger of their victims." And he is so far in agreement with Fabian socialism as to admit that in certain matters—for instance, sanitation, education, the care of children, the encouragement of scientific research—the state is a suitable means for the attainment of a universal minimum. But he sees

<sup>4</sup>*A Free Man's Worship.*

<sup>5</sup>*Why Men Fight*, ch. 2.

more plainly than perhaps any other radical the evil that a socialist state might work on individual lives. It is a signal merit of his criticism.

What he calls the "administrator's fallacy" is widespread: the notion, namely, that a certain type of social organization may have an inherent value on account of its pattern. In contemplating the form of their hypothetical society, Mr. Russell points out, socialists in particular are liable to imagine that the mere fact of its being neat and tidy gives it a certain desirability; which (he suggests) might be less obvious were they not, like the creator of the universe when he pronounced it "good," in the unconscious habit of viewing it from the administrator's position. Mr. Russell will not allow, as even Mr. Laski does, that the state may be taken as a consumers' organization. In fact, as he points out, it is in England a sporadic mixture of interests largely determined by accident; while in America he sees it as "an oligarchy of energetic multi-millionaires which controls an admirable and efficient unified system of production," its members being "more naive, more untouched by modern thought, than any other set of men with the exception possibly of a few Central African negroes."

Underlying this hostility to the state there seems to be a conception of freedom which is for the present day curiously negative. "Government and law, in their very essence, consist of restrictions on freedom, and freedom is the greatest of all political goods." The crudity of this dictum is modified by the admission of a need for authority to ensure the respect of the individual for the liberty of others, and to restrain his innate love of power. "But although the necessity of some form of government must for the present be conceded it is important to remember that all law and government is in itself in some degree an evil, only justifiable when it prevents other and greater evils."

This relic of the natural rights philosophy of a century and a half ago stands in strange contrast to the trend of modern social theory. Professor Hobhouse for example (surely as sound an anti-Hegelian as Mr. Russell) has attained a much more positive position, steering successfully, in the light of a rational social psychology, between the sterility of the older individualism on which Mr. Russell lies stranded and the quicksand of neo-Hegelianism.

We have been too much under the influence of a simple opposition between personal liberty and state control. . . . Liberty is not founded on the personal right of the individual as opposed to, or as limiting, the right of the community. . . . Liberty rests on the spiritual nature of the social bond, and on the rational character of the Common Good.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>*Prospects of Industrial Civilisation*, ch. 8.

<sup>7</sup>*Proposed Roads to Freedom*, ch. 5.

<sup>6</sup>Hobhouse, *Elements of Social Justice*, ch. 4.

In this view liberty is seen as a condition of spiritual growth which is attainable only in and by means of society. It is made possible by the establishment of rights which are recognized on the ground of their contributing to some element of the common welfare; the common welfare itself being not distinct from, or alien to, individual development, but an essential factor and condition of it.

This is more than merely an elaboration, with different emphasis, of Mr. Russell's position. For it can only be maintained that government is in itself an evil by assuming that individual liberty, in the naive sense, is in itself a good. Such it can be, of course, only to the individual conceived as end in himself: the principle thus becomes purely hedonistic. And since, apart from its hedonistic sanction, the content and effect of this good will differ as between different individuals, its objectivity proves an illusion. Mr. Russell has recently stated that he is less convinced of the objectivity of good and evil than he was twenty years ago:<sup>9</sup> perhaps the foregoing is the explanation. If so, the optimistic view of human nature prompting his anarchist sympathies becomes more fundamental to his constructive scheme than is altogether good for it; while at the same time he stands committed to a theory of liberty which of all possible ones promises him most trouble when he turns to social reform.

### III

So far Mr. Russell's attack on the state as power seems to spring from a natural reversion to eighteenth-century individualism. The fact that times have changed gives a bolder color to his thought. Then, the attack was on the juristic state in the interests of the economic man. Now, the attack is on the economic state in the interests of the human individual. There are stronger forces on both sides. The issues are wider and compromise is less possible. Mr. Russell's philosophy would in any case have brought him into conflict with Hegelianism in general. His experience has brought him to an impassioned indictment of the industrial state in particular.

A "Cambridge economist" may perhaps be permitted to point out that Mr. Russell—himself a late fellow of Trinity—is strictly consistent with the teachings of the Cambridge school in insisting on the distinction between economic welfare and what are aptly called the imponderable values of life. Over thirty years ago Dr. Marshall concluded his analysis of production with the words:

But here, as in every other economic enquiry, we must bear in mind that the only aim of that production is the development of the people in numbers, in health, in strength, in happiness and above all in character.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Preface to *Mysticism and Logic*.

<sup>10</sup>Marshall, *Economics of Industry*, ch. 6.

Professor Pigou, who appears in recent years to have become more and more uneasy as to the contrast, has stated it in terms which might serve as a text to Mr. Russell:

Human beings are both "ends in themselves" and instruments of production. On the one hand, a man who is attuned to the beautiful in nature or in art, whose character is simple and sincere, whose passions are controlled and sympathies developed, is in himself an important element in the ethical value of the world; the way in which he feels and thinks actually constitutes a part of welfare. On the other hand, a man who can perform complicated industrial operations, sift difficult evidence, or advance some branch of practical activity, is an instrument well fitted to produce things whose use yields welfare. . . . the fact we have to face is that, in some measure, it is open to the community to choose between these two sorts of men, and that, by concentrating its effort upon the economic welfare embodied in the second, it may unconsciously sacrifice the non-economic welfare embodied in the first. . . . Efforts devoted to the production of people who are good instruments may involve a failure to produce people who are good men.<sup>11</sup>

Modern, and particularly American, sociology, with its interest in the reflex effects of industrial environment, is emphasizing the same problem. What characterizes Mr. Russell's attitude is not the novelty of his criteria but the drastic and a priori manner in which he applies them.

On the lines of Pigou's illustration, Mr. Russell warns the advocates of economic reconstruction "against the danger of adopting the vices of their opponents, by regarding man as a tool for producing goods, rather than goods as a subordinate necessity for liberating the non-material side of human life."<sup>12</sup> So hard are we ridden, he thinks, by our "mania for increasing production" as to have almost lost the memory of the things that make life tolerable: spontaneous and variable activities in which the creative impulse, common in some form or other to most folk, can find play; quiet; occasional solitude and contact with the earth; "scope for instinctive desires and also for instinctive needs which often exist without corresponding explicit desires." Starvation of these things is the source of the vague sense of strain, with its frequent undertone of cynicism and futility, which pervades so large a part of industrial society; and to recover them the risks of a radical reorganization are judged worth facing, including that of the sacrifice of some part of economic welfare. "The whole urgency of the modern business world is toward speeding up, greater efficiency, more intense international competition, when it ought to be toward more ease, less hurry, and combination to produce goods for use rather than profit."<sup>13</sup> Mr. Russell does not shrink from the broader

<sup>11</sup>Pigou, *Economics of Welfare*, ch. 1.

<sup>12</sup>*Prospects of Industrial Civilisation*, ch. 2.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, ch. 9.

corollary: he is willing, more especially since his experience of China, to accept the prospect of a society materially stereotyped if thereby the spiritual stereotyping that has befallen America might be avoided.

As an architect of social reconstruction Mr. Russell starts, therefore, not with the materialist outlook of Marxian socialism, but with the more radical aim of achieving a better balance between the economic and non-economic conditions of welfare. And here the trouble foreshadowed in his strictures upon liberty and law begins to materialize. As an a priorist he is a better guide to ends than to means; and it is with a tinge of regret that one sees him turn from the inspiration of his earlier essays to lose himself in the intricacies of a quasi-mechanistic social theory. His social philosophy turns out to be singularly negative for a social reformer. His acceptance of guild socialism is qualified by the fact that for him it is a means, more or less transitory, to something like the ideal anarchism of Kropotkin. His collectivism has to be squared with a theory of liberty with which it is hardly consistent, and his individualism is ever at his elbow to forbid him complete confidence in any of the groups he finds himself bound to postulate. Notwithstanding that he sets no value on schematic symmetry as such, he is unable, once started, to prevent its luring him over some very shaky ground; while his a priori manner constantly forces him to state proposals that in themselves contain much that is both reasonable and feasible in such a fashion as to break all the bruised reeds and scare all the tired radicals within reach or hearing.

The root of the trouble may be briefly indicated in advance. Mr. Russell's extreme distrust of the state leads him, as we have seen, to espouse every kind of organization which embodies a sectional interest or opinion. His motive therefore in moving toward a federal community of autonomous groups appears primarily negative or defensive. "Where, as in an industrial community, a portion of a man's interests are already organized, this portion will win at the expense of the whole unless the other portion also is organized. The undue power of officials rests upon the fact that the interest they represent is organized while the interest with which they conflict is often unorganized. Only a more all-round organization can safeguard liberty under these circumstances."<sup>4</sup> While this may be true, its conjunction with Mr. Russell's individualism is disastrous to his polity; for since his general theory will allow no final social value to the groups as such, nor any realization of the common end to lie within them, his system results in a balance of power to preserve which the state—of all things—has to be recalled from its exile in the wilderness, bringing with it seven other devils that most people would agree in regarding as worse than its original self.

<sup>4</sup>*Prospects of Industrial Civilisation*, ch. 11.



## IV

While it is abundantly clear that positive anarchism as an ideal retains its influence on Mr. Russell's disposition, in his recent writings it seems to be receding rather than approaching: which is, incidentally, a pity, since his anarchism is on the whole sounder than his socialism. In any case, he thinks, the former would necessarily be preceded by some phase of the latter, probably and preferably guild socialism; which thus becomes, for practical purposes, the immediate objective. Even this, in at least the more backward communities, would probably become possible only after a period of state capitalism such as industrial nations are visibly approaching.

Little as he likes it, Mr. Russell evidently anticipates the use of the political state as an instrument to achieve the socialization of industry. He opposes the class war, and the minority revolution that Lenin urged upon the labor parties through the Third International. Socialists have been too impatient: they must rely upon the reasonableness of their ideal to enlist opinion throughout the entire community "until capitalists become a small band of turbulent rebels against democratically enacted laws." When Mr. Russell says that some small use of force will in the end be needed to "take the capital from the capitalists" he is obviously thinking of the police force, not the militant proletariat; and it is noteworthy that he qualifies the process of expropriation by allowing the possibility of a "life annuity to present holders."<sup>15</sup>

This perspective is obviously evolutionary rather than revolutionary; if we may apply an opposite passage written as long ago as 1896, the nature of the prospect becomes clearer still:

The profitable management of businesses by the state presupposes a certain degree of development, and should be undertaken at different times in different businesses, not, as Marx supposes, by a single revolutionary transformation. This last point is especially important, as it transforms the whole process into one of gradual organic development.<sup>16</sup>

With the socialization of capital goods in and by the state Mr. Russell contemplates, with the guild socialists, a transfer of the function of management from ownership to labor, on the principle of industrial democracy. "Every industry" (perhaps only the much maligned bureaucrat will ever appreciate the difficulty, for practical purposes, of defining that term) "will be self-governing as regards all its internal affairs, and even separate factories will decide for them-

<sup>15</sup>For a socialization plan on these lines see Hamilton and May, *The Control of Wages*, pp. 68-70. The financial scheme filed by the United Mine Workers with the Coal Commission (*New York Times* et al., June 11, 1923) is also of interest in this connection.

<sup>16</sup>*German Social Democracy*, p. 36.

selves all questions that only concern those who work in them. There will not be capitalist management, as at present, but management by elected representatives, as in politics."<sup>17</sup>—"As in politics": absit omen!

At this stage Mr. Russell's distrust of the state gives a characteristic bent to his argument. Possibly uneasy with the suspicion that in postulating a state strong enough to carry through a peaceful (and protracted) economic revolution, he has given birth to a monster, he reinvokes his "principle of minimizing power." "Public opinion will need to be alive to the dangers of bureaucracy, and trade unions will have to view state officials with the same kind of suspicion with which they now view employers."<sup>18</sup> This is more valid than consistent; but the inconsistency is not solely Mr. Russell's, it indicates a problem with which no radical program has yet grappled successfully. Mr. Russell however goes farther than most in his efforts to solve the problem by enlarging the inconsistency. Answering an objection of Mr. Graham Wallas that autonomous guilds would try to absorb into wages economic rent that might be available for state revenue, Mr. Russell replies, *tout court*, so much the better. "The purposes of the state are in the main evil, and anything that makes it harder for the state to obtain money is a boon."<sup>19</sup> This reply has reference to the present large expenditure of state revenue on "homicide, that is, on paying for past wars and preparing for future ones"; and it virtually assumes that the socialist state would be no better than its predecessors in this respect. But how a state whose financial resources are thus "minimized" is to carry on the gradual compensatory expropriation of capital; why it should not be allowed to use any rent accruing from the earlier socialized industries to mitigate the cost of acquiring the later ones; or what is to prevent a vocational group whose autonomy is financial as well as functional from becoming a vested interest as strong as any capitalist monopoly—Mr. Russell does not tell us. Perhaps it was natural that a state envisaged by a temperamental anarchist should have all duties and no rights; but this seems, after the use he has made of it, a little ungrateful.

The duties multiply: the camel's nose peeps into the tent. Since the guilds are to have this maximum of autonomy, and are yet by no means to be trusted with the common good, it becomes necessary to devise a system of mechanistic checks and safeguards.

If capitalism were eliminated, the political strength of production as against consumption might be greatly increased. If so, the need of organizing consumers to protect their own interests would become much greater . . . . . If both producers and consumers were organized, it might be assumed

<sup>17</sup>*Proposed Roads to Freedom*, ch. 8.

<sup>18</sup>*Prospects of Industrial Civilisation*, ch. 13.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, ch. 9.

that the state would be neutral as between the two. It might therefore be fairly safe to leave the state to decide the issue when the two kinds of organization came into conflict. The officials of any large producing group, such as mines or railways, would be primarily responsible to the producers in that group, but would be subject to expert criticism by the officials of the consumers' organization, who might cause the state to revise the decisions of the producers' officials in cases where the public was adversely affected.<sup>20</sup>

This scheme is of sufficiently general interest to merit examination in some detail. It affords us the instructive spectacle of Mr. Russell, along with the school of thought to which he is here indebted, falling headlong into his own "administrator's fallacy." The assumption that for any large producing group there must be somewhere a correspondingly definite consuming group has nothing but a formal symmetry to commend it. It arises in part from a superficial view of production: a view which loses sight of the magnitude of the transition involved in passing from the industrial integration of labor as such, of which we have some experience, to an industrial integration of the producing process itself. To the outsider, the ultimate consumer, the union organizer, the social theorist, economic society may well seem a series of lines of production terminating in boots, hats, bread, meat, travel, newspapers, and so on; interrelated to some extent certainly, but not to such a degree as would prevent the organization of clearly defined producers' guilds. But to the Fords, the Levers, the Morgans, the Daughertys, industry looks more like one organism of infinite complexity and adaptability specialized at various points into a multiplicity of functions; and in the transition from vocational organization based on employment to vocational organization based on production, the experience of such people would be decisive. The result might be very different from what Mr. Russell apparently contemplates; it would certainly be less rigid, and more gradual: no faster, in fact, than the present tendency to combination. It could not be artificially hastened, nor could the lines of stable integration be determined in advance—where the United States government has been beaten in the attempt to disintegrate industry from the consumers' end, it is not likely that social reformers would succeed. This is not to impugn the desirability of Mr. Russell's ends; we may accept his principles, but not his, or any, schematic program. The true place of the realist, in this matter at all events, is not with the socialists, but with the liberals—by whatever name they are called.

## V

But further: the tendency, above illustrated, of guild socialism generally to emphasize and stereotype the distinction between consumer and producer is open to question as regards both wisdom and expe-

<sup>20</sup>*Prospects of Industrial Civilisation*, ch. 11.

diency. It springs in part from a certain reluctance, evident at present in more fields than this, to admit the existence of impersonal economic or natural forces functioning as limits to the volitional control of collective destiny: a reluctance which the trend of recent sociology explains, but does not altogether justify. More fundamentally, it springs from the tendency common to most schools of socialism to assume a priori that every function of economic coöperation which is at present implicit in the social equilibrium, acting spontaneously, ought to be made explicit, and concentrated in some special organ or other. This is in most cases a habit of mind rather than a doctrine; and it leads to a sort of disintegrated Hegelianism which Mr. Russell's philosophy, for one, would be better without. It may be doubted, even were the assumption sound, whether the democratic principle could be stretched so far: Mr. Russell's state does not bear on its forehead any obvious guarantee that it would rise to his ideal, and he himself argues from present experience against it. Whether, or how far, the assumption is justifiable only experience can show; and upon that experience practice must wait, *pari passu*. To stake as much upon it as Mr. Russell does argues temerity rather than courage; his impatience has overcome his native skepticism—the fact goes far to explain the violence of his departure from the faith of his fathers.

The weakness of the position to which Mr. Russell's peculiar brand of federalism drives him is indicated by his own illustrations. How are the consumers of the products of the mining industry—a fortiori, of such industries as the textiles which are already well integrated on the labor side—to be “organized”? What conceivable nucleus of an organic group is to be discovered among the consumers of the products of the packing industry, the milling industry, the boot and shoe trades? If, as seems likely, it is mainly of instrumental goods that Mr. Russell is thinking, he must surely realize, as did every government official during the war, that the most constant visitors to the consumers' department of his arbitral state will be the organizations which come out of the producers' door; and this would be still more the case where democratic vocational organization was practically coëxtensive with the whole of industry. Even the question of the general cost of living came to a head during the war through the great industries which acted as the main distributing channels of purchasing power. Mr. Russell has a guild congress which is to settle the “relations between different groups of producers”; he does not realize how large a part of his hypothetical dualism of consumer and producer is swallowed up in this function.

But apparently the resuscitated state is not merely to act as a buffer between the two: it is to fix prices at the outset. “The state must determine prices, though it will have to do so after bargaining

with the industry; it must also, of course, determine how much it needs of any commodity." This is the neck of the camel; and it blocks out a good deal of daylight. It is impossible not to suspect a tacit appeal to war experience in this part of Mr. Russell's theorizing. But price fixing in war time—however we judge it to have worked—was in one respect made abnormally simple for the state: it was based on the assumption of an almost infinite inelastic demand. Mr. Russell's proposal credits the state in normal times with at least as great a degree of infallibility in forecasting the effective demand for commodities as is exercised now by the most highly organized producers' associations. He might profitably study, for example, the history of the Rubber Growers' Association during the past three years, or the present position of the American farmer. Further, the present producers' associations carry on their operations with the aid of two adjusting devices, neither of which would be as freely available to Mr. Russell's state—price flexibility and advertisement.

It is too naively assumed by socialists, and some economists, that the main function of advertisement is competitive. As an institution, advertisement has a large part of its business value in the fact that it reduces the spontaneity of demand, transforming the consumer, at a certain cost, from an independent variable in the producer's calculations to a factor largely under his control.<sup>21</sup> In so far as the spontaneity of demand would be restored under the non-competitive state—and Mr. Russell specifies advertising as one of the wastes to be cut out—the necessity for price flexibility might be enhanced. In any case, price fluctuation would not disappear with the elimination of competition; and the price-fixing state, if it were to function, would have to choose between applying the principles of the United States Steel Corporation to industry generally, and being drawn into management in a far greater degree than he anticipates.

Apart from the difficulty above mentioned as affecting instrumental goods, a further dilemma confronts the price-fixing state. The problem of price regulation of final utilities to the ultimate consumer is on Mr. Russell's hypothesis either unreal or insoluble. If, as is reasonable, Mr. Russell assumes that some general principle of cost accounting—a cost-plus system such as was adopted by the British building guilds—has secured acceptance among the producers' associations, there is no further scope for arbitrary action by the state or any other body on the prices of finished goods. The experience of the British government in the supply and rationing of meat and groceries convinced even politicians that the state cannot regulate prices from both ends at once. Any adjustment which demand rendered

<sup>21</sup>*Cf.* J. M. Clark, "Economics and Modern Psychology," *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 26, Jan., Feb., 1918.

desirable would then be a matter of technical efficiency and labor cost—affairs which Mr. Russell relegates exclusively to the guilds. If on the other hand no such principle is established among the producers' associations, their financial autonomy and unity of control leave both the consumers' organizations and the state powerless against them, with neither principle of action nor means to enforce any. It would still of course be open to the state to attempt the regulation of certain prices on non-economic grounds, using such credit as it could command; but the desirability of such a course, and the means of pursuing it, would remain at least as debatable as at present.

## VI

This brings us within sight of certain of the ends of Mr. Russell's social scheme in which not only does his fundamental anarchism reappear, but the failure of his efforts to reconcile extreme individualism with functional collectivism becomes manifest. We find him, for example, still hesitant between the social principle "to each according to his deserts"—as producer—and the anarchist maxim "to each according to his needs"—as individual. Accordingly, although not only wage payments but wage principles are relegated exclusively to the guilds, every man, woman, and child is to receive a free supply of the necessaries of life—including housing and education—direct from the state; and we are invited to contemplate as a permanent institution the system of rationing and food tickets under which some of us suffered during the war.

This is the camel's hump, with a vengeance: if Mr. Russell's rehabilitated state gave us pause before, with what sort of feeling shall we regard it now—particularly when we are told that its economic power of free supply may be used in a punitive sense against people who evince a distaste for work. To lessen the chances of discrimination and tyranny, Mr. Russell stipulates that the state must establish the offense in the law courts before proceeding in this fashion; but on conviction, "a man who is incurably lazy or grossly negligent could be deprived of tobacco or alcohol or meat, or in some other way submitted to economic loss." He could indeed. And what a time of it the lawyers' guild might have defining the nature of productive work or social negligence. Mr. Russell's experience has apparently encouraged him thus to enlarge and strengthen the censorship of state and law over individual activity; but he must not take it amiss if some Americans—even radicals—fail to agree.

It is noteworthy how much more reasonable Mr. Russell might have made his end appear had he chosen to approach it differently—had he studied, for example, the possibilities of the British system of industrial insurance, or the guaranteed maintenance scheme of the building guilds,

or the present administration of the family wage in Germany.<sup>22</sup> To be sure, that would have meant dropping his doctrinaire anarchism to remain consistently collectivist; or—even worse—it might have meant drawing dangerously near pure liberalism. But it might have been more useful. Characteristically, however, Mr. Russell scouts a sober consideration of means to anticipate remote and contingent difficulties that might arise from the attainment of ends; and, of course, he finds them—finds one in particular that can always be relied on to give the requisite amount of trouble.

It is the question of incentive. Would people work enough, and hard enough, under a system of universal free maintenance? Considering how much depends upon it, it is sad to see Mr. Russell's optimism declining. In 1918, writing "in the last days before a period of imprisonment," he was reasonably confident that human nature and public opinion between them would ensure that sufficient work would be done without compulsion.<sup>23</sup> In 1923 he frankly saddles his ideal community with the principle of compulsory labor. "Justice is needed primarily as regards the necessaries of life. Rations and compulsory labor are its pleasant and unpleasant sides."<sup>24</sup> Personally, after all that Mr. Russell has told us about the constructive instinct, we are not quite so certain which is which. Something—can it be modern collectivism?—has clearly disagreed with Mr. Russell's individualist disposition in the interval, to give rise to this nightmare Utopia that looks so suspiciously like the sublimation of an earlier experience.

As to the quantity of work to be done, Mr. Russell's advocacy of the four-hour day is really less utopian than it appears; but here also he manages to make his end look needlessly remote by the unconvincing nature of his means. Looking to the end, he is in better company than he knows. He quotes, of course, such employers as Lord Leverhulme, and the results of industrial psychology; but his strongest ally is perhaps that supreme technician, the late Dr. Charles Steinmetz. Steinmetz however approached the problem as one of efficiency and technique in production. Mr. Russell approaches it less securely from the side of demand: looking for a restriction, through various economies, of the actual volume of production. Here once again he enters upon shaky ground. We may allow the force of his arguments for a stationary population and a policy of birth control: quite rightly he points out the cardinal importance of the latter to any scheme of socialism. But the population question does not exhaust his difficulties. Repeatedly he argues as if the volume and nature of production

<sup>22</sup>*Economic Journal*, vol. XXXIII, Dec., 1923; U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Monthly Labor Review*, vol. XVIII, no. 1, Jan., 1924.

<sup>23</sup>*Roads to Freedom*, ch. 8.

<sup>24</sup>*Prospects of Industrial Civilisation*, ch. 13.

were determined by a demand arising solely within the geographical frontiers of the producing nation—this, above all, of England! “When we are fed and clothed and housed, further material goods are needed only for ostentation, except by that small minority who are capable of artistic enjoyment. With modern methods, a certain portion of the population, without working long hours, could do all the work that is really necessary in the way of producing commodities.”<sup>25</sup>

Of many social theorists the paradox holds that while they are acutely aware of the international character of politics they easily lose sight of the international character of production. It is obvious that if Mr. Russell’s community were to stray outside the sphere of efficiency in quest of leisure, to embark on an arbitrary control of production on a priori lines, it would find serious difficulty in maintaining the supply of the necessaries of life at even their present rising prices—let alone in supplying them gratis. Considerations of this kind retard the pace of radicalism to a degree which is discouraging to schematic theorists; but they are not to be disposed of merely by a fine impatience.

## VII

The curious conflict of motives which betrays itself in Mr. Russell’s attitude towards economic organization is manifest in his treatment of social institutions. His individualism makes him a keen and stimulating critic while it warps his constructive or prophetic views. On the negative side he deals with the nature of institutions along lines which Professor Ogburn has developed in his theory of the cultural lag: for example, “Our institutions are not yet suited either to the instincts developed by our new circumstances, or to our real beliefs. Institutions have a life of their own and often outlast the circumstances which made them a fit garment for instinct.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, we can quote Mr. Russell’s criticism against his own mechanistic socialism when he argues that “institutions cannot preserve liberty unless men realize that liberty is precious and are willing to exert themselves to keep it alive.” But the very quality which sharpens Mr. Russell’s criticism prevents his attaining a true psychological insight into the heart of his problem.

His treatment of marriage is typical. Few have argued as convincingly as he against the devitalizing effects of economic pressure as a factor in the maintenance of the legal sanction. The connection of economic security with social conformity as affecting the man, and the economic dependence of the woman, have admittedly resulted in far too many cases, in a degradation of sexual companionship to a point

<sup>25</sup>*Why Men Fight*, ch. 4.

<sup>26</sup>*Why Men Fight*, ch. I. Cf. Ogburn, *Social Change*. Lord Acton’s remark is interesting: “Ideas have a radiation and development, an ancestry and posterity of their own, in which men play the part of godfathers and godmothers rather than of legitimate parents” (*Letters to Mary Gladstone*).



at which it becomes positively inimical to individual life. "Their ancestors," says Mr. Russell of many a modern couple, "were not restrained from passion by the fear of hell-fire, but they are restrained effectually by a worse fear, the fear of coming down in the world."<sup>27</sup> But when Mr. Russell goes on to argue that with the economic independence of women, and the state maintenance of child-bearing and children, family life and legal marriage "will" largely disappear, he is taking far too narrow a view of the nature of social institutions; and this same narrowness besets his remarks upon what he rightly regards as the most formidable of them all—the institution of war.

In this supreme case he is confronted on a greater scale with the same alternative which faced him in the single community: the choice, namely, between relying upon psychological evolution to work out improved forms of association, and attempting an artificial synthesis of new forms in the hope that spiritual change may follow. The choice that he makes is at variance with the latest conclusions of both sociology and historical philosophy; but he makes it with his eyes open, and can hardly be accused of the Marxian fallacy in its naive form.

The existing evils in international relations spring, at bottom, from psychological causes, from motives forming part of human nature as it is at present. Among these the chief are competitiveness, love of power, and envy. . . . From populations largely deprived of the simple instinctive pleasures of leisure and love, sunshine and green fields, generosity of outlook and kindness of disposition are hardly to be expected.<sup>28</sup>

None the less Mr. Russell declines to trust the future to the results of psychological change, and he is unable therefore to rely upon the education of opinion for any substantial contribution toward the solution of the present chaos. That, he thinks, may ultimately come; but for any near prospect of international peace he deems the balance-of-power principle the better hope.

And it is a colossal balance that he contemplates. Arguing on Marxian lines as to the economic incentive, he is led to postulate a division of the world between a few vast empires, each containing within itself its sources of raw materials, "each more or less closed against all the others, each therefore able to defend itself though not able to attack any other large empire successfully."

It seems probable that Mr. Russell regards this forecast as realistic; but, dispassionately viewed, it is extremely doubtful whether such an integration is in fact a nearer probability than a revolution in opinion. As to the nature of the prospect, we may well doubt whether the appeal to force will not always in the last resort create more strife than it quells. No pax Romana will ever again be possible in a world expanded

<sup>27</sup>*Why Men Fight*, ch. 2.

<sup>28</sup>*Proposed Roads to Freedom*, ch. 6.

so vastly beyond the middle sea; whether we will or no, the sword fails at the last, and humanity is left to live or die by the qualities which make it human. It is above all significant that Mr. Russell's reluctance to make the act of faith in these qualities which our situation presents as in truth the only alternative to pessimism, leaves him, individualist and anarchist though he be, at the hazard of an appeal to imperial force and super-sovereignty.

### VIII

"What we need," wrote Ibsen half a century ago, in a letter that goes far to explain his later attitude to the social problem, "is a revolution of the spirit of man." Painful experience confirms his insight; our need is perhaps for another Shelley rather than another Godwin.

The enduring value of Mr. Russell's work lies in its appeal to such criteria as are now fashionably termed psychological (spiritual remains the better word for those who have the hardihood to retain it). The revolution for which it pleads with most effect is that which implies a change in the sphere of motivation. Its weakness is in its failure to apply its basic criteria in a positive as well as a negative sense; in its attempt to devise new social forms without counting on, or waiting for, the results of the change that is to start the process; in its endeavor to anticipate, in a mechanistic social balance, the consequences of an evolution of mind and ideal.

These strictures, it is true, amount to the advocacy of a difficult and exacting course between extremes; but for the realist in social affairs there is in fact no option. Society may not be an organism, but neither is it a machine; it may not "grow," but neither is it put together. Mr. Russell's individualism should have warned him against the lure of collectivist schematizing; his appreciation of vital values and processes should have encouraged him, in fortitude and patience, to trust them more fully than he does.

His federalism is in fact not bold enough. In proportion as he multiplies the number and enlarges the autonomy of his social groups, he must impute to them a positive realization of the common good, a deliberate preference of that to strict self-interest. If this is utopian, the alternative is unworkable. But thus to shift the basis of organization from the negative to the positive ground is to change the whole emphasis and perspective of reconstruction; for, rightly viewed, the consideration that responsibility for the common good must, in the last analysis, be entrusted to the voluntary action and coöperation of social groups precludes the possibility of any schematic program. The social reformer needs above all the courage to be tentative, the patience to be empirical; if he suffers the charge of "having no program" he is not thereby convicted of lacking principles or ideals.

That this line of thought should bring us back to the topic of education was inevitable; and for much that Mr. Russell has written on this subject both teachers and reformers will be grateful. His vindication of the virtues of a scientific outlook on the world of things and men is both true and noble. Still more apposite is his plea for liberty in the expression of individual opinion by teachers: no good teacher, he says, is altogether impartial, "but boys can be taught to like fairness in thought just as they can be taught to like fairness in games." If a greater freedom of expression results in a skeptical habit of mind in the student, so much the better—that is just what democracy needs. True; but hardly sufficient. For the virtues of science are after all somewhat individualist; more necessary and more difficult than the quest for these is now the fostering of the impulse toward spontaneous coöperation. On that more than on any other single factor the future of democratic society depends.

Touching education in the larger sense, Mr. Russell like many radical thinkers is in some danger of mistaking ends for means. It may be argued that the true purpose of social education is not to fit people for any preconceived form of society, democratic or other, deemed desirable in itself; but rather to render possible an ever more intelligent adaptation to environment, through whatever forms time and circumstance may require, without impeding the freedom of the educating process as end. In this view, the case for industrial democracy is not that industrial democracy would make for better management, but that the responsibilities of management would make for better democracy; just as the case for trusting a democracy with the general issues of policy is not the uncertain chance of securing a better policy, but the hope of securing a better education. By the time the education is completer it may be that the people will have outgrown its taste for democratic candy; but in the meantime it is the task—and no higher or more difficult task exists—of the leaders of thought and action to assist the education by accepting the risks, seeking constantly to purchase a maximum of the former with a minimum of the latter.

These reflections point perhaps to a different school of politics from that to which Mr. Russell has hitched his wagon: a school whose occasional assistance in the propulsion of that vehicle is accepted with scientific impartiality, while its participation in his ideals is commonly denied. None the less, it can afford to be grateful, along with all students of society, for his spirited criticism and his vindication of the ends of social life; the more freely, since in some future retrospect Mr. Russell may possibly appear, in spite of himself, to have been one among many impatient exponents of a great tradition.

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