

Is Socialism Scientific?

By Max Hirsch

One of the claims most frequently and passionately urged by modern socialists is, that their system has emerged from the empirical stage and has become scientific. Nevertheless, this claim appears to be unfounded. Knowledge becomes science through the systematic arrangement of the natural laws by which a group or groups of related facts or phenomena are governed, and in their interpretation through causal connection, so that from that which is observable conclusions can be formed with regard to that which is not observable. The essential condition through which a mere collection of facts becomes a science, is, therefore, the discovery and tabulation of the invariable, natural laws which govern their appearance. Any system which applies such natural laws to man's needs, is a system based on science, i.e. scientific. Thus navigation is scientific, inasmuch as it is based on the sciences of mathematics and astronomy; a scientific system of medicine is based on the natural laws tabulated by the sciences of biology and chemistry; a scientific system of mining is based on geology, etc. Likewise any system of politics will be scientific if it is based on well-ascertained natural laws governing the conduct of men in society. But if any political system is not based on such natural laws, still more if it is based on the express denial of the existence of such laws, it cannot be scientific; it is a mere empirical conception.

Today we are in the midst of a battle whose outcome will decide the fate of civilization. As the smoke from minor issues lifts, the great antagonists confront each other — Man against the Dictatorial State, or more generally, Freedom versus Totalitarianism. In 1901, during a period of comparatively peaceful development and friendly world-feeling, Max Hirsch foresaw this inevitable conflict. And in that same year he published a book, from which we quote, that with classic and irrefutable finality analyzed and exposed the essential nature of the authoritarian State. Whether it calls itself Socialism, Fascism, Nazism, Communism or Gradualist Collectivism, its face is the same and its purpose clear — the ruthless subordination of the individual to the Juggernaut of centralized political power. Max Hirsch realized that only those who genuinely stood for Freedom could rightfully take up arms against the justifiable zeal for social equity that motivated the misguided and erroneous proposals of Socialists. So Max Hirsch was, inevitably, a Georgist, perhaps the most famous theoretician and activist the movement has produced in Australia. We recommend the reading of "Democracy versus Socialism."

This is the position of Socialism. The most prominent of the conceptions on which it is based is, that there are no natural laws which govern the distribution of wealth; that distribution may be governed by municipal enactments alone, and that, therefore, its arbitrary regulation is a necessary function of the State, and the only means by which justice in distribution can be achieved. Whether this conception is true or not does not concern us here. If

true, then Socialism is not scientific, because there is no science on which it can be based; if untrue, then Socialism is unscientific, because it disregards the science on which the economic part of politics must be based. This denial of natural law, therefore, whether in itself it is true or not, destroys the claim of Socialism to be considered scientific, and proves that it is based on unverified or unverifiable interpretations of facts, the causal connection of which is either unknown or disregarded.

The ethical conceptions on which Socialism is based are equally empirical and equally deny the possibility of any moral science. For the conception of a right includes that of a duty to respect that right. The denial of natural rights, therefore, involves the denial of natural duties. If all rights are granted by the State, all duties are imposed by the State. Moral conduct, therefore, is conduct according to law; there is no standard by which the morality of any law may be determined, for the existence of the law constitutes its morality. Morality, therefore, has no existence; it is merely a secondary term for legality.

As in the case of economics, therefore, socialism is unscientific, whether denial of ethics, and, consequently, of ethical science, is true or untrue; if true, because there is no ethical science on which its proposals can be based; if untrue, because its proposals disregard the laws which that science has established.