

## A WORD ON SOCIALISM.

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ADDRESSED TO SOCIALISTS AND TO THOSE WHO MAY BECOME SO.

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(Translated expressly for *The Single Tax Review* by L. H. Berens.)

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### II.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIALISM.

The great political teachers, the apostles of Liberty and of Justice, of the Eighteenth Century, arose at a time when Despotism and Privilege ruled supreme and unchecked, when Might was tacitly assumed to make right and to give rights, and when Governments, under the influence of the Mercantile Theories, which regarded gold and silver as the only real wealth of the nation, were interfering with almost every branch of trade and industry, with the avowed aim of keeping in each country as much of these metals as possible. As against these tendencies, they taught that the recognition of the natural and inalienable equal rights of all—equal rights to life, to liberty and to the pursuit of happiness, as the American Constitution expresses it—was the only possible rational basis of peaceful and harmonious social life, the foundation-stone, key-stone and corner-stone of Constitutional Government. They held that the State was made for man, not man for the State. The primary function of the State, they contended, was not to grant monopolies, nor to confer, maintain and extend privilege, but to secure justice, to maintain and enforce the equal rights of all its citizens. If it would only do this, it need do little or nothing more. For under such conditions the production of wealth, as well as its equitable distribution amongst those taking part in the necessary work, would satisfactorily take care of itself. State interference and State regulation, they argued, were far more likely to do harm than to do good and would be entirely unnecessary if only the State would completely carry out its primary function. For the natural harmony of the rightful interests of mankind would soon put everything on the right track, with a minimum of friction. These doctrines were briefly summarized in the somewhat vague and misleading, much abused and misunderstood, phrase—"Laissez faire, laissez aller."

After the downfall of unchecked Despotism and the gradual adoption and extension of Constitutional Government, the great Liberal Parties which sprang into existence, both on the Continent and in Great Britain, avowedly accepted this doctrine of natural rights, of equal rights. As a matter of fact, however, for the most part they only demanded and only secured for the people such rights as cost the still all powerful privileged classes little or nothing. True, a few bold far-seeing thinkers had already openly proclaimed that the realization of the equal rights doctrine was not secured by the ex

tension of the franchise, or even equal voting power, and other such political formalities, but that it involved and demanded the recognition and enforcement of the equal right of all to the use of the earth and to share in the bounties of Nature. Any such idea, however, was too new, too bold and too big, to gain ready acceptance by the mob of little men of whom these parties were composed. Still less was it welcome to the powerful interests which supported Liberalism mainly because, in its blindness and innovating zeal, it was busily employed clearing away all remains of the ancient rights of the people to the use of the land, thus tearing down every hindrance which stood in the way of their own ever increasing greed and covetousness. Thus the most potent and vital part of the immutable truth, upon the avowal of which Liberalism had established itself, was hidden from the people.

More than this, when, despite this pretended granting of equal rights, the needs of the people became more and more pressing, Liberal doctrinaires confronted them with haughty superiority, heartless indifference, and impudent denials. "We have given all of you equal rights, what more do you want, what more can you ask for?" they insolently demanded. Of course, they had done no such thing. They had willingly given the people equal rights in immaterial, intangible and invisible things; but that the equal right doctrine, to which they paid mere lip-service, involved equal rights to the use of the earth and to share in the bounties of Nature, they had never allowed themselves to entertain for a moment, or even allowed others to avow unhindered. Small wonder that such a distorted, perverted Liberalism soon lost its hold on the people, retaining only the favor and patronage of the rich, whom, in truth, it had served too well.

This gave Socialism its opportunity; this accounts for its establishment and its phenomenal growth, more especially, perhaps, in countries such as Prussia and Russia, where the masses of the people had only recently been emancipated from serfdom and granted some modicum of political power. The needs of the people were too great to be overlooked; Socialism espoused their cause, and claimed to voice their aspirations. Socialist theorists meditated on their needs and continuously invented and proposed fresh means to help them over their immediate difficulties. Fully realizing that such equal rights as had been secured were utterly useless to the poor, to those disinherited and made helpless by existing laws, they with swift logic rejected the fundamental idea of equal rights as offering any guide to the social salvation of the industrial masses of the people. They seem to have been too immersed in their own theories to realize, or too near sighted to suspect, that the inspiring conception of the equal rights of all had a far deeper meaning, of more far-reaching import, than had ever been attributed to it by the orthodox apostles of Liberalism. Hence, instead of accepting, extending and completing this basic conception, instead of boldly avowing and bringing home to their followers that it must involve and carry with it equal rights to the tangible things of this earth, in so far as they have not been called into existence by unequal human toil; they proceeded to invent and to proclaim a

whole host of questionable, disputable and confusing theories, by an appeal to which they then proceeded to defend such actions and proposals as they, in their wisdom or ignorance, deemed called for by the immediate necessities of the day. Once having quitted the straight path of clear conceptions and eternal verities, their course has ever grown still more confused and confusing. Hence we have the paradox that while Socialism continues to make constant appeals to right feeling, to accept ideas of right and wrong, while Socialist poets have burst out into eloquent song glorifying Liberty, Justice and Right, Socialist doctrinaires, on the other hand, sneer and scoff at the same ideas, combatting them as absurd, ridiculous, obsolete fancies, quite unfit to serve as any safe guide to human conduct, individual or collective.

The source of the errors, weaknesses, illusions and delusions, of all Socialist systems are attributable to this one cause, to a misconception of the fundamental social doctrines of equal rights. Ignoring or even deriding this simple elementary truth, which, once avowed, gains ready acceptance in the minds of all free and independent men, and which has been one of the main causes inspiring such men to heroic unselfish deeds in the past, Socialist doctrinaires find themselves forced to appeal, not to the highest and noblest, but to the lowest and most ignoble passions of mankind. Every right carries with it a corresponding duty. Socialism, however, never urges upon its followers a recognition of the rights of others; it knows no right but only claims; consequently it never speaks to them of their rights or of their duties, but only of their claims. With Socialism it is not a question of what is right, but only and always of what is possible. Though some of those claiming to be its followers may speak of "a *right* to work," whatever this may mean, Socialism as taught today ignores and denies the very conception of human rights irrespective of established custom and law. What their idol the State allows, they consider right; and the State only, it holds, can make right and confer rights. In truth, however, the foundations of society are not the prevailing customs, laws and institutions maintained by the State, but the accepted conceptions of right and wrong, of what is moral and what is immoral. But Socialism, as passionately preached during the past half century, practically denies that anything is essentially right or anything essentially wrong. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, Socialism undermines all clear conceptions of morality, of right and wrong, independent of what is established. And what does it offer in its place? Simply the old despotism of the past, obedience to the maxim that "he may take who has the power, and he may keep who can." And, as we shall show beyond dispute in the pages that are to follow, it is upon such principles, or want of principles, that Socialists blindly hope to build the Utopian Socialist State of the remote future.

Small wonder that the Socialist movement of today, like its predecessor in the past, has led to nothing of real, permanent value to the masses of the people; that in all countries where it has gained any importance in the field of politics, reaction has gained in strength. Have all the pointless taunts and poisonous jeers of Socialists ever deterred any powerful group of inter-

ests, financial or political, from any piece of robbery or jobbery? Has Socialism with its innumerable books and countless pamphlets and newspapers brought forward a single enfranchising idea from which anything is to be hoped?

Not a single one! The doctrines of Socialism serve only to weaken the character and sap the moral fibre of its adherents, and to fill their heads with empty visions and a cloud of words. With passionate accusations Socialism denounces the established State; but their own ideal State is nothing more than a feeble copy thereof. The proposal to undermine and make impossible the present "Class-State" by refusing to pay taxes for its support, they receive only with ridicule. They brand the barrack-life of military service as an unworthy institution; but to refuse to serve they regard as a piece of stupidity. According to their view a knowledge of the capitalistic systems of production in far-away China and Japan is of far greater importance to proletarians than any insight or knowledge of the doctrine of their own equal rights to the use of the earth. To workers who do not know where to get bread for their hungry children, they announce as the cure-all of all their troubles the vague and misty "socialization of all the means of production." Thousands of times they demonstrate to men with empty pockets and hungry stomachs how quickly "the accumulation of capital" progresses. They are well versed in every confusing, pseudo-scientific, economic jargon, but of the right of the disinherited to realities they seem to know nothing. They have invented a thousand far-reaching theories for the abolition of poverty; but that the solution of a great social question demands courage and self-sacrifice never enters their heads.

According to the teachings of Socialism the solution of the Social Problem, the answer to the question why the children of the workers starve and they and their wives sink exhausted under the burden of their work, is to be sought in the theory of value, in vague quibblings over a vague idea. Surely one of the maddest errors of the human mind! Can there be anything more perverse than to seek the solution of the Social question, a question which concerns and immediately affects us all, in empty, useless, vague word-juggling. A great idea can only hope to conquer if it can inspire the multitude with enthusiasm. Is it thinkable that the masses of the people will ever rise in revolt with the cry: "We will live and die for the theory of surplus value, and the abolition of the capitalistic system of production!" And that without knowing at all what the former means, or any clear idea of what is to take the place of the latter. Vague, indefinite talk about the necessity of producing for use, not for the market, is little likely to affect those who feel instinctively that the few comforts and luxuries they enjoy, and all the others they should be enabled to enjoy, are called into being by others working for the markets of the world.

The true nature of any intellectual movement is revealed, *not* by anything it accidentally clutches hold of and unresistingly carries with it, but in the goal to which its energies are directed, in the forces which it sets in motion.

The art and literature called into being by any intellectual movement, itself reveals the innermost tendencies and character. The art which Socialism and other related movements have called in to being in Germany is that of the illustrated comic (?) paper known as *Simplizissimus*. Turning over its pages one is struck at once by the fact that it depicts the worker, and seems only to know the worker, as a vagabond, a degraded, degenerated, brutalized, landless, houseless, and homeless being. Their coarse and vulgar speech, their enervating cynicism, their impotent sneers, their childish impudence, their revolting and misplaced conceit, their malicious vanity, are all faithfully reproduced in its pages, a true expression, unfortunately, of the state of mind fostered by the aimless and demoralizing teachings of Socialism. Such art knows the words Freedom and Right only as poisonous mockery; the word Love only in its suggestive double-meaning. Such art unscrupulously serves doings of the worst spongers and parasites of society. Amongst those incapable of distinguishing the real from the sham, the *Simplizissimus* has succeeded in posing as a pioneer of Liberty. But those in whom the stirring tragedy of the prevailing social wrongs and injustices arouses no word of passionate indignation, no expression of warm compassion, or human sympathy; those whom the misery, needs and sufferings of the oppressed, the disinherited and dispossessed, serve only to excite to miserable sneers and obscene wit—such are no pioneers of liberty; they serve, not the sacred cause of Liberty, but the cause of License.

“But we have done so much for the people,” Socialists may reply with an air of insulted indignation. “We have so many representatives in Parliament on Municipal and Local Councils; we have great Unions, and have established many much-read papers. We have demanded a mass of reforms, have made many eloquent speeches, and given voice to many pious wishes and inspiring aspirations. That it has remained at this is not our fault.”

Truly you have been busy enough; but you seem to have forgotten the one thing really necessary. Remember your promises! Were you not to bring salvation to the masses of the people? Were you not to redeem them from captivity, from poverty and from misery? But what are you still so busy about? With a thousand petty, unimportant things, with useless squabbling about pettyfogging nothings, with hunting after office, with speeches and books and books and speeches without end. Tell us frankly, do you know of no remedy, of no way to put a summary end to our troubles? Have you for us nothing but vague, uncertain promises and prophecies about a vague uncertain and remote future?

Let it not be suspected for a moment that these words have been written in the interests of the covetousness and self-seeking of the privileged, possessing classes, or to injure the cause or damp the legitimate aspirations of the workers. Quite the contrary. That society as it exists needs reforming from its roots upwards, is with us a burning conviction. But correct thought is the necessary precursor of right action; and it is this which is so sadly lacking in the accepted teachings of Socialism. Social Democracy, we know, is but

a product of Society as it exists. The Society which made its development possible must bear the greater share of the guilt of its errors and shortcomings, which for the most part are due to the instinct of avarice, heartlessness, covetousness and self-seeking which dominate our Society. With truth has it been said that it was a disgrace to Germany that it was only through Marx and Lasalle that its attention was directed to the robbery and oppression of the poor, of the masses of its industrial working population.

Hence it is that the writer would have much preferred not to have been forced to speak of the weaknesses and shortcomings of Socialism. But the great harm these teachings have done, the vast waste of generous human endeavor they have caused, compel him to reveal the truth as it appears to him. All the good intentions of Bebel and Liebknecht, and so many other enthusiastic supporters of Socialism, cannot make good the harm already done and is still doing. Doubtless Socialism was originally inspired by the best intentions and most self-sacrificing altruism. This, however, is no excuse; quite the contrary, it is the most weighty accusation against Socialism. For Socialism has so far failed in its avowed original object, the abolition of poverty, that today many despair of its ever being accomplished. That with all the good-will and good intentions no better result has been attained; that all the self-sacrificing enthusiasm it has undoubtedly aroused has been so uselessly wasted; that so many who have served, struggled and suffered for its cause, have finally been disillusioned and have come to despair of Socialism and of progress; does not all this prove clearly how utterly unreliable must be the theories on which modern Socialism is built?

The interpretation of Socialism given in the following pages puts these theories in such a light that it would never have been written had the author any doubt of its correctness. He fully realizes how bitter it will sound in the ears of many good and honest men; but surely the duty to speak the truth as it appears to us is far more pressing and far more sacred than any consideration for the feelings of others. If the interpretation of Socialism here given is true, then it is high time it found expression. If, on the other hand, it is not true, not in accordance with the well known facts concerning Socialism, it will be quite easy to refute it.

*(To be continued)*

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## CLEAR LEGAL ROBBERY.

*(For the Review.)*

By **GEORGE WALLACE**, Jamaica, N. Y.

One of the noteworthy news items early in April informed the public that the Supreme Court had confirmed the report of condemnation commissioners who awarded the Neponsit Realty Company the sum of \$1,316,458