

THE ROOT PRINCIPLE OF SOCIALISM: ITS FALLACY.

By DAVID CATTERALL.

My attack is not on Socialists, but on Socialism; and while I have every respect for the former, I have none for the latter. I recognise the devotion, self-sacrifice, and enthusiasm of its advocates; I deplore that those excellent qualities are wasted and worse than wasted in chasing such a will-o'-the-wisp as I conceive State Socialism to be. I say State Socialism advisedly, for I don't recognise as Socialism or Socialistic any organisation or undertaking based on the voluntary principle—such, for instance, as that of the first century Christians, who had "all things common"; the various communistic societies that have existed or are still in existence; or the "New Moral World" idea of Robert Owen (where I understand the word "Socialism" originated) or the numerous Co-operative Societies. None of these, I repeat, is Socialism or Socialistic. In these undertakings people are left free to join or not join as they think fit; there is no compulsion about the matter, and if they are dissatisfied after having joined such societies, they are free to dissolve membership. All these things are based on voluntary action; State Socialism on the other hand is based on compulsion. Socialism substitutes for the individual self-choosing "I will" the State compulsory "Thou shalt." It advocates "the socialisation of all the means of production and distribution," meaning by this phrase that all land and all that is produced from land (and even the producers themselves) shall be owned, directed, and controlled through governmental agency. Men will not be permitted to produce on their own account, and the only alternative to working for the State will be—suicide, as Leonard Hall, a member of the Independent Labour Party, affirms.

Now I am not going to examine Socialism as a practical proposal, though I notice that Socialists are very coy when asked to submit details, and generally relegate that job to some future generation; neither (assuming its practicability) am I going to examine its outcome, though I think its result would be disastrous to the people; but I am going to confine myself to the principles of Socialism, or rather, to one principle, the basic principle, the foundation of the whole Socialistic structure. I think this is best, for if we succeed in destroying the foundation, the rest of the structure will come tumbling down of itself.

I am going to take Robert Blatchford's "Merrie England" as my text book. Some Socialists, I dare say, will object, but then we cannot get any Socialist book to which all Socialists will assent as the authority. My reasons for taking up "Merrie England" are that it has had a wider circulation and has been the means of making more Socialists than any other book of Socialistic thought, and also that the "Root principle of Socialism" postulated by Blatchford in that book is endorsed by other authorities of the Socialistic philosophy, whether Fabian or Marxian, as I will show.

On page 87 of "Merrie England" (new edition) we find the following:—"Socialism is terribly just, implacably honest. It is so honest that I doubt whether you can so much as look at the light of its honesty without blinking, although you are a fairly honest man, John Smith, as times go. But let me give you an idea of what I consider the very root principle of all Socialism, and of all democracy. This is the principle that there is no such thing as personal independence in human affairs. Man is a unit of Society, and owes not only all that he possesses, but all that he is, to other men. Yes! Just as no man can have a right to the land because no man makes the land, so no man has a right to his self because he did not make that self. Men are made what they are by two forces, heredity and environment. That is to say, by 'breed' and the conditions of life."

Then, after giving certain illustrations to emphasise this principle, Blatchford goes on to say (page 88):—"Whatsoever you are, you are what your forefathers, your circumstances, and your companions have made you. You did not make yourself, therefore you have no right to yourself. You were made by other men, therefore to those other men you are indebted for all you have and for all you are, and Socialism, with its awful justice, tells you that you must pay the debt."

Now this idea, this "root principle of all Socialism" (I don't accept it as the root principle of Democracy), this denial of the right of the individual to self-ownership, is endorsed by all those best qualified to expound the Socialist philosophy. The Fabians and the Marxians differ upon many points, but they are in absolute agreement with Blatchford upon this "root principle." I will give two examples. Sidney Webb, representing the Fabians, says the following in "Socialism in England" (page 79):—"A wide divergence of thought is here apparent between England

and the United States. In England the old *a priori* individualism is universally abandoned. No professor ever founds any argument, whether in defence of the rights of property or otherwise, upon the inherent right of the individual to his own physical freedom and to the possession of such raw material as he has made his own by spending personal effort upon. The first step must be to rid our minds of the idea that there are any such things in social matters as abstract rights. The whole case on both sides is now made to turn exclusively on the balance of social advantages."

Lawrence Gronlund, representing the Marxians, in his "Co-operative Commonwealth" (pages 82, 83, and 85) speaks thus:—"It (the conception of the State as an organism) together with the modern doctrine of evolution as applied to all organisms, deals a mortal blow to the theory of man's inalienable right to life, liberty, property, happiness, &c. . . . These so-called 'natural rights' and an equally fictitious law of nature, were invented by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Philosophic Socialists repudiate that theory of 'natural rights.' It is Society, organised Society, the State, that gives us all the rights we have. . . . As against the State, the organised Society, even Labour does not give us a particle of title to what our hands and brain produce."

We take up "Merrie England" once more and see the gist of this "root principle of all Socialism" expressed in the following sentence (page 87):—"Just as no man can have a right to the land because no man makes the land, so no man has a right to his self because he did not make that self."

What is man? Man is primarily an individual, with an individual brain and muscles, with individual faculties and powers, with an individual body and an individual mind; separate and distinct from his fellows as an individual. Now if a man has no right to his self as a whole, he has no right to any part of his self. It follows then that man has no right to his own brain and muscles, his faculties or powers, no right to his own body or to his own mind. Having no right to his own labour power (the active factor in all production) and no right to land (the source of all wealth and the field of all labour) it follows that he has no right to what his labour produces; and consequently, as he can only exist by what is produced by labour from land, this no-right to the product carries with it the blessed and soul-inspiring doctrine to the human race that no man has a right to live! Now I submit that this denial of the individual to self-ownership is a debasing, slavish teaching, and opposed to everything that stands for democracy and freedom; for the man who does not own himself must be owned by others, and therefore must be the slave of others.

This brings us to an interesting point; if man does not own himself, who owns him? Blatchford says (page 88):—"You were made by other men; therefore to those other men you are indebted for all you have and for all you are, and Socialism, with its awful justice, tells you that you must pay the debt." This awful justice is a bit of a staggerer, but let us be just if the heavens fall. Who are the debtors? Every living individual on earth. What is the debt? All they have and all they are. Who are the creditors? The "other men" who made the men who are living to-day: that is to say, the dead. These are then our owners—slaves to the dead, to whom we owe all that we have and are, and to whom "Socialism with its awful justice" tells us that we must pay this awful debt. Well, how is it to be done? I must confess that it appears to me to be awful nonsense to talk about paying this awful debt to the awful dead; and I fancy it is a bit of a puzzle to Robert Blatchford himself, for he goes on to say:—"You may say that I cannot pay the dead. But suppose the dead have left heirs! Likely enough they have left heirs, and Socialism with its awful justice tells me that the claims of those heirs are binding on me." This is not an argument; it is a miserable surrender. He sees the absurdity of paying the debt to the dead—which is the logical conclusion of his argument; and graciously permits his Socialistic "awful justice" to be satisfied if the debt is paid, not to the dead, but to the heirs of the dead; that is to say, to all the living.

Let us take stock once more! Who are the debtors? Every living individual on earth. Who are the creditors? Every living individual on earth. Here we see this debt and credit balance each other, and so the debt is cancelled. If "the claims of those heirs are binding on me," my claims are equally binding on them, and so we can cry quits and become free men. I suppose Blatchford would here step in and say, like Gronlund, that the individual has no natural inherent right to self-ownership; it

is Society, organised Society, the State, that gives us all the rights we have. What is Society? Simply an aggregation of individuals. If the individuals are numerous, Society is large; if the individuals are few, Society is small; and if the individuals disperse, Society vanishes. It is not Society that makes the individuals, it is the individuals that make Society. Very well! Mr. Blatchford comes along and says, "the individual has no right to himself." Why? "Because he did not make his self." Then I retort on that argument, "Society has no right to itself because it did not make itself, and therefore, having no right to itself it can give no rights to anyone else." Science tells us that out of nothing, nothing can come; but Socialism, "scientific" Socialism, tells us that out of the multitude of "no rights" of the individuals that make Society come all the rights Society possesses. Some of my Socialist friends may be good at arithmetic and so I just ask them to riddle out the following at their convenience:—How many "no rights" does it take to make a right? How many nothings does it take to make something?

I submit that the common-sense argument is that if the individual has no rights, neither has Society. But suppose we assume for the sake of argument that the individual, as such, has no rights, and that Society has the giving of all rights. What then? Why, obviously there is no standard of ethics or any criterion of what is right action or what is wrong action, apart from the decrees of the ruling authority—the State. That only is right which the State authorises in its enactments. The only wrong is the violation of those enactments. In other words, it logically means that "whatever is, is right." Was not Herbert Spencer correct when he characterised State Socialism as the New Toryism, only in place of stating "The King can do no wrong," it declares "The State can do no wrong." Moreover, if, as Gronlund affirms, it is Society, the State, that gives us all the rights we have, then State Socialism is condemned as wrong by its own authority, because Society, the State, repudiates it.

And now finally, I will show that Robert Blatchford himself throws over this "root principle" of all Socialism, this denial of the rights of the individual, and affirms the contrary. On page 69 of "Merrie England" he declares "Man has a right only to what his labour makes." On page 245 he says:—"The rights of the worker are the whole of the produce of his labour." Then, of course, Robert, if the whole of the produce belongs to the labourer, he does not owe it to *anybody*, not even to Society, does he? On page 246 we are told "The Socialist tells you that you are men, *with men's rights*." Yes, Robert. And the Socialist tells you that you are men without any rights at all.

I could give other quotations, but these are sufficient to show how "Nunquam" answers Blatchford. This "root principle," this foundation upon which the fabric of State Socialism rests, clearly won't stand argument, and I think I have proved what at the beginning I asserted, that the whole thing rests upon a fallacy and upon a doctrine that no Socialist in reality believes, and so the sooner it is relegated to the rubbish heap of exploded fallacies, the better it will be for the human race and for social progress, and as against this reactionary doctrine of slavery, let us lift up the banner of individual rights and human freedom.

WHY NOT TAKE THE REINS.

If fifty men did all the work
And gave the price to five;
And let those five make all the rules,
You'd say the fifty men were fools,
Unfit to be alive.

And if you heard complaining cries
From fifty brawny men;
Blaming the five for graft and greed,
Injustice, cruelty indeed—
What would you call them then?

Not by their own superior force
Do five on fifty live;
But by election and assent—
And privilege of government—
Powers that the fifty give.

If fifty men are really fools—
And five have all the brains—
The five must rule as now we find.
But if they fifty have the mind—
Why don't they take the reins?

C. P. GILMAN.

HERE AND THERE.

In the House of Commons on 17th August, Mr. Hunt asked the Prime Minister whether he could now say when he proposed to set up an elected Senate.

Mr. Lloyd George said the answer was in the negative.

Mr. Hunt: Are we to understand that the liberties of the people of this country are to be at the mercy of a Liberal chance majority in this House?

The Speaker: The hon. Member should save that up for perorations. (Loud laughter.)

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In the TIMES of 21st August, is an article on "Shepherding on the Yorkshire Moors." The following conversation between a tourist and a shepherd is related:—

"How many sheep to the acre do you reckon on about here?" inquired the southerner curiously.

"Nay, mister," replied the canny old dalesman, "thou's gitten hold o' t' wrang end o' t' stick. Tho' wants to ask hoo many acres gans to a sheep."

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A gentleman of France has just been laid by the heels, and tied up with red tape, because he drew a pail of water from the sea to cook his prawns in. He caught his prawns himself on the coast of his own country, and stole a pail of salt water from the Atlantic Ocean for their cooking. But in France you mustn't interfere with the salt of the ocean without paying a tax. And that dish of prawns is going to be expensive.—DAILY CHRONICLE, 16th August.

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The superiority of the present "system" over that of chattel slavery is finely illustrated by a little story of a southern man who owned a slave. The slave was sold for £375 and the money was invested in 160 acres of cheap land in Indiana. After a while the land was divided into two farms and rented, the income being far greater than could be obtained from the labour of one slave. Then the land didn't die in course of time, nor was the income from it reduced because of old age. The superiority of that "system" over chattel slavery is not hard to perceive.—T. H. TIBBLES, in THE CHANCELLOR.

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According to the MALTON MESSENGER, at Malton Police Court, on August 5th, Mr. A. E. B. Souby, solicitor, Malton, while applying for an ejection order for two of his cottages in the Old Talbot Yard, said the application was distasteful to him, and was only another illustration of the scandalous inadequacy of the housing accommodation in Malton. Both tenants were respectable working men, who paid their rent well, but the cottages were wanted for certain reasons. The tenants, he knew, had tried to find other houses in Malton, but they could not do so. The order would come into force in three weeks. He hoped that in the meantime someone would come forward and offer the tenants shelter in new premises, and that the Malton Urban Council would rise to their responsibilities and put the Housing Act into force. The order was granted.

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Coventry Corporation yesterday applied to the magistrates for ejection orders against the tenants of sixteen houses ordered to be closed. Tenants, who were still in possession, informed the Bench that they had tried their utmost to obtain other houses, but without success. One occupier said it was impossible to get houses in the town, either new or old houses.

The Magistrate: Where are these people to go?

Solicitor for the Corporation: When these orders are obtained they usually find somewhere to go. The Corporation have a scheme for providing additional workmen's houses.

Ejection orders were granted, the tenants being allowed three weeks to find other accommodation.—DAILY TELEGRAPH, August 15th.

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"... The existence of overcrowding is to a large extent due to the maintenance of the same sort of restrictions and privileges at home as Free Trade has abolished in connection with our international commerce. . . Nothing short, in my opinion, of taxation of Land Values will suffice to get at the root of this great matter, so vitally essential to the health and prosperity of the country."—Sir HENRY CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN (Keighley, December 9th, 1902).