

CONTRASTS IN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Abridged from "The Condition of Labour," by Henry George. New edition (price 3s. 6d.) in course of production.

THERE ARE many who, feeling bitterly the monstrous wrongs of the present distribution of wealth, are animated only by a blind hatred of the rich and a fierce desire to destroy existing social adjustments. This class is indeed only less dangerous than those who proclaim that no social improvement is needed or is possible. But it is not fair to confound with them those who, however mistakenly, propose definite schemes of remedy.

The Socialists, as I understand them, and as the term has come to apply to anything like a definite theory and not to be vaguely and improperly used to include all who desire social improvement, do not seek the abolition of all private property. Those who do this are properly called Communists. What the Socialists seek is the State assumption of capital (in which they vaguely and erroneously include land), or, more properly speaking, of large capitals, and State management and direction of at least the larger operations of industry. In this way they hope to abolish interest, which they regard as wrong and an evil; to do away with the gains of exchangers, speculators, contractors, and middle-men, which they regard as waste; to do away with the wage system and secure general co-operation; and to prevent competition, which they deem the fundamental cause of the impoverishment of labour. The more moderate of them, without going so far, go in the same direction, and seek some remedy or palliation of the worst forms of poverty by government regulation. The essential character of Socialism is that it looks to the extension of the functions of the State for the remedy of social evils; that it would substitute regulation and direction for competition; and intelligent control by organised society for the free play of individual desire and effort.

Though not usually classed as Socialists both the Trades Unionists and the Protectionists have the same essential character. The Trades Unionists seek the increase of wages, the reduction of working hours, and the general improvement in the condition of wage-workers, by organising them into guilds or associations which shall fix the rates at which they will sell their labour; shall deal as one body with employers in case of dispute; shall use on occasion their necessary weapon, the strike; and shall accumulate funds for such purposes and for the purpose of assisting members when on strike, or (sometimes) when out of employment. The Protectionists seek by governmental prohibitions or taxes on imports to regulate the industry and control the exchanges of each country, so, as they imagine, to diversify home industries and prevent the competition of people of other countries.

At the opposite extreme are the Anarchists, a term which, though frequently applied to mere violent destructionists, refers also to those who, seeing the many evils of too much government, regard government in itself as evil, and believe that in the absence of coercive power the mutual interests of men would secure voluntarily what co-operation is needed.

With both Anarchists and Socialists we, who for want of a better term have come to call ourselves Single Tax men, fundamentally differ. We regard them as erring in opposite directions—the one in ignoring the social nature of man, the other in ignoring his individual nature. While we see that man is primarily an individual, and that nothing but evil has come or can come from the interference by the State with things that belong to individual action, we also see that he is a social being, or, as Aristotle called him, a political animal, and that the State is requisite to social advance, having an indispensable place in the natural order. Looking on the bodily organism as the analogue of the social organism, and on the proper functions of the State as akin to those that in the human organism are discharged by the conscious intelligence, while the play of individual impulse and interest per-

forms functions akin to those discharged in the bodily organism by the unconscious instincts and involuntary motions, the Anarchists seem to us like men who would try to get along without heads, and the Socialists like men who would try to rule the wonderfully complex and delicate internal relations of their frames by conscious will.

Oppression does not come from the nature of capital, but from the wrong that robs labour of capital by divorcing it from land, and that creates a fictitious capital that is really capitalised monopoly. It would be impossible for capital to oppress labour were labour free to the natural material of production. What Socialism calls the "iron law of wages" is not the natural law of wages, but only the law of wages in that unnatural condition in which men are made helpless by being deprived of the materials for life and work. It fails to see that what it mistakes for the evils of competition are really the evils of restricted competition—are due to a one-sided competition to which men are forced when deprived of land.

We differ from the Socialists in our diagnosis of the evil, and we differ from them as to remedies. We have no fear of capital, regarding it as the natural handmaiden of labour; we look on interest in itself as natural and just; we would set no limit to accumulation, nor impose on the rich any burden that is not equally placed on the poor; we see no evil in competition, but deem unrestricted competition to be as necessary to the health of the industrial and social organism as the free circulation of the blood is to the health of the bodily organism—to be the agency whereby the fullest co-operation is to be secured.

We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community, the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacredly to the individual all that belongs to the individual; and, treating necessary monopolies as functions of the State, abolish all restrictions and prohibitions save those required for public health, safety, morals, and convenience.

Socialism in all its phases looks on the evil of our civilisation as springing from the inadequacy or inharmony of natural relations, which must be artificially organised or improved. In its idea that devolves on the State the necessity of intelligently organising the industrial relations of men; the construction, as it were, of a great machine whose complicated parts shall properly work together under the direction of human intelligence.

On the other hand, we who call ourselves Single Tax men (a name which expresses merely our practical propositions) see in the social and industrial relations of men not a machine which requires construction, but an organism which needs only to be suffered to grow. We see in the natural, social, and industrial laws such harmony as we see in the adjustments of the human body, and that as far transcends the power of man's intelligence to order and direct as it is beyond man's intelligence to order and direct the vital movements of his frame. We see in these social and industrial laws so close a relation to the moral law as must spring from the same authorship, and that proves the moral law to be the sure guide of man where his intelligence would wander and go astray. Thus, to us, all that is needed to remedy the evils of our time is to do justice and give freedom.

And it is because that in what we propose—the securing to all men of equal natural opportunities for the exercise of their powers and the removal of all legal restriction on the legitimate exercise of those powers—we see the conformation of human law to the moral law, that we hold with confidence not merely that this is a sufficient remedy for the present condition of labour, but that it is the only possible remedy.