

A SURVEY OF SOCIALISM

A Professor's Invective

By ALEXANDER MACKENDRICK

Dr F. J. C. Hearnshaw, M.A., is Professor of History at King's College, University of London. There are passages in his *Survey of Socialism* which, taken by themselves, may affect a reader with a mute despair of ever finding, in the accredited teachers of Society, that sweet reasonableness which we think ourselves entitled to expect. If there is one class in the community more than another, whose minds ought to "move in charity and turn upon the poles of truth," it is surely that sheltered group of educated men whose only obligation to the world is to rid themselves of all bias or prejudice, and to proclaim the truth as they then see it, on the many conflicting issues of rights and duties, of "mine and thine," that divide men in their daily contacts. It is disconcerting in the highest degree to find in this book evidences of class-prejudice and bitterness, with a consequent narrowness of judgment that can only be expected to inflame passion and leave the social problem more difficult of solution than it was.

It is impossible that one who really understands the economic gospel of Henry George in all its bearings and remoter implications can hold a brief for any political philosophy that involves the ownership and control of industry by the State. Such a reader will be mainly concerned to repudiate Dr Hearnshaw's half-concealed and half-revealed implication that there is an underlying kinship in principle between the policy known as "the taxation of land values" and the theory of State Socialism; but he will also reject with indignation his grotesque misrepresentation of Mr George's doctrine, as when, for example, he imputes to him the "stirring to eruptive activity" of the love of loot, and elsewhere describes the appropriation of ground-rents to the State as "a shameless appeal to the primitive cave-man's lust for loot" (page 224). Can Professor Hearnshaw not see that the offensive word just quoted may be handed back to him as being exactly applicable to the existing system under which the receiver of ground-rents and land values gets something for nothing, reaps where others have sown, and confiscates to his own use the fruits of his fellow-men's labours? How can he gravely write about "the free gifts of Nature" knowing as he does, that His Grace and Sir John lay claim to the entire ownership of these "gifts" with the right to lock them fast for their own future use? And what can he possibly mean by affirming (page 270) that "rent of land, interest and profits of commerce . . . are proper and necessary payments for indispensable services rendered? Interest we know, and profits we know, as the natural remuneration for services rendered, but what conceivable service (we ask) does the landowner *qua* landowner render in exchange for the loot (the word is, of course, Dr Hearnshaw's) that he takes from industry?

The proverbial British love of fair-play demands however, a protest against the series of unlovely epithets that are levelled at the Socialist movement—"the fountains of fury that boil in their breasts," "the fantastic rigmarole," "the diseased imagination," "the predatory passion," "the combination of the incompetent to exploit the competent," "a mass of false doctrine intended to rationalize robbery and justify spoliation, etc., etc. (we need not quote further). Such exceedingly unwise language may recoil upon him who utters it and perhaps with the unhappy result of engendering an extended sympathy with the political philosophy which he abhors in common with the followers of Henry George. It should surely be enough

for a sane, humane and charitable Professor to express his carefully considered opinion that the policy of State Socialism is a huge mistake, and would, in his opinion, and as he sees it, fail to deliver the workers and the unemployed from the fell clutch of circumstance that shuts them out from participation in the amenities and higher pleasures of our civilization.

But before closing this foolish concatenation of diatribes we come upon some evidences that Truth has a compelling power that captures the minds of men despite their utmost efforts to shut it out. On page 427 Dr Hearnshaw admits that he does not regard the social world as it stands at present with complacency, and discloses, as lying at the back of his mind, a picture of society as it ought to be and might be, with which we cannot quarrel. On page 441 we read "The indispensable preliminary to any attempt to readjust the distribution of wealth is an immense increase in the production of wealth. If, and only if, the potentialities of modern scientific industry are allowed to realize themselves; if, and only if, the fabulous resources which it is within man's power now to secure and control are actually attained and placed at his disposal; if, and only if, these conditions are fulfilled, will it be possible to formulate a scheme according to which all such necessities of life as can by present-day methods of manufacture or cultivation be supplied in almost limitless profusion at an almost negligible cost, shall be placed at the free disposal of all the members of the community without regard to their riches or rank." And again on page 447 we read, "The first (step) is to secure the removal of all the hindrances which at present hamper the production and exchange of wealth so as to procure the largest possible dividend for the community as a whole."

What more than this do we ask for when we demand, not only on the ground of Justice and Equity, but as a policy of expediency and common sense, the taxation of land values and the untaxing of industry and the products of industry? Would this simple alteration in the method of raising public revenue not have the immediate effect of releasing those "fabulous resources" which are at present held out of the reach of the Capital and Labour that are ready to use them? Would it not "allow," as present conditions do not allow, "the potentialities of modern scientific industry to realize themselves?" Would it not result in an immense increase in the cultivation and manufacture of the necessities of life, and in the placing of them at the disposal of the community "in almost limitless profusion and at almost negligible cost"? And would it not place purchasing power in the hands of those engaged in the stimulated cultivation and manufacture (which should mean all those who prefer work to starvation), and thus literally place the good things of life at the "free" disposal of every one.

We congratulate Professor Hearnshaw sincerely on his having been granted a vision of an ideal and yet easily realizable condition of society, in which equality of access to "the fabulous resources" of the earth is recognized as the basis of all freedom and equity and justice; but we challenge him to show how this condition can be effectively brought about otherwise than by the means so clearly outlined in that epoch-making book *Progress and Poverty*.