

CHAPTER XII

ADMINISTRATIVE SOCIALISM

§ 1.

Marx gave to Socialism a theory of world-wide social development, and rescued it altogether from the eccentric and localized associations of its earliest phases; he brought it so near to reality that it could appear as a force in politics, embodied first as the International Association of Working Men, and then as the Social Democratic movement of the continent of Europe that commands to-day over a third of the entire poll of German voters. So much Marx did for Socialism. But if he broadened its application to the world, he narrowed its range to only the economic aspect of life. He arrested for a time the discussion of its biological and moral aspects altogether. He left it an incomplete doctrine of merely economic reconstruction supplemented by mystical democracy, and both its mysticism and incompleteness, while they offered no difficulties to a labouring man ignorant of affairs, rendered it unsubstantial and unattractive to people who had any real knowledge of administration.

It was left chiefly to the little group of English people who founded the Fabian Society to supply a third system of ideas to the amplifying conception of Socialism, to convert Revolutionary Socialism into

Administrative Socialism.

This new development was essentially the outcome of the reaction of its broad suggestions of economic reconstruction upon the circle of thought of one or two young officials of genius, and of one or two persons upon the fringe of that politic-social stratum of Society, the English "governing class." I make this statement, I may say, in the loosest possible spirit. The reaction is one that was not confined to England, it was to some extent inevitable wherever the new movement in thought became accessible to intelligent administrators and officials. But in the peculiar atmosphere of British public life, with its remarkable blend of individual initiative and a lively sense of the State, this reaction has had the freest development. There was, indeed, Fabianism before the Fabian Society; it would be ingratitude to some of the most fruitful social work of the middle Victorian period to ignore the way in which it has contributed in suggestion and justification to the Socialist synthesis. The city of Birmingham, for example, developed the most extensive process of municipalization as the mere common-sense of local patriotism. But the movement was without formulæ and correlation until the Fabians came.

That unorganized, unpaid public service of public-spirited aristocratic and wealthy financial and business people, the "governing class," which dominated the British Empire throughout the nineteenth century, has, through the absence of definite class boundaries in England and the readiness of each class to take its tone from the

class above, that "Snobbishness" which is so often heedlessly dismissed as altogether evil, given a unique quality to British thought upon public questions and to British conceptions of Socialism. It has made the British mind as a whole "administrative." As compared with the American mind, for example, the British is State-conscious, the American State-blind. The American is no doubt intensely patriotic, but the nation and the State to which his patriotism points is something overhead and comprehensive like the sky, like a flag hoisted; something, indeed, that not only does not but must not interfere with his ordinary business occupations. To have public spirit, to be aware of the State as a whole and to have an administrative feeling towards it, is necessarily to be accessible to constructive ideas--that is to say, to Socialistic ideas. In the history of thought in Victorian Great Britain, one sees a constant conflict of this administrative disposition with the individualistic commercialism of the aggressively trading and manufacturing class, the class that in America reigns unchallenged to this day. In the latter country Individualism reigns unchallenged, it is assumed; in the former it has fought an uphill fight against the traditions of Church and State and has never absolutely prevailed. The political economists and Herbert Spencer were its prophets, and they never at any time held the public mind in any invincible grip. Since the eighties that grip has weakened more and more. Socialistic thought and legislation, therefore, was going on in Great Britain through all the Victorian period. Nevertheless, it was the Fabian Society that, in the eighties and through the intellectual impetus of at most four or five

personalities, really brought this obstinately administrative spirit in British affairs into relation with Socialism as such.

The dominant intelligence of this group was Mr. Sidney Webb, and as I think of him thus coming after Marx to develop the third phase of Socialism, I am struck by the contrast with the big-bearded Socialist leaders of the earlier school and this small, active, unpretending figure with the finely-shaped head, the little imperial under the lip, the glasses, the slightly lisping, insinuating voice. He emerged as a Colonial Office clerk of conspicuous energy and capacity, and he was already the leader and "idea factory" of the Fabian Society when he married Miss Beatrice Potter, the daughter of a Conservative Member of Parliament, a girl friend of Herbert Spencer, and already a brilliant student of sociological questions. Both he and she are devotees to social service, living laborious, ordered, austere, incessant lives, making the employment of secretaries their one extravagance, and alternations between research and affairs their change of occupation. A new type of personality altogether they were in the Socialist movement, which had hitherto been richer in eloquence than discipline. And during the past twenty years of the work of the Fabian Society through their influence, one dominant question has prevailed. Assuming the truth of the two main generalizations of Socialism, taking that statement of intention for granted, how is the thing to be done? They put aside the glib assurances of the revolutionary Socialists that everything would be all right when the People came to their own; and so earned for themselves the undying resentment of all those who

believe the world is to be effectually mended by a liberal use of chest notes and red flags. They insisted that the administrative and economic methods of the future must be a secular development of existing institutions, and inaugurated a process of study--which has long passed beyond the range of the Fabian Society, broadening out with the organized work of the New University of London, with its special School of Economics and Political Science and of a growing volume of university study in England and America--to the end that this "how?" should be answered....

The broad lines of the process of transition from the present state of affairs to the Socialist state of the future as they are developed by administrative Socialism lie along the following lines.

1. The peaceful and systematic taking over from private enterprise, by purchase or otherwise, whether by the national or by the municipal authorities as may be most convenient, of the great common services of land control, mining, transit, food supply, the drink trade, lighting, force supply and the like.
2. Systematic expropriation of private owners by death-duties and increased taxation.
3. The building up of a great scientifically organized administrative machinery to carry on these enlarging public functions.

4. A steady increase and expansion of public education, research, museums, libraries and all such public services. The systematic promotion of measures for raising the school-leaving age, for the public feeding of school children, for the provision of public baths, parks, playgrounds and the like.

5. The systematic creation of a great service of public health to take over the disorganized confusion of hospitals and other charities, sanitary authorities, officers of health and private enterprise medical men.

6. The recognition of the claim of every citizen to welfare by measures for the support of mothers and children and by the establishment of old-age pensions.

7. The systematic raising of the minimum standard of life by factory and other labour legislation, and particularly by the establishment of a legal minimum wage....

These are the broad forms of the Fabian Socialist's answer to the question of how, with which the revolutionary Socialists were confronted. The diligent student of Socialism will find all these proposals worked out to a very practicable-looking pitch indeed in that Bible of Administrative Socialism, the collected tracts of the Fabian Society,[21] and to that volume I must refer him. The theory of the minimum standard and the minimum wage is explained, moreover, with

the utmost lucidity in that Socialist classic, *Industrial Democracy*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb. It is a theory that must needs be mastered by every intelligent Socialist, but it is well to bear in mind that the method of the minimum wage is no integral part of the general Socialist proposition, and that it still lies open to discussion and modification.

[21] *Fabian Tracts*. (Fabian Society, 5s.)

§ 2.

Every movement has the defects of its virtues, and it is not, perhaps, very remarkable that the Fabian Society of the eighties and nineties, having introduced the conception of the historical continuity of institutions into the Propaganda of Socialism, did certainly for a time greatly over-accentuate that conception and draw away attention from aspects that may be ultimately more essential.

Beginning with the proposition that the institutions and formulæ of the future must necessarily be developed from those of the present, that one cannot start *de novo* even after a revolution; one may easily end in an attitude of excessive conservatism towards existing machinery. In spite of the presence of such fine and original intelligences as Mr. (now Sir) Sydney Olivier and Mr. Graham Wallas in the Fabian counsels, there can be no denial that for the first twenty

years of its career, Mr. Webb was the prevailing Fabian. Now his is a mind legal as well as creative, and at times his legal side quite overcomes his constructive element; he is extraordinarily fertile in expedients and skilful in adaptation, and with a real horror of open destruction. This statement by no means exhausts him, but it does to a large extent convey the qualities that were uppermost in the earlier years, at any rate, of his influence. His insistence upon continuity pervaded the Society, was re-echoed and intensified by others, and developed into something like a mania for achieving Socialism without the overt change of any existing ruling body. His impetus carried this reaction against the crude democratic idea to its extremest opposite. Then arose Webbits to caricature Webb. From saying that the unorganized people cannot achieve Socialism, they passed to the implication that organization alone, without popular support, might achieve Socialism. Socialism was to arrive as it were insidiously.

To some minds this new proposal had the charm of a school-boy's first dark-lantern. Socialism ceased to be an open revolution, and became a plot. Functions were to be shifted, quietly, unostentatiously, from the representative to the official he appointed; a bureaucracy was to slip into power through the mechanical difficulties of an administration by debating representatives; and since these officials would by the nature of their positions constitute a scientific bureaucracy, and since Socialism is essentially scientific government as distinguished from haphazard government, they would necessarily run the country on the lines of a pretty distinctly undemocratic

Socialism.

The process went even further than secretiveness in its reaction from the large rhetorical forms of revolutionary Socialism. There arose even a repudiation of "principles" of action, and a type of worker which proclaimed itself "Opportunist-Socialist." It was another instance of Socialism losing sight of itself, it was a process quite parallel at the other extreme with the self-contradiction of the Anarchist-Socialist. Socialism as distinguished from mere Liberalism, for example, is an organized plan for social reconstruction, while Liberalism relies upon certain vague "principles"; Socialism declares that good intentions and doing what comes first to hand will not suffice. Now Opportunism is essentially benevolent adventure and the doing of first-hand things.

This conception of indifference to the forms of government, of accepting whatever governing bodies existed and using them to create officials and "get something done," was at once immediately fruitful in many directions, and presently productive of many very grave difficulties in the path of advancing Socialism. Webb himself devoted immense industry and capacity to the London County Council--it is impossible to measure the share he has had in securing such great public utilities as water supply, traction and electric supply, for example, from complete exploitation by private profit seekers, but certainly it is a huge one--and throughout England and presently in America, there went on a collateral activity of Fabian Socialists.

They worked like a ferment in municipal politics, encouraging and developing local pride and local enterprise in public works. In the case of large public bodies, working in suitable areas and commanding the services of men of high quality, striking advances in Social organization were made, but in the case of smaller bodies in unsuitable districts and with no attractions for people of gifts and training, the influence of Fabianism did on the whole produce effects that have tended to discredit Socialism. Aggressive, ignorant and untrained men and women, usually neither inspired by Socialist faith nor clearly defining themselves as Socialists, persons too often of wavering purpose and doubtful honesty, got themselves elected in a state of enthusiasm to undertake public functions and challenge private enterprise under conditions that doomed them to waste and failure. This was the case in endless parish councils and urban districts; it was also the case in many London boroughs. It has to be admitted by Socialists with infinite regret that the common borough-council Socialist is too often a lamentable misrepresentative of the Socialist idea.

The creation of the London Borough Councils found English Socialism unprepared. They were bodies doomed by their nature to incapacity and waste. They represented neither natural communities nor any practicable administrative unit of area. Their creation was the result of quite silly political considerations. The slowness with which Socialists have realized that for the larger duties that they wish to have done collectively, a new scheme of administration is necessary;

that bodies created to sweep the streets and admirably adapted to that duty may be conspicuously not adapted to supply electric power or interfere with transit, is accountable for much disheartening bungling. Instead of taking a clear line from the outset, and denouncing these glorified vestries as useless, impossible and entirely unscientific organs, too many Socialists tried to claim Bumble as their friend and use him as their tool. And Bumble turned out to be a very bad friend and a very poor tool....

In all these matters the real question at issue is one between the emergency and the implement. One may illustrate by a simple comparison. Suppose there is a need to dig a hole and that there is no spade available, a Fabian with Mr. Webb's gifts becomes invaluable. He seizes upon a broken old cricket-bat, let us say, uses it with admirable wit and skill, and presto! there is the hole made and the moral taught that one need not always wait for spades before digging holes. It is a lesson that Socialism stood in need of, and which henceforth it will always bear in mind. But suppose we want to dig a dozen holes, it may be worth while to spend a little time in going to beg, borrow or buy a spade. If we have to dig holes indefinitely, day after day, it will be sheer foolishness sticking to the bat. It will be worth while then not simply to get a spade, but to get just the right sort of spade in size and form that the soil requires, to get the proper means of sharpening and repairing the spade, to insure a proper supply. Or to point the comparison, the reconstruction of our legislative and local government machinery is a necessary preliminary

to Socialization in many directions. Mr. Webb has very effectually admitted that, is in fact himself leading us away from that by taking up the study of local government as his principal occupation, but the typical "Webbite" of the Fabian Society, who is very much to Webb what the Marxist is to Marx, entranced by his leader's skill, still clings to a caricature distortion of this earlier Fabian ideal. He dreams of the most foxy and wonderful digging by means of box-lids, table-spoons, dish-covers--anything but spades designed and made for the job in hand--just as he dreams of an extensive expropriation of landlords by a legislature that includes the present unreformed House of Lords....

§ 3.

It was only at the very end of the nineteenth century that the Fabian Socialist movement was at all quickened to the need of political reconstruction as extensive as the economic changes it advocated, and it is still far from a complete apprehension of the importance of the political problem. To begin with, Mr. and Mrs. Webb, having completed their work on Labour Regulation, took up the study of local government and commenced that colossal task that still engages them, their book upon English Local Government, of which there has as yet appeared (1907) only one volume out of seven. (Immense as this service is, it is only one part of conjoint activities that will ultimately give constructive social conceptions an enormous armoury of scientifically

arranged fact.)

As the outcome of certain private experiences, the moral of which was pointed by discussion with Mr. and Mrs. Webb, the present writer in 1902 put before the Fabian Society a paper on Administrative Areas,[22] in which he showed clearly that the character and efficiency and possibilities of a governing body depend almost entirely upon the suitability to its particular function of the size and quality of the constituency it represents and the area it administers. This may be stated with something approaching scientific confidence. A local governing body for too small an area or elected upon an unsound franchise cannot be efficient. But obviously before you can transfer property from private to collective control you must have something in the way of a governing institution which has a reasonably good chance of developing into an efficient controlling body. The leading conception of this Administrative Area paper appeared subsequently running through a series of tracts, The New Heptarchy Series, in which one finds it applied first to this group of administrative problems and then to that.[23] These tracts are remarkable if only because they present the first systematic recognition on the part of any organized Socialist body of the fact that a scientific reconstruction of the methods of government constitutes not simply an incidental but a necessary part of the complete Socialist scheme, the first recognition of the widening scope of the Socialist design that makes it again a deliberately constructive project.[24]

[22] See Appendix to Mankind in the Making. (Chapman and Hall, 1905.)

[23] 1. Municipalization by Provinces. 2. On the Reform of Municipal Service. 3. Public Control of Electric Power and Transit. 4. The Revival of Agriculture: a National Policy for Great Britain. 5. The Abolition of Poor Law Guardians. Others to follow. (Fabian Society, 1905-6.)

[24] This generalization is a sweeping one, and would need, were one attempting to give more than a very broad impression of the sequence of Socialist ideas, considerable modification. Such earlier tracts as The New Reform Bill, Facts for Londoners, Facts for Bristol, dealt mainly with the question of machinery.

It is only an initial recognition, a mere first raid into a great and largely unexplored province of study. This province is in the broadest terms, social psychology. A huge amount of thought, discussion, experiment, is to be done in this field--needs imperatively to be done before the process of the socialization of economic life can go very far beyond its present attainments. Except for these first admissions, Socialism has concerned itself only with the material reorganization of Society and its social consequences, with economic changes and the reaction of these changes on administrative work; it has either

accepted existing intellectual conditions and political institutions as beyond its control or assumed that they will obediently modify as economic and administrative necessity dictates. Declare the Social revolution, we were told in a note of cheery optimism by the Marxist apostles, and political institutions will come like flowers in May! Achieve your expropriation, said the early Fabians, get your network of skilled experts spread over the country, and your political forms, your public opinion, your collective soul will not trouble you.

The student of history knows better. These confident claims ignore the psychological factors in government and human association; they disregard a jungle of difficulties that lie directly in our way. Socialists have to face the facts; firstly, that the political and intellectual institutions of the present time belong to the present condition of things, and that the intellectual methods, machinery and political institutions of the better future must almost inevitably be of a very different type; secondly, that such institutions will not come about of themselves--which indeed is the old superstition of *laissez faire* in a new form--but must be thought out, planned and organized just as completely as economic socialization has had to be planned and organized; and thirdly, that so far Socialism has evolved scarcely any generalizations even, that may be made the basis of new intellectual and governmental--as distinguished from administrative--methods. It has preached collective ownership and collective control, and it has only begun to recognize that this implies the necessity of a collective will and new means and methods altogether for the collective mind.

The administrative Socialism which Mr. Webb and the Fabian Society developed upon a modification of the broad generalizations of the Marx phase, is as it were no more than the first courses above those foundations of Socialism. It supplies us with a conception of methods of transition and with a vision of a great and disciplined organization of officials, a scientific bureaucracy appointed by representative bodies of diminishing activity and importance, and coming to be at last the real working control of the Socialist State. But it says nothing of what is above the officials, what drives the officials. It is a palace without living rooms, with nothing but offices; a machine, as yet unprovided with a motor. No doubt we must have that organization of officials if we mean to bring about a Socialist State, but the mind recoils with something like terror from the conception of a State run and ruled by officials, terminating in officials, with an official as its highest expression. One has a vision of a community with blue-books instead of a literature, and inspectors instead of a conscience. The mystical democracy of the Marxist, though manifestly impossible, had in it something attractive, something humanly and desperately pugnacious and generous, something indeed heroic; the bureaucracy of the Webbite, though far more attainable, is infinitely less inspiring. But that may be because the inspiring elements remain to be stated rather than that these practical constructive projects are in their nature, and incurably, hard and narrow. Instead of a gorgeous flare in the darkness, we have the first cold onset of daylight heralding the sun. If the letter of

the teaching of Mr. and Mrs. Webb is bureaucracy, that is certainly not the spirit of their lives.

The earlier Socialists gave Socialism substance, rudis indigestaque moles, but noble stuff; Administrative Socialism gave it a physical structure and nerves, defined its organs and determined its functions; it remains for the Socialist of to-day to realize in this shaping body of the civilized State of the future the breath of life already unconfessedly there, to state in clear terms the reality for which our plans are made, by which alone they can be realized, that is to say, the collective mind of humanity, the soul and moral being of mankind.