

CHAPTER XV

THE ADVANCEMENT OF SOCIALISM

§ 1.

And here my brief exposition of the ideals of Modern Socialism may fitly end.

I have done my best to set out soberly and plainly this great idea of deliberately making a real civilization by the control and subordination of the instinct of property, and the systematic development of a state of consciousness out of the achievements and squalor, out of the fine forces and wasted opportunities of to-day. I may have an unconscious bias perhaps, but so far as I have been able I have been just and frank, concealing nothing of the doubts and difficulties of Socialism, nothing of the divergencies of opinion among its supporters, nothing of the generous demands it makes upon the social conscience, the Good Will in man. Its supporters are divergent upon a hundred points, but upon its fundamental generalizations they are all absolutely agreed, and some day the whole world will be agreed. Their common purport is the resumption by the community of all property that is not justly and obviously personal, and the substitution of the spirit of service for the spirit of gain in all human affairs.

It must be clear to the reader who has followed my explanations continuously, that the present advancement of Socialism must lie now along three several lines.

FIRST, and most important, is the primary intellectual process, the elaboration, criticism, discussion, enrichment and enlargement of the project of Socialism. This includes all sorts of sociological and economic research, the critical literature of Socialism, and every possible way--the drama, poetry, painting, music--of expressing and refining its spirit, its attitudes and conceptions. It includes, too, all sorts of experiments in living and association. In its widest sense it includes all science, literature and invention.

SECONDLY, comes the propaganda; the publication, distribution, repetition, discussion and explanation of this growing body of ideas, until this conception of a real civilized State as being in the making, becomes the common intellectual property of all intelligent people in the world; until the laws and social injustices that now seem, to the ordinary man, as much parts of life as the east wind and influenza, will seem irrational, unnatural and absurd. This educational task is at the present time the main work that the mass of Socialists have before them. Most other possibilities wait upon that enlargement of the general circle of ideas. It is a work that

every one can help forward in some measure, by talk and discussion, by the distribution of literature, by writing and speaking in public, by subscribing to propagandist organizations.

And THIRDLY, there is the actual changing of practical things in the direction of the coming Socialized State, the actual socialization, bit by bit and more and more completely, of the land, of the means of production, of education and child welfare, of insurance and the food supply, the realization, in fact, of that great design which the intellectual process of Socialism is continually making more beautiful, attractive and worthy. Now this third group of activities is necessarily various and divergent, and at every point the conscious and confessed Socialist will find himself co-operating with partial or unintentional Socialists, with statesmen and officials, with opportunist philanthropists, with trade unionists, with religious bodies and religious teachers, with educationists, with scientific and medical specialists, with every sort of public-spirited person. He should never lose an opportunity of explaining to such people how necessarily they are Socialists, but he should never hesitate to work with them because they refuse the label. For in the house of Socialism as in the house of God, there are many mansions.

These are the three main channels for Socialist effort, thought,

propaganda and practical social and political effort, and between them they afford opportunity for almost every type of intelligent human being. One may bring leisure, labour, gifts, money, reputation, influence to the service of Socialism; there is ample use for them all. There is work to be done for this idea, from taking tickets at a doorway and lending a drawing-room for a meeting, to facing death, impoverishment and sorrow for its sake.

§ 2.

Socialism is a moral and intellectual process, let me in conclusion reiterate that. Only secondarily and incidentally does it sway the world of politics. It is not a political movement; it may engender political movements, but it can never become a political movement; any political body, any organization whatever, that professes to stand for Socialism, makes an altogether too presumptuous claim. The whole is greater than the part, the will than the instrument. There can be no official nor pontifical Socialism; the theory lives and grows. It springs out of the common sanity of mankind. Constructive Socialism shapes into a great system of developments to be forwarded, points to a great number of systems of activity amidst which its adherents may choose their field for work. Parties and societies may come or go, parties and organizations and names may be used and abandoned; constructive Socialism lives and remains.

There is a constantly recurring necessity to insist on the difference between two things, the larger and the lesser, the greater being the Socialist movement, the lesser the various organizations that come and go. There is this necessity because there is a sort of natural antagonism between the thinker and writer who stand by the scheme and seek to develop and expound it, and the politician who attempts to realize it. They are allies, but allies who often pull against each other, whom a little heat and thoughtlessness may precipitate into a wasteful conflict. The former is, perhaps, too apt to resent the expenditure of force in those conflicts of cliques and personal ambition that inevitably arise among men comparatively untrained for politics, those squabbles and intrigues, reservations and insincerities that precede the birth of a tradition of discipline; the latter is equally prone to think literature too broad-minded for daily life, and to associate all those aspects of the Socialist project which do not immediately win votes, with fads, kid gloves, "gentlemanliness," rose-water and such-like contemptible things. These squabbles of the engineer and the navigating officer must not be allowed to confuse the mind of the student of Socialism. They are quarrels of the mess-room, quarrels on board the ship and within limits, they have nothing to do with the general direction of Socialism. Like all indisciplines they hinder but they do not contradict the movement. Socialism, the politicians declare, can only be realized through politics. Socialism, I would answer, can never be narrowed down to politics. Your parties and groups may serve Socialism, but they can never be Socialism. Scientific progress,

medical organization, the advancement of educational method, artistic production and literature are all aspects of Socialism, they are all interests and developments that lie apart from anything one may call--except by sheer violence to language--politics.

And since Socialism is an intellectual as well as a moral thing, it will never tolerate in its adherents the abnegation of individual thought and intention. It demands devotion to an idea, not devotion to a leader. No addicted follower of so-and-so or of so-and-so can be a good Socialist any more than he can be a good scientific investigator. So far Socialism has produced no great leaders at all. Lassalle alone of all its prominent names was of that romantic type of personality which men follow with enthusiasm. The others, Owen, Saint Simon, and Fourier, Proudhon, Marx, and Engels, Bebel, Webb, J. S. Mill, Jaurès, contributed to a process they never seized hold upon, never made their own, they gave enrichment and enlargement and the movement passed on; passes on gathering as it goes. Kingsley, Morris, Ruskin--none are too great to serve this idea, and none so great they may control it or stand alone for it. So it will continue. Socialism under a great leader, or as a powerfully organized party would be the end of Socialism. No doubt it might also be its partial triumph; but the reality of the movement would need to take to itself another name; to call itself "constructive civilization" or some such synonym, in order to continue its undying work. Socialism no doubt will inspire great leaders in the future, and supply great parties with ideas; in itself it will still be greater than all such things.

§ 3.

But here, perhaps, before the finish, since the business of this book is explanation, it may be well to define a little the relation of Socialism to the political party that is most closely identified with it in the popular mind. This is the Labour Party. There can be no doubt of the practical association of aim and interest of the various Labour parties throughout modern civilized communities with the Socialist movement. The Social democrats of Germany are the Labour Party of that country, and wherever the old conception of Socialism prevails, those "class war" ideas of the Marxist that have been superseded in English Socialism for nearly a quarter of a century, there essentially the Socialist movement will take the form of a revolutionary attack upon the owning and governing sections of the community. But in Great Britain and America the Labour movement has never as a whole been revolutionary or insurrectionary in spirit, and in these countries Socialism has been affected from its very beginnings by constructive ideas. It has never starkly antagonized Labour on the one hand, and the other necessary elements in a civilized State on the other; it has never--I speak of the movement as a whole and not of individual utterances--contemplated a community made up wholly of "Labour" and emotionally democratic, such as the Marxist teaching suggests. The present labouring classes stand to gain enormously in education, dignity, leisure, efficiency and opportunity

by the development of a Socialist State, and just in so far as they become intelligent will they become Socialist; but we all, all of us of Good Will, we and our children, of nearly every section of the community stand also to gain and have also our interest in this development. Great as the Labour movement is, the Socialist movement remains something greater. The one is the movement of a class, the other a movement of the best elements in every class.

None the less it remains true that under existing political conditions it is to the Labour Party that the Socialist must look for the mass and emotion and driving force of political Socialism. Among the wage workers of the modern civilized community Socialists are to be counted now by the hundred thousand, and in those classes alone does an intelligent self-interest march clearly and continuously in the direction of constructive civilization. In the other classes the Socialists are dispersed and miscellaneous in training and spirit, hampered by personal and social associations, presenting an enormous variety of aspects and incapable, it would seem, of co-operation except in relation to the main Socialist body, the Labour mass. Through that, and in relation and service to that, they must, it would seem, spend their political activities (I am writing now only of political activities) if they are not to be spent very largely to waste. The two other traditional parties in British politics are no doubt undergoing remarkable changes and internal disruptions, and the constructive spirit of the time is at work within them; but it does not seem that either is likely to develop anything nearly so

definitely a Socialist programme as the Labour Party. The old Conservative Party, in spite of its fine aristocratic traditions, tends more and more to become the party of the adventurous Plutocracy, of the aggressive nouveau riche, inclines more and more towards the inviting financial possibilities of modern "Imperialism" and "Tariff Reform." The old Liberal Party strains between these two antagonists and its own warring and conflicting traditions of Whiggery and Radicalism. There can be no denying the great quantity of "Good Will" and constructive intention that finds a place in its very miscellaneous ranks, but the strong strain of obstinate and irreconcilable individualism is equally indisputable.

But the official Liberal attitude is one thing, and a very unsubstantial and transitory thing, and the great mass of Good Will and broad thinking in the ranks of Liberalism and the middle class quite another. Socialists are to be found not only in every class, but in every party. There can be no "Socialist" party as such. That is the misleading suggestion of irresponsible and destructive adventurers. It is impossible to estimate what forces of political synthesis may be at work at the present time, or what ruptures and coalitions may not occur in the course of a few years. These things belong to the drama of politics. They do not affect the fact that the chief Interest in the community on the side of Socialism is Labour; through intelligent Labour it is that Socialism becomes a political force and possibility, and it is to the Labour Party that the Socialist who wishes to engage in active political work may best give his means and time and energy

and ability.

I write "political work," and once more I would repeat that it is to the field of electioneering and parliamentary politics under present conditions that this section refers. The ultimate purpose of Socialism can rely upon no class because it aims to reconstitute all classes. In a Socialist State there will be no class doomed to mere "labour," no class privileged to rule and decide. For every child there will be fair opportunity and education and scope to the limit of its possibilities. To the best there will be given difficulty and responsibility, honour and particular rewards, but to all security and reasonable work and a tolerable life. The interests and class traditions upon which our party distinctions of to-day rely must necessarily undergo progressive modification with every step we take towards the realization of the Socialist ideal.

§ 4.

So this general account of Socialism concludes. I have tried to put it as what it is, as the imperfect and still growing development of the social idea, of the collective Good Will in man. I have tried to indicate its relation to politics, to religion, to art and literature, to the widest problems of life. Its broad generalizations are simple and I believe acceptable to all clear-thinking minds. And in a way they do greatly simplify life. Once they have been understood they

render impossible a thousand confusions and errors of thought and practice. They are in the completest sense of the word, illumination.

But Socialism is no panacea, no magic "Open Sesame" to the millennium. Socialism lights up certain once hopeless evils in human affairs and shows the path by which escape is possible, but it leaves that path rugged and difficult. Socialism is hope, but it is not assurance. Throughout this book I have tried to keep that before the reader.

Directly one accepts those great generalizations one passes on to a jungle of incurably intricate problems, through which man has to make his way or fail, the riddles and inconsistencies of human character, the puzzles of collective action, the power and decay of traditions, the perpetually recurring tasks and problems of education. To have become a Socialist is to have learnt something, to have made an intellectual and a moral step, to have discovered a general purpose in life and a new meaning in duty and brotherhood. But to have become a Socialist is not, as many suppose, to have become generally wise. Rather in realizing the nature of the task that could be done, one realizes also one's insufficiencies, one's want of knowledge, one's need of force and training. Here and in this manner, says Socialism, a palace and safety and great happiness may be made for mankind. But it seems to me the Socialist as he turns his hand and way of living towards that common end knows little of the nature of his task if he does so with any but a lively sense of his individual weakness and the need of charity for all that he achieves.

In that spirit, and with no presumption of finality, this little book of explanations is given to the world.

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