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‘Other Favorable Aspects of Socialism. Socialism and Nationalism. XIII.’

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We have thus far treated of socialism in the main from a general standpoint, but we may also look at it from the standpoint of different industrial classes. As has been already remarked, it is too often viewed exclusively from this latter standpoint, and has thus been presented as the theory of the industrial interests of a class. It would be a mistake, however, to forget that the wage-earning class comprises the masses of the people, and is so large that it can scarcely be called a class at all. What truly benefits wage-earners must advance the interests of society as a whole. Moreover, as the wage-earners are those whose grievances under the present system are most pronounced, it would be a mistake to neglect entirely to call attention to socialism as viewed from the standpoint of employés.

First, socialism claims that earnings will be greatly increased because laborers will then enjoy the full products of their labor, by which is meant all the product with no deductions for interest, profits and rent, which must cease to exist as separate and distinct factors in the distribution of products. Any fair treatment of rent, interest and profits will show that they are relatively a considerable item in national income, and the distribution of these among workers would make a very material addition to their earnings. The acceptance of this, however, does not involve the doctrine of surplus value advanced by Karl Marx, according to which employers under the present system rob their employés of all the fruits of their toil over and above a quantity necessary for subsistence, called accordingly subsistence wages. Nor is it necessary even for the socialists to follow the example of the extremists, and to depreciate the services of the *entrepreneur*, or captains of industry, as they are called. It is a plain fact that common ownership and management of the instruments of production must eliminate landowners and capitalists as a separate class. We have, in addition, to remember what has already been said about the increased production of wealth under socialism.

What is important is the emancipation of the masses from the evils of the wage system. The wage system implies the purchase of labor, but labor is not something which can be detached from a human being. Labor service involves a living personality, and he who purchases labor must exercise at least a limited control over the person of the laborer. There is always danger that the purchase of labor will include the purchase of the laborer. It is one of the essential evils of the wages system that it too often involves degrading conditions for the laborer whose labor is purchased. The employer very often controls the means of subsistence of the employé, and when this is the case it can mean nothing less than the control of the employé himself, taking men as we find them. Socialism promises to transform “wage slaves into shareholders and public functionaries,” because the laborers under socialism are supposed to participate in making the arrangements to which they then voluntarily submit. Socialism means industrial democracy, or self-rule in the sphere of industry, as political democracy means self-rule, self-government, in the sphere of politics. The State is thought to be a better employer than a private individual, and to allow greater freedom. Even now, where there is a good civil service, workingmen often prefer

employment in public establishments, on account of the more considerate treatment and the larger degree of freedom allowed.

Arrangements to render labor more agreeable have already been mentioned. It is anticipated that under socialism some of the genius now expended in rendering hotel parlors luxurious will be directed to the improvement of kitchens, and that in steamers crossing the ocean there will be a great improvement in the living and work rooms of sailors, stokers and other workingmen, as there has been in recent years in the apartments designed for passengers. Fourier and other early socialists held that all labor could be rendered positive pleasure. While this is an exaggeration, there can be no doubt that it can be rendered more pleasurable than now.

We must accustom ourselves, however, to look at this question of socialism more from the standpoint of the employer and the general consumer. What does socialism offer the employee? We can say that it claims to furnish him with a remedy for his relief from the most intolerable evils of the present, such as animosity and suspicion on the part of the employés, perpetual bickering, poor workmanship, and a too general endeavor to render the smallest service and secure the largest pay. What a comfort it would be to get rid of the trials and annoyances connected with the modern servant! How extremely difficult it is to get good work done! We try and try, and keep on trying to find a workman thoroughly competent and honest, until in sheer despair we declare that there are none such! Is this altogether a delightful condition of things for the employer? I do not think so. It is not pleasant, either, to be brought into contact with rude and coarse subordinates. Socialism, then, may be urged, not because workingmen are angels suffering under tasks imposed by masters who are devils, but it may be urged precisely because workingmen are so frequently ignorant, low in tastes, immoral, and inferior to other classes.

John Stuart Mill has put all this very well in the following words:

“The total absence of justness or fairness in the relations between the two is as marked on the side of the employed as on that of the employers. We look in vain among the working classes in general for the just pride which will choose to give good work for good wages; for the most part their sole endeavor is to receive as much and return as little in the way of service as possible. It will sooner or later become insupportable for the employing classes to live in close and hourly contact with persons whose interests and feelings are in hostility to them.”

What does socialism offer the professional classes? Under socialism there must be room for the services of those who are peculiarly adapted for intellectual callings. At the present time, as we all know, the ranks of the professional classes are overcrowded, because people who do not naturally belong to them at all press up into them on account of the unpleasant conditions connected with the struggle below. As the concentration of business increases and the number of desirable places in the business world becomes relatively smaller and more difficult to secure, we may expect this pressure to increase. The result is the poor character of much professional work, and a deterioration in the standards of the professional classes. If the other pursuits of life were rendered more attractive, it can hardly be expected that there would be the same eagerness on the part of unfit persons to enter the professional classes, and this would be more agreeable for those who naturally belong in them, and the result would be beneficial to society as a whole.

We have now arrived at a point where it may be well to sum up the socialist ideal; and perhaps it cannot be better done than by quoting some words of Mr. Kirkup, who separates it into five component parts. The socialist ideal, according to him, means:

- “1. A society based on useful work or service. It must be a commonwealth of men ready to be useful.
- “2. A society based on associated or co-operative industry, instead of the old forms of economic subjection, slavery, serfdom and wage labor.
- “3. That the economical development of the industrial revolution be made subservient to human good, instead of being controlled by private self-interest.
- “4. A more equitable economic system, serving as a basis for a freer, better and more beautiful life than the present.
- “5. The unity and harmony of interests within the human society, beginning with the most elementary social group, the village community or the local body of industrialists, and eventually extending to the whole human race.

“Such a system means the democratic control of government, central and local, and the co-operative control of industry by the free, intelligent and industrious people. In short, socialism means democracy in politics; unselfishness, altruism or Christian ethics; in economics, the principle of co-operation or association.”

Finally, socialism has rendered a real service of no mean importance in the discussion which it has provoked concerning the true sphere of the State, leading us to separate more sharply in theory public and private functions. The result of this discussion has, in my opinion, made it clear that the industrial functions of government ought to be widely extended in order to produce harmony in the workings of the social organism. It has shown us that there are such things as natural monopolies, and that these ought to be owned and managed by government. It has also made it plain that there are certain prominent interests of the nation, like forests, which can be adequately guarded only by the State. Of all this more hereafter.

A few words may be added concerning the relation between socialism and nationalism. The scheme advocated by Mr. Bellamy and his friends is called nationalism, and yet it is nothing but old-fashioned socialism. There seem to me to be scarcely any novel features in the program of the nationalists. Mr. Bellamy has, however, made an admirable presentation of at least certain attractive features of socialism, and has developed well some ethical ideas too often overlooked. His ingenious plan for preserving freedom in the choice of occupation deserves mention. It is to vary the length of the working day in such a manner that the attractions of different pursuits shall be equal. He is even willing to shorten the working day of any peculiarly disagreeable and dangerous occupation to an hour a day, with long vacations, if it should be necessary in order to secure a sufficient number of volunteers for that occupation. Some things which might be said in criticism of his proposal will not now be mentioned.

The organization of society on a military basis for industrial pursuits is an idea perhaps better worked out by Mr. Bellamy than by any predecessor, and it is a strong feature of his book “Looking Backward.” The military idea is one which, after all, has a powerful hold on humanity, and the benefits of service in an army are very considerable for the nation, both physically, industrially and intellectually. A large proportion of the best brains of the world have been for centuries expended in the development of military organization in all its details, and private industry has never yet succeeded in the formation of any organization which can for one moment be compared with the

German army. Manifestly if military organization were used for industrial purposes rather than war, some at least of the peculiar evils and hardships which attend it would disappear. It is, then, well to ask the question, Can we not use the achievements of military genius for the cultivation of the arts of peace and the promotion of human well-being, and thus utilize the military idea which appeals so powerfully to men, and, for that matter, to women?

General Walker, in his annual address before the recent American Economic Association, spoke of nationalism as pseudo-socialism, and said that the nationalists were not converted political economists, but men who never had been political economists. He asserted that they were just beginning their studies in economics and would, in the course of time, become sound political economists. It hardly seems to me correct to speak of nationalism as pseudo-socialism, but it is undoubtedly true that the nationalists of this country are generally extremely poor political economists, and in this respect cannot be compared with the older socialists. The study of political economy might not convert them from nationalism, but it would make their writings more interesting and profitable, and they would no longer make such a light and easy thing of the transformation of the present order into socialism. If one looks at the list of books on economics recommended in *The Nationalist*, it will be found, I think, sufficient proof of what I have said. It is indeed a motley collection, and looks as if some one might have gone into an old junk-shop, found a shelf-ful of books labeled "Political Economy," and copied their titles. If this is not enough proof, a perusal of the writings of *The Nationalist*, and a comparison of them with a book like the "Fabian Essays," will certainly be sufficient to convince one. *The New Nation*, Mr. Bellamy's weekly, which has succeeded the now defunct *Nationalist* is a decided improvement, it must be acknowledged, and shows a better grasp of economics.

I ought frankly to state that there are those who have given attention to social science, and who attach greater value than I have done to Mr. Bellamy's contribution to the literature of socialism. Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace, the distinguished natural scientist, whose recent work on Darwinism has attracted so much attention, uses these words in a letter which he wrote to me some time since and allows me to quote:

"From boyhood, when I was an ardent admirer of Robert

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Owen, I have been interested in socialism, but reluctantly came to the conclusion that it was impracticable, and also to some extent repugnant to my ideas of individual liberty and home privacy; but Mr. Bellamy has completely altered my views on this matter. He seems to me to have shown that real, not merely delusive liberty, together with full scope for individualism and complete home privacy, is compatible with the most thorough industrial socialism—and henceforth I am heart and soul with him."

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The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2015.