

What Socialism Is.



What "Unsocialism" Is.

We English have a habit of speaking of England as if it belonged to us. We are wrong: England is now private property; and if a laboring man out of employment makes so free with "his country" as to lie down for a night's sleep on it without paying its owners for the accommodation, he is imprisoned as a rogue and a vagabond. The price we must pay rises as the population grows; for the more people there are, the higher they will bid against one another in hiring land in the market for houses, tenements, and places of business. In London, for instance, the price paid annually to the ground landlords goes up by over £300,000 every year, without counting the additional charge for new buildings or repairs and improvements to old ones. After payments of one sort or another to the owners of the whole country have been deducted from the produce of the workers' labor, the balance left for wages is so small, that if every working-class family got an equal share, each share would only come to £75 a year, which (though it would seem a fortune to some poor people) is not enough for a comfortable living, much less for saving. Nevertheless the proprietary classes, without working at all for it, divide among them enough to give over two hundred thousand rich families more than £1,500 a year, and still leave more than £300 a year per family for over a million and a quarter families of moderately well-off people in addition to what they make by their professions and businesses.

The Extreme Cases.

The above figures, bad as they are, only represent averages, and give no idea of the extreme cases of wealth and poverty. Some of our great landowners get upwards of £4,000 a week without ever doing a stroke of work for it; whilst the laborers on their estates, working early and late from the time they are lads until they go into the union as aged and worn-out paupers, get from ten to thirteen shillings a week. As women get lower wages than men when they work, but receive just as large incomes from property when they are rich and idle, a comparison between the share of our yearly produce that goes to a poor working woman at the East end of London, working sixteen hours a day for a shilling, and the rich, idle lady at the West end, is still more scandalous.

What Comes of Inequality.

If you are a person of common sense and natural feeling, you must have often thought over these terrible inequalities and their cruel injustice. If you are rich, you perhaps think that inequality

is a good thing—that it fosters a spirit of emulation, and prevents things from stagnating at a dead level. But if you are poor, you must know well that when inequality is so outrageous as the figures above shew, it fosters nothing but despair, recklessness and drunkenness among the very poor; arrogance and wastefulness among the very rich; meanness, envy and snobbery among the middle classes. Poverty means disease and crime, ugliness and brutality, drink and violence, stunted bodies and unenlightened minds. Riches heaped up in idle hands mean flunkeyism and folly, insolence and servility, bad example, false standards of worth, and the destruction of all incentive to useful work in those who are best able to educate themselves for it. Poverty and riches together mean the perversion of our capital and industry to the production of frippery and luxury whilst the nation is rotting for want of good food, thorough instruction, and wholesome clothes and dwellings for the masses. What we want in order to make true progress is more bakers, more schoolmasters, more wool-weavers and tailors, and more builders: what we get instead is more footmen, more gamekeepers, more jockeys, and more prostitutes. That is what our newspapers call "sound political economy." What do you think of it? Do you intend to do anything to get it remedied?

Savings.

The produce of industry has been increased enormously by machinery, railways, and by the factory system. But the first cost of machinery, railways and factories has to be paid for out of savings, and not out of the money that people are living on. Now the only people who can spare money to save are those who have more than enough to live on: that is to say, the rich. Consequently the machinery is introduced and the factories built by the savings of the rich; and as they pay for it, they expect to get all the advantage that comes by using it; so that here again the workers are left as badly off as ever. The worst of it is that when the rich find out how easy it is for them to get still richer by saving, they think it is as easy for everybody as for themselves; and when the worker complains, they say "Why don't you save as we do?" or "How can you expect to be well off if you are not thrifty?" They forget that though you can save plenty out of £18 a week without stinting your family, you cannot save anything out of eighteen shillings without starving them.

The Three Monopolies.

Moreover, the propertied classes, by giving their younger sons an expensive education, are able to put them into the learned professions, the Government offices, and the higher managerial posts in business, over the heads of the sons of the wage-workers, who are too poor to get anything beyond the School Board education for their children. So that out of the price paid to them for the use of the land, the propertied classes buy the machinery; and out of the profits of the machinery they buy the education which gives to their working members a monopoly of the highly paid employments; whilst the wage-workers are hopelessly cut out of it all. Here are the figures for the United Kingdom:—

*Income of Propertied Classes (10,500,000 persons)	£850,000,000
„ left for Wage-workers and their families (26,500,000 persons)	500,000,000

Total National Income £1,350,000,000

This enables the rich to get the government of the country into their hands, because only rich men can afford to go into the House of Commons, or to sit upon the County Councils and Municipal Corporations; and the whole country is governed by these bodies. The workman's vote enables him to choose between one rich man and another, but not to fill the Councils and Parliament with men of his own class.

What Socialism Is.

Socialism means equal rights and opportunities for all. The Socialists are trying to have the land and machinery "socialized," or made the property of the whole people, in order to do away with idle owners, and to keep the whole product for those whose labor produces it. The establishment of Socialism, when once the people are resolved upon it, is not so difficult as might be supposed. If a man wishes to work on his own account, the rent of his place of business, and the interest on the capital needed to start him, can be paid to the County Council of his district just as easily as to the private landlord and capitalist. Factories are already largely regulated by public inspectors, and could be conducted by the local authorities just as gas-works, water-works and tramways are now conducted by them in various towns. Railways and mines, instead of being left to private companies, could be carried on by a department under the central government, as the postal and telegraph services are carried on now. The Income Tax collector who to-day calls for a tax of a few pence in the pound on the income of the idle millionaire, can collect a tax of twenty shillings in the pound on every unearned income in the country if the Government so orders.

No Remedy without Political Change.

But the Government never will give such orders until the workers, by their votes, banish the propertied classes from the House of Commons. Remember that Parliament, with all its faults, has always governed the country in the interest of the class to which the majority of its members belonged. It governed in the interest of the country gentlemen in the old days when they were in a majority in the House of Commons; it has governed in the interest of the capitalists and employers since they won a majority by the Reform Bill of 1832; and it will govern in the interest of the people when the members are selected from the wage-earning class. Inquirers will find that Socialism can be brought about in a perfectly constitutional manner through Democratic institutions, and that none of the practical difficulties which occur to everyone in his first five minutes' consideration of the subject have escaped the attention of those who have worked at it for years. Few now believe Socialism to be impracticable except those with whom the wish is father to the thought.

* This item is made up of four hundred and ninety millions (£490,000,000) which go as Rent and Interest absolutely for nothing, and of three hundred and sixty millions (£360,000,000) incomes of professional men and profits of business management. (See Fabian Tract No. 5, "Facts for Socialists.")

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