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# American Socialism.

by Victor L. Berger

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Of late we hear a great deal of "American Socialism." This term has by certain people been used as if Socialism in America was something different from Socialism in the old countries. And especially the founding of communistic or cooperative colonies was pointed out to us as being "American Socialism." The discussion about the matter is by no means free from bitterness.

We intend to argue only with the honest Know-nothings of Socialism. Such "knownothingness" is not surprising, because Socialism has been misrepresented and maligned by press, pulpit, and politicians so long that even some so-called Socialists who did not study the subject have rather vague and misleading conceptions about it.

But the first requisite for the intelligent discussion of any theme is a clear and accurate knowledge of the subject discussed.

The definition of Socialism, as generally accepted now, is "the collective ownership of all the means of production and distribution." This definition is about the same in all countries. It has been accepted by the Socialists of Germany, as well as by those of England, Italy, Holland, Belgium, and by most all the socialist groups of France.

Socialism, therefore, means virtually the same thing in all civilized countries, and justly so. For in all civilized countries, be they monarchies or republics, the action of capitalism and competition is nearly the same, and the position of the wage-workers is exactly the same: to wit, the latter depend upon the man with means for the opportunity to work and to live. In all civilized countries, and under whatever form of government, the present system of social production by individual ownership has produced two classes: the propertyless class and the capitalist class. The middle

class is fast disappearing in the mill of competition everywhere, and the issue is now, or will be very soon, between the first two classes. These are the conditions in England, in France, in Germany, and, in no small degree, in our own country. Any attempt to obscure this issue between these two classes or to delay its settlement is futile, and all other issues will speedily be absorbed by it in all civilized countries.

The difference is only in the methods of the movement. And naturally the tactics employed by the Socialists in France differ somewhat from the tactics in Germany or Belgium — but as far as they are Social Democrats, they all agree in the necessity of the rule of the people and in the use of the ballot.

It has been said that the founding of communistic colonies is the "American" idea. That is not true. Outside of the colonies of the religious sects — the Anglo-Saxon mind of former days tending towards religion — not one of the innumerable communistic or cooperative colonies that have been founded and failed in America, even if made up of American membership, was of American origin. Not one. They were all founded upon the ideas of French or German utopian Socialists — notably Fourier, Cabet, and Weitling. Of late we had some so-called "Bellamy Colonies," but Bellamy had no original Socialist ideas. His famous *Looking Backward* simply gave the ideas of modern German scientific Socialists in a utopian form. No colony scheme ever had Bellamy's approval.

Practical efforts to realize communism are not new and they are not especially American. The dawn of history shows a communistic period for all nations. Later Sparta and the monasteries of the Middle Ages give us examples of the communistic form of life. With the beginning of the Reformation and the appearance of capitalism in the history of humanity we also see

utopian hotspurs and dreamers who invented different kinds of communistic systems and occasionally tried to put them into practice.

All these attempts necessarily failed, because their promoters disregarded the natural development of human society.

As we mentioned before, history records some communistic organizations which did thrive. But under what conditions?

Since humanity has left its primitive condition all communistic communities that ever existed have not lived by their own labor, but from the wealth of others. The Spartan commonwealth, for instance, rested upon the most horrible slavery of the Helotes. The Spartans themselves did not produce, they only consumed. The case of the monasteries of the Middle Ages was similar. The monks or the nuns led a contemplative life — they prayed, begged, or taught — but they produced little or nothing, at any rate, never enough to keep the monasteries alive. The serf peasantry took care of the production.

And right here, let us define the difference between Socialism and Communism, and draw the line of demarkation.

Communism proposes the common ownership of the means of production, or, in some cases, the means of production and consumption.

Socialism, on the contrary, asks only for the common ownership of the means of production, as made necessary by the modern development of the tool into the machine. Socialism leaves consumption, i.e., the selection and the enjoyment of the means of life to the free will and the taste of the individuals.

Socialism is the child of civilization. Socialism was impossible in former centuries. The modern development of the means of production — manufacturing in the present large scale — has made Socialism possible and necessary. Socialism requires the modern industrial development, i.e., capitalism as a forerunner, which centralizes industry and trade. Socialism would even now be impossible in Turkey, Moroccan, Cuba, China, Persia, etc., and even in Russia. But Socialism is rapidly being made possible in Japan.

It is furthermore nonsensical to talk about the "Socialism" of Christ and the early Christians. The early Christians were communists in a similar sense as the

monks of the Middle Ages, but they were not Socialists. The early Christians depended upon the contributions of the richer members of the community for a living, and upon the Lord for everything else.

Communism, as we have seen in history, implies a smack of barbarism, or of religious fanaticism.

Socialism means a higher civilization by multiplying and making use of all the means of culture of capitalist society.

Communistic colonies, except such as were based upon religious fanaticism have, so far, never succeeded; most of them only carried on a mock existence paid for by the sympathizers outside. In Brook Farm, Nauvoo, Cheltenham, etc., the colonists, so to say, simply consumed the bread furnished from outside, to which they themselves hardly earned the salt.

The case is very similar in Ruskin. Although the admission to the colony requires the possession of quite a little capital — \$500 is the price of a share, which naturally excludes almost half of the entire population of the United States, and the very half that needs the relief most — the colony is not self-sustaining. It depends largely upon the capitalist world for assistance and tries to reach it by printing a paper, by selling books, by manufacturing, etc. And although there are constant appeals to the solidarity of the sympathizers, the outlook is far from being promising.

That a general return to such communistic colonies would mean the return to the system of production of a very small scale with all its weakness, waste, and barbarism, our colony believers seem to overlook. And they even call this the "American economic movement," while in reality it is the most uneconomic affair imaginable. If the successful foundation of many thousands of such communistic colonies would be possible in this or any other country, then socialism would be impossible.

We would no doubt do the capitalists a great favor if we would relieve them from the sometimes burning care of the unemployed. The trouble is we cannot do it if we try. According to the Ruskin colony idea, it would take \$50 million to take care of the 100,000 unemployed of Chicago alone. And New York has at least as many. And how about the other large cities? And the success of the colonies would not be assured even then.

Ruskin and every other cooperative colony must

work exactly like a capitalist stock company. The only difference is that the cooperative company will always be at a disadvantage, when compared to the capitalist business enterprise, even when the former has as much capital as the latter. The cooperative undertaking, because it is cooperative, cannot press any surplus value out of its members, and therefore its capital will not grow. On the other hand, it has to spend its main strength fighting strong capitalist concerns, while it is just that fight of competition that fixes the prices of the products.

Competition has to disappear ere a general lowering of the cost of production and a general uplifting of the standard of life is possible. But one colony cannot accomplish that. And one thousand colonies could not accomplish it. In order to accomplish that we must necessarily have control over the entire population.

That it is easy to regulate successfully the entire production of any branch of industry, our trust have proven to the satisfaction of all. These trusts accomplish what thousands of cooperative colonies could never accomplish, i.e., the trusts regulate production. The trusts make it possible to have a general lowering of the price of products and a general rise of the standard of living — if the people get a hold of them. The commonwealth could regulate matters even better and more successfully than the trusts, for there are means of power at the command of the commonwealth, which the trusts will never have.

But the main condition of success in this respect is that the productive basis of such a commonwealth must be very large. One state of the union — for instance Wisconsin, Kansas, or New York — would be insufficient for a Cooperative Commonwealth. None of them could furnish the basis for carrying on production on the largest modern scale even in a single industrial branch — not to speak of all branches — because competition with private enterprises would not cease. For example, it would be impossible to carry on successfully the oil business in Wisconsin in competition with the Standard Oil Company, especially since we have no oil wells in Wisconsin.

It is even questionable whether any one European country — England, France, or Germany, for instance, although each of them is called a great power — if standing alone could furnish a basis for independent cooperative production. Every one of these coun-

tries, not producing cotton and certain minerals of great importance (for instance, Swedish iron, quicksilver, copper, etc.), and every one of these countries being unable to support its inhabitants in case of the failure of a single crop, could not be considered a self-sufficient basis for Cooperative Commonwealth.

Of all the civilized countries in the world, probably the United States alone could furnish such a basis, because the people of the United States, even if isolated, could carry on production in the highest degree independent of other nations, on account of the great size of the country and the wonderful variety of its products.

Under such conditions it is clear that all communistic colony schemes have only the effect of leading people astray from the road to our goal. They only have the effect of getting the minds of the people confused as to our aims. They hinder the progress of our idea. Colony schemers have a habit of hiding and denying the class struggle, for they by necessity live in the spirit of capitalism, and are even in danger of using the methods of capitalist swindlers. For what are we to call a "Cooperative Gold Mine," started with a capital of \$2.5 million, when the cash on hand is \$33.23, "with liabilities unknown." Especially if we consider that the present owner is willing to sell this "Cooperative Commonwealth" for \$5,000 cash and \$95,000 in bonds secured by a mortgage on said "Cooperative Commonwealth." Truly, in one sense, this is the first "painfully" American colony scheme we know of; this scheme having the "gold brick" idea about it peculiar to certain Americans. But it is not the kind of Americans we Socialists appeal to....

Our American Socialism is only a branch of International Socialism, as American capitalism is a branch of International capitalism.

American capitalism differs somewhat in methods from capitalism in Europe, for here it has full sway, not having any remnant of feudalism to combat with. If anything, capitalism here is more reckless of human life and more brutal than in most of the old countries. American Socialism has to take that into consideration and also the fact that the ballot, if used rightly, forms a far more powerful weapon in this country than in any other.

American Socialism starts out with the "threadbare truism" that our present system divides society

into two classes, the "have all" and the "have nothing" class, and that it is the great mass of the people that do all the useful work who belong to the "have nothing" class. Therefore American Socialism is class conscious. This does not mean that the Socialist must hate every capitalist individually, that some should be picked out as "scarecrows," while the economic power and political encroachment of all the others should be silently submitted to. It means that while we understand that every individual capitalist is the result of the present system as much as the wage worker, we still must fight the capitalists as a class, because the producers cannot reasonably expect anything but exploitation from the exploiters as a class.

In short, American Socialism recognizes that the development of capitalist society substitutes tyrannical monopoly by a minority for individual property of the many. But it does not revolt against recognized facts; it bows to them. It does not propose to reascend the current of centuries and return to barbarism — it does not intend to go into the backwoods and start communistic colonies — or to arrest the transformation of humanity which is going on before our very eyes. On the contrary, it bends to the laws of progress and evolution. And since it is a law of sociologic evolution that with modern civilization all the means of production pass from the form of individual property to that of capitalist property and then take the concentrated form of a trust for the benefit of the few — the contention of the American Socialist is this: In the measure that these immense capitalist properties, which dry up and destroy small and individual property, are formed, in that measure social property shall be substituted for capitalist property.

To accomplish this we want to make use of our political liberty and take possession of the public powers. And while this process is going on we also want to lighten the burdens on the shoulders of the wage workers and producers in general by constantly agitating,

enacting, and enforcing laws in their favor, so as to strengthen their power of resistance in the great struggle. (This has been done in such a wonderful degree in Germany during the past 15 years that the physical well-being of the wage workers of the industrial districts has been improving greatly. Formerly the country districts used to send most of the men fit for military service, the factory districts never being able to fill their quota. This is rapidly changing on account of the many laws for the protection of workingmen. The industrial districts not only fill their quota now, but are ahead of most rural districts.)

American Socialism means to support the true economic movement of the American wage workers, the trade union movement, this being at the present time the only weapon of the wage worker outside of the ballot. American Socialists do not propose to run away from the capitalists; they intend to stay right in the battle and compel capitalist society to take care of the unemployed and the aged and invalids of labor. They intend to raise their voice and votes against the exploitation of children, mothers, and unborn babes. These and a great many other duties, which fall upon them with the present civilization, American Socialists will try to perform before the Cooperative Commonwealth is reached. But they do not intend to compete with capitalist "promoters" in selling bonds for nebulous "gold mines." American Socialists will fight open and aboveboard everywhere and fight all capitalist parties alike. They cannot and will not assist capitalist politicians of one color in one state and of the other color in another state. In short, American Socialists will be simply Socialists, and nothing else.

And to gather and unite under its banner such American Socialists is the purpose of the Social Democratic Party of America.

Victor L. Berger.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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