

IS SOCIALISM THE SOLUTION?

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If a man were to tell you that he is a Socialist, you would gain but little from his statement. The term Socialism is a blanket that covers many sins and virtues. There are almost as many grades and degrees of this system as there are men who propose it. Extreme Socialism is that based on Materialism; it denies the spiritual order completely and values things materially. In opposition to this view is the Democratic Socialist who does not deny the right to private property but restricts ownership in a moderate degree that all members of the community may enjoy a greater degree of peace and happiness. It is significant to note that in the Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII denounces Socialism but it is evident from the document that he is directing his attack against the system which, contrary to right reason, denies the right to possess private property.

Socialism is playing one of the leading parts in the drama of politics. The economic situation of the commercial world is in a confused condition, and since the disciple of Socialism comes forward with his omnipotent remedy, he gets a hearing. Many who are struggling desperately for a livelihood lend a ready ear to his comforting words for they think it possible that this new and different plan of society will relieve their plight.

The Socialist takes advantage of this situation; he makes his appeal to the poor and the miserable. He is a clever politician who convinces many listeners that they are submerged in more misery than they can bear. He proposes that wealth be the yardstick of society and that all members thereof shall have equal measure. He convinces good honest workmen that it would be right and just for them to rob the rich of their goods in order that all may have plenty. He suavely disguises or makes little of the fact that there is no room for God in his State.

Perhaps our judgment is too severe; but let us penetrate the shell of the economic structure which is exposed to us by the Socialist and examine its innermost supports. We most frequently hear of

Socialism as a system of economics: this phase of the movement is most commonly discussed by the Socialists themselves and men in public life, for money problems are of utmost importance at present. The system, however, embraces not merely an economic plan; it is a rule of life, a philosophy which proposes to direct all man's actions in accordance with the material welfare of the State.

Let us consider its doctrines as they come forth from those who are generally recognized as the proponents of the system. Though Socialists claim that the methods of their procedure have deviated much from the plan of Marx and Engels, they admit that these men furnish the fundamental ideas upon which their organization rests. A glimpse into the minds of these two will give us an inkling of what to expect from the Socialist cause.

Marx writes, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their lives, but on the contrary, it is the social life that determines their consciousness."¹ Immediately we perceive that Marx does not consider man a free agent; he is driven to act as he does by his surroundings, his work and association with people and things. He continues, "Men enter upon necessary relations independent of their wills . . . the sum total of these relations forms the economic structure of society, the real social consciousness corresponds. The method of producing a material livelihood, determines the social, political and intellectual in general."²

It is easily seen that Socialism is not only a political or economic theory. It is a philosophy embracing all phases of man's existence. One might call it a materialistic religion. One commentator says, "Socialism is not merely an economic theory: it is a form of state worship: in the strictest and widest sense, a state religion, it is essentially opposed in character and tendency to the ideal of a free democracy such as is the main inspiration of social, economic and political reform amongst the mass of the people in English-speaking countries."³

In the State of the Socialist there is, of course, no room for God. All things we see in the world have evolved from a disordered mass of particles which have made up the universe from the dim past. "In our evolutionary conception of the universe," says Engels, "there is absolutely no room for either a Creator or a Ruler: and to

¹ Preface to *Critique of Political Economy* as quoted by Elder, *A Study in Socialism*, p. 41.

² *Ibid.*

³ Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C., *Socialism or Democracy*.

talk of a Supreme Being . . . is a gratuitous insult to the feelings of religious people."⁴

Religion in the generally accepted sense of the term means the relation between man and God. But with the Socialist the State takes the place of God. The moral law, which should regulate all man's actions according to his nature and which comes ultimately from God, is no longer the norm of conduct; the State is the only rule and guide. That which promotes the good of the State is good and meritorious; anything that interferes with social progress is evil.

Following the Socialist proposals to their conclusions, we behold man as a mechanical engine of the State, a *something* that contributes to the common cause. Man's environment in society has made him what he is. He will be dealt with and judged as the chattel of the State. Many Socialists have compared the State to a vital organism, pointing out that each member has the same relation to the group as an individual cell to the organism. The member, they say, is completely dependent upon society. He must therefore, before all else, contribute to the well-being of the group.

Claiming to proceed along scientific lines, the Socialist conceives man as a product of material forces, an animal, and proposes to deal with him on this basis. He denies the existence of the soul. There is with him no spiritual order; all is matter, even thought. We cannot prove the existence of the spiritual to him: his methods do not permit him to abstract from things material. He cannot feel the spiritual with his hands, nor can he see it through the microscope. He has become so deeply absorbed in matter that he cannot appreciate anything higher. In this scheme he is not far from declaring that a man who finds himself unable to help society should commit suicide since his existence is useless. Crippled, aged and helpless *could* be exterminated, a meritorious achievement of progress to promote the common good.

The Socialist has a warped and distorted notion of man. His eyes are fixed upon the lower portion of human nature; all he sees is animal. He is blind to the spiritual side, to the wonderful powers of the soul. The Church, on the other hand, considers man in his fulness; she sees not only an animal but a creature a little less than the angels, the ruler of material creation rather than its slave. She is not concerned merely with man's temporal welfare or worldly enjoyment. Her important mission is to guide souls to God. The eternal

⁴ *Socialism. Utopian and Scientific.* P. xv.

salvation of every one of her members is the task given her by the Son of God.

Unlike the Socialist, she knows and feels the need of God. His revelation guides her as she studies man and teaches him how to act towards his Creator and his neighbor. She gives him a sanction for the sorrows and sufferings of life: she points to Christ Who taught men how to live, Who taught them how to conquer death by His passion and death on the cross. He showed men that they would rise again in glory as He arose from the grave, glorious and immortal.

The Church impresses upon man his smallness in relation to God, yet she honors him above all material things as their lord and master. "Thou hast made him a little less than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour: and hast set him over the works of Thy hands."⁵ Her whole law is summed up in the commandments of the love of God and neighbor; this is the truest foundation of society.

One has only to read the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo to understand how the Church insists that man be respected by the State in regard to those things which are proper to him. She is just to the State in following the lead of her Divine Founder Who said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God, the things that are God's."⁶

The Church is not bound to recognize and support any particular form of State Government unless it conforms to the norms of Divine and Natural moral law. She is not the advocate of Capitalism nor of any other economic system. She can and must insist on man's rights—life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Since she has been appointed to direct man to his supernatural end, she must protect him from those things which will hinder the attainment of this goal.

The Church does not deny that man is a social being, but she insists that society exists to satisfy the needs of his earthly welfare. Beyond providing those things necessary for the peace and happiness of subjects, the State should not extend its powers. The object or end of the State while assisting man toward his final end, eternal happiness, is to supply him as an individual member of society with good living conditions, culture, art, science, literature and all things conducive to a virtuous life.

The final end of man should be his chief concern; it must take precedence over temporal and material interests. The State, there-

⁵ *Ps.* viii, 6, 7. *Heb.* ii, 7.

⁶ *Matt.* xxii, 21.

fore, since it exists to help man fulfill the purpose of his existence, eternal happiness, must do nothing to thwart that purpose. She must not step between the soul and God in spiritual matters. Man has duties to society, which, in turn, has reciprocal duties. Each has rights which the other cannot deny. Both are responsible to a Supreme Being Which transcends the universe. It is He Who gives the State power to rule and enjoins subjects to obey.

We often hear that the early Church was socialistic. This is true in so far as wealth was distributed to the needy out of charity by those who had much. She is still *socialistic* in this sense. But Christ never denied man the right to possess private property. The motives which govern Christianity are directly contradictory to those of the Socialist. In Christianity love lifts a man to the highest degree of perfection of which he is capable, while the Socialist would have him deny God and make himself the slave of matter. Christ saw just as much in human nature and material things as any materialist has or will see. He saw more . . . their limits, for He created man and was the Author of his nature.

Drawing arguments from St. Thomas, the great philosopher who appreciated human nature, and the authority of the greatest minds of the ages, Pope Leo insists that man has a right to a livelihood and the State has the obligation to see that he gets it. He shows that the remedy of the Socialist will not right social evils since it is contrary to man's chief interests. He points out that this life is only a journey to man's end, man must follow the pathway which Christ indicates through His teacher and guide, the Church; that the State, while it should provide the material needs of the journey, must do nothing to hinder the traveller.

The Socialist Ideal is a fanciful picture to behold; the colors are attractive and rich, but the picture is not artistic; it lacks proportion. Man's nature in its present state is weak, it is prone to evil deeds while greediness is not the least among its selfish traits. How can a greedy man be confined to a State that tells him he may own nothing? How can a State thrive without a moral law to keep its citizens virtuous? How much incentive is there for a man to live when there is no reward for the virtuous acts of his highest faculties, stripped of his liberty and of those things he holds most dear? What a lurid aspect the picture assumes when we examine it closely and learn what it signifies!

After dwelling at some length on the evils of Socialism, Communism and Nihilism in his Encyclical *Quod Apostolici Muneris*,

Pope Leo writes, "And now, moved greatly by the extreme peril which actually threatens, We lift up anew our Apostolic voice, and conjure them again and again, for the sake of their own safety and that of the State, to welcome and obey the teaching of that Church which has deserved so well in promoting the public prosperity of the nations, and to recognize once for all that the relations of the State and of Religion are so bound together as that whatever is withdrawn from religion impairs by so much the dutiful submission of the subject and the dignity of authority. And when they shall have recognized that the Church of Christ is possessed of a power to stave off the pest of Socialism, too mighty to be found in human enactments or in the strong hand of the civil power or in military force, let them reestablish that Church in the condition and liberty needed in order to be able to exercise her most salutary influence for the good of society in general."