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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

AGAINST SOCIALISM.

BY

“HUMANITAS.”

Author of “Is God the First Cause?”, “Follies of the Lord’s Prayer Exposed”, “Thoughts on Heaven”, “Jacob the Wrestler”, “Mr. Bradlaugh and the Oaths Question”, “How the British House of Commons treated Charles Bradlaugh, M.P.”, “Charles Bradlaugh and the Irish Nation”, “Socialism a Curse”, “A Fish in Labor; or, Jonah and the Whale”, “God: Being also a Brief Statement of Arguments Against Agnosticism”, etc.

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AGAINST SOCIALISM.

[THE following remarks were originally written in the form of a letter, which, however, I did not dispatch, coming to the conclusion that it might be useful as a small pamphlet against Socialism. This must be my plea for its brevity, and also for what may be deemed its somewhat fragmentary character.]

SINCE writing my pamphlet against Socialism¹ (now nearly six years ago), which partook of the nature of a reply to Dr. E. B. Aveling, my mind has, if anything, been strengthened in the belief that State Socialism would really be a curse rather than a blessing.

I think the larger half of those who adopt Socialism do so without examining it, and also without carefully weighing the theories put forward by leading Socialists. I do not doubt for a moment that these theories are sincerely and honorably held by their principal exponents. I am confident such is the case in some instances. But I do not think the subject is sufficiently weighed and understood by the majority of those who throw up their caps in favor of it. The possibility of My Lord having, in some dim and indescribable manner, to share his riches with the ordinary hard-working — and often out-of-work — journeyman, is doubtless a very taking bait to dangle before the latter. I am here leaving out of the question the very large leaven of those who are not hard-working, but who hope to profit by any change, quite regardless as to whether it be for the better or for the worse.

But if the ordinary working man, who is tickled by this delusion, looks below the surface he will see that it would not only not work, but that it is simply madness to dream

¹ "Socialism a Curse." Price 3d. Freethought Publishing Company.

of its ever coming about. He will find that his salvation lies in the direction of Co-operation, rather than in that of confiscation. For my own part, I believe that, although the movement may do some harm—perhaps much harm—its ultimate and complete adoption is simply an impossibility.

State Socialism means State serfdom, and State espionage carried into every act and effort of one's life. It means the complete annihilation of each individual's individuality; and, if enacted to-morrow, would by sheer necessity be ignored the day after. I believe the advocates themselves would, if successful, find the condition of affairs they had brought about so intolerable as to compel them to be amongst the first to undo their own work. Some of them, at least, could not by their very nature sink themselves to the necessary State level which would be demanded by what they themselves had set up. Some few there might be willing to sink themselves for what they thought to be the general good; but it is expecting too much of human nature to suppose that the bulk of the brightest, best, and fittest would submerge themselves in the slough of mediocrity and inferiority at the bidding of a State (by which I mean the executive for the time being) composed of those who, despite the Socialistic government regulations, had, by their individuality, come to the top.

Practically, I think Socialists hold, in common with most of us, that it is the duty of the State to guarantee each individual in the free and safe enjoyment of what he may, by his superior industry, thrift, and intelligence, earn. This at least is what they profess to desire; and it is possible that the main difference between us consists in the method adopted to attain that end. Whilst giving them credit for sincerity, I hold that Socialism would not only not do this, but would actually make its being done impossible. It would squeeze, or try to squeeze, all down to a kind of worse than State mediocrity, and thus rob each of his individual merits. If it did not do this, but allowed each to possess what he individually earned or produced, there is an end of Socialism, because it would then be allowing individual accumulation of capital, which it is its particular mission to destroy.

It would seem to me that the very essence of Socialism is that an individual (or even a voluntary company formed of individuals) must *not* possess what he earns either by

brain, sinew, or actual moral worth, because one man will, by the greater exercise of these, earn ten-fold what another will. And this always strikes me as being strangely at variance with the great Socialistic complaint, that the workman does not receive what he is justly entitled to do. I am bound to admit that in many cases he does not; but will Socialism give it to him? Will robbing the intelligent, the industrious, and the better man, by levelling him down to the standard of the worser, give it him? And bear in mind that if you reduced the profits of the employer to the level of the average wage of the workmen, you would still have the question of extra merit, and consequent extra worth, of the men themselves to deal with; so that robbing the employer of the fruits of the position to which he had possibly slaved and toiled would not settle the injustice as between the workmen. The fact would still remain that all men are not equal: they are not equally wise, industrious, virtuous; nor are they equally *fit* in any respect whatever. Equality before the law is good, but it does not mean that all are equal in worth, either intellectually, morally, or even commercially, and no government stamp can make them so. Keeping this in mind, I do not see how robbing one man to balance another can be just or reasonable, whether that man be a duke, capitalist, government official, working man, or man in any other position.

If Socialism will not permit me to possess the fruits of my brain, and enterprise; of my sobriety, and greater application, where is the freedom—not to mention the right? [I would here remark that I am not forgetting the duty of the individual to the State, and to the general well-being.] But if, on the other hand, Socialism will allow me such possession, which means the possession of individual property—and you cannot logically draw the line between a trinket and a mansion—what becomes of it? You are admitting the very principle that your Socialism is set up to kill; and bear in mind that whether you admit the principle or not, it will live; and rightly live. Nature herself will not allow even a government to command: Thus much shalt thou earn, produce, or possess, and no more; or if thou producest more, thou shalt give it up, and go back to the level of the less active and deserving mass thou hast left behind. If a government could do this, and so deprive the more energetic and better

man of the fruits of his greater energy—and with them the incentive to that energy—it would at the same time be encouraging the mass to depend not upon their own efforts, but upon the efforts of others ; thus inducing and helping all—as per Socialistic law—to be indolent rather than otherwise.

“ Open your mouth and shut your eyes, and see what *the State* will send you ”, is not a wise doctrine to preach. The large heap of money shared all round, with Jack’s notion of sharing it over again as occasion may require, is however, although the very backbone of Socialism, too absurd for any practical purpose, or for serious consideration. Of course it is held that Socialism does not mean anything of the sort : but when explained (?) this is found to be what is really meant ; because the moment you discard it, you are landed in individual accumulation.

I am aware that Socialism is held to be not yet thoroughly defined : but I believe it to be undefinable ; and that the more you endeavor to define it, the more unworkable you find it. Imagine for instance the arts and sciences being worked upon a kind of huge out-door relief system, the products not belonging to the producers, but to the State ! Do you suppose you could by process of law—I am not asking *ought* you to do so—but could you make the great painter, inventor, sculptor, musician, engineer, physician, etc., etc., satisfied with the same remuneration as you would give to the railway porter, or the stable man ? Indeed, the intrigue, the red-tapeism, the discontent and rebellion which would be certain to form part of the question as to which should become the stable boy, and which the engineer or philosopher, is something ludicrous to picture. The phrenologist might possibly be brought into requisition with some advantage ; but not all the State paid (?) phrenologists, nor Government Boards that ever existed, or will exist, could make the great of brain, and the great of power, (in every calling)—mostly begot of perseverance and application—satisfied to be placed upon a par with the mass. The thing is simply a joke. The idea of finding sufficient reward—plus a “ leather medal ”—in the knowledge of having served mankind, shorn of all other and more substantial considerations, is nothing better than twaddle, and practically all, even including Socialists themselves, proclaim it to be so.

But if you do propose to remunerate the great and meritorious in something like proportion to their work, or services rendered to the State; might they spend or put such remuneration to further use, with an eye to immediate comfort, or to — perchance — future *interest*? Or would they be compelled to simply sit upon it, not even daring to hatch it into $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cents.? Perhaps a method of rewarding extra merit might be found in a system of awarding dummy medals—or, if really valuable, accompanied by criminal consequences in case of the recipient converting them into money or other valuables.

For my own part I regard Socialism as the cry of the poorer and less able—and, alas! larger—half of humanity—and I might go so far as to say: the worse half—against its own poverty and wretchedness. And it is this wretchedness, together with the hope of being able to remedy it, which constitutes the strength of the Socialistic craze, and commands the sympathy and support of many to whom the merits of the scheme, as a means to an end, would certainly fail to appeal.

Let us by all means do what in us lies: let us legislate with a view to reducing poverty and its consequent sufferings; but let us not do it at the expense of the liberty and the commonest rights of the people themselves.

What we want is reform, not serfdom. We want an extension of individual liberty; greater freedom of contract in the matter of the sale and transfer of land; fewer restrictions upon trade, commerce, markets, etc.; the readjustment of financial matters, with a view to a more equitable mode of taxation. These and many other changes calculated to directly benefit the working man, we undoubtedly require; but we do not require a retrograde movement into primitive (now called scientific) Socialism.

The science which shall thin some down and thicken others up to some kind of State regulation standard, making all good boys and girls, each being satisfied with the government dole, and also satisfied with that station and calling in life which it pleaseth—not God in this instance, but the State—to place them, is yet to be discovered. The *ism*, whether Socialistic or other, would have to be very scientific indeed to prevent the eagle from soaring and the race-horse from outstripping the ass. And it would be very mad to attempt to legislate in that direction.

But Socialism, whilst endeavoring to bring some down, would also necessarily have to prevent others from rising. It is in principle quite as adverse to a small capital as to a large one. The ability to produce wealth would be of no use; the main incentive to thrift and effort would be removed. Under the Socialistic *régime* individual possession of valuables of any kind whatever would be impossible. This is denied, because the idea is too ridiculous on the face it for standing-room; but the denial is simply a repudiation of the thing in behalf of which it is made.

If Socialism should ever reign, our very language would have to be reconstructed: *I*, *mine*, and *me*, with all that belongs to them and is understood by them, would have to be erased from our grammars as well as from our institutions; and every explanation offered by Socialists against this view is, though not so intended, essentially an argument against the feasibility of Socialism.

Perhaps one of the worst features of Socialism is, that it would create a gigantic swarm of State officials, whose duty it would be to "inspect", *i.e.* pry into the private business of every individual in the State, to such an extent as would be insufferable to any people claiming, in the smallest sense of the word, to be free. Nay, I doubt if there could be such a thing as private business; it would all have to be public, with a Government detective in every shop, house, or factory. It would be State vassalage, pure and simple.

It might, I think, be safely prophesied that should we ever "evolve" into State Socialism, we should speedily evolve out of it again. Therein lies some consolation. And, as I have remarked, some of the leading Socialist luminaries would be the first to attract and draw the smaller fry into the outward course. These leaders are in some notable instances, and for this they deserve honor, the very personification of self-help, self-assertion, and self-reliance. It is true their great individuality is in direct opposition to the principle of Socialism, and is so far inconsistent with their creed; but should that creed ever be generally and practically adopted, it would at once either kill or convert them into anti-Socialists.
