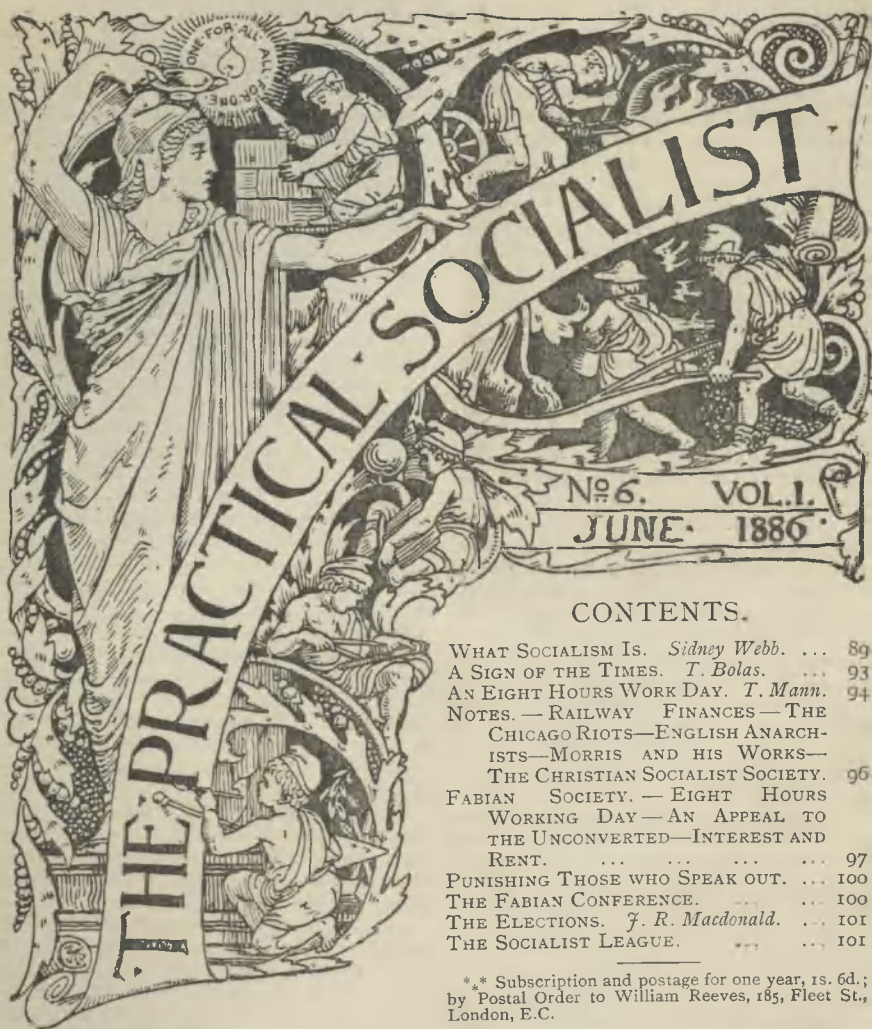


MONTHLY—ONE PENNY.



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WHAT SOCIALISM MEANS; A CALL TO THE UNCONVERTED.

BY SIDNEY WEBB, LL.B.*

The doctrines of Socialism can only be extended by bringing about a slowly dawning conviction in the minds of men; it is certain that no merely forcible revolution, organised by a minority, can ever avail, either in England or elsewhere. We seek therefore to influence only convictions, so as

* Abstract of an address delivered before the Fabian Society, May 7th, 1886.

to gradually bring about the Social Revolution—a revolution mainly in opinion.

There are many who desire to help in this work, but who are not quite decided to act; many who sympathise, but who are timid; there are many, indeed, who are Socialists, but are not conscious of their Socialism. It is to these especially, that we must address ourselves, and Socialists themselves should remember that Socialism is more than any Socialist, and its principles more than any system or scheme of reform. The Fabian Society has no such plan or scheme; we preach Socialism as a faith, as a scientific theory, as the

judgment of morality on the facts of life. Socialism suffers if identified with any particular scheme, or even with Collectivism itself. In this, as in many other cases, we find that the public are so much concerned with details, that they miss the principle: they "cannot see the forest for the trees." Indeed it is no more fair to identify Socialism with Collectivism than it would be to identify Christianity with Primitive Methodism, or with the teachings of Plymouth Brethren. Nevertheless, such misconceptions will inevitably persist, and those who may embrace Socialism, must be warned that they are not likely to receive "honour among men" in consequence; they are certain to be misconstrued, misrepresented, and reviled, and to be regarded as advocates of dynamite outrages or childish absurdities, even by those who are gradually learning their very doctrines.

Socialism is emphatically a new thing, a thing of the present century—and one of the unforeseen results of the great industrial revolution of the past 150 years. During this period man's power over the rest of nature has suddenly and largely increased: new means of accumulating capital, and also new means of utilising capital have come into being.

Many do not realise what a change this has been. At the beginning of the last century, the whole value of the land and capital of the country is estimated to have amounted to but 500 millions sterling; now it is supposed to be over £9,000 millions: an increase eighteen-fold. Two hundred years ago, rent and interest cannot have amounted to 20 millions sterling annually—now they absorb over 400 millions. Socialism arose as soon as rent and interest became important factors, it began with our own century: in its birthplace in England it was, however, beaten back for a time by the hasty misunderstandings of the teachings of Malthus, but this was set right by John Stuart Mill (who not only was a Socialist, but even publicly declared himself one) and at the present moment Socialism, which had never ceased on the Continent, permeates the whole world of thought and politics here as elsewhere.

What is the cause of Socialism? It has arisen because the great increase

in wealth has failed to exterminate or even to alleviate poverty. In this London, the wealthiest city of the world, there is also the greatest mass of poverty and misery. It has miles upon miles of palaces, serried ranks of costly carriages in Hyde Park, such signs of abundant wealth as no other land can show. Yet in this city homeless little children beg for bread, strong men die of starvation, and privation and want every night, and there is an array of over 300,000 persons, as many as would make the whole city of Brussels or Birmingham, in frequent receipt of workhouse relief. We should dwell a little on this. So dazed are we by the perfection of the organisation, that we are only too unconscious of the misery around us. Think of this army of 300,000 strong men, brave women and little children, absolutely destitute in this city where we are so comfortable: an army of 300,000 unable to get bread, or to obtain shelter from the cutting blast, and obliged to resort to the cold mercy of official charity. This is not a picture of London alone: things are much the same throughout the Kingdom. We have a total of over 3,000,000 in the pauper class; one in ten of the population, or one in eight of the wage earning class.

These men, our brothers, were not born paupers: they, too, had once hope, and some youthful aspirations, which the hard world has gradually quenched in the pitiless struggle from which we favoured ones have reaped so much of the benefit; while the iron has entered into their souls during that dreadful losing fight down the hill of poverty, until our brother, once erect and toiling for our benefit, is borne down before us to a paupers' grave.

Not only do we exact life-long labour from the poor, for which, as we have seen, so many receive in return just sufficient to keep them alive: we take their lives also. In the worst parts of London the death rate is double that of the best districts, and any doctor who has practised among the poor knows that their most fatal disease is poverty. Mr. Edwin Chadwick, C.B., says that the mean age of the gentry is 50.5 years; of the shopkeeper 27.5 years; of the wage-worker, 23.9 years; while in the case of these three classes, out of 100 children

of the gentry, 13 die under the age of 5; out of 100 children of the shopkeeping class, 38 die under that age; and out of 100 children of the wage-earning class, no less than 48 die under that age. Nearly one-half! We rob the wage-workers of 18 years of life each; they die before their time, like worn-out draught horses, and their innocent children like flies. Even as slaves they would be better off. They die in their own rooms of diseases, which we, in our wealth, know how to prevent; one or two will die to-night in London alone of actual starvation.

This is not all. Year by year our comforts and our pleasures increase, and year by year those iron-monsters, the never-ceasing machines, grow in number and complexity. Do we realise that year by year the accidents to the workers also increase, the number of fatal accidents doubling every 20 years? Last year we raised more coal than 20 years ago, smelted more iron, made more journeys, and all at less money cost: but we also killed over 9,000 more persons by accidents. How many we merely maimed is not to be ascertained. The cheap fuel with which we warmed ourselves last winter was not coal but lives of men.

This is what we have come to after 150 years of the greatest wealth-production the world has known; not only a greater aggregate production, but also an increased production per head of population. There is a small rich class endowed with every comfort the mind can describe; a middle-class, well-off, educated, leisured, powerful, and all roads open to it. These two taken together make up less than one fifth of the population. On the other hand, is the great mass of the people (of whom one-eighth are in the pauper class), earning on an average perhaps 25s. per family per week. These are condemned to a life of unremitting toil; with no leisure or higher education, no opportunity for improvement, and almost no hope of better things.

We search—and have not to search long—for the causes of this misery. Nature itself has not, it is true, been exceedingly kind to us, and we Socialists, as strongly as the Economists, demand that no useless mouths grow up to consume the too scanty

store we can produce. We too, insist that there is no place at nature's table for anyone who cannot or does not produce his quota, and we too, assert that there is—especially just now—grave danger that the number of such mouths may increase. But we also call for a proper administration of that which is produced, so that if we must go upon short rations, these may at any rate be fairly shared.

The orthodox economists tell us rightly enough the causes of the existing poverty, and they explain clearly enough the nature and extent of the deductions that go for rent, interest and the monopoly wages of exceptional ability. The bourgeois statisticians themselves enumerate these—in England at present—at half the annual produce of the workers.

There is no mystery about this, and it is fully explained not merely by Karl Marx, but even better by such writers as Mill, Cairnes and Fawcett. Economic rent and interest, they say, consist in reality of a toll levied upon production by the monopolist, and in exchange the monopolist, as such, gives nothing but permission to use land and capital. These idle receivers of rent and interest should be, Cairnes says, regarded as drones in the social hive, gorging honey in the production of which they have taken no part.

Socialism is founded upon no new system of political economy, nor upon any new statistics. It is mainly the emphatic assertion of two leading principles. We recognise, first, as the central truth of modern society, the interdependence of all. No man works alone; by division of labour and mutual exchange all are sharing in each one's toil. Each worker, by the marvellously complex exchange-system shares in the fruits of the labour of those in the most remote parts of the earth, and is in unconscious partnership with every other worker. No individual can henceforth claim as his own, the product to which he is in reality giving only certain final touches.

We claim, in the second place, to be but applying the doctrines of the economists in insisting on the ethical right of the joint workers, and the workers alone, to the whole produce of their labour, without any deduction for

the monopolist's toll. We contend for the full recognition of the admitted fact that the whole produce of labour is due to labour alone—whether labour of hand or labour of brain—and that any form of society which enables idle monopolists of certain social products to exact for their personal consumption a toll from helpless fellow citizens, although perhaps useful in the earlier stage of social evolution, is now bad; guilty as Mill and Cairnes themselves have in effect said, of causing unnecessary deaths and misery to the poorer classes.

This is essentially the Socialistic platform. Its ideal is the whole for the workers, and for none but the workers, and also no one for himself alone, but each for all, and all for each. We cannot expect to realise this ideal all at once. Society is evolving fast under our eyes, and there are various schemes into which some of us think this evolution of society will develop. There are fundamentally three main schools.

1. *Collectivists* lay special stress on the necessity for equality in consumption, lest some be otherwise compelled to have unnecessarily little. They wish with this end to extend the system of public administration of the means of production.

2. *Positivists*, so far as they have thought out their economic system, come clearly under this definition of Socialism. They would leave administration mainly as it is at present, in private hands but under some government regulations; equal personal consumption, and by workers only, being realised chiefly by an advance in personal morality.

3. *Anarchists* lay more stress upon the moral objections to any government coercion, and contend for private administration, with no other than moral regulation. Consumption is to be eventually according to needs, and to be regulated by voluntary restriction.

But all forms of socialism agree in the two general principles stated above. All agree in repudiating any claim by particular workers to their particular products, which could only be set up by ignoring the unconscious co-operation by their fellows all over the world; all are in fact opposed to the wild individualism which is a characteristic of barbarism. And all agree with the

Economist, in repudiating any moral claim in the monopolists as such, to the toll which he can levy.

It has been said that there are ideals which we hope to realise one day—not perhaps in our own lives, but living again in lives to come. The Socialist is, in the meantime, the most practical of politicians, the truest opportunist. Think how changed will be the House of Commons when the Members realise the teachings of the economists as the Socialists realize them—when economic rent and interest are clearly and consistently regarded as tolls levied upon labour by monopolists, taking what should belong to the whole community. What a different aspect is placed upon the public provision of museums, parks, picture-galleries, for the multitude; on free education, and on universal technical training, so as to secure at least—to the whole people—that real free choice of occupation in life, now enjoyed only by a small class. How altered will be the attitude towards sanitation, factory inspection, and, above all, towards taxation.

Socialism, therefore, does not mean any particular plan or scheme of social re-organisation, nor the vain dream of equality of wealth. It means no contempt for machinery, no dislike of education or culture, no enmity to brain work or invention. It is, in fact, because we want more of these things that we are Socialists.

As regards objections we need not trouble to deal with the selfish one of the man who says merely that he means to keep what he has got. Dawning conscience and increased social intelligence will bring the sons of such men over to our ranks. But may not the clever artisan or the skilled brain worker who now earns huge wages because of the scarceness of his talent, be justly allowed to consume the whole wages of his labour? He should remember that other workers are helping him, and besides that his brain or skill is not his alone; it is the result of past ages; a social and not an individual product; while his training and education are essentially the fruit of social capital expended upon him.

Loss of liberty and independence, what of these? This is perhaps felt to be the weightiest objection to collectiv-

ism, but one which Mill himself thought to weigh but as dust in the balance of advantages offered by Socialism, and this present liberty and independence of the comfortable classes, on what are they based? The king's house at Dahomey is a great square building. The mighty corner piles stand solid in the African sand, but their solidity is secured—so the natives will tell you—by the blood of the slave girls, crushed in the holes in which the piles were driven. The smiling landlord or mill-owner leans back in his saloon-carriage, rejoicing in the freedom to travel given by his long life of perpetual holiday, but he heeds not the hours of toil which his very liberty thus adds to the task of his serfs all over the world.

Yes, Socialism means a loss of such liberty. That freedom which can only be enjoyed by the oppression of the rest is the license of the tyrant, and, as Lowell says,—

“ True freedom is to share
All the bonds our brothers wear.”

It is not a comfortable gospel that we preach—no glad tidings of great joy—but it is one of which you will not be able to escape the unpleasant conviction. Perhaps those are happier who do not know, who have never thought of the source of their income: coming to them as it does like manna from heaven. But you who do know whence comes your rent and interest, will see discomfoting visions. As you feed the fire, you will see the miner, bent double underground, in his exhausting toil, giving up his life that you may be warmed. As you look upon your daughters growing up around you in your sheltered and cultured home, you will see behind them the daughters of other mothers, slaving seamstresses, working sixteen hours for sixteen pence, nay, selling themselves into a life of infamy, for want of that bread which you, by your monopolies, are forcing them to give up to you.

Then there will be no escape. Those of you who do know, those of you who are no longer in blissful ignorance; those of you who realise this economic toll levied on the scanty earnings of the poor—you will be compelled to come over to us for very shame, and work with all your might to stop this fearful

drain upon the already miserable pittance, which is all that we can extract from the rest of nature.

You have but one alternative. By steadily turning away your eyes, and caring only for your own comforts, by luxurious and selfish living, by making to yourself a false idol of art, or religion, or literature, you may perhaps be able in time to stifle your conscience, and drown the despairing cries of the misery which you are taking your part in creating. But then do not be surprised if the long suffering masses, roused at last from their ignorant patience, and deserted by those who ought to have been their leaders, shake in their despair the whole social structure about your ears, crying of your class, of its good as of its evil, “cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” It is to try to prevent matters coming to such indiscriminate ruin that we are, and you should be, Socialists.

THE SIGN OF THE TIMES.

Last month in an article headed, “A Sign of the Times,” we alluded to the improvement which has taken place in the spirit with which justice is administered in the metropolis, and we alluded to the case of Pilkington who, in order to feed his starving children, took a loaf from the barrow of a baker. Partridge, the magistrate, used the funds of the court to investigate the real merits of the case, and instead of sending Pilkington to goal, as would probably have been the case ten years ago, he remanded Pilkington. We ventured to predict that Pilkington would not be hardly dealt with, and so it has proved. In fact, he was discharged. This case means much. First, Pilkington has been defended at the expense of the