

# The Ethical Aspect of Socialism

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Most people are aware of the fact that there is such a force in the social life of the modern world as socialism. Even the Pres. of the United States knows it, and the Supreme Court knows it. They came in contact with it not long since and did not have the nerve to cross sticks with it. The mighty hunter knows it, but he does not understand. So it remains, when the high priests of government have no lighted candle to place on the basket, for the socialist to become the cloud by day and the pier of fire by night that shall lead the hosts of mankind through the wilderness of these troubled times into the promised land. Amid the political anarchy, and social chaos of today, amid the wild scramblings of a decaying capitalism, it falls upon the shoulders of the socialist movement to become the conserving force of the revolutionary changes that are immanent. Amid the multitude of false and superficial leaders, of demagogues and charlatans who will appeal to the people of the modern world in these troubled times it becomes the duty of the socialist to keep his head clear, his hands free, and his integrity un-besmirched, to keep his feet solidly on the ground of fact, and to walk with a steady and resolute step over the rough and stony soil of the next twenty years of American life. I assume that you have not come here to be entertained, if you have you will be disappointed. I did not come here to entertain you, I came here to give you the best thoughts that I have about a movement that appeals to me as to others as no other fact of modern life does appeal. In the socialist movement I see the only alternative to the most cruel and horrible despotism in the known history of man. In it I see the possibilities of the most just and humane social order that has ever graced the surface of this fair world of ours.

The time is past when it is necessary for one to spend much time in pointing out the serious limitations of existing conditions. That task is being done with such tremendous effect by conditions themselves that each one knows that he is facing a solid and obstreperous fact. It

does not take very much skill and acumen to tell that something is the matter. The extreme and enervating poverty, the gross and vulgar wealth, the political corruption of the ruling powers, the alliance of capitalism with vice and crime, the prostitution of body and mind and soul to the interests of commercial profit are as apparent as the sores on the body of a leper. It does take acumen and skill to determine the cause of these sores of our social organism, and to suggest a curative remedy. The apologist for the existing social order will tell you that those sores are but surface irritations of a temporary [sic]. They are no indication of the real condition of the social organism. Just apply a few salves on the sores in the form of legislation, and they will soon disappear, and we shall be as healthy and rugged as we ever were before. On the other hand the socialist will tell you that the condition is more deep seated. The blood and tissue of the social order is even more diseased than the surface indicates. He examines the case with considerable care. He finds that the great heart of the social organism, the system of economic production and distribution of society has been tampered with. The arteries that should carry the necessities of life to all parts of the body, have been set upon by a gang of parasitic leaches, who have sucked the health, and the life of the body to which they cling. So the socialist says that the sores cannot be removed, until the parasites have been removed, and the heart of economic production and distribution pumps its full supply of food and clothing and shelter through the arteries of the social organism. We need not legislative salves, but a changed social order.

He bases this diagnosis upon the facts of the present conditions and the history of the modern world. I want to take a few moments to present this historical background out of which the socialist movement has evolved. Some people will tell you that the socialist movement is but a passing fad, a sort of a greenhouse crop of beautiful flowers that never could stand the vigor of real out of doors reality. Such a conception is the fruit of a most profound ignorance. The socialist movement has its origins deep in the roots of history. It is the legitimate child of the modern world. Let us trace its ancestry for a moment. By the phrase, "modern world," I mean that social order towards which society has been tending for the past eight hundred years. Not only in point of time but also in fundamental characteristics is the modern world to be

contrasted with the ancient world. For a more complete development of the modern world we must look forward to the coming era when capitalism shall have disappeared. For the full and complete expression of the ancient world we must look back to the centuries when feudalism was in full swing. Feudalism was a social order based on the fundamental principle of privilege. Plato, the Greek Philosopher, wrote a book in which he pictured the ideal social order. According to Plato the ideal social order, which should be the embodiment of perfect justice, must be a social order based upon the segregation of society into classes. In his *Republic*, he provided for three clear cut definite classes. In the first place there was the class of philosophers, whose duty and function it was to rule and govern the state. By virtue of their wisdom they held this power. To them all others must give obedience. But the philosophers were to be aided in their task of administration by the soldier class. The soldier class was the strong right arm, the big stick, that was to enforce the wisdom of the philosophers. These two classes constituted the privileged class of Plato's ideal republic. But there was yet another great class, the laborers. It was their duty to do the work, provide the food, comfort, luxury of the state, and to obey without question the commands of their masters. They had no privilege but the privilege of obedience, and no right but the right to labor.

Now if you carry this ideal of Plato's in your mind and with that as a measuring rod examine the social order of feudalism, you will be struck by the extent to which the ideal of Plato is fulfilled in those conditions. There were three great classes under feudalism. The priests, the lay nobility, and the serfs. The Church, with the pope at its head was the philosophical class. From it emanated all wisdom and truth. In 1302 Pope Boniface the eighth made the claim that God had appointed the institution of the Church with the papacy at the head as the representative of God on Earth. To his command all must submit. The king and the prince must do his bidding. It derived its right to rule by virtue of a special privilege, a monopoly on truth. Thus the secular nobility became the soldier class of the order to do the bidding of the Pope. If the pope commanded the Emperor to go on a crusade, he went. It was the arm of power. For all this great superstructure of knights, barons, priests, popes, arch-bishops and all the motley band of parasites there existed the vast numbers of the

serfs, whose task it was to labor, and provide for the privileged class. Their relation as human beings to the church and the state is well indicated by the location of their barracks in the monastic settlements. They lived in barracks provided for them by their masters and located apart from other buildings, close to the sheds in which lived the other beasts of burden, and swine. Here are the three classes of Plato's republic, performing precisely the functions which Plato described. The basis of it all was the monopoly in the ownership of land. This was supported by the ignorance of the serfs, by the claims of the Church, and the power of the armed knights. The Church says today that its authority rests upon the declaration of Christ to Peter, but as a matter of fact the claims rest upon the philosophy of the pagan philosopher Plato, and have about as much to do with the teachings and commands of the carpenter of Nazareth as you and I have to do with the decisions of the Supreme Court. The truth is that the serfs were prisoners sentenced to hard labor for life by the institution that owned the land and swung the big stick. The walls of this prison were the walls of economic necessity, The ugly, brutal appearance of the walls were relieved by the poisonous weeds of the claims of the church to a supernatural control of men, and claims of the state to rule by divine right.

But privilege cannot always maintain its alleged monopoly, whether it be a monopoly of truth, or land, or the tools of production and distribution. The sun shines just as bright outside the walls of the big estates, as it does inside. Upon the imprisoned serf the light of truth was throwing its rays. A strange unrest and dissatisfaction was developing among them. The Church and the state might hold them all in bondage, but it could not keep them from observing the conditions about them, and it could not keep them from thinking about what they saw. Slowly silently these prisoners of hope were making their preparations to fulfill their historic mission in the evolution of human society. The more the church and the state asserted its claims to rule by divine right, and the more the prisoners were commanded on the penalty of eternal damnation to obey their masters, the more they thought about their conditions. The more they thought about their conditions, the more inhuman and monstrous they whole social order of feudalism became to them. Here is the most interesting record of that dim past. In the year 1165 thirty weavers in the diocese of Worcester, were summoned before the council

of Oxford. These humble workingmen, although they claimed to be Christians, and to revere the teachings of the early apostles, were charged with making light of the sacraments and priestly [sic], and absenting themselves from the Parish services. They were condemned, scourged, branded as heretics, and driven out into the winter cold to die. Thus says the Chronicler of this story, the pious firmness of this severity not only cleansed the realm of England from the pestilence which had now crept in, but also prevented it from creeping in again.

Two hundred years later England was in the midst of the peasants revolt. The worm had turned. The serf, the laborer, the outcast, the beast of burden of feudalism was fulfilling his historic mission. By the middle of the fourteenth century new life was stirring in the prisons of feudalism. There was a great social unrest among them. Just what that meant, is shown by the teachings of one English priest, who was one of the leaders of this unrest. The Privileged classes called him the mad priest of Kent. He was an undesirable citizen. He thought, and expressed his thoughts whenever he was out of prison. His name was John Ball<sup>1</sup>. He spoke as one having authority, and not at the priests. "Good people," he said, "things will never be right in England so long as there be villains and gentle folk. By what right are they whom we call lords greater folk than we? On what grounds have they deserved it? If we all came of one father and one mother, of Adam and Eve, how can they say or prove that they are greater than we, if it be not that they make us gain for them by our toil what they spend in their pride. They are clothed in velvet, and warm in their furs and ermines, while we are covered with

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<sup>1</sup> John Ball (1338-1381) a significant player in the Peasants Revolt of 1381. Having been forbidden to preach, he did nonetheless preach at Blackheath, the peasants' rendezvous south of Greenwich, England: "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman? From the beginning all men by nature were created alike, and our bondage or servitude came in by the unjust oppression of naughty men. For it God would have had any bondmen from the beginning, He would have appointed who should be bond, and who free. And therefor I exhort you to consider that now the time is come, appointed to us by God, in which ye may (if ye will) cast off the yoke of bondage and recover liberty." Afterwards, Ball was arrested, tried, convicted and hanged, drawn and quartered in the presence of King Richard II, July 15, 1381.

rags. They have wine and spices, and fine bread, we have only oak cake and straw, and water to drink. They have leisure and fine horses; we have pain and labor, and the rain and the wind in the fields. Yet it is of us and of our toil that these men hold their estate." Such was the message that John Ball and his kind spoke with such authority that they started the peasants revolt, broke the back of feudalism, and laid the foundations of the beginning of the modern world, laid them on the solid rock of democracy. It is almost six hundred years since John Ball and his followers marched to London, and demanded their freedom from the cowardly king, who betrayed them. Two great tasks have been before men, the task on the one hand of destroying the social order based on privilege, and classes, and the task of upbuilding a new social [order] based upon the principles of democracy and human fellowship.

The invention of printing effectually destroyed the monopoly on wisdom. The seeds of sedition became more widely disseminated. Revolution was in the air. In a few years the reformation was under full swing. The authority of the philosophical class was cast off. The first great rent was made in the wall with which the privileged classes held the exploited in subjugation. But that did not give freedom. It only stimulated the thirst for it. Next we hear of the forming of parliaments, or the curtailment of the power of the king, and the development of middle classes. Then comes in England the rising of the Puritans under Cromwell, and the concrete and definite protest against the claims of supernaturalism in government. The battle of Nasby and Marston Moor<sup>2</sup> gave the idea of the divine right of kings such a shock that it has never recovered.

Then came the great experiment of the republican form of government in this country. However much we may criticize our government today, the fact remains that it stands as the first great attempt of a people to govern themselves without depending on a hereditary ruling class. It is not and never has [been] purely democratic either in spirit or in form, but it is at least one revolution in advance of the surviving monarchies of Europe.

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<sup>2</sup> The Battle of Marston Moor, July 2, 1644, ultimately was a decisive victory for the English Parliamentarians and Scottish Covenanters against the Royalists in the first English Civil war (1642-1646).

Warfare, martyrdom, hardship, consecration to principle make the events of this long epoch of human development. It is all a part of the long journey from the ancient social order based upon the principles of privilege and class rule to the developing social order of the modern world based upon the principles of democracy and justice. Of this long evolutionary process, studded as it is with revolutions, the socialist movement is the legitimate product, and the lineal descendent. You never can feel the full power and significance of the socialist movement today until you see it as the logical product of this great historical process in all of its aspects, economic, social, intellectual, and ethical. This is the point that I wish to make here, that the socialist movement is the legitimate and logical product of the fundamental principles and the historic development of the modern world. It stands fairly and squarely on the principles that have characterized the development of the modern world, and it faces the condition of our social order today with its eyes open, and offers to society today, not in its creeds, and dogmas, but in its principles and its ethical dynamic, the only alternative to the most cruel and terrible despotism in the history of the human race. No movement ever had a more exhilarating and challenging paradox as its point of departure, than the socialist paradd [sic] that the economic conditions of any time determine the life of the people, coupled with the fixed determination of the socialist to change those economic conditions.

Now the immediate task to which the socialist movement is directing its energies is the overthrow of capitalism. The capitalist society of today is the old privilege of the middle ages stripped of its phylacteries, and its superstitions. Several great things have been accomplished during the last eight hundred years or more. In the first place it has become established as a principle of modern life that no institution, whether it be Church, state, supreme court, or any other institution, or no individual, either king, priest, lawyer, capitalist or socialist has any monopoly on truth. None of these has any special privilege or rebate agreement with the Almighty to carry on a trade in truth and wisdom. The results of human effort since the thirty weavers were condemned in England for thinking have demonstrated beyond the adventure of a doubt that the storehouses of wisdom are open to all men. No one can monopolize truth. Experience is our teacher, and

through experience and reason we have come to have that little bit of knowledge which we have. When anyone comes along with his claims of secret communications with the Almighty, we just laugh at him. The final authority in our judgements of truth and values today is not the Church or the state, but humanity. We have taken that monopoly on truth claimed by the Church and socialized it, taken it from the hands of the Pope and placed it in the hands of the people.

Upon this fact of a socialized authority for truth rests our doctrines of free speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of the pulpit, and our system of public school education. In spite of the many limitations, and small petty attempts to abridge the working of these institutions in our present social life, it still remains true that they have become a part of the accepted principles of the modern world. This cannot be effaced from our public mind unless you turn back the last eight hundred years of history. The socialization of the authority for truth in experience and in thought is a fundamental principle of the modern world.

In the second place we have gone a long ways towards the socialization of the authority in government. We are making rapid strides in our time in the direction of political democracy in spite of every effort of privilege to check and block this movement. This is really the second constructive principle that the modern world has developed, the principle of the socialization of political authority. From the arrogant declaration of the king who said, "I am the State." To Lincoln's famous "of the people, by the people and for the people." There are hundreds of years of conflict and many a bloody battlefield.

These mark the two great revolutions that enter as factors in producing the existing social order. But the revolution in industry has yet to be considered. We have developed in our modern life the most wonderful system of production and distribution of the necessities and comforts of life. It is estimated that by the work of three to four hours per day we could produce and distribute and [sic] that [which] we need to cloth and feed and house ourselves. So really there never was a time when men had such a mastery over nature as we have today. The toils of years, and the brains and energies of countless men have gone to the development of this great system of production and distribution.

But, and here is the great task of our time and the special problem of the socialist movement, this wonderful system which has been developed by the brains and the labor of the people has become a monopoly. This monopolized wealth is in the hands of a comparatively small and well-organized class. We have our capitalist society, with its two classes. The owners of the tools of production and distribution on the one hand, and the users of these tools on the other constitute the two essential classes of society today. The workers get in return for their work only about one-fifth of the products of their toil. The result is that they are compelled to work about five times as much as they ought in order to get enough to exist on. Those who do no more at least of the work, got not only ample reward, but they get profits beyond all dreams of avarice. A good healthy capitalist, who is on his job, who works in his factory, and has care and responsibility, I have a respect for, but we have come to a point where we have developed an idle capitalist class, who do nothing but sport and flaunt their wealth in the faces of the poor, and then dress the wounds they have made by the salt brine of charity. It is this latter type of person who is the choice fruit of capitalism on the one hand, while on the other we have the extreme poverty wrecked human beings of our large industrial towns, and metropolitan centers. They are not only exploited in the factory but they are slowly, almost helplessly dropping down the ladder of efficiency and capacity for life in the cruel merciless struggle of our capitalist society. One of the most tragic aspects of the army of unemployed is the fact that many of them have been ground to such a state that they not only have no employment, but they have lost the mental, moral, and physical capacity for work. Thousands upon thousands of them have been ground so low that they have not left the capacity to utter a protest against their degradation, but servilely and humbly they accept the pain, the degradation, and the disease that is forced upon them. So it has come about that in this nation dedicated to the proposition that all men are created free and equal, in this nation where it was once regarded as almost a sacrilege to speak of social classes in public, we find society divided into two great classes facing each other in sullen and determined struggle. On the faces of one is that arrogance and surliness born of wealth and power, on the faces of the other is that desperate resolution, or that deathly resignation born of the hellish fear of poverty.

"What," in the face of this situation, "are you going to do?" people are asking everywhere. "We are going to give away our wealth judiciously," says Andrew Carnegie. "It is a sacred trust imposed upon us by God." But not if every town in the country is given a library, can atonement be made for the Homestead Strike, and the battleships of imperialism. "We will found great Universities, and support foreign missions," says the oil magnate. But not if every state has its oil-endowed university, and every heathen is converted to Christianity, can atonement be made for the debauchery of our system of government, and our courts. "But," says another, "we will regulate it by the legislators, and the federal government. We will discriminate between the good and the bad trusts." Yes, but can the slave regulate and punish its master? No. Men do not want the wealth. What they want is this: that the system of production and distribution which society has produced by its brain and its labor shall be used to fulfill the function for which it was developed, to satisfy the necessities of human life that men and women may be freed from their bondage, and live as they ought. What shall be done in the face of this situation? Just that which was done by the modern world in the face of a monopoly on truth, and monopoly on political power. We have a monopoly on industrial wealth. We socially produce and socially use these means of distribution and production. Let them be socialized. Let them be used not to exploit the great masses of men, but to free them from the slavery [of] the wage system and poverty, and the degrading conditions that result therefrom. We do not want the vast accumulations of wealth. We want a chance to live a decent human life, without being haunted by the fear that we may leave those whom we love to a life of perilous poverty, and it's terrible consequences.

Thus we stand today. The hard cold naked wall of capitalism barren of all green grass is the bulwark behind which privilege stands. On the one side is the capitalist class with its dirty slimy spies slinking back and forth through the underground passages of legislation and the courts. On the other side the great poverty-stricken masses of laborers, held to the drudgery of an ill-requited toil by the grim necessities of life. "We will erect a few universities on the wall to cover its nakedness," says one, "or libraries" says another. No says the socialist, we will

remove the wall, for it is of us and our toil that these men hold their estate.

I have tried to present the development of the principles, and state the conditions of the existing social order, and to point out how the logic of history has developed the remedy for the situation that we face today. Apply the principle of democracy to our industrial system so that we may have an industrial system of the people, by the people and for the people. Furthermore we want this so that men may have a fair opportunity to show what is in them [and to] live full and decent human lives.

The socialist, in the face of this threatening monopoly, declares that the only sane sensible possible thing to do is to apply the very principle which people for eight hundred years have been applying to monopolies, namely the principle of democracy. The instruments of distribution and production must be socialized. Those things which are socially made and socially used must be socially owned, and socially administered. It seems to me the most sensible and most commonsense proposition that could possibly be advanced.

But says the man who calls himself a practical man, it is impossible. You could no more manage business upon that basis than you could fly. Perhaps he is right, but so far as I have observed the large industrial concerns of the country have just demonstrated that he is wrong. You have a large electrical works here in this town. Tell me, do you know who owns the plant? Does it make any particular difference who owns it? Could it not be run just as well and better if it were socially owned, and the work were done for use instead of for profit? I venture to say that the ownership might be transferred without causing this slightest disturbance in the running of the factory. The brains for management, and the inventive genius for the development of apparatus, as well as the skill and labor of the workmen are probably all hired. Take the Standard Oil Company as an illustration of one of the most effective distributing plants in the world. Is not all the essential business of the concern done by hired help? Take the great railroad systems. They seem to change hands with wonderful ease. The great manipulators buy and sell whole railroads every little while, but the trains still run, and the freight moves on. Why? Because these roads are already socially used and socially managed. They might become

socially owned without meeting any insuperable obstacle. When people tell you that the socialization of these tools of production and distribution would be an impossibility and an idle dream, just tell him that the great trusts have already demonstrated not only the possibility but the desirability, not only desirability, but the inevitability of that very thing. They are one of the great forces that are making for socialism. Either that or despotism, or that idiotic program of trust busting. The control and management of our affairs have passed into the hands of a monopoly, what shall we do? We shall socialize that monopoly.

But that would be unjust to the people who, by hard labor and thrift, and great ability, have laid aside a bit for a rainy day. Mr. Carnegie fears the needle's eye. Well why should he fear? Why did he not give the steel works to society instead of selling them to Mr. Morgan? Instead of having faith that men whom he appoints to manage a great trust fund, why could he not have faith in men who could manage for society a great industrial plant. It is not the golden eggs that society needs but the management of the hen that lays the golden eggs. The truth is that, as Mr. Carnegie and others have pointed out, their wealth does not belong to them, but it is held in trust. I agree. Only I believe in democracy, and should like to see the people have something to say about appointing the trustees.