

## Democracy and Socialism

Earl C. Davis

Pittsfield, MA

1918<sup>1</sup>

In whatever direction we may turn we come upon the idea, if not the words, "After the war, Socialism." Sometimes this idea is expressed in the language of the conservative who fears; again, in the language of the student who tries to preserve a scientific poise of impartiality; and sometimes it comes from the hopeful believer; but everywhere the result is the same, the growing realization that "after the war, Socialism."

As a matter of cold fact it may be noted that, so strong has been the swing of events in the direction of socialistic thought and action during the war, [that] the socialists in the various countries are practically determining the conditions of peace in accord with which, at the present moment, it appears that settlements will be made. Indeed, it is possible that a large number of socialists will actually sit around the board of settlement.

In other words, it may be said without great hesitation, that so great have been the changes wrought during the war, that the great war which had its origin in the great industrio-political competition and the lust for power, is ending in what is virtually a great revolution, confined to no one country, and destined to change profoundly the entire structure of modern society.

Such being the case men are turning their attention more and more to the problems of reconstruction, even in the midst of the war itself.

---

<sup>1</sup> This manuscript can be dated by its first sentence including the phrase, "After the war," and by its inclusion in a bound collection of manuscripts that include manuscripts that are clearly from 1918—e.g., "Five Months at Camp Devens."

I said a moment ago that by many it seems to be taken for granted that after the war comes socialism. But whether that development will be in the direction of a bureaucratic Socialism, or will preserve and establish the spirit of democracy, will depend upon the zeal and intelligence, the sound statesmanship of those who have a real faith in the soundness and validity of democratic principles.

There are two considerations that seem to me very important, and to have a very practical bearing upon the possible outcome of this rapidly changing era. I wish to speak of these for a little.

During the past hundred and fifty years this western civilization has been the scene of two remarkable developments. One has been the rise and spread of the idea of a democratic society. This idea, as applied to the modern world, had its origin in the conflict between feudalism and industrialism or capitalism. The idea of democratic government, of self-government, was applied first only to voluntary and heretical religious societies and clubs, etc. It first became incorporated into political units in this country, and, with some modifications, became the basis of this nation's political organization.

There has been a fairly steady spread of these principles for a hundred and fifty years, so much so, that it is fair to state that during this period the characteristic political development has been the decided tendency in the direction of political democracy, with a rapidly increasing emphasis upon the necessity of extending these principles of democratic control and administration to the entire social fabric, including the industrial order. We have been moving towards a possible social democracy.

This growth of a political democracy towards a social democracy has been one of the two significant tendencies of that last hundred and fifty years.

The other tendency, which has developed side-by-side towards a political democracy, has been the development of a great industrial system. The rapid growth of this stupendous institution with its wonderful machinery of

production and distribution, is one of the marvels of the ages.

Just to make concrete the change that has been wrought in the relations of men by the development of this great system, contrast the life and relationship to the outside world of the town of Pittsfield one hundred and fifty years ago with the life today. One hundred and fifty years ago Pittsfield was a little town by itself, newly settled here among the hills. What men used, ate and wore, they produced for the most part right here. Connection with the outside world was slow and rare. Up the river valley on horseback, or on foot was about all the communication that existed. Europe might be drenched in blood and Pittsfield would hardly have known of what had happened, to say nothing of being seriously affected by the fact.

Tonight, doubtless, there are people from all parts of the country stopping for a day or two; there are citizens and residents from all over the world. Many citizens here have traveled in most countries of the world. At this moment from all over the world vast quantities of food and material of various sorts are moving towards this city. On an average, one hundred and eighty cars of freight come into the city each day to meet the demands of our existence. The telephone, the telegraph system, the system of news distribution, these serve to tie this little remote city among the hills to all the countries of the world. Mind you, all this is the product of the labor, the inventive genius, and the organizing ability of that great industrial machinery. These are the outward manifestations of a great organic system that has been built in this modern world. Beginning in obscure corners, by the side of small streams with its little embryo factories, this system has grown, expanded, consolidated and become centralized, until at last, the two great products of its evolution stood face-to-face upon the battle fields of Europe. Then all the machinery of this system was called into action for the war.

Now there is an intimate and close relationship between this great industrial empire, and the growth of democratic thought.

This great industrial system has created the machinery that has made necessary, rational, and valid the thoughts of a social democracy. In other words, this industrial system has been, and is today, the legal parentage of the social democratic movement. The system, with its byproducts of greed, lust for power and dominion that have crumbled in the great war, has directly produced the thought, the development of democratic tendencies. Socialism, or social democracy, is not the idle dream of a visionary soul, not the vision of an idealistic society, it is the logical, and essential development, the next step in social evolution. The thoughts of socialism, of a social democratic society, developed because the economic machinery that we have been developing in the last hundred and fifty years were tying men of all the nations of the earth together into one great social system. Men of insight and knowledge saw what was taking place, and began the intellectual preparation for the social change. The economic background which makes sensible and real those ideas of social democracy, and a true internationalism, are concretely illustrated by the one hundred and eighty cars of material that come to the city every day for our needs and living from all over the world. Railroads, steamship lines, telephone and telegraph lines, all these together, with the factories etc., are the visible expression of the economic background of our modern ideas of a social democratic society culminating in an international relationship based upon international cooperation instead of international competition. Capitalism has produced this great international system of production and distribution. This great international system has given rise to the principles and the programs of a social democratic order of society. Social democracy came not to destroy but to fulfill the creative genius of capitalism. The evils of capitalism will be left behind. "After the war, socialism."

The balance has already tipped. Just as it was impossible to unscramble the eggs of industrial evolution prior to the war, so will it be impossible to unscramble the eggs cooked during the war. The fixing of coal prices in this country is an illustration. The old order has gone. It may seek a temporary revival just as competition sought a temporary revival in the anti-trust legislation, but the eggs are being scrambled.

Now this rapid transformation that is taking place in our midst today, calls for a new attitude, a new adjustment to the problems. Socialism is no longer merely a critique of capitalistic society, nor is it merely a philosophy of history, it has become, and is rapidly becoming a part of the order of things. We are interested in making it democratic instead of bureaucratic, vital instead of formal.

This is the first observation that I want to make. Those who are interested in helping and guiding in the reconstruction have got to be in the midst of it. The old method of critical aloofness no longer avails. The old criticism of capitalism, must give way to the new reconstructive labor. The old program of demands, stated in vague general terms, must give way to definite concrete measures, that grow out of the real facts of today. The task begins here at home, not with an ideal program, but with a definite program that will meet concrete needs and is economically possible. What have you to say about [a] centralized milk station that shall distribute a clean good quality of milk in the most efficient manner possible? What action is possible in meeting the local question of an efficient and economical distribution of the coal supply of the city? One of the wholesome things that has happened is the so-called war gardens. What is to be done to assure those who wish the pleasure, as well as the advantage of a garden each summer? Great as will be the need of these measures in time of war, greater still will they be in the early days of peace.

In the background of my mind is this idea. The social-democratic movement of today comes into the minds of men, not because of the socialist organization, but because of those 180 cars of produce from all over the world. It is no longer doctrinaire, it is real, vital, and pressing, related to a concrete issue right here in this city, making democracy real in Pittsfield. The dogma of the class struggle, and the pledge of party solidarity that has been the basis of organization, has no place today. The economic facts and necessities of daily life have pushed it aside in reality. Let the socialist organization of this city be democratic, and not a subsidiary branch of a large machine.

As these local problems of reconstruction reach out into the wider circle of the state, they join in true democratic fashion for those issues. I know that this may be said to be the grossest kind of opportunism, but I want to suggest that it is not opportunism, but economic necessity. It is taking facts where they are. I do not mean by this that political log-rolling and bargaining, that exchange of political power for unworthy considerations, but I mean the attitude of a straightforward statesmanship. If you wait for all these things to be forced upon you from above, we shall develop into the most powerful bureaucratic society. If the pressure comes from below, the outgrowth of immediate needs, then the democratic power of the people will register in the state and the nation, and in affairs international.

The word democracy has been written into the history of the war. It is the deeply cherished hope of the peoples of all the nations at war, that out [of] its turmoil may come a lasting peace, and a just and stable internationalism.

The word, "international," has been a common word in the vocabulary of the socialist. Many of the dreams concerning its power were shattered by the war. But one thing has been made clear during these three years, and a clear recognition of that fact would do much to clear the rubbish of the past. The way to a sound internationalism is not through the elimination of the nation, but through the recognition of the fact that the nations must be the pillars of the international structure. He who does not respect and work through the community in which he lives, will not be of great value in the international community.

If you have a new neighbor come to live near you, you judge him pretty much by his attitude towards that spot which even for the time being serves as his homestead. There are three classes of neighbors. One is the man who regards everything that he has and does as the top of perfection. He has a sneer for all around him. He boasts and swaggers, talks about his rights, and knocks and criticizes everyone and everything on all sides. A neighborhood can tolerate such a man, but such men do not make a neighborhood, or a community or a nation or an international. There is another type, who never seems to

care about the place where he lives except insofar as it affords him shelter and food. While his own place goes to wreck and ruin, he is talking about his mansion in the sky, or his castle in Spain, or telling his neighbor how to manage his affairs. This chap does not make a neighborhood. He counts for little in that particular task. The third type is he who respects his own spot, makes the most that he can out of it, and respects equally the spot and the rights and needs of his neighbor. This man makes the neighborhood. The same thinking is true of nations. The swaggering, boastful nation, domineering and swinging the big stick, will not be very much assistance in building up the community of nations. The nation that is always letting its own things go, forgetting its own institutions, its own people, suffering them to undergo all sorts of hardship and degeneration will not contribute much to the international life. But the nation, that respects itself, respects the other nations, and lives and lets live, will become a factor in the international life. I go back now to the suggestion of immediate needs. The scale has already tipped in the direction of social democracy in this country. If the great conception of internationalism is to become a reality, it will so become insofar as you and I assist, by our contribution, in making this nation, and keeping this nation, just such a nation as international life demands. Not by forgetting the nation, not by making it a swaggering nation, but a self-respecting nation among the nations. It calls for a loyalty and devotion that is deeper and more abiding than jingoism, a long, persistent and devoted loyalty, not to things as they are, but to things as they ought to be and will become. Because the clay is not yet molded into the pattern that you have in mind, is no reason for damning and rejecting the clay, so long as it is soft and pliable. From the point of view of international relations, Ex-President Taft has given you the suggestion, "The end must be, we all hope, the promotion of the rule of the people in all the important nations. In that case, war as between countries, will not be begun without the wish of the majority of the people."