

# **WHAT IS DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM?**

by  
**Carlyle King**



**Co-operative Commonwealth Federation**

Victory and Reconstruction Series

No. 3



## FOREWORD.

There are almost as many varieties of socialism as there are of Christianity. The following pages attempt to describe the main principles of democratic socialism as these have been understood in the nations of the British Commonwealth. For the details as to how these principles may be applied in different countries and under varying circumstances, one must of course go to the programs of the labor and socialist parties in those countries. This pamphlet is intended to provide an introduction to socialism for people who have become interested in the subject for the first time. The book list at the end may help them to fuller and more detailed study.

I began to write these pages at the request of the Education Committee of the Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement, Saskatchewan Section, who wanted something brief and handy on socialism for CCYM members. I should like therefore to send the pamphlet forth with comradely greetings to the Youth Movement, and to inscribe it in particular to the young men and women of the Saskatoon CCYM with whom I have worked happily for the last five years.

CARLYLE KING.

Saskatoon, October, 1943.

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# What Is Democratic Socialism?

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Socialism is both a philosophy and an instrument of social organization. As philosophy it teaches that men should live by co-operative work in peace and plenty; as instrument it shows how they may do so. Its purpose is to make democracy effective. Democracy, as we know it in the countries of Europe and America, has been woefully inadequate to provide a high level of common good; and the tragic spectacle of recurring wars and economic depressions leave no doubt that people have not yet learned how to live in peace and plenty. Socialism would correct the inadequacy and lead the way to freedom from want and fear.

The fundamental principles of socialism may be considered under four main headings: the economic, the political, the social, and the ethical.

## 1—ECONOMIC ASPECTS

Above all things good policy is to be used that the treasures and monies in a state be not gathered into a few hands. For otherwise a state may have a great stock and yet starve. And money is like muck, not good unless it be spread. Lord Bacon (1561-1626.)

Socialism, from the economic standpoint, has three main aspects: (1) an objective, (2) a method, and (3) a plan.



1. **Objective.** The objective of socialism is the extension of private property. Socialists want more people to have and own more things: more food, more clothing, more houses and gardens, more furniture, more radios, more books; more, in short, of all that the economists call **consumers' goods**. Consumers' goods include anything that people buy in shops and stores, or cause to have built or made, for their own use, benefit, or enjoyment: tables and curtains and dishes, motor cars and garages to shelter them, fountain pens and vacuum cleaners, footballs and pianos. The socialist's criticism of the present economic order, usually called capitalism, is that under it there is not enough private property in consumers' goods. The plain truth is that not enough people own enough of the things that make life satisfying and pleasant. They ought to own more, and it is the aim of socialism to see that they do own more.

2. **Method.** The method of socialism is the **community ownership** of the means of making and distributing consumers' goods. These are often called **the means of production**. They include: (i) natural resources like forests, fisheries, mines, and water power, which are the sources of raw materials for making goods or sources of energy for turning the wheels of industry; (ii) factories and plants in which equipment and consumers' goods are made; (iii) the machinery and tools which are used to make equipment and goods; (iv) the various forms of transportation, like railways, ships, airplanes, which are needed to take goods from the place of manufacture to the consumer who will use them; and (v) the banking facilities, that is the money and credit system by which goods are distributed and exchanged.

Under the present economic system called capitalism these means of making and distributing consumers' goods are mainly in the hands of a few individuals and corporations. A very small percentage of the total population of

any country owns and controls the banks, the transportation systems, the factories, the machinery, the mines and the forests. Socialists say that these means of production must come under community ownership and control. The reason is simple: if your objective is to get more consumers' goods into the hands of the people who make them, then you must see to it that those people own the means of making and distributing the goods. For inevitably those who own the means of making and distributing the goods will take the largest possible share of the goods that are made. If all the working people of a community are to get all the goods that they make, then the whole community will have to own the means of making those goods; if only a few own the means of making the goods, then that few will take the lion's share of the goods, and the rest of the people will get what is left.

That is the way it works now. Under the capitalist system in the United States in the year 1929 the 36,000 richest American families together got ten billion dollars, almost exactly as much as the twelve million families (42% of all American families) who had incomes of less than \$1,500 a year! That is, 0.1% of the families at the top of the economic scale received about the same as the 42% of the families at the bottom of the scale. This is according to the figures of three professors from the Brookings Institution in their report, *America's Capacity to Consume*. Notice that this was in 1929, the most prosperous year in America in the twentieth century. What would have been the figures on the comparative distribution of income for any year in the terrible thirties?

That kind of distribution, as Lord Bacon pointed out 350 years ago, is bad for the health of any society. Money is like manure, he said, only good if it is spread. Money, of course, is itself only a symbol; the paper bills and the cheques which we call money are merely convenient tickets to facilitate the buying and exchanging of the goods that



people want. And people will only obtain these goods when they get hold of the places from which goods come and of the ways by which they are distributed. It is possession of these means of production which now gives a few people literally power of life and death over the majority of their fellows. It therefore cannot be tolerated. **Private property in consumers' goods is desirable—the more of it the better; but monopolistic control of the means of making and distributing consumers' goods leads to tyranny and injustice. Here the community must own and control, if all the members of the community are to have their fair share of the goods produced.**

How may the community own the means of production? There are various ways. Here are some of them:

(1) **Co-operative Associations.** The people of a local community may come together, pool their resources, and own a shop or store to distribute at cost such goods as food, clothing, fuel, or machinery. They may do the same to provide themselves with credit facilities (as in a Credit Union), health services (as in a medical co-operative), or housing (as in a building co-operative). Groups of primary producers, as farmers, fishermen, dairymen, fruit growers may in the same way establish co-operatives for the marketing of grain, fish, milk, butter, cheese, and fruit. All these forms of co-operatives, and many others, have been tried in the democracies of the Western world. In the main they have been successful, and have made a substantial contribution to the living standards of the people. Under socialism co-operatives would be enormously extended.

(2) **Municipal Ownership.** The people who live in a rural municipality may decide to use the powers of their municipal government to build and operate, say, a mill for gristing flour or a factory for making jam. The people who live in an urban area may wish to use their municipal government to own and control bakeries and dairies so that bread and milk may be distributed at cost within that

area. This method of community ownership has been used successfully in many countries and might well be extensively developed under socialism.

(3) **Regional Public Ownership.** The community as province or state of a federal union like Canada or Australia might well undertake under public ownership the development of natural resources such as the water power, the timber, and the mineral wealth within its boundaries. The wealth derived from such development would go then to the enrichment of the people of that state or province and not, as now, to the enrichment of a few powerful corporations.

(4) **National Public Ownership.** The community as nation may set up appropriate bodies operating as public service commissions or boards to own and control on behalf of the nation such nation-wide services or utilities as banking, transportation and communication, and heavy industry.

These are some of the methods of community ownership which already have been successfully used in several democratic nations. Others, no doubt, would be developed as a nation advanced towards socialism. No one method perhaps is intrinsically better than the others; under differing circumstances various methods might have varying degrees of success. Possibly a combination of all the methods is desirable. **It would be for the people to decide which forms of community ownership were the most useful in any given circumstances. That is, a wise democracy would discover which was the most efficient, most economical, or otherwise most satisfactory way of owning and controlling each aspect of the nation's economy; and then proceed to act through the appropriate forms of ownership.**

3. **Plan.** Socialism requires economic planning. In the complex and complicated society of the industrial-machine age, the various departments of production must be fitted one to the other. That is, there must be co-ordina-



tion of production. That means planning. We need, for example, to plan for the production of the right amount of electrical power to keep the factories going at full speed; and the right amount of transport to distribute the products of the factories promptly; and the right amount of food, clothing, and shelter for those who keep the trains, ships, and planes running efficiently; and so for all aspects of our economic life. We shall have to find out from time to time the various needs of the population, and we shall have to find out what productive resources are available to meet the needs. We shall have to balance what we bring into the country with what we are able to export in exchange for the imports. In short, we shall have to fit the various departments of commerce and industry together for the efficient operation of the entire economic system.

This is the work of a Planning Commission with an expert staff of economists and statisticians. It will be their job to gather information about every part of the national economy and to receive opinions and suggestions from those actually engaged in the day-to-day work of factory, field, or mine. Then, using this material in the light of principles laid down by the people's representatives in parliament or congress, they will proceed to make plans for the co-ordinated production of the required goods and services.

Modern war has awakened many people who were formerly inclined to scoff at planning to the imperative necessity for this co-ordinated production in the various departments of a nation's economic life. Many who said it couldn't be done suddenly realized that it had to be done for national survival. A national emergency such as war calls for the most efficient and most economical production. This can be secured only by planning, as every nation caught in the dragnet of modern war has at once recognized by introducing the most sweeping measures of economic planning. **Some day the majority of us will**

**realize that poverty and unemployment and the frustration and misery that come with them represent a national emergency too; and then we shall bring to the saving of human life and property the same measure of economic planning that, under capitalism, we have hitherto reserved for the destruction of human life and property in warfare.**

In peacetime the most conspicuous feature of capitalist society may be described in the one word **waste**—the waste that, economically considered, is the result of neglect and planlessness. We waste our natural resources; we waste our human resources; we fail to use the entire resources of our factories and machines. Production engineers estimate that in the United States even in the boom year of 1929 plant and machine capacity was used only to 81% of its possibilities, while in 1930 this fell to 50%. In 1934 a Committee appointed by the Government of the United States reported that every family of four in America could have an income of \$4,400 per annum at 1929 prices if the productive resources of America were used to the full. But we never do so under capitalism.

Thus it comes that in the contemporary world we have seen, on the one hand, unemployment with its appalling waste of potential human value; on the other hand, that sweating of men and women in factories and mines which is equally a waste of possibilities for good life. Again, we have seen in some sectors of society men, women, and children going without necessary food, shelter, and clothing; and in other sectors of the same society we have seen food going to waste, fabrics deteriorating in warehouses, and building materials lying unused. Then the ultimate waste of war has come to rid us of both surplus men and goods.

**From the tragic and insane contradictions of such an economic system—or un-system—socialism offers release through the planned production of goods for common wealth.**



## II—POLITICAL ASPECTS

Government is a plain thing, and fitted to the capacity of many heads. Jonathan Swift (1667-1745.)

The essence of the political philosophy of socialism is (i) belief in responsible government, and (ii) belief in the free exercise by everyone of the rights of citizenship.

In the democratic countries of the Western world most of us have been taught to believe in responsible government, that is, that the people entrusted with positions of political governorship are answerable to those whom they, for the time being, govern. Power is from time to time delegated to political governors on that condition. If the governors do not fulfil their trust, or if for some reason, good or bad, they are not satisfactory to the governed, they may be recalled and others put in their places.

That is the theory according to which we choose members of parliamentary or legislative bodies; and to a considerable extent practice conforms to theory. **But what about those who rule us in the economic sphere?** What about those who, through their ownership and control of banks and mines and factories, determine far more fatefully than political governors the ways in which we live out our lives? What about those who decide how much goes into our pay envelopes or how much we are paid for the things we grow, and thereby decide at the same time how much food and clothing we shall have, what kind of houses we shall live in, what we shall have, what kind of houses we shall live in, what we shall have to spend on entertainment and recreation, and how far our children shall proceed with their education? What control do we the (supposedly) sovereign people exercise over **them**? To whom are **they** responsible? In our capitalist democracies we

choose our political rulers (or think we do); but who chooses our economic rulers?

The point is this: **society certainly needs leaders or managers or governors in commerce and industry, just as it needs them in political, educational, and religious affairs.** But are they to be responsible or irresponsible leaders, managers, governors? All adults in a democracy have a political voice through the vote at election times, but very few have any voice in determining the conditions under which they must work in field, factory, shop, or mine every week during the four years between parliamentary or legislative elections. They have no voice in deciding whether production shall be contracted or expanded, whether credit shall be tight or easy, whether employment shall rise or fall. That is, they have little or no control over or check upon the economic decisions which may make or mar their lives.

This, says the socialist, is surely the denial of democratic responsible government. Giving a man a vote at election time is not much of a boon if all the year round that man is subject to irresponsible power in the place where he works. What it comes to is this: we have the principle of democracy in one area of citizenship, the political, and the principle of dictatorship or tyranny in another area, the economic, which at the very least is equally important. Lincoln said that a nation could not endure half slave and half free. Neither can a society exist in health half democratic and half undemocratic. Since we certainly do not want to turn our backs upon the political democracy which our fathers strove so long and so hard to secure, then obviously we must extend the principle of democracy, of responsible government, from the purely legislative or parliamentary sphere to the economic sphere. That is the socialist contention. The socialist insists that unless we have democracy in economic affairs we have only a limited democracy, at the worst a sham, at the best a shadow of the real thing.



In fact we cannot even have effective political democracy until we have democratic control in the economic sphere as well. Observe how the working of political democracy is severely hampered because we have not economic democracy. For example, think of the economic penalties which under capitalism prevent people from exercising their rights of citizenship freely. Think of those who fear to lose their jobs if they are known to support policies or parties not acceptable to their employers; think of the relief recipients or the pensioners who fear to lose their pittance if they are known to be opposed to the government of the day; think of the employed persons who find themselves denied advancement or promotion because they are unorthodox in their political sympathies.

Again, consider the fact that those who control the bulk of the economic resources of a nation have large sums to spend upon the election to governmental bodies of persons sympathetic to capitalism, while their opponents are comparatively handicapped. Furthermore, many citizens are so poor that they cannot afford to buy the books and papers they need to read if they are to make sensible political judgments. Capitalism, that is, keeps people in ignorance and thereby limits their exercise of full political citizenship. And on top of all that, capitalists through their ownership of the means of wealth production are also able to own the means of production of **ideas**; through their control of the nation's wealth, they also control what people read in the newspapers, hear over the radio, see in the newsreels, and learn in school, college, and church.

Observe, too, how the undemocratic control of economic wealth adversely affects the practice of the traditional democratic rights and liberties: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of the press, and equality before the law. Certainly the employee of a company hostile to trade unionism wins

his right to freedom of speech or freedom of association at a considerable price. And what chance has the average poor man, no matter how just his cause, or securing a verdict in the courts against corporate wealth? As for freedom of the press, every Englishman may express himself, said G. K. Chesterton, "and about five millionaires own all the organs of expression!"

For these two reasons, then, (i) that men may be free to enjoy the rights and perform the duties of citizenship, and (ii) that they may be free from the dominion of irresponsible power in the places where they work, socialists advocate the democratic government of commerce and industry. Socialists believe that all the people should participate in the government of every aspect of life, and among these the economic is of the utmost importance.

This does not mean government of industry and commerce, or control of economic planning, by politicians. There is no reason to believe that the men and women elected to legislative bodies have any particular competence to the details of economic organization or production. Their special competence is in knowing and expressing the wishes of the people who have elected them. Socialists believe that legislative bodies, democratically chosen by all the citizens, should lay down broad lines of economic policy and engage people of trained competence to carry out the policies. This should apply not only to the Economic Planning Authority mentioned in the preceding section but also to the various Public Service Commissions or Boards which would be established by local, regional, or national governments to have charge of particular departments of economic development.

The procedure envisaged by socialists is roughly this: The appropriate legislative body will appoint competent people to the various Public Commissions or Boards and entrust to them the job of organizing, say, a given industry.



These Commissioners will then engage the technicians, the managers, the superintendents and other essential personnel, and these in turn will take charge of the details of production. They do so now, at the bidding of their capitalist employers; under socialism they will have the immense satisfaction of working for the good of all and not for the profit of a few. The various Commissions will, of course, make periodic reports of their progress to the government which appointed them, and the people's representatives in the legislative body will consider and discuss these reports. Lines of policy will be laid down by the legislature; the details of organization and administration will be the responsibility of those with specialized training, competence, and experience.

Furthermore, socialists believe that the people actually engaged in the work of any industry, be it agriculture, mining, manufacturing, or what you will, should have a voice in the management of that industry. The people actually engaged in the work from day to day have a special knowledge and a special point of view to contribute to the efficient organization of their industry. They must be heard. Hence the importance which socialists attach to the development of strong trade unions through which the desires, the opinions, and the suggestions of the working men and women in every occupation may be voiced. Certainly organized labor is one of the major expressions of the democratic principle in industry. It has been demonstrated again and again, even in capitalist society, that when managers and workers in a factory or shop discuss common problems together, exchange views and pool their experiences, then the workers are happier and the production is better. Under socialism, when it will be clear to both workers and managers that they are working together for social good and not for private gain, one may expect worker-manager co-operation to be a triumph for the democratic control of economic life.

What is true of trade union organization in mine or factory, and its importance in the democratic government of industry, is equally true of the corresponding organizations of farmers and fishermen and dairymen in the production and marketing of primary products. Socialists say that farmers and fishermen and dairymen must have a leading voice on all boards and commissions which deal with the part that the producing and marketing of commodities like grain or fish or milk play in the economy of a planned society.

Likewise the citizen as consumer must be represented in the democratic control of economic processes. He buys and uses the final marketable product of farm and factory; therefore he too must be given a voice in the decisions which determined the price and quality of goods.

Again, socialists believe in a Civil Service staffed by non-partisan, trained and competent officials. They regard it as scandalous that members of Government Services should ever be appointees of the political party in power and therefore removable when that party loses power. The Government Service can never be as efficient as it ought to be until its members are appointed and promoted because of competence and merit by a non-partisan Public Service Commission or similar body. Socialists want to see the Government Services staffed in this way.

Finally, socialists believe that democracy is a great deal more than voting at election times. Democracy is an attitude to people. It includes trust in people, a faith that, given knowledge and freedom, average men and women can order their common life aright. It includes toleration of minority opinion, no matter how apparently stupid or wrong-headed. It includes the acceptance of majority decision but not the ruthless suppression of peaceful and



**law-abiding minorities. It includes belief in government by the methods of discussion, reason, and persuasion.**

The road to socialism lies in that direction. Socialism, the logical extension of democracy to economic affairs, can only be achieved through the democratic methods of discussion, reason, and persuasion. Socialism and democracy go together. Socialism needs democracy. Democracy needs socialism.

### III—SOCIAL ASPECTS

**A system founded on inequality is against nature, and, in the long run, breaks down. Matthew Arnold (1822-88).**

The two chief crimes of capitalism are robbery and snobbery. Capitalism steals from the workers a large part of the fruits of their toil; capitalism creates and maintains class divisions in society.

The two crimes are intimately connected; the snobbery grows out of the robbery. Wherever the wealth of a community is concentrated in the hands of the comparatively few, and the income of society is so unequally distributed that the majority of the people cannot buy the products of their joint work, there class distinctions and class privileges and class prejudices arise. Look about you. In every country in the Western world you may see various groups of citizens, equally hard-working, receiving very different standards of food, clothing, and shelter. Indeed the general thing is that those who do the hardest and most dangerous work receive the poorest food, clothing, and shelter, both in quantity and quality. Between the people of one income group and another there is a great gulf fixed: in the main they do not know each other socially, they do not think together or play together, they do not intermarry, they do not even go to the same churches. Furthermore, the social classes which correspond to the various income groups enjoy very different standards of health, education, and leisure, and very different opportunities to give leadership and hold responsible positions in society.

Socialism stands for (i) the abolition of classes, and (ii) the achievement of equality.

By the first the socialist understands this, that neither



wealth nor rank nor position shall entitle any person to special privileges in the goods of civilization. There must not be in society groups or classes, membership of which brings advantages from which other people are excluded. The socialist applauds Walt Whitman's exclamation that he will accept nothing that every other person may not have on the same terms, and would add that no one **ought** to have a chance to get anything that others may not have on the same terms. What is available to some must be available to all. Nor can access to the professions, nor the exercise of responsible power, nor the opportunities for leadership be exclusively or mainly the preserve of classes or groups. In a socialist society people will rise to positions of responsibility or leadership only through merit and force of character.

What does the socialist mean by equality? Certainly he does not mean that everybody has an equal amount of brains, brawn, or beauty. Evidence to the contrary is obvious wherever two people meet—at least to one of them, if not to both! People differ widely, everybody knows, in physical health and strength, in talents, in intellectual power and vigor. The diversity of gifts and tastes among people is a matter of common observation. Nor is this a bad thing in a world where there are various jobs to do, where all our talents are needed and ought to be used, and where our friends' peculiar tastes make them endlessly entertaining to us. The evil arises only when difference is assumed to mean superiority and is then made the basis for a claim to privilege. We need to remember that the differences, great as they may be, between person and person are less important than their common humanity which, in the socialist's view, entitles them to share equally in the common good.

Again, equality does not mean to socialists that everybody should be paid exactly the same. It does not mean that every man should receive the same cash income as

the next man, irrespective of the kind of work each does. There is a difference of opinion among socialists on this point. Some, notably George Bernard Shaw, have stood for exact equality of income. Shaw presents very cogent reasons for his view in his *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* and answers the usual arguments advanced against his view. Most socialists, however, have held that people generally will insist on some gradation of income corresponding to the quantity and quality of work done. But all socialists would agree that every worker, either by hand or brain, should receive an income adequate to maintain him and his family in health, comfort, and security; and that the spread between this basic income and the highest income paid for special competence should not be large. Richard Acland in *What It Will Be Like In the New Britain*, a vivid description of what Britain will be like under Common Ownership, hopes that the income paid for the most responsible position in the land will not be more than ten times that of the lowest-paid worker; and he adds that he would prefer a ratio of only five to one. Probably most socialists would not quarrel with that.

What we must insist upon is that purchasing power shall be so distributed that the people may buy all the goods and services they create, that there shall be a basic minimum of the kind mentioned in the preceding paragraph, and that the avenue to additional accomplishment shall be open to all workers. **Here we approach the meaning of equality as socialists understand it... It is that all who work may have an equal opportunity with their fellows to develop their capacities to the full and make the most of their lives.**

What is needed that all may have this equality of opportunity? Let us be specific. It means: (i) food, clothing, and shelter of the standard required for health and comfort in a given climate; (ii) free access for children, young people and adults to the education and training for which they have an aptitude and from which they can



benefit; (iii) a permanent job at a wage which will enable the worker to provide for the needs of his family; (iv) security against accident and ill health; (v) security of a worker's dependents against his premature death; and (vi) security against failing powers and advancing years.

A socialist society would provide the following for all its members:

1. **Free education and training.** This is the key to equal opportunity. Most of the inequalities of the present social system that are felt to be particularly unjust would disappear if every child had the chance to obtain the kind of education or training that would fit him to make the best of his abilities.

2. **Jobs for all at adequate pay.** This follows logically upon the provision of education, which is pointless and exasperating unless the opportunity to use it is added thereto. Under socialism there will be no unemployment. All the powers of all the people will be used to provide an advancing standard of living and the opportunity for creative leisure.

3. **Comprehensive Health Services.** These will include care for the health and safety of those who work in factories, mines, shops, and offices; provision for the health of mothers, babies, and school children; the practice of preventive medicine; and the provision of the best medical, surgical, and hospital treatment to all who need it.

4. **Social Security** against the emergencies of life, as accident, premature death, and old age. This will include the provision of disability pensions, workers' compensation, mothers' allowances, and retirement pensions, at a figure sufficient to maintain the standard of living to which those who are unfortunate or incapacitated are accustomed.

How are these measures, designed to provide equality of opportunity for all citizens, to be paid for? There are

two ways chiefly: (i) During the period of transition from a capitalist society to a socialist society money may come from heavy taxation on high incomes and on inheritances. (ii) Mainly and permanently, however, the revenue for social security will come from socialized industry. It is important to remember that, for there are some people who will approve heartily of comprehensive health services, social security measures, equal educational opportunity, and so on, and yet reject the community ownership of the means of production which we have seen to be the method of socialism. The two go together: only the people's control of the economic resources will make possible the people's provision for their common security. That is, without socialism there can be no equality.

But under socialism there can be equality, and with it the setting free of men and women from the haunting dread of insecurity and the unremitting task of making a bare living which now absorbs so large—too large—a part of their time, thought, and energy. True freedom can come in this way—the freedom to grow. Men and women will have more leisure, more time and more inclination for recreation and hobbies, for games and music, for books, for travel—in short, more time and more capacity for humane living.

The family and family life, too, will again come into their own when parents are not ceaselessly worried, as most are now, about how to feed and clothe and educate their children. G. K. Chesterton once said that capitalism had well-nigh destroyed the family in the modern world, and added that he did not know which was the saddest spectacle: communism attacking the family, fascism defending it, or capitalism betraying it! Socialism, by providing social security for both the adult and growing citizen, will make possible the unhampered growth of the normal affection and mutual aid which characterize the family at its best.



Under socialism we may also confidently expect a great reduction in crime, which to-day is mainly the fruit of poverty and its attendant evils of disease, ignorance, and idleness. But let society undertake to see that every child grows up in a healthy environment, that every boy and girl has wholesome occupations and recreations, that every young person has a chance to get the training best calculated to make him a useful citizen, that every adult has a chance to work at a satisfying and remunerative job—let society undertake to do that and it will not then have to employ so many policemen and jailers to look after their unhappy fellow-citizens. Socialism will save for constructive purposes a great deal of that potential human worth that now stagnates in the enormous wastage of crime.

Back in the nineteenth century, in the heyday of advancing British capitalism, Matthew Arnold issued to his complacent fellow-countrymen a famous warning to "choose equality and flee greed." More than two generations since then of increasingly violent economic depressions and increasingly devastating wars have underlined the folly of choosing greed. Perhaps Matthew Arnold was right; perhaps it is time now, as it was then, to choose equality. At any rate, that is the socialist's faith: only when we begin to provide a life good for all men as for ourselves do we establish the foundations of a society that can endure. Otherwise we labor in vain who build it, for "a system founded on inequality is against nature, and, in the long run, breaks down." **Open to all men, says the socialist, irrespective of their nationality, race, religion, or color, the avenues to equal opportunity for education, work, and leadership; permit the millions to make their creative contribution to a common life; and you will have made a new civilization.**

## IV—ETHICAL ASPECTS

**Religion is politics, and politics is brotherhood. William Blake (1757-1827).**

"But you can't change human nature!" This is the hardy perennial among objections to socialism. After you have demonstrated that socialism is economically reasonable, politically desirable, and socially advantageous, some one is sure to think he is trumping your ace when he raises this time-battered cry about the unchangeableness of human nature. It is supposed to demolish the case for socialism once and for all.

What precisely does a man mean when he says that you can't change human nature? He means that in his experience people are predominantly greedy, selfish, and cruel; that most of the time they have their eye on the main chance and are looking out for Number One; that they are ready to trample on their fellow-men in the struggle for power and position, and usually do so. A few get ahead at the expense of the others, and the others only wish they had a chance to do the same. Men have been like this from the beginning, and they always will be.

Is this true? Is this an accurate description of human nature to-day, yesterday, to-morrow? Is the race of man essentially and by nature pugnacious, unco-operative, and greedy? There are liars, bullies, and thieves among men, we know. We have met them. But are the most of them liars, bullies, and thieves? Better, let us recognize the elements of weakness in every man, and put the question this way: does the liar, the bully, and the thief predominate in most of the people we know? Or can we say that on balance the people we know are more honest than dishonest, more truthful than untruthful, more peaceful than pugnacious? What is human nature like? Has it always been the same? Does it change?



The anthropologists, those scholars and travellers who study the uncivilized men of primitive tribes and who therefore see what we might call human nature in the raw, can throw some light on these questions about what man is really like. In remote corners of the earth there have survived into the twentieth century groups of people almost wholly untouched by any of the practices and attitudes which we call civilization. Among such are the Pygmies of Equatorial Africa, the Veddahs of Ceylon, the Punan of Borneo, and the Andaman Islanders. Here is Primitive Man or Natural Man. What is he like? According to the testimony of the anthropologists (a rich accumulation of which one may find in a fascinating book like Elliot Smith's *Human History*) Primitive Man is rather child-like, good-natured, honest, and truthful. Mainly he is well-behaved, although shy and suspicious and quick to defend himself. He is appreciative of good craftsmanship, he is kind to children, he shares his goods with his fellows. The Trobriander, for example, who lives on a remote island off the coast of New Guinea, is anything but greedy. He cultivates yams with the ambition of being recognized as a good gardener, takes one-quarter of the crop for his own use, and gives the rest to his relations-in-law! And the natives of Nicobar Island are most uncompetitive: in their boat races, the "competing" teams struggle for all they are worth, but when one team sees that it is getting a little ahead of the other it slackens off a bit until the other catches up! It would seem then that however pessimistic we may feel about human nature in places where men enjoy the blessings of ballot boxes, electric refrigerators, and bombing planes, we may take heart from the fact that our primitive ancestors weren't such bad fellows.

The biologists, who study the growth and development of living organisms, may encourage us too. They point out that co-operation or mutual aid has been just as powerful a factor in evolution as the struggle for existence that takes place in the plant and animal world. More im-

portant still for us, they point out that when we come to the higher forms of life, we find that co-operation has been more and more essential for the survival of the species and for the creation of those values which give significance and beauty to life. Turn, for instance, to the pages of Julian Huxley's *Essays of a Biologist* and note that this eminent English biologist holds that progress has come only when nations have been able to escape from the race of competition, and that, biologically speaking, co-operation among the nations in some sort of world federation is now imperative if the human species is to be less unhappy in the future than it has been in the past. Life, that is, has been increasingly co-operative through the ages and needs to become more so.

Turn also to the psychologists, who study the growth and development of human behaviour. They tell us that the human baby as it comes fresh into the world is neither honest nor dishonest, neither truthful nor untruthful, but is potentially capable of becoming either. The new-born baby has a few strong impulses and urges which, as he grows, are capable of the most astonishingly diverse and complex developments. What he turns out to be, what his "human nature" becomes, depends in large measure upon the sort of care he gets, the home he grows up in, the habits he acquires, the people he knows, the education he obtains, both formally at school and informally from his social environment, and on many similar factors. The human infant appears to be almost infinitely malleable; different kinds of upbringing and training may mould him into correspondingly different shapes or "natures." A moment's reflection will reveal to each of us how much our present ideas, attitudes, and emotions are the product of our home, our school, our church, our friends, our job, in short of all our life experiences to date. Such a reflection should make us hesitate to generalize about the apparently permanent elements of human nature.



Rather, we may sum up the foregoing by saying that there does not seem to be anything necessarily fixed or unchangeable about human character and behaviour. The evidence shows that men's attitudes and behaviour have varied enormously according to time, place, and circumstance; that on occasion at least men have been able to deal justly, live peaceably, and work co-operatively with their fellows; and that when they have been able to do so, or insofar as they have been able to do so, they have had life more abundantly. It is for us the living to draw more heavily upon the fund of latent human good, to develop our human natural resources—or our natural human resources. The faith of the socialist is this: In spite of all his "hoggish, cheating, bedbug qualities" (to use Walt Whitman's phrase) man does desire liberty, equality, and fraternity. There is within him, potentially, enough intelligence and good-will to make a better world than this. Given a fair chance, the average man will do an honest job of work. That is, the socialist is prepared to trust his fellows as he would himself be trusted.

Often it has been all too hastily assumed that people will work only for money, that the way to keep them up to the mark is to threaten them with loss of pay, and the way to get better work from them is to hold out the inducement of more pay. This is not correct. Without denying that the love of money is a powerful motive in people—it certainly is—one can point to other motives that are equally powerful. There is, for example, the sense of pride in work well done. Most people get satisfaction from doing their best at the job in hand, even if the financial reward is not large. Again, people like to have the good opinion, the respect, the admiration of their fellows and will work hard to earn these. Likewise, people will work hard to win positions of trust and responsibility and honor, even although these positions may not mean a larger income.

This question of **why** people work was investigated in 1941 by the top-ranking body of scientists in America, the National Academy of Sciences. The Academy appointed a Committee on Work in Industry composed of engineers, sociologists, psychologists, doctors, trade union officials, and business executives. This Committee spent months making tests of, and collecting facts about, the motives that lead men to do good work. Their finding, as published in their report *Fatigue of Workers*, was that the desire of workers to feel themselves members of a co-operating group, and to feel that they are doing something important, is a more powerful motive than a rise in pay. They found, that is, that men want to **belong**, to participate, to do something that matters; they found that men want to co-operate in significant work. As John Steinbeck makes one of his characters say: "Men always like to work together. There's a hunger in men to work together." They do, certainly, if the work is worth doing. The pity of it is that under capitalism so much of the work men and women are asked to do is joyless work, useless work, silly work, degrading work.

Under socialism these non-financial motives, which even now leap forward when they have a chance, will have full play. They will be powerfully mobilized for the creation of common wealth. Useless work will be no more, and the drudgery which now deadens and degrades so many will be abolished through the intelligent and humane use of the machine. Men will see that their work is wanted for the satisfaction of human needs, and will be glad to give it.

Nor will the love of money be so powerful in a society where every man knows that willingness to work is a guarantee of a chance to work at a useful job for adequate pay. Our present society puts a premium on greed and gambling. For so many people life is such a perpetual



struggle for unattained and unattainable financial security that all their days they can think of little else than grubbing for money. Their lives are bounded by the desire for money. One cannot blame them, for our society, in R. H. Tawney's phrase, is an acquisitive society. That is, our institutions, our social practices, our prevailing habits of thought, all powerfully incline us to **acquire**. Our days are passed in so clamorous a scramble for the **means of life** that we come to feel that the acquisition of money is the main **end of life**.

But a socialist society will be functional, not acquisitive. It will place the emphasis on **doing** rather than on **getting**. It will teach its children to prepare themselves for a useful job in their community; it will direct men's minds to the performance of function in association with others for mutual benefit. It can and must appeal to the powerful hunger in men to work together for common ends. In short, it will appeal to men's desire to co-operate, to men's desire to be comrades.

Co-operation and comradeship—these together are the moral dynamic, the moral driving-force, of a socialist society. Only the great city of friends, to use Walt Whitman's term, can either build or maintain socialism. When one man holds out a helping hand to another man, then a revolutionary situation is in germ, John Steinbeck points out in his fine novel of working-class comradeship, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Look at this waitress in the highway hamburger stand selling five-cent peppermint sticks at two-for-a-penny to the hard-up father of little boys whose intense faces are eloquent of their hunger for a little candy. Look at this woman lending her blanket to another woman because the night draws down and the baby has a cold. Look at this man, who has been driven from his farm by the mortgage company's tractor, helping this other dispossessed farmer to pitch his roadside tent. Something

revolutionary has begun here, something to shake the lords and masters in all lands. If this thing grows, then farewell privilege and vested interest and man's inhumanity to man. O, you who fear the common man, says Steinbeck, this is the thing to bomb!

This is the thing to cherish, says the socialist. This is the thing that will set us free, if anything will, to lead the lives of men and not those of beasts of burden. Socialism stands for quality of life; it holds that the purpose of industry and all economic activity is to provide for all men the material foundation for a good life. The economic expedients and the political devices of socialism are means to an end of human freedom. By these means men escape from the struggle for life to do the things which are worth doing for their own sakes. By these means the human spirit is set free to create beauty, to pursue wisdom, and to grow in grace and graciousness. For religion is politics, and politics is brotherhood.



## FOR FURTHER READING

**Shaw, Bernard—The Intelligent Women's Guide to Socialism.**

A clear, easy, and untechnical introduction to the subject. Notable for its argument in favor of equality of income.

**Strachey, John—The Theory and Practice of Socialism.**

A full and comprehensive treatment written from the Marxist standpoint. Contains a searching analysis of the present economic system in the first third of the book.

**Durbin, D. M.—The Politics of Democratic Socialism.**

An interesting contrast to Strachey above. Criticizes the Marxist view and argues very forcefully that "Democratic socialism is the best cure for poverty and the best method of furthering the happiness of the human race."

**Huberman, L.—Man's Worldly Goods.**

The story of the Wealth of Nations. An account of economic theory side by side with an account of economic practice from the sixteenth century to the present day.

**League for Social Reconstruction—Democracy Needs Socialism.**

A plain, straightforward account of how democratic socialism would affect the lives of various groups of citizens (farmers, industrial workers, professionals, women).

**Sandburg, Carl—The People, Yes.**

In free verse and rhapsodical prose, a stirring expression of faith in the common man and the way of democracy.

**Tawney, R. H.—Equality.**

The classical discussion of what we mean by equality and the way in which we may get it.

**Acland, R.—What It Will Be Like in the New Britain.**

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A classic of co-operative philosophy, demonstrating that both in nature and in human society co-operation, and not conflict and competition, is the way of progress.

**Steinbeck, J.—The Grapes of Wrath.**

The story of dispossessed farmers' migration from the Dust Bowl of the United States. A stirring picture of human brotherhood.

**Graves, Sally—A History of Socialism.**

A good brief account of the growth of socialist ideas in Britain and Europe in the last 150 years.

**Lewis, D] and Scott, Frank.—Make This Your Canada.**

A good account of the development of the Canadian economic system, and of how socialism would work in Canada under a C C F government.



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