

Socialism, the state and revolutionary tactics

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1871

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Effect of the Great Principles Proclaimed by the French Revolution.

From the time when the Revolution brought down to the masses its Gospel — not the mystic but the rational, not the heavenly but the earthly, not the divine but the human Gospel, the Gospel of the Rights of Man — ever since it proclaimed that all men are equal, that all men are entitled to liberty and equality, the masses of all European countries, of all the civilized world, awakening gradually from the sleep which had kept them in bondage ever since Christianity drugged them with its opium, began to ask themselves whether they too, had the right to equality, freedom, and humanity.

As soon as this question was posed, the people, guided by their admirable sound sense as well as by their instincts, realized that the first condition of their real emancipation, or of their humanization, was above all a radical change in their economic situation. The question of daily bread is to them justly the first question, for as it was noted by Aristotle, man, in order to think, in order to feel himself free, in order to become man, must be freed from the material cares of daily life. For that matter, the bourgeois, who are so vociferous in their outcries against the materialism of the people and who preach to the latter the abstinences of idealism, know it very well, for they themselves preach it only by word and not by example.

The second question arising before the people — that of leisure after work — is the indispensable condition of humanity. But bread and leisure can never be obtained apart from a radical transformation of existing society, and that explains why the Revolution, impelled by the implications of its own principles, gave birth to Socialism.

Socialism Is Justice...

Socialism is justice. When we speak of justice, we understand thereby not the justice contained in the Codes and in Roman jurisprudence — which were based to a great extent upon facts of violence achieved by force, violence consecrated by time and by the benedictions of some church or other (Christian or pagan), and as such accepted as absolute principles, from which all law is to be deduced by a process of logical reasoning — no, we speak of that justice which is based solely upon human conscience, the justice to be found in the consciousness of every man — even in that of children — and which can be expressed in a single word: equity.

This universal justice which, owing to conquests by force and religious influences, has never yet prevailed in the political or juridical or economic worlds, should become the basis of the new world. Without it there can be neither liberty, nor republic, nor prosperity, nor peace. It then must govern our resolutions in order that we work effectively toward the establishment of peace. And this justice urges us to take upon ourselves the defense of the interests of the terribly maltreated people and demand their economic and social emancipation along with political freedom.

The Basic Principle of Socialism.

We do not propose here, gentlemen, this or any other socialist system. What we demand now is the proclaiming anew of the great principle of the French Revolution: that every human being

should have the material and moral means to develop all his humanity, a principle which, in our opinion, is to be translated into the following problem:

To organize society in such a manner that every individual, man or woman, should find, upon entering life, approximately equal means for the development of his or her diverse faculties and their utilization in his or her work. And to organize such a society that, rendering impossible the exploitation of anyone's labor, will enable every individual to enjoy the social wealth, which in reality is produced only by collective labor, but to enjoy it only in so far as he contributes directly toward the creation of that wealth.

State Socialism Rejected.

The carrying out of this task will of course take centuries of development. But history has already brought it forth and henceforth we cannot ignore it without condemning ourselves to utter impotence. We hasten to add here that we vigorously reject any attempt at social organization which would not admit the fullest liberty of individuals and organizations, or which would require the setting up of any regimenting power whatever. In the name of freedom, which we recognize as the only foundation and the only creative principle of organization, economic or political, we shall protest against anything remotely resembling State Communism, or State Socialism.

Abolition of the Inheritance Law.

The only thing which, in opinion, the State can and should do, is first to modify little by little inheritance law so as to arrive as soon as possible at its complete abolition. That law being purely a creation of the State, and one of the conditions of the very existence of the authoritarian and divine State can and should be abolished by freedom in the State. In other words, State should dissolve itself into a society freely organized in accord with the principles of justice. Inheritance right, in our opinion, should be abolished, for so long as it exists there will be hereditary economic inequality, not the natural inequality of individuals, but the artificial man inequality of classes – and the latter will always beget hereditary equality in the development and shaping of minds, continuing to be source and consecration of all political and social inequalities. The task of justice is to establish equality for everyone, inasmuch that equality will depend upon the economic and political organization of society – an equality with which everyone is going to begin his life, that everyone, guided by his own nature, will be the product of his own efforts. In our opinion, the property of the deceased should accrue to social fund for the instruction and education of children of both sexes including their maintenance from birth until they come of age. As Slavs and as Russians, we shall add that with us the fundamental social idea, based upon the general and traditional instinct of our populations, is that as the property of all the people, should be owned only by those who cultivate it with their own hands.

We are convinced gentlemen, that this principle is just, that it is essential and inevitable condition of all serious social reform, and consequently Western Europe in turn will not fail to recognize and accept this principle, notwithstanding the difficulties of its realization in countries as in France, for instance where the majority of peasants own the land which they cultivate, but where most of those very peasants will soon end up by owning next to nothing, owing to the parceling

out of land coming as the inevitable result of the political and economic system now prevailing in France. We shall, however, refrain from offering any proposals on the land question...We shall confine ourselves now to proposing the following declaration:

The Declaration of Socialism

“Convinced that the serious realization of liberty, justice, and peace will be impossible so long as the majority of the population remains dispossessed of elementary needs, so long as it is deprived of education and is condemned to political and social insignificance and slavery — in fact if not by law — by poverty as well as by the necessity of working without rest or leisure, producing all the wealth upon which the world now prides itself, and receiving in return only such a small pan thereof that it hardly suffices to assure its livelihood for the next day;

“Convinced that for all that mass of population, terribly maltreated for centuries, the problem of bread is the problem of mental emancipation, of freedom and humanity;

“Convinced that freedom without Socialism is privilege and injustice and that Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality;

“The League [for Peace and Freedom] loudly proclaims the necessity of a radical social and economic reconstruction, having for its aim the emancipation of people’s labor from the yoke of capital and property owners, a reconstruction based upon strict justice — neither juridical nor theological nor metaphysical justice, but simply human justice — upon positive science and upon the widest freedom.”

Organization of Productive Forces in Place of Political Power.

It is necessary to abolish completely, both in principle and in fact, all that which is called political power; for, so long as political power exists, there will be ruler and ruled, masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited. Once abolished, political power should be replaced by an organization of productive forces and economic service.

Notwithstanding the enormous development of modern states — a development which in its ultimate phase is quite logically reducing the State to an absurdity — it is becoming evident that the days of the State and the State principle are numbered. Already we can see approaching the full emancipation of the toiling masses and their free social organization, free from governmental intervention, formed by economic associations of the people and brushing aside all the old State frontiers and national distinctions, and having as its basis only productive labor, humanized labor, having one common interest in spite of its diversity.

The Ideal of the People.

This ideal of course appears to the people as signifying first of all the end of want, the end of poverty, and the full satisfaction of all material needs by means of collective labor, equal and obligatory for all, and then, as the end of domination and the free organization of the people’s lives in accordance with their needs — not from the top down, as we have it in the State, but from

the bottom up, an organization formed by the people themselves, apart from all governments and parliaments, a free union of associations of agricultural and factory workers, of communes, regions, and nations, and finally, in the more remote future; the universal human brotherhood, triumphing above the ruins of all States.

The Program of a Free Society.

Outside of the Mazzinian system which is the system of the republic in the form of a State, there is no other system but that of the republic as a commune, the republic as a federation, a Socialist and a genuine people's republic — the system of Anarchism. It is the politics of the Social Revolution, which aims at the abolition of the State, and the economic, altogether free organization of the people, an organization from below upward, by means of a federation.

...There will be no possibility of the existence of a political government, for this government will be transformed into a simple administration of common affairs.

Our program can be summed up in a few words:

Peace, emancipation, and the happiness of the oppressed.

War upon all oppressors and all despoilers.

Full restitution to workers: all the capital, the factories, and all instruments of work and raw materials to go to the associations, and the land to those who cultivate it with their own hands.

Liberty, justice, and fraternity in regard to all human beings upon the earth.

Equality for all.

To all, with no distinction whatever, all the means of development, education, and upbringing, and the equal possibility of living while working.

Organizing of a society by means of a free federation from below upward, of workers associations, industrial as well as a agricultural, scientific as well as literary associations — first into a commune, then a federation communes into regions, of regions into nations, and of nations into international fraternal association.

Correct Tactics During a Revolution.

In a social revolution, which in everything is diametrically opposed to a political revolution, the acts of individuals hardly count at all, whereas the spontaneous action of masses is everything. All that individuals can do is to clarify, propagate, and work out ideas corresponding to the popular instinct, and, what is more, to contribute their incessant efforts to revolutionary organization of the natural power of the masses — but nothing else beyond that; the rest can and should be done by the people themselves. Any other method would lead to political dictatorship, to the re-emergence of the State, of privileges of inequalities of all the oppressions of the State — that is, it would lead in a roundabout but logical way toward re-establishment of political, social, and economic slavery of the masses of people.

Varlin and all his friends, like all sincere Socialists, and in general like all workers born and brought up among the people, shared to a high degree this perfectly legitimate bias against the

initiative coming from isolated individuals, against the domination exercised by superior individuals, and being above all consistent, they extended the same prejudice and distrust to their own persons.

Revolution by Decrees Is Doomed to Failure.

Contrary to the ideas of the authoritarian Communists, altogether fallacious ideas in my opinion, that the Social Revolution can be decreed and organized by means of a dictatorship or a Constituent Assembly — our friends, the Parisian Social-Socialists, held the opinion that that revolution can be waged and brought to its full development only through the spontaneous and continued mass action of groups and associations of the people.

Our Parisian friends were a thousand times right. For, indeed, there is no mind, much as it may be endowed with the quality of a genius; or if we speak of a collective dictatorship consisting of several hundred supremely endowed individuals — there is no combination of intellects so vast as to be able to embrace all the infinite multiplicity and diversity of the real interests, aspirations, wills, and needs constituting in their totality the collective will of the people; there is no intellect that can devise a social organization capable of satisfying each and all.

Such an organization would ever be a Procrustean bed into which violence, more or less sanctioned by the State, would force the unfortunate society. But it is this old system of organization based upon force that the Social Revolution should put an end to by giving full liberty to the masses, groups, communes, associations, and even individuals, and by destroying once and for all the historic cause of all violence — the very existence of the State, the fall of which will entail the destruction of all the iniquities of juridical right and all the falsehood of various cults, that right and those cults having ever been simply the complaisant consecration, ideal as well as real, of all violence represented, guaranteed, and authorized by the State.

It is evident that only when the State has ceased to exist humanity will obtain its freedom, and the true interests of society, of all groups, of all local organizations, and likewise of all the individuals forming such organization, will find their real satisfaction.

Free Organization to Follow Abolition of the State.

Abolition of the State and the Church should be the first and indispensable condition of the real enfranchisement of society. It will be only after this that society can and should begin its own reorganization; that, however, should take place not from the top down, not according to an ideal plan mapped by a few sages or savants, and not by means of decrees issued by some dictatorial power or even by a National Assembly elected by universal suffrage. Such a system, as I have already said, inevitably would lead to the formation of a governmental aristocracy, that is, a class of persons which has nothing in common with the masses of people; and, to be sure, this class would again turn to exploiting and enthralling the masses under the pretext of common welfare or of the salvation of the State.

Freedom Must Go Hand-in-Hand With Equality.

I am a convinced partisan of economic and social equality, for I know that outside of this equality, freedom, justice, human dignity, morality, and the well-being of individuals as well as the prosperity of nations are all nothing but so many falsehoods. But being at the same time a partisan of freedom — the first condition of humanity — I believe that equality should be established in the world by a spontaneous organization of labor and collective property, by the free organization of producers' associations into communes, and free federation of communes — but nowise by means of the supreme tutelary action of the State.

The Difference Between Authoritarian and Libertarian Revolution.

It is this point which mainly divides the Socialists or revolutionary collectivists from the authoritarian Communists, the partisans of the absolute initiative of the State. The goal of both is the same: both parties want the creation of a new social order based exclusively upon collective labor, under economic conditions that are equal for all — that is, under conditions of collective ownership of the tools of production.

Only the Communists imagine that they can attain through development and organization of the political power of the working classes, and chiefly of the city proletariat, aided by bourgeois radicalism — whereas the revolutionary Socialists, the enemies of all ambiguous alliances, believe, on the contrary, that this common goal can be attained not through the political but through the social (and therefore anti-political) organization and power of the working masses of the cities and villages, including all those who, though belonging by birth to the higher classes, have broken with their past of their own free will, and have openly joined the proletariat and accepted its program.

The Methods of the Communists and the Anarchists.

Hence the two different methods. The Communists believe that it is necessary to organize the forces of the workers in order to take possession of the political might of the State. The revolutionary Socialists organize with the view of destroying, or if you prefer a more refined expression, of liquidating the State. The Communists are the partisans of the principle and practice of authority, while revolutionary Socialists place their faith only in freedom. Both are equally the partisans of science, which is to destroy superstition and take the place of faith; but the first want to impose science upon the people, while the revolutionary collectivists try to diffuse science and knowledge among the people, so that the various groups of human society, when convinced by propaganda, may organize and spontaneously combine into federations, in accordance with their natural tendencies and their real interests, but never according to a plan traced in advance and imposed upon the ignorant masses by a few “superior” minds.

Revolutionary Socialists believe that there is much more of practical reason and intelligence in the instinctive aspirations and real needs of the masses of people than in the profound minds of all these learned doctors and self-appointed tutors of humanity, who, having before them the sorry examples of so many abortive attempts to make humanity happy, still intend to keep on working

in the same direction. But revolutionary Socialists believe, on the contrary, that humanity has permitted itself to be ruled for a long time, much too long, and that the source of its misfortune lies not in this nor in any other form of government but in the principle and the very existence of the government, whatever its nature may be.

It is this difference of opinion, which already has become historic, that now exists between the scientific Communism, developed by the German school and partly accepted by American and English Socialists, and Proudhonism, extensively developed and pushed to its ultimate conclusions, and by now accepted by the proletariat of the Latin countries. Revolutionary Socialism has made its first brilliant and practical appearance in the Paris Commune.

On the Pan-German banner is written: Retention and strengthening of the State at any cost. On our banner, the social-revolutionary banner, on the contrary, are inscribed, in fiery and bloody letters: the destruction of all States, the annihilation of bourgeois civilization, free and spontaneous organization from below upward, by means of free associations, the organization of the unbridled rabble of toilers, of all emancipated humanity, and the creation of a new universally human world.

Before creating, or rather aiding the people to create, this new organization, it is necessary to achieve a victory. It is necessary to overthrow that which is, in order to be able to establish that which should be...

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