

Communism versus Mutualism

William Batchelder Greene

1874

COMMUNISM is the form which human association naturally assumes at its origin. It implies the absolute supremacy of the chief, the utter subordination of the associates, and has for its maxim the fraternal rule,—each is to work according to his ability, and each is to receive according to his needs. In human communistic societies, as in the societies of wild horses, cattle, or sheep, all individuality is concentrated in the chief, who is instinctively obeyed by the associates as something extra-natural, and ruling by a mysterious, inscrutable right. The individualities of the associates are, among communistic men, as among sheep, numerical only. Each individual is just like all the others, and does just what the others do. The first very marked step in human progress results from the division of labor. It is the characteristic of the division of labor, and of the economic distribution of tasks, that each individual tends to do precisely what the others don't do. As soon as labor is divided, communism necessarily ceases, and MUTUALISM, the negation of communism, and the reciprocal correlation of each to every other, and of every other to each, for a common purpose, commences. The march of social progress is out of communism into mutualism. Communism sacrifices the individual to secure the unity of the whole. Mutualism has unlimited individualism as the essential and necessary prior condition of its own existence, and co-ordinates individuals without any sacrifice of individuality, into one collective whole, by spontaneous confederation, or solidarity. Communism is the ideal of the past; mutualism, of the future. The garden of Eden is before us, as something, to be achieved and attained; not behind us, as something that was lost when labor was divided, tasks were distributed, individualities were encouraged, and communism, or the mere animal and instinctive social order, had the sentence pronounced against it, "Dying, thou shalt surely die."

Mutual insurance has shown, by practical exemplification, a little of what the nature, bearings, and workings of the mutualistic principle are. When the currency shall have become mutualized by mutual banks, and the rate of interest on money loaned shall have been brought down to zero per cent per annum, it will become possible to generalize mutual insurance, applying it to all the contingencies of life, so that men, instead of being, as now, antagonistic to each other, shall be so federated with each other, that an accidental loss falling on any one individual shall be a loss to be compensated by all other individuals, while a gain accidentally accruing to any one individual shall fall to the community, and be shared by all. Under the mutual system, each individual will receive the just and exact pay for his work; services equivalent in cost being exchangeable for services equivalent in cost, without profit or discount; and so much as the individual laborer

will then get over and above what he has earned will come to him as his share in the general prosperity of the community of which he is an individual member. The principle of mutuality in social economy is identical with the principle of federation in politics. Make a note of this last fact. Individual sovereignty is the John the Baptist, without whose coming the mutualistic idea remains void. There is no mutualism without reciprocal consent; and none but individuals can enter into voluntary mutual relations. Mutualism is the synthesis of liberty and order.

[In order to more fully explain the doctrine of mutualism, we take the liberty to print the following correspondence, sent to us for our perusal. Since we have omitted all of a private or personal nature, we trust the authors will pardon our making public their valuable thoughts.—*Editorial.*]

NORTH ABINGTON, MASS., Sept. 28. 1874.

COL. WILLIAM B. GREENE. *Dear Sir,*—When I made up the essays on interest into a tract, I did so at a venture, i.e., I felt it to be so strong, that it ought to be so used, and I trusted that the means would be provided in due time. Well, now that it is made up, and you are pleased with it, it has occurred to me that you would be willing to share in the cost. It would be practicable, through a few labor reformers who are in the city, to sow a few hundred of these tracts, or, indeed, some thousands, if they were provided; and would not something of the kind be worth your while? The pamphlets you sent have been received. Thanks. There are some striking remarks about God as being alive, in that on the divinity of Jesus. As to banking—is not what men want, the willingness to work together, instead of to lend to each other? Does “The Equity” (newspaper) commend itself to you as of the right temper and strength, so that it ought to live?

Respectfully,

JESSE H. JONES.

BOSTON, MASS., Sept. 29, 1874.

REV. JESSE H. JONES. *Dear Sir,*—Your letter of yesterday, to me, has been duly received. Contents noted. Please find enclosed a check for the money called for. You say, “As to banking, is not what men want, the willingness to work together, instead of to lend to each other?” I reply, that, so far as my experience goes, the willingness of John to help Thomas and Peter in their work usually takes the form of a willingness to lend money to them to help them along. The application to me for help in any work, almost always, perhaps always, assumes the shape of a request for a loan, or, perhaps, a gift, of money. So long as services are estimated in money values, the man who lends money lends aid and service. Money honestly acquired is the representative of services performed, for which the community is still in debt; and the transfer of money from Peter to John is the transfer of claim for wages due, and not yet paid in kind. I don’t believe in the Christian communism you advocate. I repudiate it. I believe in *work* and *wages*. The apostles tried Christian communism, and failed. We to-day are no better, to say the least, than the apostles were, and no more competent to command success.

Respectfully,

WM. B. GREENE.

BOSTON, Oct. 2, 1874.

REV. JESSE H. JONES. *Dear Sir,*—You ask me, in your communication of yesterday, this pregnant question, “As to methods, does it not seem as though the first thing should be a hearty brotherly union of feeling, and then such co-operation as can be accomplished?” I have to say, in reply, that the hearts of all living creatures are in the hand of the Almighty, who turns them whithersoever he will. God has put the associative sentiment into the hearts of cattle; for, otherwise, they would not go in herds; he has also put it into the hearts of wild and tame geese; for, otherwise, they would not go in flocks, and so on. In man, the associative instinct is, or ought to be, subordinated to reason. The Master says, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Sheep that go in flocks, regulating their motions upon those of their leader, and wolves that go in packs, instinctively organized under special wolves that are their rulers, know many things; but they don’t know *truth*, because they take no cognizance of things supersensual. If you know any truth, state it. I have looked over the numbers of “The Equity,” and find in it instinctive and sentimental ejaculations, but no clear statement of any truth. Tell me whether it is with the wolves, or with the sheep, that I ought to have “a hearty brotherly union of feeling,” and why. The wild asses of the desert go in herds; but the lions dwell apart. Who furnish the correct ideal for imitation,—the wild asses, or the lions? And in what respect is either one of these ideals preferable to the other? and why? Ought not both of these ideals to be rejected? In every nook and corner of your question, there lurks, as it seems to me, the virus of a heresy not at all belonging to your theological environment. What is wanted at this time is not instinctive association based on feeling, followed by unreasoning co-operation, working disaster to the co-operators, but, first of all, that special knowledge which is possessed by men “who know, their rights, and, knowing, dare maintain,” enabling them to act on Andrew Jackson’s maxim, and “demand nothing that is not clearly right, and submit to nothing that is clearly wrong.” Gen. Jackson was an individual lion, and dwelt apart. It was his custom to say, “I take the responsibility.” There is also wanted, at this time, secondly, a well thought out mutualistic organism in society, whereby, not animal and instinctive men, but twice-born, or spiritual men, may guarantee and insure each other against the assaults of the Devil’s kingdom. The bees and beavers have wrought out the utmost possibility of instinctive co-operation. Sin comes before salvation, and is the condition of it: in like manner, individualism—the utter negation of the sentimental associative principle you celebrate, and the ground of the special social disorder that is of human, and not animal origin—is the indispensable prerequisite of mutualism. Mutualism, the ultimate outbirth of civilization, the triumph of the human element in man over the animal element, is the opposite of the communism which “The Equity” advocates. I go for mutualism, and am against communism and socialism.

Respectfully,

WM. B. GREENE.

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