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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SOME OBJECTIONS TO SOCIALISM ***

SOME OBJECTIONS TO SOCIALISM.

From "The Atheistic Platform", Twelve Lectures

By Charles Bradlaugh.

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SOME OBJECTIONS TO SOCIALISM

The great evils connected with and resulting from poverty—evils which are so prominent and so terrible in old countries, and especially in populous cities—have, in our own land compelled the attention, and excited the sympathy, of persons in every rank of society. Many remedies have been suggested and attempted, and from time to time, during the present century, there have been men who, believing that the abolition of individual private property would cure the misery abounding, have advocated Socialism. Some pure-hearted and well-meaning men and women, as Robert Owen, Abram Combe, and Frances Wright, have spent large fortunes, and devoted much of their lives in the essay to test their theories by experiments. As communities, none of these attempts have been permanently successful, though they have doubtless, by encouraging and suggesting co-operative effort in England, done something to modify the fierceness of the life struggle, in which too often the strongest and most unscrupulous succeeded by destroying his weaker brother. Some Socialistic associations in the United States,* as the Shakers and the Oneida community, have been held together in limited numbers as religious societies, but only even apparently successful, while the numbers of each community remained comparatively few. Some communities have for many years bravely endured the burden of debt, penury, and discomfort, to be loyal to the memory of their founder, as in the case at Icaria of

the followers of Cabet. But in none of these was the sense of private property entirely lost; the numbers were relatively so small that all increase of comfort was appreciable, and in nearly all the communities there was option of the withdrawal of the individual, and with him of a proportion of the property he had helped to create or increase.

** Particulars of all existing Socialistic communities in the United States are given in the works of Mr. Hinds and Mr. Nordhoff.*

During the past generation, Socialistic theory has been specially urged in Germany, and the Socialist leaders there have acquired greater influence because of the poverty of the people, and because too of the cruel persecution to which Social Reformers, as well as Socialists, have been subjected by Prince Bismarck's despotic government.

A difficulty arising from the repressive measures resorted to in Germany has been that German emigrants to the United States and to Great Britain, speak and write as if precisely the same wrongs had to be assailed in the lands of their adoption as in the land of their birth.

Very recently in England—and largely at the instance of foreigners—there has been a revival of Socialist propaganda, though only on a small scale compared with fifty years ago, by persons claiming to be "Scientific Socialists," who declare that such Socialists as Robert Owen and his friends were Utopian in thinking that any communities could be successfully founded while ordinary society exists. These Scientific Socialists—mostly middle-class men—declare their intense hatred of the *bourgeoisie*, and affirm that the Social State they desire to create can only be established on the ruins of the present society, by a revolution which they say must come in any event, but which they strive to accelerate. These Scientific Socialists deny that they ought to be required to propound any social scheme, and they contemptuously refuse to discuss any of the details connected with the future of the new Social State, to make way for which the present is to be cleared away. Most of the points touched on in this lecture were raised in the discussion on Socialism between myself and Mr. Hyndman recently held in St. James's Hall. Others of the questions have been raised in my articles in *Our Corner*, and in the reply there by Mr. Joynes.

The Socialists of the Democratic Federation say that "Socialism is an endeavor to substitute an organised co-operation for existence" for the present strife, but they refuse to be precise as to the method or character of the organisation, or the lines upon which it is to be carried out. Their reason is, probably, that they have not even made the slightest effort to frame any plan, but would be content to try first to destroy all existing government. I suggest that this want and avoidance of foresight is, in the honest, folly, and in the wise, criminality. They mix up some desirable objects which are not all Socialistic with others that are not necessarily Socialistic, and add to these declarations which are either so vague as to be meaningless, or else in the highest degree Socialistic and revolutionary.

Whilst Mr. Hyndman, one of the prominent members of the Democratic Federation, thus speaks of Socialism as endeavoring "to substitute an organised co-operation," Mr. E. Belfort Bax, another prominent member and co-signatory of the manifesto, emphatically says, "no 'scientific' socialist pretends to have any 'scheme' or detailed plan of organisation." When organisation can be spoken of as possible without any scheme or detailed plan, it shows that words are used without regard to serious meaning.

These Socialists declare that there must be "organisation of agricultural and industrial armies under State control," and that the exchange of all production must be controlled by the workers; but they decline to explain how this control is to be exercised, and on what principles. We agree that there are often too many concerned in the distribution of the necessaries of life, and that the cost to the consumer is often outrageously augmented; but we suggest that this may be reformed gradually and in detail by individual effort through local societies, and that it ought not to be any part of the work of the State. We point to the fact that there are now in Great Britain—all established during the present reign—nearly one thousand distributive co-operative societies, with more than half a million members, with over seventeen and three-quarter millions of pounds of yearly sales, with two and a half millions of stock-in-trade, with five and a quarter millions of working capital, and dividing one and a half millions of annual profit; and that these societies, each keeping its own property, still further co-operate with one another to reduce loss in exchange by havings a wholesale co-operative society in England, with sales in 1882 exceeding three and a half millions sterling, and another similar wholesale society in Scotland, with transactions in the same year to nearly one million sterling. We say the way to render the cost of exchange of products less onerous to the laborer is by the extension and perfection of this organisation of co-operative distribution, and that this may be and is being done successfully and usefully, ameliorating gradually the condition and developing the self-reliance of the individual workers who take part in such co-operative stores, and thus inciting and inducing other individuals to join the societies already founded, or to establish others, and so educating individual after individual to better habits of exchange. We say that this is more useful than to denounce as idlers and robbers "the shopkeepers and their hangers on," as is done by the present teachers of Socialism. We object that the organisation of all industry under State control must paralyse industrial energy and discourage and neutralise individual effort.

The Socialists claim that there shall be "collective ownership of land, capital, machinery and credit by the complete ownership of the people," and yet they object that they are misrepresented when told that they want to take the private economies of millions of industrious wage-earners in this kingdom for the benefit of those who may have neither been thrifty nor industrious. The truth is that, if language is to have any meaning, the definitions must stand given by me and unchallenged by my opponent in the St. James's Hall debate, viz.: (1) "Socialism denies all individual private property, and affirms that society, organised as the state, should own all wealth, direct all labor, and compel the equal distribution of all produce." (2) "A Socialistic State would be a State in which everything would be held in common, in which the labor of each individual would be directed and controlled by the State, to which would belong all results of such labor." The realisation of a Socialistic State in this country would, as I then urged, require (1) a physical force revolution, in which all the present property owners unwilling to surrender their private properties to the common fund would be forcibly dispossessed. This revolution would be in the highest degree difficult, if not impossible, for

property holders are the enormous majority.

Mr. Joynes, in an article published in *Our Corner*, does challenge my definition, and says that the immediate aim of Socialism "is not the abolition of private property, but its establishment by means of the emancipation of labor on the only sound basis. It is private capital we attack, the power to hire laborers at starvation wages, and not the independent enjoyment of the fruits of labor by the individual who produces them." And he refers me to a paragraph previously dealt with by me as an illustration of contradictory statement, in which he and his cosignatories write: "Do any say we attack private property? We deny it. We only attack that private property for a few thousand loiterers and slave-drivers, which renders all property in the fruits of their own labor impossible for millions. We challenge that private property which renders poverty at once a necessity and a crime." But surely this flatly contradicts the declaration by Mr. Hyndman in the debate, of "the collective ownership of land, capital, machinery, and credit." I am afraid that Mr. Joynes has in his mind some other unexplained meaning for the words "capital" and "property." To me it seems impossible that if everything be owned collectively, anything can be owned individually, separately, and privately.

Mr. Joynes, however, apparently concedes that it is true that the private property of "a few thousand loiterers and slave-drivers" is attacked. Though he does not in his reply explain who these "few thousand" are, I find in "The Summary of the Principles of Socialism," signed by Mr. Joynes, that they are "the capitalist class, the factory owners, the farmers, the bankers, the brokers, the shopkeepers, and their hangers-on, the landlords." But these make much more than a "few thousand." The census returns for England and Wales alone show under the headings professional classes, 647,075; commercial classes, 980,128 (and these do not include the ordinary shopkeepers); farmers and graziers, 249,907; and unoccupied males over twenty, 182,282. Add to these proportional figures for Scotland and Ireland, and it is at once seen how misleading it is to speak of these as a "few thousand." Mr. Joynes disapproves of my "small army of statistics." I object that he and his friends never examine or verify the figures on which they found their allegations. Mr. Joynes says that it is not private property, the fruits of labor, that is attacked by the Socialists, but "private capital, the power to hire laborers." Does that mean that £30 saved by an artisan would not be attacked so long as he kept it useless, but that if he deposited it with a banker who used it in industrial enterprise, or if he invested it in railway shares, it would be forfeited? If an artisan may, out of the fruits of his labor, buy for £3 and keep as his own a silver watch, why is the £3 to be confiscated when it gets into the hands of the Cheapside or Corn-hill watch dealer?

A property owner is not only a Rothschild, a Baring, or an Overstone, he is that person who has anything whatever beyond that which is necessary for actual existence at the moment. Thus, all savings however moderate; all household furniture, books, indeed everything but the simplest clothing are property, and the property owners belong to all classes. The wage-earning classes, being largely property owners, viz., not only by their household goods, but by their investments, building societies, their small deposits in savings banks, their periodical payments to their trade societies and friendly societies, they would naturally and wisely defend these against confiscation. If the physical force revolution were possible, because of the desperate energy of those owning nothing, its success would be achieved with serious immediate crime, and would be attended with consequent social mischief and terrible demoralisation extending over a long period.

Mr. Hyndman has written that "force, or fear of force, is, unfortunately, the only reasoning which can appeal to a dominant estate, or will ever induce them to surrender any portion of their property." I read these words to him in the debate, and he made no reply to them. I object that a Socialistic State to be realised by force can only be so realised after a period of civil war shocking to contemplate, and one in which the wisest would go near madness.

But a Socialistic State, even if achieved, could not be maintained without a second (mental) revolution, in which the present ideas and forms of expression concerning property would have to be effaced, and the habit of life (resulting from long-continued teachings and long-enduring traditions) would have to be broken. The words "my house," "my coat," "my horse," "my watch," "my book," are all affirmations of private property which would have to be unlearned. The whole current of human thought would have to be changed.

In a Socialistic State there would be no inducement to thrift, no encouragement to individual saving, no protection for individual accumulation, no check upon, no discouragement to waste.

Nor, if such a Socialistic State be established, is it easy to conceive how free expression of individual opinion, either by press or platform, can be preserved and maintained. All means of publicity will belong to, and be controlled by, the State. But what will this mean? Will a Socialistic government furnish halls to its adversaries, print books for its opponents, organise costly journals for those who are hostile to it? If not, there must come utter stagnation of opinion.

And what could the organisation and controlling of all labor by the State mean? In what could it end? By whom, and in what manner, would the selection of each individual for the pursuit, profession, or handicraft for which he was fittest be determined?

I object that the Socialistic advocates exaggerate and distort real evils, and thus do mischief to those who are seeking to effect social reforms. For example, they declare that the whole of the land of the country is held by "a handful of marauders," who ought to be dispossessed, and when told that there are 852,438 persons owning on an average less than one fifth of an acre each, holding probably in the neighborhood of towns, and that more than half a million of these persons are members of building societies, paying for their small properties out of their wage-earnings, they only say: "Do you suppose those who hold building allotments will be dispossessed?" But if they are not dispossessed, if their private property is left to them, then "collective ownership" must have a new meaning. Pressed with the fact that there are 205,358 owning on an average fifteen acres each, they make no other answer. Yet this 1,037,896, representing with their families more than four millions of human beings, are clearly not a "handful," nor is there any evidence offered that they are "marauders." My complaint is that the possibility of early Land Law Reform is injured and retarded by such rashness. It is an undoubted evil that in this crowded kingdom so few as 2,238 persons should own 39,924,232 acres of land, and that the enormous holdings should be inadequately taxed, but we need the influence of the one million small landowners to enable us legally to reform and modify those obnoxious land laws which have facilitated the accumulation of such vast estates in so few hands. In the

debate with myself, Mr. Hyndman spoke very contemptuously of the "small ownerships" and "paltry building allotments," yet he ought to know that the holders of these houses are law-abiding, peace-promoting citizens, who are encouraged by these slight possessions, which give promise of comfort in life, to strive so that the comfort shall be extended and secured.

A sample of the wild and extraordinary exaggeration indulged in by the Democratic Federation may be found on p. 48 of the "Summary of the Principles of Socialism," where it is gravely declared that the "idlers who eat enormously and produce not at all form the majority of the population," and this may be fairly contrasted with another statement by the same persons that the present conditions of labor have "brought luxury for the few, misery and degradation for the many." If the latter be accurate, the former must be a perversion.

The Socialists say that there are a few thousand persons who own the National Debt, and they recommend its extinction; usually leaving it in doubt as to whether this is to be by wholesale or by partial repudiation. When reminded that there are an enormous number of small depositors (at least 4,500,000 accounts in one year) owning through the ordinary savings banks £45,403,569, and through the Post Office Savings Bank, £36,194,495, they neither explain the allegation as to the few thousands, nor do they condescend to offer the slightest explanation as to how any savings have been possible if all the wealth created by labor has been "devoured only by the rich and their hangers-on." Repudiation of the National Debt would ruin the whole of these. The Socialist leader says that the small ownership of land and these small savings do not really benefit the working classes, for that in times of depression the savings are soon used up. That may often be true, but if there were no savings then it must be starvation, pauperism, or crime; at least the saving mitigates the suffering. When told that there are 2,300,000 members of friendly societies, who must represent at least 9,000,000 of the inhabitants of this country, and that these, amongst other investments, have £1,397,730 in the National Debt, we are answered that these are mere details. On this point I think Mr. Joynes a little fails in candor. He takes one set of my figures, and says "the share of each individual is on the average a little more than £3 3s., and the dividend which annually accrues to each of these propertied persons is slightly over 2s. It does not require a very high standard of intelligence to enable a man to perceive that Socialists who intend to deprive him of these 2s., and at the same time to secure him the full value of his work, are proposing not to diminish his income, but to raise it in a very high degree." Let me first say that the friendly society represents to each artisan investor, not the 2s. per year, but his possible sick money, gratuity on disablement, allowance whilst unemployed, etc.; next, that here Mr. Joynes does in this actually admit an attack on the private property of the laborer, and does propose to take away the accumulated "fruits of labor" from the independent enjoyment of the individual who earned it. And the working-man's house? and his savings in the savings-bank, or in the co-operative store? Are these to be taken too? If not, why not? and if yes, of how much of the fruits of his labor is the laborer to be left by the Socialists in "independent enjoyment"? When pressed that the confiscation of the railways "without compensation," would bankrupt every life assurance company, and thus destroy the provision made for hundreds of thousands of families, because in addition to about £5,262,000 in the Funds, and about £75,000,000 invested on mortgages of houses and land, the life insurance companies are extensive holders of railway securities—the advocates of Socialism only condescend to say: "Who are the shareholders in the railways? Do they ever do any good in the world? They are simply using the labor of the dead in order to get the labor of the living." But is this true? The shareholders originally found the means to plan, legalise, and construct the railway, to buy the land, to pay the laborer day by day his wage, whilst yet the railway could bring no profit, to buy the materials for the permanent way, to purchase and maintain the rolling stock. Many hundreds of shareholders in unsuccessful lines have never received back one farthing of what they paid to the laborer. No laborer worked on those unsuccessful lines without wage. Some railway shareholders have got too much, but there are thousands of comparatively poor shareholders who are to be ruined by the seizure of their shares without compensation. It is not at all true that railway shareholders use "the labor of the dead in order to get the labor of the living." On the contrary, during the last few years the tendency on lines like the Midland, has been to afford the widest facilities, and the greatest possible comfort consistent with cheapness, to working-folk travelling for need or pleasure. That all railway managers are not equally far-seeing is true, that much more might be done in this direction is certain, that some managing directors are over-greedy is clear, but that the change has been for the better during the past twenty years none would deny who had any regard for truth. That railway porters, pointsmen, guards, firemen, and drivers are, as Mr. Joynes well urges, often badly paid, and nearly always overworked, is true, but making the railways State property would not necessarily improve this. The Post Office is controlled by the State for the State, and the letter-carriers and sorters are as a body disgracefully remunerated.

Mr. Joynes complains that I have not met the question of the "surplus value" of labor, which he says "is the keystone of the Socialistic argument." He does not explain upon what basis the alleged surplus value is calculated, but shelters himself behind a vague, and I submit incorrect, reference to a declaration by Mr. Hoyle, the well-known earnest temperance advocate. Mr. Joynes says that in one and a-half hours the laborer earns enough for subsistence. Mr. Hoyle's often-repeated declaration is in substance to the effect, that if the whole drink traffic of the country were abolished, and neither wines, beers, nor spirits drunk by any of the industrial classes, then that the working men could earn enough for comfort in very much less time than they now do. Mr. Joynes here entirely overlooks the substance of Mr. Hoyle's declaration, which is, in effect, that the working men do now receive, and then spend wastefully, what would keep them. I have always contended that in nearly every department of industry labor has been insufficiently paid, in some cases horribly paid, and I have claimed for the laborer higher wages, and tried to help to teach him, through trades' unions and otherwise, how to get these higher wages; but if Mr. Joynes and his friends mean anything, wages are to disappear altogether, and the State is to apportion to each a sort of equal subsistence, without regard to the skill or industry of the individual laborer, so that the skilled engineer, the unskilled hod-carrier, the street sweeper, the ploughman, and the physician, would each, in the Socialistic State, have neither less nor more than the other.

The Socialists say "the laborers on the average replace the value of their wages for the capitalist class in the first few hours of their day's work; the exchange value of the goods produced in the remaining hours of

the day's work constitutes so much embodied labor which is unpaid; and this unpaid labor so embodied in articles of utility, the capitalist class, the factory owners, the farmers, the bankers, the brokers, the shopkeepers, and their hangers-on, the landlords, divide amongst themselves in the shape of profits, interests, discounts, commissions, rent, etc." But without the capitalist where would be the workshop, the plant, or the raw material? It would be better if in co-operative production workmen would be their own capitalists, but surely the owner of capital is entitled to some reward? If not how is he to be persuaded to put it into fixed capital as factory and plant? Why should he beforehand purchase raw material on which labor may be employed, subsist labor while so employed, and take the risk of loss as well as profit in exchanging the article produced? And why is not the farmer to be sustained by the laborers if that farmer grows the food the laborer requires? Why should not the shopkeeper be rewarded for bringing ready to the laborer articles which would be otherwise in the highest degree difficult to procure? If the laborer procured his own raw material, fashioned it into an exchangeable commodity, and then went and exchanged it, there are many to whom the raw material would be inaccessible, and more who would lose much of the profits of their labor in fruitless efforts to exchange. The vague declarations by the Socialist that production and exchange are to be organised are delusive without clear statement of the methods and principles of the organisation. Robert Owen is called "Utopian" by these Democratic Federation Socialists, but at least he did try to reduce to practice his theories of production and exchange. The Democratic Federation say that "surplus value" is produced by "labor applied to natural objects under the control of the capitalist class." I object that but for capital, fixed and circulating, there are many natural objects which would be utterly inaccessible to labor; many more which could only be reached and dealt with on a very limited scale. That but for capital the laborer would often be unable to exist until the object had exchangeable value, or until some one was found with an equivalent article ready to exchange, and I submit that the banker, the shopkeeper, the broker may and do facilitate the progress of labor, and would and could not do so without the incentive of profit.

We agree that "wage" is often much too low, and we urge the workers in each trade to join the unions already existing, and to form new unions, so that the combined knowledge and protection of the general body of workers as to the demand for, and value of, the labor, may be at the service of the weakest and most ignorant. We would advocate the establishment of labor bureaux, as in Massachusetts, so that careful and reliable statistics of the value of labor and cost of life may be easily accessible. We would urge the more thorough experiment on, and establishment of, cooperative productive societies in every branch of manufacture, so that the laborers furnishing their own capital and their own industry, may not only increase the profit result of labor to the laborer, but also afford at least a reasonable indication as to the possible profit realised by capitalists engaged in the same industries. We would increase wage (if not in amount, at any rate in its purchasing power), by diminishing the national and local expenditure, and thus also decreasing the cost of the necessaries of life. We would try to shift the pressing burden of taxation more on to land, and to the very large accumulation of wealth.

We contend that he or she who lives by the sale of labor should, with the purchase money, be able to buy life, not only for the worker, but for those for whom that worker is fairly bread-winner. And life means not only healthy food, reasonable clothing, cleanly, healthy shelter, education for the children until they are so sufficiently grown that labor shall not mean the crippling of after life—but also leisure. Leisure for some enjoyment, leisure for some stroll in the green fields, leisure for some look into the galleries of paintings and sculpture, leisure for some listening to the singer, the actor, the teacher; leisure that the sunshine of beauty may now and then gild the dull round of work-a-day life; and we assert that in any country where the price of honest earnest industry will not buy this, then that if there are any in that country who are very wealthy, there is social wrong to be reformed. But this is the distinction between those with whom I stand and the Socialists.

We want reform, gradual, sure, and helpful. They ask for revolution, and know not its morrow. Revolution may be the only remedy in a country where there is no free press, no free speech, no association of workers, no representative institutions, and where the limits of despotic outrage are only marked by the personal fear of the despot. But in a country like our own, where the political power is gradually passing into the hands of the whole people, where, if the press is not entirely free it is in advance of almost every European country, and every shade of opinion may find its exponent, here revolution which required physical force to effect it would be a blunder as well as a crime. Here, where our workmen can organise and meet, we can claim reforms and win them. The wage-winners of Durham and Northumberland, under the guidance of able and earnest leaders, have won many ameliorations during the past twenty years. Each year the workers' Parliament meets in Trades Union Congress, to discuss and plan more complete success, and to note the gains of the year. Every twelve months, in the Co-operative Congresses, working men and women delegates gather together to consult and advise. Each annual period shows some progress, some advantage secured, and though there is much sore evil yet, much misery yet, much crime yet, much—far too much—poverty yet, to-day's progress from yesterday shows day-gleam for the people's morrow.

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