



# FABIAN SOCIETY.

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TRACT NO. 4.

## What Socialism is.

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“As the births of living creatures at first are ill-shapen, so are all innovations, which are the births of time.

“Time is the greatest innovator, and if time of course alters things to the worse, and wisdom and counsel shall not alter them to the better, what shall be the end?”

*Bacon's Essay on Innovations.*

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NOTE.

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The following tract has been prepared by certain members of the Fabian Society with the view of supplying information as to the opinions largely held throughout the world by those who call themselves Socialists; but it must not be assumed that these opinions are endorsed by the Fabian Society collectively, or necessarily by any member of it.

Socialism





## Introduction.

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THE last three centuries of English history have been characterised by a political, agricultural and industrial revolution.

At the Reformation, the increasingly important trading class in the cities formed the main strength of the Crown as against the Church and the Baronage. The Civil Wars and the Revolution of 1688-9 placed direct political influence within the reach of this growing middle class; and, from the early part of this century, its wealth has made it the supreme power in the State, through the medium of representative government. Meanwhile, the destruction of the feudal system, consummated by the decimation of the English Baronage in the Wars of the Roses, had tended to place a large portion of the land of the country at the immediate disposal of the King; and the Reformation added the bulk of the territorial possessions of the Church to the estates with which the Tudors were enabled to reward their favorites and supporters. In accordance with the new ideas of property introduced into Northern Europe during that period by the revived influence of Roman law, these estates were granted in *private* ownership, subject only to the dues to the Crown, abolished in 1645, and replaced in 1660 by a royal revenue raised by general taxation. In these arrangements the claims of the peasantry settled upon the soil from time immemorial were completely ignored. In consequence, these peasants were driven from the land to become hired laborers, vagabonds and paupers. The destruction of the legal rights of the majority of Englishmen in their native soil was completed by the enclosure of common lands, and the removal of small yeomen-farmers to clear the way for large estates farmed by tenants, which took place during the eighteenth and at the beginning of the present century. Thus the English peasantry were transformed into proletarian wage-workers: an instrument ready to the hand of capitalist production.



The discoveries of North and South America and of the passage to India round the Cape of Good Hope, and the era of colonisation which followed opened out new fields for English enterprise. The invention of the steam-engine and of machinery in the eighteenth century completely changed our industrial as well as our agricultural system. The small industries, in which the producer utilised his own capital, were superseded by production on a large scale, with its infinitesimal division of labour, its divorce of capital and the workman, its complete separation of the toil of head and hand, and its competition of capital for profit and of labour for the right to employment. The wars of Napoleon I., checking industry on the Continent, whilst, by raising the price of provisions, they increased agricultural profits at home, enabled England to retain the advantage in commercial development which her inventions had procured her; and, when peace was declared, she was in a position so to utilise the new machinery and facilities of transport and communication as to make herself mistress of the markets of the world. Free trade in corn has enabled her, until lately, to maintain this position; but signs are not wanting that her pre-eminence—and with it high rates of profit for capital, and average sufficiency of employment for wage-labour—is upon the wane.

From this political and economic revolution have sprung alike the enormous increase in our national wealth, and the unsatisfactory nature of its social distribution.

The foundation upon which our modern economic system rests is the monopoly of land and capital (the means of production) by individuals. This monopoly, *i.e.*, *ownership* as distinct from *usufruct*, originated in the ages of violence and open robbery, and is now protected by the legal and political system gradually fabricated for their own security by the monopolist class. The possessors of property in the means of production have thus been enabled to take advantage of the necessities of the propertyless, and to induce them to work on condition of receiving such a share of the produce of their labour as suffices to keep them alive. The man who has nothing but his labour-force, sells that to the owner of land or machinery or raw material, at a price which is always tending to be forced to a lower level by the competition of increasing population. It is true that, on the other hand, this price may be, and sometimes is, raised by the

insistence of the workers upon an increased standard of subsistence ; but as machinery tends to oust personal skill in labour the mass of unskilled workmen forced to undersell one another for starvation wages continually augments. The existence of this surplus labour in the market is a necessity of capitalist production, since it is only in consequence of competition amongst labourers for work that the capitalist is able to force his workmen to leave him the lion's share of the produce. The difference between the value produced by the workers and the wages they receive is appropriated by the landlord and capitalist class ; and each individual landlord or capitalist keeps as much for his personal share as the competition of other owners of land and employers of labour will admit. This competition appears to return a certain amount of surplus value (difference between the produce of labour and its remuneration, absorbed by the non-producing classes as profits, interest, rent, &c.) to the workers as consumers ; but increased cheapness of living in one direction, *e. g.*, bread and groceries, tends to be counterbalanced by increased dear-ness in others, *e. g.*, rent and meat, so that, for the majority of the workers, real wages remain practically at the level of subsistence. Labour combinations, such as Trades Unions and the like, and the higher standard of comfort, upon which so much stress has recently been laid, have only operated by enabling a certain proportion of the more skilful and prudent workers to exact a fluctuating and uncertain advance of wages in particular trades, where personal ability has not yet been superseded by machinery. But the rapid increase of mechanical agency, the alarming development of commercial gambling in its various forms of speculation, manipulation of the money-market, political wire-pulling, over-production, &c., and the recurring periods of alternate inflation and depression which are the necessary result of production for profit, not for use, combine to render the worker's position every day more insecure. In all such cases, he is the helpless and irresponsible victim of the action of others ; he has been forced to sell himself for a mess of pottage, and is consequently deprived of the guidance of his own life and the direction of his own labour. For the so-called freedom of contract between wage-payer and wage-receiver is the bargain of Jacob and Esau, in which one party possesses those necessaries of existence that the other must obtain or starve.



But this evolution of economic conditions, fatal to national prosperity, and degrading alike to the idle and to the working population, has brought with it tendencies which are an earnest of remedy. The Great Industry, massing the workers in large cities, and rendering all the branches of production mutually interdependent, has socialised labour and paved the way for co-operation.

The conscious growth of social feeling thus stimulated, and the inevitable development of the representative system towards Democracy, have resulted in State interference on behalf of the exploited class. Education and political power have been the means of suggesting to the oppressed the possibility of changing their social condition by legal methods, and in this direction such English Socialism as exists has hitherto mainly moved.

In other parts of the civilised world the economic problem has been longer and more scientifically discussed, and Socialist opinion has taken shape in two distinct schools, Collectivist and Anarchist. English Socialism is not yet Anarchist or Collectivist, not yet definite enough in point of policy to be classified. There is a mass of Socialistic feeling not yet conscious of itself as Socialism. But when the unconscious Socialists of England discover their position, they also will probably fall into two parties: a Collectivist party supporting a strong central administration, and a counterbalancing Anarchist party defending individual initiative against that administration. In some such fashion progress and stability will probably be secured under Socialism by the conflict of the ineradicable Tory and Whig instincts in human nature. In view of this probability, the theories and ideals of both parties, as at present formulated, are set forth below; though it must be carefully borne in mind that the majority of English Socialists are not committed to either, but only tend more or less unconsciously in one or other direction.



## Collectivism.

*Summarised from BEBEL'S 'Woman in the Past, Present and Future.'*

THE monopoly of the means of production being proved by an examination of the history of past and present economic and social development to be the underlying cause of the existing confusion in production and inequality in distribution, Collectivists propose to transfer the control of land and capital to the State; or rather to the community organised administratively; for the State as we know it—an organisation for the maintenance of monopoly—will abolish itself by the act of “expropriating the expropriators.” “The government of persons will be replaced by the administration of things.”

The machinery of the Collectivist State will consist of executive committees in each local commune or district, representing each branch of industry, elected by universal suffrage for brief periods of office, and paid at the rate of ordinary workmen; and of a central executive committee, consisting of delegates chosen in like manner, or else directly appointed by the local communal councils. These to be supplemented, where necessary, by intermediate provincial committees.

The business of this executive agency will be to calculate the resources of the community and its needs, and, by comparison of the statistics collected, to regulate production according to consumption. Just as such statistics furnish material for the Budget and for the trading enterprises of large firms to-day, they will furnish the standard for social labour in the society of the future. They will determine the daily social labour required from each; and as the amount of this at any given period will depend upon the relation between the development of the needs of society and the advance in the arts of production, and as it will be for the interest of each and all to shorten as much as possible the hours of necessary toil, invention and ingenuity will be thereby as much stimulated as now they are discouraged by the lack of interest of the workers in the introduction of labour-saving appliances and more powerful motors.

Production will be carried on only for the purpose of consumption and not for profit, therefore there will be no buying and selling of



commodities. The social value of articles will be measured by the average length of the working time required to produce them under average conditions. The calculated average value of ten minutes of social work in one trade will be exchangeable for ten minutes of social work in another. The labour of each worker will be rewarded according to this estimated average standard, by labour notes or certificates of time; and each may work as long as he finds necessary to supply his individual needs, after which he will be free to employ his time and earnings as he likes. As regards the real equality of this system of remuneration, each is free to choose the productive occupation he prefers; and in conditions which afford to all equal physical and mental advantages, the differences of capacity, where choice of function is allowed, are very slight. In cases, however, in which the supply of labour does not equal the demand, the executive must interfere and re-arrange matters, *e.g.*, in the relative numbers of labourers required in town and country at different seasons of the year. But when regard for human welfare has replaced regard for profit, it will be the interest of all to render every kind of labour both pleasant and safe; and mining, sea-faring, factory-work, &c., will be carried on under scientific, sanitary, and artistic conditions now undreamt of; for their introduction would not repay the individual capitalist. Labour will be directed by foremen elected by the workers, and paid at the same rate; and, as society improves, this office will probably be filled by all in turn.

The exchange of articles of consumption will be effected by communal and district depôts under the control of the executive; and thus useless middlemen will be set free for productive labour. This change will also simplify the transport service by preventing the unnecessary passing hither and thither of goods of doubtful utility, and thus the executive will be able to extend the means of transit in such a manner as to facilitate the decentralisation of the population.

The collective possession of land will allow of agriculture being treated as a physical problem on a wider basis than has been possible under the régime of private proprietorship. The highest fertility of the soil does not depend so much on the skill or care expended upon small portions of land as upon topographic conditions only capable of national and international treatment: *e.g.*, elevation, forests, water



supply. We are unable to estimate the increase in productiveness obtainable by wholesale improvements in irrigation, drainage, levelling, tree-felling and planting, the alteration of the chemical constituents of soil by the scientific use of sewage and other manures, and so forth, or the freedom from toil such improvements will bring in their train.

Finally, the organisation of society must provide for the needs of the old and sick, and the nurture and education of children from the moment they are weaned until they are of age, education for boys and girls alike being compulsory, physical, intellectual and technical.

As to the immediate methods by which the new social and economic condition is to be introduced, Collectivists are divided into Revolutionists, who disdain all political action, and wait till evolution brings the moment for radical change; and Opportunists, who by political action aim at using the organised force of the State as it is, to transform it into the State as it ought to be.



## Anarchism.

*(Drawn up by C. M. WILSON, on behalf of the London Anarchists.)*

ANARCHISM is a theory of human development which lays no less stress than Collectivism upon the economic or materialistic aspect of social relations; but, whilst granting that the immediate cause of existing evils is economic, Anarchists believe that the solution of the social problem can only be wrought out from the equal consideration of the whole of the experience at our command, individual as well as social, internal as well as external. Life in common has developed social instinct in two conflicting directions, and the history of our experience in thought and action is the record of this strife within each individual, and its reflection within each society. One tendency is towards domination; in other words, towards the assertion of the lesser, sensuous self as against the similar self in others, without seeing that, by this attitude, true individuality impoverishes, empties and reduces itself to nonentity. The other

tendency is towards equal brotherhood, or to the self-affirmation and fulfilment of the greater and only true and human self, which includes all nature, and thus dissolves the illusion of mere atomic individualism.

Anarchism is the conscious recognition that the first of these tendencies is, and has always been, fatal to real social union, whether the coercion it implies be justified on the plea of superior strength or superior wisdom, of divine right or necessity, of utility or expedience; whether it takes the form of force or fraud, of exacted conformity to an arbitrary legal system or an arbitrary ethical standard, of open robbery or legal appropriation of the universal birthright of land and the fruits of social labour. To compromise with this tendency is to prefer the narrower to the wider expediency, and to delay the possibility of that moral development which alone can make the individual one in feeling with his fellows, and organic society, as we are beginning to conceive of it, a realisable ideal.

The leading manifestations of this obstructive tendency at the present moment are Property, or the domination over things, the denial of the claim of others to their use; and Authority, the government of man by man, embodied in majority rule; that theory of representation which, whilst admitting the claim of the individual to self-guidance, renders him the slave of the simulacrum that now stands for society.

Therefore, the first aim of Anarchism is to assert and make good the dignity of the individual human being, by his deliverance from every description of arbitrary restraint—economic, political and social; and, by so doing, to make apparent in their true force the real social bonds which already knit men together, and, unrecognised, are the actual basis of such common life as we possess. The means of doing this rest with each man's conscience and his opportunities. Until it is done any definite proposals for the reorganisation of society are absurd. It is only possible to draw out a very general theory as to the probable course of social reconstruction from the observation of growing tendencies.

Anarchists believe the existing organisation of the State only necessary in the interest of monopoly, and they aim at the simultaneous overthrow of both monopoly and State. They hold the centralised "administration of productive processes" a mere reflection of the



present middle-class government by representation upon the vague conception of the future. They look rather for voluntary productive and distributive associations utilising a common capital, loosely federated trade and district communities practising eventually complete free communism in production and consumption. They believe that in an industrial community in which wealth is necessarily a social not an individual product, the only claims which any individual can fairly put forward to a share in such wealth are: firstly, that he needs it: secondly, that he has contributed towards it to the best of his ability: thirdly (as regards any special article), that he has thrown so much of his own personality into its creation that he can best utilise it. When this conception of the relation between wealth and the individual has been allowed to supersede the idea now upheld by force, that the inherent advantage of possessing wealth is to prevent others from using it, each worker will be entirely free to do as nature prompts, *i.e.*, throw his whole soul into the labour he has chosen, and make it the spontaneous expression of his intensest purpose and desire. Under such conditions only labour becomes pleasure and its produce a work of art. But all coercive organisation working with machine-like regularity is fatal to the realisation of this idea. It has never proved possible to perfectly free human beings to co-operate spontaneously with the precision of machines. Spontaneity, or artificial order and symmetry must be sacrificed. And as spontaneity is life, and the order and symmetry of any given epoch only the forms in which life temporarily clothes itself, Anarchists have no fears that in discarding the Collectivist dream of the scientific regulation of industry, and inventing no formulas for social conditions as yet unrealised, they are neglecting the essential for the visionary.

The like reasoning is applicable to the moral aspect of social relations. Crime as we know it is a symptom of the strain upon human fellowship involved in the false and artificial social arrangements which are enforced by authority, and its main cause and sanction will disappear with the destruction of monopoly and the State. Crime resulting from defective mental and physical development can surely be dealt with both more scientifically and more humanely, by fraternal medical treatment and improved education, than by brute force, however elaborated and disguised.

As for the expression of the common life of the community, and the practical persuasion and assistance desirable to raise those who have lagged behind the average of moral development, it is enough to note the marvellous growth of public opinion since the emancipation of platform and press to become aware that no artificial machinery is needful to enforce social verdicts and social codes of conduct without the aid of written laws administered by organised violence. Indeed, when arbitrary restraints are removed, this form of the rule of universal mediocrity is, and has always been, a serious danger to individual freedom; but as it is a natural, not an artificial result of life in common, it can only be counteracted by broader moral culture.

Anarchism is not a Utopia, but a faith based upon the scientific observation of social phenomena. In it the individualist revolt against authority, handed down to us through Radicalism and the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, and the Socialist revolt against private ownership of the means of production, which is the foundation of Collectivism, find their common issue. It is a moral and intellectual protest against the unreality of a society which, as Emerson says, "is everywhere in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." Its one purpose is by direct personal action to bring about a revolution in every department of human existence, social, political and economic. Every man owes it to himself and to his fellows to be free.

