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WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

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Socialism is that form of human society, which makes it impossible for an individual or group of individuals to commit an unsocial act, that is, an act in which the interest of society is subordinated to the advantage of the individual or group of individuals.

The Aim of Socialism: A society free from unsocial acts, thus is identical with that of Christianity as taught by Jesus. The difference is that Christianity endeavored to bring about this condition by inculcating brotherly love into all members of human society, and the experience of nineteen centuries has proven that self interest is stronger than brotherly love. Socialism therefore abandoned the hope of changing human nature and endeavors to eliminate unsocial acts by reorganizing society so that self interest becomes identical with public interest, that is, eliminating those conditions under which self interest is opposed to public interest.¹⁾

1) The argument often heard against socialism, that it could work only after all men have become angels, thus is the reverse of the truth. The difference between Christianity and Socialism is that Socialism does not count on changing human nature, but endeavors to change society so that, with human nature as it is, the aim of Christianity can be fulfilled.

Most socialists consider the private ownership of the means of production and distribution (capital, land, tools and factories, transportation and distribution systems, etc.) as the foremost cause of unsocial acts, and therefore propose public ownership of all the means of production and distribution as a step to eliminate most of the unsocial acts in present day society.

Regarding the form of public ownership, opinions may differ. In democratic nations as America, experience has shown governmental (State, Municipal, etc) ownership as frequently unsuccessful, by introducing a new class of unsocial acts; abuse of the public trust for individual private advantage. In nations with a strong centralized government, such abuse of public office for private gain is rare, but the government is either in the hands of a ruling class (the Germany of old) or a class consciousness develops amongst the office holders (the Russia of old), and another form of unsocial acts develops, the abuse of public trust for the advantage of the office holding class. Another form of dealing with the problem is being tried in Russia's Soviet government, and is worth watching. This essentially consists in self-government of all industrial, agricultural and local groups, with commission government dealing with the inter-relations of the self governing group.

Public ownership of the means of production and distribution does not necessarily imply complete communism, but private ownership in commodities, money, etc. may remain, at least as far as it does not lead to unsocial acts. Neither does it require absolute equality in every respect, of all members of society.

Opinions also may differ on the methods of bringing about such reconstruction of society, and have changed from the conception of some of the early European leaders, that the introduction of universal suffrage would be sufficient. (Lasalle), and the militaristic organization described by Bellamy's "Looking Backwards", which was once so popular. In general "democracy" has been associated with socialism, so much so, that most socialist political parties have adopted the name "Social Democracy" or tried to do so. On the other hand, some socialists in the last years have come to the realization that socialism can never be accomplished under a democracy, but that in the transition period a dictatorship is necessary, however much in its final form socialist society must be a democracy. For the reason that the ownership of the means of production and distribution, also controls the means of information (newspapers, etc.) and the educational systems of the countries, and can supply to the masses such information as causes them to vote in the manner desired, and by controlling the educational system, can educate the masses so as to make them accept the present form of society as final. It cannot be denied that the history of the last years has given more support to this conception than comfortable to the friends of democracy.

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This is not intended as a propagandistic exposition of the principles of any of the various forms of political or industrial socialism, but a discussion of the social conception which runs throughout the ages of mankind, as exemplified by Socrates and Cicero (*de officiis*), by Christ and the Christian Religion, up to the various forms of political socialism and the co-operative movement between corporation and its employees which is rapidly gaining ground in our large modern corporations, that is, the endeavor to bring about some form of society, which eliminates or reduces to a minimum the occurrence of un-social acts, that is, acts by which for individual advantage is given precedence over the common welfare.