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Municipal Socialism

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The rapid increase of urban population over rural means to the thoughtful man that in a comparatively few years the great masses of the people will live in cities. Small cities will grow larger, new cities will spring up and the percent of rural dwellers will gradually decrease until it will no longer demand consideration. This fact has turned the tide of thought in a new direction. Government is becoming more intensive. The question now before the public is not so much, How shall we govern our state or nation? but, How shall we govern our cities?

We now find ourselves confronted with the problem of municipal government. In what manner shall we conduct the government of our cities so the greatest number may receive the greatest good? and what form of city government shall we have? It is proposed by some that city governments shall be miniature kingdoms; each city to be ruled over by one called whatever may be, but possessing power not unlike that of a king. Others propose a purely democratic government but fail to define the limits of such government; other theories are not wanting and among these is to be found that known as Municipal Socialism.

Municipal Socialism is a form of city govern-

must purely democratic. Each individual is to have the same rights and privileges as every other individual, it differs from ordinary democratic governments only in that it extends the function of government to fields heretofore held sacred to private individuals. It assumes that all fields open to private individuals are open to municipalities, and further, that since any government is merely a body of individuals banded together for a common good, government may have fields into which the private individual is not permitted to enter because such entry would be to the detriment of society.

Municipal socialism is not a new thing. We find it in Greece in her palmier days; in Rome when she ruled the world; in fact to a greater or less extent during the whole history of man since he became a social being. But in the past the sword was law and municipal socialism had no chance to reach a mature state of development. Now, however, since the art of war is suffering the convulsions of its last agony and the regime of eternal peace is at hand municipal socialism demands that it be allowed to take root in the soil and grow to maturity at which time it promises to fulfill the fondest hopes of its advocates.

Just what is the function of government or

what it should be has been a long disputed question. One class of thinkers maintain that government has no right to interfere in any way with the private individual. This principle applied only to business is the germ of the laissez faire doctrine; applied to all man's activities the result is anarchy. Socialism maintains that each man is an integral part of an immense organism and that the organism has a right to adopt measures for the common good although some members may be injured thereby. Between these extremes there is a vast number of theories approaching first one extreme and then the other. All existing governments have taken a stand somewhere between the two extremes but the advancement of civilization shows a strong tendency toward socialism; not necessarily socialism applied to government as a whole but socialistic principles applied to many of the branches of the government.

Opinion has been oscillating for years between socialism and individualism but it has now crystallized to that extent that it is generally admitted that socialism is admissible though whether practical under all circumstances or not remains yet to be determined. Municipal socialism, as distinguished from socialism in general, has been and is

being tried with many industries.

Before attempting to show whether municipal socialism is practical or not it will be well, perhaps, to review briefly the condition of municipalities in Europe and America and see wherein the present system fails and what reforms are needed.

London will serve as an example illustrating the condition of the average European city. It furnishes startling facts and yet upon examination of most other European cities facts no less startling are ascertained. The cities where such irregularities do not exist will later be noticed and a cause assigned for the improved condition which they enjoy.

In London one fifth of the people die in workhouses, public hospitals or lunatic asylums. Fifty-five per cent of the children of the laboring classes die before reaching the age of five years while only eight per cent of the children of the upper classes die before reaching that age. The length of life of the workman compared with the length of life of the higher class man is as twenty-nine to fifty-five. It costs the workman so much for the necessities of life, taxes, etc., that it is practically impossible for him to make any provision for his declining years. The ground rent and interest paid to the parasitic class of London is \$185,000,000, while it

costs only \$35,000,000 for the government of the city. Thus the people of London pay out \$220,000,000 annually or five-sixths of which goes to support a parasitic class. The city is poorly lighted; the water supply is deficient and the water is of a poor quality; the sanitary condition of some parts of the city is shocking; the slums are in such a condition that health and morality is the exception not the rule. There with countless other evils may be found not only in London but in nearly every other large city in Europe. All this exists under land lordism, private ownership of monopolies, and a system of municipal government in harmony with private ownership; and there is no prospect for a change of policy or a betterment of the existing conditions as long as private ownership holds the reins of government.

Is the condition better in our own land? Not so. New York is an almost perfect facsimile of London except that its water supply is adequate and the water good; otherwise its evils are only less extensive than those of London because it is smaller than London. There is no difference in intensiveness. Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco and many other large cities present conditions little or no better with the same cause assigned as in London.

With such conditions existing it is super-

plains to ask, Is a reform needed? Every one admits that a change in the government of our cities is imperative. A system of government worse than feudalism stands in its way unless a change is made for the better. Equality of opportunity has long since ceased to be even a fond dream; equality before the law is an unrealized dream; and equality between men of different classes, in any sense, is fast becoming naught but a play of fancy.

What is the remedy? Is it municipal socialism? If so what has municipal socialism to show for its accomplishments? It would be hard to find a more vicious system of city government than the system prevalent in both the old world and the new, but would municipal socialism be better?

The city of Glasgow in Scotland, has given municipal socialism a more extensive trial than any other city in the world and below is recorded a part of what has been done there.

In 1866 the city of Glasgow obtained authority from Parliament to take charge of the slum districts in the city. A commission was appointed by the city to take charge of the work. Eighty-eight acres of the worst slum area was purchased by the city. The old crookeries were torn down; the

whole area renovated; model tenement houses were built by the city; the streets in this district were widened and well paved; the houses rented for such a price that in a comparatively few years the money obtained therefrom will pay the principal expended in making the improvement besides keeping up the interest. Not only did this vastly improve the sanitary condition of the city, but it added comfort to thousands, and further it is a paying investment.

The city built, at enormous expense, an aqueduct to convey pure water to the city from Lake Katrina, thirty-four miles away. The city is now supplied with plenty of pure water at a price less than private companies charged. Provision is made for supplying abundance of water to the people when the city shall have reached a population of a million or more. And further this investment like the renovating of the streets is a paying one.

The city owns its gas works; supplies gas at a price over half of what the private companies charged and besides makes a handsome profit which besides keeping up the interest on the amount invested will in a few years pay off the principal and thereafter leave the city a fertile source of revenue.

In 1872 the city built an elaborate

system of tramways. These were leased to two syndicates under the following conditions viz: (1) That the syndicates jointly pay the interest on the sum invested; (2) that sufficient money be paid into a sinking fund to pay, at the expiration of the lease in 1894, the debt incurred in building the lines; (3) that a renewal fund of four per cent of the cost of the lines be paid for repairs etc.; (4) that a yearly rental of \$750 per mile be paid to the city, that a rate of not more than a penny a mile be charged and in addition that a rate of half a penny a mile be made morning and evening for the accommodation of the working people.

This most brilliant scheme was successfully carried out and in 1894 the city took possession of the tramways and has since derived a handsome revenue therefrom.

Not less brilliant than this was the widening of the Clyde thereby connecting the city with the sea and making it one of the most important ports in the world. The city owns its docks said to be the finest in the world. The revenue derived from the docks and the partial monopoly of the Clyde adds to the city treasury the magnificent sum of from \$1,750,000 to \$2,000,000 annually.

Now do these constitute all the industries

that Glasgow manages for itself. The city has parks; museums; public schools on a large scale, both general and technical; public libraries; a magnificent hospital for patients with contagious diseases; an efficient sanitary commission; numerous general hospitals; an excellent sewerage system and a sewage farm; adequate street cleaning provision; markets; slaughter houses; efficient relief corps; and other lesser industries all in admirable working condition and operating successfully. Besides all this the city is reaching out for more.

The most striking of this magnificent social work is that taxes have not been raised a single penny and the city has made provision to pay all its debts in a few years after which time its income will be sufficient to almost if not wholly eliminate the need of levying taxes.

Following in the footsteps of Glasgow comes Birmingham with achievements in some lines which even eclipse those of Glasgow in the same lines. The first notable work accomplished by Birmingham was the taking over of its gas works in 1873. The first year this industry yielded the city a revenue of \$140,000,

besides the price of gas was reduced from seventy-five cents per thousand feet to fifty cents per thousand. Next the waterworks were taken over with little opposition. The city, from thriftiness, did not care to make the water works a revenue yielding enterprise, but the water works pays expenses and water is furnished the people in double the quantity at a greatly reduced rate. The city now has a new water works system and brings its water from the mountains eighty miles away. The cost of constructing this new plant was \$35,000,000; however, the water is paying the interest on the investment and enough is being put into a sinking fund to pay the principal in a short period of years.

Birmingham's most brilliant achievement was in the taking over of the slums. An area of ninety acres of the slum district was purchased by the city for \$8,000,000. All the tumble-down buildings were demolished, the streets widened and improved, and that portion of the land suitable for business houses was rented to business men for seventy-five years under certain conditions favorable to the city. The buildings erected on the ground had to conform to certain conditions fixed by the city, and besides keeping the buildings

in good repair and paying the city a sum of money which before the expiration of the lease will discharge the debt incurred by the city in making the improvement, the buildings will revert to the city at the expiration of the lease. On that portion of the area suitable for dwellings the city erected model dwelling houses from which a reasonable revenue is obtained.

This scheme was more gigantic than the slum movement in Glasgow, and it is considered a greater achievement since the land was put to its best possible use, while in Glasgow tenement houses were built in the heart of the city where the land would have brought more rental for business purposes; yet both schemes are monuments to the success of municipal socialism.

Besides having socialized its respective industries corresponding to those mentioned for Glasgow, Birmingham has socialized its cemetery, has public bath houses; art galleries; and is like Glasgow making out for more. Again like the case of Glasgow, the rate of taxation has not been raised a cent. In a few years the city will be entirely out of debt and with its numerous sources of revenue it may, if it chooses, dispense with

taxation largely if not wholly besides enjoying the vast improvements it has made.

Along with Glasgow and Birmingham, Manchester should be classed. Its socialistic activities have been conducted on a grand scale and its success has been not less encouraging than that of the two former cities. In these cities an essential part of the municipal evolution has been the adoption and successful application of the civil service to every branch of the city government. Liverpool, Dublin, Swansea, Leeds, Nottingham, and Sheffield have successfully socialized a part of their industries. Many other towns, in England, large and small are following the example and the London County Council is doing much to bring London into line also.

Berlin and several other German cities, Paris and a large number of smaller cities on the continent are profiting by the example set by the English cities in which municipal socialism has achieved such marked success.

In the United States, Cincinnati furnishes the only example of municipal ownership of tramways and these are operated successfully. Boston successfully operates the only municipal housing houses in the United States. Twenty-

three cities in the United States own their electric light plants. New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Kansas City and many other cities own their water works; Philadelphia, Richmond, Danville, Va., Wheeling, Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Charlottesville, Va., Belfontaine, Hamilton, O., Anderson, Ky., Duluth, and Sonoma, Calif., own their gas works. Beyond this municipal socialism in the United States has not extended very far; yet almost without exception municipal socialism so far as it has been tried has worked admirably from the start, and in cases where the start was poor, when once started the industry flourished. Washington is said to be the best governed municipality in the United States and it comes the nearest approximating the ideal of municipal socialism, in so far as civil service is concerned, of any city in the United States.

Why should not the principles of municipal socialism be carried out? Andrew Jackson, more than half a century ago sounded the young of socialism when he said in speaking of the United States Bank, "Monopolies in private hands are dangerous". History confirmed his belief. The United States Bank was a dangerous monopoly. Just so with every other monopoly in private hands. Private monopoly of

land has been long recognized as a fruitful source of extortion; private ownership of street rail-ways, city water works, gas works, electric light plants, telephones, telegraphs, and many other industries are fruitful sources of wealth - the public being exploited for the benefit of the few. Then since government is simply a body of people banded together for a common good why not socialize these industries for the benefit of the many? Why not take over all unreasoned income, which is, really, the the product of society? Why not take over when conditions will warrant until all desirable industries belong to the city.

Is there any reason why taxation should be the only source of revenue which a city may have? And taxation, too, so adjusted that the heaviest burden falls on those least able to bear it? Is there any reason for such a state of affairs? Why should not a city reap the profit from its water works, its gas works, its tramways or any other industry it may support? If these sources of revenue were utilized taxes would be unknown, comfort might be the lot of every one and the greater proportion of the parasitic class which

society now supports would become producers.

Municipal Socialism offers public parks; good libraries; cheap gas; adequate water supply at small cost; good schools; efficient sanitation; good sewerage system; better health; better morals; in fact greater advantages for the mass as in every line. It offers better officials and equality of opportunity as far as law can make them equal.

The objector to municipal socialism says government should not extend its functions into the sphere of the private individual. It is not the function of government, he asserts, to manage industries. Further public officials can not be found that will manage public affairs for the public interest. Private enterprises are managed more economically than public enterprises, hence public enterprises can not compete with private. These with scores of other objections he hurled at municipal socialism because such a policy might and probably would prevent him

and others from exploiting the public out of millions.

Experience has shown that good men can be secured for the management of government affairs; that public industries can compete favorably with private enterprise; that the chance for bribery, boodle and other fraud is greatly reduced by socializing industries; that a better class of men go into politics under such a system; and that not only does municipal ownership possess all the advantages of private ownership many additional ones. It is a means of securing the greatest good to the greatest number.

Before municipal socialism can be adopted in the mass of our towns and cities many obstacles must be overcome. The government of the cities is now largely in the hands of men who seek office for the money there is to be obtained therefrom and of course they will violently oppose any change towards socialism which could have no other result than to lessen their chances for boodle or other means of exploitation. Valuable franchises may now be so handled that no number

of the city council need have office
 empty handed if he yields to the temptation
 set before him. Election laws and elec-
 tions must be improved; the best element
 of society must realize that it is for
 the common good that they enter the politi-
 cal arena. Men must not only come
 to think more of others but must aban-
 don the present method of acting too
 hastily. Many of our cities are deeply
 in debt today because their officials did
 not consider seriously enough certain
 steps. These and other obstacles must be
 overcome, but they are not insurmountable,
 and with such brilliant examples as Glas-
 gow, Birmingham, and Manchester as well
 as other shining examples in the Old as well as
 the New World ever before the public mind
 victory need not be despaired of.

The tendencies in both the Old
 World and the New is strongly towards
 municipal socialism; its advantages
 are being seen, and heroic measures are
 being adopted in some places to reach
 that end. When the cities wherein munic-
 ipal socialism partially adopted are com-

pared with those employing the old
vicious system where each gets all he can
and keeps all he gets - where trickery and
cunning is substituted for justice - when
then we compared the cause of municipal
socialism demonstrates its superiority over
private ownership. The outlook is prom-
ising from a socialistic point of view. There
will be no sudden transition to municip-
al socialism but it will come by a strong
and steady growth. In a few decades
we may expect to find our chief indus-
tries under one, prosperity greatly increased
and a regime of pure government inaug-
urated.

Appendix - Sources of information.

Fabian Tracts - Nos. 8, 13, 57, 18, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34,
35, 36, 37, 61,

Municipal Government in Great Britain -- Albert Shaw
Socialism and Communism -- -- -- Woolsey.

City Government in the United States -- A.R. Conkling

Municipal ownership of monopolies -- Frank R. Parsons

Government ownership of telegraph and telephone -- H.R. Lynde

Municipal fuel yards H.R. Lynde

Government vs. Private ownership of railroads George T. Anthony

Municipal bus Edward W. Bennie