

Socialism in the United States.

Thesis of

Fredrick John Smith.

Class of '95.

Index.

Page

Introduction.

Securing guards against socialism

Freedom - religious and political

Natural resources - mineral, soil fertility

Rise of Socialists

Erroneous ideas of socialism

True doctrine - (Program and impulse)

Conditions favorable to its growth

German socialism, Introduction of

Communist organizations

Fourier Movement

Secular and religious colonies - as to success

Colonies existing today

The "practical Socialists"

Education by the --

Laurence Gronlund

Their position as to other reforms

Favor Unions

How far we are socialist.

Twentieth Century - representative

Plan - Coöperative Company -

Recapitulation

Present tendency of socialism

Conclusion

Socialism in The United States.

It seems almost incredible that in a country where there is freedom with all its attendant advantages and possibilities, where there is such an immense acreage of tillable land, where not only the precious metals, gold and silver, but also the more common ones, lead, iron, copper, and zinc are dug from the earth in such abundance, where the school system approaches the ideal, where religion and politics are matters of opinion: in a word in a country where all those things are present which make for man's happiness and well-being, there should be a feeling of unrest among its people. This, nevertheless, is the case in our land today. There has for years past been brewing a conflict in which has been arrayed on the one hand the laborer and the employed, on the other, the capitalist and the employer. Reasons for this conflict have been given by various schools of thinkers, prominent among them being the class called socialists, who hold that all this difference is attributable to capitalistic production. In competition in other words.

Ever since the socialist have made their appearance in the United States there have been vague and erroneous ideas as to what their teachings are. They

have been accused of holding every kind of belief, from the most absurd to those so impracticable that they could only have originated in the mind of one demented. By many they have been classed side by side with the anarchist, when the fact of the matter is that these two schools are diametrically opposite. The one would abolish all government, while the other would place all power in the hands of government. This confusion is no doubt due as much to the lack of unity among those professing to be socialists as to a lack of understanding on the part of the people.

Socialism as it is taught today and according to the best thinkers of the school means the abolition of all private productive enterprises, which are all to be carried on under the direction of society as a whole. Individual enterprise is, however, not to be destroyed as is argued by so many of its opponents; for if it were socialism would at once lose its force. Equality is to be established, not mental or financial equality as it is so oft times interpreted, but equality of opportunity is to be the goal to which we are to lead. This has ever been the most important point in the socialistic program; production and distribution controlled by the whole society. With the program is connected what has been termed the impulse, which is their appeal to ethics, religion, and the prejudices

of the people. By this means they are enabled to secure so easily the ear of those who feel themselves oppressed.

And thus the discontent among a certain class of our people has ever offered an excellent field for the germs of socialism. The labourer ground down to the level of a slave, often thrown altogether out of employment, his family reduced to starvation, has always been a ready listener to their sweet promises of how they would, when once they gained control, establish equality. How they would make it impossible for one man to amass millions of dollars while hundreds of his fellowbeings were starving at his door. I say, when men are driven to desperation by want and the sight of starving wives and children such thoughts find easy lodgment in their brain. Such were the conditions that brought to our shores disciples of Marx and Engels, the originators of the German Socialism of today. They and they scattered broadcast fell on fertile soil and soon bore fruit. Soon, through their agency was organized the "Socialist Labor Party" - a platform was adopted setting forth their principles and demands. It soon gain followers from the German population, and especially did they from the German "Immigrants". The object of this party was to bring about a change of conditions by political reform, and if this would not prove effective

nothing short of revolution should be resorted to. They meant to change conditions and human nature which had been in process of formation for years, either by repeated strokes at the ballot or by a single terrific stroke of the bullet. To this day, however, it has been unable to accomplish what it set out to do, it is losing strength its adherents being only the most radical men, although in the last presidential campaign it had candidates in the field.

There are other sources, however, from which can be traced the introduction of socialism; for at the same time and even before that time there were established various colonies whose basis of operation was nothing less than socialistic. Among the most enduring of these was the colony of Shakers that was located at Mount Lebanon, New York in 1774. The community now settled there, the strongest Shaker colony in the United States, is after its existence of over one hundred years, often pointed to as a demonstration that a socialistic community is practicable. Following closely in the matter of age are the Harmonites, followers of one George Rupp, who came from Germany and settled in Pennsylvania; but soon removed from there to Harmony Indiana. Their interests here were sold out to Robert Owen, and a new colony, one lasting to this day was established at

Economy near Pittsburg. Robert Owen, on the site vacated by the Harmonites organized a secular community, the two foregoing were religious, calling it New Harmony. This new colony for a time flourished, and although education and religion were free, yet the bond of union was not welded strong enough to keep them together. Another little band located at Zoar, Pennsylvania, where they today may be found prosperous and rich. Still another band which is considered the most successful of all is at Amana, Ohio, where it was located in 1855.

Of greater significance than these was the movement inaugurated by the Frenchman, Fourier. It is of more importance because it did not restrict itself to a small clan or a religious sect. It was most aggressive during the years between 1840 and 1850, and it was for the purpose of furthering this communistic movement that Horace Greeley opened the columns of his paper in its defense. In connection with these socialistic societies is sometimes mentioned the "Brook Farm," experiment, but this seems hardly proper, and yet to be exact one would have to admit that they were actuated by the same principle.

There is a fact of interest which I noticed in the history of these early demonstrations, and it is that those of a secular nature were the first to come to naught, while on the other hand those that were bound by religious ties succeeded financially; but their teachings were too narrow to admit of much growth, at least, by new converts.

The dissolution and failure of some of these pioneer societies did not eradicate the principle. In fact it has from these early beginnings been continually branching, so that at the present time, not in the least dismayed, we find in operation numerous colonies, societies and associations in various parts of our country.

Among them are:

- The Bellamy Co-operative Association, Bethlehoor, Pa.
- The Credit Beneficiary Association, Hustburg, Tenn.
- The Labor Exchange of San Diego, Calif.
- The Cincinnati Labor Exchange.
- The Co-operative Home Association, Patterson, N. J.
- Gibsonville Altrust Community, Grand Blanc, Mich.
- In Zion, Inscora, Ohio.

These and others that might be mentioned are engaged in the various occupations of life. Some carry on manufactures, some house-building, others exchange of labor, and the last named is composed

of a band of Germans, who own and operate seven thousand acres of land.

Aside from those composing the Socialist Labor Party and the communistic societies there is among us a class that is doing more work than either of these; for the first has lost favor because of its revolutionary ideas as well as from the fact that it is made up principally of the foreign element. The second factor is not really aggressive. The leaders of this third group can no longer be called dreamers or visionaries. That criticism has lost weight from the fact that among them are some of our most intelligent and patriotic citizens, many of them products of the United States. They are laying aside Eutopian schemes, and are working in practical lines. They believe that their greatest task is to educate the toiling masses, and this accomplished their teachings will be followed out, and there will be ushered in the universal cooperative commonwealth. It is folly for us any longer to try to persuade ourselves that their work will amount to nothing, for they have become firmly engrafted on our soil. They will push their work in all directions. Thus we can no longer ignore them, but it becomes our imperative duty to

study their teachings, to look into their plans that we may know which way they will tend to lead us.

Among the first things that comes to our notice is the manner in which they promulgate their doctrines. Not, as was the custom in the old line by appeals to the feelings and prejudices of the American labour, but they are making converts by preaching and teaching socialism in plain English. They come coolly before the worker, explaining to him why it is that he fares so ill, and how conditions might be changed that he too, as well as the most potent millionaire, might enjoy the days spent on earth. The best representative of these, perhaps, is Laurence Gronlund, who is spending his time among the people of California whom he already finds well-prepared to receive the tidings he brings to them. Just now he is organizing there a society of the Fabian type in England by which he hopes to further spread the gospel of socialism.

Another phase of their work is not to be overlooked and that is the manner in which they are putting their teachings into practice. They are not Socialists and only socialist, putting aside everything that is not just what they are after. No, far from it, they are not so narrow-minded

as that, but they favor reform in whatever shape or from whatever source it may come. When the People's Party was organized it was not long ere they saw that there was the place for them to do good work. In the Omaha platform were some of the very principles for which they were striving, and it must be said, and that on good grounds however strong popular opinion may be to the contrary, that the People's Party stands for much that is socialistic. This fact is substantiated by their discussions in which they advocate government ownership of railroad and telegraph lines. In fact the whole foundation in that it is built upon the opposition to ~~capitalistic~~ ^{capitalistic} production is socialistic in spirit.

Then, again, socialists of today look favorably upon all trades unions, confederations, combines of all kinds among the laboring classes, for they say, 'All this is tending in our direction and hence we must only abide time and the United States will slowly drift into a cooperative commonwealth. Already, they say, the people are controlling the post office department, the army and navy, and the public schools, purely and simply on a socialistic plan. Municipalities are doing all over our land, they hold, what they intend shall

be done by the nation. They are owning and controlling the waterworks and lighting facilities. The township takes care of the highways and bridges, the paupers and weak-minded, and so on through the category they take us until we ^{are} almost persuaded that we are socialists on a grand scale without even knowing it. - That unconsciously we are drifting into the very conditions which we decry so loudly as being dangerous to our liberties.

Among those who work in this line the Twentieth Century may be mentioned as a representative. This magazine has through its corps of editors and contributors from its beginning labored to bring about universal coöperation. During this year they have begun the work by organizing a coöperative company, which is on the plan of a stock company, the people to be the shareholders. This company applied for and received a charter from the State of New York. Its capital stock is \$30,000, representing the plant of the magazine which they intend to publish and control that they may the better bring before the American people their aims and desires. For an obvious reason they begin with the publication of a magazine, for they knew that the political partisan papers of today would never do them justice.

Although they begin modestly, they intend to go much farther. Their hope and desire is that eventually they will be able to control in every avenue of work that has to do with the production, manufacture, and distribution of the necessities of life. They believe that in time all men will become shareholders in one great company and, then, of course, we will have the socialist regime - everything in the hands of society. How nearly they will accomplish what they have set out to do, we cannot judge, but as to their methods they are typical American Socialists. They are what are sometimes termed the practical ones, in distinction from the professorial who sit in their study and plan the way they would have things, the Christian socialists of whom there are a few in our country, who lay great stress on the religious aspect of socialism, and in distinction from the old line revolutionary socialist. They are the class most prominent and numerous in our land; and any one who has followed their movements fails to see any sign of the bloody strife which they would bring about, according to their opponents. They are liberty loving, patriotic men and women, actuated in their work by no selfish motives, but by a broad humanitarian spirit. If they err we must at least

give them credit for sincerity, if they fail we can forgive them, remembering that they are but mortals.

These, then, in conclusion, are the different schools in our land, those that settle in colonies and societies, the revolutionary socialists, the Christian socialists, the practical socialists, and Henry George and his followers is sometimes given as a school, though the right to do this is emphatically denied by George himself. There is, however, a class that must be included, and ^{those are} that is the Nationalists, followers of Edward Bellamy. They accept the name, but say that they go much farther than the socialist, their ground plan being much as portrayed in "Looking Backward."

One thing is certain, and that is that the idea of socialism is fast gaining ground, however we may deplore or even ignore it. The conditions we are in are highly favorable to its development, and if we would rid our country of it we must to work and right the wrongs done to so many of our brethren. This done socialism will of itself disappear, or as they would have it we would all be socialists.

F. J. Smith.

May 25, 1895.