Socialism in the United States

Thesis of

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Labor of '25
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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 community where all these 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 employer 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 or competition in other words.

Ever since the socialist has 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 mental. 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. 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 almost lose its force. Equality is to be established, not mental or financial equality as 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 socialist 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 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 grooms of socialism. The labour 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 fellow beings 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 our chieftains, disciples of Marx and Engels, the originators of the German Socialism of today, in 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 gained 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 box or by a single terrific stroke of the bullet. In 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 the same time and even before that time there were established various colonies whose basis of operation was nothing less than socialist. Among the most enduring of these was the Colony of Shakers that was located at Mount Lebanon, New York in 1794. 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 socialist 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 were removed from there to Harmony, Indiana. Their interests 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
occupied by the Harmonists organized a secular com-
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 Zoro, Pennsylvania, where they today
may be found prosperous and rich. Still another
land which is considered the most successfully
all is at Amaca, 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 move-
ment that Horace Greeley opened the columns of
this paper in its defense. In connection with
these socialistic societies is sometimes mentioned
The "Brook Farms" 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 mere 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 off that at the present time, not in the least damaged, we find in operation numerous colonies, societies, and associations in various parts of our country.

Among these are:

- The Bellamy Co-operative Association, Bethlehem, Pa.
- The credit Sanificatory Association, Hunting, Tenn.
- The Labor Exchange, San Diego, Calif.
- The Cincinnati Labor Exchange.
- The Cooperative Home Association, Patterson, N. J.
- In Zorn, Indiana, Ohio.

These and others that might be mentioned are engaged in the various occupations of life. Some carry on manufacture, some house-building, thus exchanging labor and the last named is composed
of a band of Germans, who own and operate seven
thousand acres of land.

Aside from those comprising the Socialist Labor
Party and the Communist 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 elements. The second factor is not really
effective. 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 Utopian
schemes, and are working in practical lines.
They believe that their practical task is to educate
the toiling masses, and this accomplished their
teachings will be followed out, and then will be
reached in the universal cooperative Common-
wealth. It is folly for us any longer to try to
persuade ourselves that their work will amount
to nothing, for they have become firmly engaged
on our side. 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 proclaimate their doctrines. Not as was the custom in the old line by appeals to the feelings and prejudices of the American labor 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 suffers ill and how conditions might be changed that he too, as well as the most paler millionaire, might enjoy the days spent on earth.

The best representative of these, perhaps, is Lawrence Guilded, who is spending his time among the people of California whom he already finds well-prepared to receive the tidings he brings. 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 Socialist 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 longer they
said that there was the place for them to do good
work. In the Omaha platform were some of their
principles for which they were striving, and
it must be said, and that on good grounds however
strong popular opinion may be. The contrary,
that the People's Party stands for much that is so-
cialistic. This fact is substantiated by their dis-
cussions in which they advocate government
ownership of railroads and telegraph lines. In fact,
the whole foundation on which it is built upon
the opposition to 

**Capitalistic**

Production is so

cialistic in spirit.

Thus, again, socialists of today look favorably
upon all trades unions, confederations, combos
of all kinds among the laboring classes, forty
day. All this is tending in our direction and
hence we must only a little time and the United
States will slowly drift into a cooperative com-
monwealth. Already, they say, the people are contro-
ing the postoffice department, the army and navy,
and the public schools; purely and simply our so-
cialistic 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 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 cooperation. During this year they have begun the work by organizing a cooperative 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 $50,000, 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 give with the publication of a magazine for they knew that the political Martian fighters of today would never do them justice.
Although they began modestly, they intend to progress much farther. Their hope and desire is that eventually they will be able to control in every avenue of life 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 that, 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 professional 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 holding revolutionaries. 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, active in their work by no selfish motives, but by a broad humanitarian spirit. If they are not already
give them credit for sincerity, if they fail we can forgive them remembering that they are but mortals.

Here, 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 a school, though the right to do this is emphatically denied by George himself. Here is, however, a class that must be included, and 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 its conditions. We are in an highly favorable to its development and if we would rid our country of its much work and right the wrongs done to so many of our brethren. This done socialism will itself disappear, or as they would have it we would all be socialists—

F. J. Smith
May 25, 1895.