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Socialism Today

With a Socialist premier guiding the ship of state in France, a Socialistic Chancellor of the Exchequer tramping the political quarter deck in England and a Social Democrat (which means a Socialist who really votes the ticket) roosting upon the lid of the municipal stein in Milwaukee, the augurs seem to point balefully to a great many scare heads about Socialism and the Socialists during the next year or two.

The red brethren themselves are firmly convinced that their millennium is dawning. In another decade they say with confidence they will be in control of all the Continental nations save Russia, Greece, Turkey and the Balkan states, and perhaps of England and many of the American states as well. By 1930 they expect to elect a Socialist President of the United States, and by 1930 they hope to proclaim a world republic, with the Manifesto of 1847 as its constitution and the copious whiskers of Karl Marx as its Coat of arms.

Mr. Roosevelt's Alarm

So much for the Socialists themselves. Other prophets, a good deal less moved by enthusiasm, appear to be equally certain that the red flag and flaming torch are destined to encircle the earth. The pioneer of all such dubious croakers was Herbert Spencer, that connoisseur of unpleasant things. Back in the 80's, in his famous tract, "The Coming Slavery," Spencer raised his voice in lamentation over the growing spirit of paternalism in government, and predicted that it would culminate in downright Socialism.

He won not a few to his views and today they are held by many necromancers of the first consideration. One such is Arthur James Balfour, leader of the Conservative party in England, and another is Theodore Roosevelt. Mr. Roosevelt, in the course of an active life in politics and the roaring camp, has accumulated a large stock of startling and conflicting doctrines, political and economic, but Socialism is not one of them. He is, on the contrary, a savage foe to the Socialists, and has belabored them mightily on occasion, and he confesses quite frankly, the while his club comes down, that his enmity is grounded upon a fear that some of their ideas stand in danger of gaining acceptance among the plain people.

That fear, it must be confessed, is far from a mere phobia of the chair. In Germany, for example, the Socialists are fast making themselves masters of the state. If they could but force the enactment of suffrage laws as liberal as those of the United States, or even those of France, they would overturn things at the next election. As it is, they poll nearly 3,500,000 votes, and their army is growing year by year.

They already have enough men in the Reichstag to make it very unpleasant for the government, and in some of the provincial assemblies they are equally well represented. So long as Germany enjoys its present unbounded prosperity, it is likely, perhaps, that they will find serious opposition in the complacency of the small trading class and the somewhat bombastic patriotism of the people in general, but once the wolf appears at the door, following a commercial collapse or a disastrous foreign war, they will gallop into power with a whoop.

The American Socialists

In France the Socialists usually hold about forty seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and in addition they control the city governments of most of the large towns, including Paris. In Italy they are gaining steadily, and in Denmark, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Belgium and Switzerland the same tale is there to tell.

Under the old suffrage laws in Austria they made little progress, but when universal manhood suffrage was proclaimed, in 1905, they straightway elected eighty-seven members of the Reichstag. Even in Japan and the South American republics there are growing Socialist minorities. In Australia and New Zealand a labor party which has borrowed practically all of its thunder from Socialism is in full control, and all sorts of Socialistic schemes, including old age pensions, state employment bureaus and public ownership, are being tried.

In the United States the voting strength of the Socialists has grown from 88,000 votes to nearly 450,000 in 20 years, but for all that the party is scarcely in a healthy state. For this anemia three causes are to be blamed. The first is the fact that there are several hunkerous factions in the party, each clinging to its particular panaceas and refusing resolutely to consider those put forward by its rivals. The second cause is the active participation, in the councils of the most conspicuous faction, of various extremely voluble amateur theorists, chiefly wealthy young men. The public is moved to laugh at these fellows, and so, by an easy psychological process, it comes to laugh, too, at the doctrines they represent. The third and last cause of Socialism's malnutrition in the United States is the bitter opposition of the trades unions.

Opposed By The Unions

On the continent of Europe Socialism and trades unionism go hand in hand. In Germany and Belgium, in truth, they are substantially identical. The typical German workman votes the Socialist ticket as dutifully as he pays his union dues. He believes that Socialism offers the only practicable remedy for the ills of labor. The big men of his union are almost always active Socialist propagandists and nearly all the Socialists he has ever heard of are union men.

But in the United States the unions, if those made up entirely of foreigners be excluded, may be said to be relentless foes to Socialism. Union leaders so different in aims and methods as Samuel Gompers and John Mitchell agree in denouncing it as a dangerous form of folly. Here and there of course, one will find earnest Socialists in the ranks of organized labor, but the unions as unions usually fight shy of the red flag.

No doubt this indifference to the sweet music of the Socialist Lorelei is due to the fact that unionism, in its practical results, has been far more successful in the United States than anywhere else. It began as an appeal for a square deal and that appeal, in a democracy, was bound to strike home. When the strikes and other turmoils of the early 80's began, the sympathy of the public was on the side of the strikers. Certain astute opponents tried to deprive them of that sympathy by denouncing them as anarchists, but that device in the long run was bound to fall. The unionists were fighting for those comforts and advantages which every American had come in regard as his rights. As a result, the average man harbored a sneaking hope that they would win, and his hope transformed into public opinion, helped them to do so.

Today the American union workman is so far above the lowest class of the population and so far upon the road to his desires, that he is pretty well satisfied not only with himself but also with that scheme of things which has enabled him to become the independent, well-fed man he is.