

Why I Am Not A Socialist

By GILBERT K. CHESTERTON.

I have been asked to give some exposition of how far and for what reason a man has not only a faith in democracy, but a great tenderness for revolution, may nevertheless stand outside the movement commonly called Socialism. It is to do this I must make two prefatory remarks. The first is a short platitudinous explanation of the title. The second is a rather long personal explanation. But they both have to be stated before we get to the absolute doctrines, which are the most important things in the world.

The terse and necessary truism is the expression of ordinary human disgust at the industrial system. To say that I do not like the present state of wealth and poverty is merely to say I am not a devil in human form. No one but Satan or Beelzebub could like the present state of wealth and poverty. But the second point is rather more personal and elaborate; and yet I think that it will make things clear to explain it. Before I come to the actual proposal of collectivism, I want to say something about the atmosphere and implication of those proposals. Before I say anything about Socialism, I should like to say something about Socialists.

I will confess that I attach much more importance to men's theoretical arguments than to their practical proposals. If you will, I attach much more importance to what is said than to what is done; what is said generally lasts much longer and has much more influence. I can imagine no change worse for public life than that which some prigs advocate, that debate should be curtailed. A man's arguments show what he is really up to. Until you have heard the defense of a proposal you do not really know even the proposal.

Thus, for instance, if a man says to me, "Taste this temperance drink," I have merely doubt slightly tinged with distaste. But if he says, "Taste it, because your wife would make a charming widow," then I decide.

Or, again, suppose a man offers a new gun to the British navy, and ends up his speech with the fine peroration, "And after all, since Germans are our brothers, what matters it whether they win or no," then again I decide. I could decide to have the man shot with his own gun, if I could. In short, I would be openly moved in my choice of an institution, not by its immediate proposals for practice, but very much by its incidental, even its accidental allusion to ideals. I judge many things by their parentheses.

Now, I wish to say first that Socialistic Idealism does not attract me very much, even as Idealism. The glimpses it gives of our future happiness depress me very much. They do not remind me of any actual human happiness, of any happy day that I have ever myself spent. No doubt there are many Socialists who feel this and there are many who will reply that it has nothing to do with the actual proposal of Socialism. But my point here is that I do admit such allusive elements into my choice.

I will take one instance of the kind of thing I mean. Almost all Socialists Utopias make the happiness, or at least the altruistic happiness, of the future chiefly consist in the pleasure of sharing, as we share a public park or the mustard at a restaurant. This, I say, is the commonest sentiment in Socialist writing. Socialists are Collectivists in their proposals, but they are Communist in their idealism.

Now, there is a real pleasure in sharing. We have all felt it in the case of nuts off a tree or the National Gallery, or such things. But it is not the only pleasure nor the only altruistic pleasure, nor (I think) the highest or most human of altruistic pleasures. I greatly prefer the pleasure of giving and receiving.

Giving is not the same as sharing; sharing is based on the idea that there is no property, or at least no personal property. But giving a thing to another man is as much based on personal property as keeping it to yourself. If after some universal interchange of goods every one was wearing some one else's hat, that state of things would still be based on private property.

Now, I speak quite seriously and sincerely when I say that I for one should greatly prefer that world in which every one wore some one else's hat to every Socialist Utopia that I have ever read about. It is better than sharing one hat anyhow. Remember we are not talking now about the modern problem and its urgent solution; for the moment we are talking only about the ideal—what we would have if we could get it. And if I were a poet writing a Utopia, if I were a magician waving a wand, if I were a God making a Planet, I would

deliberately make it a world of give and take, rather than a world of sharing.

I do not wish Jones and Brown to share the same cigar box; I do not want it as an ideal; I do not want it as a very remote ideal; I do not want it at all. I want Jones by one mystical and godlike act to give a cigar to Brown and Brown by another mystical act to give a cigar to Jones. Thus it seems to me instead of one act of fellowship (of which the memory would slowly fade) we should have a continual play and eury of new acts of fellowship keeping up the circulation of society.

Now, I have read some tons or square miles of Socialist eloquence in my time, but it is literally true that I have never seen any serious allusion to or clear consciousness of this creative altruism of personal giving. For instance, in the many Utopian pictures of comrades feasting together I do not remember one that had the note of hospitality, of the difference between host and guest and the difference between one house and another. Now, on brings up the point that the fathers laid down: so one is proud of the pears grown in his own garden; in the less non-conformist Utopias, there is indeed the recognition of traditional human habits; but I am not speaking of drink, but of that yet nobler thing, "standing drink."

Keep in mind, please the purpose of this explanation. I do not say that taste; fits and hospitalities would not happen in a Collectivist state. I do say that they do not happen in Collectivists' instinctive visions of that state. I do not say these things would not occur to Socialists. I say they do not occur to Socialists. I know quite well that your immediate answer will be, "Oh, but there is nothing in the Socialist proposal to prevent personal gift." That is why I explain thus elaborately that I attach less importance to the proposal than to the spirit in which it is proposed.

When a great revolution is made, it is seldom the fulfilment of its own exact formula; but it is almost always in the image of its own impulse and feeling for life. Men talk of unfilled ideals. But the ideals are fulfilled, because spiritual life is renewed. What is not fulfilled, as a rule, is the business prospectus. Thus the Revolution has not established in France any of the strict constitutions it planned out; but it has established in France the spirit of eighteenth century democracy, with its cool reason, its bourgeois dignity, its well-distributed but very private wealth, its universal minimum of good manners.

Just so, if Socialism is established, you may not fulfil your practical proposal. But you will certainly fulfil your ideal vision. And I confess that if you have forgotten these important human matters in the telling of a leisurely tale, I think it very likely that you will forget them in the scurry of social revolution. You have left certain human needs out of your books; you may leave them out of your republic.

Now, I happen to hold a view which is almost unknown among Socialists, Anarchists, Liberals and Conservatives. I believe very strongly in the mass of the common people. I do not mean in their "potentialities," I mean in their faces, in their habits and their admirable language. Caught in the trap of a terrible industrial machinery hurried by a shameful economic cruelty, surrounded with an ugliness and desolation never endured before among men, stunted by a stupid and provincial religion, or by a more stupid and more provincial irreligion, the poor are still by far the sanest, jolliest and most reliable part of the community—whether they agree with Socialism as a narrow proposal is difficult to discover. They will vote for Socialists as they will for Tories and Liberals, because they want certain things, or don't want them.

But one thing I should affirm as certain, the whole smell and sentiment and general ideal of Socialism they detest and disdain. No part of the community is so specially fixed in those forms and feelings which are opposite to the tone of most socialists: the privacy of homes, the control of one's own children, the minding of one's own business. I look out of my back windows over the back stretch of Battersea, and believe I could make up a sort of creed, a catalogue of maxims, which I am certain are believed, and believed strongly, by the over-whelming mass of men and women as far as the eye can reach.

For instance, that an Englishman's house is his castle, and that awful properties ought to regulate admission for it; that marriage is a real

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bond, making jealousy and marital revenge at the least highly pardonable; that vegetarianism and all pitting of animal against human rights is a silly fad; that, on the other hand, to save money to give yourself a fine burial is not a silly fad, but a symbol of ancestral self-respect; that when giving treats to friends or children one should give them what they like, emphatically not what is good for them; that there is nothing illogical in being furious because Tommy has been coldly caned by a schoolmistress and then throwing saucers at him yourself. All these things they believe; they are the only people who do believe them; and they are absolutely and eternally right. They are the ancient saviours of humanity; the ten commandments of man. Now, I wish to point out to you that if you impose your Socialism on these people, it will in moral actuality be an imposition and nothing else; just as the creation of Manchester industrialism was an imposition and nothing else. You may get them to give a vote for Socialism, so did the Manchester individualists get them to give votes for Manchester. But they do not believe in the Socialist ideal any more than they ever believe in the Manchester ideal; they are too healthy to believe in either. But while they are healthy, they are also vague, slow, bewildered and unaccustomed, alas, to civil war.

Individualism was imposed on them by a handful of merchants; Socialism will be imposed on them by a handful of decorative artists and Oxford dons and journalists and Countesses on the Spree. Whether, like every other piece of obligate humbug in recent history, it is done with a parade of ballot-boxes, interests me very little. The moral fact is that the democracy definitely dislikes your favorite philosophy, but may accept it like so many others, rather than to take the trouble to resist.

Thinking thus, as I do, Socialism does not hold the field for me as it does for others. My eyes are fixed on another thing altogether, a thing that may move not, but which, if it does move, will crush Socialism with one hand and landlordism with the other. They will destroy landlordism, not because it is property, but because it is the negation of property. It is the negation of property that the Duke of Westminster should own whole streets and squares of London; just as it would be the negation of marriage if he had all living women in one great harem.

If ever the actual poor move to destroy this evil they will do it with the object not only of giving every man private property; they will probably exaggerate in that direction; for in that direction is the whole humor and poetry of their own lives. For the Revolution, if they make it, there will be all the features which they like and I like: the strong sense of British coziness, the instinct for special festival, the distinction between the dignities of man and woman, responsibility of a man under his roof. If you make the Revolution it will be marked by all the things that democracy detests and I detest, the talk about the inevitable, the love of statistics, the materialist theory of history, the trivialities of sociology and the uproarious folly of eugenics. I know the risk I run. Perhaps democracy will never move. Perhaps the British people, if you gave it beer enough, would accept even eugenics. It is enough for me for the moment to say that I cannot believe it. The poor are so obviously right I cannot fancy that they will never enforce their righteousness against all the prigs of your party and mine. At any rate, that is my answer. I am not a Socialist, just as I am not a Tory, because I have not lost faith in democracy.

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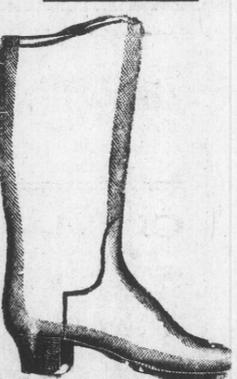
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ADVERTISE IN THE MAIL AND ADVOCATE FOR BEST RESULTS

THE C.C.C. AT HOME

The 'At-Home' marking the formal opening of the C.C.C. new hall, Mechanics' building, took place last night and was a great success, there being over 300 ladies and gentlemen participating in the dance and forming the audience at the concert. Amongst the prominent personages present were His Excellency the Governor and Lady Davidson, Miss Davidson, Miss Grace Archbishop Roche, Rev. J. McDermott, Adm. Rev. J. Pippy, chaplain of the corps; the Premier and Lady Morris, T. J. and Mrs. Edens, the officers of the C.C.C. and officers of the city brigades; as well as President J. P. Scott of the Mechanics' Society; Mrs. Scott, Mrs. (Hon.) J. D. Ryan and others.

The hall was beautifully decorated and brilliantly illuminated, and the scene presented to the eyes of the many spectators in the galleries was a very pretty one indeed. After the formal opening a very enjoyable concert was held, in which Professors Hutton and McCarthy and Messrs M. Doyle and M. Ryan gave items which were heartily appreciated, while the band rendered some very sweet selections.

"On with the dance" was then the order, and the lady and lassies present "tripped the light fantastic" till 3 o'clock this morning, the corps band under the baton of Capt. Arthur Bulley supplying a splendid program of dance music. In fact the music was of such a high order that the dancers repeatedly applauded it. The floor arrangements were in the capable hands of Mr. John Donnelly, Municipal Water Inspector.

The lady friends of the corps served refreshments in the dining room during the night. The beautiful decorations to the hall and its adaptability for such gatherings of that sort last night were favourably commented upon and Capt. Bulley of the band to whom this innovation is due received hearty congratulations. The proceeds which were very satisfactory will be devoted to the funds of the corps.

LOCAL ITEMS

Get the Coca-Cola Gum habit.

The express with the Kyle's passengers arrived here at 1.45 p.m. to-day.

Wallace's Chocolates R most excellent.—ap12,tf

A man, a resident of Hamilton Street, ill of diphtheria, was taken to hospital this morning.

Venus and Velvet pencils will give you satisfaction.—ap12,tf

Magistrate M. F. O'Toole of Reception Harbor arrived here by the shore train to-day.

The people who are always "chewing the rag" about the war would be better occupied in chewing Coca-Cola Gum.

His Grace Archbishop Roche, accompanied by Revs. J. McDermott and McGrath (Bell Island), left by this morning's train for Placentia.

Cleveland Trading Co. are distributors of Coca-Cola Chewing Gum.

SHIPPING

Sagana North of Battle Harbor.

Argyle left Placentia 4.30 p.m. yesterday on Red Island route.

Clyde left Fortune Harbour 12.05 p.m. yesterday going North.

Dundee left Bonavista 2.05 p.m. yesterday outward.

Ethie left Heart's Content 1 p.m. yesterday, due at Carbonar to-day.

Glené left Belleoram 5 p.m. yesterday going West.

Erik arrived at Port aux Basques 11 a.m. yesterday.

5c. CRESCENT Picture Palace 5c.

"The Fattel Note"
A Southern story pictured by the Selig Company.

"THE GREATER LOVE"
A fascinating Lubin Drama.

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A great Vitagraph Comedy with Hughie Mack and Kate Price.

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Venus Drawing pencils are perfect.—ap12,tf

REVENGE

I hope the man who took my watch, whoever stooped so low, will miss more trains than I have missed. Because the thing was slow! —Judge.

Be many, be true, be brave, be open, be just, and then be as strong, as cogent in your reasoning as you can.

Kyle left Port aux Basques 10.30 p.m. yesterday.

Meigs left Flower's Cove 6 p.m. yesterday going north.

The Portia left Harbor Breton early this morning.

The Prospero left Seldom at 10.30 this a.m., going north.

Have you tried Coca-Cola Chewing Gum?