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HOW WE LIVE AND HOW WE MIGHT LIVE.¹

THE word Revolution which we Socialists are so often forced to use, has a terrible sound in most people's ears, even when we have explained to them that it does not necessarily mean a change accompanied by riot and all kinds of violence, and cannot mean a change made mechanically and in the teeth of opinion by a group of men who have somehow managed to seize on the executive power for the moment. Even when we explain that we use the word revolution in its etymological sense, and mean by it a change in the basis of society, people are scared at the idea of such a vast change, and beg that you will speak of reform and not revolution. As however we Socialists do not at all mean by our word revolution what these worthy people mean by their word reform, I can't help thinking that it would be a mistake to use it, whatever projects we might conceal beneath its harmless envelope. So we will stick to our word, which means a change of the basis of society; it may frighten people, but it will at least warn them that there is something to be frightened about, which will be no less dangerous for being ignored; and also it may encourage some people, and will mean to them at least not a fear but a hope. Fear and Hope—those are the two names of the two great passions which rule the race of man, and with which revolutionists have to deal; to give hope to the many oppressed and fear to the few oppressors, that is our business; if we do the first and give hope to the many, the few must be frightened by their hope; otherwise we do not want to frighten them; it is not revenge we want for poor people, but happiness; indeed what revenge can be taken for all the thousands of years of the sufferings of the poor?

However, many of the oppressors of the poor, most of them, we will say, are not conscious of their being oppressors (we shall see why, presently); they live in an orderly quiet way themselves, as far as possible removed from the feelings of a Roman slaveowner or a Legree; they know that the poor exist, but their sufferings do not present themselves to them in a trenchant and dramatic way; they themselves have troubles to bear, and they think doubtless that to bear trouble is the lot of humanity, nor have they any means of comparing the troubles of their lives with those of people lower in the social scale; and if ever the thought of those heavier troubles obtrudes itself upon them, they console themselves with the maxim that people do get used to the troubles they have to bear, whatever they may be.

Indeed, as far as regards individuals at least, that is but too true, so that we have as supporters of the present state of things, however bad it may be, first those comfortable unconscious oppressors who think that they have everything to fear from any change which would involve more than the softest and most gradual of reforms, and secondly those poor people who living hard and anxiously as they do, can hardly conceive of any change for the better happening to them, and dare not risk one tittle of their poor possessions in taking any action towards a possible bettering of their condition; so that while we can do little with the rich save inspire them with fear, it is hard indeed to give the poor any hope. It is then, no less than reasonable that those whom we try to involve in the great struggle for a better form of life than we now lead should call on us to give them at least some idea of what that life may be like: a reasonable request, but hard to satisfy, since we are living under a system that makes even conscious effort towards reconstruction almost impossible: it is not unreasonable on our part to answer, "There are certain definite obstacles to any real progress of man; we can tell you what these are; take them away and then you shall see."

However I propose now to offer myself as a victim for the satisfaction of those who consider that as things now go we have at least got something, and are terrified at the idea of losing their hold of that, lest they should find they are worse off than before and have nothing. Yet in the course of my endeavour to show how we might live, I must more or less deal in negatives. I mean to say I must point out where in my opinion we fall short in our present attempts at decent life. I must ask the rich and well-to-do what sort of a position it is which they are so anxious to preserve at any cost? and if after all it will be such a terrible loss to them to give it up? and I must point out to the poor that they, with capacities for living a dignified and generous life, are in a position which they cannot endure without continued degradation. How do we live then under our present system? Let us look at it a little.

And first, please to understand that our present system of Society is based on a state of perpetual war. Do any of you think that this is as it should be? I know that you have often been told that the competition, which is at present the rule of all production, is a good thing, and stimulates the progress of the race; but the people who tell you this should call competition by its shorter name of *war* if they wish to be honest, and you would then be free to consider whether or no war stimulates progress, otherwise than as a mad bull chasing you over your own garden may do. War or competition, whichever you please to call it, means at the best pursuing your own advantage at the cost of some one else's loss, and in the process of it you must not be sparing of destruction even of your own possessions, or you will certainly come by the worse in the struggle. You understand that perfectly as to the kind of war in which people go out to kill and be killed; that sort of war in which ships are commissioned, for instance, "to sink, burn, and destroy"; but it appears that you are not so conscious of this waste of goods when you are only carrying on that other war called commerce; observe, however, that the waste is there all the same.

Now let us look at this kind of war a little closer, run through some of the forms of it, that we may see how the "burn, sink, and destroy" is carried on in it. First, you have that form of it called national rivalry, which in good truth is now-a-days the cause of all gunpowder and bayonet wars which civilised nations wage. For years past we English have been rather shy of them, except on those happy occasions when we could carry them on at no sort of risk to ourselves, when the killing was all one side, or at all events when we hoped it would be. We have been shy of gunpowder war with a respectable enemy for a long while, and I will tell you why: It is because we have had the lion's share of the world-market; we didn't want to fight for it as a nation, for we had got it; but now this is changing in a most significant, and to a Socialist, a most cheering way; we are losing or have lost that lion's share; it is now a desperate "competition" between the great nations of civilisation for the world-market, and to-morrow it may be a desperate war for that end. As a result, the furthering of war (if it be not on too large a scale) is no longer confined to the honour-and-glory kind of old Tories, who if they meant anything at all by it meant that a Tory war would be a good occasion for damping down democracy; we have changed all that, and now it is quite another kind of politician that is wont to urge us on to "patriotism" as 'tis called. The leaders of the Progressive Radicals they would call themselves, long-headed persons who know well enough that social movements are going on, who are not blind to the fact that the world will move with their help or without it; these are the jingoes of to-day. I don't mean to say they know what they are doing: politicians, as you well know, take good care to shut their eyes to everything that may happen six months ahead; but what is being done is this, that the present system, which always must include national rivalry, is pushing us into a desperate scramble for the markets on more or less equal terms with other nations, because, once more, we have lost that command of them which we once had. Desperate is not too strong a word. We shall let this impulse to snatch markets carry us whither it will, whither it must. To-day it is successful burglary and disgrace, to-morrow it may be mere defeat and disgrace.

Now this is not a digression, although in saying this I am nearer to what is generally called politics than I shall be again. I only want to show you what commercial war comes to when it has to do with foreign nations, and that even the dullest can see how mere waste must go with it. That is how we live now with foreign nations, prepared to ruin them without war if possible, with it if necessary, let alone meantime the disgraceful exploiting of savage tribes and barbarous peoples, on whom we force at once our shoddy wares and our hypocrisy at the cannon's mouth.

Well, surely Socialism can offer you something in the place of all that; it can offer you peace and friendship instead of war. We might live utterly without national rivalries, acknowledging that while it is best for those who feel that they naturally form a community under one name to govern themselves, yet that no community in civilisation should feel that it had interests opposed to any other, their economical condition being at any rate similar; so that any citizen of one community could fall to work and live without disturbance of his life when he was in a foreign country, and would fit into his place quite naturally; so that all civilised nations would form one great community agreeing together as to the kind and amount of production and distribution needed; working at such and such production where it could be best produced; avoiding waste by all means. Please to think of the amount

¹ This paper has been delivered as a lecture on several occasions; and I have been often asked to reprint it: hence its appearance in *Commonweal*.

of waste which they would avoid, how much such a revolution would add to the wealth of the world! What creature on earth would be harmed by such a revolution? Nay, would not everybody be the better for it? And what hinders it? I will tell you presently.

Meantime let us pass from this "competition" between nations to that between "the organizers of labour," great firms, joint-stock and other capitalists in short, and see how competition "stimulates production" among them: indeed it does do that; but what kind of production? Well, production of something to sell at a profit, or say production of profits: and note how war commercial stimulates that: a certain market is demanding goods, there are say a hundred manufacturers who make that kind of goods, and every one of them would if he could keep that market to himself, and struggles desperately to get as much of it as he can, with the obvious result that presently the thing is overdone, and the market is glutted, and all that fury of manufacture has to sink into cold ashes. Doesn't that seem something like war to you? Can't you see the waste of it—waste of labour, skill, cunning, waste of life in short? Well, you may say, but it cheapens the goods. In a sense it does; and yet only apparently, as wages have a tendency to sink for the ordinary worker in proportion as prices sink; and at what a cost do we gain this appearance of cheapness! Plainly speaking, at the cost of cheating the consumer and starving the real producer for the benefit of the gambler, who uses both consumer and producer as his milch cows. I needn't go at length into the subject of adulteration, for everyone knows what kind of a part it plays in this sort of commerce; but remember that it is an absolutely necessary incident to the production of profit out of wares, which is the business of the so-called manufacturer; and this you must understand that, taking him in the lump, the consumer is perfectly helpless against the gambler; the goods are forced on him by their cheapness, and with them a certain kind of life which that energetic, that aggressive cheapness determines for him: for so far-reaching is this curse of commercial war that no country is safe from its ravages; the traditions of a thousand years fall before it in a month; it overruns a weak or semi-barbarous country, and whatever romance or pleasure or art existed there, is trodden down into a mire of sordidness and ugliness: the Indian or Javanese craftsman may no longer ply his craft leisurely, working a few hours a day, in producing a maze of strange beauty on a piece of cloth: a steam-engine is set agoing at Manchester, and that victory over nature and a thousand stubborn difficulties is used for the base work of producing a sort of plaster of china-clay and shoddy, and the Asiatic worker, if he is not starved to death outright, as plentifully happens, is driven himself into a factory to lower the wages of his Manchester brother worker, and nothing of character is left him except, most like, an accumulation of fear and hatred of that to him most unaccountable evil, his English master. The South Sea Islander must leave his canoe-carving, his sweet rest, and his graceful dances, and become the slave of a slave: trousers, shoddy, rum, missionary, and fatal disease,—he must swallow all this civilisation in the lump, and neither himself nor we can help him now till social order displaces the hideous tyranny of gambling that has ruined him.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

(To be continued.)

CO-OPERATIVE PRACTICE IN AID OF SOCIALISM.

CO-OPERATION, the offspring and natural handmaid of Socialism, having been seduced and perverted by the sons of Capitalism, has too long been treated as a stranger by us. Signs are not wanting, however, of a permanent and mutually-beneficial *rapprochement* between these closely-related movements. Co-operators are beginning to learn that self-interest, apart from higher motives, must draw them on to Socialism. Socialists are recognising that, although true social co-operation is impossible without the previous destruction or automatic collapse (as the case may be) of the present social structure, they as a party, or in private groups, may profitably employ for the advancement of their cause the services of such co-operation as is now available. The co-operative Socialist bakeries and press in Belgium, the projected Social-Democratic bakeries in London, and the recently established grocery stores of the Socialist League, are so many indications of the way the wind blows.

Let us, then, review the field which lies before us, with a view to the intelligent and therefore successful organisation of this co-operative campaign.

In the first place, what are the objects to be gained by it? Let me commence by anticipating any charge of utopianism—I adopt the vulgar spelling along with the vulgar meaning of the word—by disclaiming any hope of creating at present the framework of the co-operative commonwealths of the future. Such co-operative or even communistic experiments as we may now inaugurate can only be regarded as means and not as ends. We shall be constructing upon healthy and enlightened principles the temporary habitations of the artificers of the new structure, but not (unless accidentally and incidentally) laying any part of its foundations. For the same reason we shall effect no monastic schism or separation of Socialists from the rest of the world; on the contrary, we shall aid each other to live and work to the best purpose in it.

The chief objects, I think, of such efforts as I refer to, are or should be the following: (1) Mutual benefit and insurance: making the pro-

fession of Socialism less dangerous to its actual disciples, less deterrent, if not entirely attractive, to its potential or would-be disciples by improving their material position—at the expense, *bien entendu*, of the trading and capitalist classes. (2) Having diverted from the pockets of private employers and taken much of the surplus returns or profits now contributed to them by Socialists, to employ them as "sinews of war" for the cause. (3) By such means also to accelerate (in a merciful spirit, of course), on the principle of "every little helps," that disintegration and decomposition of the Old Order which so few of us deplore. (4) To acquire during the same processes experimental data, by means of which a more conscious and therefore more rapid evolution of the New Order may be furthered, the aim and operations of the revolution rendered more scientific, and its immediate results more sure and abiding. To create meanwhile models and precedents for the imitation of municipalities, trades' unions, and other public bodies. (5) To provide a training in co-operative industries or services, and the administration thereof, to many Socialists now deficient in it, and a new sphere for many desirous of aiding the Socialist movement but unsuited or disinclined for agitation or other work connected with the direct propaganda. (6) Applying to *communities* only, and not to purely industrial co-operative enterprises: To provide as complete practical training¹ as possible for the work of the day after the revolution, while affording to contemporary workers in the cause recreative retreats and centres of social communion and mutual edification, missionary centres for country districts, and, last but not least, educational centres for the young.

Secondly, how are such objects to be attained through co-operative practice? That is to say, what forms of co-operative enterprises should be promoted, by whom should they be promoted respectively, and how should the necessary capital be obtained for starting them? I am not going to attempt in this article to answer all these points in order or in detail, although I hope hereafter to submit satisfactory answers to them. But I will conclude by indicating some of the means and forms through which I think the above objects may be attained.

I shall roughly divide all possible co-operative enterprises into two classes—(1) the Industrial Co-operative, including co-operation in production, distribution, and accessory or miscellaneous services separately and in combination, and (2) the Communistic, embracing community of use, service, and consumption, with or without socialised forms of production. This class, as Raymond Unwin has pointed out in the *Commonweal* of March 5th, is best adapted for country districts, but I think communistic constitutions might be devised of a sufficiently elastic character for application to colonies in the neighbourhood of London, Paris, Berlin, Glasgow, New York, and other large cities, where educational and missionary establishments are desirable, and where such establishments can only be well and economically conducted (as appears to me at least) in connection with a real *community*. Such colonies would have to acquire sufficient land, on suitable terms, both to render them self-supporting by communistic practice (*i.e.*, by the socialisation of production, distribution, and consumption alike) as regards the usual *necessaries* of life, and to enable them in addition to supply the outside public at competitive rates with market-garden produce or manufactured commodities in regular demand. All adult able-bodied members would be required to work their appointed time in the *communal* services, but that time would only be sufficient to supply the community directly or (in a few departments, such as tea and coffee) indirectly with the said *necessaries* of life. Members not otherwise occupied in the neighbouring city would be expected to devote part of their surplus time to the co-operative industries selected by the colony, the greater part of the net returns from which might be devoted to the promotion and formation of other co-operative enterprises in the interest of Socialism, and to the propaganda funds of the respective societies to which members of the colony belonged, *pro rata*. In other towns communities might be established not owning land, and not necessarily *producing* any of their *necessaries*, but associated on the club principle for co-operative house-keeping (so far as usual *necessaries* are concerned) and for mutual service and social communion. Such communities might be catered for by co-operative societies promoted and organised by their own members. Other co-operative industries and services, depending for their revenue partly upon comrades but chiefly upon the outside world, would in time grow up from the same roots and prey upon the vitals of commercialism. In all these cases practical communism in the *necessaries* of life is treated as the starting-point, the lever of success. Independence of the competitive labour-market is, barring trade and political organisation, the only weapon with which it is possible to defy the Ogre of Capitalism. It is the only true basis of mutual insurance.

As to purely industrial co-operative societies started without such communistic foundations, the most hopeful without doubt are those started on a large scale; and these require either a large initial outlay of capital, large credit such as could only be obtained by promoters well known for their technical experience and skill as managers, etc., of older concerns, or else the support of important public bodies. If the trades' unions were enabled to employ their funds in the promotion of co-operative enterprises within their respective trades, or still better in alternative but simple and necessary trades requiring but slight instruction, and to appoint joint committees for regulating the exchange between them, they could then provide a much more efficient and (to the capitalists) formidable relief for their members on strike than by "sotering" them away in allowances. But as the trades' unions are not yet educated up to this mark, there is no reason why the Socialist

¹ Physical and industrial, as well as moral and social.