

Private Property

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The question of private property is a vital one. In the sixteenth century the trade gilds were discarded. With the introduction of machinery nothing was acquired to take their place. Thus a worker who had had a whole group to support him in any grievance, now relied solely upon himself. Manufacturers were not slow to take advantage of this; as a result the worker became merely another commodity, subjected to the rapacious greed of competition. This condition has prevailed, until today we find a small group of rich men have been able to lay upon the laboring class a yoke as unbearable as slavery itself. It is no wonder then that the right to private property, that traditional and innate right of all mankind, has been challenged. It is not to be marvelled at, that today we find the forces of Communism and Socialism arrayed against this fundamental right of man.

The condition of the laboring class in Europe during the major part of the nineteenth century was very grave. Working men labored endless hours for little pay. If they complained, someone else could be found to take their places. There was an over-supply of labor, and accordingly the price paid for this "commodity" was very low. About this time there came to the fore in Germany and France a young man with new theories on History and Economics. This man, his name was Marx, had become impregnated with a mixture of the Utopian theories of Proudhon, Saint-Simon, and others. He subscribed to none of the theories of these men, but rather built up a new one, with some of its more important principles based on those. Aided by his prolific talent for writing, he soon spread the new doctrine throughout Europe. Marx' theory came to be called Socialism. It soon became popular among the working classes of all nations, and for a time threatened the peace and security of Europe. Due to friction among its own members, the international society of Socialists which had been formed, in time died out. But the doctrine still survived and continues to thrive in those countries today in which the laboring class are undergoing great hardship and poverty.

The reason for the popularity of Socialism is evident when one looks at the main tenet. Based on the envy of the poor man for the rich, by this, Socialists hoped to sweep

the whole world, and they very nearly succeeded. In place of private property, they would substitute state-ownership. The state would own all property, and would allot equal shares to every man. Each person would have the same as his neighbor. No wonder then that Socialism swept Europe. Would not such a doctrine appeal to the poor who were starving? The lazy ambitionless man, would this not appeal to him? Certainly such a policy would rid the state of the evils of Capitalism.

Such an arrangement, however, would be manifestly unjust. No man would own anything. He could call nothing his own. In such a state the Englishman's home is most assuredly not his castle; it is the state's. Moreover, if this arrangement be examined more closely, it will be seen that from such only harm can come to the working-man. For a man works in order to live. He saves, is honest, industrious, and efficient for two reasons; in order to do his work well, and in order to earn more money so that he may reach a higher station in life. If a man works hard, spends little time or money on pleasure, and saves, he undoubtedly deserves more than he who, laboring as little as possible, is inefficient, and spends all his surplus money on pleasure. No man works for the sole benefit of his employer. In anything man does, he does it ultimately for himself. The main purpose of man's work then is to feed and clothe himself and his family; in other words to get and to be enabled to keep property. Surely he is within his rights here. He has worked hard and therefore deserves what he earns. That wage which he has received surely is his, to do with what he will. It is precisely in this that the power of ownership, the power to dispose of property at will, consists. Socialism, by transferring possessions of the individual to the state, strikes at the interests of every wage-earner; deprives him of the liberty of doing what he will with his own.

The injustice of this fundamental principle of Socialism is quite evident. Man from his very nature has the right to possess property. It is in fact one of the distinctions between man and brute. For man, besides having the full perfection of the animal nature, also possesses higher faculties which make him similar to the angels. These higher faculties are the intellect, by which man knows truth, and the will by which he desires that good which will lead him to his ultimate end. Man has power to

reason. The brutes, at least the domestic animals, are given their food when it pleases the owner. In the same way the Socialists would have man dealt out that of which he should have full control. But man is not a brute to be given what it pleases his owner, that is the state, to give. Rather he is a rational being and as such has a perfect right to not merely a temporal possession of goods, which may be taken from him by man-made authority, but to the permanent and full possession of that property.

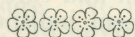
Before states existed man's right to his own property prevailed. It was always taken for granted that what a man had earned was his. No one, at least previous to Socialists, ever questioned his right. Mankind has always lived on the soil. Whether he own or labor there, or be employed in a factory, still his whole sustenance depends upon agriculture. In early days all men lived on farms. They either owned these lands or worked on them for the owner. With the introduction of machinery and new methods of farming it became possible for a percentage of the people to reap harvest enough to feed all. But from the fact that man obtains what is necessary for the preservation of life from the soil, that what he receives has been due to the skill and care lavished by him on its cultivation, it would seem indisputable that man has a right to that land. The universal consent of all races of people in all the different parts of the world would seem to show that nature itself confirms man's right. When a man expends his energy, his strength, and his intellect in order to improve his land, to cultivate and reap necessities of life, it seems but just that he should possess and hold without fear of molestation that part of the earth upon which he has left the imprint of his personality.

By abolishing the right to possess private property, Socialists attempt to improve and correct a bad situation. Truly their attempt is a praiseworthy one. At least they are trying. But men never seem to learn that a deplorable situation, as that in which modern society finds itself, can not be made right by means of an injustice. The tenet, which would abolish the right of mankind to own property, is contrary to man's natural rights. Man has been made steward of that property which he may possess. His is a God-given right. No man may take that from him. If he acquire it dishonestly, he has no rights in the matter. But if he receive the property honestly by the

use of those abilities that he has been given, then he has become care-taker of that property, and should act as such.

As in so many other matters in our modern world, men seem to trifle with quack remedies, as it were, instead of getting down to the actual causes of the disease. Man was given the right to own property when he was created, but with it he was also given the corresponding duty of helping his neighbor. For the last few decades men have forgotten their duties and have held tightly to their rights. Thence has sprung up this difficulty. The correction does not lie in taking away all men's rights to own property. Rather it lies in educating them to see that they have a duty to perform when they acquire property.

To correct a great evil, man must be shown that he is merely a steward in this matter of property. No man may suspend his right to it. But he must guard that property and use it, not as an instrument to further crush his slaves into the slime, but rather to spread happiness and peace about him. In this way the whole question is solved in a Christ-like manner and no injustice is wrought to anyone.



I had rather feel compunction than know its definition.

—*Thomas a Kempis.*

A dictator is a gentleman who assumes the implications of deity while still suffering from human infirmities.

—*Wisdom.*

And such is human life; so, gliding on,
It glimmers like a meteor and is gone!

—*Rogers.*

Teach me to feel anothers' woe,
To hide the fault I see;
That mercy I to others show,
That mercy show to me.

—*Pope.*