Why a Workingman Should be a Socialist

BY

GAYLORD WILSHIRE

CHARLES H. KERR & COMPANY
(CO-OPERATIVE)

118 West Kinzie Street, Chicago.
WHY A WORKINGMAN SHOULD BE A SOCIALIST

A Socialist is one who desires that the wealth of the nation be owned collectively by all the people rather than individually by a small fraction of them, called capitalists. By "wealth of the nation" is meant the land, the railroads, the telegraphs, the flour mills, the oil refineries; in short, all those agencies by means of which food, clothing and other commodities are produced.

By Socialism we mean the government ownership and management of all wealth-producing industries. For instance, just as certain institutions, such as the common schools, the post office, etc., are now owned and managed by the people; under Socialism, not only these, but all our industries would be so owned and managed. In short,
Socialists propose, instead of permitting Morgan and Rockefeller to own the United States and run it for their selfish interests, that we—the people—shall assume possession of it ourselves and run it for our own benefit.

This is such a very simple proposition that anyone should be able to understand it; and that every patriotic American, and especially every workingman, is not in favor of Socialism can be explained only by his ignorance of what Socialism really is. It is surely a praiseworthy sentiment in a people to desire to own their native land, and quite as natural and praiseworthy as for a man to wish to own his home instead of renting it of a landlord.

We say that every workingman who understood what Socialism meant would certainly become a Socialist, for assuredly his condition in life is not such that he should fear a change. You who read this, perhaps, are poor; you are dissatisfied, or at least you ought to be dissatisfied, with your lot in life; you have a sense of being unjustly dealt with by society. You know
that your labor, alone, produces all the
good things of life, and that some one else
enjoys them; you know all this, and you
know or should know, that so simple a
thing as casting your ballot intelligently
can produce a change, so that you yourself
will receive and enjoy all the fruits of your
labor, with no necessity of giving the lion's
share, or any share at all, to Rockefeller,
Vanderbilt & Co.

It is true that there is some excuse for
your not realizing that the shackles which
tie you to poverty are but figments of your
imagination. You are be-fooled and hum-
bugged at every source to which you might
look for information. The newspapers,
ostensibly devoted to the interests of the
workingmen, in reality are but the tools of
the capitalists—their owners.

Now reflect on your condition and con-
sider that you are a citizen of the United
States, a country possessing natural re-
sources capable of easily supporting more
than ten times its present population. You
are informed by unchallenged and uncon-
trovertible statistics that, through the de-
development of the steam engine and labor-saving machinery, the labor of one man can to-day produce commodities—food, clothing, lodging; etc.—sufficient to provide comfortably for twenty; and yet the fact stares you in the face that the return you get for your labor scarcely keeps you alive. Knowing these things, can you remain contented under a social system that gives you an existence more miserable than that of a slave? Do you never wonder to whom the surplus goes, and why?

Let us put the matter clearly before you. The capitalist class owns the essentials of production—that is, the railways, the flour mills, the oil and sugar refineries, etc., and the land. Now, to get clothing, food and lodging, both land and machinery must be employed, and if one class owns these essentials of production, it is evident that it can demand of you, the class which does not own them, as much rent as it pleases for the use of them. And what does it choose to demand? Everything that you produce, except the very small part called "wages," or "salaries," which it allows you
to keep to sustain your existence. You are in nearly the same position as a horse, in that you can never expect to get any more than just enough to keep you in working condition. The chief difference is that the employer of the horse feeds him even when he cannot for the time being use him, while your employer feeds you only when you are useful to him, and when you are not—as in dull seasons—he lets you out to starve, so far as he is concerned. He loses money if his horse dies, but he loses nothing if you die.

You may ask, why don't capitalists pay higher wages? Why don't they pay wages sufficient to allow you to properly feed and clothe yourselves and your families? Furthermore, why don't workingmen successfully demand wages sufficient to enable them to educate their children in the public schools? What a mockery are free schools, when we must send our children to the mine and the factory to earn food for the family?

The answer is short and simple. As long as there are millions of unemployed men in the United States only too glad to get a
chance to work for wages that will afford the bare necessities of life, wages will never rise. Consider a familiar every-day occurrence in business life. A and B each own a coal mine. Owing to competition each is forced to sell his coal at the lowest price possible. Now the cost of labor being the chief item in the expense of mining coal, if A pays his men less than B, it follows that he is in the position to undersell B, and, unless B can manage to get his labor as cheap as A, he must retire from business, for he can sell no coal. The capitalists under our competitive system could not pay higher wages, even though they might wish to do so.

Then, on the other hand, consider the laborer—the miner. Suppose that he is getting two dollars a day and that some poor fellows out of employment come along—immigrants, for instance, who, rather than starve, offer to work for one dollar a day. It is certain that, as the owners of the mines are forced to buy the cheapest labor offered, our two-dollar-a-day laborer must accept a reduction in his wages to
one dollar or be replaced by the immigrant. Hence we can see how it is that the pressure of the unemployed upon the labor market always keeps the price of labor at the lowest notch. And the more labor-saving machinery that is introduced, the greater the number thrown out of employment, and the fiercer the struggle to get hired at any price.

Now once recognizing this fact that low wages are due to our present competitive system, one can easily see how absurd it is for Democrats and Republicans to claim that either high or low tariff can ever make wages high. And workingmen are at last coming to recognize the fact that there is no reliance to be placed on either of the old parties, and that they must organize a party of their own which will do away with the competitive wage system entirely, and substitute the co-operative system.

Workingmen, Americans: The issue is plain. Yours is the choice—whether you will remain slaves in your own country, fettered by your own hands, to see your wives and your children live in poverty
and squalor, aye, and often starve before your very eyes; or whether you will be free men, not in name only, but in reality—whether you will own your own country and enjoy the full fruits of your honest labor.

You may say: "Ah well! Those are fine words; but it is impossible for anything to be done: workingmen always have been poor and always will be. You Socialists merely make us feel our poverty more keenly—make us discontented, without showing us any practicable plan to abolish the causes of our discontent. Of course we want to be in better circumstances; of course we wish to provide better for our families. Certainly we would rather send our children to school than to the factory. We know that we are virtually slaves, and we should like nothing better than to end our slavery. What fool would not have his fellow men own their own country, rather than the capitalists? But even supposing the wealth of the nation were divided up, as we suppose you Socialists propose, it would simply be a question of time
until Rockefeller & Co. would have it all back again."

Workingmen, you are mistaken: Socialists do propose a most practicable solution of the problem of how to abolish poverty permanently. If you will consider our plan you cannot help but agree that its accomplishment would prevent any fear of Rockefeller & Co. ever getting our country away from us after it is once restored. Socialism means anything but the division of wealth. It means the absolute concentration of the ownership of the wealth of the country into the collective control and ownership of the people themselves, through the government. The only division that Socialists propose is the fair division of commodities produced, but they never propose the division of the ownership of the machinery that produces commodities. For instance, the people (the government) will collectively own both the land, the grain elevators and the flour mills, while you and I individually will own the product: the bread.

As to the practicability of the government ownership of the means of produc-
WHY A WORKINGMAN

tion, it is best answered by the consideration of the excellent management of such machinery as is now under the control of the government, such as the post office, the public schools, the Panama Railway, etc. When, by the mismanagement of private owners, some railway is thrown into the bankruptcy court, and the government is forced to take control and conduct it through a receiver, it is a well-known fact that such government management has been uniformly successful. So, if the people can successfully operate bankrupt railroads, why should they not be able to operate solvent and successful railroads? Indeed the question is already answered, for government ownership of railways and telegraphs is the usual method in Europe and Australia.

As a matter of fact there is really no serious attempt to deny the feasibility of government ownership, and what we will now demonstrate is, not its practicability, but its absolute necessity, as applied to all the means of production, if we wish to save ourselves from starvation. It seems par-
adoxical, but nevertheless it is true, that the greater the productiveness of machinery, the more difficult it is for the laborer to get the product. Let us consider the present state of industry in the United States.

Within the last few years the owners of the various great industries of this country, through the tremendous development of their plants, and the consequent fierce competition to sell goods, have been compelled to consolidate their interests into Trusts to preserve themselves from bankruptcy, owing to overproduction and the threat of resultant low prices. Considering the millions of poorly clothed and underfed men, women and children, it may seem to many that the excuse of "overproduction" advanced for the existence of the Trust is the boldest of lies.

But it must be remembered that the owners of the sugar trust, the beef trust, and other trusts are not in business from philanthropic motives, but to make money. Hence the mere fact of people starving for the want of what their machinery produces does not constitute any sound business rea-
son for capitalists to feed them. Unless people have money they have no legal right to food. So we see that as far as the capitalist is concerned there is "overproduction" when he finds no buyers, notwithstanding that there may be plenty who want but have no money to buy.

In a country as productive as the United States and where wage-workers—the great consuming class—are paid such a small part of what is produced, there must always be danger of a great surplus remaining in the hands of the capitalists unless they avoid such a result either by increasing consumption or by restricting production; and restricting production means the shutting down of factories, turning out of employment willing workers to starve in the midst of plenty.

The critical period, viz., that of a great unemployed question, has so far been avoided only by reason of the constant progress of invention, which has given the capitalists an opportunity to increase consumption and at the same time to make a good profit in employing workingmen both
in the building of new machinery and in the reconstruction of old. For instance, within the last few years the street car lines have been transformed from the horse-power systems to electric power, which has given employment to thousands of men. So as long as there is a demand for new machinery there is always life for the existing social system, since labor can be kept satisfied by being employed.

The appearance of the Trust, however, means that the making of more machinery is becoming unnecessary. The existing machines are not only sufficient for the demand, but as a matter of fact the capitalists say that there are already too many. And the Trust is a necessity, they say, not only to prevent production of unnecessary machinery, but to prevent the operation of the existing surplus machinery in producing surplus goods which can only be sold at a loss.

Now Socialists are quite in accord with the capitalists in declaring that anti-trust laws are absurd, since Trusts are a necessary development of our competitive sys-
tem, yet at the same time we realize that the Trusts are the forerunners of a huge unemployed problem. For while the Trust solves temporarily the problem of overproduction for the capitalist, it does so only by bringing up a future unemployed problem for the workingman.

Overproduction, as we have seen, is caused by the competitive system preventing the workingmen demanding enough wages to buy the goods that they themselves have produced. To prevent overproduction the competitive system must be abolished and a new system substituted which will allow the workers to consume what they produce. This new system is Cooperation, the inauguration of which would mean that the workers would receive wealth according as they produced it, instead of upon the present basis of allowing them the bare necessities of life.

On the other hand, it is evident that if the workers take all they produce there will be nothing left for the capitalists. Hence there will be no incentive to own property privately, for there will be no profit, no
rent, no interest. The abolition of the profit system, in fact, means practically the end of the system of private ownership of capital, as it likewise means the inauguration of the system of public, or government, ownership of trusts and monopolies—or, in short, of all capital.

Socialism means the co-operative or government ownership and management of capital, and the co-operative distribution of the product to the workers, and by workers we include the brain-worker as well as the hand-worker. Socialism means industrial democracy. We now live under an industrial autocracy, with King Rockefeller as our industrial ruler, just as before 1776 we lived under a political autocracy with King George of England as our political ruler. But the reasons which led America to achieve political democracy are not nearly as strong as those which are now about to force her to achieve industrial democracy.

Public ownership of monopolies, or Socialism, is an inevitability because it affords the only possible solution for the distribution of commodities when the machinery of
production finally develops beyond the control of the capitalists. This stage in the evolution of industry is now upon us. The Trust is the significant sign of the impending collapse of capitalism.

The Trust is not only a protection against competition, but is also a labor-saving machine, effecting tremendous economies in production. Just as the manual laborers of fifty years ago tried to destroy the first machines which threatened to displace them, so we see a like ineffectual clamor, voiced equally by both Mr. Bryan and Mr. Roosevelt, from the smaller capitalists of to-day against their inevitable displacement by the trust magnates. But monopoly is the future determining factor in production, and competition is forever dethroned. Already we see each of our great industries controlled by one corporation and headed by one man—a "captain of industry"—and this state of affairs is what more than anything else demonstrates the practicability of Socialism. Certainly if a Gould can successfully manage the telegraphs of the country, there can be no diffi-
cully in the government doing the same thing. If Mr. Rockefeller, moreover, can manage the oil business, Mr. Vanderbilt the railways, Mr. Armour the beef business, Mr. Pillsbury the flour business, Mr. Carnegie the iron business, Mr. Havemeyer the sugar business, Mr. Frick the coal business, and Mr. Astor our land—we say, if individual capitalists can manage these properties for their own selfish ends, that we, the people, can just as well manage them for our own use and benefit.

Capitalism in its death throes tries every means to sustain prices at a profitable basis against the constantly growing menace of overproduction. To this end while it adopts the Trust at home, as a means of restricting domestic production, on the other hand, it institutes a policy of "Imperialism" abroad as a means of increasing foreign consumption. Hence we see that both Trusts and "Imperialism" work hand in glove, and are simply the results of a vain struggle to maintain falling prices.

All the foregoing is pretty plain talk, and should not be easily misunderstood. Some,
however, while following the argument that (1) wages cannot, under the competitive wage system, rise above the subsistence point, no matter how productive labor may become; (2) that this curtailment of consumption must result in overproduction; (3) that next is the Trust, and (4) that the Trust must be followed by (5) the great unemployed problem—here they may stop without seeing the end of the whole matter in (6) the final, public ownership of the Trusts and other machinery of production—Socialism.

Of course, it must strike everyone as absurd that people cannot get enough to eat because they produce too much, and yet everyone realizes that a laborer cannot eat if he doesn’t earn any wages with which to buy food. It is also plain that a laborer cannot get a job of the baker to make bread, if the baker already has baked more bread than he can sell. It is likewise evident that if the laborer were his own baker he would not starve when it is his own oven that is full of bread.

Now this is simply the Socialist argu-
ment. We say that this country of ours, America, is like a grand bake-oven filled with bread, and cake, too, for that matter; that the head baker of the national oven, Mr. Rockefeller, can't hire us to bake bread because he can't sell us the bread we have made, but that this is no reason why we should starve when all we have to do is to take over the bakery and feed ourselves with our own baking.

And there really would be no opposition from Rockefeller to our taking the business off his hands so long as we took it for ourselves and let him have his share along with us. Rockefeller is not necessarily such a selfish fellow, but he naturally would object if he thought we were going to take the national bakery—otherwise our own country—away from him in order to give it to Carnegie or Vanderbilt, the very men from whom he has just wrested it. The opposition to Socialism, in fact, isn't from Rockefeller, but from the stupidity and apathy of the very people most to be benefited by it, from the workingmen themselves.

All we have to do in order to own our
own country is for a majority to vote for the Socialist Party, the only party that is pledged to carry out that idea. With the success of that party and the change that it would bring about, no one need work more than three hours a day, and everyone who wanted to work could find it, receiving in return the full fruits of his labor. Everyone would have leisure; children would be educated; all would be free, and happiness would reign supreme.

Workingmen, you now know the road to freedom. When you pursue that path you will be free—before that, never!
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From time immemorial paid biographers, parasitical panegyrists, preachers and Sunday school teachers have sung the praises of the rich and wealthy citizens of the land; muckrakers have muckraked Rockefeller and members of the Standard Oil Company group until a magazine no longer sells merely because it is publishing stories of graft and corruption; books have been published by the score telling magnificent and marvelous tales concerning the holders of the great fortunes of the United States, but it has fallen to the lot of Gustavus Myers to write the first full and authentic account of the actual sources of these vast accumulations of wealth and to disclose the methods used in their acquisitions. His "History of Great American Fortunes," in three volumes, published by Kerr & Company, of Chicago, marks an era in the field of economic research.

Mr. Myers is unlike most authors in that he has no axe to grind, he has no philosophy to preach, he has no monthly check from capitalist or corporation. He is a searcher after truth, and, unlike most writers, he does not hesitate to publish the facts when he finds them, be they good or bad. The result is a three-volume work filled to the brim with startling disclosures and surprising statements based upon Congressional and State documents.
court records and various other authoritative sources. At no stage of his narrative does Mr. Myers mince his words; he bores directly into the heart of his subject and leaves nothing undone to show that our parents and teachers have filled our minds with falsehoods of the most baseless sort when we were children by telling us that as we grew up we could become wealthy and still retain our ideals of honesty, in both theory and practice. Through three volumes containing more than a thousand pages Mr. Myers gives us a most depressing story of the graft, bribery, corruption, avarice, debauchery and chicanery lying behind the great American fortunes. Truthfully, the story is a sickening recital of man’s inhumanity to man in his greedy pursuit of wealth, but it is nevertheless a work which should be read by every American citizen be he high or low, rich or poor, naturalized or native.

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properties by Harriman and the Standard Oil Company, and will also deal with those great fortunes which have grown out of the control of public franchises, mines and various manufacturing industries.

The author arrives at no conclusions as a result of his investigations, but leaves the readers to do so in accordance with the facts which he has presented. In brief, there can be but one conclusion, and that is that thrift, temperance and hard work are not the recipe for getting rich, else many millions of people who have to work hard and who are thrifty and temperate would forthwith become so. Through all fortunes large and small there runs the same heavy streak of fraud and theft, of bribery, graft and corruption. The little trader with his misrepresentation and swindling is different from the “big fellow” in degree only.

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