

THE TRUE SOCIALIST

A CATHOLIC not being a true socialist, ought not to call himself a socialist. The Pope has said so.

The true socialist, the genuine Marxist, was never a Catholic and never could be one. For the economic theory that capitalism was fated by inexorable law to pass away, superseded by a class-conscious proletariat that would order all industry on a basis of social equality and thereby produce a co-operative commonwealth, was the dogma and the hope of the true socialist. We say *was* because when Lenin and his supporters resolved to enforce in their own way the Marxian doctrine in Russia, the old-fashioned Marxian socialist, particularly in England and Germany, was profoundly shocked. Hyndman, the 'father of English socialism,' with Kautsky and the 'old guard' of the German Social-Democratic Party, protested that Lenin and the Russian communists were not behaving according to plan, since no class-conscious proletariat had yet been organised in Russia. What happened at Moscow queered the pitch altogether for socialism. The Bolshevik tyranny, in fact, did not, and has not, inaugurated social equality, neither has it produced the co-operative commonwealth of the socialist vision.

Russian communism turns out to be something utterly different from the hope of the old social democrats of Europe.

The Marxian dogma, with its economic interpretation of history, its economic determinism, 'and all that,' made at the best but a very limited appeal to English socialists. Two or three members of the present Government, including the Right Hon. Thomas Kennedy and Mr. Montague of the Air Min-

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istry, once professed the true Marxian faith. For a brief season, nearly forty years ago, dear old George Lansbury belonged to the Social Democratic Federation; but 'cheerfulness kept on breaking in,' and Mr. Lansbury found he was no true Marxist. The present Prime Minister, from the first, set his face against Marxism. For him as for Mr. Sidney Webb (now Lord Passfield) socialism was always a becoming, never a being. Socialism was not even the jam of tomorrow, for there never would dawn a day, according to the Fabian prophet, when it could be said, 'Now we have socialism.' An 'inevitability of gradualness' was the larger hope. As for the other leaders of the Labour Party, His Majesty's ministers, their socialism is a preference for social reform and a sincere desire to ameliorate the condition of the working classes without upsetting the existing social order (and many who call themselves conservatives or liberals in politics share the same preferences and desires).

The true socialist was not and could not be a Catholic. And for this reason. The true socialists, the men and women who back in the latter part of the nineteenth century started the socialist movement in Great Britain—university men for the most part—did most thoroughly believe that supernatural grace was not needed for mankind. Not by the help of God, but solely by human agency was society to be transformed. We should all become good, we were naturally good, when once the wicked capitalist—who could not help being wicked—and the equally wicked landlord (not personally blameworthy, and often a good fellow) were got rid of, and all co-operated for the happiness of all. Original sin to the true socialist was a mischievous theological intrusion. The promised land was just round the corner. We had but to vote for socialist candidates and we should be there. With a socialist majority in power all would cease

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from iniquity, and live righteously. It dated from the eighteenth century, this touching belief in the perfectibility of mankind, and was inherited from Robert Owen. To Shelley and the revolutionary poets it appeared that priests and kings were the stumbling block to the earthly paradise.

The true socialist, therefore, was not and could not be a Catholic. And for the same reason it is impossible to-day for any to become Catholics who believe that economic changes (however just these changes, and however necessary) and social reforms, however desirable, are all that men and women need for 'the good life.' Therefore, since we are not true socialists, the Pope says we ought not to call ourselves socialists.

Yet as political parties are the established means of government in Great Britain, 'socialist' is a convenient term for supporters of the Labour Party. ('Labourite' is horrid; and 'social reformer' is depressing. Besides, the Labour Party has no monopoly of social reform).

Of course the true liberal can no more be a true Catholic than can the true socialist. For the true liberal also rejects the idea of supernatural grace, maintaining that 'education' will do the trick, that by correct training we shall learn to do the correct thing, as in cricket and rowing. Previous papal encyclicals, notably Leo XIII's *Libertas Praestantissimum* of 1888, told the world what liberalism meant. Moreover, our liberals of to-day, beyond a resolution not to desert free trade, have but little in common with traditional liberalism. Not being true liberals, they yet retain a cherished title, unrebuked.

We have long known that we were not true socialists—indeed, the communists have said so with increasing bitterness for some years past. Yet because we still hold the conviction that production of goods should be for use rather than for profit; that to live by

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usury is dishonourable—not forgetting the fifteenth century writer's words 'he that practiseth usury goeth to hell, but he that practiseth it not tendeth to destitution'—that only by co-operation in industry, and more especially in agriculture, can our economic troubles be eased, and that trade or exchange of itself produces nothing; the name 'socialist' clings to us, and with memories not ignoble. Perhaps if we call ourselves Christian Socialists as, I am told, the Catholics in Austria call themselves, we shall not be misunderstood. John Ruskin described himself in *Fors Clavigera* as 'a communist of the school of Homer and Sir Walter Scott.' The Bolsheviks do not rank Ruskin with true communists.

Anyway, whatever our political label, the social question remains; and for Catholics to ignore it is plainly to commit a positive disloyalty to the Holy See.

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