Regimentation and Compulsion

When asked to explain how Socialism is contrary to what he terms "human nature," our opponent, being unfamiliar with the subject, has no intelligent answer. Occasionally he will say the masses will not stand for any plan that necessitates regimentation or compulsion.

Certainly the producers of wealth have stood for worse propositions. For many generations they have put up with long hours of work when employed, and hunger when unemployed. During the last half century they have suffered the tortures of two world wars, resulting in millions killed and other millions permanently maimed, broken homes, their children with insufficient food and clothing. During this period the world's workers have gone through the most devastating depression in the history of capitalism. The masses have stood for all these evils of the profit system. More than that, they have permitted themselves to be robbed of the world itself, and all the wealth they have extracted therefrom.

Another objection we hear: that the ambitions of life, the desire for gain, greed and cupidity, all deter man from acting in a co-operative manner. These are all flimsy arguments put forward to bolster claims that workers will refuse to participate in any effort leading to liberation.

Human Nature and Human Behavior

When our critic talks about "human nature," that is not what he means. He is actually talking about "human behavior," something quite different. Human Behavior is a product of time, place and social conditions. These have changed continually, and man's "behavior" had modified and adjusted itself in response to changing environment. For instance in some of the old Grecian city states: the community behavior decreed it right and proper, that if a man had been unsuccessful in obtaining offspring from his own wife, he could ask his friend for the loan of his wife for that purpose. It was also customary for a man receiving a visit from a good friend to show his hospitality by allowing his guest to sleep with his wife. The "behavior" of these people today is far different than that of the past, the wife is regarded as inviolable; the customs of these early Greeks would be looked upon as a scandalous disgrace.

The Spartans had other "behaviors" that would not be condoned today. When the new-born arrived they were examined. If the child was sturdy it was allowed to be reared, if puny it was ordered by the Elders to be disposed of by hurling it from a cliff into some chasm. The people behaved this way, because they considered it for the good of the child, and in the best interest of the community.

In Sparta, over two thousand years ago, stealing from neighbouring communities was regarded as commendable conduct. The young men were taught to steal, if they did not they went without. If they were caught they were whipped without mercy, not for stealing, but for being so awkward as to be caught at it. (See Plutarch's Lycurgus). Today, small-scale stealing is not tolerated. It is against all penal codes.

Habits of life have changed considerably since the turn of the twentieth century. Outside of the industrial centers, women were supposed to conduct the affairs of the home only. Their tasks were to bake the bread, brew the beer, make the soap; oftentimes they made the children's clothes, devised the toys, and sewed together the rag dolls. Women did not frequent beauty parlors, nor did they as a rule smoke or drink in public.

The Changed Status of Woman

The two World Wars took woman from the home and altered her entire existence. The increasing need for greater production and cheap labor-power to supply war requirements, were the factors responsible for drawing woman into the factories to work the same as man. She soon responded to her surroundings. She had to get up early in the morning to punch the clock, no time to dress a head of long and unruly hair — easier for her to haircut the same as man. Dresses in the factory are a nuisance — she discards them for the well known symbol of wage slavery, the denim overalls. She works as does man, she drinks, smokes, and gambles with him. She has developed a new code of ethics, a new "behaviorism."

People are not born with any principles of "innate" behavior; their conduct throughout life is the result of the circumstances that have enveloped them. It is not natural for people to steal: they do so only under certain social environmental conditions. For instance, a cardinal of the church would not ordinarily think of stealing food, neither would an average working-man, but should either of them be restricted to surroundings where the only alternative was steal or starve, the natural need for food would predominate. Desires would determine actions and they would forget the commandment "thou shalt not steal."

When the whole community has access to the entire wealth produced, stealing and all other crimes existing today against private property will disappear.

Adjustment to Changing Environment

History has taught us, that when environment has changed, people have quickly adapted themselves to the new surroundings. With the establishment of a new social order of common-ownership, there will arise a new behaviorism harmonizing itself to the new sequence of things. People will readily work together in mutual sympathy, because it will be to their interest to do so. This living in harmonious relationship with the world and its inhabitants, this new social behavior can truly be called "human nature," asserting itself in an environment of freedom.

Man A Social Animal

The Italian socialist essayist, Antonio Labriola, says: "Presocial man is a historic unreality." Man is a social animal. He could not have survived otherwise. Throughout history his struggle has been continuous. Climate, fires, droughts, plagues and wild animals had to be contended with. The actions of people, their thoughts and imaginations, are largely determined by the environment of past and present generations. People of all climes are molded by the influences of their youth, the education received, the work they do, and the brain-washing they are subjected to. These are the main factors responsible for human conduct or "behaviorism."

Socialism — The Only Answer

The understanding of Socialism is a vital and important part of a worker's education. It is the key which can unlock the secret of capitalism's problems heretofore considered difficult.

It brings to his horizon a view of a new system of society, free from worry, misery, insecurity and exploitation; a life of comfort, happiness, and leisure for all the peoples of the world.

To work for this is man's most important worth-while effort: "The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of society as a whole."

FRED EVANS

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