

# PAPER READ

BY

G. H. JONES

BEFORE

THE BRITISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

PARIS



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## Thoughts and Problems in the Industrial World.

Is the heading I have chosen for my paper this evening.

Our president will remember that the choice of a heading was a somewhat difficult matter, for there were objections raised to some titles that would have been more exact, or precise, on account of the political colour attaching thereto in the minds of many.

I desired to talk about.

“ Capitalism versus Labour ” or put in other words “ Individualism versus Collectivism ”.

These are the terms of that extremely interesting and extensive field of thought that is generally called Socialism ; and it is Socialism, however qualified, that to many minds bears a political appearance, and is thus refused admittance in any paper given under the auspices of our Chamber of Commerce. To my mind Socialism can be treated quite apart from politics, for as I understand it Socialism is the study of Industrial phenomena, and politics are the putting into force of principles that have emerged from the furnace of criticism and have arrived at a mature stage.

To night then I shall endeavour to leave on one side every political aspect of the question, and treat the two opposed

forces, viz : Individualism and Collectivism, in as philosophical a manner as possible.

Now, to talk about these two systems, or forces, it is first of all necessary to enquire as to their meaning. I at once consulted Johnson's Dictionary, but as the edition. I have was published in 1828 I did not get much light there. The whole subject, if not born since 1828, has been so dressed out that it appears to have arisen within the last 60 years.

Well, Individualism means the power of each individual to organise his life as he thinks fit, and as best can. It admits of one individual prevailing upon another to come to his help for Salary, and, as this Salary is only a portion of the value of the work done, it leaves the other part in the hands of the said individual who thus becomes a Capitalist, and Capitalism begins. Individualism leads to Capitalism and this is why I shall use the two terms as synonymous.

Collectivism on the other hand does not admit that any individual should be able so to rise above his fellows, and asserts that the individual who employs others for wages, that are never the full value of the work accomplished, does, by withholding the difference, deprive or rob his fellowman.

It is possible to suppose that in the first ages of man, when Capital did not exist, and when the only want of man was to eat to live, that the few that were on our planet were all equal.

But very soon this style of life was found inadequate. It became necessary to organise defence against the animal world, and then against other peoples, and the chieftain came into existence, not so much by the force of his own will but rather by the felt weakness of others.

This headship started and, humanity having lived thro' all its ages under it, it has become a natural order of things.

Could we take humanity apart from the life it has gone thro' and ask if one man is not as good as another we might reply with the Irishman and say „ Yes, certainly, and better too ". As we come down the ages we find the individual man being made, or accepted, above his fellows. It was as chief of the

hunting expedition that he had a larger portion of the capture, or as chief of an attacking party upon a neighbouring people that he had more of the spoil, and thus he became a capitalist.

When Industry was brought in an idea might have occurred to a man, that was of convenience to his neighbours, and it seemed natural that he should have the monopoly of making it. His industry became too much for his pair of hands to accomplish, and he prevailed on others to come to his help for a fixed sum, and here again Capitalism came in.

This order of things went on and was accepted as satisfactory till industry made such immense strides that it was no longer possible to carry it on in the old simple ways. It became necessary to divide it up, as it were, into sections, and to house it in large buildings where hundreds of men worked together, perhaps, without ever seeing their chief amongst them. Capitalism in all its nakedness then came into force in earnest and as the Capitalist remained in his office the workman began to ask himself many questions.

„ Who is this man ”?

„ Why should he rule over us ”?

„ Where does his capital come from ”?

„ Is it not the result of our labour ”?

And the capitalist remained ignorant, or heedless, of these questionings and by degrees came to look upon himself not simply as the chief in a mutual understanding but rather as of a different, if not superior, class. Friction, followed by struggles, came along and to day we are witnessing a tremendous battle between Capital and Labour. Many are the problems that arise, as it were, from the ruins caused by this gigantic struggle !

„ Where is the natural equality between man and man ”?

„ If one individual, by dividing the workers into sections and thus preventing cooperation, can domineer over the many where is the difference between their state and that of slavery? ”

„ If the worker can be settled with on a salary basis, and this depending entirely upon the good will of the Capitalist, what shall become of him when sickness or age overtake him? ”

„ If these great organisations of industry, that can only be carried on in colossal beehives, are to be the general order of things how can the ordinary workman partake of the happier features of this world? ”

„ Is it a proper thing that the few should have all the advantages of this world and that the millions should be condemned to ceaseless toil?

The space at my disposal does not admit of cataloguing the thousands of problems that arise in this field of thought.

Altho' it is true that the present unsatisfactory state of affairs has followed on Individualism or Capitalism yet it is not fair to lay all the blame on it.

Industry has had to be organised as it is to day for otherwise it would not have been able to cope with the production of the great works that have followed the discovery of the use of steam. This has brought inventions by which the Railways run at 60 miles an hour from land's end to land's end. It has given us the huge Leviathan of the deep that takes us round the world in the time we used to take in going from one city to another in the same country.

To produce these new means of locomotion the old simple organisation of industry was, of course, inadequate. This same steam has created machinery of all descriptions that has opened up to man boundless horizons in the production of endless articles of necessity and pleasure.

These great advantages have not been obtained without some disadvantages, but where I think something is wrong is when the disadvantages fall on labour and the glorious advantages go to Capital.

As one advantage after another accrued to the Individual, he, feeding on them, gradually got farther and farther from the point of relative equality with the working man until he felt, with his capital at his back, almost omnipotent.

He refused to reason the case and to see what this capital really was, viz : a portion of the work of each workman that, had

it gone into the right pocket, would have left him in the position of comparative equality with those who were his fellow toilers.

To day Capitalism rules and is generally accepted as the only basis upon which to organise Industry ; but to my mind the relative positions of the Capitalist and labourer have altered so much to the advantage of the former that something will have to be done to bring them back towards their earlier stand point.

I have a reproach to address to Capital. It has a baneful influence on the heart of man. It would appear to melt out all the softer and kindlier parts of human nature. It will look, unmoved, upon the misery that itself brings upon a human being. Appeal to it in any other language than its own and no adder can be so deaf. It seems to me a sad thing that humanity should have come to look upon money, or capital, as the chief aim in life. It was not always so. There have been times in the history of man when other ideas held a larger space in his mind. Think of the time when freedom of conscience inflamed the breast of man till he would willingly have laid down his life rather than have foregone such riches.

Humanity has passed thro' several phases. It started with equality and passed on to the tribe with an elderman or chief, then budded into serfdom and then emerged into the present state of Capitalism and Salaried Labour. Each form probably had its purpose to fulfil. Our present state has much to its credit. Were it not for the individualist principle, looking out for its reward, humanity would be in a worse state than it is at present. Who knows that but for it we might still have to put up with the slow and bone shaking means of locomotion, or be condemned never to move from the place of our birth? To day the whole world is near us, and many are enabled to partake of nature's bounties, from all climes, thanks to the Steamship and Railway Engine. Mans ingenuity has been called forth by this chance of reward so that to day we not only can eat of universal produce but we are clothed in a far superior manner at a less cost. Thanks to individualism the

treasures of mother earth have been brought to mankind and boundless riches, such as Coal and Gold, have been added to the wealth of humanity. But with all this it is not absolutely certain that we have arrived at the final phase of humanity's Evolution.

So far we have been considering the origin of Individualism and the problems it has raised. These problems have produced the thoughts in the Industrial world that are generally classed as Collectivism. Collectivism asks us to view the state of anarchy and battle that exists in the Industrial world. It pleads that no man should be allowed to raise himself upon the degradation of his brother man. It says that nature wills that all men should be equal, if not in intellect, they should all have equal opportunities. Its leading principle is that Nature's riches are the common property of mankind. It gives, as the correct formula, the equal repartition of these riches, and their utilisation placed within the reach of all.

Amongst the priests of this new creed are men of noble ideas. They have thought long over the evils and misery existing in the present world of labour. They believe that the course of things we have been describing under the heading of Individualism is the cause of all the trouble. They assert that until man regains equality with man nothing but unrest and turmoil can be our portion. To obtain their end they say that all production should be collective, ie : all men should join equally in producing all things. By this means Capital would be done away with as being no longer necessary. This collective producing would include every form of work, Agriculture, Fishing, the Chase and Industry. As producers would be equal so would the distribution of products be equal to all workers.

Now, gentlemen, who amongst you can object to this equalising religion? Surely if such a Utopia could be brought about we should all be delighted. It is only fair to state here that the Collectivist thinker does not expect his ideal world to be sprung upon us shortly by a decree. He is quite aware that much water will pass under the bridge before the dawn of this new

world. He realises that the opposing force of Individualism has been growing thro' many many centuries and has taken a very deep root in the nature of man and that a complete remodelling of the Industrial world will require the Collective energies of many generations.

To my mind there are insuperable objections to the building up of this splendid fabric. The first and gravest objection is that the foundation is fragile and unreliable. What must necessarily be the ground work of this ideal structure?

Why, human nature !

The heart of Man !

Can we conceive of any thing less propitious upon which to raise a pure and lasting society?

Before a real start can be made all the world must adopt this system of life. Frontiers could not exist, for if there were such obstacles the productions of other parts of the world would be wanting ; because our renovated country would not have capital to procure these products of more suitable soils. You will readily see, and our friend the Collectivist will admit, that the project is tremendous and therefore will not come in our day.

But notwithstanding the length of time necessary for the arrival of this new life it is well for us to bestow a little thought upon it. It may be that in thinking over the matter we shall find flaws in the actual state that we can mend and put right to the advantage of all. There are many schools of thought on labour's side in the Industrial world but the trend of all is Collectivism and, as I said before, equality is the goal.

If equality is to be a real thing it must apply to all phases of life. Equality of payment for work done. Equality of position in a social sense. Equality of living circumstances — thus some cannot have the privilege of living in a healthier or more beautiful part of the world than others.

It would necessitate all men knowing how to do all kinds of work otherwise the more disagreeable portions, such as mining and scavenging, would constitute an unequal portion for those who would have to do them. Then, as agricultural and

indoor work would have to go forward there would be inequality in this respect for it is impossible to consider these two existences as equal.

Another objection that I see is how one man may have children and another be deprived of this satisfaction if all men are to be retributed on equal lines according to work done. In the one case the childless man would be accumulating capital again, or if the children were provided for by the Collectivity then he would be the poorer as he would be deprived of the satisfaction accruing to the Father.

Another rock on which the ship of the new world would be wrecked is Woman and thus history would again repeat itself.

This is so well understood that part of the new creed is the suppression of marriage.

As human nature must be the foundation of the new organisation, I am convinced that it will not support such a block in the edifice.

Lastly the scheme is so enormous, the regulation of all life by committees, that the governing body would be so numerous that we should end the experiment by having more masters than we have to day.

I have spent as much time as you can allow on the consideration of the opposing principles in question and I now want to see how we can conciliate them and bring harmony to exist.

We sometimes overlook the fact that a sort of Collectivism is at present in practice.

There are many cooperative societies both for production and distribution in different parts of the world. Perhaps we shall soon have greater light on this subject when the mists roll away from around that most ancient civilisation of China. We may find there that Collectivism plays a very great part in that old organisation.

But even in our newer world we find the collective idea at work as in our postal service carried on for the good of all. All our highways are on the same plan and if the roads of the land are so managed then why not the *Rail* road? In fact such

is the case in most of our possessions across sea. Besides these things our Gas works and the water supply are in many towns managed on the collectivist principle.

For the last 20 years the same idea has been at work in our schools, free education at the collective expense, and now the question is being asked : why not provide our children with food for the body, in the same way as we do provide them with food for the mind?

Our forefathers would not have thought it possible to have a Creusot or Sunlight soap establishment, where an entire Village or Town is engaged in the same workshop. There are many such vast undertakings, under one management, in England, America, France, and other countries.

Then we have the European Army system under which 3 or 4 millions of men are grouped and managed as easily as a family. It would then appear not altogether impossible to organise a whole country and unite in one group the whole of one branch of industry and, thus doing with each branch, all production and distribution could be worked on the collective principle.

For those of you who wish to read of these things there is a highly interesting work by an American author, Bellamy ; the title of which is.

„ LOOKING BACKWARD ”.

He imagines a man having been in a House that was burnt down to the ground and who was buried under the ashes and rubbish in a lethargic state. This man was found, restored to life in the year 2000, and it is of the state of America and its collective organisation in that year that our Author writes.

It is not for us to say how humanity will steer its course in the distant ages. We know that great changes have taken place and it is more than probable that others equally great will have their day.

As the matter appears to me I fear the equalising movement will have a downward tendency under this universal collective system. Society will be too much like an army, not having an idea other than that of the governing body. For the same

reason I do not admire those great Industrial Societies that I mentioned a few minutes ago. I like a man to feel himself a man and to act as a man and not automatically.

I think it possible to organise a very large business where each member shall feel himself to be a live member of the body and as such shall have his fair share of the good things accruing to the body ; — the whole being directed by a head that would only have its faire share with the other members.

I view with great favour the growth of the limited liability companies. This is a comparatively recent form of business which admits the union of all the workers, whatever part they occupy, and an equitable division in the profits.

If this form of business continues to increase in the same proportion as in recent times, the greater part of industry will soon be so conducted ; and thus Master and Man will become joint owners of the workshop.

In this way will the harsher parts of the present Industrial Life be softened and that without trying to do an impossible thing, viz : eradicate the individualist principle out of man.

The Chimera of universal equality will then cease to worry men's minds.

As the industrial world is organised to day the really objectionable point, to my mind, is the fact I mentioned in the first part of this paper, viz : that labour does not obtain all the value it adds to the things it works at but that too great a share accrues to Capital, and as the world gives such a prominent place to wealth hence the too great disparity between men.

As I think over this, the most important subject in the existing material world, it does seem false and unnatural that one man or woman should think himself superior to another simply because he has more *metal* in his pocket. We, none of us, brought anything into this world, and we are frequently reminded of a very certain truth, that we cannot take any thing out of it. If such is the case should we not feel that we are very much on a par one and all?

The Widow's mite gives us the true view of the matter ; that money is nothing of itself but that the heart and conscience are all.

It is not what we do, but the Why and How we do it that imports. I am absolutely with the Collectivist when he says that Capital or Money is the chief cause of the present deplorable state of Society. I am firmly convinced that if we could bring humanity to look at money in a rational way, ie : simply as a means of exchange, instead of striving after it for itself and then erecting it as a God and defending this soulless God by any and every means, we should give a totally different complexion to our stay in this world and should enhance the pleasures of this life immeasurably.

I will not stop to paint the transformation scene that would ensue but will leave the framework to be filled up by your glowing imaginations. It would appear that, little by little, we are moving on in the evolutionary, not the revolutionary, way towards another style of life and it may be that in time man will come to look upon money in a different light.

We have at present a Scotchman who has come to the conclusion that he ought to use his vast Capital to the general good before he dies — that it would be criminal not to do so. It doubtless occurs to him that his wealth, is not of his own making, but is in fact that portion of labours reward that he has withheld and it weighs as an immense load, too much for him to bear, and he would throw it from him as it were so as to be able to breathe and stand upright and look his fellow man in the Face. Is it not possible that such teaching may produce in time men who will start their business life where the rough Scotchman ends his? Yes let us try to give a different colour to Capital, that men may no longer be inclined to trample upon conscience or fellow man in its pursuit. Bring down the hideous idol from its pedestal, that keeps out the light of heaven that would reveal to us nobler ideals.

In a speech recently made in London, Lord Avebury, better known as Sir John Lubbock, mentioned the following anecdote.

I send this to the late Andrew Carnegie the American  
Steel King for his criticism. He replied in a letter saying "your  
work is rather my blessing on those who would make friends of food and  
land out of steel."

A Welsh preacher out for a walk on his native mountains, once saw a monstrous figure on an opposite hill ; as he got nearer he saw it was a man, and when he came close he found it was his own brother. It would be well if opponents could meet like these two brothers for certainly they would find much in common, more to unite upon than there would be to separate them.

In this paper I have tried to bring before you two opposing powers and I hope you will see there is a possibility of reconciling them and that our common humanity will be able to march on without any of those dreadful upheavals that haunt and disturb the minds of many.

