

experiments underground. He entered the catacombs beneath the Jardin des Plantes, accompanied by three laboratory assistants, an engineer, and an attendant. The professor went in the direction of the Boulevard St. Michel. After a time he came upon a large pyramid-shaped mound which obstructed the passage. Holding torches close to the mound the party discovered that the pyramid was composed entirely of cats' heads, numbering many thousands. Those on the top were freshly cut. The mound had evidently been accumulating for years. It seemed entirely inexplicable how the heads came to be in an unfrequented passage underground. While the scientist were puzzling their brains and trying to imagine their existence of a secret sect of religious fanatics, the engineer unfolded a plan of the catacombs. From this document they discovered that they were under the premises of a well-known cheap restaurant which makes a special feature of jugged hare at popular prices. Close by an air-shaft passed through the eiclars of the restaurant in question.

The Ethics of Socialism.

I am not going to write a defence of socialism, or to discuss it at all in its political aspect. It does not follow necessarily because a thing is beautiful that it is also capable of being carried into practice. For instance, the beauty of the moon is indisputable, but it is not practicable to arrange for moonlight on our own terms. It is a fact palpable to the lowest intelligence that the greater part of imaginable beauty is and always must remain unattainable. To say that because other people are crying for a particular moon, and that they are not likely to get it, therefore it is a very stupid sort of a moon, is merely an obtuse form of insincerity which will not appeal to any impartial mind.

Fundamentally, a wide-spread socialising, if not socialism, is the ideal of every warm-hearted man from King to pauper and peasant; just as it is also their ideal that everyone should be free from disease. It would be most people's ideal, if it bore any relation to possibilities, that we should all remain at the age of 30 or 40 for ever, or until we had had enough of living on this particular planet. So that there is no reason to say that an ideal is either bad or foolish merely because it is unattainable or difficult of attainment. (This is quite apart from the fact that people who laugh at Socialism as unattainable, speak almost in the same breath of the dangers that would follow if it were to be attained.) And here I had better protect myself from a charge of going to another extreme by at once pointing out that I have not said that Socialism is unattainable, I have merely said that the beauty of an ideal has nothing whatever to do with its practicability.

Socialism, as I see it, is the choosing of the second of Nature's laws of survival at the expense of the first. The first law is survival by the warfare of species, the second is that law of mutual aid which we find among the sparrows, the parrots, the crabs, and even the bees and ants. Each is as indubitable as the other, and it is for anyone to frame his life or his ideal of society on either or on both. The individualist and the advocate of co-operation can each quote Nature to suit his particular case, and quote her with quite surprising cogency. The difficulty from the practical point of view is to decide how far Nature's secondary law of co-operation is subsidiary to her primary law of the survival of the fittest. That the law of co-operation is the more beautiful only people heated with political passion could fail to see.

I believe more idiotic nonsense has been talked on both sides on this subject of Socialism than on any that has been discussed during my sojourn on this earth. One does not know half the time whether the defenders or the attackers are attacking or defending collectivism (which is rather a matter of economic adjustment than of ideals, either bad or good) or of communism, or whether they are discussing intermediate steps or an eventual goal. Nine-tenths of them plainly have never read the arguments of the other side (on which ever side they may be), and almost none of them appear to have studied the elements of sociology, or even looked widely at a page of statistics. Why should not the subject be honestly and fairly discussed—and why should not the

most intelligent men discuss it instead of the nebulous-minded and violently prejudiced people who seem by some fate to have the question nearest their heart? I have never heard really thoughtful men take up an extreme attitude on either side; why, then, this ridiculous violence of opinion from people who seem to live in a fog on every question of social evolution.

Socialism would not necessarily be bad ethically because it was upheld by some rather brutal and violent men. Otherwise every religion would be bad on the ground of the fanatics and persecutors who have upheld noble faiths in every age and clime; both sides would be wrong in every violent argument; and every cause would be worthless unless it was discussed by gentle people as ideal as the goal at which they aimed. The cogency of the arguments for or against Socialism has, therefore, nothing whatever to do with the merits and demerits of its opponents or supporters—although it might be held from the political point of view that for a new as for the old state of Society there must be leaders gifted with moderate and critical, and

constructive rather than hampered by violent and destructive habits of mind. But, as I have said, that has nothing to do with the ethical merits and weaknesses of Socialism.

But since both sides in the present fierce controversy are neglecting every principle of ethics, casting aside all charity, fairness and imaginative appreciation of others' aims, it is not perhaps of much use to emphasise the validity of any claim in expectation that it will be understood or admitted by the other side. On the other hand individualism can only establish its ethical position by conceding the right of the freest and fullest discussion to its opponents, and by admitting that the issue must rest with a majority duly instructed by this discussion in the merits of the respective claims of the two parties. And both sides must deal honestly with their opponents. It is not fair of the Socialists to confound capital with the capitalist, or of the anti-Socialist to confound Socialism with the Socialist. Then, again, the assailants of either system should remember that it is not a matter of cast-iron policy, but that every detail

is subject to revision at every step by the vote of the electorate. Thus the view that Socialism would do away with marriage should by its weakness anger every honest opponent of Socialism, because he must know that marriage could not be done away with unless the greater number of the people wished it so—in which case it would have to go under the most Conservative Government equally with the most Radical. Weak arguments can only strengthen the opponent's case, and personally I want "the best to win" on the merits of the case.

To me the sole question is between those two opposed laws of Nature—ultimately the basis of our ethics. For "the ethically right must also be possible." The whole point, then, is whether we have evolved far enough to let Nature's law of co-operation triumph over Nature's law of the survival of the fittest. If yes, the ethics of Socialism are right; if no, we have to evolve to a higher plane before practicable Socialism can be more than a beautiful hope.

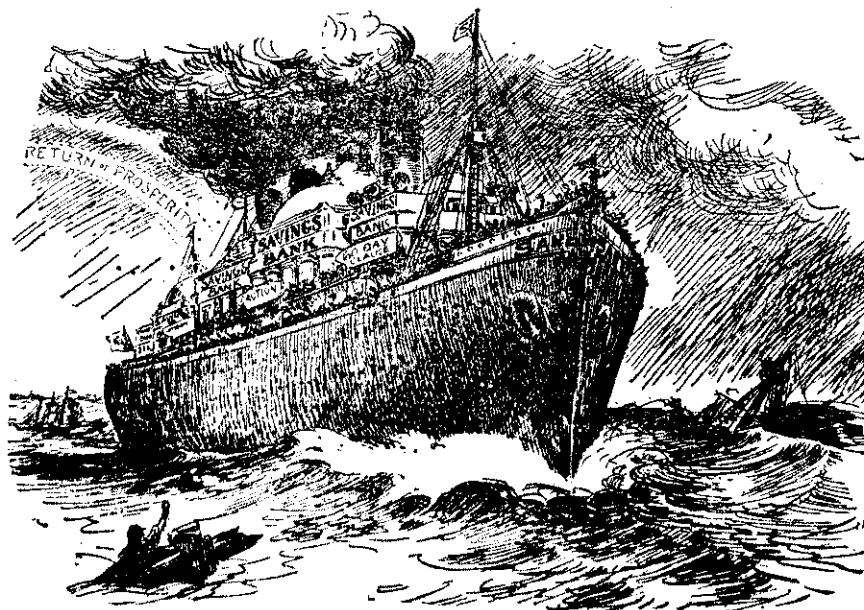
Pierrot in "Auckland Star."

Views of the World's Cartoonists.



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