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SOCIALISM AND THE STANDARDISED LIFE.

BY

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SOCIALISM AND THE STANDARDISED LIFE.

By WILLIAM A. ROBSON,

(A Member of the New Fabian Group.)

IF the society in which we live were an aristocratic plutocracy, and the amount of wealth possessed by individuals were determined exclusively by their virtue, wisdom, biological excellence, creative vitality, and functional needs (assuming that it were possible to discover acceptable objective standards of measurement for those qualities), many of the most effective arguments put forward by Socialists for the reorganisation of the social and economic fabric of society would fall on deaf ears. As things are, however, there is no perceptible relation subsisting between private wealth and human virtue; and one result of this is that the Socialist argument is able to make an increasingly powerful appeal to the reason, instincts and emotions of an ever-growing multitude of plain men and women.

A very large number of persons with a strong sympathy for the under-dog remain nevertheless impervious to the irrefragible economic reasoning and the serried rows of statistics, the heart-rending pictures of sweating and disease in the underworld, the dramatic horrors of poverty and unfulfilment, by means of which Socialist writers and speakers endeavour to seduce them from their allegiance to the "divine right of things as they are"; and impervious they will remain until the crack of doom, unless and until a certain belief has been shattered. That belief is the fear that in a Socialist state we should undergo the sort of existence which may shortly be called the Standardised Life.

The Spectre of Monotony.

A number of vague and inconsistent and confused ideas are mixed up in that phrase, but the underlying conception is a notion of life being lived according to rote and order; of whole armies of citizens being regimented and dragooned in all the activities of their lives down to the smallest and most personal details of the day's round. An imaginary picture is raised in people's minds of a nightmare of barren and unfruitful Order; of men being allowed to shave only between certain hours; of the length of women's skirts being prescribed by Order in Council; of artists being authorised to paint only such pictures as are authorised by a Ministry of Fine Arts; of poetic licence being converted into an actual licence for poets (issued by the local authority on the recommendation of two resident rate-payers, not being undischarged bankrupts or convicted of a punishable offence within the preceding five years); of the menu for each day of the week being scheduled (like the Lessons in Church) in an Act of Parliament, and examined by the local Inspector of Dietetics—and so forth and so on, *ad nauseum*. Worse still, we should all be driven to talk alike, dress alike, and think alike; to give notice to

the police before changing our minds concerning any matter referred to in The Public Opinion (Change of Mind) Act of 1953 ; to become, in short, docile, unspontaneous, regulated automata. Over and above all that is the fear that in an egalitarian society there will be, quite apart from external regulation, a minimum of colour, variety and oddness, and a maximum of sameness and flatness. The knobs will be knocked off people's lives, the corrugated eccentricities ironed out of their characters, as it were, and the advent of Socialism become the apotheosis of mediocrity.

When people attempt, as they often do, to adumbrate in some form such as that the apprehensions they feel on this score, Socialists are wont to scoff at the notion as though it were a fantastic absurdity, and then dismiss the whole matter with a laugh. But it cannot be dismissed in this way ; and many enlightened and generous-minded individuals feel acutely that so long as the advent of Socialism appears to present a menace to the spontaneity of human nature and to threaten the development of personality, for so long will the Socialistic idea, however desirable on other grounds, be utterly and completely detestable to them. "The spice and flavour of life would be gone with flat equality," observes Professor Taussig,* the American economist ; and even so sympathetic a lover of his fellow-creatures as the late W. H. Hudson, compared the condition of a sheep, who cannot "follow his own genius" without infringing the laws we have made for his kind, with "that of human beings under a purely Socialistic form of government. . . . In that state every man did as he was told : worked and rested, got up and sat down, ate, drank, and slept, married, grew old and died in the precise way described.† Professor Graham Wallas, himself one of the early Fabian essayists, and at one time a leader of Socialist thought, points out that the old objection to the "dull uniformity" of Socialism, which has always seemed so absurd to the Socialists, nevertheless constantly reappears.‡

It appears to be time, therefore, that those who are Socialists should realise that this brooding apprehension of what I have called the "standardised life" is an obstacle which must be fairly faced and dealt with ; and, if not overcome, frankly acknowledged as an evil which cannot be avoided. Mere evasion does no good at all, and only serves to alienate people by making them believe that Socialists are not even aware of the non-economic human values in life which seem of deep significance to many men and women who are not profoundly interested in political machinery, but whose support or acquiescence is nevertheless essential if any far-reaching scheme of social reform is to be carried through. Many avowed Socialists are prepared to admit that if the advent of a Socialist Commonwealth were likely to produce a marked increase in the uniformity of existence as regards character, intellect, and the activities of work, culture and leisure, they would be prepared to vote steadily and consistently against its introduction, regardless of all other considerations. If it could be shown, conversely, that the present economic system tended to produce a greater diversity of character and environment, to yield a richer harvest, as it were, in terms of human nature, than any

* Principles of Economics. Vol. I., p. 136.

† The Book of a Naturalist, p. 123, 2nd Ed.

‡ The Great Society, p. 372.

alternative system, then, despite all its evils, it would doubtless be worth enduring for the sake of that one supreme irreplaceable good.

How Capitalism Produces Uniformity.

But the assumption, commonly made, that the existing economic organisation of society does in fact prevent the standardisation of life and that it produces, despite other evils, the maximum diversity of life and character, is a statement whose validity requires careful investigation.

It does not appear that any defence of the existing order of society can be based on those grounds. In the first place we may note that the very inequality of wealth which is brought about by the present state of affairs often leads to exactly the kind of standardisation in regard to "personal" matters which is most dreaded under Socialist rule. That is to say, each economic class, particularly those at the top end of the scale, tends to set up uniform standards of behaviour, dress, and manners, and to compel every member of that class to conform thereto with an exactitude and a rigour which would make a liquor-law enforcement officer in an American coastal city turn green with envy. The further up the scale we go, the more standardised the life of the individual tends to become in its small details; and the existence of wealthy persons leading a fashionable life in a great city is far more prescribed than that of the poor, whose class distinctions and class-appearances have reference to comparatively few matters. The most expensive hotels and restaurants in Paris, Berlin, London, New York, Timbuctoo, Brighton, and the Andaman Islands have a deadening uniformity which makes them almost indistinguishable; service, commodities, waiters, furniture, and visitors are standardised to a point which makes it impossible for a man to remember in which city he is staying, until he gets outside and sees what the ordinary run of people look like.

Wealthy people, indeed, tend on the whole to be even more alike than poor people, not only in speech and dress, but also as regards their mental outlook and habits of life. The cause of this is a matter of extreme importance to our discussion. The main driving force behind the tendency to standardise the way of life is the desire "to keep up appearances"—that is, to maintain the unmistakable outward semblance of belonging to a particular economic class. Thus it comes about that the more anxious a group is to attain an exclusiveness and an identity of its own, the more standardised do the forms of conduct and outward habits which it prescribes for those who would appear as belonging to it tend to become. The costume of a man in well-to-do circles invited out to dinner in London or New York is prescribed as rigidly as the dress of a convict or a soldier; in each case the clothing is uniform, and is produced by the desire for a recognisable symbol of similarity. At the English public schools, the standardisation of life is carried to extreme limits, and a boy does something which "isn't done"—that is, which isn't done by all the other boys—only at the peril of facing consequences of a particularly unpleasant kind.

This maintenance of a standard mode of life is by no means confined to the wealthier classes of the community, though it is among the members of what is regarded as "fashionable society" that it

reaches its extreme limits. The lower middle classes, the small shopkeepers, and many other sections of the community, bear the insignia of their class, and coercion is placed upon them to don it, ranging from the enormous silent pressure whereby a struggling artisan is forced by his neighbours to provide an ugly and expensive funeral for his wife, to the elaborate disregard for standardised conventions which must perforce be exhibited by the artist who wishes to pose as a Bohemian, which is itself an inverted form of standardised class conduct arising from group consciousness. The groups which seek to standardise behaviour and outlook are, of course, by no means always income-groups; sometimes they are occupation-groups, though it may be said that occupation-groups approximate roughly to income-groups on the whole, despite wide individual deviations from the average.

In so far, then, as the existing economic order leads to inequality of income; and in so far as inequality of income leads to this group standardisation of life, we can say that the present state of society in Western civilisation definitely tends to produce a standardised life. The greatest diversity of life is to be found in those quarters where the least effort is made to keep up the appearance of belonging to an economic class—in academic and scientific circles, for example, where private wealth is not as a rule highly regarded.

How Socialism may promote diversity.

From this point of view, therefore, it is true to say that in so far as the measures advocated by Socialists will tend to abolish economic class distinctions by bringing about a greater equality of income, to that extent also will they release individuals from the tyranny of having to carry out many standardised conventions which they at present follow somewhat slavishly for the sake of identifying themselves with the particular class which has adopted those practices.

In what has so far been said, the standardisation of life has been discussed in a quite general way, and no attempt has been made to differentiate the various kinds of matters which are capable of being subjected to a standardising process. But a clear distinction may be drawn between (a) the standardisation of individuals from a biological point of view, (b) the standardisation of environment, (c) the standardisation of behaviour, (d) the standardisation of thought, feeling, speech and outlook. It is obvious that there might exist a society in which there were a great diversity of character, physique, intellect, and feeling, and yet in which a great uniformity of conduct prevailed; or, conversely, people in a given community may narrowly resemble one another physically and in respect of their natural biological dispositions, and yet act, feel and think differently under approximately similar conditions, and the society in which they live may be such that each is free within certain limits, to act, feel and think more or less as he pleases.

So far as the standardisation of human nature itself is concerned, the best safeguard for the preservation of diversity would appear to be "a fair field and no favouritism" arising from economic class distinctions in the marriage market. That is to say, the free play of natural selection must not be burked and thwarted and crabbed within narrow limits through the operation of extraneous causes. The existing economic organisation of society is, as Bernard Shaw has often pointed out, dysgenic; the field of selection for nearly all

men and women is narrowed down to those whose economic and social position is approximately similar to their own. This hampering of biological instincts by environmental circumstances clearly tends to prevent human nature from propagating itself in the most variegated manner possible; and those Socialist measures which are likely to effect a widening of the field of selection in marriage, by removing some of the barriers founded on economic class distinctions, will certainly tend to promote a greater differentiation than we at present experience rather than a lessening of it.

We must not be led, in our anxiety to safeguard and develop the spontaneity and diversity of human life, into supposing that any question of social advantage or ethical value attaches necessarily to the conception of standardisation in connection with the existence of human beings. Far from it. In itself, standardisation is neither good nor bad. If we examine the matter impartially, we can see that the entire fabric of modern civilisation depends in no small measure upon life being highly standardised in some respects, and upon human beings being treated in identically the same way for certain purposes. One of the conceptions which has done most to free Western society from the bondage of capricious tyranny is the idea of equality before the law; but this essentially involves the standardisation of human activities and human beings into certain fixed categories. Political democracy, again, results inevitably in a standardisation of human rights and duties and a standardised equality of voting rights. The whole system of governmental administration as we know it in England to-day relies, in fact, on an equality of treatment being meted out, and a potential equality of service being rendered, by the executive agent to all falling within the ambit of a particular class; and, therefore, on a standardisation of the mutual rights and duties of all persons coming within each category. Although Sidney Webb has pointed out with great wisdom that a modern democracy must cater essentially for minorities, the fact remains that in catching hold of the various minorities, as it were, whether it be the sick, or the blind, or the epileptic, or the orphan widows over seventy, or the illegitimate gasworkers under twenty-five, it is the similarities of the individuals in each class which is insisted upon rather than their differences; and so the process of standardisation marches steadily forward.

Standardisation in Industry.

It is true, of course, that mere size has a certain connection with standardisation. When an institution exists on a small scale, individual function is not highly differentiated, and it is impractical to standardise activities. As the institution grows in size the work becomes more specialised and, partly from necessity, life becomes more standardised. The enlarged scale of life in the modern world has had a good deal to do with the marked increase of standardisation.

One of the outstanding results of the industrial achievements of our age is the attainment of a high pitch of standardisation, for the first time in history, of commodities and services produced by man. Scientific knowledge and economic advantage have conspired together to produce huge quantities of goods of every description, so undifferentiated that one example is indistinguishable from another to the

unaided human eye. The day of the master craftsman is almost gone ; and only the wealthy can now afford hand-made articles bearing the slight imperfections which make them perfect. The old uniqueness has given way to a degree of standardisation which makes it possible to replace the entire engine of a Ford car with a similar unit in twenty minutes ; and to order by telegram a set of false teeth or a geared spindle that shall be correct to the thousandth part of an inch.

This standardisation of dead matter has been accompanied by a no less remarkable standardisation of human industrial capacity. Men and women are nowadays often spoken of in industrial life as "hands," and the underlying significance of that term is the fact that employers expect to find a specialised and standardised industrial capacity at their disposal, rather than a diverse human being possessing unknown productive qualities. The great majority of wage-earners are now regarded as being hardly less standardised than the commodities which they produce ; and if a man has a special economic value peculiar to himself he is to be accounted not only fortunate, but exceptional.

Furthermore, the whole tendency of the industrial side of the Trade Union movement has been towards the universal establishment of the Common Rule : that is, towards the standardisation of the conditions of work and rates of pay for all engaged in a given trade or occupation. In recent years efforts have been made to extend this standardisation of industrial conditions to the international sphere, and much of the work of the International Labour Office has been directed towards this end. Mr. Frank Hodges, Secretary of the Miners' International Federation, remarked the other day that the consideration uppermost in the minds of himself and his colleagues was "the question of standardisation of the conditions of labour in the principal coal-producing countries of the world," and the leaders of the thirty or more international trade associations affiliated to the Amsterdam International are all more or less concerned with the same question. Trade Union leaders have no greater natural inclinations for uniformity than other people ; but the bitter logic of events has driven them irresistibly towards making and enforcing a demand for standardised conditions of employment.

It is sometimes said that the standardising activities of Trade Unions are merely due to the economic conflict in which they are at present perpetually involved, and that when the economic structure of society has been transformed to a more harmonious design that they will recognise and even encourage a freedom now impossible. But this argument is difficult to accept.

In any case we must take into account the fact that the demands of productive efficiency have of recent years been making new claims on the workers in the direction of standardisation. The industrial psychologists, the "fatigue" experts, and the "efficiency engineers," allege that a larger output can be obtained with less strain on the worker if methods of manipulation and muscular operations are standardised and carried out according to plan. We must probably reconcile ourselves to an extension of this kind of functional guidance under any system of economic production.

Standardisation in matters industrial seems, indeed, to be not only an accomplished fact, but a process which must be pushed to its

logical extreme if productive efficiency is to be improved and the world enabled to attain that desirable point where it will be able to earn its living by working not more than three or four hours a day. When that time comes, the real work of the work will be done for non-economic motives during the intervals we now call leisure.

What we have got to beware of, both then and now, are two things : In the first place, we must be careful not to tolerate any standardisation in the industrial sphere which cannot justify itself economically. A great deal of monotonous uniformity which is imposed to-day is entirely unwarranted and unnecessary on the grounds of efficiency, as everyone who has been in the Army or the Civil Service can testify. In the second place, we must take care that increased standardisation in the industrial sphere does not lead to habits of mind and body which extend standardisation to the realm of leisure and non-economic pursuits. If that were so, we should merely have used our increased wealth to purchase slavery.

Where Standardisation is Desirable.

Despite the general caveat which we have just entered, there are, apart from purely economic advantages, certain fields in which an increase of standardisation is highly desirable on quite other grounds : for standardisation in some fields involves interchangeability, and interchangeability tends towards improved communication, a greater mobility of action, a greater ease of coming and going, which leads in turn to a wider vision and a fuller comprehension of strange nations and the common lot of man.

Thus a greater standardisation of the world's currencies, of weights and measures, of passport regulations, is something to be desired ; and so is the adoption by Western European countries of a standardised system of university regulations, which would enable students to go from one seat of learning to another without loss of academic "time." Sometimes international hostility definitely militates against forms of standardisation which are obviously desirable on other grounds, as, for example, when before the war the gauge on the West Russian railways was deliberately made larger than the standard Continental size, in order (as it was vainly hoped) to prevent the German trains from running on the Russian lines in case of war.

When we come to consider the standardisation of non-economic behaviour, of thought, feeling, speech and outlook, the problem immediately becomes far more subtle and profound. It is obviously desirable that the tendency to shake hands with the right hand must be standardised if the custom of hand-shaking is to be preserved. It is, again, necessary and desirable that mankind should utilise certain standardised instruments of thought, such as mathematical symbols and written characters ; and further, that the very thought of mankind itself should be standardised in regard to many kinds of matters. The standardisation of intellectual conceptions concerning various phenomena in the world of reality is, indeed, one of the main effects of scientific investigation. We all think alike (or nearly alike) about the strength of vanadium steel, the theory of quadratic equations, and the atomic weight of rare earths, in so far as we think about those matters at all. The standardisation of thought does not, however, necessarily involve true scientific analysis ; and the conception

of the universe common among the ancient Romans was the standardised but erroneous belief that it was bounded by a flaming rampart. But *per contra* scientific analysis, no less than the rule of law, does involve the standardisation of intellectual concepts to a very marked extent.

Since scientific progress is generally believed to be desirable, the standardisation of knowledge which accompanies it must be accepted for better or for worse; we cannot have the smile without the Cheshire Cat in any circumstances. What is much more serious is the standardisation of thought in regard to many of the matters on which science has not yet shed her light, whether it be the effectiveness of the death penalty as a deterrent from murder, or man's place in the universe. It is precisely the tendency and desire of all traditional religions to standardise human thought on matters of pure speculative belief which is the one overwhelming disadvantage of all organised churches. The very basis of formal religion is, indeed, the standardisation of the outward forms of faith. Just because the progressive march of science tends to produce a standardisation of ideas in regard to those phenomena concerning which an exact knowledge has been gained, it is all the more necessary that a complete absence of standardisation should prevail in the realm of speculative belief. The realm of speculative belief is usually regarded by philosophers as being that part of the universe which is not susceptible of being experienced by our sense perceptions. But one may easily include within its province also all those parts of the world of reality which are knowable, but hitherto unknown, and as to which human speculation is often as positive, dogmatic and standardised as it is in regard to the purpose of creation, man's place in the universe, or his chances of immortality. A great many of our ideas concerning political and social matters are mere standardised beliefs which have been adopted from consciously or unconsciously interested motives,* or accepted as the line of least resistance, or assimilated and repeated from mere habit.

Habit as a Standardising Force.

Habit plays a part of great importance not only in the formation of standardised forms of thought, but also in the creation of standardised modes of conduct. A man's "habitual" conduct is his normal conduct in any given set of circumstances; and so powerful is the influence of habit that it is quite a startling and exceptional occurrence for an adult person to make a real break with the habits of speech, thought and action which he has acquired.

The influence of habit in standardising behaviour is not confined to the human race, but is also to be found among animals. And among them, too, we trace the same lack of vivid impulse and spontaneous freshness which we associate with the conception of human beings acting under the influence of habit. Professor Kohler, a distinguished psychologist who spent some years at the Anthropoid Station in Teneriffe making careful and valuable observations of chimpanzees, points out that among these animals, processes which were originally very valuable "have a disagreeable tendency of sinking to a lower rank with constant repetition. This *secondary self*

* See J. A. Hobson: *Free Thought in the Social Sciences.*

training (i.e., the development of habit), is usually supposed to bring about a great saving, and it may be so, both in man and in anthropoid apes. But one must never forget what a startling resemblance there is between these crude stupidities of the chimpanzees arising from habit, and certain empty and meaningless repetitions of moral, political or other principles in men. Once these all meant more, one cared about the 'solution' in a predicament deeply felt or much thought about; but later the situation does not matter so much, and the statement of the principles become a *cliché*.*

The deadening effect of habit on the conduct even of animals is clearly shown by Professor Kohler; and he definitely observes that he liked the behaviour of the chimpanzees during their tenth or eleventh repetition of a "solution" less than in the first or second. Something is spoilt in the chimpanzee even when many different experiments follow each other in quick succession, but particularly when the same ones are repeated.

There can be no doubt whatever that the constant repetition of thoughts, sayings and actions leads to the development of habits; that such habits tend to produce the standardised life; and that the standardised life is antithetic to the highest activities of mankind. Development involves individuation; and in a cultured society in which great equality of wealth and cultural opportunity existed, there *could* not be at one and the same time a high average cultural level and a high degree of standardisation at that level. The former precludes the latter in the very nature of things.

Standardisation in Russia.

What has all this got to do with Socialism, it may be asked. The point we are trying to make is that as a matter of fact it has very little to do with it. The two countries where the greatest amount of standardisation of thought and feeling appear to have been imposed on the inhabitants at the present time are Russia and the United States. In Russia the oft-repeated story of Marxian Economics decreed by Ukase, of the labour theory of value endocrinated at the point of the bayonet (or with the hilt of it at least menacing the teachers' trousers), of atheism declared by statute, is an old and well-worn tale, supported rather convincingly by the recent publication of the Soviet Criminal Code, with its savage penalties for such offences as "propaganda and agitation intended to assist the international bourgeoisie," "the insulting expression of disrespect towards the Russian Socialist Federation Soviet Republic," and "the teaching of religious doctrines to young children and persons under age" in public or private schools.†

A recent example of Soviet methods tending to standardise Russian thought is a decree issued by the Soviet Government regulating the supply of literature to libraries.*

"The following books are to be removed from the libraries of the workers' clubs, travelling libraries, and small libraries in towns and villages :—

* Kohler. *Mentality of Apes*. Eng: Tr. 1925, p. 204/5/6.

† The Criminal Code of the Russian Socialist Federation Soviet Republic. H.M. Stationery Office, 1925.

* The Times, 12th November, 1925.

(a) In the section of philosophy, psychology, and ethics all books written in the spirit of idealistic philosophy, mentalism, occultism, spiritualism, theosophy, and also books on phrenology and magic, oracles, dream-books, etc.

(b) The section on religion must contain solely anti-religious literature; historical and philosophical books that had formed part of this section must be included in the corresponding sections.

(c) From the section dealing with political and social questions must be removed:—(1) Anti-revolutionary books published in the time of Tsardom by Government institutions and various religious and patriotic organisations.

(2) Propagandist pamphlets against the Communist movement, the Bolsheviks and the champions of peace, published during 1914-17, and the propagandist literature of 1917 advocating a constitutional monarchy, a democratic republic, civic freedom, constitutional assembly, universal suffrage, etc.

(3) Propagandist and reference books and pamphlets issued by Soviet organs in 1918, 1919 and 1920 concerned with matters that have been differently dealt with by the Soviet Government and are consequently out of date (land, taxes, free trade, food policy, etc.) are to be removed from small libraries.

(4) Reference books on law, collections and explanations of the now superseded laws of the Tsar's and the Provisional Government must be removed from small libraries.

(d) From the pedagogic section must be removed books on religious education, church schools, etc.

(e) In the section of natural science, small libraries must be purged of books that confound science with religious inventions and speak of the wisdom of the Creator, the immorality of Darwinism, etc.

(f) In the section of history, literature and geography the books to be removed include books and manuals for school children and the masses published in the days of Tsardom and containing praise of monarchism, of Tsars, Ministers, the nobility, the Church, the war, and capitalism."

And in the United States.

In the United States the degree of standardisation which is imposed in regard to speech and behaviour is even more striking but far less widely known. The trial of Mr. Scopes at Dayton, Tennessee, for teaching the theory of evolution propounded by Charles Darwin attracted a good deal of attention in Europe, where it added to the gaiety of nations; but it was only one incident in a whole series of episodes which are standardising the mind of America. Two years ago, for example, the Senate of the State of New York passed by a large majority a measure entitled the Higgins Patriotic Text-Book Bill, which attempted to lay down for educational authorities minute requirements as to the historical text-books which might be used in the State schools. Any book which "fails to emphasise the scope of the victory of the United States in any of its wars" was to be banned; and no book might be used if (among other things) it falsifies, distorts, doubts or denies the acts of oppression recited in the Declaration of Independence. Also, any book which "belittles, ridicules, doubts or denies, or which, if a text-book dealing with the revolutionary period, omits to mention the services and sacrifices of American patriots

by which national independence was won, or which emphasises or enlarges upon the possible human failings or shortcomings of such patriots without giving at least equal prominence to their virtues and merits" would be barred from the public schools. This measure did not become law, but its passage through the senate of the leading State in the Union is significant. In Chicago a women's society has been actively engaged in attempting to purge the schools of all history books which tend to "lessen the heroic measure of the men who have made history for the United States." Unofficial bodies like the Ku Klux Klan and the National Civic Federation are exerting a powerful influence in coercing huge masses of American citizens to conform to certain standard sentiments and customs set up by a minority of coarse and brutal politicians; and even when applying for a passport visa the visitor or emigrant to America is made to declare that he is neither an anarchist or a polygamist.

A similar development is to be observed in the universities of America. At Princeton, it has been decreed by the Student Council that "No Freshmen shall wear fur coats,"* and black "slickers" must now be worn; at Yale, Freshmen are not permitted to sit in the orchestra of the Students' Theatre, or to eat in Morey's Restaurant. Each must carry a box of matches. At Lafayette College, Freshmen are permitted to smoke only corn-cob pipes! At many of the other universities similar standardising regulations are in force; at one well-known seat of learning in the West law students must carry canes, and engineers wear Stetson hats.

Not content with all these existing and potential forms of standardisation, Professor McElroy, the Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford, remarked in his inaugural address recently that if America was to continue great, "her polyglot population must think common thoughts on things essential, and acknowledge common standards of right and wrong."† That is to say, the standardisation of thought and of ethical values throughout the population is regarded as a paramount necessity, quite regardless of the truth and validity of the standard so established.

Whatever the cause may be, it is undeniable that in the United States on the one hand, and in Russia on the other, we have two vast countries presenting a high degree of standardisation in regard to many of the things where diversity would seem most desirable. Yet the political and economic systems of the two countries are poles asunder. In Russia, even after allowing for the New Economic Policy, an extreme form of Communistic Socialism obtains, side by side with a peculiar political organisation based partly on occupation and partly on geographical vicinity, and dominated by a small group of able and despotic intellectuals. In the United States, on the other hand, individualistic capitalism has reached a point of development unparalleled elsewhere, and its attendant features of combination and monopoly have been carried to lengths undreamed of in the old world. The theoretically democratic political system on which the social structure is based has in many ways produced the worst features of a plutocracy. Clearly, then, the example of Russia and America demonstrate that there can at any rate be no

* The New Student. N.Y., 26th April, 1924.

† The Times, 30th January, 1926.

direct and inevitable connection between the Standardised Life and either capitalism or socialism. An inequality of riches may lead to the standardisation of existence under certain conditions as easily as a dead level of equality of income. Public ownership may be the bedfellow of uniformity no less easily than private enterprise.

Diversity under Public Ownership.

The absence of any necessary connection between the general economic organisation* of a community and the diversity of life enjoyed by its inhabitants is borne out by an examination of existing institutions. We talk glibly of capitalist industries and public undertakings; but, if truth were told, when the question has been decided as to whether a particular service or productive undertaking should be privately or nationally or municipally owned much less has been settled than at first sight appears. For there is a huge variation of type within each category. The police force, the Navy, the British Museum, the public houses at Carlisle, the printing factory run by the Stationery Office at Harrow, Prince Henry's Room in the Strand, the local sewage systems, the electrical supply in Manchester, secondary education, and the Suez Canal, can all be said in some senses to be publicly owned and publicly controlled; but there is as great a diversity in the methods by which they are managed as there is between the way in which the Midland Bank is run as compared with the little oil-shop at the corner of a village street in Gloucestershire. In some ways, indeed, there is a closer resemblance between the Post Office and the privately-owned Great Western Railway (or even the Southern Railway) than there is between the railway company and a Bond Street milliner's shop.

It is clear, then, that the cornerstone of Socialist theory, "Production for service instead of for profit," with its actual expression in public ownership of the means of production does not necessarily involve any narrow stereotyping of methods or types of functional activity. Diversity in the economic sphere can as well be maintained under socialised ownership as under profit-making enterprise.

In what has been said so far an attempt has been made to show: *first*, that the standardisation of certain kinds of thought and behaviour, organisation and material, goods and services, is in many respects essential for the maintenance of Western civilization; *second*, that the process of standardisation could with advantage be extended to various fields in which a chaotic and hampering diversity now obtains; *third*, that standardisation has no necessary relation to any particular economic system; and *fourth*, that uniformity of thought and human activity in certain directions is highly undesirable.

The problem which confronts a community at any given time, is, therefore, not whether it should standardise the life of its members in every possible respect, or attempt, conversely, to maintain a complete diversity; but to what extent, in what measure, how, why and when it should resist or promote measures tending toward uniformity. That is the *crux* of the whole matter; and a question which may often present very great difficulty. There is a point

* By the word organisation here I mean the method of production, distribution and exchange prevailing at any time. I do not mean the stage of economic development which has been reached.

of maximum return or advantage in this realm no less than in the field of economic production. The little more or the little less one way or the other in the process of standardisation may make all the difference between a community merely "carrying on" and in its being able to make a creative contribution to the life of mankind.

Some Guiding Principles.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to lay down any abstract rules on the subject. But certain broad generalisations present themselves for consideration. The first of these is that what we call personality or individuality begins where standardisation leaves off, as regards human beings no less than objects. If any proof of this self-evident truth were necessary, we have only to turn to the realm of artistic endeavour. Individuality is a comparatively late development in the march of evolution, although we find distinct manifestations of it in the higher reaches of the animal kingdom.* Even in so recent an epoch as the civilisation of Ancient Egypt there is a curious impersonality to be observed in the gorgeous display of art treasures which have recently come to light; the rigid conventions and modes and superstitions of the time seem to have weighed down the creative activities of the artist within narrow limits, and in a subtle way deprived him of much of his individuality, despite all the superb craftsmanship which he was encouraged to lavish on his work.

So far as our own age is concerned, the chief danger which Socialists will have to guard against if they wish to avoid producing a barren uniformity of existence, is the temptation to connect things which do not necessarily hang together. Socialism is a doctrine of reform having to do primarily with economic matters; and it will lose rather than gain in force and attractiveness if it is linked up with divorce reform, vegetarianism, the abolition of capital punishment, anti-vaccination, trousers for women, religion and what-not. Some progressive minded people think alike on all or many of these subjects; but many others do not. If Socialists wish to establish a society in which life shall be tolerable, they will have to pay more attention to the differences between human beings than to the similarities among them. A man may feel that the existing distribution of property is disadvantageous; but it does not follow that he is also in favour of wearing sandals or prohibiting intoxicating liquor. And if a condition of subscribing to the one tenet is being committed to the others, he will either refuse to join the association which aims at redistributing property, or enter it and feel mentally uncomfortable. The Socialist doctrine must accordingly be confined within narrow limits if it is to be kept wide enough to embrace those who want a full and deep and diverse life. If it is made so "comprehensive" that it takes up a point of view and establishes a dogma on every important question, Socialism will become a strait jacket. The points of contact and separation between human beings must, in short, be multiplied and kept isolated; and opportunities for association and dis-association provided by a complex system of mutating groups confined to particular matters.

* See, for examples of it among chimpanzees: *The Mentality of Apes*. Kohler. Kegan Paul. Eng. Tr., 1925.

The Separation of Categories.

The relevance of all this to the present discussion is that nothing tends to produce the undesirable forms of standardisation more certainly than the welding together of categories which are not necessarily connected.

And similarly in the realm of morals. If a man cannot be a Socialist and a member of the Socialist party yet also a liar, an adulterer, a wife-beater, a bully, a hypocrite and a gambler, life under Socialism will be intolerable. If under Socialism he continues to be all those things life will also be intolerable and Socialism a proved failure. This may shock a good many people who feel rightly that the attitude of mind which results in the Socialist outlook towards property with all its altruistic implications cannot and must not be indifferent towards other aspects of life; that it is wrong and dishonest to divide the mind into water-tight compartments working independently of each other, and to separate the moral aspects of property from other ethical questions. No such thing is advocated. It is admitted that a man without an intellectual and spiritual unity, who does not see life "whole," as it is sometimes said, and perceive the relationship between apparently unconnected phenomena, is a drifter, and without mental poise and integrity. But this comprehensiveness of outlook, and the reconciliation of conflicting impulses and values which produces it, is a development which should take place in the mind of the individual, and no attempt should be made to reflect it rigidly in external institutions and group organisations. If such an attempt is made, highly undesirable forms of standardisation of thought and action will result, and a strong element of coercion will be introduced into spheres wherein freedom and diversity are of the first importance.

We come finally to one further consideration. Socialism, as commonly conceived, represents the apotheosis of the Many, the giving to the great mass of the thwarted and unfulfilled under-dogs of this tormented world an opportunity for development and good living which is denied to them under the existing conditions of poverty, squalor, brutality, and ugliness in which they now dwell.

The Many and the Few.

All that is true; but it does not follow that Socialism either must or should ignore the Few. By the Few one means the handful of exceptional men and women to be found in every walk of life who are actually or potentially capable of making a creative contribution to the wealth of the world in some particular direction. Nearly all progress is due to the Few, and any community which neglected and made no attempt to nourish them, would be doomed to a barren fate. A Socialist society would probably find the encouragement of exceptional ability to be necessary on general grounds; we are concerned with it here only on account of the sidelight it casts on this question of Standardisation. The relevance lies in the fact that the development and encouragement of the Few, not at the expense of the Many but side by side with them, would almost inevitably check any tendency to over-standardisation. The Few, by their very nature, cannot be

standardised, will not submit to uniform treatment, and would be entirely suffocated and frustrated if they did. So that if a Socialist community were aware of the importance of the Few in the scheme of things, a strong anti-standardising tendency would be likely to manifest itself; and processes and measures aiming at producing uniformity in regard to matters in which diversity had previously prevailed, would be scrutinised not only from the point of view of how the proposed change would affect the great mass of human beings, but also from the point of view of its effect on the exceptional individual of special capacity. The activities of the United States in the field of education are a good example of the evil effects resulting from a tendency to cultivate the Many at the expense of the Few, and one which might well serve as a warning. Everyone in America now has an implied right to go to college, and the result is that the universities are indiscriminately crammed to overflowing with youths and maidens of whom large numbers derive scant benefit from the curriculum, but who nevertheless often succeed in lowering the whole atmosphere of the institution.

America in this respect has broken down not only the barriers of wealth and kinship which bar the way for most people to the higher reaches of educational opportunity in England, but also the barriers of mental endowment and "educable capacity": and it is not at all certain whether she has not emptied the baby out with the bath. The present condition of higher education in the States is all in the direction of nourishing and standardising the average student and of starving the student of exceptional ability.

Having regard to all this, I suggest that one important step in Socialist thought which appears to be needed in order to counteract the possibility of excessive standardisation, is a much greater concentration on Maximum Standards. Hitherto, the Minima have had it all their own way, as it were, and we have heard endlessly of a National Minimum Wage, National Minima of Health, leisure and so forth. The Minima are essentially important. But some attention should also be devoted to National Maxima: that is, how opportunities for maximum fulfilment may be provided in the Socialist Commonwealth. We tend to think rather fatalistically that the great pictures are painted, the great inventions made, the great scientific laws formulated, the great medical facts discovered, the great mathematical theories invented, the great sonatas composed, and all other works of genius achieved by a congeries of accidental events over which we have no control, and, therefore, that it is neither necessary nor useful for Socialists to think or worry about them, since all that can be done is to "level up" the bottom strata.

It may not be possible to "organise" the production of great work in the way in which the production of munitions was organised during the war of 1914-18; but it does not follow that a society, Socialist or otherwise, cannot do a great deal towards either keeping the ring for genius, as it were, or conversely, in cramping its development.*

The Socialist movement in England does already in a vague way dimly perceive the place and value of the creative Few; and there is good reason to believe that its appreciation will grow in scope and

* Since this was written Mr. Graham Wallas's "Art of Thought" has appeared, which deals in a fascinating and constructive way with this problem.

intensity as the movement enlarges its horizon. In that event, there should be no serious danger of a Socialist community making misguided attempts at promoting uniformity and thereby producing anything like the kind of existence which we have called the Standardised Life.

Life in the Socialist Commonwealth will in many ways be far less standardised, mechanical and monotonous for most people than it is at present. One of the reasons why the present system is breaking down is that it no longer arouses the kind of individual initiative and creative diversity which is most needed by the age in which we live; and what Socialism is really aiming at is to bring about an environment which will be far more conducive and stimulating to individual diversity and the originating effort which springs from it than is the present one. The ideal Society would be one in which the marriage of individual capacity and environmental opportunity yielded an infinite diversity of life where to-day squalor, monotony, flatness, sameness, and stultification hold sway. Socialism alone offers the promise and the possibility of such an enrichment of human existence.

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