

Capitalism and Communism— The Hellish Twins

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THE world in which we live, the ruin of what used to be Christendom, is overshadowed by two mighty evils, the one in maturity or about to pass, the other adolescent and increasing in strength. The first is called Industrial Capitalism, the second is called Communism.

I do not propose here to suggest a remedy, nor even a defence against these plagues, but only to remark their appearance and attempt to make clear their nature. No remedy can be approached for any disease until its nature is known.

It is at the outset to be remarked that these two monstrosities (the contrast between which and the conflict between which most occupy contemporary attention) proceed from the same spiritual root and are nourished upon the same philosophy, produce therefore what are in the main similar fruits and take for granted what is fundamentally a similar structure of society. Communism is a product of Capitalism, and though it is put forward as a remedy for the disease of Capitalism, yet it breathes the same air, for it is of the same parentage. The twins are of one mother; and that mother is the spirit which despises the divine in man, lets loose greed and envy to the enslavement of man, subjects man to material things, is hostile, therefore, to beauty as to humour and to humility most of all.

It is often so with evil things in apparently violent contrast and even conflict, when of two such things the latter is put forward as a remedy for the problems raised by the former. It is so, for instance, with Alcoholism and Prohibition. The violent inhumanity of the first directly created the corresponding inhumanity in the second. In each there is a regarding of wine as a dreadful drug rather than a recognition of it as a human good.

CAPITALISM AND COMMUNISM

Let us define our terms:—

The term "Capitalism," or more fully "Industrial Capitalism," is the more difficult of the two to define because it has arisen gradually out of a very different state of things and still carries about it the fossil remnants of an earlier and healthier state, and also because, like the word "gentleman" and a hundred others, it has come to be used with the greatest looseness and ambiguity.

Capitalism may be defined as a state of society in which human industry, the human effort to create wealth, that is, to transform natural environment from a condition where it is less to a condition where it is more serviceable to human needs, is organized for the profit of a few who have the mass of their nominally free fellow-citizens at their mercy. At the same time, it is organized with the object of giving the fullest license to acquisitiveness and thus rendering conditions unstable for all.

Its essence does not consist in the use of machinery. Its essence does not depend upon rapidity or universality of communication nor upon the type of product aimed at. Our race has had in the past exactly the same essential organization of economic society though dealing with purely agricultural produce grown under the most primitive forms of cultivation. No; the characteristic of Capitalism lies in this, that it is a system of production where a few citizens control the means of production and distribution, not for beauty or usefulness, but for their own advantage and are so the masters of a vastly more numerous mass of citizens who are exploited and progressively deprived of freedom.

When freedom has wholly disappeared, Capitalism is transformed into another form of society: either a form in which citizens have become public slaves serving one political power, or have become private slaves, the property of the individual few who own them.

The first of these results is called Communism: the second is best called "The Servile State."

Capitalism as it advances to maturity cuts off one area of free choice after another from the average individual in the State, and the further the process has advanced the more Capitalist has society become; until the last stage is reached, when no freedom or dignity survives, and Capitalism is transmuted into naked servitude, public or private, as the basis of the State.

Capitalism being thus informed by the necessity of killing choice in man, of imposing on him another's will, cannot but destroy his diversity. It is marked always by an increasing standardization and deadness, a loss of multiplicity—which is life—and a persistent effort to eliminate all those elements in social activity which lessen the power of the few controllers, or foster separate, multiform private actions and selections. Hence is it the death of well-divided ownership with its accompaniment of the humanities.

Capitalism does not mean the use of Capital: if it meant that, every form of production whatsoever would be Capitalism. It does not mean the right of individuals to control the means of production; if it meant that Capitalism would be identical with economic freedom, instead of being what it is, the prime enemy of economic freedom. It does not mean a differentiation between citizens, so that some have less and some more of the produce; if Capitalism meant that it would apply to every human society that ever has been. It does not even mean a state of society in which the minority possess or control the means of production and the majority do not, for where a very large minority have control divided among them there is a spirit of economic freedom abroad quite opposite to the spirit of Capitalism. It is when the proportion between the minority and the majority becomes outrageous, when the degree of economic freedom—that is, of personal choice in action left to individual citizens—becomes inhumanly small, that Capitalism proper has come into being.

Communism is, as I have said, much easier to define

and its definition leaves far less play for the foolish, the dishonest, and the confused to juggle with questions of degree.

Capitalism can be half defended by foolish, dishonest or confused minds for possessing the very virtues to which it is deadly. But with Communism it is another matter. You can only defend it for what it is.

Communism is a proposal, of elementary simplicity, that production shall be organized by one authority only, which authority shall distribute the products at will.

The essence of Communism is not equality, still less has it any relation to the political conception called "Democracy." Its essence is production by all men acting in subservience to one will, which is their despotic master. Whether that will be the will of a clique or of selected officials or of a despot is all one, so that there be no separate, conflicting or competing control. Under Communism you are compelled, whoever you are, to do that work which is appointed for you. The product of your labour escapes you completely, it is given to whomsoever the master wills and in whatsoever portions he wills. This slave production does not primarily aim at usefulness, still less at beauty, but at enforcing the power of the central Master.

Two forces are at work which increase the appeal and advance the arrival of Communism in a society already organized, and suffering, under Capitalism. These two forces are the protest of justice and the protest of necessity.

The human race cannot be divorced from justice, however warped in application; and, under Industrial Capitalism, there proceeds increasingly as it develops the insistent force of the question, "By what right?"

Before Capitalism was developed, when it was still in embryo, when the controllers of production were very numerous and the remaining area of economic liberty very large, the answer to the question, "By what right?" was given in the single term "Property."

There is an instinct in man which only pedants contest, by which he recognizes the dominion of himself and others over material objects. It is a normal attitude of man's soul, which has stamped itself upon every language and upon every institution and which leaves the normal man in the presence of theft, fraud, or wanton destruction, as he is left in the presence of falsehood or murder. His moral nature refuses to deny the rights of property; and however much academic fools, remote from experience and nourished on print, argue in abstract terms against it, the strength of nature is always too much for them.

It was upon this fundamental instinct for property, indeed, that Capitalism itself arose, although Capitalism soon proved itself a poison which killed private property and reduced it from a general healthy institution spread throughout the State to the precarious condition in which its remnants now struggle to survive. Yet, at every step in the advance of Capitalism, it was the appeal to the human conscience in the matter of property which was Capitalism's sure ally. On that is based the sanctity of contract and, therefore, those contracts which, by merging small property in large, gradually destroy the sense of property in men; on that is based the *moral* defence of all that organization whereby to-day centralized Capitalism enjoys *armed* defence. It is by an appeal to the rights of property—the condition of human dignity and freedom—that Capitalism pretends to a moral basis, although it is the murderer of property.

Clearly this ancient answer to the question "By what right?", namely, the answer "Because it is mine, and if you take it you are dishonoured," applies less and less with every passing year to the Capitalist world. Capitalism has killed its own main moral foundation. No one seriously regards the multi-millionaire who has risen by speculation, the shreshuffler who has risen to millions by fraud, the monopolist merger which has turned a thousand independent men into hired servants,

as enjoying the sacred right of ownership. The myriads who are compelled to work for the advantage of a few chance successive masters have no human tie binding them to these. They will envy the vulgarian his luck, or they will be stolidly indifferent in the conviction that nothing can improve their lot; but they feel no moral respect for possession as it is enjoyed in turn to-day by such men as typify Capitalist control.

Now Communism meets this question, "By what right?" with a clear answer. "The Capitalist controllers have no right," it says. "The only right to the enjoyment of produce lies with the human being who creates that produce, and since the individual cannot produce it alone but only under the conditions of society, therefore is the community the only real producer—and therefore the community only has the right to enjoy the produce."

So far the open answer of Communism. But it is silent on the inevitable corollary. The "Community" cannot control: if the community is to act as one unit it must be in the hands of one or a few.

This metaphorical and usual talk of the "Community" means, in the ideal world and in practice, that only the person who arrogates to himself, or is by custom entrusted with, or has captured, the power to speak in the name of the community—an individual despot or the member of a despotic clique—can decide what wealth shall be enjoyed and by whom; and, as he only can provide livelihood, he is the absolute master.

The postulate herein contained that, "The individual can only produce wealth as part of the community" is, of course, the basis of the second great driving force, which is making for the triumph of Communism, the argument from necessity.

Every one must admit that no individual producer creates wealth without the aid of society. If there were no sense of property in man every one would be a Communist in morals. Though half a dozen small

farming families each cultivate its little plot and live wholly upon the profits thereof, yet even there the maintenance of boundaries, protection against depre- dation and the settlement of disputes must be a communal affair; and, in practice, there is no society—however simple—wherein the communal factor in the production of wealth is not apparent. Nevertheless, man does not allow it to destroy in him the sense of private property. He subordinates, under normal conditions, the communal claim to the consequences of ownership. For his every instinct tells him that, lacking ownership, he lacks choice and personality and therefore all that makes life worth having for him.

But under abnormal conditions, such as Capitalism has produced, the plea of necessity is very strong. The leader of the Belgian Socialist party has put it very simply (for like most Socialists he has a simple mind), "Since monopoly," he said, "is nowadays inevitable, at least let the monopoly, in justice or even for mere purposes of efficiency, be vested in the community."

Capitalist production has ended in a state of society where the Communist plea, from necessity, is urged upon every side. To this urgency many modern discoveries in physical science have added. We get light, food, information, most daily transport, furniture, not at our own choice or by instruments under our control, but from centres over which we have no power and which centres are in the hands of a small number, the true masters of us all.

In all such communal services the necessity of communal control is obvious. But communal control can be urged as a necessity by the Communist in many other fields, if there be granted to him—as there necessarily is by a Capitalist society—certain postulates.

For example, under Capitalism the units of pro- duction and distribution, already very large and few, tend to get larger and still larger and fewer. Allow un- controlled competition, allow private greed as the main motive of life, destroy the old corporate safeguards

of well-ordered property, and the larger enterprise will always eat up the smaller.

Almost any human activity will produce more wealth at a cost of less consumption of wealth when it is centrally controlled and administrated than when it is controlled from diverse centres. Nothing can be more individual than dairy farming, yet one of the stock examples of Capitalist (and therefore Communist) efficiency is a milk monopoly which controls the buying up and distribution of nearly all our milk in England to-day, for the larger organization can under-sell and destroy the small distri- butor. If you leave Capitalism free play the obvious and rapidly attained end of the milk industry in this country would be its complete control by one company—that is, by one tiny group of human beings against whose methods of delivery, selection, and the rest the hundreds of thousands of other human beings affected by their masters' arbitrary orders have no power of protest whatsoever.

A great central organization controlling the public vehicles of a big city can, if competition be allowed free play, eat up all the lesser units until its monopoly is established. The one individual, or the tiny group, which controls the monopolist company, can then impose upon the millions who use the public vehicles what condi- tions of discomfort and tribute they choose.

In other words, Capitalism having produced uniform monopolistic control in more and more, and larger and larger, departments of our lives, the Communist can plead with regard to a greater and greater proportion of our activities this plea of necessity.

"You, the private citizen, have lost your freedom anyhow, as far as public transport is concerned" (and fighting, and food, and drink, and information and pretty well everything.) "You suffer your gross incon- veniences, your agonizing lack of security, and the exasperating sense of dependence, all for the advantage of a few rich men who exploit you. Communal ownership

and Communal organization of work would end all that. You would still be under a monopoly, but under a monopoly which would have no motive in exploiting you and which would render you secure against a sudden loss of livelihood through the vagaries of the Capitalist machine."

This argument applies, of course, to a hundred other evils of social life under Capitalism; to the waste and vulgarity of advertisement, to the succession of boom and slump, to the barbaric chaos under which a man is well fed to-day and starving to-morrow, with no idea who—if anyone—may be responsible for the change or how it could have been prevented.

The logical and even the moral position of Communism therefore is very strong, as opposed to Capitalism; and of the two Communism is necessarily the advancing force. It has the greater appeal because it has not been as yet widely experienced. The vileness of Capitalism is by this time widely known. The converse sufferings of men under Communism are as yet for the most part hearsay.

It behoves us to distinguish between those abominations which are common to both systems and those which are peculiar to Communism.

Capitalism and Communism which it has engendered, have both that contempt for human dignity and therefore for individual freedom which we have quoted as the chief mark of the twins. Either system, Capitalism, which led the way, or Communism, which is its consequence, aims at the subjection of humanity to simple forms imposed upon the individual in spite of his will, and, as a consequence of this, tends to destroy beauty; for beauty is not to be arrived at by a command but rather by a delicate appreciation proceeding from the individual soul. It is since the beginnings of Capitalism that beauty has decayed, particularly in architecture, the fundamental and enduring social art which makes up our permanent environment.

But between the imperfect system called Capitalism

and its perfected result in Communism there is this difference of degree, that under Capitalism many noble buildings have continued the tradition of better times whereas, so far as can be judged from present results, and from the first experimental Communistic attempts, everything under Communism, and particularly architecture, is obscenely ugly and revolting; and this, as it would seem, of set purpose.

In general, Communism and Capitalism have in common those fruits which proceed from the common root of both, which is a greedy contempt for the Divine in man, a greedy appetite for what this world can give, as though there were no other, and all this greed informed by that false scale of values which, even in temporal affairs, puts first the basest things. There is the obvious difference between the twins, that Capitalism is the result of letting individuals scramble among themselves under the mere spur of blind greed, while Communism aims at revenge against those who have thus outraged human equality and at eliminating the hideous chaos in which we live. But both have for their sustenance a denial of the image of God in man, both show that denial in their fruits.

But though the two plagues have a common spirit, the earlier original one and the later, its development, there are about Communism features so much worse even than those which degrade Capitalism that when, or if, Communism should be established for its short reign, our present life under Capitalism would seem, by comparison, a sort of Paradise.

This is because under Capitalism much does survive of that by which the soul of man has lived in better times and by which alone it can live in fullness. Capitalism, being of its nature imperfect, cannot but allow exceptions to itself. Even the most highly industrialized modern societies have much in them of older and better things.

The simulacrum of political freedom expressed in the farce of voting may be neglected; but there is much real

freedom remaining all the same. The short hours of leisure which the wage-slave enjoys can be used in some degree, sometimes a large degree, at his own choice and for his own ends. Men are not only nominally free under Capitalism but in exceptions and by patches are actually free. Great numbers are struggling to maintain economic independence as farmers, as small shopkeepers, even as craftsmen. Spiritual independence is suppressed under Capitalism by indirect methods only, and these methods do not cover the whole mass of human life. Thus, under Capitalism to criticize the rich men who control the machine is made dangerous, especially through the corruption of the lawyers who are their servants, but it is not in theory impossible.

All these palliatives of Capitalism may be summed up in the expression that Capitalism is ashamed of itself. It is a vice into which Christendom has fallen and a recent vice. Even its ephemeral beneficiaries remember not without regret, the state of affairs before it grew up. Its worst modern form is not a lifetime old. Its emergence in force is not three generations old. Three hundred years ago it was hardly a threat (though the seeds, of course, were sown earlier in the disruption of Christendom, which began four hundred years ago, and Calvin was the greatest of the sowers).

You will hardly ever read a naked apology for Capitalism; nearly every such apology is halting and modified. All allusion to it is deprecatory. Capitalism, in a word, is Christendom fallen very sick and knowing that it is so.

But Communism boldly affirms its attachment to all the evils of Capitalism except the evil of insecurity—and even that it does not guarantee one against in fact, for it claims the right to deal with the individual as if to starve or kill him if it feels inclined. All the other monstrous ills of Capitalism—the war on personality, that is on freedom, that is on human dignity, and therefore on humour, on affection, on beauty and on all

that comes from choice—Capitalism, at least, pretends not to wage. But Communism wages that war openly. When we call the mass of citizens under Capitalism, "Wage Slaves," Capitalism protests against the exaggeration of the term; but Communism glories in making all its subjects slaves, with the security (when it chooses) and the dullness and the uniformity of slaves, and the bestial degradation of slaves.

Capitalism has arisen through a revolt against the moral law and an ignorance of God's justice, as well as that scornful denial of God's image in man which we have seen to be at its root; but Communism is openly anti-God and actively hostile to the Divine image persisting in our fallen race. It is no accident that Communism in practice denies God officially and wars against even the vaguest impulse of religion. The spirit which moves it is a spirit necessarily denying the Divine. It hates and would destroy all that vision, which Christians call a "revelation" has given to man; the family and the shrine; certainly the altar.

What will be the fate of this force now setting out with so much in its favour to destroy the shaken fabric of Capitalism? What will be the fate of this younger twin of the Hell-dame?

It is never possible to say with confidence that this or that will result from forces apparent upon the surface of society. One can only note the direction in which these forces move, judge their probable consequences and wonder what unknown obstacles may divert them in the future.

But, as things now stand, it would seem that Capitalism—a compromise between freedom and servitude—an evil containing in itself a poison destructive of itself—cannot endure.

Consequently it would seem that Communism will strengthen its present position, increase for a time the spiritual area of its action, and even the geographical area over which it can establish its political and social

scheme. Protestant Europe—particularly Protestant Germany—is ripe for it.

But as a personal judgment I should be inclined to guess that the domination of Communism, even where it has a hold over society by force, still more where it only has a hold as an ideal, must be short-lived. As it seems to me, the natural end of the development which Capitalism started and which Communism proposes to continue and complete is that Servile State in which the mass of men shall be openly and legally subjected to work for the benefit of masters who shall themselves enjoy security from such a system, while that system shall also procure security and sufficiency for their far more numerous slaves. Capitalism, and Communism its successor, seem to me naturally to tend towards a final and stable society of this sort: a society wherein will be differentiated free men in control on the one hand and the mass of their slaves on the other. But side by side with this social condition of the future I imagine there will exist another social condition which shall have reacted towards the old Christian ideals and shall have produced a society the citizens of which shall be free, their property well divided and guaranteed by corporations or guilds and themselves, thus sufficiently controlling the means by which they live.

If such a division comes about I take it the two systems will, whether they occupy different areas or intermix within the same area, stand side by side as opposing religions have stood in the past.