

**SHADOW OR
SUBSTANCE: SOCIALISM
OR INDIVIDUALISM?**

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Shadow Or Substance: Socialism Or Individualism? by Wm. Preston Hill

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WM. PRESTON HILL

**SHADOW OR
SUBSTANCE: SOCIALISM
OR INDIVIDUALISM?**

Shadow or Substance

Socialism or Individualism?

A timely inquiry into: The effect of labor-saving machinery on production, the wages of labor, the distribution of wealth, and the source of the labor fund; together with a discussion as to the sagacity or short-sightedness of the individualist and collectivist points of view, and the wrong or right road to progress

By

DR. WM. PRESTON HILL



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*From my den
through
Silva Company
St Louis*

INTRODUCTION.

Social unrest and discontent among the masses of the people are very evident today among all the civilized nations of the world. Many competent observers have ascribed this to the great war, which unsettled the minds of multitudes of people and strengthened the tendency to violence and disorder.

But even before the war, there had been for many years a gradual increase of unrest among the workers of all civilized nations. This was due to a variety of causes, some of which date back to the great French Revolution.

That mighty upheaval was brought about by the intellectual movement of the eighteenth century which had slowly but surely undermined the faith of the masses of the people in revealed religion and in the divine right of kings and nobles. This process had been going on for several generations until it had completely sapped the foundations of the old feudal system and it needed only a spark to cause its overthrow.

These two beliefs were the moral foundation of the old regime which secured it unquestioning obedience on the part of the people and gave it that stability which comes only from the perfect harmony between social consciousness and political and economic systems.

We must clearly recognize the fact that ever since that great revolution which profoundly unsettled

the minds of men, that stability has not existed in our modern society and there has been a rising tide of democracy all over the world, and a constant agitation of new ideas of all kinds, good, bad, or indifferent, constructive or destructive, judicious or impracticable.

These ideas now find eager listeners among all the people. The tremendous development of power-driven machinery has concentrated large masses of industrial workers in cities. This has brought large numbers of them into daily contact with each other where they can discuss the problems of the day. It has increased their mental alertness, improved their education, facilitated their access to sources of information, enabled them to form effective unions and fraternal societies to protect their interests and increase their solidarity and, above all, has multiplied production many fold, which as a natural consequence has also greatly increased wages.

All these factors combined have considerably increased the social influence and political power of the masses of the people, but it has also filled them with new ambitions and new desires and has opened their ears to the whisperings of discontent and the grotesque flattery of demagogues.

Coincident with this, there has been a concentration of enormous wealth in the hands of a few and an increase in the class of the idle rich enjoying

unearned incomes who have not always used their good fortune with moderation, dignity, or good sense.

All this seems unfair to those whose shoulders bear the brunt of industry and who contribute real toil for the wages which they receive out of production.

It was easy therefore for agitators to point out that there are special privileges in our present economic system which discriminate against the producing masses and that the workers could by acting collectively abolish these and thereby increase their own prosperity. Also they could secure for themselves the full product of their labor by having the state controlled by them, own and operate all the means of production and distribution. This program is attractive and has considerably fanned the smoldering embers of discontent. It is a part of the thought in the background of much of our industrial warfare.

This presents a real danger today which cannot be lightly cast aside. It is extremely foolish for us to attempt to ignore these changed conditions. Judging from the widespread social unrest, our period must be regarded as one of change and it is inevitable that considerable readjustment must take place in our institutions before we reach that complete harmony between the social consciousness of our people and the established order, which is required to produce stability.

The question is, in what direction shall the readjustment take place? When we consider the tremendous importance of the issues at stake and the immense mass of human happiness or misery depending on a right solution of them, even the most careless thinker will perceive the necessity of not jumping at any hasty conclusion.

Every true man owes it to himself and his children to study this question without prejudice one way or the other and to get at the facts as near as possible. Arguments that are not sustained by the facts are mere rhetoric and amount to nothing whatever. We want the facts and in this treatise I have endeavored to present authentic facts and figures and to quote the references where they can be seen and let the reader form his own conclusions.

We have been too careless in the past in accepting plausible eloquence as the truth. This is a mistake.

It is easy enough to criticize the existing order of society; our institutions in actual operation on a large scale are before us and we have grown familiar with them and easily recognize defects which develop from time to time and which have to be corrected, to meet changing conditions.

But how to do this, presents a much more difficult problem. What direction shall the remedy take? Shall it be towards greater collectivism or towards greater freedom of individuality? In what direction do the interests of the working classes lie?

Can these defects be best eradicated by the complete overthrow of the present structure of society?

We must find out, first, whether the present system has such fundamental defects that it is unworkable without great detriment to the masses of the people. Second, we must find out whether we cannot remedy these defects by the procedure provided by the present system of government for such changes.

Third, we must know exactly what we are going to put into its place. We must thoroly satisfy ourselves that the new system has advantages which justify the change and is itself free from other defects perhaps just as bad.

In short, before overturning the present system we must test the new system with the facts available before us.

The history of revolutions in other countries and recently in Russia has convinced every thoughtful man that no matter how justified a revolution may be at the time, it is nevertheless a mighty convulsion and for the time being at least brings a whole nation face to face with appalling ruin and misery in which millions of people are sure to perish.

We cannot afford therefore in a matter of such tremendous consequences to make any mistake that can possibly be avoided by a careful examination of the facts beforehand.

Moreover, history has clearly demonstrated that until a fundamental change takes place in the minds

of the people, any progress can be no more than temporary and superficial and therefore a forcible revolution would prove to be not only premature but useless. Progress may seem too slow to suit many impatient minds, but to be permanent it has to be sustained by the public opinion of the great masses of a nation and this changes very slowly.

Moreover, we know by experience that in the long run, in spite of all obstacles, public opinion does prevail and the ideas of one age become the law of the next. Our present system of law is the outgrowth of the conception of right and justice which prevailed among our ancestors and there is no doubt whatever that the general ideas of equity of the present generation will become the law of the next.

It is a certainty, capable of demonstration, that if any considerable modification of the existing ideas of equity should take place among the people of a nation, it would only be a question of time until that change would be reflected in their laws. Our present system of law is the basis of the established order now, but the law of the future is even now being created in our very midst by the prevailing ideas which recommend themselves to the general mass of our people at present.

No matter how irrational, impracticable or inconsistent some of these ideas may seem to some of us, they are nevertheless a real force to be reckoned with and which may prove irresistible in the future.