

**LEADERS OF
SOCIALISM,
PAST AND PRESENT**

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Leaders of Socialism, Past and Present by G. R. S. Taylor

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G. R. S. TAYLOR

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LEADERS OF SOCIALISM

PAST AND PRESENT

I

ON LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP

IT is not very scientific to take notice of such unimportant things as political leaders and their ideas of leadership. They may be brilliantly attractive, glowingly eloquent, heroically audacious, or inexplicably clever; they may have thousands or hundreds of thousands of followers; they may appear of gigantic proportions in the pages of the popular historians. But when all is said that can be said for them, it does not amount to much, when they are drawn in due perspective against the background of the universal stage. The journalist, the novelist, the dramatist, the school child, may all have their ardent views of the powers and possibilities of the great man. The level-headed scientist can only see him as a mere speck on the horizon, or, if you prefer it another way, a bobbing cork in the river of history, floating with the stream, not guiding it. He is the sport of his circumstances, ordered

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here and there by world-impulses which he did not create, which he cannot disregard. But this miserable slave of destiny has his uses. Although he does not lead anybody, yet he is quite a convenient indicator, just to show which way the water is flowing. He is an intelligible summary of a vast movement which would go on without him, of course, but would not be easily understood if it were not compressed into the narrow limits of his petty individuality. Such is the use we propose to make of the great man in the following pages; a convenient summary of the various developments of the Socialist movement. No single one of these leaders expresses it with any completeness (perhaps Jean Jaurès does that more than any of the others), but together they give us a very good idea of the direction in which they are all being carried.

That is the rather ignominious scientific valuation of the great man. He has another side, however. He is a human being, even though a slave; he is entitled to his own little say, for what it is worth. Even Karl Marx does not get a fair hearing, if he appears only in the general history of Socialism. If any one could wave his arms above the current to the onlookers on the bank, one would suspect Mr. Bernard Shaw capable of doing it: yet, just consider the immanent danger there is that he will be put down by accident as "leader of the Fabian Society" or by some such ridiculously misleading description; when, as a matter of fact, he spends his life inventing (and believing) revolutionary thoughts

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which would scare the peaceful ladies and gentlemen of the Fabian Society beyond repair, if they only understood what he meant. Fancy connecting the creator of Andrew Undershaft, gunpowder maker, with a society whose most valiant ideal is to creep about Downing Street and Spring Gardens in rubber-soled boots, lest any one should get to hear of Socialism ; a Society whose perpetual nightmare is that the world may know that it has designs of any kind whatsoever. Mr. Shaw does not lead the Fabian Society—he is, on the contrary, perpetually giving it away ; it is one of his jokes which has not yet dawned on the members.

So, from motives of ordinary fair play, the individual must be allowed to stand by himself, quite apart from his clubs and associations and parties. In the narrow limits of these pages there is no space to look at each subject from all his sides, and it is the mark of the great man to have many sides. We have endeavoured to pick out the particular characteristic which was, or is, the peculiar mark of each one's leadership ; each one's contribution to the evolution of Socialist thought. Beyond their common acceptance of the main outline of Socialism, each one, it is suggested (and it will be the endeavour in these pages to prove the truth of the suggestion), advanced one further step ; or, rather, expressed clearly a new step which the movement had taken in its progress onwards. Thus, Lassalle and Keir Hardie express the need for political independence, while Jean Jaurès demonstrates the need for a further advance from this in-

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dependent position until the Socialist Party becomes interlocked with every subject of national or international life. Saint-Simon and Sidney Webb, in their very different ways, have insisted on the urgent need for precise scientific assistance and expert officials as the foundation of all government. Karl Marx expresses the great fact that Socialism is based on the dicta of Science ; and William Morris has shown that it is the inevitable basis of sound Art. And so on. No one of all these men has held the whole truth ; but the sum of all their leadership has brought us to the Socialism of to-day. As we have already said, Jean Jaurès more nearly expressed the whole than any one else : for he is the exponent of scientific thinking and of political action. He appreciates the need for the expert, and he feels the full force of the untrained democratic voice, and realizes its value. In politics he is always asserting the independence of Socialism ; but, with infinite skill, he is continually blending it with every phase of affairs. He always keeps open the door for each new group to join the Socialist Party as the time becomes ripe ; he keeps in close touch with Trade Unionism, and skilfully expounds what is good in the General Strike, yet never advises it. He is a brilliant fighter and yet the most cautious of generals. He is, in short, the biggest cork in the Socialist stream.

To avoid all possible misunderstanding, perhaps it is well to point out what all these men have in common, since it will be only their peculiar qualities which will be discussed under their individual names.