

**THE CONFLICT OF
OLIGARCHY
AND DEMOCRACY: SIX
LECTURES**

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The Conflict of Oligarchy and Democracy: Six Lectures by J. Allanson Picton

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J. ALLANSON PICTON

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SIX LECTURES

BY ^{James} J. ALLANSON PICTON, M.A., M.P.

[SECOND EDITION.]

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PREFACE.



ON various occasions, when taking part in discussions on Communism, I have found that in the popular mind there is a broad though vague distinction between that and Socialism. I am not aware of anything in the writings of the chief authorities on the subject to justify such a distinction; but in almost any Radical Club it will be found that discussion cannot conveniently be carried on without recognising it. When, for instance, it has fallen to my lot to urge that Socialism involves the suppression of all individual property, even in the form of tools or produce from labour, I have been told that this is not Socialism at all, but Communism, which my interlocutors did not profess to support. When, however, I have pressed for a farther development of the distinction, I have not been very successful in obtaining what I wanted. All I have been able to gather is that Socialism, according to this view, means a regard for the welfare of the community as a whole, and an

unhesitating vigour in repressing, not only privilege, but any inordinate exaltation of the fortune of individuals. The only principle discoverable in this vague kind of Socialism is the superiority of the general interest to all particular interests. This of course is a principle which no one of any school will be found to deny; and the only importance to be attached to the prevalence of this discursive talk about Socialism is the indication it affords of a profound conviction on the part of the many that the principle, though universally recognised, is not observed.

To those whose experience is similar the prevalent fears about the spread of Communistic doctrine must appear almost entirely groundless. Whatever may be the case on the continent of Europe, the so-called Socialists of our rising Democracy have for the most part no idea whatever of abolishing the institution of private property. But they insist very strongly that private property derives its original right from the just claim of a man to retain the produce of his own labour. They would admit indeed that this claim is necessarily limited by the fact that in most cases the labourer works upon raw materials which are not his own, but belong to some one else. Still they suspect that of the

increased value, given by labour to the raw material, too small a portion is retained by the labourer whose industry has created it; and they trace this wrong to institutions, laws, and customs, which tend to concentrate all the profits and advantages of our civilisation in the hands of a few. Therefore they attach great value to the utilitarian formula, "the greatest good of the greatest number"; and their Socialism consists merely in a desire to effect such constitutional and social changes as will bring us nearer to the utilitarian ideal.

But their notions about the changes necessary are very fluid and fluctuating. A considerable number of democrats are greatly taken with Mr. Henry George's doctrine of "land nationalisation"; but the meanings attributed to the phrase are very various. National communism in the use of all natural raw material suggests itself to some; and others have a dream about the possibility of throwing all accumulated capital into one common fund, to be used under some public authority for purposes of production. But it will usually be found that all through such speculations there runs the assumption that the individual labourer will keep intact his house and home, his furniture and tools, nay, his garden plot, and his savings.

The inconsistency between this assumption and the dreams to which I refer is not perceived; and when once it is realised that the destruction of private property in land-tenures, and still more the nationalisation of capital, involves the suppression of all private property whatever, refuge is taken in the convenient but indefinable distinction between Communism and Socialism.

It was with the hope of giving some help towards a better and more definite direction of these vague Socialistic aspirations, that the lectures here printed were delivered. The aspirations are right and good. It is impossible to deny that the complaints made by the many about the one-sidedness of our civilisation have been amply justified by history, and are still sustained by present experience. But if the grounds of those complaints are to be removed, the multitude must have an intelligent and a definite idea both of the origin of the disadvantages under which they labour, and also of the proper scope of the remedies suggested. In the following lectures I have endeavoured to trace the roots of oligarchy in our history. It is not so much the limitation of political power to a few that I have had in mind, but rather the excessive concentration of wealth, luxury,

and even comfort over a very limited area. I have endeavoured to illustrate both the power and the impotence of political reform; and have insisted upon the enormous and overwhelming importance of unrestricted education for the million. In the lectures on the Land Monopoly, and On the Distribution of Wealth, I have indicated two definite lines of reform by which reasonable comfort in life might be more equably diffused. And in a concluding lecture, while urging that popular character is necessarily the basis of popular happiness, I have given reasons for taking a hopeful and even sanguine view, not only of the material improvement, but of the moral elevation of the future democracy.

J. ALLANSON PICTON.

March, 1885.

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