

**GOVERNMENT
OWNERSHIP IN
PRODUCTION
AND DISTRIBUTION**

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Government Ownership in Production and Distribution by Walter Vrooman

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WALTER VROOMAN

**GOVERNMENT
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GOVERNMENT
OWNERSHIP

IN

Production and Distribution,

Being an account of 337 now existing National and
Municipal Undertakings in the 100 Principal
Countries of the World,

BY

WALTER VROOMAN.

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PREFACE.

As this is, so far as the writer knows, the first investigation of the kind, it would be unreasonable to hope it to be free from mistakes, or that it should tell the whole story. It will be found to fall far, very far, below a full statement of an enumeration of the now actually socialized institutions and enterprises of the various leading governments of the world.

But that a book is needed, such as the writer has tried to furnish, all reformers must agree who have come in contact with the surprising stupidity and ignorance displayed by many concerning the magnitude of existing concrete socialism.

An English aristocrat and high official of the British consular staff, in this country, whom I visited in the hope of securing data for the chapter on Great Britain in this book, in answer to my request for information concerning socialized businesses in his country, answered: "Be assured, my dear sir, that we have none of those things in H'ingland; we there believe in h'individualized h'enterprise. H'individualism is the basis of our h'institutions."

While this representative of the British government was thus assuring me that in "H'ingland" all business was conducted by "H'individuals," I had in my pocket a list of two hundred and sixty-nine enterprises, that in his country are owned and operated by the government, and the list was still incomplete.

Mr. Sidney Webb in his *Socialism in England* (p. 65) says: "The 'practical man,' oblivious or contemptuous of any theory of the Social Organism or general principles of social organization, has been forced by the necessities of time, into an ever deepening collectivist channel. Socialism, of course, he rejects and despises. The Individualist City Councillor will walk along the municipal pavement, lit by municipal gas and cleaned by municipal brooms, with municipal water, and seeing by the municipal clock in the municipal market, that he is too early to meet his

children coming from the municipal school hard by the county lunatic asylum and municipal hospital, will use the national telegraph system to tell them not to walk through the municipal park, but to come by the municipal tramway, to meet him in the municipal reading room, by the municipal art gallery, museum and library, where he intends to consult some of the national publications, in order to prepare his next speech in the municipal town-hall, in favor of the nationalization of canals and the increase of the government control over the railway system. 'Socialism, sir,' he will say, 'don't waste the time of a practical man by your fantastic absurdities. Self-help, sir, individual self-help, that's what's made our city what it is.'" (11)

INTRODUCTION.

The purpose of this book is to combat the principle of paternal government and to prove that the tendency of society in both civilized and uncivilized countries is toward fraternal government. Progress consists in rescuing human affairs from the domain of chance and making them subservient to law. When in primitive times, the strong man with a club, who has used it too freely upon his fellows, is overcome by the many weaker members of his tribe; then, the general interests begin their long conflict against unrestrained individual caprice. The history of this struggle is the history of the development of civilization.

With primitive man duty extends only to members of a single tribe. To murder a fellow tribesman or steal his food is contrary to the law of the tribe, the only law that exists. But all outside the tribe are enemies. To kill and rob them conflicts with no moral obligation because as yet obligation exists only in the tribe. Then larger tribes destroy smaller ones or absorb them. Those that absorb soon gain an advantage over those who simply destroy and where the habitat is capable of supporting a dense population, leaving some of the energies of the people free from the struggle for food to follow the line of natural development, nations are formed. The dominion of law is thus extended so that it not only restrains men from capriciously destroying one another inside small groups leaving them free to kill and rob outside, but it makes it possible for commerce and friendly social intercourse to become permanently established and regulated between people speaking various dialects and

having different domestic habits. In the small tribe, the chief and warriors were so intimately bound together in all their relations of life by their common poverty and common dangers that although tyranny was often exercised, they had one common feeling and interest. But when nations developed and wealth became more plentiful, the rulers began to form castes and separate themselves from their subjects; and as personal sympathy and fellow-feeling between rulers and ruled lessened, the temptation increased for those in power to override the rights of their subjects, in seeking to gratify their personal appetites and ambitions. Then came the long struggle between despotism and democracy, between the rulers of society, who in the gratification of their desires wish to be above all law or to be a law unto themselves, and the people who wish to limit the power of their rulers by constitutions, parliaments, legislatures and the other safeguards of representative government. After thousands of years of struggle and education, the people of the leading nations of the world have become victorious to a greater or less extent, and the liberties of kings, emperors and presidents, of generals and political tax-gatherers, are limited by certain well-defined regulations, confined to paper and clung to tenaciously by the people; that is, the political chiefs of the world have been brought under the dominion of law. But during the great industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, new forms of warfare have in a large measure superseded the old and a new species of ruler, autocrat, general and president have come into existence, whose gigantic powers over their fellow-men somewhat resemble the powers of the primitive kings. These have the power of sacrificing their fellows to their own caprice, that is, they have not yet been subdued and brought under the dominion of law. They are our industrial captains, our commercial autocrats, our corporation presidents. Just when poor suffering humanity after thousands of years of struggle against oppression had succeeded in evolving

laws capable of protecting their liberties against the caprice of political rulers, this new variety of despot makes his appearance, and, although leaving the people still free in name, and without openly destroying their written constitutions and codes, gains mastery of the food supply, and, by controlling the peoples' means of life, institutes a new form of slavery which again reduces them to the helpless condition of a thousand years ago. But the old conflict between law and anarchy, between the general interest and unrestrained individual greed, has started again with vigor. And as is proved in the following pages, the movement which aims to subdue these modern lawless economic rulers, industrial captains, and kings of commerce, has not only made great progress in the way of getting theoretical converts, but in the hundred principal nations of the world has gained a multitude of practical victories. That new paternal government created by the changed industrial and social conditions of this century, which in reality rules the world and plays the part of bad father to all the peoples, was more quick than the common people to discover the advantages to be gained from using existing political institutions as means toward accomplishing their purposes. And so by careful manipulation, this real yet secret government, the centralized money power, has taken possession of those political institutions which the people through centuries of suffering and struggle had built up for their own protection. During the past few years our great political governments have become simple departments of this new power. Our written laws and constitutions are defied by the members of its royal family, but enforced with unmitigated vigor by them upon their enemies. Our written laws and mandates of courts have become a one-edged sword terrible to those outside, but blunt to those inside the magic circle. But although this reign of anarchy, that is, the rule of the individual caprice of the few over the rights of the many, has been partially established, although the citadels of law and