

POPULIST PRINCIPLES APPLIED

Socialist Principles Distinguished—Radical Difference Pointed Out—Majority Rule the Vital Issue

Editor Independent: In my letter of last week, I outlined the developments in the majority rule program, showing how the people's party in state and nation, even though its membership is nominal only, can secure constitutional amendments from the legislatures elected this year, and next year can insure the installation of majority rule in national affairs.

Furthermore, the people's party platform conforms to the principles of progress, while the socialist platform is out of line. It follows that there is urgent need for the continued existence of the people's party, either under its present name or a term that will be more satisfactory to the liberal hosts that will be looking for a home should the next democratic national convention be controlled by the reactionists.

The fundamental difference between the people's party platform and the socialist platform is that the one is the natural evolution of free institutions while the other is a product of a people who have never lived under free institutions. Permit me to emphasize this point.

The English and American people have inherited and live under free institutions. The people are the source of political power.

In Germany the opposite system prevails. "German science declares authoritatively for the prince, whose will it considers the highest in the state, which latter is itself sovereign." It is patent that in Germany the people are not the source of power. Germany has not reached the stage of free institutions. The few rule the many in all things. Practically everything is determined by officials—rulers are divine appointed or elected.

Necessarily the future of society as viewed by German students and American scholars is vastly different. The American sees the people of today in power theoretically, and he observes a tendency to an effective majority rule, and experience shows that under majority rule certain kinds of legislation prevail, namely, a tendency to abolish the legal advantages of the few and in other ways the weak and helpless are protected, yet not to an extent that interferes with social efficiency. There is religious liberty also, free speech and voluntary association. These are the results of the sovereignty of the people—the products of free institutions. But as yet these principles are absent in the German state.

This fundamental difference and its effect on German thought is pointed out by the political scientists of England, Switzerland and America. Prof. Borgeaud of Switzerland in a prize thesis awarded by the law faculty of Paris in 1893, "Adoption and Amendment of Constitution in Europe and America," says in the concluding chapter of the history of the American constitutional system:

"The sovereign people itself establishes its constitution. . . . Except in case of urgent necessity, justified by one of those revolutionary crises in which force necessarily has precedence over law, no convention in America would dare arrogate to itself the sovereignty of the people, the exercise of which belongs to the electors, and to them alone."

This view, Prof. Borgeaud points out is disputed by Prof. von Holst, "whose remarkable works on the United States have brought him fame on both sides of the Atlantic." The German professor's criticism is directed at Judge Jameson's work on Constitutional Conventions, and the judge's reply is that the von Holst theory would make the constitutional convention the master and the people its slaves. This is quoted by the Swiss professor and he follows it with Jameson's comment:

"That he (Prof. von Holst) failed in some respects properly to appreciate those (American) institutions ought not to be deemed remarkable, when it is remembered that, before him, De Tocqueville also failed. That my critic must have failed, that his brief sojourn among us could not have fitted him to dogmatize in regard to the practical operation of the constitutional convention—a perfectly unique institution—seems to be certain, if the judgment pronounced by one of the most learned English historians, Mr. E. A. Freeman, is to be taken as sound. In a recent work that writer says: 'A Swiss or a Norwegian may judge of the workings of free institutions, because he, like the Englishman, has daily experience in his own land. But these things are mysterious to German professors, because they are mysterious to German statesmen also.

The German scholar simply reads in a book of things which we are always looking at and acting in. He therefore utterly fails to understand many things at Athens or Rome or anywhere else, which come to us like our A. B. C.' After referring to Ranke and Curtius, as illustrating this general defect, he closes a high eulogium upon Mommsen with this statement of the points in which he fails as a historian: 'What is lacking in him (Mommsen) is political and moral insight which is born with a man, the political insight which is gained only by living in communities of freemen.' (Freeman's Methods of Historical Study, pp. 289-291.) Where Curtius and Ranke and Mommsen failed to estimate correctly the simple and ordinary machinery of free communities, it can hardly be deemed remarkable, as we have said, that von Holst should have misapprehended the novel and peculiar institution presented him for study among us." (Jameson on Conventions, p. 658.)

This is the American, English, and Swiss view of the criticism of the Germans when they venture an opinion concerning free institutions or their product. If so strong a case is made out against the German historians, how much stronger must the criticism be of German thought which attempts to deal in futures—forecast the political and social institutions? The German socialist's forecast is utterly vitiated by his surroundings. The tendency of the universe is away from the German political system and toward the sovereignty of the people, and as the ideal commonwealth will be controlled by the sovereign people it follows that the present-day German concept of the ideal state is almost sure to be erroneous. For example, the German concept usually excludes voluntary association. Voluntary association is the bed-rock of our liberties. It follows that the German idea of industrial organization is erroneous. Self-government will prevail, which always results in liberty—liberty to work where one may choose and live where one may choose, and in such manner as one may choose provided he does not infringe the rules laid down by society for the promotion of the general welfare.

This and other principles of liberty, which result from the sovereignty of the people, are the basis of the English and American system of society, but are unknown in Germany, Russia, China, and many other countries. It is impossible, therefore, that the German socialists can have forecasted the state of society which the American and English people are to develop.

Scanning the views of American socialists we find one faction fighting against the adoption of majority rule—the referendum and initiative. Mr. A. M. Simons, editor of the International Socialist Review, is of this school. Another portion of the socialist party base their philosophy on the sovereignty of the people. Mr. Wilshire is of this school. Mr. Wilshire has worked and is working for the real sovereignty of the people, whereas Mr. Simons and his co-workers are laboring for the sovereignty of the socialist party—the rule of the few. The highest conception which Simons and his comrades have is party government, whereas the American school of thought stands for enlightened majority rule, which, when it is established, will as unerringly root out legal privilege as gravitation brings down the apple.

This leads to another fundamental distinction. Americans aim to abolish legal privilege (private monopoly), and this has been the demand in England and America for the past three hundred years. The German socialists aim to abolish private capital, having no adequate conception of free institution and the great corollary, "equal rights to all, special privileges to none." The American remedy is to abolish private monopoly. Private monopoly is the crying evil of the day and is tending to produce a serious depression, yet the aim of the socialist party is the immediate public ownership of not only the monopolies, but of all the means of production and distribution. The reason assigned is that competition has been and is the cause of industrial depression, and therefore to remove these depressions it is necessary to terminate competition between organizations within each industry. This is refuted by the history of the "quantity theory," also by the fact that today the evil is private monopoly, while the "surplus value" theory is refuted in detail by Prof. Bohm Bawerk.

A more detailed statement of the American principles of social progress, and which underly both the political parties of America, and which, when applied, may lead to a co-operative commonwealth, is as follows:

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therefore they have the right to alter their system of government at will.

The final enactment of constitutions is by direct vote—majority rule. The system of voting is termed the referendum.

Statutory laws are also enacted by a majority rule system, but woefully crude: Each political party enumerates a series of legislative measures, pledging that if agreed to by a majority of the voters, the party will carry out the people's will. All politicians since the disintegration of the federalist party in national affairs in 1817 have stood for the doctrine of majority rule.

Majority rule, then, is a fundamental principle in both the great parties. An improved form is obtained by adding to the representative system a people's veto (through the optional referendum) and direct initiative.

THE RESULT OF MAJORITY RULE.

The aim, under majority rule, is:

1. To secure equal rights to all. The result of this will ultimately be (a) the ownership of monopolies by a public corporation—a corporation in which each adult casts one vote; (b) equal opportunity to serve the public—competition in the public service.

2. The second great aim is to protect the weak up to the point where to go farther would interfere with the efficiency of the service to the public.

These are the main features of legislative policy under majority rule.

In applying these principles, we find a tendency to a development of monopolies in transportation and all other means of communication, also a tendency in manufactures and trade. As rapidly as monopoly develops it will be necessary, of course, to change the ownership of the monopoly from a private corporation to a public one.

Furthermore, there is a tendency to abolish private profits in the liquor traffic in great cities, as a means toward its complete eradication.

And as competition between organizations within an industry entails much waste and a low grade form of competition, the tendency, under the effective business organization of majority rule will be to establish legal monopolies as rapidly as the cut-throat stage of competition is reached. And when the majority rule system is fully developed we can conceive that it will be likely that legal monopolies will be decreed before the cut-throat stage of competition is reached.

As to the land, its value apart from improvements is due to the presence of society, therefore the application of equal rights will result in the eventual ownership of the land by a corporation in which each of the adults will own a share of stock. This will increase the income of all workers, for under private ownership the product of the poorest land in cultivation is the average wage, which will be greatly increased when rental values are applied to the payment of public service corporations, such as the school, etc.

Furthermore, majority rule tends to develop co-operation, namely, that form of mutual helpfulness in which the corporation is composed of voluntary associates.

In the course of years it may be that there will be developed a co-operative commonwealth. But in reaching it, if we do, the aim each year will not be

to develop such a system, but to preserve equal rights in the changing conditions and protect the weaker members of society. This is the legislative compass of the scientist, and of democracy. Whether or not the Creator designs a monopoly in this or that industry is no concern of the framers of human laws. Their duty is to apply the principles of liberty and brotherhood to the ever-changing conditions which the Creator provides. In other words, the Creator changes the conditions, and it is the duty of the legislators to meet these changing conditions with laws that preserve equal rights and duly protect all.

The socialist party leaders, such as Mr. Simons, have a different conception of the principles of progress.

Such of the legislative nominees of the republican and democratic parties as pledge to immediately install an effective majority rule will help to install a system that will immediately result in the termination of private monopolies and in progress in scores of other directions. The system of government will be radically changed. It will be the twentieth century revolution.

The people's party can force the adoption of this great change. It has only to declare for majority rule and that it will nominate legislative candidates wherever both the old-line candidates refuse to pledge for majority rule. Success can be secured, doubtless, without the nomination of a populist candidate.

Ten states are to elect legislatures this year: Ohio, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Mississippi. The Kentucky populists have ordered their state convention for July 4 and doubtless will force the fight along the lines above described. They almost won out on these lines two years ago.

Let the populists in the other nine states call conventions or conferences. Don't mind if the attendance is small. Secure expressions of opinion by letter. Our strength lies in our program. Last year a majority in seven legislatures were carried by organized labor and referendum leagues and the Washington state grange merely by questioning candidates. One or two men in a state did practically all the work. Let the people's party join in the work and stand ready to put up legislative candidates. The chairman or secretary can do all the work and at slight expense.

The people's party has before it an opportunity for great usefulness. It should enunciate the platform that is to prevail and then should help to complete the installation of majority rule, which will be the greatest change the world has ever experienced.

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