

INDIA'S ROAD TO SOCIALISM

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FOREWORD.

Amidst the grave contradictions and the conflicting ideologies that face us to-day in national and international affairs, there is one outstanding fact that challenges our attention. That fact is the ushering in of socialism into world polity. Feared as a bogey, hunted after as a mirage, suspected as subversive doctrine, suppressed as sedition, it is gradually emerging as the only way out of the mess that humanity has made of its affairs. It has become the fashion, not merely for doctrinaire theorists and agitators out for mischief but for conservative statesmen and responsible administrators as well, to call in the aid of socialism to solve the problems that confront them. Indeed it is an amusing feature of our times that opposing systems and rival schools of thought claim allegiance to the socialist doctrine and seek to justify their practices in the light of the socialist philosophy. Britain, ruled by the most blue-blooded of Imperialisms claims, in effect, to have built up an administration, the most socialistic in the whole world! German Nazism and Russian Bolshevism engaged in a death struggle for the ideological conquest of the earth, alike claim descent from the great masters who propounded the socialist theory and mouth identical slogans in regard to the welfare of the proletariat, the destruction of the bourgeoisie, etc. In the midst of

a devastating war, Parliaments as well as Dictators rush to nationalise Industry, control the prices, regulate the wages, curtail the profits, put down the money-changers, and adopt other measures which would inevitably lead to a socialist economy.

How shall we explain this curious phenomenon? How shall we reconcile its contradictory and rather amusing features? The truth seems to be that the world is in growing pains. The institutions and the traditions that humanity set up during its childhood to meet the primitive conditions of its existence on this planet seem no longer to satisfy the needs of our times. The old forms are breaking down. Men are tired of the bejewelled monarch who pretends to protect his subjects by might of his mien. People have lost faith in the shining altar at the Temple beckoning to a life of glory beyond Death. The patriarchal family can no longer satisfy the fast multiplying needs of the individual. The feudal virtues fall short of the cravings of the modern man. Faith in a merciful God, loyalty to a protecting king, obedience to the wise headman of the family—these were good enough in those days when man was at the mercy of Nature and his needs and aspirations were necessarily limited. But now, science has given man such an ascendancy over Nature that his powers and his needs have grown beyond his wildest dreams. He finds a vast empire open out before him and await his advent. He is impatient to rush forward and to conquer. But he is held back by

the chains which he himself forged in the past. He is made to render homage to God, king and father, dolls which satisfied his cravings during his childhood. But he is now grown up, he is adolescent and is filled with new passions and new ambitions. He protests against these ancient restrictions. He wants to go forward, to break with the past.

This conflict has been to some extent solved in the realm of religion in India, though unfortunately the solution has not been widely adopted. Indians who took to religious reflection earlier than other nations, soon discovered that the ancient notion of a fatherly God, sitting high above in the Heavens, and dispensing justice to erring mortals was strangely inconsistent. The urge to a better and a fuller life could not come from without, as an act of grace from someone else but it could come only from within, from a better understanding of one's own being and from a greater effort to be true to oneself. "*Aham Brahma Asmi*," God is within me—I am God. This is revolutionary doctrine and like many revolutions it was suppressed by a hypocritical leadership that erected a barrier so as to prevent its reaching the masses. The *mantra* was made available only to the initiated, the esoteric. The exoteric, the multitude, were outside the pale of its beneficence.

What the Vedanta achieved for religion in India, the doctrine of Democracy achieved for

politics in Europe. The western nations soon made the discovery that the idea of a King whose arms were mighty enough to protect the inhabitants of a whole country, was rather absurd. The people should combine among themselves to fight for their safety and their rights. The country should be ruled not by an individual king but by the organised will of the people. This solution again was revolutionary and, in its turn, was sought to be thwarted by the erection of racial barriers. The theory was propounded that the white races, the chosen people of God, were the true inheritors of Democracy while the coloured peoples of the earth had to be subjugated and ruled by their betters.

Socialism is the attempt to find a remedy in the sphere of economics for the growing pains of humanity. It points out that the patriarchal chief, the feudal lord, the capitalist boss have had their day. They were no doubt needed in their times and played their part well. But to-day the individual must become his own chief, the peasant his own lord and the worker his own boss. Industry must become democratised. The doctrine of "*Aham Brahma Asmi*" must be applied to the region of economics. Socialism is therefore revolutionary thought but it is well to remember that it is not more of a revolution than Vedanta or Democracy. Much of the fear and the prejudice against Socialism is born of the ignorance of its true import. Peace and ordered progress can be

maintained side by side with the adoption of socialist measures. Indeed it is becoming apparent to most Governments in the world that the only effective means of preserving law and order is the rapid building up of a socialist economy within their frontiers.

Again the attempt is being made to defeat the revolution, now in the economic sphere, by the erection of doctrinal tariff walls. Socialism is said to be the monopoly of the industrially advanced nations. Peasant civilisations dependent upon cottage industries must have a long wait and pass through their travails of feudalism and capitalism before they can be admitted to the society of the elites of the earth, the socialists. This is the greatest danger to India to-day and Sri K. Santhanam has made an earnest endeavour to study this danger and give us timely warning. At a time when there is so much of socialist slogan-mongering and so little of constructive thought, it is a relief to peruse this book which goes down to fundamentals, while, at the same time, keeping clear of the danger of dogmatising.

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India's Road to Socialism

PART 1

BASIC IDEAS AND ASSUMPTIONS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The most important political and psychological development in India during the present decade is the rapid and to some people alarming spread of Socialist ideas. This is no doubt true of most countries of the world. It is due primarily to two causes. The rapid development of Socialist economy in Soviet Russia and the necessity of economic planning to escape from the economic collapse in most capitalist countries brought about by the great depression with which this decade started, cleared the ground for the propagation of the new gospel from a new vantage ground. The very steps taken by the principal capitalist countries like the United States of America, Britain and France, helped the advocates of socialism. Huge public works, currency control, state assistance to housing and

shipping, unemployment relief and other devices of capitalism served to emphasise the superiority of planning to the old doctrine of *laissez faire*.

It may be admitted that the industrial countries have to a large extent recovered from the great depression but two ugly factors have contributed to this recovery. The countries which still exist on primitive economy have been forced to reduce their standard of life which was already deplorably low, as the prices of primary commodities have been depressed to a greater extent than those of manufactured goods. Part of the recovery was due to furious rearmament which has introduced the dilemma of war or economic breakdown. It is not realised to what an extent rearmament has proved to be a substitute for socialist planning. There is no limit to the quantity of armament which a country can possess. As every kind of military equipment becomes obsolete in a few years owing to technical improvements, rearmament is a perpetual process. Not being articles of individual consumption and therefore, not limited by individual purchasing capacities of the people, it is not bound by the law of demand and supply which controls the supply of other articles in a capitalist economy. Such rearmament is obviously limited by national resources but States can mortgage the future of their countries to a far greater extent than individuals.

Disinterested thinkers of the capitalist countries have been deeply perturbed by both these factors. In the long run the prosperity of the industrial countries depends on the purchasing power of the agricultural countries which form the markets for the manufactured goods. Continued rearmament on a large scale is bound to produce a grave distortion in the national economy of every country engaged in it. The disastrous war which has now broken out is bound to strike another dangerous blow at capitalism whoever may be the victor and even if the war ends in a stalemate. Socialism will appear more than ever as the only way out of the present tangle.

It is not the purpose of this book to discuss the international aspects of socialism. It is obvious that international events will have their profound effects on this country in every direction. Socialism is not a plan or a doctrine for any country. Its basic ideas are applicable to all countries. But no special effort is needed to expound them. The difficulty in India is rather that no attempt is made by Indian thinkers and leaders to go beyond these general ideas and relate them to the objective factors which are bound to govern the development in India in any case. It is not intended in this book to produce a detailed plan of socialist reconstruction of India. Its purpose is rather to define and discuss the features which are special to India in any such reconstruction.

The vital difference between physical and social sciences is that in the case of the latter no calm and disinterested experiment is possible. *A priori* ideas and prejudices play and have to play a dominant part. It is not possible to change the distribution of wealth or political power within a country or between different countries without inviting passions and conflicts which are not conducive to calm reflection. It is nevertheless as true in the social sciences as in physics or chemistry that only actual experience can establish the truth. Ideas and principles can only formulate hypotheses to be put to the proof of actual experiment. It may be admitted that human values change far more rapidly than physical phenomena though even the latter do not appear to be as immutable as they were once believed to be. Still the rate of change of human needs, desires and instincts is not so great as to make scientific thinking or action based on such thinking impossible or useless. Only, such thinking and action have not the same validity as the laws of the physical sciences or the permanence of the mechanical inventions based on such laws. While it is undeniable that a system based on free individual action impelled by the profit motive results in grave inequalities, gross injustices and recurring economic and political crises, it is no less true that the socialist plan is still in the nature of a hypothesis. It is not any fault of socialism. Every new system must start in the form of a hypothesis, at first grotesque

and unbelievable, next a subject matter of discussion and finally as a courageous experiment in the face of dialectical opponents and prophets of disaster.

At the same time, it is flatly contradictory to the claim of scientific approach made by socialists either to believe that socialist principles have *a priori* validity or that they would not require continual modification and limitation in the light of actual experience. Unscientific use is made of the great Russian experiment both by its opponents and its panegyrists. The leaders of Russia have proved themselves to be wise opportunists within the general plan of socialism. But they cannot as yet be declared to have proved that it is the only or even the best plan under modern conditions. Their wonderful five-year plans and their substantial fulfilment merely warrant the hope that full proof may be forthcoming before long. It may, however, not be so near as some in their enthusiasm fondly believe. Recent Soviet diplomacy has shown that socialist leaders are not proof against the temptations of power politics. They have yet to demonstrate that they have found the means to eliminate the corruption and inefficiency of bureaucratic management while maintaining its stability and security.

In propaganda, it is inevitable that socialism should be represented as a single definite plan of social reconstruction based upon a few immutable

principles of absolute and universal application. It is not possible to evoke the enthusiasm of the masses to new courses without making them believe that the millennium is at hand. This naturally provokes fantastic and exaggerated descriptions of the possible evil consequences of the adoption of socialism on the part of the defenders of the existing scheme of things. This tug-of-war is inevitable in every social process. But no lasting benefit can be achieved for mankind through fanaticism. Those who are earnest about the evolution of a new order based upon the socialistic outlook can do no greater service to the cause than by obtaining a clear and reasoned comprehension of the main elements of that order. The capitalist order has infinite variations. It has produced not only the Imperialist Democracies of Britain and France with their high general standards of life side by side with exploitation of the poorest peoples on earth kept at the margin of starvation but also the impressive spectacle of the U. S. A. with its almost self-sufficient economy and the well-distributed and contented prosperity of Sweden and Denmark. It is no less certain that the socialist order also will have infinite variations according to the circumstances and resources of the countries adopting it. Between extreme individualist capitalism, which has disappeared for ever, never to return, and complete communism which may never come into existence within any period we may contemplate, there are an

infinite number of positions. Nor will it happen that any country will continue to occupy any one position for long or that the dynamic changes of different countries will be exactly parallel. This book is chiefly intended to indicate the directions in which India would have to go in conformity with her objective conditions, ancient traditions and the present impulses and ideals animating her millions.

There is bound to be a close connection between the means and ends. Though they may start with the same goal in view, the actual achievement will vary with the method adopted. Socialism imposed through a violent revolution must differ widely from that reached through constitutional methods. Those who imagine that there is only one road to Socialism suffer from a morbid obsession of the futility of rational persuasion and an exaggerated faith in forcible methods. It is at least a necessary and profitable undertaking for Indians to investigate whether this country cannot hope to achieve its new order through generally non-violent methods and, if such a thing were possible, to try to have as concrete and clear a picture as possible of the process and the result.

These will be the main topics discussed in this book. But, before embarking on them two questions have to be answered. Cannot India advance on the road of capitalism and arrive at a result obtained

by some of the smaller nations of Europe like Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and Holland? Would it not be better to preserve for our rural population their primitive economy as far as possible and save them from the evils of complicated and regimented systems which both capitalism and socialism involve? The Indian socialist answers both questions in the negative. But, he relies largely on general *a priori* arguments which have no particular relation to Indian conditions. In the next few chapters an attempt will be made to discuss these two questions without any prejudices born of abstract theoretical belief.

CHAPTER II

WHY NOT CAPITALISM?

The general evils of capitalist economy are too well-known to require detailed description. Grave inequalities in wealth and income, recurring trade cycles of boom and depression, struggle for markets and the exploitation of undeveloped peoples, and Imperialism are all its unsavoury fruits on the material plane. Nor are its fruits on the moral plane any better. Character, intelligence and ability are rigidly subordinated to wealth obtained by hook or by crook; greed is installed as the greatest of all virtues; uncertainty for mere physical existence and the fear of seeing one's wife and children in distress corrodes the joy of life; little and valueless objects called property imprison the infinite longings of the human soul.

This is, however, only one side of the picture. In the short period of a single century, capitalism has brought about an immeasurable increase in the wealth, knowledge and power of many countries. A few facts about the United States will be sufficient to indicate the immensity of the changes effected. In 1936, the average family income in the U. S. A. was estimated to be 2,200 dollars or about Rs. 600 per month at the present rate of exchange.