

THE INTELLIGENT WOMAN'S GUIDE
TO SOCIALISM AND CAPITALISM

THE INTELLIGENT WOMAN'S GUIDE
TO SOCIALISM AND CAPITALISM
BY BERNARD SHAW



BRENTANO'S PUBLISHERS NEW YORK
1928

COPYRIGHT, 1928, BY BRENTANO'S INC.

First printing, June, 1928
Second printing, July, 1928

PRINTED AND BOUND BY J. J. LITTLE & IVES CO., NEW YORK, U. S. A.

TO
MY SISTER-IN-LAW

MARY STEWART CHOLMONDELY

THE INTELLIGENT WOMAN TO WHOSE QUESTION
THIS BOOK IS THE BEST ANSWER I CAN MAKE

A FOREWORD FOR AMERICAN READERS

I have never been in America; therefore I am free from the delusion, commonly entertained by the people who happen to have been born there, that they know all about it, and that America is their country in the same sense that Ireland is my country by birth, and England my country by adoption and conquest. You, dear madam, are an American in the sense that I am a European, except that the American States have a language in common and are federated, and the European states are still on the tower of Babel and are separated by tariff fortifications. When I hear people asking why America does not join the League of Nations I have to point out to them that America is a League of Nations, and sealed the covenant of her solidity as such by her blood more than sixty years ago, whereas the affair at Geneva is not a League of Nations at all, but only a so far unsuccessful attempt to coax Europe to form one at the suggestion of a late American President, with the result that the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs makes occasional trips to Geneva, and, on returning, reassures the British House of Commons by declaring that in spite of all Woodrow-Wilsonian temptations to combine with other nations he remains an Englishman first, last, and all the time; that the British Empire comes before everything with him; and that it is on this understanding and this alone that he consents to discuss with foreigners any little matters in which he can oblige them without detriment to the said reserved interests. And this attitude seems to us in England so natural, so obvious, so completely a matter of course, that the newspapers discuss the details of Mr Chamberlain's report of his trip without a word about the patriotic exordium which reduces England's membership of the League to absurdity.

Now your disadvantage in belonging to a league of nations instead of to a nation is that if you belong to New York or Massachusetts, and know anything beyond the two mile radius of which you are the centre, you probably know much more of England, France, and Italy than you do of Texas or Arizona, though you are expected, as an American, to know all about America. Yet I never met an American who knew anything about America ex-

cept the bits she had actually set eyes on or felt with her boots; and even of that she could hardly see the wood for the trees. By comparison I may be said to know almost all about America. I am far enough off to get a good general view, and, never having assumed, as the natives do, that a knowledge of America is my intuitional birthright, I have made enquiries, read books, availed myself of the fact that I seem to be personally an irresistible magnet for every wandering American, and even gathered something from the recklessly confidential letters which every American lady who has done anything unconventional feels obliged to write me as a testimony to the ruinous efficacy of my books and plays. I could and should have drawn all the instances in this book from American life were it not that America is such a fool's paradise that no American would have believed a word of them, and I should have been held up, in exact proportion to my accuracy and actuality, as a grossly ignorant and prejudiced Britisher, defaming the happy West as ludicrously as the capitalist West defames Russia. What I tell you of England you will believe. What I could tell you of America might provoke you to call on me with a gun. Also it would lead you to class me as a bitter enemy to America, whereas I assure you that though I do not adore your country with the passion professed by English visitors at public banquets when you have overwhelmed them with your reckless hospitality, I give it a good deal of my best attention as a very interesting if still very doubtful experiment in civilization.

But this much I will permit myself to say. Do not imagine that because at this moment certain classes of American workmen are buying bathtubs and Ford cars, and investing in building societies and the like the money that they formerly spent in the saloons, that America is doing as well as can be expected. If you were at this moment a miner's wife in South Wales you would be half starving; but the wife of a Colorado miner might think you very lucky in having nothing more violent than half starving to endure. The sweated women workers in the tenements of your big cities are told that in America anyone can make a fortune who wants to. Here we spare them that mockery, at least. You must take it from me, without driving me to comparisons that between na-
viii

A FOREWORD FOR AMERICAN READERS

tions wound as personalities do between individuals, that Capitalism is the same everywhere, and that if you look for its evils at home you will miss nothing of them except perhaps some of the socialistic defences which European States have been forced to set up against their worst extremities.

In truth it is odd that this book should not have been written by an American. Its thesis is the hopelessness of our attempts to build up a stable civilization with units of unequal income; and it was in America that this inequality first became monstrous not only in money but in its complete and avowed dissociation from character, rank, and the public responsibility traditionally attached to rank. On the eastern shores of the Atlantic the money makers formed a middle class between the proletariat, or manual working class, and the aristocracy, or governing class. Thus labor was provided for; business was provided for; and government was provided for; and it was possible to allow and even encourage the middle class to make money without regard to public interests, as these were the business of the aristocracy.

In America, however, the aristocracy was abolished; and the only controlling and directing force left was business, with nothing to restrain it in its pursuit of money except the business necessity for maintaining property in land and capital and enforcing contracts, the business prudence which perceives that it would be ruinous to kill outright the proletarian goose that lays the golden eggs, and the fear of insurrection. There was no longer a king and an aristocratic governing class to say to the tradesman "Never mind the public interest: that is our business: yours is to get as rich as you can, incidentally giving employment to the proletariat and increasing our rent rolls". All that remained was the tradition of unscrupulous irresponsibility in business; and when the American millionaires first began to astonish Europe with their wealth it was possible for the most notorious of them, in the course of an enquiry into the proceedings of a Trust with which he was connected, to reply to a criticism as to the effect of his business policy on the public with a simple "Damn the public!". Had he been a middle class man in a country where there was a governing class outside and above business, or a monarch

with a council in the same position, or even a State Church, his answer would have been entirely in order apart from its verbal profanity. Duly bowdlerized it would have run "I am a man of business, not a ruler and a lawgiver. The public interest is not my job: I do not presume to meddle with it. My sole function is to make as much money as I can". Queen Elizabeth would have applauded such an attitude as socially sound and highly becoming: nothing angered her more than presumptuous attempts on the part of common persons to concern themselves with *her* business of high politics.

When America got rid of monarchs and prelates and popes and British cabinets and the like, and plunged into the grand republican experiment which has become the rule instead of the exception in Europe since the war swept all the emperors into the dustbin of history, she raised the middle classes to the top of the social structure and thus delivered its civilization into their hands without ennobling their traditions. Naturally they raced for money, for more money, and still more money, and damned the public when they were not doping it with advertisements which were by tacit agreement exempted from the law against obtaining money by false pretences or practising medicine without qualifications. It is true that they were forced to govern as well by the impossibility of maintaining civilization without government; but their government was limited and corrupted by their principle of letting nothing stand in the way of their getting rich quickly. And the ablest of them at that game (which has no attraction for the ability that plays the higher games by which finally civilization must live) soon became rich at a rate that made the European middle classes envious. In my youth I heard little of great men arising in America—not that America did not produce them, but that her money masters were more apt to persecute than to advertize them—but I heard much of the great fortunes that were being made there. Vanderbilt, Jay Gould, Carnegie, Rockefeller became famous by bringing our civilization to the point to which Crassus and the other millionaire contemporaries of Sulla and Julius Cæsar brought the civilization of ancient republican Rome just before it set up Emperor idolatry as a resting place on the

A FOREWORD FOR AMERICAN READERS

road to ruin. Nowadays we have multimillionaires everywhere; but they began in America; and that is why I wonder this book of mine was not written in America by an American fifty years ago. Henry George had a shot at it: indeed it was his oratory (to which I was exposed for fortyfive minutes fortyfive years ago by pure chance) that called my attention to it; but though George impressed his generation with the outrageous misdistribution of income resulting from the apparently innocent institution of private property in land, he left untouched the positive problem of how else income was to be distributed, and what the nation was to do with the rent of its land when it was nationalized, thus leaving the question very much where it had been left a century earlier by the controversy between Voltaire and the elder Mirabeau, except for the stupendous series of new illustrations furnished by the growth of the great cities of the United States. Still, America can claim that in this book I am doing no more than finishing Henry George's job.

Finally, I have been asked whether there are any intelligent women in America. There must be; for politically the men there are such futile gossips that the United States could not possibly carry on unless there were some sort of practical intelligence back of them. But I will let you into a secret which bears on this point. By this book I shall get at the American men through the American women. In America as in England every male citizen is supposed to understand politics and economics and finance and diplomacy and all the rest of a democratic voter's business on the strength of a Fundamentalist education that excites the public scorn of the Sioux chiefs who have seen their country taken from them by palefaced lunatics. He is ashamed to expose the depths of his ignorance by asking elementary questions; and I dare not insult him by volunteering the missing information. But he has no objection to my talking to his wife as to one who knows nothing of these matters: quite the contrary. And if he should chance to overhear——!!!

CONWAY, NORTH WALES
17th April 1928

G. B. S.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I

A CLOSED QUESTION OPENS

Socialism is an opinion as to how the income of the country should be distributed. Its distribution is not a natural phenomenon: it is a matter for arrangement, subject to change like any other arrangement. It has been changed within living memory to an extent that would have seemed incredible and scandalous to Queen Victoria, and is still being changed from year to year. Therefore what we have to consider is not whether our distribution shall be altered or not, but what further changes are desirable to attain a prosperous stability. This is the closed question which re-opened in the nineteenth century under the banner of Socialism; but it is one on which everyone should try to form an original personal opinion without prompting from Socialists. PAGE I

2

DIVIDING-UP

Dividing-up is neither a revolutionary novelty nor a Mosaic jubilee: it is a necessary and unpostponable daily and hourly event of civilized life. As wealth consists of food that becomes uneatable unless immediately consumed, and of articles that wear out in use and perish if kept unused, it must be divided-up and consumed at once. Saving is impossible: the things will not keep. What is called saving is a bargain whereby a person in possession of spare food allows another to consume it in return for an undertaking to reverse the transaction at some future time. Between the two nothing is saved, as one consumes what the other saves. A proposal that everybody should save is pure nonsense. A nation which stopped working would perish within a fortnight even if every member of it had "saved" a million. 6

3

HOW MUCH FOR EACH?

This question does not settle itself. It has to be settled by law and enforced by the police. If the shares are to be altered the law must be altered. Examples of existing distribution. This has today become so repugnant to the general moral conception of fairness and so incompatible with the public health that there is a general revulsion of feeling against it. But the revulsion can have no political effect until it becomes arithmetically precise. It cannot be dealt with in terms of more or less: the question of how much more or less must be exactly determined. And as wealth is measured in money, distribution must be dealt with in terms of income. 7

NO WEALTH WITHOUT WORK

As a nation lives from hand to mouth there must be continuous productive labor or there will be no food to distribute. But though everyone must eat, everyone need not work, because under modern conditions each of us can produce much more than enough to support one person. If everyone worked everyone would have a good deal of leisure. But it is possible to arrange that some people shall do all the work and have no leisure in order that others should have all leisure and no work. These two extremes are represented by complete Socialism and complete Slavery. Serfdom and Feudalism and Capitalism are intermediate stages. The continual struggle of persons and classes to alter the allotment of the labor task and the distribution of wealth and leisure in their own favor is the key to the history of revolutions. Enormous increase of the stakes in this game through modern discoveries and inventions. . . . PAGE 9

COMMUNISM

Communism must be considered without personal, political, or religious prejudice as a plan of distribution like any other. It was the plan of the apostles, and is universally practised in the family. It is indispensable in modern cities. All services and commodities which are paid for by a common fund and are at the disposal of everyone indiscriminately are examples of communism in practice. Roads and bridges, armies and navies, street lighting and paving, policemen, dustmen, and sanitary inspectors are familiar and obvious instances. . . . II

LIMITS TO COMMUNISM

Communism is so satisfactory and unquestioned as far as it has gone that those who are conscious of it may ask why everything should not be communized. Reasons why this cannot be done. Communism is applicable only to commodities and services which, being necessary or useful to everybody, enjoy general moral approval. It can be extended to matters in which the citizens are willing to give and take, as when the oarsman pays rates for a cricket pitch in consideration of the cricketer paying rates for the lake. But services as to which there is any serious difference of opinion, such as church services, and commodities which some people believe to be deleterious, such as alcoholic liquors, are excluded from the scope of Communism. Surreptitious communism is necessary in the case of science, and of learning generally, because the ordinary citizen does not understand their importance sufficiently to be willing to pay for their endowment. Governments are therefore obliged to endow them without

CONTENTS

consulting the electors, who are left to believe that Greenwich Observatories, National Galleries, British Museums and the like are provided gratuitously by Nature. PAGE 14

7

SEVEN WAYS PROPOSED

Seven plans of distribution are at present advocated or practised. 1. To each what he or she produces. 2. To each what he or she deserves. 3. To each what he or she can get and hold. 4. To the common people enough to keep them alive whilst they work all day, and the rest to the gentry. 5. Division of society into classes, the distribution being equal or thereabouts within each class, but unequal as between the classes. 6. Let us go on as we are. 7. Socialism: an equal share to everybody. 19

8

TO EACH WHAT SHE PRODUCES

Apparent fairness of this plan. Two fatal objections to it: (*a*) it is impossible to ascertain how much each person produces even when the product is a material object; and (*b*) most people's work consists, not in the production of material objects, but in services. The clearest case of individual production is that of a baby by its mother; but a baby is an expense, not a source of income. In practice production and service are made commensurate by paying the workers according to the time taken in producing the commodity or rendering the service; but this does not carry out the plan, as, when the time spent in qualifying the worker is taken into account, the calculation becomes impossible. Illustrative cases. Case of the married woman keeping a house and bringing up a family. The plan is impossible, and, at bottom, nonsensical. 21

9

TO EACH WHAT SHE DESERVES

Tendency of those who are comfortably off to believe that this is what is actually happening. Circumstances which support this view. Facts which reduce it to absurdity. Proposals to adopt the principle and make it happen in future. The first and final objection is that it cannot be done. Merit cannot be measured in money. The truth of this can be ascertained at once by taking any real case of two human beings, and attempting to fix the proportion of their incomes according to their merits or faults. 26

10

TO EACH WHAT SHE CAN GRAB

This plan postulates equal grabbing power as between children, old people, invalids, and ablebodied persons in the prime of life. That is,

THE INTELLIGENT WOMAN'S GUIDE

it presupposes a state of things that does not exist. Otherwise it is simple amorality, which even pirates find impossible if they are to hold together for any length of time. It is, however, tolerated at present in trade. Lawless robbery and violence are barred; but the tradesman may get as much and give as little for it as he can; and the landlord may even use legalized violence to get the utmost for the use of his land. The results of this limited toleration of grab are so unsatisfactory that laws are continually being made to palliate them. The plan, which is really no plan at all, must be dismissed as disastrous. . . . PAGE 29

II

OLIGARCHY

The plan of making the few rich and the many poor has worked for a long time and is still working. The advantages claimed for it. The rich class as a preserve of culture. The incomes of the rich as a reservoir of money which provides by its overflow the socially necessary fund of spare money called capital. The privileges of the rich as a means of securing a governing class. Efficacy of the plan when organized as the Feudal System. How it works in villages and Highland clans. How it fails in cities. Modern urbanized civilization has no use for it, all our governing work being done by paid public servants. This leaves it with only one pretension: that of providing capital by satiation and overflow. But the satiation is too costly even when it is achieved. There is no guarantee that the rich will use any part of their income as capital, or that when they do so they will invest it at home where it is most needed. The accumulation of capital can be provided for in other ways. The plan is breaking under the weight of its enormous abuses. . . . 30

12

DISTRIBUTION BY CLASS

This happens to some extent at present. We are accustomed to think that monarchs, as a class, should receive more than manual laborers; and as a rule they do. But monarchs receive much less than Steel Kings and Pork Barons; and unskilled laborers receive more than great mathematicians, who, as such, receive nothing, and have to live by poorly paid professorships. Clergymen get very little; and racing bookmakers get a good deal. Nobody can determine what they ought to get; yet nobody can defend what they do get on any rational ground. Those who think it a matter of course that scavengers should receive less than bank managers cannot say how much less, without which determination their opinion can have no effect in a political settlement of distribution. The main argument for enriching a class is that it enabled them to produce an idolatrous illusion of superiority which gives them authority, which is necessary in organizing society. But in modern society the persons in au-
xvi

CONTENTS

thority are often much poorer in money than those whom they command. Illustrative cases. Real authority has nothing to do with money. PAGE 35

13

LAISSER-FAIRE

Letting things alone is now called letting them slide: an admission that they will not stay where they are. Change is a law of nature; and when parliaments neglect it and Churches try to ignore it, the effect is not to avert the changes but to make them hasty, ill-considered, and often catastrophic. Unless laws and Articles of Religion change as often and as quickly as the activities they control, a strain is set up which, if not relieved by the prevalence of up-to-date ideas in government and the Churches, must wreck civilization. . . . 38

14

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

The study of poverty. Poverty does not produce unhappiness: it produces degradation: that is why it is dangerous to society. Its evils are infectious, and cannot be avoided by any possible isolation of the rich. The attractions of poverty. The folly of tolerating it as a punishment. We cannot afford to have the poor always with us. The statute of Elizabeth. What constitutes poverty. The sufferings of the rich. They are avoidable only by voluntarily foregoing idleness and gluttony: that is, foregoing the only privileges that riches confer. Poor and rich being equally objectionable, the question arises how much is enough? What is enough for savage life. What was enough for our grandmothers is not enough for ourselves. There is no limit to the higher requirements of mankind. The question is therefore unanswerable as applied to civilized life. The problem of distribution cannot be solved by giving everyone enough: nobody can ever have enough of everything. But it is possible to give everybody the same. . . . 41

15

WHAT WE SHOULD BUY FIRST

The effect of distribution on industry. Political economy, or the art of spending the national income to the greatest general advantage. Importance of the order in which goods are produced. Those which are wanted most should be produced first. Food, clothes, and houses should come before scent and jewellery, babies' needs before the needs of lap-dogs. Nothing but equality of purchasing power can preserve this vital order in the industries which cater for purchasers. Inequality of income upsets it hopelessly: the labor which should feed starving children is expended in the production of trivial luxuries. This is excused on the ground that the purchasers give employment. Absurdity of this plea . 49

EUGENICS

Effect of distribution on the quality of people as human beings. The problem of breeding the nation. In breeding animals the problem is simple though the art is uncertain and difficult, because the animal is bred for some single specific purpose, such as the provision of food or for racing or haulage. The stockbreeder knows exactly what sort of animal is wanted. Nobody can say what sort of human being is wanted. It is not enough to say that certain sorts are not wanted. The stockbreeders' methods are therefore not applicable: the keeper of a human stud farm, if such a thing were established by a mad professor of eugenics, would not know what to aim at or how to begin. We are therefore thrown back on natural sexual attraction as our only guide. Sexual attraction in human beings is not promiscuous: it is always specific: we choose our mates. But this choice is defeated by inequality of income, which restricts our choice to members of our own class: that is, persons with similar incomes or no incomes. Resultant prevalence of bad breeding and domestic unhappiness. The most vital condition of good distribution is that it shall widen the field of sexual selection to the extent of making the nation completely intermarriageable. Only equality of income can do this. PAGE 53

THE COURTS OF LAW

Though Justice should not be a respecter of persons, the courts must respect persons if they have different incomes. Trial by jury is trial by a jury of peers, not only the peers of the accused but of the accusers and of the whole body of citizens. This is in practice impossible in a civilized society of persons with unequal incomes, as the person with a large income has not the same interests and privileges as the person with a small one. As access to the courts of justice costs money the poor are cut off from them by their poverty or terrorized by the threats of the rich to drag them there. The abuses of divorce and alimony. Sale of husbands and wives. Blackmail. Abuses in the criminal courts. Corruption of the law itself at its source in Parliament by the rich majority there. Severity of the laws against theft practised by the poor on the rich. Complete exemption of the crime of rich idling, which is the form of theft practised by the rich on the poor. Inequality of income thus effects a divorce of law from justice, leading to an anarchic disrespect for the law and a general suspicion of the good faith of lawyers. . . . 56

THE IDLE RICH

Idleness does not mean inactivity. Over-exertion and "rest cures" of the rich. Their dangerous and exhausting sports. The flapper dances .
xviii

CONTENTS

harder than the postman walks. Spartan training of the old rich. It is soon acquired by the new rich, who begin by trying to loaf. The diplomatic and military services as preserves for the energetic rich. The unpaid magistracy. Estate management. Parliament. Effect of contraception and hotel life in service flats in extending the possibilities of complete uselessness and self-indulgence. Exceptional cases of eminent workers with unearned incomes. Florence Nightingale and John Ruskin. Not inactivity but consuming without producing is what is meant by economic idleness. Ironic vanity of the attempt to secure happiness and freedom by having plenty of money and nothing to do. PAGE 59

19

CHURCH, SCHOOL, AND PRESS

The Church school in the village. Deference to the rich taught as loyalty and religion. Persecution of schoolmasters for teaching equalitarian morality. Corruption of the universities and of the newspapers. Difficulty of separating the mass of falsehood inculcated and advertized in the interest of the rich from the genuine learning and information in which rich and poor have a common interest. 63

20

WHY WE PUT UP WITH IT

We endure misdistribution and even support it because it is associated with many petty personal benefits and amusements which come to us by way of charity and pageantry, and with the chance of winning the Calcutta Sweep or inheriting a fortune from an unknown relative. These pageants and prizes are apprehensible by the narrowest minds in the most ignorant classes, whereas the evils of the system are great national evils, apprehensible only by trained minds capable of public affairs. Without such training the natural supply of broad minds is wasted. Poverty, by effecting this waste on an appalling scale, produces an artificial dearth of statesmanlike brains, compelling us to fill up first-rate public posts with second-rate and often sixth-rate functionaries. We tolerate the evils of inequality of income literally through want of thought. 65

21

POSITIVE REASONS FOR EQUALITY

Equal division has been tested by long experience. Practically all the work of the world has been done and is being done by bodies of persons receiving equal incomes. The inequality that exists is between classes and not between individuals. This arrangement is quite stable: there is no tendency for the equality to be upset by differences of individual character. Here and there abnormal individuals make their way into a better

THE INTELLIGENT WOMAN'S GUIDE

paid class or are thrown out into an unpaid vagrancy; but the rule is that each class either keeps its economic level or rises and falls as a class, its internal equality being maintained at every level. As people are put so they will stay. Equality of income, far from being a novelty, is an established practice, and the only possible one as between working individuals in organized industry. The problem is therefore not one of its introduction, but of its extension from the classes to the whole community.

PAGE 68

22

MERIT AND MONEY

Equality of income has the advantage of securing promotion by merit. When there is inequality of income all merits are overshadowed by the merit of having a large income, which is not a merit at all. Huge incomes are inherited by nincompoops or made by cunning traders in vice or credulity; whilst persons of genuine merit are belittled by the contrast between their pence and the pounds of fools and profiteers. The person with a thousand a year inevitably takes precedence of the person with a hundred in popular consideration, no matter how completely this may reverse their order of merit. Between persons of equal income there can be no eminence except that of personal merit. Hence the naturally eminent are the chief preachers of equality, and are always bitterly opposed by the naturally ordinary or inferior people who have the larger shares of the national income. 70

23

INCENTIVE

It is urged against equality that unless a person can earn more than another by working harder she will not work harder or longer. The reply is that it is neither fair nor desirable that she should work harder or longer. In factory and machine industry extra exertion is not possible: collective work goes on at the engine's speed and stops when the engine stops. The incentive of extra pay does not appeal to the slacker, whose object is to avoid work at any cost. The cure for that is direct compulsion. What is needed is an incentive to the community as a whole to choose a high standard of living rather than a lazy and degraded one, all standards being possible. Inequality of income is not merely useless for this purpose, but defeats it. The problem of the Dirty Work. On examination we discover that as it is done mostly by the worst paid people it is not provided for at present by the incentive of extra pay. We discover also that some of the very dirtiest work is done by professional persons of gentle nurture without exceptional incomes. The objection to dirty work is really an objection to work that carries a stigma of social inferiority. The really effective incentive to work is our needs, which are equal, and include leisure. 72

XX