

## SOCIALISM

### WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

The dictionary defines socialism as:

- 1. a theory or system of social organization that advocates the vesting of the ownership and control of the means of production and distribution, of capital, land, etc., in the community as a whole.*
- 2. procedure or practice in accordance with this theory.*
- 3. in Marxist theory the stage following capitalism in the transition of a society to communism, characterized by the imperfect implementation of collectivist principles.*

Socialism is then a political system in which the means of production, distribution and exchange are mostly owned by the state, and used, at least in theory, on behalf of the people (whose 'good' is decided by the state). The idea behind socialism is that the capitalist system is intrinsically unfair, because it concentrates wealth in a few hands and does nothing to safeguard the overall welfare of the majority, this is fallacious. Under socialism, the state redistributes the wealth of society, according to the judgement of the rulers. Socialism is a system of expropriation of private property (regardless of how this was earned) in order to distribute it to various groups considered (by the rulers) to be deserving. It is a system of social and economic organization that would substitute state monopoly for private ownership of the sources of production and means of distribution, and would concentrate under the control of the secular governing authority the chief activities of human life. Social advocates state control and even state ownership not only of "*natural monopolies*", but also of all the sources of wealth. The socialist schemes were mainly directed towards the establishment of Communism for the '*collectivist*' idea is the economic basis of modern Socialism.

### BRIEF HISTORY OF SOCIALISM

In the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. Charles Hall, first put forward that idea of a dominant industrial and social "system", which is the pervading conception of modern Socialism. Hall worked out the various basic principles of Socialism, which Marx afterwards appropriated and combined. Yet Karl Marx and of his friend Friedrich Engels, are considered the fathers of modern socialism. In 1848, Marx and Engels published the "*Communist Manifesto*". This document was the beginning of modern "*scientific Socialism*". After 1848, in his exile in London, Marx studied, and wrote, and organized with two results: first, the foundation of "*The International Workingmen's Association*", in 1864; second, the publication of the first volume of "*Das Kapital*", in 1867. Those who would

style themselves Marxists and would refer to "*Das Kapital*" as "*The Bible of Socialism*".

### THE TEACHING OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ON SOCIALISM

It may come as a surprise to many to learn that already in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the incomparable St. Thomas Aquinas wrote about '*socialism*' and why it is wrong. We read: "*In regard to an external thing man has two powers: one is the power of managing and controlling it, and as to this it is lawful for a man to possess private property. It is, moreover, necessary for human life for three reasons. First, because everyone is more zealous in looking after a thing that belongs to him than a thing that is the common property of all or of many; because each person, trying to escape labour, leaves to another what is everybody's business, as happens where there are many servants. Secondly, because there is more order in the management of men's affairs if each has his own work of looking after definite things; whereas there would be confusion if everyone managed everything indiscriminately. Thirdly, because in this way the relations of men are kept more peaceful, since everyone is satisfied with his own possession, whence we see that quarrels are commoner between those who jointly own a thing as a whole. The other power which man has over external things is the using of them;; and as to this man must not hold external things as his own property, but as everyone's; so as to make no difficulty, I mean, in sharing when others are in need*" (Summa Theologica, IIa IIae, Q. Ixvi, a. 2). If man, then, has the right to own, control, and use private property, the State cannot give him this right or take it away; it can only protect it. Here, of course, we are at issue with Socialism, for, according to it, the State is the supreme power from which all human rights are derived; it acknowledges no independent spiritual, domestic, or individual power whatever. Socialism manifests in its derogation or denial of all the truly personal and self-directive powers of human nature, and its misuse of such of such human qualities as it does not despise or deny is a plain confession of its material and deterministic limitations. It is true that the institutions of religion, of the family, and of private ownership are liable to great abuses, but the perfection of human effort and character demands a freedom of choice between good and evil as their first necessary condition. This area of free choice is provided, on the material side, by private ownership; on the spiritual and material, by the Christian family; and on the purely spiritual by religion. The state, then, instead of depriving men of these opportunities of free and fine production, not only of material but also of intellectual values, should rather constitute itself as their defender.



### ‘QUOD APOSTOLICI MUNERIS’

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1878, Pope Leo XIII in the Encyclical ‘*Quod Apostolici Muneris*’ wrote : “*Catholic wisdom, sustained by the precepts of natural and divine law, provides with especial care for public and private tranquillity in its doctrines and teachings regarding the duty of government and the distribution of the goods which are necessary for life and use. For, while the socialists would destroy the "right" of property, alleging it to be a human invention altogether opposed to the inborn equality of man, and, claiming a community of goods, argue that poverty should not be peaceably endured, and that the property and privileges of the rich may be rightly invaded, the Church, with much greater wisdom and good sense, recognizes the inequality among men, who are born with different powers of body and mind, inequality in actual possession, also, and holds that the right of property and of ownership, which springs from nature itself, must not be touched and stands inviolate. For she knows that stealing and robbery were forbidden in so special a manner by God, the Author and Defender of right, that He would not allow man even to desire what belonged to another, and that thieves and despoilers, no less than adulterers and idolaters, are shut out from the Kingdom of Heaven. But not the less on this account does our holy Mother not neglect the care of the poor or omit to provide for their necessities; but, rather, drawing them to her with a mother's embrace, and knowing that they bear the person of Christ Himself, who regards the smallest gift to the poor as a benefit conferred on Himself, holds them in great honor. She does all she can to help them; she provides homes and hospitals where they may be received, nourished, and cared for all the world over and watches over these. She is constantly pressing on the rich that most grave precept to give what remains to the poor; and she holds over their heads the divine sentence that unless they succor the needy they will be repaid by eternal torments. In fine, she does all she can to relieve and comfort the poor, either by holding up to them the example of Christ, "who being rich became poor for our sake, or by reminding them of his own words, wherein he pronounced the poor blessed and bade them hope for the reward of eternal bliss. But who does not see that this is the best method of arranging the old struggle between the rich and poor? For, as the very evidence of facts and events shows, if this method is rejected or disregarded, one of two things must occur: either the greater portion of the human race will fall back into the vile condition of slavery which so long prevailed among the pagan nations, or human society must continue to be disturbed by constant eruptions, to be disgraced by rapine and strife, as we have had sad witness even in recent times.*

### ‘RERUM NOVARUM’ — SUBTITLED ‘ON CAPITAL AND LABOR’

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1891, this same pope, issued the Encyclical ‘*Rerum Novarum*’ which is subtitled “*On Capital and Labor*”. In this document, Pope Leo XIII sets out the Catholic Church's response to the social instability and labor conflict that had arisen in the wake of industrialization and that had led to the rise of socialism. The Pope taught that the role of the state is to promote

social justice through the protection of rights, while the Church must speak out on social issues in order to teach correct social principles and ensure class harmony. He restated the Church's long-standing teaching regarding the crucial importance of private property rights, but recognized, in one of the best-known passages of the encyclical, that the free operation of market forces must be tempered by moral considerations:

***"Let the working man and the employer make free agreements, and in particular let them agree freely as to the wages; nevertheless, there underlies a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner. If through necessity or fear of a worse evil the workman accept harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice."***

*Rerum Novarum* is remarkable for its vivid depiction of the plight of the nineteenth-century urban poor and for its condemnation of unrestricted capitalism. Among the remedies it prescribed were the formation of trade unions and the introduction of collective bargaining, particularly as an alternative to state intervention. *Rerum Novarum* also recognized that the poor have a special status in consideration of social issues: the Catholic principle of the “*preferential option for the poor*” and the notion that Almighty God is on the side of the poor found their expression in this document.

### CONCLUSION

Socialism has for its philosophical basis, pure materialism; its religious basis is pure negation; its ethical basis the theory that society makes the individuals of which it is composed, not the individuals society, and that therefore the structure of society determines individual conduct, which involves moral irresponsibility; its economic basis is the theory that labour is the sole producer, and that capital is the surplus value over bare subsistence produced by labour and stolen by capitalists; its juristic basis is the right of labour to the whole product; its historical basis is the industrial revolution, that is the change from small and handicraft methods of production to large and mechanical ones, and the warfare of classes; its political basis is democracy which is condemned by the Church. It may be noted that some of these bases have already been abandoned and are in ruins, others are beginning to shake; and as this process advances the defenders are compelled to retreat and take up fresh positions. Thus the form of the doctrine changes and undergoes modification, though all cling still to the central principle, which is the substitution of public for private ownership.

