

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER.

VOL. XXXIII (No. 6)

JUNE, 1919

NO. 757

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The Philosophy of B*rr*nd R*ss*ll

With an Appendix of Leading Passages From Certain Other works.

Edited by Philip E. B. Jourdain.

Price \$1.00.

There is a great deal to be said for any philosophy that can stand a joke. Philosophies are usually too dignified for that; and for dignity Mr. B*rr*nd R*ss*ll has little reverence (see Chap. XX, "On Dignity"). It is a method of hiding hollow ignorance under a pasteboard covering of pomposity. Laughter would shake down the house of cards.

Now what has given rise to much solemn humbug in philosophy is the vice of system-making. This vice the great contemporary of Mr. B*rr*nd R*ss*ll—Mr. Bertrand Russell—has avoided by a frank and frequent disavowal of any of his views as soon as later consideration has rendered them untenable without philosophic contortions. But such a characteristic is a little disconcerting to those of his admirers whose loyalty exceeds their powers of criticism. Thus one of them, referring to *The Problems of Philosophy* when it first appeared, wrote: "I feel in Mr. Russell's book the interest that a curate would feel in the publications of an archbishop who made important modifications in Christian doctrine every year."

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The views of Mr. Russell offer a valuable study for people who are interested in knowing something about the causes of war, and probable rivalry which the future may bring about, the prospects of permanent peace, America's policy, etc. It is important that, after peace, the nations should feel that degree of mutual respect which will make co-operation possible.

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By Bertrand Russell.

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THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING COMPANY

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THE EGYPTIAN GOD BES.

(From Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, Vol. II, p. 286.)

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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TRUE DEMOCRACY AND PROGRESS.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE RUSSIAN SOVIET SYSTEM.

BY VICTOR S. YARROS.¹

IN a recent issue of *The Open Court* the present writer challenged the claim of the Russian Bolshevik leaders that their "Soviet system" embodies a higher form of democracy than the American or any European form. He attacked the dictatorship of the small quasi-proletarian clique that has ruled central Russia in the name of the working classes and the poorer peasants, and he objected to the disfranchisement of the so-called bourgeois elements of the population.

Several correspondents have taken issue with him, on the ground, as they contend, that these undemocratic and illiberal measures are temporary and begotten of emergency and the danger of counter-revolution. What of the Soviet system itself in its substantial and permanent features? he has been asked. Is not the Soviet system a notable and valuable contribution to the art of democratic government? Has it not, as a matter of fact, impressed and fascinated the liberal thinkers of Europe and America? Have not even the severe critics of Bolshevism admitted, with astonishment or reluctance, that the Soviet system "works" in Russia and contains elements worthy of study and emulation?

Yes, the Soviet system has taken many Western minds captive. There is undoubtedly something in it that appeals to radicals and liberals in the West. What is that something, and how much of it, if anything, can Europe or America adopt with advantage? These are legitimate questions that can be discussed calmly and without prejudice.

¹ Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy.

What is the essence of the Soviet system—or, rather, what would be its essence under normal conditions?

The answer is that the principle of the Soviet is representation on a new basis. Under it men vote together because *they work together* and belong to the same social and economic group. In the words of an apologist and supporter of Bolshevik Russia:

"A soviet delegate comes from a group—a shop or a union—meeting regularly. A soviet representative is continuously in touch with the people he represents. The soviets are elected largely by occupations. They are full of miners who know mines; of machinists who know machines; of peasants who know the land; of teachers who know children and education. The soviet is a center for the transaction of business by men who know their business."

The same writer, by way of contrast, thus characterizes our American Congress—and, of course, the characterization would apply to the British Commons, the French parliament, the various diets or assemblies, or the Russian Duma as it existed under the Czar:

"A congressman represents all sorts of people, irrespective of their work, who meet at the polls every two or four or six years: there is no other bond of union among them. Congress is full of lawyers and politicians and office-grabbers. Congress is too often a talking machine, an arena for playing party politics."

This is not scientific or philosophical language, but the points made are tolerably clear. Are they valid? Are the people of a state or nation likely to be better represented, and more faithfully and intelligently served, under the soviet plan than under the familiar and conventional plan? Let us see.

When voters elect an alderman, a state legislator or a member of Congress, they elect him, as a rule, because he belongs to a certain party and stands on a certain platform. We may and should eliminate national party issues from local elections, but we cannot make local elections nonpartisan or nonpolitical. Local issues simply—and properly—take the place of national issues, more or less irrelevant. We vote as partisans, and we join parties because on the whole they severally reflect and represent our political and economic opinions. It must be admitted that parties have an irritating way of outliving their usefulness and their representative character, but if thousands cling to parties that are morally dead and practically futile, whom but ourselves can we blame for this fact? Tradition, habit, inertia, prejudice, thoughtlessness keep such parties alive, rather than the intrigues and stratagems of pro-

fessional politicians. Besides, when a really vital issue emerges, a realignment is quickly and spontaneously effected. Passions, convictions, interests outweigh tradition and habit when there is a conflict between these sets of influences.

In short, roughly and generally speaking, the familiar plan or system is a system of government by parties, big or small, and therefore by opinions. The question how our opinions are formed—what part class or group interest plays in the process—need not be raised here. Perhaps opinion is inspired or prompted by economic interests, but only the shallow and half-baked radicals maintain that opinions are of no consequence and may be completely ignored. The fact is that men fight for opinions, make sacrifices for opinions, and are often unconscious of any personal or class interest back of the opinion, not to mention the by no means exceptional individuals whose opinions manifestly conflict with their pecuniary interests.

We must, therefore, consider and criticize the familiar plan of nominating and electing representatives as a plan designed to give us government by discussion, government by compromise and adjustment, government by opinion. From this point of view, our system is undoubtedly full of faults and imperfections. Sometimes what we call representative government is not in fact representative. Men elected to represent mixed and heterogeneous constituencies are found to represent narrow special interests, spoils cliques, etc. Again, too often the representatives are not competent to voice the opinions of their constituencies and not industrious or capable enough to acquire such competency. Then, too, party platforms may be so ambiguous, indefinite, and empty that the men who stand on them can hardly be said to have opinions on the actual issues of the period. Finally, even if we suppose that the elected representative of a ward or district is faithful, intelligent, and fit to represent those who voted for him, what of the minority in the same district, which is deprived of a voice in the legislative body? Who represents that minority? Some one from another district, where those who believe as this minority does constitute a majority? This is scarcely satisfactory, for localities have special needs and special conditions, and may have special opinions even while accepting the general platform of the party that commands a majority of the district.

For example, a Democrat from a Chicago district is not an ideal representative of an Alabama Democratic constituency, nor a Vermont Republican a fit and desirable representative of an

Oregon or Kansas Republican constituency. When a minority in a district is deprived of a voice, it practically is governed and taxed without its consent.

These evils have long since been recognized by students and rational reformers, hence the movement for minority representation and for proportional representation. That proportional representation is steadily gaining ground, everybody knows. Even some of our new city charters provide for such representation, and on small commissions in charge of municipal affairs we now find not only members of the major parties, but labor men, Socialists, and other radicals.

The logical position of the upholder of democratic and representative government is thus sufficiently indicated. He must advocate the creation of large election districts and the election from them of representatives on the basis of proportional representation. We must demand that every legislative body contain members of each of the important parties, schools, and social groups. A system that insures this gives us government of and by opinion. If, in addition, the term of office is made short, the method of nomination simple and fair, and the election pure and honest—that is, free from fraud—then the system is as democratic, as genuine, as popular as we can expect any system to be under present intellectual and moral conditions. Indifferent, ignorant, careless men cannot expect to be loyally and properly served by representatives. Eternal vigilance still is, and always will be, the price of good, or truly democratic, government. "Educate your masters," said an English Tory statesman after a notable extension of the suffrage system that enfranchised millions of workmen, agricultural laborers, and others. If the "masters" remain ignorant or apathetic, they are masters only in name. Those rule who take the trouble to rule, who work, watch, improve every opportunity, and assert themselves on all lawful occasions.

Sound and true democracy cannot be created by fiat or miracle. Education and slow political and moral evolution are forces for which there are no substitutes. Given education, however, with adequate machinery and organization, and government by discussion and the free play of opinion can be made a reality.

One admission must here be noted in all candor. It is possible, and perhaps probable, that if Second Chambers are retained, they will in an ever-increasing measure be converted into modified soviets—that is, they will be composed of representatives of great industries, occupations, professions, interests. There is no reason

why England, France, Italy, or some American State should not make the experiment of a second chamber so formed and constituted. That is, farmers, manufacturers, merchants and bankers, carriers, workmen, professional men, artists, and others might form guilds or other organizations and send men from their own respective ranks to represent them in a chamber smaller than the popular and democratic chamber elected, as now, on the basis of opinion, party affiliation and the like.

Now compare the Soviet system *at its best* with a thoroughly reformed and modernized system of government by opinion.

At the base of the Soviet pyramid, we are told, are the voters of the villages, hamlets, towns, and cities. These voters meet in factories, in village halls, railroad depots, and the like, and elect the local soviet. The methods and procedure are, and are to remain, elastic. The local soviets elect the delegates to, or members of, the District soviets, and these in turn send delegates to the Provincial soviets. At the top of the pyramid is the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, a body composed of delegates of the lower soviets. The soviets delegate authority to executive committees, local, provincial, and national.

The admirers of this system prefer not to discuss the two main criticisms that are made by its opponents. But they must and will be discussed by candid persons who really wish to study the relative advantages or merits of the rival plans.

In the first place, the voters of the hamlets, villages, towns, and cities do not elect either the Provincial or the National soviet. Is this democratic? Is it free from danger? The All-Russian Congress of Soviets is very remote indeed from the governed, whose consent is supposed to be necessary to make government popular and democratic. There is no guaranty whatever that the general and higher soviets will always represent all the elements, sorts, and conditions of the people. As a matter of fact, the higher soviets may have as many politicians, lawyers, and non-workers as the American Congress. The superiority claimed for the local soviet may be real, for the latter is composed of representatives of all "legitimate" occupations, interests, and professions. But when delegates elect other delegates, and the latter elect delegates to still another body, the character of the supreme body plainly depends on all manner of accidental and adventitious influences. This is not democracy.

The second criticism of the Soviet system is even more fundamental. It is all very well to talk in general terms about the wonder-

ful results of representation of occupations, vocations, interests, actual social groups having common needs and experiences, but is it a fact that the members of a given group or profession think alike? Will it ever be a fact? Do workmen in a steel mill agree on political and economic questions? Are all the employes of a big store of one mind respecting such questions? Is there unanimity among all railroad workers? Do teachers see eye-to-eye in the realm of government and social science?

These questions answer themselves. In any factory we are likely to find conservatives, moderates, liberals and radicals, Socialists, Syndicalists, anarchists, and what not. Men and women who work together not only do not think alike, but often violently differ among themselves and attack each other's gatherings. The bitterness among Socialists and anarchists is proverbial, as is the antagonism between ardent trade unionists and anti-union workmen of strongly individualist proclivities. Illustrations need hardly be multiplied on this point.

Now, when in any soviet, workmen see themselves, as they inevitably will, opposed by workmen, teachers by teachers, physicians by physicians, clerks by clerks, what balm will they find in the thought that they respectively "work together"? A foe is a foe, and an opponent an opponent, whether he works at the next machine, in the next shop, or in a totally different vocation.

Convictions and opinions are ultimately the determining factors in legislation and political action. The voter, the individual, wants his opinion to prevail, or at least to have a fair chance. He wants his "side" to have its day in court. A brother worker who does not agree with him cannot represent him.

It cannot be seriously doubted, therefore, that eventually the Russian voters will insist on fair and proper representation of opinions in the soviets, local and general. This cannot be secured except by proportional representation, and proportional representation involves profound modifications in the Soviet system. Opportunity must be afforded to those who think alike to act and vote together. If workmen, artists, teachers, and professional voters wish to be represented by the same set of delegates, they cannot justly be deprived of that right. Farmers cannot justly be prohibited from voting for teachers to represent them, nor teachers from voting for labor leaders. So far as the mechanical Soviet system precludes such inter-group voting it is more undemocratic and objectionable than any feature in the rival system.

Which system will insure adequate and just representation of

all social groups, all opinions, all schools of thought? This is the paramount question. Which system will give us orderly and progressive government? Which is designed to make democracy safe, workable, rational, and sober-minded?

No reason has been furnished by the admirers of the Soviet system for scrapping our own imperfect system and blindly adopting their ill-considered, ill-devised substitute. We can and should improve our system and certain useful hints toward improvement may possibly be discerned in the Soviet system. But—nothing more than hints. The notion that we can change things, elements, qualities by changing *names* is puerile. The notion that a reshuffling of human units will somehow rid us of religious, economic, social, and other differences, the differences that divide us into parties, factions, and schools of thought, is fantastic and grotesque.

To repeat, evolution, not revolution or miracle, will solve our problems and remove the obstacles to human solidarity and human justice, national and international, that face us on every side.

SAVAGE LIFE AND CUSTOM.

BY EDWARD LAWRENCE.

XII. EMANCIPATION AND FUTURE OF SAVAGE RACES.

WE have now completed our imaginary tour of the world, and should be able to give an answer to the question, What is a savage?

We have seen that the life led by the wild races of man, under their own natural unfettered conditions, is by no means a hard or a miserable one. Savages are usually happy and contented with their lot; among themselves they are well-behaved and extremely polite; the men make good husbands and the women good wives. It is very seldom indeed that serious crime is committed; they are extremely temperate, and have great respect for the aged.

The early years of childhood are altogether delightful. Children are carefully schooled and taught to do that which is right, according to the moral standard of their tribe; and as we have noted, such teaching is not lost when adult life is reached.

Yet, on the other hand, we find them indulging in many superstitious rites, some of which appear reprehensible to a degree; many others appear to us ridiculous and absurd; while their cannibalism and human sacrifices fill us with deepest horror. Nevertheless, we