

The Quest Society Discusses Socialism

A Practical suggestion for Improving Housing Con- ditions in Shanghai

A meeting of the Quest Society was held yesterday afternoon in the Royal Asiatic Society's Lecture Hall. The President, Dr. Herbert Chatley, was in the chair and there was a fair attendance present to hear the discussion on the subject of "Socialism: Should the State Own and Manage Essential Industries?"

Mr. W. H. Emberley, in opening the discussion, said that he hoped those present had not come with the idea in their heads that he was going to launch a denunciation on capitalists. There were as many brands of Socialism as of bad whisky, and he felt sure that all those forms of Socialism that had led to anarchy, syndicalism, Bolshevism and kindred evils were Socialism gone mad. Yet when one thought of Tsardom as it had existed in Russia and in other countries that might be named, one could not be surprised at Bolshevism, but at the same time, when one thought of the use of capital, capitalists were to be congratulated on the uses to which they put the tokens of which they seemed to have an abundant share.

The speaker ascribed the worldwide distress prevalent at the present time to the want of system in all governments, by which he meant themselves. If during the war the governments of various nations could run all public establishments such as the telegraph, railways, shipping etc., for the destruction of mankind they could also run them for the opposite motive—for the good of mankind. China furnished a good example. Everything below the land was government property. If the same thing held good in other countries there would be no steel king, oil king, tobacco king, etc. The very fact that men and women would blow up in smoke enormous sums of money in order to enrich men of the calibre of the founder of "Bull Durham" Tobacco was surprising and alarming to him. It was somewhat surprising to him that the voting population of Great Britain had not insisted in all public utilities being run by the Government or municipalities.

He made allusion to slum life in London and Leith wherein dwelt a class of people little removed from the beast. The conditions that existed were beyond computation and were largely responsible by the want of a system in their government. It seemed marvellous that in a country situated as Great Britain was there should be £200,000,000 annually wasted in drink, and yet in London alone there were no fewer than 600,000 families who could not find a home. At this point, the speaker referred to housing conditions in Shanghai and urged that the ratepayers should insist that the money wasted in high rentals should be capitalized by the Municipal Council for building houses. Just as the British Government had assumed control of the oil industry, so governments should take charge of all industries so as to create a world of happiness that transcended every other human consideration.

Mr. A. J. Hughes spoke in rebuttal of Mr. Emberley's viewpoint as to government ownership of essential industries for which the latter had given no technical reasons and suggested that another evening be devoted to the subject.

Mr. S. W. Wolfe said that he looked forward to an improved Socialism that would do away with monopolies and make for the greatest good to the greatest number.

Mr. W. J. Davey traced the historical progress of individualism and its development into Socialism. The exploitation of man by man had been the keynote of human relations in the past, but the keynote of the future should be the exploitation of the whole globe by man associated with man for the good of the whole of mankind.

The Chairman, Dr. Chatley, in referring to Mr. Emberley's suggestion that the Shanghai ratepayers should insist on the Municipal Council building houses, said that the Council had already built one house and operations had been going on for four years. (Laughter).

Mr. H. Chatley, in dealing with

Mr. Emberley's points, said that the letter had referred to the swing of the pendulum in Russia. He did not quite know to what swing Mr. Emberley alluded. He (the speaker) had had experience with clocks and pendulums. If Mr. Emberley meant the Bolshevik pendulum, then he would have none of it and would gladly see it smashed. Regarding the expenditure of £200,000,000 on drink, the speaker argued that that sum standing alone by itself no doubt seemed huge, but when it was divided by 40,000,000 which represented the population of Great Britain, the drink bill amounted to but £5 per capita.

Mr. Emberley: I don't know whether Mr. Chatley means to include among the consumers of liquor the women, children and total abstainers in England. (Laughter). If you eliminate them, you will find that the figure is a good deal more than £5 per head.

Mr. Chatley: I would suggest that you omit the population altogether. (Laughter).

Mr. Emberley concluded by saying that so long as present conditions existed, it would be impossible to keep men quiet and content.

A vote of thanks was moved to Mr. Emberley and the meeting adjourned for a fortnight.