

Australian Ideals

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The Two Principles

It is clear that in Australia there is a struggle being waged between two conflicting principles – The commercial principle and the principle of solidarity – the principle of private interest against the principle of common interest.

The strife of the adherents of these rival principles is the staple of our newspaper controversies, our Parliamentary debates, our economic and social discussions. The one fixes its attention in all that has been won in the past by competition, by the pursuit of private gain and profit. The other prefers the general good to private gain, looks to the diffusion among the masses of such benefits as nature and civilisation afford it proclaims that the best cannot be got out of life by a man or by any class when the masses around are in want or misery.

Reduced to its simplest terms the bourgeois principle is “each for himself and the devil take the hindmost.” The aim of the other class is to prevent such private appropriation, to make the benefits accrue to the gain of all.

The contending parties are each seeking to get control of the State. The truth is, the bourgeois likes the State interference, so long as it helps him to make private gain and profit. He dislikes that interference when it tends to favour public as distinct from the private advantage.

The Power of the State

Nor is it surprising that both parties should look to the State for help in achieving what it thinks to be right. The State can act by compulsion, it has an arm more far-reaching than any other power, it has greater credit, greater taxing power than any man. Justice between man and man can be secured by mass action, by the action of the organised community. It was the must hope, with the view of securing justice, as they saw justice, and an orderly peasantry contented to duck their heads, and uncover to the squire and all his rich relations, that they made so many laws to compel labourers to work for a maximum wage; and it now with a similar view, probably, that the mine-owners of the Rand and of Kimberly make their labour laws and their location laws, and their hut taxes, this as to compel the roving Kaffirs to settle down and spend their lives in unhealthy, low paid labour. It is with the view also of securing justice that the labouring classes, ever since they have found an articulate voice and votes have been pressing for a minimum wage instead of a maximum wage.

Unless one realises the distinction between these two principles of action, its impossible to understand the broad leaning of our political struggles, or to discern the blurred lines of cleavage between the contending parties. But when you once see it, you see it always, You

will find it in the movement what is called “A White Australia; “ in the movement represented by our factories acts; in the opposition to liberalism and in the growing sense of the vulgarity of titles and gaudy uniforms; in the attempt to regulate our export trade ; in the efforts for healthy finance as against borrowing; in our treatment of education, of literature, theatre; of art; in our manners and our morals. One policy is to facilitate private gain; the other is to promote the common good. One policy is disintegrating ; the other is combining. One policy is, in a sense, anarchic ; the other is social – or, as some prefer to call it, socialistic.

White Australia

Where does Kanaka labour find it's chief support?

Where do you find most advocates of the Chinese and Japanese Immigration?

Is it not in the bourgeois chambers of Commerce, Shire Councils, Stock Exchanges, Agricultural Societies – bodies which throughout Australia seem to be dominated by profit-makers as against wage-earners?

Where do you find the chief opponents of coloured aliens?

Obviously, among the labouring classes the latter have, with a truer instinct resulting, no doubt, from a more intimate experience and closer contact discerned not merely the danger of lower wages, but the danger to our national character. The admixture of such differing types of civilisation is bad for both. Human life reaches its lowest degradation where two civilisations meet and cannot fully blend. The rich man and his children have not to rub shoulders with the coloured alien, as the poor man and his children have – have not to compete with the alien for a living. Therefore the rich man in this matter represents the anarchic spirit – the spirit which makes one's personal ease and comfort, and wealth the chief end of life.

Social Legislation

What is the ideal before us in our Factories Acts and similar legislation — such as laws for conciliation and arbitration in labour disputes. It is a nobler physical and moral manhood and womanhood — a free, healthy, stalwart, self-respecting race. When we aim; at fair wages, fair hours and fair conditions of labour, we take as our post-plate; that profits are of less importance than the character of our people.

As in the case of the coloured alien question, it is the national character of the future generations in Australia that is involved, The pale and overworked, underpaid, and underfed makers of shirts or boots, not merely are stunted and miserable in their own lives, but their offspring also suffer; and our society suffers.

THE MOST PRECIOUS TREASURE WHICH ANY NATION HAS IS ITS HUMAN BEINGS; AND WE MUST GUARD THAT TREASURE JEALOUSLY.

Labour is good for us all; but it is good only when it draws out and develops our powers, not when it dwarfs or crushes them.

I am not going to discuss whether what we are doing is not rather what the doctors call treating the symptoms rather than the causes of our social distempers. It is enough to say that we are feeling our way by experiment, and all with an eye to a high standard of human life.

But we interfere with profit-making; and then the bourgeois takes objection. He pulls the strings of the Shire Councils, and the Shire Councils pass resolutions against the factory laws. 'None of your factory laws for the country districts,' the bourgeois exclaims; and then he finds that labourers will flock into the towns where wages are kept up, and will refuse to work at the country employment, where they are refused the protection of the factory laws, where they are often housed and treated worse than the employers Beasts.

Free Men

So free men everywhere condemn the social arrangements which doom the bulk of humanity to excessive toil, to insufficient; sustenance, insufficient rest,, insufficient recreation — to dependence on others for opportunity to work and live, to perpetual -anxiety as to the means of subsistence. No one can estimate, the gains to science, to art, to literature, to national and social life, if every child reared- to manhood -or womanhood had equal, or even approximately equal, opportunities for leading a sane, healthy existence, in which there is scope for the exercise of all the vital powers.

Titles

Titles give a false weight to one's acts and utterances. We listen, we repeat their words, not because of their merit, but because they proceed from a man with a title.

Titles are really devices for creating distinctions in name where there is no distinction in fact — for putting men in a false perspective — a means of gaining deference for persons whose personalities would not necessarily gain deference otherwise.

It is moral superiority which is the only true basis of distinction. George Washington William Ewart, Gladstone, Michael Davitt, John Burns, George Higinbotham, Abraham Lincoln — these men are raised to eminence and distinction in the hearts of their contemporaries, and of posterity, by their acts and their principles, not by the artificial advantage of having themselves styled ' Sir' This or ' Lord ' That !