

POLITICAL IDEALS

By
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Political ideals

In dark days, men need a clear faith and a well-grounded hope; and as the outcome of these, the calm courage which takes no account of hardships by the way. Political ideals must be based upon ideals for the individual life. The aim of politics should be to make the lives of individuals as good as possible.

Every man has in his being to develop into something good or bad; there is a best possible for him, and a worst possible. His circumstances will determine whether the capacities for good are developed or crushed, and whether his bad impulses are strengthened or gradually diverted into better channels. The more good-will one man has, the more he is likely to create among others.

There are two kinds of impulses, corresponding to two kinds of goods. There are the *positive impulses*, which aim at acquiring or retaining private goods that cannot be shared; these centre in the impulse of property. And there are *creative* or constructive impulses, which aim at bringing into the world or making available for use the kind of goods in which there is no privacy and no possession. The best life is the one in which the creative impulses play the largest part and the possessive impulses the smallest.

There is in human beings, as in plants and animals, a certain natural impulse of growth, and this is as true of mental as of physical development. Mental growth may be helped or hindered by outside influences.

What we shall desire for individuals is strong creative impulses, overpowering and absorbing the instinct of possession, reverence for others; respect for the fundamental creative impulse in ourselves. A certain kind of self-respect or native pride is necessary to a good life; a man must not have a sense of utter inward defeat if he is to remain whole, but must feel the courage and the hope and the will to live by

the best thing in him, whatever outward or inward obstacles it may encounter. So far as it lies in a man's own power, his life will realize its best possibilities if it has three things: creative rather than possessive impulses, reverence for others, and respect for the fundamental impulse in himself.

Political and social institutions are to be judged by the good or harm they do to individuals. The institutions under which we live are very far indeed from what they ought to be. Institutions and especially economic systems have a profound influence in moulding the characters of men and women. They may encourage adventure and hope, or close them against everything but the risk of obscure misfortune. They may make a man's happiness depend on what he adds to the general possessions of the world, or upon what he can secure for himself of the private goods in which others cannot share. Modern capitalism forces the wrong decisions of these alternatives upon all who are not heroic or exceptionally fortunate.

Man's impulses are moulded, partly by their native disposition, partly by opportunities and environment, especially early environment. Direct preaching can do very little to change impulses, though it can lead people to restrain the direct expression of them, often with the result that the impulses go underground and come to the surface again in some contorted form. When we have discovered what kinds of impulse we desire

We must not rest content with preaching, or with trying to produce the outward manifestation without the inner spring: we must try to alert institutions in the way that will, of itself modify the life of impulse in the desired direction.

At present our institutions rest upon two things: property and power. Both of these are very unjustly distributed; both, in the actual world, are of great importance to the happiness of the individual. Without property, as things are, a man has no freedom, and no security for the necessities of a tolerable life; without power, he has no opportunity for initiative. If men are to have free play for their creative impulses, they must be liberated from sordid cares by a certain measure of security, and they must have a sufficient share of power to be able to exercise initiative as regards the course and conditions of their lives.

Few men can succeed in being creative rather than possessive in a world which is wholly built on competition, where the great majority would fall into utter destitution if they become careless as to the acquisition of material goods, where honour and power and respect are given to wealth rather than to wisdom, where the law embodies and consecrates the injustice of those who have toward those who have not. In such an environment even those whom nature has endowed with great creative gifts become infected with the poison of competition.

The inspiration and outcome of a reforming movement ought to be freedom and a generous spirit, not niggling restrictions and regulations.

Economic affairs touch men's lives, at most times, much more intimately than political questions.

The hope of possessing more wealth and power than any man ought to have, which is the corresponding motive of the rich, is quite as bad in its effects; it compels men to close their minds against justice, and to prevent themselves from thinking honestly on social questions, while in the depth of their hearts they uneasily feel that their pleasures are bought by the miseries of others.

A happy life must be one in which there is activity. If it is also to be a useful life, the activity ought to be as far as possible creative, not merely predatory or defensive. But creative activity requires imagination and originality, which are apt to be subversive of the *status quo*.

The whole system in which education is conducted needs to be changed, in order that children may be encouraged to think and feel for themselves, not to acquiesce passively in the thoughts and feelings of others.

There can be no real freedom or democracy until the men who do the work in a business also control its management. By a share in the control of smaller bodies, a man might regain some of sense of personal opportunity and responsibility.

Although individuals and societies should have the utmost freedom as regards their own affairs, they ought not to have complete freedom as regards their dealings with others. To give freedom to the strong to oppress the weak is not the way to secure the greatest possible amount of freedom in the world.

Democracy is a device – the best so far invented – for diminishing as much as possible the interference of governments with liberty. But democracy is not at all an adequate device unless it is accompanied by a very great amount of devolution.

The more men learn to live creatively rather than possessively the less their wishes will lead them to thwart others or to attempt violent interference with their liberty. In proportion as men live creatively, they cease to wish to interfere with others by force.

Good political institutions would weaken the impulse toward force and domination in two ways: first, by increasing the opportunities for the creative impulse, and by shaping education as to strengthen these impulses; secondly by eliminating the outlets for the possessive instincts. The diffusion of power, both in the political and the economic sphere, instead of its concentration in the hands of officials and captains of industry, would greatly diminish the opportunities for acquiring the habit of command, out of which the desire for exercising tyranny is apt to spring.

The abolition of capitalism and the wage system would remove the chief incentive to fear and greed, those correlative passions by which all free life is choked and gagged.

Few men seem to realize how many of the evils from which we suffer are wholly unnecessary, and they could be abolished by a united effort within a few years. If a majority in any civilized country so desired, we could, within twenty years, abolish all abject poverty, quite half the illness in the world, the whole economic slavery which binds down nine tenths of our population; we could fill the world with beauty and joy, and secure the reign of universal peace.

Capitalism and the Wage System

From the highest to the lowest, almost all men are absorbed in the economic struggle: the struggle to acquire what is their due or to retain what is their due. Material possessions, in fact or in desire, dominate their outlook, usually to the exclusion of generous and creative impulses. Possessiveness – the passion to have and to hold – is the ultimate source of war, and the foundation of all the ills from which the political world is suffering. Only by diminishing the strength of this passion and its hold upon our daily lives can new institutions bring permanent benefit to mankind

Institutions which will diminish the sway of greed are possible, but only through a complete reconstruction of the whole economic system. Capitalism and the wage system must be abolished; they are twin monsters which are eating up the life of the world. In place of them we need a system which will hold in check man's predatory impulses, and will diminish the economic injustice that allows some to be rich in idleness while others are poor in spite of unremitting labour; but above all we need a system which will destroy the tyranny of the employer, by making men at the same time secure against destitution and able to find scope for individual initiative in the control of the industry by which they live. A better system can do these entire things, and can be established by the democracy whenever it grows weary of enduring evils which there is no reason to endure.

We may distinguish four purposes at which an economic system may aim: first, it may aim at the greatest possible production of goods and at facilitating technical progress; second, it may aim at securing distributive justice; third, it may aim at giving security against destitution; and, fourth, it may aim at liberating creative impulses and diminishing possessive impulses. Capitalistic enterprise involves a ruthless belief in the importance of increasing material production to the utmost possible extent now and in the immediate future.

On the other side of material production, the world is living too fast; in a kind of delirium, almost all the energy of the world has rushed into the immediate production of something, no matter what, and no matter at what cost. And yet our present system is defended on the ground that it safeguards progress!

Among the evils of capitalism and the wage system encourage predatory instincts that allow economic injustice, and that they give great scope to the tyranny of the employer. Under this system there are many means of becoming rich without contributing anything to the wealth of the community. The constant risk of destitution compels most men to fill a great part of their time and thought with the economic struggle. Economic injustice is the most obvious evil of our present time. There is economic injustice as soon as a man has more than his share, unless it is because his efficiency in his work requires it, or as a reward for some definite service. The modern

growth of monopolies in the shape of trusts, cartels, federations of employers and so on has greatly increased the power of the capitalist to levy toil on the community. Justice can never be secured by any system of unrestrained force exercised by interested parties in their own interest. The tyranny of the employer is unavoidable so long as the employer retains the right of dismissal with consequent loss of pay. The most dangerous aspect of the tyranny of the employer is the power which it gives him to interfere with men's activities outside their working hours. A man may be dismissed because the employer dislikes his religion or his politics, or chooses to think his private life immoral.

As men grow more and more civilized, incentives based on hope become increasingly favourable to those that are based on fear. It would be far better that men should be rewarded for working well than that they should be punished for working badly. Sufficient pay to ensure a livelihood ought to be given to every person who is willing to work

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No one ought to be allowed to suffer destitution so long as he or she is *willing* to work. And no kind of enquiry ought to be made into opinion or private life. It is only on this basis that it is possible to build up an economic system not founded upon tyranny and terror. It ought to be open to all who so desire to do short hours of work for little pay, and devote their leisure to whatever pursuit happens to attract them.

There must be activities which train men for those that they are ultimately to carry out, and there must be possible achievements in the near future, not only a vague hope of a distant paradise.

Really vital and radical reform requires some vision beyond the immediate future, some realization of what human beings might make of human life if they choose. Without some such hope, men will not have the energy and enthusiasm necessary to overcome opposition, or the steadfastness to persist when their aims are for the moment unpopular. Every man who has really sincere desire for any

great amelioration in the conditions of life has first to face ridicule, then persecution, then cajolery and attempts at subtle corruption.

Economic systems are concerned essentially with the production and distribution of material goods. Our present system is wasteful on the production side, and unjust on the side of distribution. It involves a life of slavery to economic forces for the great majority of the community, and for the minority a degree of power over the lives of others which no man ought to have. In a good community the production of the necessities of existence would be a mere preliminary to the important and interesting part of life, except for those who find a pleasure in some part of the work of producing necessity. It is not in the least necessary that economic needs should dominate man as they do at present.

Private ownership of land and capital is nor defensible on grounds for justice, or on the ground that it is an economic way of producing what the community needs. The chief objections to it are that it stunts the lives of men and women, that it enshrines a ruthless possessiveness in all the aspects which is given to success, that it leads men to fill the greater part of their time and thought with the acquisition of purely material goods, and that it affords a terrible obstacle to the advancement of civilization and creative energy.

The difficulty involved (in creating institutions that can take us forward) is merely the difficulty of inspiring men with hope, in giving them enough imagination to see that the evils from which they suffer are unnecessary, and enough thought to understand how these evils are to be cured. Revolutionary action may be unnecessary, but revolutionary thought is indispensable, and, as the outcome of thought, a rational and constructive hope.

Pitfalls in Socialism

The method of gradual reform has many merits as compared to the method of revolution. Economic justice demands a diminution, if not a total abolition, of the proportion of the national income which goes to the recipients of rent and interest.

A greater upheaval, and a great change in men's habits of mind, is necessary for any really vital progress.

The power of officials is a great and growing danger in the modern state. Officials and legislators are usually very remote from

those whom they govern, and not imaginatively acquainted with the conditions of life to which their decision will be applied. This makes them ignorant of much that they ought to know. The mere possession of power tends to produce a love of power, which is a very dangerous motive. Because the only sure prove of power consists in preventing others from doing what they wish to do. The essential theory of democracy is the diffusion of power among the whole people, so that the evils produced by one man's possession of great power shall be obviated. But the diffusion of power through democracy is only effective when the voters take an interest in the question involved.

The true ends of democracy are not achieved by any system which places great power in the hands of men subject to no popular control except that which is more or less indirectly exercised through parliament.

A new economic system which merely attacks economic motives and does not interfere with the concentration of power is not likely to effect any great improvement in the world. The problem of distribution of power is more difficult than the distribution of wealth

The tyranny of the majority is a very real danger. It is a mistake to suppose that the majority is necessarily right. Wherever divergent action by different groups is possible without anarchy, it ought to be permitted. In such cases it will be found by those who consider past history that, whenever any new fundamental issue arises, the majority are in the wrong, because they are guided by prejudice and habit. Progress comes through the gradual effect of a minority in converting opinion and altering custom.

The man who works in a state has the right to a voice in the management of his state.

Individual liberty and Public Control

Society cannot exist without law and order, and cannot advance except through the initiative of vigorous innovators. Yet law and order are always hostile to innovations, and the innovators are almost always, to some extent, anarchists. Innovators have difficulty in being allowed to exist and work. Each generation believes that this difficulty is a thing of the past, but each generation is only tolerant of

past innovations. Under the influence of socialism, even progressive opinion, in recent years, has been hostile to individual liberty.

In everything that concerns the economic life of the community, as regards both distribution and conditions of production, what is required is more public control, not less.

Whether a man is Christian, Muslim or Jew is a question of no public concern, so long as he obeys the laws; and the laws should be such as men of all religions can obey.

The instinct of conventionality, horror of uncertainty, and vested interests, all militate against the acceptance of a new idea. And it is even harder to think of a new idea than to get it accepted; most people might spend a lifetime in reflection without ever making a genuinely original discovery.

In a modern civilized society, where the conditions of life are in constant rapid change, and demand, for successful adaptation, and equally rapid change in intellectual outlook, there should be an attempt to encourage, rather than discourage, the expression of new beliefs and the dissemination of knowledge tending to support them. But the very opposite is, in fact, the case. From childhood upward, every thing is done to make the minds of men and women conventional and sterile.

The whole realm of thought and opinion is utterly unsuited to public control; it ought to be free, and as spontaneous as is possible to those who know what others have believed. To preserve and strengthen the impulse that make individuality should be the foremost objective of all political institutions.

In a capitalist society, owing to the partial restraints imposed by law, it makes cunning men rich and honest men poor, because the force of the state is not put at men's disposal according to any just or rational principle.

The possessors of land and capital are able at present, by economic pressure, to use force against those who have no possessions. This force is sanctioned by law, while force exercised by the poor against the rich is illegal.

The motive underlying the public control of men's possessive impulses should always be the increase of liberty both by the prevention of private tyranny and by the liberation of creative impulses. If public control is not to do more harm than good, it must

be so exercised as to leave the utmost freedom to private initiative in all those ways that do not involve the private use of force.

The creative impulses, unlike those that are possessive, are directed to ends in which one man's gain is not another man's loss. The man who makes a scientific discovery or writes a poem is enriching others at the same time as himself. Any increase in knowledge or goodwill is a gain to all who are affected by it, not only to the actual possessor. Those who feel the joy of life are happiness to others as well as to themselves. The creative part of a man's activity ought to be as free as possible from all public control, in order that it may remain spontaneous and full of vigour. The only function of the state in regard to this part of the individual life should be to do everything possible toward providing outlets and opportunities.

The object of education ought not to be to make all men think alike, but to make each think in the way which is the fullest expression of his own personality. Any kind of censure on freedom of thought or on the dissemination of knowledge is, of course, to be condemned utterly.

Huge organizations, both political and economic, are one of the distinguished characteristics of the modern world. These organizations have immense power, and often use their powers to discourage originality in thought and action. They ought, on the contrary, to give the freest scope that is possible without producing anarchy or violent conflict. They ought not to take cognizance of any part of a man's life except what is concerned with the legitimate objects of public control, namely possessions and the use of force. And they ought, by devolution, to leave as large a share of control as possible in the hands of individuals and small groups. If this is not done, the men at the head of these huge organizations will infallibly become tyrannous through the habit of excessive power, and will in time interfere in ways that crush out individual initiative. Those who resist authority when it encroaches upon the legitimate sphere of the individual are performing a service to society, however little society may value it.

National Independence and Internationalism

What constitutes a nation is a sentiment and an instinct, a sentiment of similarity and an instinct of belonging to the same group

and herd. But in national feeling there is always latent, or explicit, an element of hostility to foreigners. Group feeling produces a limited and often harmful kind of morality. Men come to identify the good with what serves the interests of their own group, and the bad with what works against those interests, even if it should happen to be in the interests of mankind as a whole.

A man does right, as a rule, to have his thoughts more occupied with the interests of his own nation. But in all matters which are of equal concern to other nations and to his own, a man ought to take account of the universal welfare, and not allow his survey to be limited by the interest, or supposed interest, of his own group or nation.

The international authority ought to possess an army and navy, and these ought to be the only army and navy in existence. The only legitimate use of force is to diminish the total amount of force exercised in the world. Just as the police are necessary to prevent the use of force by private citizens, so an international police will be necessary to prevent the lawless use of force by separate states.

The civilized races of the world are faced with the alternative of co-operation or mutual destruction. The present war is making this alternative more evident. And it is difficult to believe that civilized men will deliberately choose to destroy civilization, rather than acquiesce in the abolition of war.

Universal free trade (among nations) would indubitably be of economic benefit to mankind. But the desire for exclusive markets is one of the most potent causes of war. Exploiting what are called 'inferior nations' has become one of the main objects of big nations' statecraft. It is not only, or primarily, trade that is desired, but opportunities for investment; finance is more concerned in the matter than industry.

If men could divest themselves of the sentiment of rivalry and hostility between different nations, they would perceive that the matters in which the interests of different nations coincide immeasurably outweigh those in which they clash

The wage system has made people believe that what a man needs is work. This, of course, is absurd. What he needs is the goods produced by work, and the less work involved in making a given

amount of goods, the better. A better system would produce only an increase of wages or a diminution in the hours of work without any corresponding diminution of wages.

Our economic system is topsy-turvy. It makes the interests of the individual conflict with the interests of the community in a thousand ways in which no such conflict ought to exist. Under a better system the benefits of free trade and the evils of tariff would be obvious to all. Whether a man of science is an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a German is a matter of no real importance. His discoveries are open to all, and nothing but intelligence is required in order to profit by them. The whole world of art and literature and learning is international; what is done in one country is not done for that country, but for mankind. Those who wish to see mankind fruitful in the work which men alone can do, will take little account of national boundaries, and have little care to what state a man happens to owe allegiance.

All our economic problems, all the questions of securing the rights of labour, all the hopes of freedom at home and humanity abroad, rest upon the creation of international good-will. So long as hatred, suspicion, and fear dominate the feelings of men toward each other, so long as we cannot hope to escape from the tyranny of violence and brute force. Men must learn to be conscious of the common interests of mankind in which all are at one, rather than those supposed interests in which the nations are divided.

Excellence of one country is to the advantage of all the world He will wish his own country to be great in the arts of peace, to be eminent in thought and science, to be magnanimous and just and generous. He will wish it to help mankind on the way toward that better world of liberty and international concord which must be realized if any happiness is to be left to man. He will not desire for his country the passing triumphs of a narrow possessiveness, but rather the enduring triumph of having helped to embody in human affairs something of that spirit of brotherhood which Christ taught and which the Christian churches have forgotten. **Life and hope for the world are to be found in the deeds of love.**

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April 1, 2008.