

HOOVER DEFENDS INDIVIDUALISM OF AMERICAN SYSTEM

Autocracy, Communism, Syndicalism, Capitalism and Socialism Declared Mere Catchwords—Some True, Others False, and All Interesting Only Through Their Challenge of Society and Its Forces in U. S.

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BY HERBERT HOOVER.

FIVE or six great social philosophies are at struggle in the world for ascendancy. There is the individualism of America. There is the individualism of the more democratic states of Europe with its careful reservations of castes and classes. There are communism, socialism, syndicalism, capitalism and familiar to the masses, whether by birth, by possession, militarism or divine right of kings. Even the divine right still lingers on although our lifetime has seen fully two-thirds of the earth's population, including Germany, Austria, Russia and Italy, arrive in the state of angry disgust with this type of social motive power and throw it on the scrap heap.

Some of these philosophies perhaps more adapted to one race than another. Some are false, some are true. What we are interested in is not the question of physical fitness and spiritual forces of America.

The partisans of some of these other brands of social schemes challenge us to compare the results of their partisans even among our own people are increasing in their agitation that we adopt one or another or a mixture of them in place of our tried individualism.

There are those who have been left in sober doubt of our institutions or are confounded by bewildering catchwords of vivid phrases. Nor indeed should we disregard the potency of some of these phrases in their use to arouse the indignation of the proletariat. "Capitalistic nations," "Germany over all," and a score of others have been used to review those that have jumped to horseback during the last ten years in order that we may be properly awed by the growing and powerful social have that can be worked where the beastial instinct of hate, murder and destruction are clothed by the demagogue in the fine terms of political idealism.

For myself, let me say at the very outset that my faith in the essential truthfulness and vitality of the developing creed by which we have hitherto lived in this country of ours has been confirmed and deepened by the actual experiences of seven years of service in the backwash and misery of war. Seven years of contending with economic degeneration, with social disintegration, with incessant political dislocation, with all of its seething and ferment of individual and class conflict, with government and the primary motivation of social forces, and the necessity for broader thought upon the great issues to humanity, and from all of it I emerge an individualist—an unashamed individualist. But let me say also that such a view of individualism is not the individualism of the past. For America has been steadily developing the ideals that constitute progressive individualism.

American System Tempered. No doubt individualism run riot with no tempering principle, would provide a long category of inequalities, of tyrannies, dominations and injustices. America, however, has tempered the whole conception of individualism by the injection of a definite principle, and from this principle it follows that attempts at domination, whether in government or in the processes of industry and commerce, are under an insistent curb. If we would have the values of individualism, their stimulation to initiative, to the development of hand and intellect, to the high development of thought and spirituality, they must be tempered with that firm and fixed ideal of American individualism—an equality of opportunity. We would not have these values we must soften its hardness and stimulate progress through that sense of service that lies in our people.

Therefore, it is not the individualism of other countries for which I would speak, but the individualism of America. Our individualism differs from all others because it embraces these great ideals; that while we build our society upon the attainment of the individual, we also safeguard to every individual an equality of opportunity to take that position in the community to which his intelligent character, ability and ambition entitle him; that we keep the social solution free from frozen strata of classes; that we shall stimulate the effort of each individual to achievement; that through an enlarging sense of responsibility and understanding we shall assist him to this attainment, while he in turn must stand up to the emery wheel of competition.

Safeguards Not Enough. Individualism cannot be maintained as the foundation of society if it looks to only legalistic justice based upon contracts, property and political equality. Such legalistic safeguards are themselves not enough. In our individualism we have long since abandoned the laissez faire of the 18th century—the notion that it is every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. We abandoned that when we adopted the ideal of equality of opportunity—fair chance and Abraham Lincoln. We have confirmed its abandonment in terms of legislation of social and economic justice—in part because we have learned that it is the hindmost who throws the bricks at our social edifice. In part because we have learned that the foundation of society is the best nor the hindmost the worst—and in part because we have learned that social injustice is the destruction of justice itself. We have learned that the impulse of production can only be maintained at a high pitch if there is a fair division of the product. We have also learned that fair division can only be obtained by certain restrictions on the strong and the dominant.

Whatever may be the case with regard to old world individualism (and we have given more back to Europe than we received from her) the truth that is important for us to grasp today is that there is a world of difference between the principles and spirit of old world individualism and that which we have developed in our own country. Classification Is Declined. Like most Americans, I refuse to be damned by anybody's word-classification of it, such as "capitalism," "plutocracy," "proletariat" or "middle class," or any other, or to any kind of compartment that is based on the assumption of some group dominating somebody else. The rightfulness of our individualism can rest either on philosophy, political, economic or spiritual grounds. It can rest on the ground of being the only safe avenue to further human progress. But no civilization could be built or can endure solely upon the groundwork of unrestrained and unintelligent, self-interest. The problem of the world is to restrain the destructive instincts while strengthening and enlarging those of altruistic character and constructive impulse—for thus we build for the future.

Yet true as this is, the day has not arrived when any economic or



HERBERT HOOVER, WHO WRITES ON "AMERICAN INDIVIDUALISM."

social system will function and last if founded upon altruism alone. The will-of-the-wisp of all breeds of socialism is that they contemplate a motivation of human animals by altruism alone. It necessitates a bureaucracy of the entire population, in which, having obliterated the economic stimulation of each member, the fine gradation of character and ability are to be arranged in relative authority by ballot or more likely by a Tammany Hall or bolshevist party, or some other form of tyranny. The proof of the futility of these ideas as a stimulation to the development and activity of the individual does not lie alone in the stately failure of Russia, but it also lies in our own failure in attempts at nationalized industry.

Autocracy Is Will-of-the-Wisp. The will-of-the-wisp of autocracy in any form is that it supposes that the good Lord endowed a special few with all the divine attributes. It contemplates one human animal dealing to the other human animals his earth, his government, his glory, and of immortality. The proof of the futility of these ideas in the development of the world does not lie alone in the grim failure of Germany, but it lies in the damage to our moral and social fabric from those who have sought economic domination in America, whether employer or employee.

We in America have had too much experience of life to fool ourselves into pretending that all men are equal in intelligence, in ambition. That was part of the clap-trap of the French revolution. We have grown to understand that the only way to assure to the individual through government is liberty, justice, intellectual welfare, equality of opportunity, and stimulation to service.

It is maintenance of a society fit to these human qualities that our individualism learns from the individualism of Europe. There can be no rise for the individual through the frozen strata of classes, or of castes, and no stratification can take place in a mass lived by the free stir of its particles.

The pioneers of our American individualism had the good sense not to reward Washington and Jefferson and Hamilton with hereditary dukedoms and fixtures in landed estates, as Great Britain rewarded Machiavelli and his disciples. Our American fields of opportunity would have been clogged with long generations inheriting their father's privileges without their father's capacity for service.

Examples Are Cited. That our system has avoided the establishment and domination of class has a significant proof in the present administration in Washington. Of the 12 men comprising the president, vice-president and cabinet, nine have earned their own way in life without economic inheritance, and eight of them started with manual labor.

Furthermore, the maintenance of productivity and the advancement of the things of the spirit depend upon the ever-renewed supply from the mass of those who can rise to leadership. Our social, economic and intellectual progress is almost solely dependent upon the creative minds of those individuals with imaginative and administrative intelligence who create or who carry discovery to widespread application. No race possesses more than a small percentage of these minds in a single generation. But little thought has ever been given to our racial dependency upon them, and that our progress is in so large a measure due to the fact that, with our increased means of communication these rare individuals are today able to spread their influence over so enlarged a number of lesser capable minds as to have increased their potency a million-fold. In truth, vastly greater productivity of the world with actually less physical labor is due to the spirit spread of their influence through the discovery of these facilities.

Leadership is the quality of the individual. It is the individual alone who can function in the world of intellect and in the field of leadership. If democracy is to secure its authority in morals, religion, and state-ship, it must stimulate leadership from its own mass. Human leadership cannot be replenished by selection like queen bees, by divine right or bureaucracy, but by the free rise of ability, character and intelligence.

Individual Is Keystone. Progress of the nation is the sum of progress in its individuals. Acts and deeds that lead to progress are born out of the womb of the individual mind, not out of the mind of the crowd. The crowd only feels:

tion. They have seen the spiritual and material mobilization of nations, of classes and groups, for sacrifice and service; they have conceived that real human progress can be achieved by working on "the psychology of the people"—by the "mass mind"; they yielded to leadership without reservation; they conceived that this leadership could continue without tyranny; they have forgotten that permanent spiritual progress lies with the individual.

Living Standards Problem. The high and increasing standards of living and comfort should be the first of considerations in public mind and in government needs no apology. We have long since realized that the basis of an advanced civilization must be a high and growing standard of living for all the people, not for a single class; that education, food, clothing, housing and the spreading use of what we so often term non-essentials are the real fertilizers of the soil from which spring the finer flowers of life. The economic advance in the past 50 years has lifted the general standard of comfort far beyond the dreams of our forefathers. The standard of living has advanced to the point where the standard of living is by greater invention, greater elimination of waste, greater production and better distribution of commodities and services, for by increasing their ratio to our numbers and dividing them justly we each will have more of them.

The superlative value of individualism through its impulse to production, its stimulation to invention, has, so far as I know, never been denied. Criticism of it has laid its wastes but more importantly in its failure of equitable sharing of the product. In our country these contentions are mainly over the division to each of his share of the comforts and luxuries, for none of that man in the mass does not place a place to his head—and we have much besides. In less than four decades we have added electric lights, plumbing, telephones, gramophones, automobiles and what not in wide diffusion to our standards of living. Each in turn began as a luxury, each in turn has become so commonplace that 70 or 80 per cent of our people participate in them.

Surplus Is Small. To all practical souls there is little use in quarreling over the share of each of us until we have something to divide. So long as we maintain our individualism we will have increasing quantities of leisure and taxes with which to fight out proper sharing of the "surplus." The income tax returns show that this surplus is a minor part of our total production after taxes are paid. Some of this "surplus" must be set aside for rewards to saving, for stimulation of proper effort to skill, to leadership and invention—

therefore the dispute is in reality over much less than the total of such "surplus." While there should be no minimizing of a certain fringe of injustices in sharing the results of production or in the wasteful use made by some of their share, yet there is a vastly wider field for gains to all of us through cheapening the costs of production and distribution through the eliminating of their wastes, from increasing the volume of product by each and every one doing his utmost, than will ever come to us even if we can think out a method of abstract justice in sharing which did not stifle production of the total product.

It is a certainty we are confronted with a population in such numbers as can only exist by production attuned to a pitch in which the slightest reduction of the impulse to produce will at once create misery and want. If we throttle the fundamental impulses of man our production will decay. The world in this hour is witnessing the most overwhelming tragedy of ten centuries in the heart-breaking life-and-death struggle with starvation by a nation with 150 millions of people. In Russia under the new tyranny a group, in the result of social theories, has destroyed the primary self-interest impulse of the individual to production.

Socialism Held Fallacious. Although socialism in a nationwide application has now proved itself with rivers of blood and inconceivable misery to be an economic and spiritual failure and has wrecked itself finally upon the rocks of destroyed production and moral degeneracy, I believe it to have been necessary for the world to have had this demonstration. Great theoretic and emotional ideas have arisen before in the world's history and that man in the mass does not find bankruptcy deluged the world with fearful losses of life. A purely philosophical view might be that in the long run humanity has to try every way even precipices, in finding the road to betterment.

Private property is not a fetich in America. The crushing of the labor trade without a cent of compensation, with scarcely even a discussion of it, does not bear out the notion that we give property rights any headway over human rights.

It is where dominant private property is assembled in the hands of the few that the individual begins to feel capital as an oppressor. Our American demand for equality of opportunity is in more than mere material gain becoming a thing to be feared. Out of fear we sometimes even go too far and stifle the reproductive use of capital by crushing the initiative that makes for its creation. The domination by arbitrary individual ownership is disappearing because the works of today are steadily growing more and more beyond the resources of any one individual, and steadily taxation will reduce relatively excessive individual accumulations. The number of persons in partnership through division of ownership among many stockholders is steadily increasing—thus 100,000 to 200,000 partners in a single concern are not uncommon. The overwhelming large portion of our mobile capital is that of our banks, insurance companies, building and loan associations, and the vast majority of this is the aggregated small savings of our people. Thus large capital is steadily becoming more and more a mobilization of the people in order to attract their support. The directors and managers of large concerns, themselves employees of these great groups of individual stockholders, on policy holders, reflect a spirit of community responsibility.

Organisms Prove Useful. With the enormous shift in growth to industry and commerce we have erected organisms that each generation has denounced as "Frankenstein," yet the succeeding generation proves them to be controllable and useful. The growth of corporations, of our trade unions, of electrical power, of our farm cooperatives, of our trade unions, of our trade associations, and of a hundred others indeed develops both beneficial and malign forces. The blind become frightened. But our basic social ideas march through the new things in the end. Our demagogues, of both radical and standpat breed, thrive on demands for the destruction of one or another of these organizations as the only solution for their defects, yet progress requires only a guardianship of the vital principles of our individualism with its safeguard of true equality of opportunity in them.

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