

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Conservatism, the social question and the idea of a socialist monarchy

May 22, 2019 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Dr. Rudolph Meyer, the friend of Karl Rodbertus, a Socialist-Conservative, and formerly the publisher of the Berliner Revue, was often among the guests at Engels' house, during the time of his stay in London. His passports were his expert knowledge in the sphere of political economy, and the circumstance that he was living in exile, having been persecuted by Bismarck. As a good East-Elber he was no enemy to alcohol, and one evening at Engels' he drank a regular skinful. It was extremely droll, quite conscious of his condition, he kept on shouting, in a slightly thickened voice: **"Well, well, if any one had ever told me that I, a Prussian Conservative, should one day, here in London, be made squiffy by the Revolutionary Communists!"** This was on Christmas Eve, and then, to be sure, such things might well befall one in Engels' house.

— From Ch IX of Eduard Bernstein's memoirs [[source](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bernstein/works/1915/exile/ch09.htm)]
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Having spoken of Wagener's timid defense of Friedrich Wilhelm IV (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2019/05/18/hermann-wagener-and-the-neutering-of-a-counterrevolutionary/>), as a compromise to the liberal ascendancy in the Kaiserreich, another subject worth noting is Herr Wagener's eventual abandonment of the Ständestaat and his conversion to a form of right-wing socialism (or "feudal socialism," as Marx and Engels called it — not that I consider that at all an accurate descriptor). The fact that anti-capitalism has its origins in the aristocratic defenders of patrimonial-feudalistic relations, and that socialism is a bastardized and greatly inferior continuation of this original anti-capitalism, is a fact of history infrequently noted and even less frequently explored. My previous discussions of this include: (1) (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/bonald-and-the-socialists-some-unsettled-debts/>), (2) (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/03/04/the-yearning-for-lord-and-manor-in-socialist-thought/>), (3) (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2018/07/09/temptations-of-right-wing-socialism/>). It has been remarked of too by Kuehnelt-Leddihn (<https://fee.org/articles/the-roots-of-anticapitalism/>).

Channeling the state socialist Lorenz von Stein, sometime around 1855 Wagener began writing that unless kingship "musters the high moral courage to become a kingship of social reform," it would degenerate into either one of despotism, a hollow shadow, or a republic. In 1864, he regarded the

political counterweight in a pro-monarchist coalition to be the small craftsmen *and* the working class. To von Gerlach in 1865, he confided that “the hallmark of the times is precisely the disintegration and decomposition of all outdated institutions and organisms.” [i.e. among other things, estates]. In a speech given to the Reichstag in 1867, he renounced serfdom, saying that such a thing can be upheld only “as long as awareness of their abjectness has not seeped into the masses.” Bismarck’s social insurance was too moderate, and he rejected the Anti-Socialist Laws as well.

The definitive statement of Herr Wagener’s social policy positions is in a booklet published in 1878, entitled *Die Lösung der sozialen Frage vom Standpunkt der Wirklichkeit und Praxis. Von einem praktischen Staatsmanne*. [The Solution to the Social Question from the Standpoint of Reality and Practice. From a practical statesman.]

“Socialism is not only a postulate of “the brutal instincts and desires of the working classes,” as many would like to believe, but a new, very consistent system, and in spite of or because of its errors – a very strong system, which evenly embraces all areas of human life,” he states.

Now one of the most valuable observations that Wagener draws, and it has been pointed out by others like Antoine Blanc de Saint-Bonnet before, is the straightforward continuity between liberalism and social democracy or “socialism,” a fact that neither committed classical liberals nor socialists are willing to acknowledge, as in:

The further development of this theory will be the more conclusive the more one comes to the conclusion that the French Revolution and contemporary socialism are essentially identical in their innermost core, as in their catchwords, and that there is nothing in between but the undoubtedly unsuccessful attempt to corrupt and mutilate the concept of the “people,” to arrest the revolutionary development in the interest of the popular classes favored by the present conditions at a quite arbitrary stage, and to brand the masses of the people as nasty and brutish.

Sovereignty of the individual; Sovereignty of the people; absolute independence from any authority, whether in heaven or on earth; Liberty, equality, fraternity; Elimination of all exploitation and oppression; general welfare: it would indeed be difficult to discover a major difference between the much-vaunted and much-vilified program of the day.

The only difference is the different interpretation that it finds, and the gradual disappearance of the ecclesiastical traditions, which is expressed in particular in the attitude to marriage and family.

As a result of this different interpretation, it has meanwhile come to pass that certain circles no longer want to know more about the “fraternity” of the First Revolution, that the concept of “man” first begins with the staff officer of today’s society, the “capitalist.” Sovereign people are only those who have, above all, in their pockets what dominates the world today, and of course the “tyranny, exploitation and oppression” to be eliminated is to exclude that which is accomplished with the aid of money.

“Sanctity of property,” “legal order”: these are the counter-slogans with which one today hopes to summon and defeat the revolutionary onslaught of socialism!

As if before the French Revolution there had not existed a “legal order,” as if that revolution had stood before the sanctity of “feudal,” “clerical,” and “ecclesiastical” property; as if the modern historical category of “industrial” capitalist property was more sacred than the past form, and as if a legal order did not reoccur after any possible socialist overthrow.

They wanted to destroy the monarchy and erect the sovereignty and self-government of the people, and they destroyed everything that hitherto stood in the way of the unfettered Caesarean despotism: the rights and privileges of the provinces and cities, the corporations and individuals, and one has set up a permanent state of siege and a tyranny that knows only the only change to be exercised today by a convention and tomorrow by a dictator.

They wanted to destroy feudalism and lordship, vassalage and bondage, and wanted to establish the sanctity of the individual, and they destroyed all the barriers and impediments which protected the individual against the whole, the weak against the strong, and they erected then the new feudalism of industry, the bread and wages, and a new bondage, in which hunger replaces the whip, and typhus has replaced the former police prohibitions of unbridled proliferation.

One wanted to eliminate the old estates and classes and their antagonistic opposition, and set up the brotherhood of all men, and one has destroyed the last remnants of fraternal convictions, which had still been preserved in the old brotherhoods and cooperatives, and set up the “war of all against all” and not only “the peaceful struggle for existence,” but also the serious bloody civil war, the “revolutionary brotherly love” with petroleum lighting.

One wanted to eliminate the administrative and legislative divergence and autonomy of the individual landscapes and provinces and erect the one and indivisible republic, and one has destroyed the earlier unity of the people – today facing each other as *bourgeois* and *peuple* in unforgiving hatred...

Alright, fine and dandy so far. Later on, Wagener states that provided socialism is taken on its economic merits and extirpated from its radical political agitation, it is fully in line with conservatism as against Manchesterism. These principles of socialism being: “elimination of individualism through collectivism; replacement of private capital with collective capital; elimination of present anarchic production governed only by “free competition” by a social organization of national labor, abolition of the former unlimited rule and exploitation of capital by preserving and restoring the union of capital and labor, and equitable distribution of the common (social) product to all according to the measure and the value of their achievement: it only requires a reasonably correct translation of these postulates of socialism into the usual mode of “conservatism” in order to put the surprising concurrence of both into the light.”

Hence in fact socialism is *not* merely a consequence of liberalism, but rather it is, in his words, “the theoretical expression of the fact that in the mass of the people knowledge has acquired form and strength, that the weak are in need of protection against the strong, as well as that the individual needs the universal guarantee of the whole, and that it is above all the task of the state and its government to grant the joint guarantee.”

Wagener states in the absence of poor relief, the iron law of wages tending toward subsistence in conjunction with the reserve army of labor that accompanies freedom of movement and trade, would develop into a slave-market and the existing wage-relationship to a new kind of bondage, “and indeed to a bondage which would have become all the more oppressive and unbearable, as the lordly master this time without any obligation or obligation faced with no personal human relationship... In the ancient world, at least, the slave had to be bought whole, while today he is bought piece by piece...”

It follows too that the bourgeois fear of a “community of women” under socialism is baseless, and that socialism strengthens marriage rather than dissolving it: “Therefore, the claim of sanctity of marriage and of the family can be claimed only by socialism, which in turn has at least the serious intention of granting to the mass of the people the possibility and the indispensable material of an orderly family life,

and so morally and politically to acknowledge marriage and family as the most important and indispensable elements of the foundations of the state and society.” He quotes Constantin Frantz to the effect that liberal capitalism knows only the “worker” selling his labor-power and no other category.

The monarchy of the future will be a “social kingdom,” and the future king “the patron of the weak, the king of beggars and the father of the mass of the people.”

Consequently, Wagener warns that the true way to negate the Revolution is not by “police and criminal justice, nor reaction and military,” but by fulfilling its legitimate social postulates by and through “the orderly legal abolition of the bondage and the emancipation of the Third Estate.”

The mantle of history now passing on to the proletarian Fourth Estate, one must not be a nostalgic and realize that “nothing is more dangerous and more fatal to the monarchy and the kingdom than to identify itself with the social class in which it rules.”

Liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be disparaged, but redeemed. The rules of law and administration must be penetrated by a “social spirit,” and so the way one fights the evils of civic and political equality... is to institute social equality.

The people’s state will have to be a monarchical state, however. The rule of parliament and of parties is nothing but a class tyranny, as the socialists would concur in their skepticism of “bourgeois democracy.” But neither can proletarian dictatorship be accepted. Hence: “To socialism, therefore, belongs a strong supremacy over the parties, the monarchy, the greatest protection and defense, because it is the only possible instance of equality for all parties and interests, and all under the same conditions submit to the interest of state.”

Wagener cannot accept the more radical claims of the labor theory of value, either. The “worker” alone is a chimera, and to reduce man’s essence to his capacity for labor is dreadful. He proposes founding a Ministry of Labor and Employment to engage in statistical planning of the various economic sectors and to keep the income shares of labor and capital at some equitable balance. Further, to introduce the eight-hour working day, a reinstatement of usury laws (but ill-defined on what usury would be in an industrial and mercantile system (https://economics.barnard.edu/sites/default/files/chapter_1-camb-final-13_2.pdf)), and again the notion of a “collective capital” or capital as social trust — again, vague.

His plan is actually to create an “embourgeoisement” of the working classes, and favors a “strong middle class,” while abandoning the “paternal system” he has now turned his back on and labeled “unsustainable”:

For this purpose, it is above all necessary to **take seriously the practical recognition of equal rights in legislation and administration and finally abandon the unsustainable patriarchal or paternalistic system....**

Therefore, a decisive state action can be achieved only on the sustained applause of the masses, which does not allow the differences of possession to be regarded as reasons for political differentiation, but on the contrary pursues the end of compensating for the social differences by creating a new middle class appropriate to industrial society and to bridge it, and thereby to create for the modern state the great and sure middle party, in which the sustaining and moving forces in turn find their adjustment. [i.e. equilibrium]

Indeed, towards the end of his pamphlet he explicitly states his notion that socialism at its core is some middle-class uplifting movement and not a revolutionary one: "Put more briefly, this would mean that socialism is essentially aimed at establishing a new industrial middle class within the industrial society and on the basis of collective work."

But neither is he a distributist, the idea of "every man a proprietor" is unrealistic to him:

"For this reason, too, no violent or even periodically repeating "division," but rather a detachment of private property similar to the relinquishment of feudal loads, has been put into the eye by the means of the social production process, and this thereafter becomes the task of true reform politicians to extract the fruitful content of the legitimate essence contained in this process.

Lasalle's basic idea in his "system of acquired rights" in this respect is precisely that no social function can be the object of political domination, and that the private domination of social production by "capital" is just as antisocial, non-public and feudalistic as patrimonial rule used to be vis-a-vis the state."

Now, Wagener owed much of his conceptions to one of his acquaintances by the name of Rudolf Meyer ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Meyer_\(Publizist\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Meyer_(Publizist))), who I mentioned in the beginning. Wagener and Meyer together edited a journal by the name of *Berliner Revue* in the 1870s. Whereas Wagener stayed on with the German conservatives, Meyer went from conservative socialist to just about a Marxist, and maintained a personal correspondence with Marxist circles, as well as publishing in Marxist journals. Meyer's core theory was expounded in his work *Der Emancipationskampf des vierten Standes* (1875) [The Emancipation Struggle of the Fourth Estate], from which Wagener draws heavily.

Meyer drew a distinction between at the time his own side, the "conservative or ecclesiastical socialists" as against the "democratic socialists," reducing the difference essentially into revolution vs. reform:

The difference between the conservative socialists and the ecclesiastical socialists on the one hand and the democratic socialists, Social Democrats, on the other hand, lies only in the popular or desired *modus procedendi*. The former want a quiet, bloodless reform, which comes from the initiative of the now ruling authorities: state (government), church, possessing classes, and uses the help of the fourth estate, thus educating it for a future that is better for it. They want to conserve what can be conserved by satisfying the legitimate demands of the fourth estate, which can not be denied in the long run; they want to preserve all the truly good achievements of civilization and peacefully inaugurate a new economic order. The social democrats, on the other hand, do not hope for such an initiative "from above." And unfortunately they have a good reason to do so, because the occasional efforts of the conservative socialists have so far been unsuccessful. Thus, the Social Democrats, the people in mass, strive for the fourth estate to be drawn into the struggle and to bring about a change in the current economic order only through its own power.

This is why revolutionaries made it such a large part of their identity to reject reform through electoral means, the ever-present fear of somehow becoming the stooges of reaction.

Now the entire project of "socialist monarchism" was riddled with contradictions, of course. Wagener expected that turning the proles into a *Mittelstand* would secure the crown rather than endanger it, as an anti-bourgeois person such as himself ought to have immediately realized. Middle class politics means graft, endless chattering, factionalism in the distribution of offices, a jealous demand for fictitious rights, and so on. "Le bourgeois gentilhomme" is an oxymoron.

Wagener and Meyer also severely overestimated the potential conservatism of any form of socialism whatsoever. Oh yes, lots of left-leaning figures in our time are now having a hard-on for men like Christopher Lasch, Michel Clouscard, and loudly clamoring against “neoliberalism” for fueling the gay rights agenda (<http://theagonist.org/essays/2019/04/15/essays-mccormack-queering-the-world-for-capital.html>), among any of other causes in the global culture wars; Paul Gottfried is being his usual fellow-traveler self (<http://theagonist.org/essays/2019/04/15/essays-gottfried-the-lessons-of-the-old-left.html>), Angela Nagle is coming out against open borders, etc. etc.

This is self-delusion. It is the town whore reinventing herself as a pious woman of faith and good works without making due penance for her past transgressions. Communism’s role in social liberality and licentiousness cannot be swept aside. (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/08/10/the-myth-of-the-socially-conservative-old-left/>).

Any talk of socialism as a guarantor of marriage is complete bunk, as well. The definitive socialist position on the Woman Question was written by long-time SPD chairman August Bebel, who was also an early proponent of decriminalizing sodomy.

Bebel, in *Woman and Socialism*, first published in 1879, had this to say on what the position of woman would look like in a future socialist society (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bebel/1879/woman-socialism/ch28.htm>):

In the new society woman will be entirely independent, both socially and economically. She will not be subjected to even a trace of domination and exploitation, but will be free and man's equal, and mistress of her own lot. Her education will be the same as man's, with the exception of those deviations that are necessitated by the differences of sex and sexual functions. Living under normal conditions of life, she may fully develop and employ her physical and mental faculties. She chooses an occupation suited to her wishes, inclinations and abilities, and works under the same conditions as man. Engaged as a practical working woman in some field of industrial activity, she may, during a second part of the day, be educator, teacher or nurse, during a third she may practice a science or an art, and during a fourth she may perform some administrative function. She studies, works, enjoys pleasures and recreation with other women or with men, as she may choose or as occasions may present themselves.

In the choice of love she is as free and unhampered as man. She woos or is wooed, and enters into a union prompted by no other considerations but her own feelings. This union is a private agreement, without the interference of a functionary, just as marriage has been a private agreement until far into the middle ages. Here Socialism will create nothing new, it will merely reinstate, on a higher level of civilization and under a different social form, what generally prevailed before private property dominated society.

Man shall dispose of his own person, provided that the gratification of his impulses is not harmful or detrimental to others. **The satisfaction of the sexual impulse is as much the private concern of each individual, as the satisfaction of any other natural impulse. No one is accountable to any one else, and no third person has a right to interfere. What I eat and drink, how I sleep and dress is my private affair, and my private affair also is my intercourse with a person of the opposite sex.** Intelligence and culture, personal independence, – qualities that will become natural, owing to the education and conditions prevailing in the new society, – will prevent persons from committing actions that will prove detrimental to themselves. Men and women of future society will possess far more self-control and a better knowledge of their own natures, than men and women of to-day. The one fact alone, that the foolish prudery and secrecy connected with sexual matters will disappear, will make the relation of the sexes a far more natural and healthful one. If between a man and woman who have entered into a union, incompatibility, disappointment or revulsion should appear, morality commands a dissolution of the union which has become unnatural, and therefore immoral. As all those circumstances will have vanished that have so far compelled a great many women either to chose celibacy or prostitution, men can no longer dominate over women. On the other hand, the completely changed social conditions will have removed the many hindrances and harmful influences that affect married life to-day and frequently prevent its full development or make it quite impossible.

Never forget: every liberal is a communist, and every communist is a liberal.

For a decent contemporary attack on socialism from a conservative Catholic perspective, see Fr. Victor Cathrein, S.J.'s *Socialism exposed and refuted* (<https://archive.org/details/socialismexposed00cathuoft/>) (1892).

How can you tell the difference? For one, Fr. Cathrein openly notes the remaining authoritarian aspects of capitalism, and rather than screeching against them, embraces their necessity. (<https://archive.org/details/socialismexposed00cathuoft/page/156>):

This modern industrial order in great manufactories and other industries is based upon the strongest moral force. The owner of the factory or industry, either in person or by means of his representative, confronts the laborers as proprietor and can rule them with almost absolute power. The laborer, it is true, is not forced to offer his service to such establishments, but if he wishes to obtain from them labor and support he must submit unconditionally to their ruling. The least insubordination will be the cause of his dismissal. Therefore force controls the modern system of production, but only moral force, to which each one submits for his own interest. **In the socialistic state, on the other hand, the directors of the various industries would confront the laborers not as proprietors, but as equals, possessing the same rights. Each one has the same right as his neighbor to consider himself a proprietor; nor can any one be dismissed ; but every one must get work, for the simple reason that all private production is interdicted. The practicability of large private industrial institutions, therefore, does not prove the possibility of extending the same system to entire states.**

The arguments taken from the state industries which have been attempted by some governments, such as railroads, mail service, telegraphs, state mines, etc., do not conclude in favor of socialism. For in these public industries also the state or its representatives are considered as proprietors in their relation to the laborers. Besides, the directors are personally interested in such establishments, and are themselves also under the influence of the same moral force as the laborers. Every official as well as every laborer must be satisfied with his position. There is no alternative left him, if he wishes to gain his livelihood. Besides, he may be dismissed at pleasure or his salary may be curtailed if he gives any occasion of complaint to his superiors. Even a slight murmur on his part may suffice to deprive him of his position. Hence it is that in our modern state industries, wherever they have obtained, main force is the ruling power, and all is directed by absolute control. But in the socialistic state of the future, in which every man is to be a sovereign and to receive his position and his support from the community, in which, moreover, the final decision regarding the control of labor, the division of produce, the appointment of officers, should be the business of the people, the case would be quite different.

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3 thoughts on “Conservatism, the social question and the idea of a socialist monarchy”

1. [Walter Devereux](#) says:

[May 22, 2019 at 2:17 pm](#)

Where were Wagener and Meyer on the national question?

Fr. Cathrein does not seem to offer a satisfactory answer to the complaints of where the moral force of the proprietor derives from, or why, in actuality, socialist practice hardly eliminates the proprietor as such; it preaches equality, but practices arbitrary hierarchy. How does his work, I wonder, interact with the understanding of industrial capitalism present in *Rerum Novarum*?

[Reply](#).

2. Aldon says:

[February 8, 2021 at 9:11 am](#)





OverTheWall

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Meister Eckhart too (partially). Suso defended him

WIESTER LERNART too (partially, JUSO defended him
successfully, some of his shits got burned tho)
And a bunch of Beguines too, a bunch (glad they went
extinct)

11:55 PM · Feb 6, 2021



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Which do you find most agreeable?

Reply.

- Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur says:

February 8, 2021 at 9:49 am

None of them.

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