

## THE SERVILE STATE

John Anderson had two passions—philosophy and freedom, and *The Servile State* is philosophy analysing social and moral tendencies destructive of freedom. Anderson rejects any belief in a utopian social harmony, arguing that every society is the location of a struggle between freedom and repressive tendencies, repression usually demanding conformity by promising harmony, peace and (in economically turbulent times) material security. Anderson deplored moralising because he thought that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ referred to real features of human life. His highly original moral views are conspicuous in this discussion, by a committed atheist, of *The Servile State*, the 1912 criticism of collectivist tendencies written by the Catholic social philosopher Hilaire Belloc.



Widely regarded as the most important Australian philosopher, **John Anderson** (1 November 1893–6 July 1962) was the Challis Professor of Philosophy at Sydney University between 1927 and 1958. Born in Scotland and a graduate of the University of Glasgow, Anderson taught at the universities of Cardiff, Glasgow, and Edinburgh before coming to Sydney. The founder of the ‘Sydney realist’ school of philosophy, Anderson’s fierce empiricism and commitment to moral, political, and philosophical independence influenced a generation of ‘Andersonian’ students, writers, and activists, and his penetrating world-view continues to shape intellectual, political, and cultural life in the Harbour City to the present day.

**Kenneth Minogue** is Emeritus Professor of Political science at the London School of Economics. He has written books on liberalism, nationalism, the idea of a university, the logic of ideology, and more recently on democracy and the moral life. His most recent books have been *Politics: A Very Short Introduction* for the Oxford University Press, and an edited volume, *Essays in Conservative Realism*. He was born in New Zealand and educated in Australia.



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*Studies in Empirical Philosophy*

John Anderson

Introduction by Kenneth Minogue



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# Introduction

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Kenneth Minogue

What is a twenty-first century free market think-tank like the CIS doing in reviving a philosophical essay on servility written in 1943? The journal in which it first appeared was obscure, and the writer John Anderson is hardly a household name these days. It gets worse: Anderson in his early days was a Marxist who advised the Australian Communist Party, and his conception of freedom never quite disentangled itself from Trotskyist and other left wing deviations. A further problem is that the article is a discussion of a largely forgotten book by Hilaire Belloc, whose fame today rests more on his comic verse than on his contribution to Catholic social thought. Republishing this piece is indeed an odd thing to do, but I think the CIS may be on to something. And that something is rediscovering the moral foundations of libertarianism.

The free market tradition cultivated by the CIS emerges historically from Adam Smith and the development of a science of economics. Smith, and those who think like him, had a marvellous grip on the paradoxes of prosperity. Earlier thinkers believed that the way to enrich a nation was for the state to direct the economic energies of the people, but experience has long shown that the only way to generate prosperity is to leave people alone. Smith and Co. weren't advocating the doctrine of *laissez faire* (which historically began its life as a policy *for* states rather than a limitation on them) but the rule of law, which is very different. This free market tradition generates most of what we have come to understand about freedom, and it has led on to public choice theory, sociological accounts of the work ethic, and much else. You certainly don't need philosophical ideas to get a grip on this argument, though its economic elaboration can become very complex indeed. Freedom only began to need a few philosophical foundations when

it collided with the socialist passion for creating ideal communities exhibiting perfect harmony.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many intellectuals turned against the free market while some were persuaded that only socialised central direction could avoid the waste and conflict of capitalism. Many thought that only a true community could release human potential. In those days, collectivist utopias multiplied in both theory and practice, and their influence on educated, or more usually half-educated, people was considerable. The spread of these managerial ideas has revealed one of the most profound dreams of our civilisation, and it took many forms. In the last century, Nazis, nationalists of many kinds, and Communists were all exponents of it. More recently ethnic cleansing has offered a replay, in a less comprehensive form, of the passion for some kind of communal perfection. Today, all but the most deluded in our own civilisation reject such experiences, but experience alone is no match for a dream of perfection.

The problem for libertarians is that the collectivist dream transcends politics and can inspire arguments so seductively moral as to draw upon positively religious inspiration. The perfect community is heaven brought down to earth. Much of twentieth-century history was a tragi-comedy of human beings immolating themselves in the flames of collectivist dreams. And this power of dreams to bewitch people poses the basic rhetorical problem faced by those of us who cherish our free way of life.

There can never, of course, be a conclusive end to the war between the lovers of freedom and dreamers of perfection. Our appeal is to realism, to a recognition of what we today as human beings are actually like, and of what is possible to us. We do not peddle utopias. Instead, where collectivists expose as the secret of our civilisation the oppression of the underprivileged, we affirm that some of this is circumstantial rather than systematic, and most of it results from the opportunities (and inevitable failures) of an adventurous, liberal and democratic world. Our problem is to exhibit the moral profundity of this understanding of the human condition. And that, I think, is why republishing 'The Servile State' is an interesting move in advancing the understanding of libertarianism.

The last great moment when this problem dominated intellectual life was in the totalitarian epoch, which in some sense ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Hayek brilliantly exposed the dangers of perfectionist central power, while Popper's distinction between Open and Closed societies was another striking account of the social and political conditions of freedom. A little later, Isaiah Berlin attacked totalitarian modes of thought as versions of philosophical idealism. Impressive as they certainly were, none of these writers quite transcended an instrumentalist vision of liberty. They argued cogently that without liberty there could be no prosperity, happiness or security from arbitrary interference in our lives, but they failed to touch the dream of a perfect community.

One rhetorical difficulty was that collectivists deceitfully claimed that even freedom itself was among the comprehensive perfections of their collectivised harmony. In doing so, they misunderstood freedom by identifying it with power. Absurd formulae such as 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want' were often invoked. The libertarian problem was that the tradition stemming from Smith and John Stuart Mill told us a great deal about the realities of a free society, but did not really touch the moral question. They did not, in other words, release the meaning of freedom from its vast range of instrumental benefits, of which prosperity was perhaps the most discussed, though not, morally, the most important. Freedom was identified merely with the free market, of which it is a part, but only a part. Liberals could give an answer to the question: what is the point of being free? They did not realise that the very question itself is tainted.

Let us now bring Anderson into play. He was professor of philosophy at Sydney from 1926 to 1958. Although a libertarian, he was an unlikely champion of the free market, for which he often blamed the commercial corruptions of his time. He was a professional philosopher whose adventurous intellectual trajectory had moved from Scottish idealism to Marxism, and on through various dissident forms of Marxism (mediated by the ideas of the French Syndicalist Georges Sorel) culminating in a view of freedom that had largely detached itself from its earlier Marxism. He certainly shared the same enemies as modern libertarians: he detested central planners, regimenting



bureaucrats, believers in solidarity, careerists, and sentimental exponents of an unfocussed universal philanthropy. All these things, he argued, constituted 'servility,' and generated an unfree condition of life. Anderson wrote with considerable clarity, but he was also grindingly focussed on logical questions. He was a real virtuoso of fallacy detection. He could reliably spot self-refutation, infinite regress, question begging, and other fallacies however deeply they might be concealed behind muddled prose. There were, however, other aspects of his thought that will certainly seem eccentric in contemporary terms.

Our libertarian world, for example, values individuals making choices, but Anderson's Marxism had distanced him both from the idea of the individual and the activity of making choices. Instead, human beings were vehicles within whose minds and activities a variety of 'social forces' contested for influence. A great deal of moral (or moralising) talk was support for, or opposition to, one or another kind of social movement. And in a remarkable intellectual move, he argued that these social forces were either good or bad *as a straight moral matter of fact*. This belief in an objective goodness was a notable contrast with the intellectual scaffolding surrounding it. Objective goodness might be a religious assertion, or a version of moral absolutism. Anderson had no time for either. He famously disposed of theology with one deadly semantic flick: as 'guesswork.' Most moral concepts such as duty ('that whose nature it was to be done') were, as thus defined, empty of content. They were merely tokens that might be used by one social force or another (usually a repressive one) with the aim of subjecting uncritical people to their demands. You might have thought that Anderson must be a positivist and a materialist, except that he didn't believe in ultimate philosophical substances, even matter. It should be clear that he escapes easy classification.

Underneath this rather dry argument, however, beat an undoubtedly romantic soul. Anderson was his own hero in a story about the drama of philosophy, as a figure advancing truths and kindling the spirit of inquiry from generation to generation. Not many would, indeed, be 'kindled' into the life of inquiry, but the inquiring tradition was based in academic institutions, and its liveliness was facilitated by a struggle against the managerial orthodoxies that often sought to limit

the range of criticism. Anderson had certainly taken on board the socialist idea of struggle, but whereas socialists thought the struggle was to achieve a world in which the one true morality could be lived, Anderson put struggle right at the heart of his moral theory. He knew very well, what political philosophers have always known but later generations of rebels did not, that freedom cannot possibly be the revolt of slaves against oppressors. As Rousseau puts it: Slaves run towards their chains believing that they are securing their liberty. Slave revolts produce nothing but new forms of despotism.

Anderson's emphasis on struggle and conflict in moral life might have led him to take up a purely relativist view of moral language. He might have argued that saying 'X is good' was just a fancy way of pretending that there was something objective in the need to do X. It would amount merely to propaganda, or 'moralising.' Indeed, that is just what he did say—but it was certainly not, in his view, the end of the matter. A proposition such as 'X is good' might often be no more than propagandist advocacy, but it could not even function in that role unless it could call upon some implicit recognition of objective moral qualities. Goodness was thus real and objective, something occurring in the empirical world in which we live; it was part of ordinary experience. Among the 'goods' he recognised were academic inquiry, love and appreciation of beauty. The crucial point was that a proposition such as 'X is good' as a true moral statement about the world raised no normative questions. It was not something people 'ought to do,' but something they did (or failed to do) under certain conditions that could, in principle, be specified.

Anderson argued, then, that the real world was furnished not only with 'social forces,' interests, ideas, people, and other such entities, but also objective things describable (but never prescribable) as 'goods' and 'bads.' Human life is thus embedded in certain irreducible moral realities. Philosophical inquiry was one of these goods, along with enterprise, disinterestedness, love, and many other things. The goods and bads played significant causal roles in the world. Goods could elicit further goods in their operation; they cooperated with each other. Bads had the general character of being repressive; they were hostile to human spontaneity and their influence led to servile behaviour,

demanding conformity. Goods were stimulated by the difficulties they faced when authorities tried to fit them into some grand scheme for social betterment. Goods emerged, indeed they could *only* emerge, in conflict with the human propensity to unify the world by power and regimentation. The world could never be made safe for goodness. The point about goods was that they were mutually supportive, whereas evils tended to conflict—a fact about the world that could at the time be illustrated by the war between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. On the other hand, it was not the case that whatever opposed evil must therefore be good, as the Soviet case also illustrated.

The romantic aspect of this doctrine is its revelation that society is marked by a (rather concealed) struggle between real moral entities, and that only the philosopher knows what is happening. Such a philosopher stands above the constant drizzle of moralistic nonsense demanding conformity to some current orthodoxy. Such a philosopher exhibits goodness, and lives a life of inquiry, standing out against what in the old days would have been called ‘bourgeois respectability.’ In this sense, there is an ideological ‘sub-text’ lurking beneath the argument, a doctrine that constitutes a saving remnant of mankind who understand things the generality do not. And the whole doctrine depends on believing that goods and bads are objectively occurring entities in the world.

Should we believe any of this? John Mackie, one of a notable line of Anderson’s students who became internationally recognised scholars (and Anderson’s successor in holding the philosophy chair at Sydney), used to remark that the number of people who could apprehend Anderson’s ‘good’ could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Mackie was an acute moral thinker, as in his book *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. But there is little in the field of ethics that is not contestable. Do I myself believe in objective moral qualities? What I certainly do believe is that the significance of moral action lies not merely in doing whatever is thought to be ‘the right thing’ but also in what the actor reveals about himself in doing whatever he does. Significant and meaningful (though seldom incontestable) judgments can be made in this area. I certainly do not believe that moral judgments can be seen merely as statements of approval or disapproval, or that one cannot judge them outside their cultural context.

What is certainly interesting about Anderson's metaphysics of morality is that it goes some way to dealing with one central problem faced by all who value freedom. The problem results from the fact that liberty, like the moral life itself, can never generate a perfect society. The free often do foolish things, and those who have the option to choose their course of action will not infrequently do bad things. A free society is therefore inescapably imperfect. In Andersonian terms, we may choose to glory in its imperfections as a badge of freedom. And so long as we can do this, we have a way of closing down the insidious merry-go-round of perfectionist aspirations. And it is part of that deeply tiresome merry-go-round that we commonly think that no imperfection should be merely endured. Each imperfection is a problem, and the thing to do with problems is to solve them.

The collectivist merry-go-round consists of asking, of every supposed imperfection: what causes it? We must find the cause and remove it! For the collectivist in our time, every imperfection must result from some form of oppression, and probably an oppression being concealed by our glib talk about freedom. This is a conceptual grid that leaves us helpless in the face of the perfectionist merry-go-round. For by definition, a collectivised perfection is precisely one in which the imperfections of life have all been understood, and resolved. The libertarian (in this respect on the same track as the Christian believer) recognises that the human condition is essentially imperfect in many ways, but inescapability cuts no ice with the perfectionist rationalist. Encountering the perfectionist merry-go-round is, because of its mechanical character, rather like being trapped on a desert island with a speak-your-weight machine. A mind so focussed on a single form of aspiration has no possibility of any contact with a libertarian—and Andersonian—reality in which the world, for all its mixed character, contains marvellous things. We never escape the tautology that perfection is better than imperfection.

That is why the question: what is the point of freedom? is an illicit question. Freedom is a moral good, and that alone is its real 'point.' Reasons of advantage can certainly be found for it, but they are not the heart of the matter. To the extent that we recognise freedom as good, we do not need to assemble reasons or inducements that make it desirable. Freedom is simply the essence of what we are—so long as we continue to exhibit it and value it.



# *The Servile State*\*

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John Anderson

The prognostications of Hilaire Belloc in *The Servile State*<sup>1</sup> were not taken very seriously by the Socialists to whom they were, in the main, addressed; and, in the period between the two wars, they must have seemed to many to have lost such point as they had ever had. Even then, of course, there were thinkers who associated the actual establishment of servile conditions with attempts at Collectivism. But for the most part Socialism was still felt to be a liberating force, and the tendency to enslavement was regarded as coming from avowedly anti-Socialist quarters. At the present time, however, the danger of regimentation must be acknowledged to have grown enormously, and at least a strong case can be made out for the view that propaganda of a 'Socialist' colour has largely contributed to the decline of the sentiment of liberty. Under these circumstances it is interesting, and may be important, to return to Belloc's analysis and consider its relation to the contemporary situation.

There is, indeed, much in the book which remains as unconvincing as it was thirty years ago. The doctrine of the Distributive State, and the account of its growth from an originally servile civilisation and its decay at the beginning of the modern period, are marked by preconception and partisanship. And although the discussion of Collectivism might be little affected even if the references to Distributivism were completely excised, still it is coloured by the same sort of assumptions, by an undue emphasis, in particular, on property and legality. The emphasis on property leads to a 'class' theory which brings Belloc close to the commonly accepted interpretation of Marxism—to a division of society

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\*John Anderson, 'The Servile State,' in *Studies in Empirical Philosophy* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962). Reprint, with an introduction by Kenneth Minogue (Sydney: CIS, 2009).

into two sets of individuals,<sup>2</sup> the propertied and the propertyless, as opposed to a distinction of functions (of ways of living and forms of organisation) which may operate variously in the same individuals. And the emphasis on legality affects the whole argument of the book.

This may be illustrated from the fundamental definition given on p 16: ‘That arrangement of society in which so considerable a number of the families and individuals are constrained by positive law to labour for the advantage of other families and individuals as to stamp the whole community with the mark of such labour we call The Servile State.’ No doubt formal enactment is important; and the ‘social’ legislation whose inception in England was a principle stimulus to this book, was of great political significance. Nevertheless, Belloc’s formulation obscures the fact that actual legislation is neither a necessary nor a sufficient determinant of political reality. On the one hand, a law may not be enforceable (as witness attempts in various parts of the world at various times legislatively to abolish strikes); on the other hand, people’s social situation may prevent their doing what they are legally ‘free’ to do. This was recognised, in Socialist propaganda, in the application of the term ‘wage-slavery’ to the condition of workers in present-day society, even in the absence of that legal compulsion to labour for a master of which Belloc speaks (p 3). The usage may be a bad one; the differences between the position of wage-workers and that of slaves may be vastly more important than the resemblances, and particularly the differences in respect of possibilities of *organised* action. But it implies the truth that ‘status’ is not simply a matter of law.

The illustration is an important one in several respects. Clearly, as Belloc argues, the contention that a servile status with security is preferable to wage-labour with insecurity is no sort of proof that the latter also is servile. That the worker is subject to disabilities (disfranchisements) is undeniable; it is equally undeniable that he has certain enfranchisements. Some measure of servitude, an inequality of franchise, the existence of privilege, may be inseparable from society as such. But, in any case, the antithesis of political freedom and economic power is a false one; and it is false, too, to say that the worker cannot have political freedom while economic inequality exists. Here the Marxian doctrine (largely followed by Belloc) of the proletariat or propertyless class is

particularly misleading. The divorce of the worker from certain forms of property ('capitalist' property) does not imply his 'de-humanisation,' his divorce from enterprise, his lack of all control of the processes of production. If he had no such control, he would have no political freedom, no power of agitation, no influence whatever on the progress of events—he would really be a slave. That some workers under some conditions would prefer security to such rights (powers of enterprise) as they now possess may well be true. But that enterprise, such as it is, has the social force of property, and any analysis which concentrates on the legal possession of certain movables can only obscure the issues.

The distinction between the worker and the slave, then, is in terms of enterprise (of rights, of a 'movement'), which is at once political and economic. But it is also moral. And here it is remarkable to find Belloc professing, in his inquiry, to 'keep strictly to the economic aspect of the case. Only when that is established and when the modern tendency to the re-establishment of slavery is clear, are we free to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the revolution through which we are passing' (pp 19, 20).<sup>3</sup> No doubt it does not advance discussion of events to say that some of them 'ought to be' and others 'ought not to be.' But to regard that as moral characterisation is to treat the moral characters of things as not really belonging to them, to take their 'advantages' and 'disadvantages' not as inherent in their operation but as annexed to them from without—and what would be the force of such judgments *after* the facts had been ascertained is not at all apparent. It is impossible, however, to discuss social processes except in terms of ways of living or forms of enterprise, and that *is* moral characterisation. To know, in particular, that servitude is bad is to know something of its mode of developing and what will help and what hinder it.

Belloc, indeed, does not succeed in avoiding moral considerations; for example, in the fifth Section, he has a good deal to say about the 'moral strain' (tension) involved in the divergence between the professions of capitalism and its actual procedures. But in his proposal to postpone moral questions he again exhibits affinity with Marxism, particularly as expounded by Engels. In what precise sense economics can be said to be primary and other aspects of culture (including morals) secondary is a question of great difficulty for the student of Marxism—



it may, indeed, be impossible to give *any* clear sense to this doctrine. But at least it has been a commonplace of Socialist propaganda (as it is of current propaganda of 'social improvement') that material conditions have first to be put in order and 'higher' things can thereafter be attended to. And the view that material things come first is certainly that taken by Engels—most strikingly in his speech at Marx's funeral (contained in *Karl Marx, Man, Thinker, and Revolutionist*, edited by D Ryazanoff; English translation published by Martin Lawrence in 1927).

Marx, said Engels, 'discovered the simple fact (heretofore hidden beneath ideological excrescences) that human beings must have food and drink, clothing and shelter, *first of all*, before they can interest themselves in politics, science, art, religion, and the like. This implies that the production of the immediately requisite material means of subsistence, and therewith the extant economic developmental phase of a nation or an epoch, constitute the foundations upon which the State institutions, the legal outlooks, the artistic and even the religious ideas, of those concerned, have been built up. It implies that these latter must be explained out of the former, whereas the former have been explained as issuing from the latter' (pp 43, 44; my italics). This, of course, is glaringly false. It is not the case that the winning of subsistence is antecedent to cultural ideas and activities; it is, for the most part, bound up with them and is frequently postponed or subordinated to them (i.e. men risk their subsistence for the sake of their 'ideas'). If moral forces exist in the society at all, they must (as they obviously do) affect economic exchanges and the whole system of production, and any economic theory which puts them out of consideration will be defective on that account. In fact, the attitude of 'putting the economic first' leads straight to that servility whose growth Belloc undoubtedly deplors.

It can be said, then, that while Belloc recognises moral factors in society and indeed considers them of very great importance, his procedure is such as to obscure them. One considerable influence, in his view, making for the establishment of the Servile State, is the desire of the masses themselves for 'security and sufficiency.' Under capitalism, with its general condition of 'political freedom' but restriction to the few

of property in the means of production, the many have neither security nor sufficiency; and, seeing no way back to the Distributive State in which the wide diffusion of property gave 'economic freedom' and thus such security as is possible to men, they are to a large extent prepared to accept a servile status on the understanding that their material wants will be provided for. This, of course, is only one of the facts recognised by Belloc as leading towards slavery. But the important moral fact which he, with his insistence on property, passes over, is that the desire for security and sufficiency is the very mark of the servile mentality.

No one will deny that certain materials are required for any way of life whatever; but a way of life which sought to have its materials *secured* for it would be poor and unenterprising. Here we may advert to Sorel's distinction<sup>4</sup> between the outlook of the consumer (emphasising ends, things to be secured) and that of the producer (emphasising activities, a way of life, a morality). Excising the utilitarian part of Marxism and drawing upon the work of Proudhon, Sorel takes the social importance of the 'working-class movement' to reside in its development of the productive spirit—a development which depends on 'expropriation' and can only be retarded by proprietary sentiments. Naturally, Sorel would not claim that the continuance of this spirit is *secured* by existing social divisions, but would regard it as possible for the workers' movement to degenerate—as indeed it has done. If it were true (though Belloc gives no real evidence for it) that already in 1912 the mass of workers were concerned above all with security, that would imply the breakdown of workers' enterprise; and it is certainly against that enterprise that 'social service' legislation was and is directed. But, while it flourished, it was bound up with the 'propertyless' condition of the workers, with their *lack* of security. And in general it can be said that movements enlivening society and advancing freedom have to engage in constant struggle for the materials they require, and lose their independent and creative spirit under 'protection.'

The producer's mentality was never, of course, characteristic of the Labour movement, or even the Socialist movement, as a whole. Belloc draws attention, in the eighth Section, to the type of 'Socialist' (now in the ascendant) whose real interest is in social regulation and not

in social equality. And closely akin to him is the 'sentimental Socialist' who seeks to 'abolish poverty,' for whom, that is to say, the worker is defined negatively, by what he is deprived of, instead of by his positive participation in certain forms of organisation and activity—a kind of view which, as we have noted, appears in Marxism, in spite of Marx's criticism (e.g. in *The Communist Manifesto*) of social philanthropy. But in arguing that even the sincere and revolutionary Collectivist is forced in the same direction, that he 'finds the current of his demand canalised' (p 125) since the road to confiscation is checked and barred while the way to 'securing human conditions for the proletariat' is open (viz., by sacrificing freedom, by accepting a position of legal servitude, with security, under the capitalist), Belloc again misses a vital point. That is that by taking Socialism *as an end*, by seeking an established condition of society in which workers' disabilities would be done away with, the Collectivist is already manifesting a servile outlook<sup>5</sup>—and the same applies to the Distributivist 'solution' of capitalist instability. To aim at a stable society is to attempt to do away with the conditions under which free activities are possible, and the well-intentioned reformer *always* produces results which he did not anticipate, helps on tendencies to which he is avowedly opposed.

This leads us to consideration of the actual experiment in 'collectivisation' which we have witnessed, viz., in the Russian system. It is no reproach to Belloc that he did not anticipate Bolshevism. The fact remains that he was wrong in holding that the Socialist movement would be only a factor contributing to the enslavement of the workers to the existing capitalist class, and would fail to realise Collectivism in the sense of 'the placing of the means of production in the hands of the political officers of the community' (definition given on p 5). It is not, of course, in any literal sense that one can speak of the rulers of Russia as officers 'of the community,' but their regime is of the character of State Socialism, and the workers are slaves of the State (to the admiration of the Fabian lovers of regulation of whom Belloc spoke) and not of capitalistic owners. No doubt this result has come about in a curious way; the monopoly of enterprise by the ruling party was achieved in the *name* of the workers and was marked in its early stages by sincere attempts at devolution of control. No doubt, also, the ruling

group is, in some sense, a capitalist class—as the privileged controller of industry. Still, the system was established through confiscation; and it is part of the criticism of Socialist theory that the attempt to establish a Socialist order leads to this new kind of privilege and not, as Belloc supposed, to the mere strengthening of the old privileged class through the agency of the State. This new type of regimented State could have come about in the first instance only with the aid of Socialist propaganda, though, once the example had been given, a similar kind of political control could be brought about by other means. In fact, it could not come again by the same means, since the consolidation of the ruling order has been marked by the gradual disappearance of the revolutionary side of Socialist ideology and the dominance of an ideology of ‘security and sufficiency,’ which has been reflected in the ideology of the Labour movement everywhere, the result being that it now *seeks* only what Belloc said it was effecting—a State-guaranteed provision for the people’s wants.

Granted that this line of development could scarcely have been anticipated, it should be noted again that what principally distorted Belloc’s view was his concentration on property (on legal title to materials) as against the notion of *control*—in terms of which, as we saw, the formal propertylessness of the workers is offset by their power of organising their own industrial and political activities. And here again the antithesis of the economic and the political is misleading. The lesson of Bolshevism is that political monopoly (‘dictatorship’) is a major economic force, that the monopoly of industrial enterprise which it carries with it, does not require to be supplemented by formal property rights—may, indeed, operate all the more effectively without them. As Burnham puts it (though the view is not original to him), ‘the concept of ‘the separation of ownership and control’ has no sociological or historical meaning. Ownership *means* control ... If ownership and control are in reality separated, then ownership has changed hands to the ‘control,’ and the separated ownership is a meaningless fiction.’<sup>6</sup>

It is unfortunate that Burnham, while he clearly delineates certain of the characters of the new ruling class, comes down on the side of management rather than direction (of the internal rather than the

external relations of enterprises) as its main distinguishing feature. This involves an underestimation of the importance of *political* monopoly, of centralised direction by 'the party.' No doubt the technicians are of importance to the party and may influence its policy; but to treat them as the rulers is to ignore important conditions both of the rise and of the continuance of totalitarian regimes—and indeed to ignore essential features of any industrial society. And the point is specially important because Burnham discerns in the capitalist countries (with particular reference to the United States) the growth of the same 'managerial' tendencies as have come to fruition in Russia and Germany. We may, I think, properly apply the term 'servile' to those States which are marked by the suppression of all political opposition and thus of all independent enterprise. But in other States the managerial and bureaucratic stratum seems to be less closely linked with the really directing class, to occupy a middle ('mediating') position between it and the masses, and the system, in the absence of 'the party,' is reminiscent of the state of affairs anticipated by Belloc rather than of totalitarianism—with the important proviso that, so long as there are competing parties, the workers will have *some* political power.

It can scarcely be denied, however, even if we reject the 'managerial' diagnosis, that the capitalist countries are moving in the direction of regimentation and that the *ideology* of servility is rapidly gaining ground. The process has, of course, been greatly accelerated by the war; this might, indeed, if we abstract from particular national aims and consider the whole society of predatory nations, be described as the 'purpose' of the war. Naive persons believe, because one side is opposed to freedom, that the other side must be in favour of it. But freedom consorts ill not merely with regimentation 'in the national cause' but with the avowed aims of the 'liberating' belligerents. Even if the *word* freedom is used, 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear' are simply the *sufficiency* and *security*, the desire for which marks the servile mentality. And it is this which gives appositeness to Belloc's analysis, even though, as we have seen, he takes these aims not to be servile in themselves but only to make for servility in their collision with existing economic trends. The decline of liberalism could not be more clearly marked than by

the association of the name with the advocacy of regimentation, of the 'protective' State.

The propagandist character of these formulae should not, of course, be lost sight of. They are partly retrospective and defensive—it has to be made out that the responsibility for war and insecurity rests upon certain particular nations and movements, the subjection of which can thus inaugurate an epoch of peace and security. In this aspect the 'security' propaganda, like Wilsonism and the doctrine of 'making the world safe for democracy' in the last war, implies no real intention of removing disabilities; its function is that of silencing, or of justifying to the public at large the steps taken to silence, demands for political independence at the present time. But that is not its only aspect. There *is* the real intention of permanently reducing political independence and extending the powers of the State, and this, as Belloc saw, has to be combined with promises of 'benefits' in return for the surrender of rights. The expectation of such benefits is of course delusive; there is no system which can abolish insecurity and guarantee sufficiency. But, by the time that is realised, it will not be possible to have back for the asking the rights that have been surrendered in the name of solidarity. Solidarist conceptions, of course, have always been widely accepted, but in ordinary times their influence is checked by independent movements. In time of war, however, the doctrine of 'national service' gains enormous force, which can be turned to the establishing, for peace-time, of a corresponding doctrine of service to the community. Thus war, by undermining political independence, gives impetus to the movement in the direction of the 'social service' (or servile) State.

It has been argued that, even if the provision of absolute security and sufficiency is impossible, it is still a reasonable policy to 'get as much of them as we can.' But here it has to be emphasised, first, that no reliance can be placed on the State or any other earthly Providence. As already indicated, the States in question all have their share of responsibility for the 'insecurity' which it is proposed to remove; their mode of operation *includes* war and oppression. And those persons who expect 'sufficiency' to be provided for them, will find themselves worse off in relying on what the State deems sufficient than in making their

own organised efforts for the provision of the materials they require; they will soon find (as indeed they could see already if they wanted to) that State provision will be hedged about with all sorts of qualifications and restrictions, so that, except for those who will themselves embrace bureaucratic careers, their last state will be worse than their first. But the second and more vital point is that the pursuit of security and sufficiency is itself a low aim, that the maintenance of a high level of culture depends on the existence of a plurality of movements which take their chance in the social struggle, instead of having their place and their resources assigned to them from a supposedly all-embracing point of view. Croce, in 'History as the Story of Liberty,' has particularly emphasised the way in which liberty (and, with it, culture) declines under conditions of fancied security and is reborn in adversity. On this view both liberty and servility are features of society at any stage, but at least the *ordering* of society is antipathetic to liberty.

The absurdity of the pretences of the advocates of a 'planned society' should be noted here. It is assumed that the agents of centralised control are capable of fitting every form of social activity into a general scheme. Even in war-time, when many activities are willingly abandoned or curtailed, the anomalies and confusions of directed work are only too apparent. But this will be nothing to the chaotic condition of affairs if the fuller activities of peace-time are to be similarly directed. There is no one who is competent to make provision for all departments and aspects of social life. But if the decline in liberty, the progressive abandonment of the voluntary principle, has been such as to prevent the recrudescence of independent movements, if the desire for security has really taken possession of the mass of the people so that 'planning' is inevitable, it can only take the form of the subordination of social life to certain narrow interests, interests, especially, of a commercial kind. That is the direction in which the propaganda of 'public utility' and 'service of the community' is working. And it is because the Labour movement is so thoroughly devoted to these interests (is, indeed, their standard-bearer) that it can be said, as a movement of 'emancipation' or social regeneration, to have failed—in fact, to have made good Belloc's description of it (with special reference to its Socialist side) as working towards slavery.

Contemporary Labour propaganda (with few and unimportant exceptions) is imbued with the fallacy that what opposes Fascism must be supporting freedom—as if two tyrannies could not conflict. Hence it upholds solidarity, is in favour of the regimentation of strikers and the imprisonment of dissidents (or those suspected of dissidence), and is indifferent to free discussion. In taking this line it ignores the fact that solidarity can only mean the maintenance of present privileges, and that a struggle ‘for freedom’ can proceed only *from* freedom and not through enslavement. And planners in general miss or conceal the fact that planning can advance only *what can be planned for*—and that is not culture but commerce. The particular importance of discussion at the present time lies in the fact that there are different possible outcomes of the war (including a negotiated as against an oppressive peace), and the sinking of opposition ‘in the interests of all’ means an artificial ‘unity’ in which some special interest (and the outcome which it prefers) is favoured. That this will in any case be the commercial interest is hardly to be doubted; but planning will make assurance doubly sure.

These considerations are specially appropriate to the question of planning for education. The conclusion that this can only mean commercialising education is confirmed by observation of present facts, as well as by considerations of the propaganda of the planners. That people’s education, for the time being, should be directed by reference to the assistance they can give in the prosecution of the war, will appear plausible to many, though it makes the assumption of identity of interest which has been criticised above—in other words, though it passes over the fact that the kind of society that will emerge from the war will depend in part on the kind of educational and other social activities that have been carried on while it lasted. In fact, it is perfectly clear that the same conceptions of utility and ‘service of the community’ that inform the present regulations will, if our planners have their way, continue to dominate education in the future. Here, as in other planning, there is the pretence at exact measurement of capacity (a pretence which has the support of the tribe of ‘mental measurers’), there is the fitting of people into their appropriate pigeonholes—a procedure which has the effect of killing the natural interest in learning and encouraging a narrowly professional



careerism. These measures are taken under such demagogic slogans as 'equal opportunity for all,' but such formulae betray the commercial mentality of their users. The real educational question is not of the provision of a career to individuals, of the supplying of education to them as a commodity, but of the maintenance of a tradition of learning, the continuance of the learned way of life—however few or many may participate in it. To attempt to postpone that task to the service of the State is to manifest a deplorably low level of culture.

It must indeed be allowed that, apart from any special planning, the level of culture, the social status of learning, has been falling; and this cultural decline can be closely correlated with the encroachments of 'Science' on education. There is not, of course, any scientific field in which disinterested inquiry cannot be pursued; nevertheless, it is practical considerations (e.g. 'the needs of industry') that have very largely determined the problems to which scientists have addressed themselves, and it is certainly on account of their practicality that scientific studies have gained ground in the schools. But this is the sort of practicality which takes 'social unity' (i.e. established interests) for granted. There is in fact a direct opposition between the 'practical' and the critical outlooks, and it is only the study of, and absorption in, ways of life (the study of 'the humanities') that can promote criticism.<sup>7</sup> The naïveté of scientists, trying to 'get things done' and ignoring the whole range of the literature of social and political criticism, imagining, for example, that social conclusions (in the crude form of precepts) can be drawn from biological premises, is a sufficiently well-marked phenomenon of our times. It might well be argued that the contemporary scientist (whose affinity with the managerial stratum has been emphasised by Burnham) is the typical exponent of a servile ideology. Or, if this description could be applied more aptly to the psychologist, who has introduced a factitious 'exactness' into the field of humane studies, at least the propagation of 'scientific methods' has gone hand in hand with the overlaying of freedom and culture by Philistinism.

Now the importance of all this for the lover of freedom is that, exemplifying the adverse conditions which can overtake culture, it enables him to see more precisely how regeneration comes about.

One condition of this recovery is the sharpening of the issues which occurs when servility is gaining ground, the demonstration of the mischievous character of conceptions which had seemed harmless or even admirable—conceptions of ‘service’ or of ‘the development of personality,’ the whole mass of philanthropic ideas. Their implications become clearer, and hitherto unawakened minds begin to see into what a morass they are being led, while more fully developed thinkers come to realise what opportunities of criticism they have missed, what are the vulnerable points on which they might have directed their fire. But this leads on to the second condition of recovery—the realisation by these thinkers of their own shortcomings, of their failure to develop the resources of their own fields of study. Thus the adverse conditions under which humane studies, and especially classical studies, may be expected to labour for a considerable time, may lead to their renewal in a more critical form—one in which they may shed their pedantry and appear at once as the true form of scientific thinking and as the vehicle of an intellectual *opposition*. In fact, the two outstanding features of any movement upholding a liberal culture will be intellectualism and opposition.

The intellectualist attitude is especially important in the field of social study, for it is there that the notion of objectivity, of the recognition by the inquirer of the ways of working of things themselves, is weakest. It is quite commonly assumed by teachers in the social sciences, not merely by the uninstructed public, that these are ‘practical’ subjects, the very conception of which involves reference to some purpose (the realisation of ‘welfare,’ or whatever it may be), and that it is misleading—to the Marxist it is ‘reactionary’—to treat them as mere matter of fact. We have noted, indeed, that even the inquiries of the physical scientist are dominated by ‘practical’ considerations, that he treats things from the point of view of what can be done with them. Up to a point this does not affect the objectivity of his inquiries; but it implies a false division of things into users and used, the counterposing of a voluntaristic to a mechanistic realm, and, while in the end it leads to false conceptions of ‘nature,’ it confirms the attitude of those who, from a different starting-point, take a voluntaristic view of society. All this may help to explain why the

scientist not merely fails to subject established interests to scrutiny but shows no conception of the difficulties of social study and is ready to make pronouncements in that field without having the preliminary training which he would consider essential in the field of his own special study.

The vital point here is that there are *no* 'practical' subjects, that social study, like any other study, consists in finding out what is the case, how the things studied actually do work. Of course, people have policies, to which the things they study are relevant. But, while this is equally the case whether these things are human or non-human, while, again, the operation of policies is itself the subject of study, it is part of the findings of that study that what people are doing is very different from what they think they are doing, and that the attitude of 'trying' is far from dominating human behaviour—and, in particular, that the activity of study itself is an independent force, having its own 'laws' or ways of working, and not depending for its existence on being chosen, either 'for its own sake' or for some ulterior purpose. In fact, any *attempted* subordination of study to other purposes is an attack on study itself; and the principle anti-theoretical attitude at the present time is meliorism, the setting up of 'betterment' as the guide to social theory and practice.

The confusions inherent in this doctrine have already been partly indicated. The main point is that it represents as a question of degree what can only be a question of kind. Any scheme of social improvement must be such as to advance certain *specific* tendencies and could be treated as 'of benefit to all' only in terms of some quite indefinite conception of 'benefit.' Goodness does not admit of degrees; and if we raise the question of its extension over a wider field, the advancement, let us say, of inquiry as one particular good, it is obvious that these are interests to which this will be a hindrance. Not only so, but such advances can never be settled and secure. It is only in the struggle with evils that goods exist, and the attempt to eliminate evils, as Croce points out (*op. cit.* English translation, p 62), could lead, at its most successful, only to a drab existence which would emphatically be evil. Liberty 'has lived and always will live ... a perilous and fighting life.' It is the permanence of this struggle, with its ups and downs, that meliorism ignores.

The scientific student of society, then, will not be concerned with reform. What he will be concerned with is opposition—what he will be above all concerned to reject is ‘social unity.’ And he will reject it not merely as a description of present conditions but as a conception of a future society. The doctrine of history as struggle is at once the liberal and the scientific part of Marxism; the doctrine of Socialism as something to be established (‘classless society’) is its servile part. The point is not merely the drabness that might result from attempts to eliminate social struggles, but the impossibility of eliminating them—and, therewith, the loss of independence and vigour that can result from the spreading of the *belief* that they can be eliminated. The belief (in spite of evidence) in the present existence of a society without ‘classes,’ i.e. without distinction and opposition among ways of living, has, more than anything else, facilitated acceptance of the view that insecurity and oppression (brought under the single head of ‘Fascism’) can be done away with. But this view is not merely unscientific, in that it treats such social phenomena as accidental, as having a source essentially alien to society, as arising from the peculiar ‘wickedness’ of a particular individual or group (and all the more unscientific in that there could be no possible safeguard against the repetition of such ‘accidents’); it is also indicative of a failure in responsibility, of a desire to be relieved of troublesome problems—in a word, of servility.

How far the process of social regimentation and cultural degeneration will go it is, I think, impossible to say. What can be said is that so long as there are rights of opposition (so long, e.g. as we are not subjected to a one-party system), culture will still have a front to fight on. And here independent institutions are of special importance—institutions, i.e. which are not merely nominally autonomous but have a *doctrine* of independence; Universities, trade unions, etc., which will resist being treated as servants of the State, or in which, at the worst, a resistant minority will remain. For the measure of freedom in any community is the extent of opposition to the ruling order, of criticism of the ruling ideas; and belief in established freedom, or in State-guaranteed ‘benefits,’ is a mark of the abandonment of liberty. The servile State is the unopposed State.

## Endnotes

- 1 First published in October, 1912. References here are to the third impression, October, 1913.
- 2 Cf. the disabilities imposed in Russia (for a period at least) on persons 'of bourgeois origin.' Consideration of what justification for such procedures could be found in Marx does not fall within the scope of this article.
- 3 It is perhaps less remarkable to find James Burnham, in *The Managerial Revolution*, similarly professing to avoid moral issues and to deal only with the actual trend of affairs.
- 4 In *Reflections on Violence*. (Cf. my article, 'Marxist Ethics,' *AJPP*, June 1937: v. s. pp 325–327.)
- 5 The view of Bernstein (though his position is less clearly and forcefully developed than Sorel's) is also in point here—that it is the movement, not the end, that matters.
- 6 *The Managerial Revolution*, English edition, May 1942, pp 87, 8. (Cf. the statement on p 69 that the State, in managerial society, 'will, if we wish to put it that way, be the 'property' of the managers. And that will be quite enough to place them in the position of ruling class.')
- 7 In saying that this is necessary I do not, of course, say that it is sufficient.