Socialism primary document

WHII Voorhees

In the 19th century, a cooperative movement began to grow in Europe and the United States. Individuals banded together in economic, financial, and other ventures, sharing labor and profits. Utopian, or idealistic, societies also appeared. Groups of individuals withdrew from the world and tried to live together harmoniously. Their communities usually featured a guiding political outlook or religion, shared work, and adequate social benefits for all. British utopian socialist Robert Owen founded and inspired several such living arrangements. In this excerpt from his *Revolution in the Mind and Practice of the Human Race* (1849), Owen passionately decried what he saw as the “irrational system of society” that included individual competition and war, and explained the tenets that would guide his ideal society.

From *Revolution in the Mind and Practice of the Human Race*

By Robert Owen

**On Social Reorganization**

*The universal permanent government, constitution, and code of laws, based on the unchanging laws of nature, for the world, in which there is but one real interest for all its population, wherever situated: and also for each state or nation separately, until they shall have acquired the knowledge and wisdom to unite in federative union.*

**Introduction**

The period for introducing the permanent rational system of society, based on the ascertained laws of nature, for remodelling the character of man, and for governing the population of the earth in unity, peace, progressive improvement, and happiness, is rapidly approaching, and no human power can long resist the change. The governments of the world will, therefore, soon be compelled, in their own defence, to adopt this superior system, to prevent their being involved in anarchy, war, and ruin. This change will root up and utterly destroy the old vicious and miserable system of ignorance, poverty, individual competition, and contests, and of national war, throughout the world; and will introduce, in place thereof, the rational system of society, in which competition, strife, and wars, will cease for ever; and all will be trained, from infancy, solely to promote each other’s happiness. This system can be the best commenced by convincing governments of the truth of the principles on which it is founded. There must be also a sufficient number of individuals
instructed to acquire its genuine spirit of charity, affection, and philanthropy for man over the world; and taught the best mode of applying it to practice. They must likewise possess patience and perseverance, to overcome all the obstacles which the prejudices arising from ignorance, will oppose to their progress; and, above all, they must be united, have full confidence in each other, and be directed by one heart and one mind.

It is now deserving of the most serious consideration, that under the irrational system of society, hitherto alone known, and devised in opposition to nature, almost all the external circumstances formed by man, are of a vicious or inferior character; but that, under the proposed rational system, formed in accordance with nature, all the circumstances under human control will be of a good and superior character.

Also, that under the existing religious, political, commercial, and domestic arrangements of Great Britain, 250 individuals cannot be supported in comfort upon a square mile of land: while under the proposed system, with much less labour and capital than are now employed, 500 may be immediately supported in abundance; and in a few years after the new arrangements shall have been matured, 1,000, 1,500, and probably, without any additional new discoveries, 2,000 individuals, may be so supported upon every square mile of land of an average quality.

Such will be found to be the difference between the rational system of society, based on the unchanging laws of human nature, and formed in accordance with them, compared with a system based on falsehood, and constructed in direct opposition to the ascertained laws of humanity.

Under the latter, the earth is gradually approaching toward a pandemonium; while under the former, it will rapidly advance, without retrogression, toward a terrestrial paradise, for the creation of which Nature has now provided the most ample materials.

**Duties of Government**

A rational government will attend solely to the happiness of the governed; to attain which it will ascertain what human nature is—what are the laws of its organization and existence, from birth to death—what is necessary for the happiness of a being so formed and matured—what are the best means to attain those requisites, and to secure them permanently for all the governed...