Socialists Want to Regiment People

Fenelon’s idyll on Crete is even more alluring. Mentor is made to say: "All that you see in this wonderful island results from the laws of Minos. The education which he ordained for the children makes their bodies strong and robust. From the very beginning, one accustoms the children to a life of frugality and labor, because one assumes that all pleasures of the senses weaken both body and mind. Thus one allows them no pleasure except that of becoming invincible by virtue, and of acquiring glory.... Here one punishes three vices that go unpunished among other people: ingratitude, hypocrisy, and greed. There is no need to punish persons for pomp and dissipation, for they are unknown in Crete.... No costly furniture, no magnificent clothing, no delicious feasts, no gilded palaces are permitted."

Thus does Mentor prepare his student to mold and to manipulate -- doubtless with the best of intentions -- the people of Ithaca. And to convince the student of the wisdom of these ideas, Mentor recites to him the example of Salentum.

It is from this sort of philosophy that we receive our first political ideas! We are taught to treat persons much as an instructor in agriculture teaches farmers to prepare and tend the soil.

A Famous Name and an Evil Idea

Now listen to the great Montesquieu on this same subject:
"To maintain the spirit of commerce, it is necessary that all the laws must favor it. These laws, by proportionately dividing up the fortunes as they are made in commerce, should provide every poor citizen with sufficiently easy circumstances to enable him to work like the others. These same laws should put every rich citizen in such lowered circumstances as to force him to work in order to keep or to gain."

Thus the laws are to dispose of all fortunes! Although real equality is the soul of the state in a democracy, yet this is so difficult to establish that an extreme precision in this matter would not always be desirable. It is sufficient that there be established a census to reduce or fix these differences in wealth within a certain limit. After this is done, it remains for specific laws to equalize inequality by imposing burdens upon the rich and granting relief to the poor. Here again we find the idea of equalizing fortunes by law, by force.

In Greece, there were two kinds of republics, One, Sparta, was military; the other, Athens, was commercial. In the former, it was desired that the citizens be idle; in the latter, love of labor was encouraged.

Note the marvelous genius of these legislators: By debasing all established customs -- by mixing the usual concepts of all virtues -- they knew in advance that the world would admire their wisdom.

Lycurgus gave stability to his city of Sparta by combining petty thievery with the soul of justice; by combining the most complete bondage with the most extreme liberty; by combining the most atrocious beliefs with the greatest moderation. He appeared to deprive his city of all its resources, arts, commerce, money, and defenses. In Sparta, ambition went without the hope of material reward. Natural affection found no outlet because a man was neither son, husband, nor father. Even chastity was no longer considered becoming. By this road, Lycurgus led Sparta on to greatness and glory.

This boldness which was to be found in the institutions of Greece has been repeated in the midst of the degeneracy and corruption of our modern times. An occasional honest legislator has molded a people in whom integrity appears as natural as courage in the Spartans.

Mr. William Penn, for example, is a true Lycurgus. Even though Mr. Penn had peace as his objective -- while Lycurgus had war as his objective -- they resemble each other in that their moral prestige over free men allowed them to overcome prejudices, to subdue passions, and to lead their respective peoples into new paths.

The country of Paraguay furnishes us with another example [of a people who, for their own good, are molded by their legislators].*

*Translator's note: What was then known as Paraguay was a much larger area than it is today. It was colonized by the Jesuits who settled the Indians into villages, and generally saved them from further brutalities by the avid conquerors.

Now it is true that if one considers the sheer pleasure of commanding to be the greatest joy in life, he contemplates a crime against society; it will, however, always be a noble ideal to govern men in a manner that will make them happier.
Those who desire to establish similar institutions must do as follows: Establish common ownership of property as in the republic of Plato; revere the gods as Plato commanded; prevent foreigners from mingling with the people, in order to preserve the customs; let the state, instead of the citizens, establish commerce. The legislators should supply arts instead of luxuries; they should satisfy needs instead of desires.

A Frightful Idea
Those who are subject to vulgar infatuation may exclaim: "Montesquieu has said this! So it's magnificent! It's sublime!" As for me, I have the courage of my own opinion. I say: What! You have the nerve to call that fine? It is frightful! It is abominable! These random selections from the writings of Montesquieu show that he considers persons, liberties, property -- mankind itself -- to be nothing but materials for legislators to exercise their wisdom upon.

The Leader of the Democrats
Now let us examine Rousseau on this subject. This writer on public affairs is the supreme authority of the democrats. And although he bases the social structure upon the will of the people, he has, to a greater extent than anyone else, completely accepted the theory of the total inertness of mankind in the presence of the legislators: "If it is true that a great prince is rare, then is it not true that a great legislator is even more rare? The prince has only to follow the pattern that the legislator creates. The legislator is the mechanic who invents the machine; the prince is merely the workman who sets it in motion. And what part do persons play in all this? They are merely the machine that is set in motion. In fact, are they not merely considered to be the raw material of which the machine is made?"

Thus the same relationship exists between the legislator and the prince as exists between the agricultural expert and the farmer; and the relationship between the prince and his subjects is the same as that between the farmer and his land. How high above mankind, then, has this writer on public affairs been placed? Rousseau rules over legislators themselves, and teaches them their trade in these imperious terms: "Would you give stability to the state? Then bring the extremes as closely together as possible. Tolerate neither wealthy persons nor beggars.

If the soil is poor or barren, or the country too small for its inhabitants, then turn to industry and arts, and trade these products for the foods that you need. On a fertile soil -- if you are short of inhabitants -- devote all your attention to agriculture, because this multiplies people; banish the arts, because they only serve to depopulate the nation.

If you have extensive and accessible coast lines, then cover the sea with merchant ships; you will have a brilliant but short existence. If your seas wash only inaccessible cliffs, let the people be barbarous and eat fish; they will live more quietly -- perhaps better -- and, most certainly, they will live more happily.

In short, and in addition to the maxims that are common to all, every people has its own particular circumstances. And this fact in itself will cause legislation appropriate to the circumstances."

This is the reason why the Hebrews formerly -- and, more recently, the Arabs -- had religion as their principle objective. The objective of the Athenians was literature; of Carthage and Tyre, commerce; of Rhodes, naval affairs; of Sparta, war; and of Rome, virtue. The author of The Spirit of Laws has shown by what art the legislator should direct his institutions toward each of these objectives. But suppose that the legislator mistakes his proper objective, and acts on a principle different from that indicated by the nature of things? Suppose that the selected principle sometimes creates slavery, and sometimes liberty; sometimes wealth, and sometimes population; sometimes peace, and sometimes conquest? This confusion of objective will slowly enfeeble the law and impair the constitution. The state will be subjected to ceaseless agitations until it is destroyed or changed, and invincible nature regains her empire. But if nature is sufficiently invincible to regain its empire, why does not Rousseau admit that it did not need the legislator to gain it in the first place? Why does he not see that men, by obeying their own instincts, would turn to farming on fertile soil, and to commerce on an extensive and easily accessible coast, without the interference of a Lycurgus or a Solon or a Rousseau who might easily be mistaken.

Socialists Want Forced Conformity
Be that as it may, Rousseau invests the creators, organizers, directors, legislators, and controllers of society with a terrible responsibility. He is, therefore, most exacting with them:

"He who would dare to undertake the political creation of a people ought to believe that he can, in a manner of speaking, transform human nature;
transform each individual -- who, by himself, is a solitary and perfect whole -- into a mere part of a greater whole from which the individual will henceforth receive his life and being. Thus the person who would undertake the political creation of a people should believe in his ability to alter man's constitution; to strengthen it; to substitute for the physical and independent existence received from nature, an existence which is partial and moral. * In short, the would-be creator of political man must remove man's own forces and endow him with others that are naturally alien to him."

Poor human nature! What would become of a person's dignity if it were entrusted to the followers of Rousseau?

*Translator's note: According to Rousseau, the existence of social man is partial in the sense that he is henceforth merely a part of society. Knowing himself as such -- and thinking and feeling from the point of view of the whole - he thereby becomes moral.

Legislators Desire to Mold Mankind

Now let us examine Raynal on this subject of mankind being molded by the legislator:

"The legislator must first consider the climate, the air, and the soil. The resources at his disposal determine his duties. He must first consider his locality. A population living on maritime shores must have laws designed for navigation.... If it is an inland settlement, the legislator must make his plans according to the nature and fertility of the soil.... It is especially in the distribution of property that the genius of the legislator will be found. As a general rule, when a new colony is established in any country, sufficient land should be given to each man to support his family.... On an uncultivated island that you are populating with children, you need do nothing but let the seeds of truth germinate along with the development of reason.... But when you resettle a nation with a past into a new country, the skill of the legislator rests in the policy of permitting the people to retain no injurious opinions and customs which can possibly be cured and corrected. If you desire to prevent these opinions and customs from becoming permanent, you will secure the second generation by a general system of public education for the children. A prince or a legislator should never establish a colony without first arranging to send wise men along to instruct the youth...."

In a new colony, ample opportunity is open to the careful legislator who desires to purify the customs and manners of the people. If he has virtue and genius, the land and the people at his disposal will inspire his soul with a plan for society. A writer can only vaguely trace the plan in advance because it is necessarily subject to the instability of all hypotheses; the problem has many forms, complications, and circumstances that are difficult to foresee and settle in detail.

Legislators Told How to Manage Men

Raynal's instructions to the legislators on how to manage people may be compared to a professor of agriculture lecturing his students: "The climate is the first rule for the farmer. His resources determine his procedure. He must first consider his locality. If his soil is clay, he must act in another manner. Every facility is open to the farmer who wishes to clear and improve his soil. If he is skillful enough, the manure at his disposal will suggest to him a plan of operation. A professor can only vaguely trace this plan in advance because it is necessarily subject to the instability of all hypotheses; the problem has many forms, complications, and circumstances that are difficult to foresee and settle in detail."

Oh, sublime writers! Please remember sometimes that this clay, this sand, and this manure which you so arbitrarily dispose of, are men! They are your equals! They are intelligent and free human beings like yourselves! As you have, they too have received from God the faculty to observe, to plan ahead, to think, and to judge for themselves!