

NATURAL LAW IN SOCIAL LIFE

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BY

W. R. LESTER, M.A.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

*The United Committee for the Taxation
of Land Values,
11, Tothill Street, London,
S.W. 1.*

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Natural Law in Social Life.

"There is in human affairs one order which is the best. That order is not always the one which exists; but it is the order which should exist for the greatest good of humanity. God knows it and wills it; man's duty it is to discover it and establish it."

—DE LAVELEYE.

These words well express the thoughts I am anxious to develop. It is this order in human affairs, this "greatest good of humanity," which exists whether men choose to co-operate with it or not, that I mean by Natural Law in Social Life. This "best possible order" is a relationship of man to man, the decree of a power we may describe as God, Nature, Providence, or Fate, but which, whatever the name, does in fact exist and can only be ignored at our peril.

DEFINITION OF TERM "NATURAL LAW."

As we shall only get clear views by defining terms, let us begin with a definition of the term "law." Webster defines it as "A rule or mode of conduct made obligatory by some sanction which is imposed or enforced for its violation by a controlling authority," and Walker, as "A rule of action; a decree, edict, statute or custom publicly established." Clearly these definitions deal only with human laws—statutes of kings and parliaments—established and enforced by organised human authority. They are the laws of man and not the kind of laws with which I am now dealing.

A law of nature may be defined as a correct deduction or generalisation from observed facts. It is a rule or principle of nature. When we find by experience that one fact is never observed unless in company with another, we say it is a law of nature that it should be so. Likewise when we find that one fact invariably precedes or follows another, or when identical conditions invariably lead to identical results, we say it is a law of nature that it should be so.

ATTRIBUTES OF NATURAL LAW.

These "laws" decree that like causes are invariably followed by like consequences, so that if we desire to attain any given end, a definite course of action must of necessity be followed, or we shall surely fail to attain our desire. In other words, the rules of nature must be observed, whatever the rules or laws of society may say about it. These "laws of nature" are sometimes termed "the blind forces of nature." But no description could be more untrue; it is impossible to think of anything more sure, more precise and more unchanging than these natural forces. They leave nothing to chance. There never was a change without adequate cause for that change. The whole universe shows intelligence, plan, design. These laws are ever present, ever alert, never failing, never erring, always exact. They are omnipresent and everlasting. Design, order, purpose, intelligence is written all over them. We cannot imagine a world in which, let us say, at one place or time, hydrogen and oxygen together produce water and at another something else. This invariable uniformity and not human volition is the "reign of law."

NATURAL LAWS AND HUMAN LAWS CONTRASTED.

No contrast could be greater than that between human law and natural law. Human laws are made by man; nature's laws exist independent of man. Human laws are not acknowledged by all men, for they vary from

time to time and from Country to Country; nature's laws are acknowledged by all men, in all places and at all times, whether they know it or not. Human laws are ever subject to alteration, addition, and even repeal; nature's laws are unchanging and unchangeable. Human laws may show favour and unfairness; nature's laws are utterly impartial for "The sun shines and the rain falls on just and unjust alike." Human laws can be and often are evaded; the laws of nature cannot be evaded. Punishments for breach of human laws, varying from time to time and from place to place, are imposed (if, by chance, the breach is discovered) by the ruling authority of the moment; natural laws cannot be evaded and are therefore unaccompanied by punishment or reward properly so called; they only bring *consequences*. All we can say is that conformity to nature's laws brings *consequences* of one kind while attempts to thwart them bring *consequences* of another kind. The retributive justice we find in nature takes no account of guilt as guilt. It is blind to intentions. When we suffer under it, it is not because we are guilty, but because we happen to have got into a position which lays us open to suffering. Whether or not we are in that position through our own fault or ignorance does not in the least matter—enough that we have got out of harmony with the nature of things. That is all the law takes account of. Man can conquer nature only by obedience to her.

NATURAL LAWS ARE OF DIFFERENT KINDS.

PHYSICAL LAW.

Natural laws operate in spheres which can be classified as Physical, Economic and Moral. Physical Laws cover such invariable uniformities as the Laws of Mechanics, of Mathematics, of Astronomy or of Electricity. These laws never fail to work in any circumstances. For example, it is *always and everywhere* true that a river cannot rise above its source; that you cannot draw a

circle whose circumference is four times its diameter ; that the sails of a ship appear on the horizon before the hull ; that the whole is greater than the part ; that the sun appears in the east and disappears in the west, and that the poles of a magnet are equal and opposite. It is beyond the power of man to alter or "violate" any of these invariable uniformities of the physical universe.

ECONOMIC LAW.

By Economic Laws I mean such invariable truths as that the growth of population increases the value of land, and *vice versa* ; that man seeks to satisfy his wants with the minimum of exertion ; that abundance brings cheapness and scarcity brings dearness ; that co-operation increases production, while strife lessens it. These Economic Laws are as invariable and universal as are the Physical Laws, though not yet so well ascertained and codified. For not only is the science of Political Economy younger than the Physical Sciences but its advance has suffered from the persistent obstruction of those powerful "interests" which profit from special privilege and whose last wish it is that the cold light of Scientific enquiry be turned on to the true source of wealth, so as to lay bare the distinction between incomes derived from service rendered and incomes derived from tribute levied. We must not be surprised if the aim of these powerful privileged interests is to darken counsel and not to clarify it. But as civilisation advances so will knowledge of the laws of political economy grow, and we shall surely learn the lesson that only as we work *with* those laws and not against them is it possible to increase the sum of well-being and happiness.

MORAL LAW.

This brings us to the Moral Law, which from the earliest time has engaged the earnest thought of the wisest men and has given rise to more discussion than

is to be found in any other sphere of human life. Not that its existence or its behests are doubtful, but because it is concerned with the relationship of man to man and lays down the laws or rules of how they *should* act if the common good is to be attained. As the sense of justice grows many an accepted custom and time honoured statute, which profits some at the expense of others, comes to be recognised as sinning against the moral law, and voices are raised in protest. This gives rise to the resentment of the privileged interests which profit from the unjust laws called into question, and they decry the Moral Law much as they do its twin sister the Economic Law. Thus passion and prejudice warp judgment and prevent a just appreciation of Moral Law in a way that does not obtain in the realm of Physical Law where the search for truth is allowed free play.

THE MORAL LAW DEFINED.

What is this Moral Law? What is this "order in human affairs which is the best?" In what consists "this order which God knows and wills and which man must discover and establish?" Here I am very conscious of treading ground already entered by the greatest thinkers, and wish to approach the enquiry without dogmatism and purely in the spirit of the student or explorer. Therefore in the endeavour to answer these questions, I turn once more to definition and would define moral or ethical law as those rules of conduct which must be observed by men if they are to live together in harmony and happiness. These are the rules of conduct which must be observed if man is to attain his highest destiny, variously interpreted by the sages as virtue, happiness, knowledge, righteousness, brotherhood, and "the Kingdom of Heaven." The Moral Law lays down the rules of conduct which men *must* observe if they are to succeed in living together.

Man is so made that he cannot exist in isolation. He must live in association with his fellow men or perish. That is the very law of his being. But association is possible only when the Moral Law is respected. Therefore the Moral Law may truly be described as "The Law of Life," and it will be found as we advance in knowledge that these rules of conduct are as invariable, as exact, and as little evadable as those of the physical and economic sciences. I mean that if mankind wishes peace, goodwill, harmony, security, the moral law *must* be observed just as surely as that if the builder is to build a house which will stand he *must* respect the laws of mechanics, or that if we wish our bodies to be healthy we *must* respect the laws of health.

THE PROVINCE OF MORAL LAW AND THE TEST OF RIGHTNESS.

It is the province of Moral Science or the Science of Ethics to disclose these laws or rules of conduct, and from what has been said it follows that the test of the morality or rightness of any human act is whether it makes for or against the harmony, co-operation and goodwill which is essential to the ideal commonwealth of equal rights and equal duties. And to those who doubt or question the existence of any standard or measure of right I would point out that each time they open their mouths to say an act is just or unjust, right or wrong, they assume its existence and the possibility of ascertaining what it is. I would also remind them that the conception of duty involves the acceptance of its correlative right. The moment that brings the recognition of duties brings also the recognition of rights. The fact that a man recognises it as his *duty* to forbear from acts which prevent his neighbour living the free life, gives him the *right* to the free life for himself. And here we see evidence of the beautiful harmony always present in the natural order, for it is in a deep sense true that the only way to gain

respect for one's own rights is to respect those of one's neighbour. Denial of rights involves denial of duties, for there can be no duty to respect rights which do not exist. Duties are as inseparable from rights as the after is from the before, the upper from the lower, the effect from the cause.

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE.

HOW CLASS INTERESTS ARISE.

We are free agents in the sense that we are free to act morally or immorally ; for our destiny or against it. But we can no more control the consequences of our choices than we can control the movements of the planets through space. A higher power than ours determines those consequences. In choosing the tree we choose the fruit the tree will bear. The crop we reap depends on the seed we sow and how we sow it, and this explains why the civilisation of to-day is as it is. Its glorious achievements are matched by its dismal failures. It is the fruit of conditions for which we ourselves are responsible. In unequal laws and in legalised privileges which deny the equal right of all to live and work, we have sown the seeds of class divisions, class hatreds and the wars we everywhere witness. The threatened collapse of our social order is the result of conditions which we ourselves have chosen and which make living together in true fellowship impossible—try as we will. For we have taken the free gifts of nature, the common birthright of all and made them the perquisite of the privileged few, thus driving a wedge through society from top to bottom, which divides it into landed and landless, into those who charge for the use of the earth and those who pay for it, into those who "give work (!)" and those who hunt for it. Man has been set against man. With such a clash of interests, who can wonder that when a well meaning Prime Minister calls on all of us to be good friends and work together in "the Locarno Spirit," the answer should be further industrial

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strife on a scale hitherto unknown. Men who are forbidden access to nature's inexhaustible opportunities for self employment and reduced to a bitter scramble for a living wage under artificial conditions which make "jobs" scarce, cannot be expected to view their job-competing neighbours with friendly eye, all the preaching in the world notwithstanding. Under such artificial conditions a morbid outlook on life is contracted and enduring peace is impossible either at home or between the nations. When to get employment is made so difficult that the foreigner in securing work, seems to be taking the bread from the mouths of our own people, bad blood and envy are the sure results and from there it is a short step to open warfare between nations. Having chosen the conditions we must abide by the consequences.

SELF INTEREST AND THE MORAL LAW.

The Moral Law being "the law of life," the law which men must observe in their progress towards perfection, it follows that not only for our neighbour's sake but also for our own we must obey its dictates. For neglect to do so inevitably bears fruit in suffering and death both for our neighbour and for ourselves. We may flout the Golden Rule, but only at the peril of our own lives. If we would gain the goodwill of our neighbour we must respect his rights. Otherwise we suffer his enmity and on all sides foes arise to destroy us. It is false teaching that says we can become prosperous through the loss of others, as those who think that loss of trade by one nation is gain of trade by another, would have us believe.

THE NATURAL LAW OF DISTRIBUTION.

The supreme dominance of natural law in social life is found on every side wherever we may turn. From it evolves the Natural Law of the Distribution of Wealth or how the products of industry are naturally

distributed among the members of a community. And from the Law of Distribution is, in turn, derived the law of Property, or what a man may rightfully claim as his own, quite apart from what may happen to be law or custom in any particular state. The Natural Law of Distribution is just the simple rule that wealth must be distributed among members of the community in proportion as they contribute to its production.

How do we *know* this to be the Natural Law? Apart from our innate sense of right and wrong we know it in the same way as we know a tree and judge it by the fruit it bears.

NONCONFORMITY TO NATURAL LAW OF DISTRIBUTION AND THE CONSEQUENCES.

Experience tells us that refusal to conform to this law of distribution bears fruit in the direst of consequences, while conformity to it brings prosperity and brotherhood. In measure as we fail to conform to this law does production of wealth dwindle and finally stop altogether. For when men *know* that what they produce is to be taken from them (whether by lawful process or not) and handed to others, an effect is produced on their minds, and through their minds on their actions, which makes them refuse to continue production. If the "slacking" of the working population is as common as we are told it is, may this not well be due to the conviction that the fair share of what is produced does not come their way because more than their fair share goes to others? We have no right to complain that miners are not giving of their best when they have daily before their eyes the toll called "royalties" levied on the coal they win and paid to others who render no service in return. Denial of Nature's Law of Distribution soon results in there being nothing to distribute, while respect for the law is the certain way to attain maximum pro-

duction, for there is no spur to work like the worker's conviction that he will reap the full benefit of what comes from his toil. Thus, judged by results, the natural Law of Distribution is vindicated.

WHAT A MAN MAKES IS HIS OWN.

And now as to the natural Law of Property. The institution of private property has been violently assailed and defined as "robbery" by schools who call themselves advanced. The idea springs from treating as identical the right of a man to what his labour produces and the legalised power conferred on others to confiscate what he produces. But clearly the natural law of property follows from the natural law of distribution. For since wealth should be distributed among individuals in proportion as each contributes to the sum of wealth, it follows that the share thus coming to each is his rightful property, and that the natural law of distribution, and the natural law of property are one and the same. In other words, *what a man produces is his own* provided he pays to the community the equivalent of any natural advantage of situation he enjoys in the course of production. That is, provided he pays economic rent to the community, every penny of what is left is his rightful property. This arrangement assures to all men an equal opportunity to produce and establishes the principle of "service for service" which is the fundamental basis of just distribution. A self evident proposition directly it is understood! Yes, but a proposition denied both by reactionary and "advanced" thought as we shall see later. The Natural Law of Property makes the product the rightful property of the producer, and also implies his right to what has been produced by others provided it is obtained from them in free exchange and in whatever part of the world it may be made. This law is the condemnation of Protective tariffs and the vindication of Free Trade. In every reasoned defence of property, it will be found to mean the guarantee to

individuals of the fruits of their labour—and rightly so. The real vindication of private property and the real law of distribution is the law that gives the product to the producer.

RIGHTFUL PROPERTY AND PROPERTY IN LAND CONTRASTED.

And this is where those "advanced" schools, who denounce *all* private property as robbery go astray. The term property cannot be stretched to cover private property in land, which is really at the back of their minds when they denounce private property as such. The confusion lies in identifying "natural" property with property in land. Property in land is but legalised power to confiscate what men produce, that is, power to confiscate "natural" property, for the alternative which confronts the landless man is, on the one hand starvation, or on the other, surrender of what he produces in return for leave to use the earth. I would avoid harsh terms, but property in land and its rent is purely predatory and the very negation of true property rights. It is the power to command services without rendering service—to get something for nothing. And in violating the rule of service for service, which as we have seen, is the essential condition of a just distribution, it provides the most powerful disruptive force in society. Thus do extremes meet. The vested interests which defend private property in land and those "advanced thinkers" who, while denouncing it, would dole out equally the products of labour, are allies in an attack on true rights of property.

INVASION OF TRUE PROPERTY RIGHTS AND THE CONSEQUENCES.

Tested as we have tested the law of distribution, we find that when the right of men to what they produce is invaded, nature remonstrates with all her force in

stoppage of production followed by misery and death. Communities are free to conform to this law or to resist it. In this they can do as they please. But whichever be their choice the results are certain—wellbeing and goodwill, or alternatively, poverty and enmity. It thus comes about that despite all the power and respectability of the supporters of private property in land, that institution remains a violation of true property rights. We must obey the natural Law of Property at peril of our lives. No more can we divert the blood from its natural flow and expect the heart to continue its beat, than we can divert the flow of wealth from its natural channels and expect social life to survive.

THE "ADVANCED SCHOOLS" AND THE "VESTED
INTERESTS" ALIKE REPUDIATE TRUE PROPERTY
RIGHTS.

Unhappily for us all, this is just what human laws attempt to-day. There exists to-day many a law that one would think was specially designed to deprive the producer of his rightful property. These man made laws are defended by the selfish interests who profit by them and supported by all the forces of the state. In strange company with these selfish interests we find men who, in the name of advanced thought, deny the right of a man to his own product and propose to share it out equally. "Not mine, not thine, but *ours*" is their cry. "From each according to his ability ; to each according to his needs" say others. These are the contradictory ideals of distribution advocated by the various schools of Socialism. Well sounding and well intentioned as they both are, we deny the morality of either, for both conflict with nature's law that what a man makes is his own. The arbitrary State action here involved is supposed to be based on charity or benevolence. But it is forgotten that there is something greater even than these—Justice. Justice must come before even charity,

and it may well be found that when men are assured of the full fruits of their labour, very little charity will be called for. "Equality of opportunity and reward according to service rendered" is the true maxim and squares with the natural law of distribution and of property. It also scores on the ground of practicability, for what human court is qualified to assess either the "ability" or the "needs" of each and every citizen? Not equality of wealth, nor yet wealth according to "needs," but "equality of opportunity and diversity of wealth according to service" is the condition which accords with economic justice.

SOCIALISTS AND THE NATURAL ORDER.

Unquestioning belief in the almost superhuman wisdom of the Socialist state—whose laws, he hopes, will improve, tutor and manage the laws of nature—leads the State Socialist on this false scent. Frequently he even goes so far as to deny that Natural Law in Social Life exists at all. The State alone, he maintains, can grant or withhold rights to its subjects. Says Mr Sidney Webb in a declaration which is typical and could be duplicated from the writings of many Socialists:—"The first step must be to rid our minds of the idea that there are any such things in social matters as natural rights."

In conflict with the dictates of natural law, the Socialist State proposes to take arbitrarily from some men what they produce and arbitrarily to share it out among others. It therefore, with the best intentions in the world, proposes to violate men's right to what they produce just as surely as do the selfish interests through private property in land. This notion that man's wisdom, as expressed through the state, is so great that he can devise an order which improves on "the order which God knows and wills" and to which we must conform or perish, is inherent both in Socialism and

in Communism and dooms their devices to failure. The besetting fault of all such doctrines is their refusal first to acknowledge Natural Laws, and then to give them free play. Consequently they are founded on no abiding principle and change their aspect from time to time and place to place.

SOCIALISM UNSCIENTIFIC BECAUSE BASED ON REPUDIATION OF NATURAL ORDER.

The unforgivable sin is to think we can play fast and loose with the eternal realities of the universe and it is because the Socialist State would try to do so that it can lay no claim to a scientific basis. "Seeing (to quote Max Hirsch in 'Socialism versus Democracy') that it is founded on the conception that there are no natural laws which govern the distribution of wealth, that distribution is the affair of the State alone, that arbitrary regulation by the State is the only means by which Justice can be achieved; and seeing that science is concerned solely with *natural* law, it follows that this denial of natural law and this reliance on arbitrary human enactment in the most important of human relationships places State Socialism outside the region of science and leaves it the victim of human error and frailty." All this would be avoided were it realised that the evils of society are not caused by any failure of the natural order, or by any defect in human nature, but solely by man's ignorance of that order and his perverse though often well-intentioned attempts to thwart it.

NOT THE LAWS OF NATURE BUT THE LAWS OF MAN ARE TO BLAME.

Not the laws of nature but the laws of man are at fault and need repeal. Not by denial of human rights and denunciation of the natural order shall we ever learn "the art of living together," but in discovery of these

rights and laws and giving them free play. Not the natural order, but our ignorance of and contempt for it is the source of our social troubles. On all sides this order is assailed to-day. The natural law of "equal freedom, equal rights and equal duties" is legally flouted wherever we turn. Our laws fail to recognise the elementary principle that what a man makes is his rightful property, and give his earnings to privileged classes.

LEGALISED POWERS TO CONFISCATE RIGHTFUL PROPERTY.

These legalised powers of confiscation were described by Thomas Carlyle as "Alchemies" which do their work in the name of "rent and law." With sure instinct Carlyle put his finger on the greatest of all these "Alchemies" which is the legal power conferred on some to forbid the use of land unless the terms they dictate are accepted by the landless. Property in land and its rent is the denial of rightful property and of all disruptive forces in society it is the greatest. As well might we look for goodwill and co-operation in a society where it is legal for some men to own others, as in a society where some men own the land on which all must exist, and the rest are landless. A community thus divided cannot be expected to practise "the art of living together in friendship."

"THE ART OF LIVING TOGETHER" AND EQUAL RIGHT TO USE LAND.

Access to land is the equal birthright of all and the rent of land is communal property. By nature's decree the economic rent of land expresses with marvellous precision all the gains and advantages which man achieves as he progresses from barbarism to civilisation. The growth of economic rent is as inseparable from the advance of civilisation as the shadow from the substance. When allowed to return to the whole community which creates it, every member secures his

rightful share in the benefits of advancing civilisation otherwise unattainable. Here we have true communism and the only kind of communism humanity stands in need of. The day which gives this communal value to the community will leave each individual citizen in enjoyment of the full product of his individual labour, that is, in possession of his rightful property. For the first time we shall reconcile communal rights with individual rights and learn that in every way they harmonise one with the other.

This coming of each into his own, this giving to the community what is the community's and leaving to the individual what is the individual's is no mere human device—no mere smart idea of man's invention as its enemies would have us believe, but the expression of nature's everlasting law. It is the first and greatest step we must take towards "the art of living together" and the essential condition of lasting peace. It is the putting into practice of "that order which God knows and wills," the order which in his upward progress it is surely man's destiny to attain.

W. R. LESTER.