

*The Sandisfield Arts Center holds a series called “Political Forums” each year. Any individual is welcome to provide a topic for consideration to the Programming Committee in January for the upcoming season.*

*On August 10, 2013 “ The Enigma of Socialism” was presented by Val Coleman. We have included the text of the forum on our blog as a reference for readers of the September 2013 Sandisfield Times article by Larry Dwyer*

## THE ENIGMA OF SOCIALISM

Socialism. All of my life I have been surrounded, cajoled, nearly drowned by the very idea. It was and is everywhere. My three-novenas-a-year Catholic mother proudly voted for Norman Thomas, the gentle Ohio theologian and American Socialist in 1928. Somehow, this aggravating idea that societies should take care of folks appealed to her gentle soul. I wanted to be a playwright, just like George Bernard Shaw no less....and **he** was a very active socialist. Shaw and his fellow “Fabians” believed in a presentable “gradual” not “revolutionary” change. I went to Antioch College where the place was swimming with at least 75 different brands of socialism all the way from something gentle and agrarian to a couple of bitter Stalinists and – believe it or not – one of the actual honest-to-God founders of the American Communist Workers Party.....an economics professor named Louis Corey, nee Louis “Fraina” By the way, by the time I got to him Corey-Fraina had evolved like many of us...into a Social Democrat, a person who wants to put the humanistic values of Socialism into a Democratic society. So don’t dump socialism in some historical sinkhole which poison’s history.

Like it or not, socialism was born in the great secular struggles to humanize our lives....so it is often a chameleon, hiding in capital economies or disappearing into dictatorships of all sorts. It has both gentle and violent branches and has been claimed in one form or another by saints, oligarchs, fascists, American presidents, playwrights, Kings and Queens.

It is, at root, a decent *idea*....or...at best...an idea of decency....

I just plain don’t know where to begin, or more explicitly, where **it** began.....what a minestrone! Did it start with some obscure Russian anarchist like Bakunin?,

should I begin with the mess of the Spanish Civil War?, What about the Greeks who invented “demos”, a voting, if class-limited democracy ....then there was Plato’s paternal philosopher kings, Erasmus’ jaundiced eye or do I reach all the way forward to Norman Thomas or Eugene V. Debs....both brave and passionate advocates for the working man.....

They were all socialists in whole or in part.

Perhaps it’s just too damn much, perhaps the Enigma of Socialism is that it never stood still enough to have its picture taken....that it swept back and forth across the brutality of society trying to find a way for folks to live decent lives, be fair to one another. Am I a socialist? Or a social-democrat? Or just a democrat. Do I want the government to run everything or some things or just a few things or nothing at all? Is it proper to denounce folks as “socialists” if they advocate generous and humane solutions. Was Jane Addams, the saint of the Settlement House movement, somehow poisoned by the word “Socialism” which she used generously. What about Dorothy Day? The Catholic worker’s advocate...do we dump her in the socialist landfill?

Is the word “socialism” a curse and a dodge for another, more radical form of political upheaval? What’s the conventional view.....was it a theory....or was it a long line of people who pulled and shaped it like taffy. Utopian socialism or Renaissance Humanism or, look out-- Communism. Got to start somewhere.

So lets try a conventional beginning.

*The OED (Sandisfield’s gold standard in dictionaries) says:*

*Socialism is “a theory or policy of social organization which aims at or advocates the ownership and control of the means of production, capital, land, property etc. by the community as a whole and their administration or distribution in the interests of all.*

A raw description that doesn’t explain that once you have placed the responsibility for society on the “community as a whole” you have set out on a long journey to find what is the best, most sensitive way to make the world work. Obviously

socialism at its best has been inhabited by democracy and become something far beyond, far more humane than “ a policy of social organization.”

To reflect on this definition...first of all, it is NOT pure Karl Marx, (forgive me for bringing him in the side door, when some people insist on making him the principal author of Socialism.) This definition is not pure Marx, it is the clinical sum off passions that began a long time ago....the passion to work collectively, together, to make a better world. In a sense, the idea of socialism is not unlike the idea of poetry.....mixing, rhyming , smoothing, and uplifting the language to meet life at its sanest, life at its most humane. Socialism is without doubt the child of humanism.....

I've spent a good part of the past winter trying to pluck socialism out of the early history of civilization. I want it to be an ancient flood....a cascading outcry that comes out of our best instincts and tries to fix the world, re-calibrate the way we live, do business, make art, make love and take care of one another. But then, I'm a romantic who believes that we actually want to create Brigadoon.

But here's the bad news.

Left to its own devices, society regularly morphs from one kind of selfish, unbalanced, unfair autocracy to another. Think of the Babylonian Kings and warriors, think of the bloody crusades....and from there to the feudal fiefs and villages of the middle ages and then, on to the savagery of the industrial revolution. With the possible exception of the ministries of Jesus Christ or Buddha, (maybe the British “levelers”) it's hard to find a single social scientist who actually tried to create or even envision a social structure that was fair and unselfish....where men were fundamentally free....**before the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.**

I know. I know. What about the Erasmus and Thomas More...Mohammed, Pericles, Moses or St. Augustine . Yeah...a lotta guys warmed up the dialogue, dreamed of Utopias and actually tried to describe a perfect world In his “Republic” Plato created what might be called a “city of despair”.....a long look at the inherent **in**justice of mankind which leads Socrates to the conclusion that the proper “city” should be run by the philosophers and philosopher-Kings...who would govern for the good of the state. Some think that Plato was contemplating a partial “communism”..... At one point, Socrates even contemplated a city in which

there was NO private property. Whoops! But these guys were what we used to call in the theatre, “painting the drop, the sky cyc”.....the back-curtain that set the scene....scenery....visions of immortality.....not the real world.

Our task is to follow the thread, the stream of humanism.....in its early reaches it is thin and migratory....and to see where later it merges with what we now call “socialism”.

Although it has beginnings buried in way- past movements and ideas, *modern* socialism has its origins in the two great sea-changing revolutions...the French and the Industrial. Academia would have it that the word “socialism” was coined on 13 February 1832 in Le Globe, a lefty French newspaper by a lost-to-history fella named Pierre Leroux.

In England, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, a man of many parts (who will loom large in our discussion) named Robert Owen was also using the word . Let’s linger with just him for a minute or two.

Robert Owen was probably the first of what we will call “Utopian Socialists” --- people who dreamed of a perfect society that had been transformed into small, local collectives where child labor, corporal punishment and fierce class distinctions did not exist. He was the first practical answer to the “Dark Satanic Mills” of William Blake’s indictment of the industrial revolution.

*Incidentally, Blake’s “dark satanic mill” was actually the Albion Flour Mills in Lancashire. I have been told that this mill was the first of its kind.... literally the beginning of British industrialization....and it was right down the road from Robert Owens’s establishment)*

It was an appalling and unforgiving world that Robert Owen was born into....the industrial revolution had finally begun in England....textile mills and mines sprang up, peasants were taken from the field to work the mines.... Owen was determined to do something about it, come what may.

Owen took over a mill at New Lanark in Scotland on the Clyde (which water-powered the mill). Ugly practices (later commonplace ) such as “truck shopping” (in which the owners provided the only source of food and goods....and paid the Workers in an early form of “script”. What in America we called “the company

store”) were ended by Owen who started out as a classical liberal and utilitarian schooled by Jeremy Bentham and...evolved into a primitive “socialist”, determined to create a “perfect” social and economic world where the workers were free of the excesses of the capitalist bosses. In their day, the “utopians” were for the most part, lonely, isolated voices....

Owen believed, for example, that man’s character was formed by circumstances not under his control. It was a startling view that led to the practical conclusion that the great secret in the formation of character was to place him under the proper influences --- physical, moral and social --- from his earliest years. Admirable in the abstract, perhaps, but ultimately dangerous if the “proper influences” were not humane. But the industrial evils of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century were so awful that Owen appeared to a few, to be a knight in shining armor.

He prospered at first.....and New Lanark appeared and disappeared like a dying fireworks burst. Briefly, became a place of pilgrimage for social reformers, statesmen....even Royals like the Tsar of Russia.

He had fixed ideas about “perfect” communities.....of a precise size and shape in which children were raised by their families until the age of three after which they would be brought up by the community. (Kibbitzum?) In 1825 such an experiment was tried in Glasgow....and failed. Undaunted, he tried again...this time in the United States, in a small community in New Harmony, Indiana. New Harmony was a great mixture, much like Owen himself....who was experimenting with everything he had ever dreamed..*there was no precedent*...the community began as a “tabula rasa” and soon became crowded with worthy folks with the highest aims, vagrants, adventurers.....Owens’s son called them “a heterogeneous collection of radicals, devotees to principle, honest latitudinarians, lazy theorists with a sprinkling of unprincipled sharpers thrown in.” Somehow, a historic misunderstanding of the total lack of individual sovereignty and private property ultimately doomed the community.....but the first steps towards a collective (or cooperative) society of people caring for one another had been taken. Owen ended his life teaching a kind of secular socialism.....a couple dozen communities were created following Owens’s path....they all failed but one, Ralahine in County Clare

Ireland.....which lasted three and a half prosperous years, dying when it's proprietor ruined himself gambling.

Setting the stage for utopian or communal socialism were of course many other religious communities such as those formed by the Quakers, the Shakers, the Oneida Community etc.

A moment with the Oneida Community in upper New York state...It's leader was one John Humphrey Noyes....a remarkable man who studied other communities at length (early on, he wrote a book called "A History of American Socialisms") before starting a collectivist community in Oneida, New York. It lasted a remarkable 32 years (1847-1879) . Noyes was a religious "perfectionist" who argued for love on a communal basis....but oddly he admired the celibate Shakers. The community ran a hugely successful steel-trap factory and eventually went into the Community silver plate business.....that outlasted the community. I knew a Mrs. Russell who had grown up in Oneida.....an incredibly sweet and loving woman who took care of me in the late years of World War II. She was a secret "socialist" in a small middle western reactionary town.

Another socialist pioneer was Charles Fourier who founded briefly successful....what he called "communist" communities in Texas and New Jersey. Fourier, by the way, is credited with the creation of the word "feminism" in 1837. Fourier believed that the extension of liberty to women was the "general principal of all social progress." The point was.....all of these "cooperative" and "collectivist" communities, experiments in some form of socialism....were founded by dreamers who believed in much larger agendas...embracing social and civil freedom for everyone.

While early socialists emphasized the gradual transformation of society through the forming of small utopian communities..... inevitably, most were disillusioned and turned to direct political action. At the heart of the matter however was the common belief of all socialists *in cooperation rather than competition*.

Around now...halfway through the 19<sup>th</sup> Century we encounter the intellectuals who re-defined the socialist movement and are often authors of the crazy-quilt factionalism that defines socialism to this day.

First, a word about Mikhail Bakunin.....the father of modern anarchism and the author of a sort of libertarian socialism.....in which the workers directly manage the means of production. Bakunin was all hero spending half of his adult life in prison and challenging Marx' at every turn....arguing for "syndicalist" view of the future in which *One Big Union of all workers would take over*. The famous (or infamous) American Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW) was the institutional inheritor of Bankunin's passion.....their magnificent story of personal martyrdom and the uninhibited "free speech" movement I have told probably too many times elsewhere.

We come to Karl Marx, the German philosopher, economist, sociologist, historian, journalist and revolutionary socialist. In a sentence, *Marx and his friend Frederick Engels, tried to take the vision and idealism of early utopian socialism and turn it into a revolution....*Marx taught a body of ideas that he believed could only be achieved by overthrowing the capital society by deliberate revolutionary steps modeled on the dialectic of GWF Hegel and the French revolution. *The workers, Marx argued, were the real producers of wealth...the toilers...the proletariat, whose labor was the real coin of value. They were the instrument of change.* This argument has become "**The Labor Theory of Value**".... a cornerstone of socialist thinking.

However, unlike Marx, our utopian socialists believed it was possible to work within and reform capital society.....indeed, this very issue of whether socialism could be achieved non-violently, through democratic change, frames the socialist argument to this day.

And it must be emphasized that in Marx there were echoes of the Enlightenment. The great "philosophe" Rousseau, in "The Social Contract"....his 18<sup>th</sup> Century statement of faith in the nature of mankind....begins with "Man is Born Free and everywhere he is in chains". One hundred years later on the eve of a European revolution in 1848 Marx and Engles began their Communist Manifesto with "Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains." *Whatever we think of our world today....however much we hate the kind of Communism in the Soviet Union which turned the promise of a decent, fair socialist world into a horrid tyranny....it must be said that decent men and decent woman fought*

***mightily and continuously to bring us out of the medieval and biblical darkness via the socialist formulation.***

As it was such a strong, virulent point-of-view, sweeping away most everything in its path, socialism gained its real strength through its critics, its “revisers”.... the taffy-pullers. Probably one of the most powerful, the most effective and at the same time the most hated of the “revisionists” was one Eduard Bernstein.

Bernstein was one of the leaders in Europe’s largest and most powerful socialist party....the German SPD with 4.5 million votes at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. (Interestingly, the old monarchist himself, Bismark, had responded to the pressure of the SPD with welfare provisions and limiting working hours) But Eduard Bernstein set in train the great dichotomy that has plagued socialism henceforward. In 1896 from inside the socialist movement, he bravely published a series of articles under the title “The Problems of socialism”----arguing stridently against the Marxist call for revolution and asking for evolutionary change....that socialism would ultimately prevail through democratic means. Bernstein was opposed by the German Marxist purists, notably Rosa Luxemburg and her partner Karl Liebknecht who had formed the “Sparticists” faction of the SPD. Luxemburg was a dazzling intellectual who, more than anyone else, was able to create a powerful and persuasive literary argument for revolutionary socialism. She and Liebknecht were assassinated by German fascists at the beginning of World War I, but not before she had roundly denounced Lenin and the Bolshevik barbarity looming on the horizon.

But hold on....before we get tangled in the bizarre history of socialistic and communistic factions.....the bitter, sometimes even homicidal disputes between different points of view (often marginal but terribly important at the time) I would like to go back , as my old football coach would say, to some “fundamentals.”

Let’s try to clear up some old foolishness regarding the difference between “socialism” and “communism”. It ain't easy. Communism has a far longer history....etymological history that is.....and can be traced to the early Christian belief that common possession was a more perfect way of life than private ownership, As we have seen, long before the word “socialism” was coined in 1832, experiments in “communal” or “communist” living were tried especially in religious communities. Modern “communism” ---- although envisioned and

usually created by social idealists, often has become a totalitarian system of government in which the state owned virtually everything and.... acting through a single authoritarian party.... controls in large measure the economic, social and cultural life of a nation. But modern socialism, the concept of some degree of communal ownership of the means of production in a democracy....has prospered in many states (England and Sweden for example) retaining the freedom-of-choice for its people, but only when it has arrived and settled in as a result of a democratic process... There are endless varieties of both Communism and Socialism and they all have had dramatic outcomes.....the iron-fisted Soviet Union has collapsed into some sort of quasi-capital Russia. Chinese communism has remained a single party state but has loosened property and capital ownership. The Brits installed a largely socialist system...now so deeply rooted that even the ultimate conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher kept much of it in place.

To be a “socialist” in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is far from being a historical communist, but more likely to describe a humane belief in collective ownership in some major industries and state functions.... in an open and challengeable constitutional democracy.

But let’s get back to our stumbling chronology.

The stage was set....in 1903 at a meeting of socialist parties throughout the world held in London, with the Russians creating the “*mise en scene*”, the canvas on which they would like the socialist adventure to be performed hence forward. Two Russian factions emerged....along those same ideological lines that had been festering since the beginning. The “Bolshevik” or Majority, favored an immediate revolution of workers and peasants and led by Vladimir Lenin, created the Soviet Union. The “Menshevik” or Minority faction awaited a capitalist revolution and were purged in the Soviet Union, but became a sort of paradigm for later, social-democratic governments.

## **America.**

As we have seen, the Utopian Socialists that we talked about created a couple dozen “model socialist communities” in America in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In

addition to Robert Owens's remarkable "New Harmony, Indiana" and the Oneida Community, there was Brook Farm, The Icarians, and communities in Aurora, Oregon, Bethel Missouri and Winter Park Florida and other, smaller...the size of what we now call "cooperatives". Although most failed, they established an appetite for more humane communities and presaged the cooperative movements that remain everywhere today.

The Socialist Labor Party, the first formal socialist political entity in America, was founded in a convention in Newark in 1876. The new party originally consisted mainly of German immigrants who had brought the Marxist ideals with them. The idea spread and prospered, particularly in the labor community. Probably the most memorable, and certainly the most eloquent American socialist was Eugene Victor Debs from the American Railway Union. In 1894 Debs called for a strike against the Pullman Company, a strike that appalled the government and denied the legitimacy of the strikers....Debs ended up in prison as an "insurrectionist" But the socialist movement gained its strength and much of its membership through the power of labor and was deeply involved with American Federation of Labor, the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World...the Wobblies.

Debs ran as the Socialist party's candidate for president in 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912 and 1920....the last time from a prison cell.

Debs and the Socialists were broken apart by the First World War. There was a pacifist point-of-view in the early socialist movement and they strongly opposed conscription....Debs said "*Wars throughout history have been waged for conquest and plunder....the master class has always declared war and the subject class has always fought the battles.*"

An apoplectic Woodrow Wilson signed into law the Espionage Act that among other things, jailed anyone who "willfully obstructs the recruiting or enlistment of service of the United States." Scores of socialists were convicted of treason, including Debs for the third time, and jailed...he was stripped of his citizenship and disenfranchised for life. There followed what is considered one of the most brutal periods of political repression --- known as the "red scare" involving both socialists and communists....on a single day in 1920 Attorney General Alexander Mitchell Palmer rounded up 6000 people. If you saw the film "Reds" you caught

that story from the point of view of semi-romantic communist John Reed, author of *Ten Days that Shook the World*. And those of us who were functional in the 1950s remember Joe McCarthy's ugly reprise. Interestingly, Bradley Manning, the Wikileaks soldier, is being prosecuted as we speak under Wilson's Espionage Act.

Now we come to my mother's finest hour or finest folly, depending on where you sit. Norman Thomas, pacifist, once a Presbyterian minister and leader of the American Socialist Party....ran for President six times consecutively from 1928 on.....on the Socialist ticket.

**Doro thee Coleman, a suffragette just enfranchised, voted for him.  
Whoopie!**

By all accounts Norman Thomas was (no cliché intended) a gentleman and a scholar. He was drawn to the Socialist Party as a conscientious objector. In 1917 the party was strongly anti-militarist. Thomas brought questions of conscience and human dignity to the party's platform....he was not an orthodox Marxist, more of "Christian socialist" who believed he saw on the long horizon a gentler, more persuasive kind of socialism that would arrive via the franchise and create a social-democratic state within the framework of the American constitution. Thomas was grudgingly admired by many middle-class Americans. But in the middle Thirties, the party descended into a maelstrom of factionalism.....an old guard, a new guard, the democratic Marxists (see Bernstein above), the revolutionary Marxists.....Thomas restored order....more or less...the greatest significance of Thomas' presence in the Socialist oeuvre was that he raised what would become the important social and moral issues going forward....birth control being one....he saw the objections to birth control as deeply racist....an effort to "breed against the world....against the rising tide of color." Thomas was one of the very few public figures who opposed the internment of the Japanese following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although a founder of the American Civil Liberties Union he accused the organization of "dereliction of duty" when they supported the Japanese interment. His voice was virtually alone among Christians when he argued passionately to open the United States to the Jewish victims of the holocaust. Thomas, in other words, opened Socialism back up to the dreams of decency and fairness of the Utopians of a hundred years earlier.

Despite the fact that he opposed President Roosevelt bitterly on several occasions, Norman Thomas helped to create the intellectual landscape for Roosevelt's stunningly socialistic New Deal. **Ah....the New Deal, us liberal's double martini.** In the context of a talk about Socialism I now must talk about the New Deal as a kind of Socialism Light.....a broad, humane effort to marshal the power of government to restore a nation that was savaged by the Great Depression. Between 1933 and 1938 the Roosevelt administration enacted over 30 domestic economic programs.....a full dress Keynesian opera that ranged from massive construction projects that required the hiring of hundreds of thousands of the unemployed to the institution of Social Security..... draconian measures to reel in Wall Street....even a Federal Artists Program to get painters and dramatists out of their self-pitying saloons.

Out in Illinois where I was three-through-eight in those years the whole landscape of our little town changed.....a CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) opened up to house the men who built the dam on the Embarrass River that created the waterfall that powered the generators that turned on the electric lights (for the first time ever) on the American farms.

On accepting the Democratic nomination for President in 1932, Franklin Roosevelt had said, *"Throughout the nation men and women....look to us for guidance and for a more equitable opportunity to share in the distribution of the nation's wealth. I pledge myself to a new deal for the American people....."*

A re-distribution of the nation's wealth!

And his liberal coalition with its "socialistic" malady lasted all the way into the Sixties as Harry Truman mounted a "Fair Deal" (compromised by the ugly McCarthy era), Dwight Eisenhower built the interstate highway system and Lyndon Johnson tried hard and failed to create a Great Society without systemic poverty.... using government initiatives..

## **England.**

Any sensible person would think that the earth's oldest monarchy had little to do with frisky, proletarian socialism. But from early on, Britain was the most

dramatic European stage for bottom-up social change. The 17<sup>th</sup> Century English Civil War is to this day celebrated by socialists as the world's first successful bourgeois revolution. Emerging from the civil war were a number of what we might call "socialist" groups ....the "Levellers" being the most prominent. They argued a whole agenda of new freedoms....trial by jury, progressive taxation, abolition of the monarchy and autocracy, and an end to the "star chambers". Then came Robert Owen with his New Lanark Community in Scotland who fought against child labor and horrible working conditions. From that came the trade union movement....a movement that to this day is of sweeping political importance... ultimately through the Labor Party.

The seeds of a socialist state in England were sewn as early as the 1830 with the "Chartist Movement"-----a massive and revolutionary massing of the working class that published petitions to the Parliament demanding Universal suffrage (for men), the secret ballot, removal of property requirements for Parliament, annually elected parliaments.....they were brutally repressed but gradually their reformist goals were achieved.

Marx and Engels worked and lived in England. Engels' wrote the seminal "Condition of the Working Class in England." Marx lived in close poverty and wrote his masterpiece "Das Kapital" in London. Socialism and its political children rested in the Liberal, Labor and the Socialist Parties..

Of special interest to me is the Fabian Society...a famous British Socialist organization organized to advance the principals of socialism through gradualist and reformist rather than revolutionary means. Founded in 1884 by the British literary intellectuals Sidney and Beatrice Webb , the Fabians drew many prominent British figures such as George Bernard Shaw, Virginia Woolf, H.G. Wells and Ramsey MacDonald to the socialist cause. They sought to transform society by setting an example of clean, simplified living. The Fabians did argue for co-operative economics which included the state ownership of capital. They participated in the foundation of the Labor Party in 1900.....an event that ultimately reshaped 20<sup>th</sup> Century England.

The Labor Party stunned the world in 1945 by sweeping to victory and removing the celebrated Winston Churchill from office as he sat in the "Big Three" Potsdam

Conference that decided the fate of Europe and Japan following the war. Clement Atlee took his place....and equally important, the Labor Party almost immediately established a welfare state in England, including the nationalization of industries such as coal mining and put in place the revolutionary National Health Service which continues to this day and provides a paradigm for the delivery of health services in Canada, Sweden and elsewhere. America has considered but never installed such a system for years...I remember my high school debate topic.....”Socialized Medicine” (that would be 1947) Just two years ago, many of us argued for a “public option” in the new Affordable Care Act. Our euphemism on the left for an American national health service is the “single payer” system. But since the “war” England’s dance with socialism has taken many turns. Although modified by various conservative governments, much of the nationalizations have remained in place. Interestingly..... Scottish, Welsh and Irish *Nationalism* has drifted left into quasi-socialist movements.

### **Summary.**

So what do we have?

We have a gentle conception that was born somewhere in the middle of our better angels. A dream that suggests that we have a collective responsibility for one another, and that society is perfectible despite the savagery of class, ego, wealth and human selfishness. Like most things in life, it has arrived in fits and starts...and suffered terrible failures. *Soviet communism, which can trace its very beginnings to the same gentle pastures of Robert Owen became what Edmund Wilson called a “hideous tyranny”.*

But, memorably, out of the great self-correcting system of a voting democracy (which as Eduard Bernstein argued is the only fair way to organize society) comes the need to act collectively, to create institutions of care and sufficiency.....at the level of the state..... the simple requirements of humane survival...public institutions managed whether we like it or not, by the state at some level.....fire departments, public schools, cops, municipal hospitals, public libraries, a raft of agencies “tasting” our food and testing our water....Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid.....the debate is never really whether we need such institutions....only whether they can survive in a free society.

Socialism, the protected child of Robert Owen, the touchstone of British governance, the father of the American New Deal....has been battered about by both its advocates and its enemies. Why has the word “socialist” or “Socialism” fallen on hard times? Socialism, as we have seen, is a long slalom through history, an idea handed from one protagonist to the next. It’s recent careless use as a profanity to belittle decent folks trying to give us an unhurried, thoughtful society....really infuriates me. You’re a socialist if you want a day’s pay for a day’s work, you’re a socialist if you support the public schools or admire a government that cleans our water,, builds our highways and railways and yes.....bails out a dying auto industry. You’re a socialist if you are Teddy Roosevelt...lining up with Ida Tarbell and Victor Debs to end the savage 19<sup>th</sup> Century trusts. You’re a socialist if you secretly love old Emma Goldman who spent every day of her life seeking justice for the working class and ended up appalled by the Soviet famine. You’re a socialist if you want to keep guns out of the hands of crazy people. You are a socialist if you dare to sit down with a black friend at a Woolworth lunch counter in 1961. You’re a socialist if you admire Social Security, food stamps, the Tennessee Valley Authority, Interstate Route 9 or the Hoover Dam. And you’re a socialist stand in line all day in Florida to cast a vote.

I AM A SOCIALIST. Thank you.

Val Coleman  
June 13, 2013

