

ZAKĀT OR CHARITY

has been brought to perfection, along with the perfection of religion, in Islām.

One of the greatest problems facing humanity is undoubtedly the problem of the distribution of wealth, with which is also bound up the question of political power. The system of capitalism which is the foundation-stone, so to say, of the materialistic civilization of modern Europe, has led to the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands and to the growing impoverishment of the masses. Political power has followed in the wake of wealth, and at the bidding of the capitalist the politician has to declare peace and war. The insatiable thirst for wealth on the part of the capitalists, who are the real controllers of political power, has reduced many nations of the world to a state of slavery, and regular plunder has been legalized under different high-sounding phrases such as colonization, occupation, mandate, sphere of influence, and so on. The Great Powers are only great capitalists on a national scale. They can afford to reduce other nations to the beggary to which the masses in their own countries are reduced.

The reaction against capitalism set in towards the middle of the nineteenth century. It came under the name of Socialism and gradually developed into what is now known as Bolshevism. It holds Russia in its grip, perhaps as severely as capitalism still holds other European countries. Whether, in Russia, it has come to stay is a question which only the future can decide. But there is one thing that strikes one as very strange. Bolshevism, which had come in to liberate the people, is as much of a bondage as capitalism. The autocracy of Czardom has only given place to the autocracy of the Soviet. Government by proletariat differs but little from the democratic government of the capitalist countries.

The question before us however is, has Bolshevism,

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by state-ownership of Industry, finally solved the great problem of the distribution of wealth? Five, nay, ten years are but as one moment or even less in world-history. To say that because the five years plan has accelerated production to an extent which could hardly be imagined, and that therefore the state-ownership of Industry is the solution of the problem, is to show over-hastiness in drawing a conclusion. Who knows that the people entrusted with the carrying out of the scheme, the state-agents, may not tomorrow degenerate into an oligarchy similar to the oligarchy of capitalism? Human nature is too prone to these tendencies, and Bolshevism offers hardly any remedy to check such tendencies. But there is more than this. Bolshevism which came as the friend of labour defeats its own end by denying to labour its fruits. The rigid system of doling out the necessaries of life to all alike, to the indolent and the hard worker, the stupid and the intelligent, will undoubtedly foster conditions which must soon become unbearable for humanity; for it is going directly against nature and nature's recognized laws. But its evil results cannot be seen in a day.

To Islām is due the credit of not only solving the Islām's solution of wealth problem but, at the same wealth problem. time, developing the higher sentiments and building up character, on which alone can be laid the foundations of a lasting civilization for the human race. The rigid laws of Bolshevism, which give the body sufficient to live on, are killing the higher sentiments of human sympathy and love, qualities which not only make life worth living but lacking which humanity must degenerate into the worst barbarism. Islām accomplishes both objects by its state institution of charity, which goes under the name of zakāt or poor-rate. Every possessor of wealth in the Islamic commonwealth

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is required to contribute annually one-fortieth of his wealth to a common fund, which is managed by the state, or by the Muslim community where there is no Muslim state, and this fund is utilized by the state or community for the amelioration of the condition of the poor. Zakāt, therefore, acts not only as a levelling influence, but also as a means of developing the higher sentiments of man, the sentiments of love and sympathy towards his fellow-man; while the rigid system of state-ownership and equality of distribution helps to kill man's higher instincts. By this means, too, wealth is made to circulate in the body-politic of Islām, just as blood circulates in a living organism, a fixed portion of the wealth of the richer members being drawn to the centre, whence it is sent forth to those parts of the body-politic which need it most. The institution of zakāt thus becomes not only a levelling influence but also means for the upliftment of the nation as a whole.

It should be borne in mind that zakāt is not simply obligatory charity. It is a state institution. Zakāt is a state institution or where there is no Muslim state, a national institution. The individual is not at liberty to calculate and spend his zakāt as he likes. It must be collected by the state or on a national basis, and spent by the state or community. Where the Holy Qur'ān describes the main heads of the expenditure of zakāt, it mentions an item of expenditure on officials appointed to collect and distribute the same, which shows clearly that, by the institution of zakāt, it contemplated either a department of the state or at least a public fund managed entirely by a public body. The donor is not required to give a certain portion of his savings to deserving persons, but to contribute the same to a fund which must be used for the upliftment of the community. It was in this sense that the Holy Prophet