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People and Country: Thirty Socialist Theses

Gustav Landauer

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1. The word socialism, which — like all concepts — cannot be defined in the abstract but can only be defined more or less clearly by its historical contingency, is used to summarize the directions of will that aim at a specific transformation of social conditions, the acquisition, production and distribution of the goods and services of life and culture, which is to be described in more detail.
2. All tendencies towards transformation must be directed — regardless of how conscious those who want it are — firstly by what is felt to be a necessity for the future, either on the basis of knowledge or on the basis of the situation in life and the instinctual life promoted or inhibited by both, or on the basis of cultural ideals of various origins; and secondly by the possibilities that exist on the basis of the past in the external and internal conditions of people.
3. Anyone who considers how much diversity, nuance and incompatibility is contained in these abbreviated and com-

pressed words will understand and find it self-evident that a tendency as general and wide-ranging as socialism, as well as individual and ubiquitous, cannot be uniform, but must be multi-branched, fragmented and differentiated.

4. Socialism is directed against the possibility, which undoubtedly exists in the current organization of society and has become a reality everywhere, that one can be, remain or become poor despite economically useful work, and that one can be, remain or become rich despite economically useless work or total unemployment; furthermore against the possibility and reality that one is not allowed to work despite the will to work. Socialism therefore wants to create conditions in which everyone can, through their work, create for themselves and for the children or old people or other weak and helpless people in their care not only a tolerable, not only an enjoyable, but also a culture-filled life.
5. Every attempt to explain socialism in sharper, more definite, more solid terms leads to explaining not the essence of socialism, but a specific socialist trend. This will be done in the following, since the intention of these sentences is of course to express a very specific direction of opinion and will, namely mine.
6. To repeat once again: the socialist wants all usefully working people within a specific community (including those members of this community who are unable to work or who are exempt from it for special reasons) to have the opportunity to participate fully in cultural life.
7. Before we look at the ways and means of achieving this goal, we must say what is meant by useful work, what is meant by a community and what is meant by culture.

great, captivating madness, will not rise again in the new human culture? That may or may not be so: in any case the state is a drip when it comes to earthly things and a nothing when it comes to heavenly longings.

8. We call useful or productive work that produces, transforms, transports or distributes goods that are necessary for the standard of living and culture of the people of a community. Work that organizes the work just described with the least expenditure of effort is also useful. Any work that creates aids for productive work or removes obstacles is useful. The work of all those who nourish and heal the mind and body is useful. The work of research people that aims to facilitate or improve the extraction, transformation, transport and distribution of life's goods is useful. It is useful to give beauty to the things produced or to the forms of work. It is useful to give working people joy, elevation and deep feelings.
9. But the last-mentioned, the researchers, the artists and the poets, are already at the limit. Their activity and the special disposition of their minds pushes them to move away from the sphere of productive work. Science becomes wisdom; art becomes a craft in itself, which no longer serves the other trades, but the deepest needs and impulses of humanity; poetry breaks away from battle, hunting, farming and viticulture and all other work: it becomes art.
10. Only that which serves life can be called useful, not (life itself). No one has ever called eating, walking and standing, sleeping or defecating, procreating and giving birth useful work. Work is a second, artificial order of life activity which, in the state, population density and climate of culture, is necessary for the first or natural order of life activity. Wisdom, art and poetry are third order life activities, whose name we will now mention: religion. It is artificiality that has become a new nature, which no longer serves life, but is itself life, like the natural activities, feelings and drives of our nature from which it takes its material. If it does not take its material from life, from the beauty of its silence and its passions, but

from the realm of the second order, the means of life, from the sphere of utility and work, then this is a sign that work is inhibited and disorganized, that the conflicts, wildness and torments that are reserved for natural life alone have penetrated into a realm where they do not belong: the realm of work that is supposed to serve life.

11. Thinkers, poets and artists do not serve utility, but luxury or religion. The question cannot be answered today as to what is advisable: whether in a socialist community these elevated people, of whom there are always only a few, would do well to devote themselves to productive work and expect the many and long hours of celebration for religion or luxury; or whether the community will preserve and care for them royally, as was once the case with the priests. Perhaps it is also like this: that in their younger years they naturally belong to the working community, until their greatness is so victorious that they can only live for the spirit and solitude or for the celebration.
12. It is not important to say today how this special thing will come about; for we are certainly not talking here about professors, journalists, amateur poets and monument makers, but about a few who will perhaps always be recognized, even in times of socialist organization of work, by the fact that they are misunderstood. In the end, let them torment themselves and suffer: whoever creates luxury because his life is luxurious must also be luxurious in suffering pain.
13. The culture of a people or a community includes food, personal hygiene, clothing and housing appropriate to the climate, ample leisure and, to make this possible, the use of all the technology available to the people or community and, in order to fulfill leisure beautifully, the means to indulge in many different luxuries of the senses and instincts, of the

regulated by the state, and at different times there are always different areas that are free of the state. In the past, it took care of smoking and drinking coffee, but not marriage; now it has set up a public toilet for this and leaves other pleasures free. I cannot go into the details, and I also want to remain calm and not talk any further about the misdeeds. I will only put forward a few theses. Firstly, it is inappropriate and impracticable to regulate the most varied purposes through the central authority of the state. Every purpose needs its own special purpose association; and where the purposes overlap, purpose associations are needed, and where the purposes conflict, arbitration offices are needed. Secondly, it is a hindrance and a threat to culture that the state has and must have the tendency not only to achieve the purposes of united people, but to be an end in itself. Only genuine and noble madness should be an end in itself. In the state, people worship an invisible and holy power to which they submit themselves. People should worship and submit themselves to an invisible and holy power. Above all the purposes of life there should be a meaning, a sanctification, a madness, a something for the sake of which people live and live. But the state, if you take away its purposes, the purposes that it cannot achieve and that it botches, is nothing, a complete nothing. It turns out, then, that the state exists for the sake of people, but that it cannot help people; that people exist for the sake of the state, but that it cannot mean anything to people. We cannot find the dark and overwhelming thing that can mean something to us, to all of us together; we cannot find the meaning of life and the world; we are seekers. But we can find that which can help and serve us in life: the most expedient form of human association for the sake of benefit and culture. Who knows: if we finally pursue the purposes of life, which are actually completely clear to us, with strength and character, whether then the riddle of life, the

worse, the disgusting and dirty national conflicts within the state arise from this, when in fact the affairs of each nation are to be settled by itself (that is: by the language association), and the state wars are falsely motivated by national overheating, when in truth no war has ever been fought for the sake of language and customs. Nationality is authenticity and bond of love and spirit enough, and does not need a state to dwell as an end in people and to create a structure of beauty out of them. But the other ends that are still locked up in the state will only be freed and form human associations when they are genuinely and completely saturated with madness, spiritualized and filled with blood. When the union of people for useful work is love, love of equals, love of the cause, because for people among themselves, justice towards all is better than love towards some, and when then in communities and associations everyone goes to the table of culture according to their wishes and spirit: then there will no longer be a state, except in the association of friends of the state, who can then play state among themselves to their heart's folly, just as they play skat today, but must leave the others in peace.

30. Since people have lost or sadly weakened the unifying spirit, the group spirit and the collective spirit, the spirit of understanding in matters of self-evidence and the spirit of freedom and character in matters of independence, they must be directed, commanded and kept in check in another way: the spirit has been replaced by a lack of spirit or the state. The state or the bureaucracy, bound by laws and armed with the weapons of force, is the final authority in all human affairs for which it is currently valid, and the extent of its power is determined by an alternation of mad interest and exhausted indifference that one might almost call fashionable. There is no area of individual and group life that has not already been

body and mind. Nothing more specific can be said about this in this general sense: climate, historically established levels of need, technology and habitual luxury are interdependent and dictate the extent to which they are used.

14. But now that we are trying to say what a people or a community is, we can no longer agree with the usual expressions, as was still possible to some extent before. We have so far managed to encompass many particularities with very general remarks. But a people is something that does not exist; and here we can only say that a people is the feeling of a sense of belonging together among many people, in contrast to other such feelings of belonging together, but that the nature and basis of such feelings in each case has its own particular historical conditions, which not only have no common root, not only no common generic concept, but are not even similar to one another.
15. A people, as we understand it today, is a hybrid of nationality, state borders and economic or cultural unity. The state and its borders are miserable accidental products of the most miserable manifestations of so-called history. Nationality, race, tribal qualities are wonderfully deep-rooted and unifying individual characteristics. The French nation is a linguistic union and therefore an intellectual union and a religious community: Rabelais, Moliere, Voltaire are its princes and kings. The same is true of the German nation: the folk song is the Magna Carta of this glorious union and Goethe is the king in it. And so the Jews have their unity and their Isaiah and Jesus and Spinoza. There once was another intellectual union that was not subject to the spirit of language and stopped even less at the borders of the state than language: Christianity with its Dante and its Gothic, which stretched from Moscow to Sicily and Spain. Its origin

was like the origin of all spirit: from the heads, longings and hearts of the few and from the dimly felt needs and desires of the peoples; but its meaning, when it stood at its peak, was to be the expression, symbol and transfiguration, the art of a cultural community. Christianity with its Gothic towers and battlements, with its symmetry of the asymmetrical, with its freedom in beautiful and strict bondage, with its guilds and brotherhoods was a people in the highest and most powerful sense: the most intimate penetration of the economic and cultural community with the spiritual alliance.

16. But this is over; and we do not know when the divine conqueror will come, who will spread the banner of the spirit over our culture and let the storm of madness blow. We must prepare ourselves and see clearly. The great unity is torn apart; a multitude of small spiritual communities exist and want to live and have no necessary connection with any overall culture. One must understand that spinning and weaving, forging and carpentry were once permeated by a spirit. There is nothing spirit or madness to do with our manufacturing and our agriculture, with our trade and commerce. Chemists, technicians, even lawyers, insofar as they are organizers (oh God!), have something to do with it, as useful people. But the dispute about Darwinism or teleology, about free will, about materialism and spiritualism, is on a completely different field: this spirit has no body other than the spirit itself.
17. Friedrich Nietzsche made the memorable and, if a beautiful exertion of all forces can be called that, tremendous attempt to give the spirit this body, this relationship to life, this usefulness. If I understand him correctly, the driving force behind his intense thoughts and his most delicate moods was this need: to bring the most extravagant fantasies and con-

ages of the gods; This was also the essence of Christianity when it was alive in the Middle Ages: love and a spirit that unites people and unites all. This is what the linguistic union of the nation would be like if the state did not oppress and constrain it; this is how the Jewish race is a state despite everything; this is how it is everywhere where a reality: climate or blood or history or need that welds people together, has created an equality in the souls and a union out of the people, a person not legal but spiritual, an organism of a higher order. This was the tribal state of which we have spoken; this was the city republic. But this is not the state. It does not reside in the hearts and souls of its members. The state has never become an individual property, never the truth, never a real madness. Since the end of the Middle Ages, the state has tried in vain to take the place of the decaying city republics, tribal associations, guilds and brotherhoods, village communities, foundations and corporations. Real madness carries the spirit into everything it touches; it has given form and beauty and life to the old cities, to the houses, to the dead objects of everyday use; but the state has no spirit, has never given beauty to anything, has left or made everything cold and dead. The form of dead things is necessity with the appearance of freedom; the form in which living beings form themselves into a union, unite into a higher organism, is necessity with the feeling of voluntariness. The form and lack of form of the state, however, is coercion and violence.

29. That is why the state is a false illusion, because it attaches to the location, the territory, the area ends that are not local, that are not connected at all, that can only be achieved in a small circle or in extensive, separate associations. That is why the state, although it is not a nation-state, is always forced to wrap itself in the wonderful, genuine illusion of nationality as in a cloak of lies: but this only makes things

homeland still have to be defended from time to time because states exist.

28. We are now coming closer to understanding what the state really is. The state is a delusion or an illusion. This does not say anything bad about it; delusion or illusion is just another name for spirit; delusion or illusion is everything that people have beyond eating, drinking and mating; delusion has also entered into our eating, drinking and loving. Delusion is not only every goal, every ideal, every belief in the meaning and purpose of life and the world: delusion is every banner that people follow; every drumbeat that leads people into danger; every alliance that unites people and creates a new structure, an organism, out of a sum of individual beings. Delusion is the highest thing that man has; there is always something of love in him; love is spirit and spirit is love: and love and spirit are delusion. Do not think that the state is an old delusion that must be overthrown or renewed or replaced. There is nothing more worthy of veneration than old madness, even when it is fading away or stands in the way; there is nothing more powerful than old madness that is still alive and passes from generation to generation; and there is always something ugly about new madness, which is murky, pervasive and uncertain like young dogs or new wine. The state is not such an old madness, nor is it such a strangely unholy young madness. The state has never been young and can never become holy. It is infamous, quite different from what Voltaire called infamous. But there is real and false madness. There is living and necessary madness, and there is manufactured and imposed madness. Real madness sits within the individual, and the equality of madness in the multitude creates the external structure. Real madness is a unifying quality. Love is a readiness and reality that sits within man; it founded the family; it and its Dionysian devotion created tragedy and im-

structions of the mind, the most profound depressions of the soul down and up to the living relationships of people with one another: to explain all mind in terms of moral needs and forces, to trace all religions and spiritual fantasies back to the need or the abundance of power, in any case to the co-existence of people, to ethos and ethnos. But things are not so simple: Christianity was the spirit of the peoples of the Middle Ages, not because it was the expression of their life and coexistence, not because it had an earthly and physical, moral, human-linking meaning, but on the contrary: because it gave the life and coexistence of people a supernatural, spiritual meaning; because it abolished all the purposes of working or warring people, raising them up to a purpose of transfiguration and redemption. But the spirit of people living today does not provide such a meaning of the world; such a purpose of life does not enter into our minds. And so the attempt of Nietzsche, whose mind did not have enough darkness, whose head was too clear, is no longer to be called mighty, but violent: his great longing finally made him content with a small help. He could not bear to stand before a closed gate. But we must bear it. It is closed.

18. But the same is true of the language association that we call the nation. Nationality is a beautiful and lovely truth; its connection with economic life is a lie. There is the German language; and in connection with that, there is German customs, German art, German poetry. But there is not German coal and German iron, German sewing machines and German chemicals. There are certain products that still retain their local character: Nuremberg gingerbread, Westphalian ham and the like. It is sad and miserable enough that one cannot find much left when one tries to list local products. The time will come when work will once again grow together with the homeland, with the community and the landscape. But not

with language: homeland and language have something in common, but nothing decisive. Homeland is the connection of man with the earth, the climate, the landscape, and above all with the geological conditions; homeland is the body; but language is the spirit. Home and language are connected through customs and traditions: in the closest sense. Language, however, is inspired and blows far beyond the home and the soil. Work, on the other hand, which has also left home and soil, has not followed the path of the nation or language community and cannot follow it, any more than one can play the violin with a bread knife. The confusion in thinking about these separate things is so absurd that one has to speak crudely and stupidly. Language has grown together with the landscape in the idiom, in the usage, in the dialect; it grows beyond this through the language of books, schools and pulpits, through the prose of thinkers and teachers and the poetry of the great poets. There we have the nation. Work, now, under completely different conditions, has left the home in the country and the guilds in the cities and has sought out larger markets for exchange. The fact that the appearance arose that these completely separate things have something to do with each other is only due to the fact that the two phenomena have been merged and enclosed with the state. The state has not been able to prevent the customs, traditions and linguistic habits of the homeland from developing into great art and a comprehensive linguistic spirit; but it has distorted and hindered the development of the great economic and cultural communities that correspond to the process of production, technology and exchange, and, where they wanted to develop, pushed back and destroyed them.

19. Since socialism has nothing to do with questions of the spirit, only has to do with the fact that it must defeat such intellectual tendencies that stand in its way, since it has no contact

times tied to a place, it is not tied to the state. Germanness is not the cohabitation, the huddled togetherness of a tribe whose blood still contains the memory of homelessness, wandering and the cultivation of the land, it is not a square of conquerors ready to fight, who hold down a defeated people between them and who must always be armed and ready to protect the country from the outside (the maintenance and refreshment of all these things are outright lies and historical follies): Germanness is spirit, is a binding quality, is language. If the spirit of language and Germanness were really the basis of the so-called German state or empire, then the wars of this state would have to be connected with the war that Lessing waged against Corneille, for example, and the internal institutions of the German empire would have a relationship with the rhythm and spirit of Goethe's poems. Hardly any high school professors believe this.

27. It will be a great and far-reaching thing when the minds of men are purified of superstition in public affairs, just as in private matters of knowledge and morality some (few) have already been freed from it by the centuries-long work of wise men. Therefore it cannot be said often enough: the state is not a country. Land is soil, nothing else; the other, the figurative and lying meaning only arose and was believed when the sovereigns were no longer sovereigns, but still wanted to be sovereigns. The farmers and their associations, the house builders and residents, the land registry associations (if there were any; but for the sake of the land registry one really does not need a territorial state) and the communities have to do with the soil. All these individuals are united in what in good German is called an office. An office or administrative district is a community association. The state is not there to defend the country; On the contrary, the country and the

22. In the community life of people today there is only one functional spatial structure: the community and the community association.
23. The boundaries of the community make perfect sense (which of course only excludes madness, but not nonsense and impracticality in individual cases): they enclose a locality that naturally ends where it ends.
24. But the state is by no means an extensive locality, as the community is a limited one. What unites people in the state is not living together, but a confused heap of purposes that are intertwined through history, tradition and force.
25. We know that the state came into being through the migration and settlement of tribes. There was a people that occupied and then owned a country. State and country were one: the state was a place that had to be settled, cultivated and defended. It was the tribal land, the land of the fathers, the fatherland. The earth that was cultivated, the people who lived together on it and the institutions that they created for their purposes: these three were one; and institutions and laws were connected with the ancestors and the premonitions of the people. They were rooted in the ground and yet hovered like a cloud from heaven as the spirit of the mountains above the people. It was the true Trinity: God the Father the ground, then his Son the human child and above that the Holy Spirit.
26. But now there is no longer a tribal state and no fatherland, only sanctified spiritlessness. The spirit of our times, their language and art, does not hang over the state; the reality from which these structures arose is a reality and a people that are yet to come. We must dissolve the tangle of the state, we must separate and divide and be destructive. The community of the spirit is not tied to a location, and if it still is some-

with language associations, unless the false concept of nationality stands in its way, since it is only concerned with culture and the possibility for everyone to participate in it: therefore it must be said that the people within which socialism can prevail, the people with socialist institutions, is not just any state or nation. Rather, a people is something that has not existed for centuries and that must first be created again. A people is an economic community. The people are a cultural association. We have no unifying and banishing spirit; we all do not have it together. We have individual spirit, linguistic spirit, group spirit; but the god of the people has passed away. So, economically speaking, it is a people of materialists; for the sake of culture, for the sake of leisure, for the sake of spirit, the economic community, the cultural people, must take the place of the state. The people, therefore, of which we are speaking from now on, has nothing to do with state borders and nationality. It is a connection between people that actually exists, but which has not yet become an association and a union, a higher organism. And since every such higher organism, even if to a limited extent, is in turn spirit and even madness, we say: first of all this new national spirit, this new people, must exist before socialism can live anywhere other than in the spirit and desire of individual, atomized people. Socialism can live, really live, live as reality only in a second, higher order structure: in the newly emerging organism of the people. Socialist organisation is something completely different from what superficiality suggests today. At the basis of the production and circulation process, people must come together, grow together into a structure, into a sense of belonging, into an organism with innumerable organs and divisions. Socialism will not become a reality in the state, but outside, outside the state, initially as long as this outdated silliness, this organised encroachment, this giant idiot still exists, alongside the state.

20. If one looks at the strangely trembling, twitching, twisted and crazy line that makes up the borders of a state, such as the German Empire, one immediately notices that in this creation of a designer who has become or remained childish, only one line has any sense of reality: the coast. From a higher point of view, one could of course say that the coastline is also confused and crazy enough and that the spirit that created the states is similar to the creative spirit of nature precisely because there is no reason in it, only the purposeless necessity of nature. That would be a real, proper priestly, sophisticated and cowardly speech. For whether nature has purposes or not can be completely disregarded here; it certainly has no human purposes. But the state clearly wants to be a creation that serves the purposes of the human community. I know that the dry and clattering ghosts of natural law, rational law and the historical school of law are haunting this remark; the Darwinists would also like to have their say. All this scholarly discussion can be ignored; we can get over it if we admit without further ado — not admitting, rather, but putting forward as a support for our theses — that the history of man and the origin of states does indeed bear a hopeless resemblance to the growth of geological layers and similar natural processes. The accumulation of many small unconsciousnesses, variable adaptations and submissions, combined with occasional catastrophes, has really built up states and made history. Nevertheless, it is the characteristic of man that he determines his life and his social life according to his memory and knowledge, his comparison and thinking, the awareness of his drives and his necessary and therefore powerful will. Man sets himself goals and uses historically inherited institutions and structures, uses the possibilities of reality, not as they wish to push forward in a dull way, out of their gravity, or to persist in their inertia, but as he wills. This will is necessary; a stupid school expression for this is:

unfree. The doctrine of the unfreedom of the will does not deny that there is a will, it only denies that any will can be different from what it is. That is self-evident. The will: that is, the extremely complex mental mixture of drives, feelings of pleasure, premonitions and associations of ideas that nestles around the action as an overture, accompanying music and finale (where it does not remain music without action in neurasthenics who are full of will but lack action); the will is a will by necessity, is not a cabbage or a hazelnut, but must be a will; and cannot want potatoes if it wants Burgundy wine. That is precisely why it is a will; and one might almost say: the more forced a will is, the more compelling it is. But this is only said in rhetorical brevity and would have to sound different if there were time for a longer, more nuanced discussion. For of course there are no differences in the degree of intensification in any necessity, including that of the will; everything is equally necessary, just as it is the same whether I say: something is necessary, or simply: it is. But there are differences in the origin of this necessity. It is a different thing whether the will is born of the will or of the abdomen. Whether man must will because it drives him powerfully into the exaggerated and splendid, or because the whip of misery or brutality cracks over him. Whether the state continues to grow because many small wretched things want and do not want, or whether it is overcome because powerful longings and passions, insights and formal drives set about shaping things. There is a difference whether a wild madness from the past guides the pen, or whether artistic sense and the intuition of genius draw clear contours towards what is to come.

21. The madness of the state is that it is a functional structure, but that it has the forms and boundaries of a spatial structure.