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Anarchist Communism Defined and Defended

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[Comrade H. Davis or the Socialist League, delivered a lecture having this title, at 13 Farringdom Road, under the auspices of the Clerkenwell Branch of the Socialist League, on the 22nd of last month.]

In all discussions on this subject, said be, whether our opponents be of the most generous or the most hostile sort, Anarchy, is, they admit, the highest form of civilization conceivable. Anarchy has been defined by an intelligent opponent as "a state of Society in which each individual is a law unto himself." A grand, but an impossible ideal, we are told, this is when looked at from the imperfections of to-day. Now opposition to most schemes for a reorganization of Society are urged from a more or less well defined knowledge of the imperfections, and therefore, the injustice that would probably follow from their practical application. But in this case Anarchy is opposed for the very opposite reason-its perfection and unmistakable expression of individual liberty. Industrial organization, it is said, would bean impossibility where anarchy prevailed, because in-

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dividuals would not give up their opinions which would often be in opposition to either a minority or a majority. This presupposes men incapable of perfecting any work whatever without the lash of Authority. Indeed it seems to be assumed by many that we not only ignore, but are actively hostile to, organization and cooperation; thus do they build their seemingly strongest arguments against our position on a fallacy of the most rudimentary character. The fact is that organization not only has no fears for us, but indeed we rely mostly on it for the production of the commodities upon which we live, and for an efficient exchange of those services which make up all that is pleasant and ennobling in life. We only claim for organization what we affirm is our right in every other connection, that it shall be voluntary and free from that domination by which it is controlled And hindered to-day-authority, the creature born of the tyranny of the strongest. Of course we cannot confidently predict the entire satisfaction of every whim and caprice for every member of the community in every detail of life; but then, neither can anyone else whatever be his scheme of re-organization. The most comprehensive system of society present-, its difficulties; but under Anarchy, while we admit the existence of difficulties, we are assured of the entire absence of dangers which would menace the special status of the people. Doubtless the difficulties will only be adjusted by small and unimportant sacrifices made by each individual as the occasion may arise; a system of "give and take," as another comrade has put it, will probably prevail. It may be as well at this juncture to refer to the difference between Anarchist Communism and Collectivism, or, as it is most often called, Social Democracy. This is the more necessary as we are often assured that there is no difference in principle, between them. all differences arising in the method of attainment. The clearest definition, as well as the sharpest contrast between the two positions, was given by A. R. Parsons, in his speech before the Court in Chicago. "There are" he said, "two distinct phases of

Socialism in the labor movement throughout the world to-day. One is known as Anarchism, without Political Government or Authority, the other is known as State Socialism or Paternalism or Governmental control of everything. The State Socialist seeks to ameliorate and emancipate the wage laborers by means of law, by legislative enactments. The State-Socialists demand the right to choose their own rulers.,' Anarchists would have neither rules nor law-makers of any kind, The Anarchist seeks the same ends by the abrogation of law, by the abolition of all Government, leaving the people free to unite or dis-unite. as fancy or caprice may dictate, coercing no one, driving no party. Social Democrats demand the abolition of monopoly; and yet the method by which they propose to achieve their object is an unmistakable intensification of the very thing they wish to destroy. The Joint Stock Company is often pointed to by them as the worst form of Capitalism, which indeed it is, and by far the worst sort of employer; and yet, strange to say, so obscured is their view of the situation that they often raise a cry of triumph at a new development of the trust or syndicate and claim that it is a step in their direction ;they fondly hope, and wait for the last triumph of capitalist exploitation which will result in the total concentration of capital in the smallest number of bands, the eventual realization of the Social Democratic State. History is one long record of the struggles of the workers against governments, all of which have ever protected the propertied and most powerful portion of the community in their privilege and power. We aim at the entire destruction of classes, which can only be achieved by the destruction of government-the raison d'etre of clam society. Our ideal is the total absence of possessors and non-possessors, which is best expressed in the welding of all classes in one working and enjoying community. Thus, then, while Social Democracy clamors for more law, we demand its abolition: leaving the people entirely free to work out their own course of life.

The lecturer, who was listened to with marked attention, was then asked questions which raised some very interesting discussion. First he was asked whether editorship would be regarded as an exercise of authority which ought not to prevail under Anarchy? To this he replied, that editorship would not be regarded as an undue exercise of authority, any more than would the control of a steam engine by a skillful engineer; or the navigation of a ship by a skillful captain. He was then asked, would the exercise of certain rites among religious bodies such as circumcision be permitted? His answer was that Anarchists consider all such usages as the outcome of ignorance, against which they protest wherever it is found regardless of the form it may take. Even to-day force is not used for its repression, notwithstanding most men do not agree with it, and certainly except through educational methods, no interference would take place. Another question was, "Would education be compulsory?" Comrade Davis said: We are ardent educationalists, and claim the free and equal opportunity for all alike in the process of inquiry and the exercise of the faculties; we do not regard the present system of education as affording due opportunity to all, but rather as the institution of caste—one section of the community being educated at the expense of the other. In this connection he was in agreement with Michael Bakunin. The notion that the education of men can be completed within the four walls of the school, he regarded as simply ridiculous. Men receive their lasting impressions of the world long after they have left the school, and form their life ideas when they enter the world. In fact our position can be best gauged by the expression, "the best teacher of men is man; the best school is the world." We, however, would not compel even so good a thing as education, and we have never yet been shown the necessity for this compulsion. Fathers are often compelled to send their children to work, long even before these children have completed their scanty school education of to-day, in order to add to the insufficient income of the family; thus poverty

acts as a deterrent to education. When the free conditions of society prevail which we are striving for, the interest of one will be the concern of all; then indeed will the opportunity for free education be afforded to all and its necessity be recognized by every member of the community.