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# Letters on Property and Anarchist Communism

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1999

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A series of letters discussing whether communist-anarchism is a form of anarchism (it is!) and how private property, not communism, violates liberty. Also discusses the question of people who decide not to become communists in a free society.

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an “agro-industrial federation” which is “intended to provide reciprocal security in commerce and industry.” The purpose of “specific federal arrangements is to protect the citizens of the federated states from capitalist and financial feudalism, both within them and from the outside.” This is because “political right requires to be buttressed by economic right.” Thus the “agro-industrial federation” would be required to correct the destabilising effects of market exchanges (which can generate increasing inequalities in wealth and so power). It seems clear that Proudhon was aware that in the market, the strong dominate the weak and that a contract between the weak and the strong will always favour the latter (see the *Ninth Proposition* in **What is Property?**). Again, this aspect of the free market is ignored by Mr. Garner. However, it is part of the reason why most anarchists are communists.

I could go on, but this letter is far too long as it is. I could mention the natural barriers to entry which every industry generates which could encourage the degeneration of a self-managed economy into capitalism as unemployed workers have to sell their labour to survive. I could also mention that Mondragon (the most successful co-op network) has started hiring more wage slaves, thus undermining self-management (the co-op members have exercised their property rights and refused to let them join their co-op, in other words). Would this stop under Mr. Garner’s system? He gives us no real reason to think it would. In all, I would again argue that private property would undermine a free market based labour-managed economy and send it back into capitalism and that Mr. Garner’s claims are simply wrong. I feel Proudhon would have agreed with me (as can be seen from his comments regarding the necessity of an “agro-industrial federation”).

Iain M. McKay

Now, consider what would happen in Mr. Garner's system of property. The only way of gaining access to the means of life would be to enter into a contract with the property owners. This would mean that the non-property owner would be subject to the authority of the property owner and so they would be governed by another. It could be argued that the wage worker "consents" to this government, but this is also the case of the citizen in any democratic state. No one forces you to life in a given state. You can leave and consent to another state. Thus property, rather than being the expression of liberty as Mr. Garner states, is actually its denial. It generates social relationships which are inherently authoritarian and can be considered the state writ small. As recognised by Proudhon in **What is Property?:** *"The Proprietor ... and the sovereign (for [they] are synonymous) each imposes his will as law and suffers neither contradiction nor control; that is, he pretends to be at once the legislative and the executive power ... property necessarily engenders despotism, the government of arbitrary will."* [p. 210]

How can an anarchist support such an institution? Needless to say, Mr. Garner continually fails to mention this aspect of property, an aspect we see everyday under the current system. Given the basic, fundamental, commonality between property and state (monopoly of power over a given area) can an anarchist support it? No, of course not. Now, in a regime of "occupancy and use" and possession rather than property, this issue does not arise. But as Mr. Garner himself notes, he is against possession and in favour of property.

Now, Mr. Garner claims that Proudhon argued that property ensured that "a person is answerable only to themselves." He also suggests that Proudhon was in favour of the free market. This seems unlikely. Why? Because we discover the "later" Proudhon arguing that that mutualism would fix "*a maximum and minimum*" for "*profit margins*" as well as "*organising of regulating societies*" in order to "*regulate the market.*" [**Selected Writings**, p. 70] Elsewhere we discover him arguing that for

My half of an exchange of letters in **Freedom** from 1999 discussing whether communist-anarchism can be a form of anarchism and how its ideas relate to those of Proudhon's. They show the continuity of communist-anarchists ideas with those of Proudhon's, indicating the voluntary nature of communist-anarchism and why consistent anarchists need to be against private property. As they cover common fallacies about communist-anarchism, property and Proudhon, I hope they will be of a wider interest. I should note that, sadly, Richard Garner subsequently rejected individualist anarchism and became a right-wing "libertarian" (of the "anarcho"-capitalist type).

## First letter on Property and Anarchist Communism

Dear *Freedom*

Richard Garner (in letters, **Freedom** vol.60, no. 4) argues that Kropotkin shows a contradiction, that his communism cancels out his anarchism. Kropotkin is quoted as saying that "*Who, then, can appropriate for himself the tiniest plot of ground in such a city, without committing a flagrant injustice?*" [**Conquest of Bread**, p. 90] and so Mr. Garner states that this means that Kropotkin would be against *land "occupied for personal use."* He goes further and quotes John Henry MacKay to show that this proves that, for communist-anarchists, "*society has the right to control the individual.*"

However, nothing could be further from the truth. Mackay's argument does not "trap" the communist-anarchist because it does not accurately portray their position (just as Mr. Garner's comments do not portray Kropotkin's arguments correctly either). Communist-anarchism is **voluntary** communism, communism from free choice. Mr Garner states that "*it is up to workers to decide to dispose of [their] product, and to control produc-*

tion” and this is true. Communist-anarchism is about convincing working people that their interests would be best served by sharing that product freely with the rest of communist society. It is not about forcing people to become communists, rather it is about convincing them of the validity of communist-anarchism. That is the point of the **Conquest of Bread**, to show that communism is the best means of maximising individual liberty and production. It is for this reason that communism is based on workers’ control while rejecting the free market. The communist-anarchist commune is a voluntary association, in other words.

Now, if we look at page 90 of the **Conquest of Bread** we discover that the above quoted comment by Kropotkin is from a discussion on the “*abolition of rent*” and the need for “*free dwellings*” (i.e. the end of landlordism). A few pages later Kropotkin considers the case of “*some poor fellow*” who “*has contrived to buy a house just large enough to hold his family.*” He states that “*by all means let him stay there*” and goes on to say that communist-anarchists would “*lend him a helping hand if need be.*” [pages 95–6] Thus Kropotkin accepts that land **could and would be** occupied for personal use, in direct contradiction to Mr. Garner’s claims.

Is there a contradiction in Kropotkin’s thoughts? No more than in Proudhon’s when he argued that Property was theft (and despotism) as well as liberty. Indeed, in **What is Property?** Proudhon argues that “*The land cannot be appropriated*” (the title of Chapter III, part 1) which is also, as noted by Mr. Garner, Kropotkin’s position. The apparent contradiction that MacKay and Garner point to is simply a failure to take into account anarchist theory on their part. Thus Kropotkin accepted that some people would not desire to join a communist-anarchist commune and so their use of land and other resources for their personal needs would be respected. Kropotkin bases himself on the difference between property rights and use rights, between property and possession. The

running of a given commune or workplace, those who use the resource manage it. The aim of confederation (i.e. common ownership) is to ensure equal access and equal rights to everyone. To quote Carlo Cafiero, the “*common wealth being scattered right across the planet, while belonging to the whole of humanity, those who happen to be within reach of that wealth and in a position to make use of it will utilise it in common... As part of humanity, they will exercise here, in fact and directly, their rights over a portion of mankind’s wealth. But should an inhabitant of Peking visit this country, he would enjoy the same rights as the rest, in common with the others, he would enjoy all the wealth of the country, just as he would have in Peking.*” [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 250] This effectively answers Mr. Garner’s comments about communism and who is entitled to have a say on resource use.

As I said in my initial reply, use rights replace property rights in an anarchist society. That implies decentralisation and freedom as functional groups manage themselves and work with others as equals. Perhaps Mr. Garner is so in love with “property” he cannot envision any alternative means of possession? He seems to be applying the logic of property to communist-anarchism and fails to note its fundamentally different basis in possession. Now, contrast this system with property. Under property, as Mr. Garner continues to argue, the owners have the right to exclude others. To quote Proudhon from 1864, the owner “*can be said to be the property owner on one condition only: he must have absolute sovereignty over it, he must be its exclusive master — dominis, it must be his domain — dominium.*” [p. 127] Compare this with Tucker’s definition of the state. He argued that the state was marked by two things, aggression and “*the assumption of authority over a given area and all within it.*” [**Instead of a Book**, p. 22] However, the property owner also has authority over a given area (the property in question) and all within it (workers and tenants). Thus property and state share a common definition.

selling of land? Does it not, in fact, sound like a man opposed to property in land and in favour of possession?

From these quotes, combined with the comments I quoted in my last letter, I would suggest that opposition to property in land was a common theme throughout his political writing. Mr Garner's claims fly in the face of this evidence (as well as being irrelevant concerning his comments regarding 1840!).

Now, Mr. Garner quotes Proudhon's **Selected Writings** for Proudhon's comments regarding the difference between property and possession. What he fails to mention is that these date from 1864 when Proudhon had substantially revised his ideas! In addition, he fails to mention that in this period Proudhon did not seem to be an anarchist as he explicitly links his new ideas to the control of the State, **not** its abolition. Thus we find Proudhon arguing that "*property, by creating guarantees for itself that both spread it more equally and establish it more firmly in society, itself becomes a guarantee of liberty and keeps the State on an even keel. Once property has been firmly established ... the power of the State is increased to the maximum ... every citizen is able to make his own judgement on ... the functioning of government.*" [p. 133] In addition, he asks "*What force could adequately counterbalance the enormous power of the State? There is only one: property.*" [p. 135] Keeping "*the State on an even keel,*" increasing the power of the State to "*the maximum*" and counterbalancing it suggests that Proudhon had passed from anarchism into liberalism. However, some of the old Proudhon remained for we discover him arguing that the "*politics*" of property "*may be summed up in a single word: exploitation*" and that property is "*an absolutism within an absolutism.*" [p. 134 and p. 141]

Which brings me to the essential point. Mr. Garner claims that decentralisation and communism do not go together. However, what he fails to acknowledge is the basic ideas of communist-anarchism. Yes, indeed, a confederation of communist-anarchist communes do possess everything together. However, they do not **use** it together. In the day to day

former is theft and despotism (as it means ensures the many work for the few) while the later is freedom (as the owner and the users are one in the same). By appropriation Kropotkin (and Proudhon) meant not the use of land but the turning of land in private property, the ability to exclude others from land you are not personally using. The apparent contradiction thus disappears.

Kropotkin's argument is based upon this difference. He recognised, along with Proudhon, that use rights replace property rights in an anarchist society. In other words, individuals can exchange their labour as they see fit and occupy land for their own use. This in no way contradicts the abolition of private property, because occupancy and use is directly opposed to private property (in the capitalist sense). Therefore, in a free communist society individuals who reject communism can use whatever land and other resources as they wish (and can use personally), exchange with others, and so on **because they are not part of that society**. That is why it is called "free communism" and why Kropotkin contrasted it to authoritarian or state communism.

Now, the claim that "*workers' control necessitates free enterprise*" has been somewhat violated under capitalism (which is not a "free market" in the sense desired by Individualist Anarchists like Tucker but is a market of sorts). Under the current system, private property has violated workers' control totally. Workers' sell their liberty to others in return for access to the means of life (which have been turned into private property). Mr Garner does not address or even acknowledge the fact that private property has lead to the owners of such property gaining control over the individual and so denying them liberty during working hours (and beyond). It is because of this that Proudhon, Kropotkin and others rejected the claim that "*anybody who holds workers' control and liberty as moral ideals must recognise private property and the free market as a means of furthering these ideals.*" Proudhon was well aware that the free

market did not, in fact, defend workers' control. He argued for **agro-industrial federations** to protect workers' control via mutual aid and solidarity (see his **The Federal Principle**). These seem to be the "*regulating societies*" which he argues would "*regulate the market*" in a mutualist society. [**Selected Writings**, p. 70]

Why would these be necessary? Simply because in competition there are winners and losers. The losers in a system based on private property do not have access to the land and other means of life and so have to sell their labour to those who do. By selling their labour they automatically sell their liberty, the control over their body and mind, to another ("*property is despotism*," in Proudhon's words). Thus private property results in the boss having the right to control the worker. It was for this reason Proudhon attacked property in the name of possession and urged the regulation of the market by agro-industrial federations.

Rather than communism cancelling out anarchism, it is private property that cancels out anarchism. Which is why anarchists have rejected that particular social institution.

Iain McKay

## Second Letter on Property and Anarchist Communism

Dear *Freedom*

Richard Garner (**letters**, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1999) states that Kropotkin contradicts himself when he (Kropotkin) argued that "Who, then, can appropriate for himself the tiniest plot of ground in such a city, without committing a flagrant injustice?" while allowing individuals to hold land for personal use. He asks me what I "believe 'for himself' means, if not personal use?" and asks me (and Kropotkin) to "make up your mind."

fortunately Mr Garner has yet again decided to ignore my argument and misrepresent Proudhon along with Kropotkin.

Iain McKay

## Fourth Letter on Property and Anarchist Communism

Dear *Freedom*

Mr Garner quotes (in letters 26/6/99) from Proudhon's works to maintain that he (Proudhon) did, in fact, support property in land after all. He quotes from works written in 1851 and 1864 to maintain (yet again) that I am not, in fact, "arguing the same point as Proudhon did in 1840." How strange. Even stranger is that even the "latter" Proudhon also stated his opposition to private property in land. To quote from his **Selected Writings**, "*What I cannot accept, regarding land, is that the work put in gives a right to ownership of what has been worked on.*" [p. 129]

As regards Proudhon's **General Idea of the Revolution** (which Mr. Garner also quotes to defend his claims) we discover him stating his reforms would ensure "*property will have lost its fundamental vices, it will be transfigured. It will no longer be the same thing. Still, let us continue to call it by its ancient name... PROPERTY*" [p. 199] Now, does this not imply that Proudhon was following **What is Property?** but confusing things by calling "possession" property? We also discover him proposing a decree which, in part, reads, "*When the property has been entirely paid for, it shall revert immediately to the town, which shall take the place of the former proprietor ... the towns ... [will] fix ... the boundaries of possessions ... the former proprietors who have held their title by working their properties themselves, shall be placed on the same footing as the new, subjected to the same rental payments*" [pp. 199–200] Now, does this sound like someone in favour of the buying and



ers' control implies the market (he calls it capitalism). He also argues that in the market some win and some lose, the losers becoming unemployed. These unemployed workers, Caplan argues, then could sell their labour to the successful worker controlled factories. Of course, this re-introduces wage labour and so ends workers' control. Thus the market, instead of being the condition for workers' control, effectively ends it. Capitalism (wage slavery) replaces anarchism (liberty).

Caplan considers this an inevitable result of private property. After all, according to Caplan, property owners have the right to "exclude" others from their resources. This means that the owners can allow access to the resource to others as long as these others agree to the conditions the owners put down before hand (such as "allow me to govern you and take the product of your labour in return for a wage"). Mr. Garner, in contrast to Caplan, states his vision is a market based socialism. Caplan states that he is a capitalist and, therefore, supports private property, inequality in resources (as generated by market exchanges), hierarchy in the workplace and bosses' control. Needless to say, Caplan's position excludes him from anarchism (although he tries to claim he is one). I would suggest that Caplan's position is more correct — a free market economy will degenerate into capitalism, end workers' control and ownership and so freedom (as Proudhon was aware and so he argued for agro-industrial federations and regulation of the market to protect mutualism). That is one of the reasons why most anarchists are communists. Another reason is the fact that, to quote Proudhon, "property is despotism" — namely the fact that property owners govern those who use that property. Obviously in a regime of possession this is not a problem. This is not the case under property. Hence Kropotkin's support for individuals to possess resources if they did not want to join the communist commune. Rather than being the contradiction Mr. Garner claims it is, Kropotkin's position is consistent with anarchist theory — as I argued in all my previous letters. Un-

However, in my letter I did explain what I thought Kropotkin meant by "for himself" — that from the context Kropotkin was discussing landlordism and not land for personal use. This can be seen from page 90 and from the comments I quote from pages 95–6. Kropotkin on page 90 is discussing the abolition of landlordism and on pages 95–6 Kropotkin is discussing those who have a house suitable for their own needs. There is no contradiction, other than that generated by quoting out of context.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Garner does not address the fact I pointed out that Proudhon also argued that "*Land cannot be appropriated*" (Chapter 3, part 1 of **What is Property?**). Proudhon, it is well known, supported the use of land (and other resources) for personal use. How, then, can he argue that the "*land cannot be appropriated*"? Is Proudhon subject to the same contradiction as Kropotkin? Of course not. As I explained in my initial reply, we must take into account the difference between private property and possession, appropriation and use. The former leads to usury and domination while the later promotes liberty. That Mr. Garner ignores my basic argument (and a large chunk of my letter) suggests an unwillingness on his part to address it and the implications it has for his own arguments.

On a related matter, Mr. Garner suggests that the "second logical failing" of anarchist-communists is that we have "still asserted that we don't have a right to own private property" while "voluntary" (why the quotation marks? Perhaps Mr. Garner does not believe us?) communism "implies that people have the right to choose not to own property privately." This, he claims, "necessarily implies the right to own property, which is the same as a right to privately own property." All I can say is that Mr. Garner seems intent in ignoring the bulk of my letter in order to create a straw man. I argued in my letter that there was a difference between private property and possession. The former is a means to exclude people from resources you own but do not use (landlordism, for example, is based on this). This

basic point was explained by Proudhon in 1840. I would have imagined that an anarchist would be familiar with this basic libertarian position and analysis. Kropotkin was aware of it. In **The Conquest of Bread** he mentions “*the form of possession of the instruments of labour*” and of economists’ “*thesis in favour of private property against all other forms of possession.*” [pages 145–6] Which, to state the obvious, means that there are many different ways to possess an item, private property being but one.

The aim of anarchist-communism is, to quote another of Kropotkin’s work, to place “*the product reaped or manufactured at the disposal of all, leaving to each the liberty to consume them as he pleases in his own home.*” [**The Place of Anarchism in the Evolution of Socialist Thought**, page 7] In other words, to give individuals possession of the goods they need (in their *own* home!) and for them to use them to maximise their pleasure. This, of course, implies individual possession of the products a person decides to consume (including homes). However, this does not imply property in the capitalist sense. And, of course, this basic principle applies to those who do not desire to join the communist-anarchist commune. They would have the same rights to possess the resources they need to live (i.e. to produce the consumption goods they need). This does not imply the “right to own property privately” as it currently means. It implies the same rights of possession (“use-rights”) as those who live in the communist-anarchist commune but extended to include any resources (such as land) used by the individual.

Mr. Garner seems to want to call two different things the same name. He desires to call the use-rights based possession of anarchism the same name as the property-rights of capitalism. This just produces confusion. For example, the right-wing icons (and decidedly non-anarchist) Murray Rothbard, Frederick von Hayek and Mrs Thatcher all supported “property” and “private property.” Does this mean that Mr. Garner (and

together and share the produce of our labour freely between us, then we (together) act as capitalists in relation to ourselves as individuals? This shows the flaw in Mr. Garner argument. Given that we are talking about anarchist, and so **voluntary**, communism Mr Garner has just created and destroyed a straw man of his own creation. As I made clear in my previous letter.

Ironically enough, Proudhon starts from the “premise” Mr. Garner assigns to us communists. According to Proudhon, the “*right of the usufructuary is such that he is responsible for the thing entrusted to him; he must use it in conformity with general utility... the usufructuary is under the supervision of society and subject to the condition of labour and the law of equality.*” [page 66] This is because Proudhon believed that “*property in produce, even if this is allowed, does not mean property in the means of production... [workers] are, if you like, proprietors of their products, but none proprietor of the means of production. The right to the produce is exclusively **jus in re**; the right to the means is common, **jus ad rem.***” [page 86] And let us not forget that Proudhon, like Kropotkin, argued that “*land cannot be appropriated*” (chapter 3, part I) — a fact Mr. Garner has consistently avoided mentioning, never mind answering, all the through this argument. There is a reason for Proudhon’s position, as will become clear.

Moving on, Mr. Garner states that I should consult the right-libertarian Bryan Caplan’s webpage on the Spanish Anarchists. I would suggest **he** consult my reply to Caplan’s incredibly distorted account of the Spanish Revolution and the Spanish Anarchists (available at [flag.blackened.net](http://flag.blackened.net)). Essentially Caplan repeats the Stalinist lies that the CNT forced peasants into the collectives in Aragon. My reply refutes his claims, as anarchists before me refuted the Stalinists.

However, Caplan’s webpage does mention something relevant to this discussion. Caplan is an “anarcho-capitalist” (i.e. an extreme laissez-faire capitalist who claims, incorrectly, to be an anarchist). In his essay he argues, like Mr. Garner, that work-

Mr. Garner states that he feels communist-anarchists believe that individuals “don’t have the right to choose to exclude people from the resources those people need.” I assume he means that possessors have a right to their possessions rather than the property owners right to exclude others from resources they claim to own but do not use. He feels that I have not answered this point. I must admit to feeling perplexed by Mr. Garner’s words. In my both previous letters I argued that communist-anarchists respected the rights of individuals who did not want to join the communist commune. I quoted Kropotkin to that effect (**Conquest of Bread** pages 95–6 and page 81). I also pointed out that in the chapter on Expropriation, Kropotkin argued that it would be limited to property which was used to exploit others labour. I am surprised that Mr. Garner claims I have not answered this point! Anyway, here is Kropotkin again. In **Act for Yourself** Kropotkin explicitly states that a peasant “*who is in possession of just the amount of land he can cultivate*” would not be expropriated in an anarchist revolution. Similarly for the family “*inhabiting a house which affords them just enough space ... considered necessary for that number of people*” and the artisan “*working with their own tools or handloom.*” [pages 104–5]. Perhaps Mr. Garner, after my repeating these comments yet again, will now acknowledge I have answered this point.

While Mr. Garner may “feel that communists start with the premise that individuals...don’t have the right to decide by themselves, to the exclusion of the rest of society, how resources should be allocated,” communist-anarchists do not. As noted, if an individual did not want to join the communist commune then they did not have to. Mr Garner states that if the commune owns the factory then this is identical to the capitalist owning it. If the possessors of the factories (the workers) desire to pool their resources and own them (and what they produce) as a commune, then this “identical to capitalism”? Presumably if I and my partner decide to live

anarchists like Tucker) mean the same thing when he talks about “private property”? I doubt it. As John Stuart Mill pointed out over a hundred years ago, the “powers of exclusive use and control are very various, and differ greatly in different countries and in different states of society.” To use the term “property” to describe many different social customs is simply silly (and produces silly comments, such as the Tory MPs – in **Saturn’s Children** – who argued that “primitive communism” did not exist as tribal people “own” their own clothes and weapons! Talk about missing the point). It also seems to ensure that communist-anarchism is subjected to straw men arguments.

Mr Garner states that “housing co-operatives own houses as corporate property.” The same can be said for the communist-anarchist commune. The members of the commune possess the resources of the commune in common (and consume many of its products individually just as the housing co-op members control their own home). Those who do not wish to pool their resources are free to live outside (as happened in the collectives in Spain, for example). However, they have no means to appropriate land and resources and just possess what they actually use. For individuals to appropriate resources implies that they are physically stopping people from using any excess they own, or hiring people to do so, and only allowing others access when they agree to submit to the property owners’ authority – both of which are the germs of the state.

Thus, I would suggest, that Mr. Garner seems intent in attacking straw men. Kropotkin does not (nor communist-anarchists in general) show a contradiction in his argument as communist-anarchism does not mean the end of individual possession (how could it? Individuals would obviously possess their clothes, for example, the food they take from communal stores and so on). What it does mean is the socialisation of the resources of those who wish to live in a communist society, while leaving those who do not the necessary resources to

live (“*the point attained in the socialisation of wealth will not be everywhere the same*” – **The Conquest of Bread**, page 81). It is, as I argued in my initial letter, the end of **private property** in the means of life (i.e. the ability to exclude others from resources you are not currently using) and their transformation into a combination of communal and individual **possession** (as would be implied by the term “free communism”).

If Mr. Garner desires to use the term “private property” to describe all forms of possession, then he is free to do so. However to do so cannot help to breed confusion and helps to ignore an important difference between two essentially different concepts. One concept is capitalist, and so generates exploitation (“property is theft”) and domination (“property is despotism”) and which no anarchist can support and remain an anarchist. The other is libertarian, the idea of individual possession in Proudhon’s sense of the term, and one which communist-anarchism is based on. As I tried to make clear in my last letter. Sadly Mr. Garner decided to ignore that aspect of my argument.

Iain McKay

## Third Letter on Property and Anarchist Communism

Dear *Freedom*

Richard Garner claims (in Letters, 29/5/99) that while I invoke the name of Proudhon, in fact “Proudhon and McKay are in disagreement, which means that his whole argument is without premise.” Why is this? Because, after a lengthy quote from Proudhon, Mr. Garner asserts that “Proudhon didn’t want to abolish property but to unify it with possession.”

Now Mr. Garner quotes page 36 of Proudhon’s **What is Property?** in order to make his claim. Looking at said page we discover Proudhon stating quite clearly that “*instead of inferring from this that property should be shared by all, I*

*demand, as a measure of general security, its entire abolition.*” Now Mr. Garner obviously read this page to extract his quote. The question now becomes how does he manage to assert that Proudhon did not aim to abolish property when Proudhon states the exact opposite?

So, rather than me and Proudhon disagreeing, it seems clear that Mr. Garner and Proudhon are at odds. Mr. Garner states Proudhon did not seek to abolish property. Proudhon, in contrast, states that he does. I wonder who is the more accurate authority with regards to Proudhon’s ideas, Proudhon or Mr. Garner? In other words, the “assumption” that I am “arguing the same point as Proudhon did in 1840” is a valid one and so my argument remains ignored by Mr. Garner.

Mr. Garner states that, for Proudhon, “all workers have a claim to become proprietors.” He also states that “Proudhon’s ideal is obviously not to replace property with possession but to unify property with possession.” This is not Proudhon’s position: “*Every occupant is, then, necessarily a possessor or usufructuary, a condition that excludes proprietorship.*” [page 66] It is very clear from Proudhon’s work that Mr. Garner is misrepresenting his ideas, just as he misrepresented Kropotkin before Proudhon. However, even assuming that Mr. Garner is correct, I am confused by his comments. I argued that under anarchism private property is replaced by possession. Mr. Garner states that instead it “unifies” property and possession. Personally, I cannot see that much difference. If we have a “occupancy and use” regime then, obviously, the occupier controls what happens on the resources she uses. As she just has enough resources to work alone, she cannot hire (and so govern and exploit) wage labourers. Nor can she exclude others from resources she claims to own but does not use. Mr. Garner’s point, assuming he has one, is to make the splitting of hairs easier. As he himself states, in a society “where only possession existed, who would be the proprietor, for one implies the other?”