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1890

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Why I Am an Anarchist

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Why am I an Anarchist? That is the question which the editor of the Twentieth Century has requested me to answer for his readers. I comply; but, to be frank, I find it a difficult task. If the editor or one of his contributors had only suggested a reason why I should be anything other than an Anarchist, I am sure I should have no difficulty in disputing the argument. And does not this very fact, after all, furnish in itself the best of all reasons why I should be an Anarchist – namely, the impossibility of discovering any good reason for being anything else? To show the invalidity of the claims of State Socialism, Nationalism, Communism, Single-taxism, the prevailing capitalism, and all the numerous forms of Archism existing or proposed, is at the same blow to show the validity of the claims of Anarchism. Archism once denied, only Anarchism can be affirmed. That is a matter of logic.

But evidently the present demand upon me is not to be met satisfactorily in this way. The error and puerility of State Socialism and all the despotisms to which it is akin have been repeatedly and effectively shown in many ways and in many places. There is no reason why I should traverse this ground with the readers of the Twentieth Century, even though it is all suffi-

cient for proof of Anarchism. Something positive is wanted, I suppose.

Well, then, to start with the broadest generalization. I am an Anarchist because Anarchism and the philosophy of Anarchism are conducive to my own happiness. "Oh, yes, if that were the case, of course we should all be Anarchists," the Archists will shout with one voice – at least all that are emancipated from religious and ethical superstitions – "but you beg the question; we deny that Anarchism is conducive to our happiness."

Do you, my friends? Really, I don't believe you when you say so; or, to put it more courteously, I don't believe you will say so when you once understand Anarchism.

For what are the conditions of happiness? Of perfect happiness, many. But the primal and main conditions are few and simple. Are they not liberty and material prosperity? Is it not essential to the happiness of every developed being that he and those around him should be free, and that he and those around him should know no anxiety regarding the satisfaction of their material needs? It seems idle to deny it, and, in the event of denial, it would seem equally idle to argue it. No amount of evidence that human happiness has increased with human liberty would convince a man incapable of appreciating the value of liberty without reinforcement by induction. And to all but such a man it is also self-evident that of these two conditions – liberty and wealth – the former takes precedence as a factor in the production of happiness. It would be but a poor apology for happiness that either factor alone could give, if it could not produce nor be accompanied by the other; but, on the whole, much liberty and little wealth would be preferable to much wealth and little liberty. The complaint of Archistic Socialists that the Anarchists are bourgeois is true to this extent and no further – that, great as is their detestation for a bourgeois society, they prefer its partial liberty to the complete slavery of State Socialism. For one, I certainly can look with more pleasure – no, less

pain – upon the present seething, surging struggle, in which some are up and some are down, some falling and some rising, some rich and many poor, but none completely fettered or altogether hopeless of as better future, than I could upon Mr. Thaddeus Wakeman’s ideal, uniform, and miserable community of teamy, placid, and slavish oxen.

To repeat, then, I do not believe that many of the Archists can be brought to say in so many words that liberty is not the prime condition of happiness, and in that case they cannot deny that Anarchism, which is but another name for liberty, is conducive to happiness. This being true, I have not begged the question and I have already established my case. Nothing is more needed to justify my Anarchistic creed. Even if some form of Archism could be devised that would create infinite wealth, and distribute it with perfect equity (pardon the absurd hypothesis of a distribution of the infinite), still the fact that in itself it is a denial of the prime condition of happiness, would compel its rejection and the acceptance of its sole alternative, Anarchism.

But, though this is enough, it is not all. It is enough for justification, but not enough for inspiration. The happiness possible in any society that does not improve upon the present in the matter of the distribution of wealth, can hardly be described as beatific. No prospect can be positively alluring that does not promise both requisites of happiness – liberty and wealth. Now, Anarchism does promise both. In fact, it promises the second as the result of the first, and happiness as the result of both.

This brings us into the sphere of economics. Will liberty abundantly produce and equitably distribute wealth? That is the remaining question to consider. And certainly it cannot be adequately treated in a single article in the *Twentieth Century*. A few generalizations are permissible at most.

What causes the inequitable distribution of wealth? “Competition,” cry the State Socialists. And if they are right, then, indeed, we are in a bad box, for we shall, in that case, never

be able to get wealth without sacrificing liberty, and liberty we must have, whether or no. But, luckily, they are not right. It is not competition, but monopoly, that deprives labor of its product. Wages, inheritance, gifts, and gambling aside, every process by which we acquire wealth, rests upon a monopoly, a prohibition, a denial of liberty. Interest and rent of buildings rest on the banking monopoly, the prohibition of competition in finance, the denial of the liberty to issue currency; ground rent rests on the land monopoly, the denial of the liberty to use vacant land; profits in excess of wages rest upon the tariff and patent monopolies, the prohibition or limitation of competition in the industries and arts. There is but one exception, and that a comparatively trivial one; I refer to economic rent as distinguished from monopolistic rent. This does not rest upon a denial of liberty; it is one of nature's inequalities. It probably will remain with us always. Complete liberty will very much lessen it; of that I have no doubt. But I do not ever expect it to ever reach the vanishing point to which Mr. M'Cready looks forward so confidently. At the worst, however, it will be a small matter, no more worth consideration in comparison with liberty than the slight disparity that will always exist in consequence of inequalities of skill.

If, then, all these methods of extortion from labor rest upon denials of liberty, plainly the remedy consists in the realization of liberty. Destroy the banking monopoly, establish freedom in finance, and down will go interest on money through the beneficent influence of competition. Capital will be set free, business will flourish, new enterprises will start, labor will be in demand, and gradually the wages of labor will rise to a level with its product. And it is the same with the other monopolies. Abolish the tariffs, issue no patents[,] take down the bars from unoccupied land, and labor will straightway rush in and take possession of its own. Then mankind will live in freedom and in comfort.

That is what I want to see; that is what I love to think of. And because anarchism will give this state of things, I am an Anarchist. To assert that it will is not to prove it; that I know. But neither can it be disproved by mere denial. I am waiting for some one to show me by history, fact, or logic that men have social wants superior to liberty and wealth or that any form of Archism will secure them these wants. Until then the foundations of my political and economic creed will remain as I have outlined them in this brief article.