The minds of men are in confusion, for the very foundations of our civilization seem to be tottering. People are losing faith in the existing institutions, and the more intelligent realize that capitalist industrialism is defeating the very purpose it is supposed to serve.

The world is at a loss for a way out. Parliamentarism and democracy are on the decline. Salvation is being sought in Fascism and other forms of “strong” government.

The struggle of opposing ideas now going on in the world involves social problems urgently demanding a solution. The welfare of the individual and the fate of human society depend on the right answer to those questions. The crisis, unemployment, war, disarma-ment, international relations, etc., are among those problems.

The State, government with its functions and powers, is now the subject of vital interest to every thinking man. Political developments in all civilized countries have brought the questions home. Shall we have a strong government? Are democracy and parlia-
mentary government to be preferred, or is Fascism of one kind or
another, dictatorship — monarchical, bourgeois or proletarian —
the solution of the ills and difficulties that beset society today?

In other words, shall we cure the evils of democracy by more
democracy, or shall we cut the Gordian knot of popular govern-
ment with the sword of dictatorship?

My answer is neither the one nor the other. I am against dicta-
torship and Fascism as I am opposed to parliamentary regimes and
so-called political democracy.

Nazism has been justly called an attack on civilization. This char-
acterization applies with equal force to every form of dictatorship;
indeed, to every kind of suppression and coercive authority. For
what is civilization in the true sense? All progress has been essen-
tially an enlargement of the liberties of the individual with a cor-
responding decrease of the authority wielded over him by external
forces. This holds good in the realm of physical as well as of po-
litical and economic existence. In the physical world man has pro-
gressed to the extent in which he has subdued the forces of nature
and made them useful to himself. Primitive man made a step on the
road to progress when he first produced fire and thus triumphed
over darkness, when he chained the wind or harnessed water.

What role did authority or government play in human endeavor
for betterment, in invention and discovery? None whatever, or at
least none that was helpful. It has always been the individual that
has accomplished every miracle in that sphere, usually in spite of
the prohibition, persecution and interference by authority, human
and divine.

Similarly, in the political sphere, the road of progress lay in get-
ing away more and more from the authority of the tribal chief or of
the clan, of prince and king, of government, of the State. Econom-
ically, progress has meant greater well-being of ever larger num-
bers. Culturally, it has signified the result of all the other achieve-
ments — greater independence, political, mental and psychic.

Regarded from this angle, the problems of man’s relation to the
State assumes an entirely different significance. It is no more a
No intelligent student will deny the importance of the economic factor in the social growth and development of mankind. But only narrow and wilful dogmatism can persist in remaining blind to the important role played by an idea as conceived by the imagination and aspirations of the individual.

It were vain and unprofitable to attempt to balance one factor as against another in human experience. No one single factor in the complex of individual or social behavior can be designated as the factor of decisive quality. We know too little, and may never know enough, of human psychology to weigh and measure the relative values of this or that factor in determining man’s conduct. To form such dogmas in their social connotation is nothing short of bigotry; yet, perhaps, it has its uses, for the very attempt to do so proved the persistence of the human will and confutes the Marxists.

Fortunately even some Marxists are beginning to see that all is not well with the Marxian creed. After all, Marx was but human — all too human — hence by no means infallible. The practical application of economic determinism in Russia is helping to clear the minds of the more intelligent Marxists. This can be seen in the transvaluation of Marxian values going on in Socialist and even Communist ranks in some European countries. They are slowly realising that their theory has overlooked the human element, den Menschen, as a Socialist paper put it. Important as the economic factor is, it is not enough. The rejuvenation of mankind needs the inspiration and energising force of an ideal.

Such an ideal I see in Anarchism. To be sure, not in the popular misrepresentations of Anarchism spread by the worshippers of the State and authority. I mean the philosophy of a new social order based on the released energies of the individual and the free association of liberated individuals.

Of all social theories Anarchism alone steadfastly proclaims that society exists for man, not man for society. The sole legitimate purpose of society is to serve the needs and advance the aspiration of the living man. It is inherent in every human being and is a thing of growth. The State and social institutions come and go, but individuality remains and persists. The very essence of individuality is expression; the sense of dignity and independence is the soil wherein it thrives. Individuality is not the impersonal and mechanistic thing that the State treats as an “individual”. The individual is not merely the result of heredity and environment, of cause and effect. He is that and a great deal more, a great deal else. The living man cannot be defined; he is the fountain-head of all life and all values; he is not a part of this or of that; he is a whole, an individual whole, a growing, changing, yet always constant whole.
Individuality is not to be confused with the various ideas and concepts of Individualism; much less with that “rugged individualism” which is only a masked attempt to repress and defeat the individual and his individuality. So-called Individualism is the social and economic laissez faire: the exploitation of the masses by the classes by means of legal trickery, spiritual debasement and systematic indoctrination of the servile spirit, which process is known as “education.” That corrupt and perverse “individualism” is the strait-jacket of individuality. It has converted life into a degrading race for externals, for possession, for social prestige and supremacy. Its highest wisdom is “the devil take the hindmost.”

This “rugged individualism” has inevitably resulted in the greatest modern slavery, the crassest class distinctions, driving millions to the breadline. “Rugged individualism” has meant all the “individualism” for the masters, while the people are regimented into a slave caste to serve a handful of self-seeking “supermen.” America is perhaps the best representative of this kind of individualism, in whose name political tyranny and social oppression are defended and held up as virtues; while every aspiration and attempt of man to gain freedom and social opportunity to live is denounced as “un-American” and evil in the name of that same individualism.

There was a time when the State was unknown. In his natural condition man existed without any State or organized government. People lived as families in small communities; they tilled the soil and practiced the arts and crafts. The individual, and later the family, was the unit of social life where each was free and the equal of his neighbor. Human society then was not a State but an association; a voluntary association for mutual protection and benefit. The elders and more experienced members were the guides and advisers of the people. They helped to manage the affairs of life, not to rule and dominate the individual.

Political government and the State were a much later development, growing out of the desire of the stronger to take advantage of the weaker, of the few against the many. The State, ecclesiastical...
being civilized. True civilization is to be measured by the individual, the unit of all social life; by his individuality and the extent to which it is free to have its being to grow and expand unhindered by invasive and coercive authority.

Socially speaking, the criterion of civilization and culture is the degree of liberty and economic opportunity which the individual enjoys; of social and international unity and co-operation unrestricted by man-made laws and other artificial obstacles; by the absence of privileged castes and by the reality of liberty and human dignity; in short, by the true emancipation of the individual.

Political absolutism has been abolished because men have realized in the course of time that absolute power is evil and destructive. But the same thing is true of all power, whether it be the power of privilege, of money, of the priest, of the politician or of so-called democracy. In its effect on individuality it matters little what the particular character of coercion is — whether it be as black as Fascism, as yellow as Nazism or as pretentiously red as Bolshevism. It is power that corrupts and degrades both master and slave and it makes no difference whether the power is wielded by an autocrat, by parliament or Soviets. More pernicious than the power of a dictator is that of a class; the most terrible — the tyranny of a majority.

The long process of history has taught man that division and strife mean death, and that unity and cooperation advance his cause, multiply his strength and further his welfare. The spirit of government has always worked against the social application of this vital lesson, except where it served the State and aided its own particular interests. It is this anti-progressive and anti-social spirit of the State and of the privileged castes back of it which has been responsible for the bitter struggle between man and man. The individual and ever larger groups of individuals are beginning to see beneath the surface of the established order of things. No longer are they so blinded as in the past by the glare and tinsel of the State idea, and of the “blessings” of “rugged individualism.” Man is reach-
rulers came from on high; power, like faith, was divine. Philosophers have written thick volumes to prove the sanctity of the State; some have even clad it with infallibility and with god-like attributes Some have talked themselves into the insane notion that the State is “superhuman,” the supreme reality, “the absolute.”

Enquiry was condemned as blasphemy. Servitude was the highest virtue. By such precepts and training certain things came to be regarded as self-evident, as sacred of their truth, but because of constant and persistent repetition.

All progress has been essentially an unmasking of “divinity” and “mystery,” of alleged sacred, eternal “truth”; it has been a gradual elimination of the abstract and the substitution in its place of the real, the concrete. In short, of facts against fancy, of knowledge against ignorance, of light against darkness.

That slow and arduous liberation of the individual was not accomplished by the aid of the State. On the contrary, it was by continuous conflict, by a life-and-death struggle with the State, that even the smallest vestige of independence and freedom has been won. It has cost mankind much time and blood to secure what little it has gained so far from kings, tsars and governments.

The great heroic figure of that long Golgotha has been Man. It has always been the individual, often alone and singly, at other times in unity and co-operation with others of his kind, who has fought and bled in the age-long battle against suppression and oppression, against the powers that enslave and degrade him.

More than that and more significant: It was man, the individual, whose soul first rebelled against injustice and degradation; it was the individual who first conceived the idea of resistance to the conditions under which he chafed. In short, it is always the individual who is the parent of the liberating thought as well as of the deed.

This refers not only to political struggles, but to the entire gamut of human life and effort, in all ages and climes. It has always been the individual, the man of strong mind and will to liberty, who paved the way for every human advance, for every step toward a intellectual. Added to it is the tendency to follow in the footsteps of family tradition, and become doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, etc. The groove requires less effort and personality. In consequence nearly everybody is out of place in our present scheme of things. The masses plod on, partly because their senses have been dulled by the deadly routine of work and because they must eke out an existence. This applies with even greater force to the political fabric of today. There is no place in its texture for free choice of independent thought and activity. There is a place only for voting and tax-paying puppets.

The interests of the State and those of the individual differ fundamentally and are antagonistic. The State and the political and economic institutions it supports can exist only by fashioning the individual to their particular purpose; training him to respect “law and order;” teaching him obedience, submission and unquestioning faith in the wisdom and justice of government; above all, loyal service and complete self-sacrifice when the State commands it, as in war. The State puts itself and its interests even above the claims of religion and of God. It punishes religious or conscientious scruples against individuality because there is no individuality without liberty, and liberty is the greatest menace to authority.

The struggle of the individual against these tremendous odds is the more difficult — too often dangerous to life and limb — because it is not truth or falsehood which serves as the criterion of the opposition he meets. It is not the validity or usefulness of his thought or activity which rouses against him the forces of the State and of “public opinion.” The persecution of the innovator and protestant has always been inspired by fear on the part of constituted authority of having its infallibility questioned and its power undermined.

Man’s true liberation, individual and collective, lies in his emancipation from authority and from the belief in it. All human evolution has been a struggle in that direction and for that object. It is not invention and mechanics which constitute development. The ability to travel at the rate of 100 miles an hour is no evidence of
its biological and sociological completion from the great Anarchist scientist and thinker. In his profound work, Mutual Aid Kropotkin shows that in the animal kingdom, as well as in human society, co-operation — as opposed to internecine strife and struggle — has worked for the survival and evolution of the species. He demonstrated that only mutual aid and voluntary co-operation — not the omnipotent, all-devastating State — can create the basis for a free individual and associational life.

At present the individual is the pawn of the zealots of dictatorship and the equally obsessed zealots of “rugged individualism.” The excuse of the former is its claim of a new objective. The latter does not even make a pretense of anything new. As a matter of fact “rugged individualism” has learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Under its guidance the brute struggle for physical existence is still kept up. Strange as it may seem, and utterly absurd as it is, the struggle for physical survival goes merrily on though the necessity for it has entirely disappeared. Indeed, the struggle is being continued apparently because there is no necessity for it. Does not so-called overproduction prove it? Is not the world-wide economic crisis an eloquent demonstration that the struggle for existence is being maintained by the blindness of “rugged individualism” at the risk of its own destruction?

One of the insane characteristics of this struggle is the complete negation of the relation of the producer to the things he produces. The average worker has no inner point of contact with the industry he is employed in, and he is a stranger to the process of production of which he is a mechanical part. Like any other cog of the machine, he is replaceable at any time by other similar depersonalized human beings.

The intellectual proletarian, though he foolishly thinks himself a free agent, is not much better off. He, too, has a little choice or self-direction, in his particular metier as his brother who works with his hands. Material considerations and desire for greater social prestige are usually the deciding factors in the vocation of the freer and better world; in science, philosophy and art, as well as in industry, whose genius rose to the heights, conceiving the “impossible,” visualizing its realization and imbuing others with his enthusiasm to work and strive for it. Socially speaking, it was always the prophet, the seer, the idealist, who dreamed of a world more to his heart’s desire and who served as the beacon light on the road to greater achievement.

The State, every government whatever its form, character or color — be it absolute or constitutional, monarchy or republic, Fascist, Nazi or Bolshevik — is by its very nature conservative, static, intolerant of change and opposed to it. Whatever changes it undergoes are always the result of pressure exerted upon it, pressure strong enough to compel the ruling powers to submit peaceably or otherwise, generally “otherwise” — that is, by revolution. Moreover, the inherent conservatism of government, of authority of any kind, unavoidably becomes reactionary. For two reasons: first, because it is in the nature of government not only to retain the power it has, but also to strengthen, widen and perpetuate it, nationally as well as internationally. The stronger authority grows, the greater the State and its power, the less it can tolerate a similar authority or political power along side of itself. The psychology of government demands that its influence and prestige constantly grow, at home and abroad, and it exploits every opportunity to increase it. This tendency is motivated by the financial and commercial interests back of the government, represented and served by it. The fundamental raison d’etre of every government to which, incidentally, historians of former days wilfully shut their eyes, has become too obvious now even for professors to ignore.

The other factor which impels governments to become even more conservative and reactionary is their inherent distrust of the individual and fear of individuality. Our political and social scheme cannot afford to tolerate the individual and his constant quest for innovation. In “self-defense” the State therefore suppresses, persecutes, punishes and even deprives the individual of life. It is aided
in this by every institution that stands for the preservation of the 
existing order. It resorts to every form of violence and force, and 
its efforts are supported by the “moral indignation” of the majority 
against the heretic, the social dissenter and the political rebel — the 
minority for centuries drilled in State worship, trained in discipline 
and obedience and subdued by the awe of authority in the home, 
the school, the church and the press.

The strongest bulwark of authority is uniformity; the least diver-
gence from it is the greatest crime. The wholesale mechanisation 
of modern life has increased uniformity a thousandfold. It is every-
where present, in habits, tastes, dress, thoughts and ideas. Its most 
concentrated dullness is “public opinion.” Few have the courage to 
stand out against it. He who refuses to submit is at once labelled 
“queer,” “different,” and decried as a disturbing element in the com-
fortable stagnancy of modern life.

Perhaps even more than constituted authority, it is social uni-
formity and sameness that harass the individual most. His very 
“uniqueness,” “separateness” and “differentiation” make him an 
alien, not only in his native place, but even in his own home. Of-
ten more so than the foreign born who generally falls in with the 
established.

In the true sense one’s native land, with its background of tra-
dition, early impressions, reminiscences and other things dear to 
one, is not enough to make sensitive human beings feel at home. A 
certain atmosphere of “belonging,” the consciousness of being “at 
one” with the people and environment, is more essential to one’s 
feeling of home. This holds good in relation to one’s family, the 
smaller local circle, as well as the larger phase of the life and activ-
ities commonly called one’s country. The individual whose vision 
encompasses the whole world often feels nowhere so hedged in 
and out of touch with his surroundings than in his native land.

In pre-war time the individual could at least escape national and 
family boredom. The whole world was open to his longings and 
his quests. Now the world has become a prison, and life contin-
ual solitary confinement. Especially is this true since the advent of 
dictatorship, right and left.

Friedrich Nietzsche called the State a cold monster. What would 
he have called the hideous beast in the garb of modern dictator-
ship? Not that government had ever allowed much scope to the in-
dividual; but the champions of the new State ideology do not grant 
even that much. “The individual is nothing,” they declare, “it is the 
collectivity which counts.” Nothing less than the complete surren-
der of the individual will satisfy the insatiable appetite of the new 
deity.

Strangely enough, the loudest advocates of this new gospel are 
to be found among the British and American intelligentsia. Just 
now they are enamored with the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” In 
theory only, to be sure. In practice, they still prefer the few liberties 
in their own respective countries. They go to Russia for a short visit 
or as salesmen of the “revolution,” but they feel safer and more 
comfortable at home.

Perhaps it is not only lack of courage which keeps these good 
Britishers and Americans in their native lands rather than in the 
millennium come. Subconsciously there may lurk the feeling that 
individuality remains the most fundamental fact of all human asso-
ciation, suppressed and persecuted yet never defeated, and in the 
long run the victor.

The “genius of man,” which is but another name for personality 
and individuality, bores its way through all the caverns of dogma, 
through the thick walls of tradition and custom, defying all taboos, 
setting authority at naught, facing contumely and the scaffold — ul-
timately to be blessed as prophet and martyr by succeeding gener-
ations. But for the “genius of man,” that inherent, persistent quality 
of individuality, we would be still roaming the primeval forests.

Peter Kropotkin has shown what wonderful results this unique 
force of man’s individuality has achieved when strengthened by 
co-operation with other individualities. The one-sided and entirely 
inadequate Darwinian theory of the struggle for existence received