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Freedom - Opening Preface to the First Volume

Freedom Press (London)

October, 1886

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Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 1, No. 1, online
source RevoltLib.com, retrieved on April 12, 2020.

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Through the long ages of grinding slavery behind us, Freedom, that unknown goal of human pilgrimage, has hovered, a veiled splendor, upon the horizon of men's hopes. Veiled in the trembling ignorance of mankind, their misty unreasoning terror of all that revealed itself as power, whether it were an apparently incomprehensible and uncontrollable natural force, or the ascendancy of superior strength, ability or cunning in human society the inward attitude of slavish adoration towards what imposes itself from without as a fact beyond our understanding, that is the veil which hides Freedom from the eyes of men sometimes it takes the form of the blind fear of a savage of his medicine or his fetish, sometimes of the equally blind reverence of an English workman for the law of his masters, and the semblance of consent to his own economic slavery wormed out of him by the farce of representation. But whatever the form the reality is the same, ignorance, superstitious terror, cowardly submission.

What is human progress but the advance of the swelling tide of revolt against this tyranny of the nightmare of ignorant dread

which has held men the slaves of external nature, of one another, and of themselves I Science and the arts, knowledge and all its varied shapes of practical application by ingenuity and skill, the binding and enlightening force of affection and social feeling, the protest of individuals and of peoples by word and deed against religious, economic, political and social oppression, these, one and all, are weapons in the hands of the Rebels against the Powers of Darkness sheltered behind their shield of authority, divine and human. But they are weapons not all equally effective at all times. Each has its period of special utility.

We are living at the close of an era during which the marvelous increase of knowledge left social feeling behind, and enabled the few who monopolized the newly acquired power over nature to create an artificial civilization, based upon their exclusive claim to retain private, personal possession of the increased wealth produced.

Property-not the claim to use, but to a right to prevent others from using-enables individuals who have appropriated the means of production, to hold in subjection all those who possess nothing but their vital energy. and who must work that they may live. No work is possible without land, materials, and tools or machinery; thus the masters of these things are the masters also of the destitute workers, and can live in idleness upon their labor, paying them in wages only enough of the produce to keep them alive, only employing so many of them as they find profitable and leaving the rest to their fate.

Such a wrong once realized is not to be borne. Knowledge cannot long, be monopolized, and social feeling is innate in human nature, and both are fomenting within our hide-bound Society – as the yeast in the dough. Our age is on the eve of a revolt against property, in the name of the common claim of all to a common share in the results of the common labor of all.

Therefore, we are Socialists, disbelievers in Property, advocates of the equal claims of each man and woman to work for the com-

munity as seems good to him or her—calling no man master, and of the equal claim of each to satisfy as seems good to him, his natural needs from the stock of social wealth he has labored to produce. We look for this socialization of wealth, not to restraints imposed by authority upon property, but to the removal, by the direct personal action of the people themselves, of the restraints which secure property against the claims of popular justice. For authority and property both are manifestations of the egoistical spirit of domination, and we do not look to Satan to cast out Satan.

We have no faith in legal methods of reform. Fixed and arbitrary written law is, and has always been, the instrument employed by antisocial individuals to secure their authority, whether delegated or usurped, when the maintenance of that authority by open violence has become dangerous. Social feeling, and the social habits formed and corrected by common experience, are the actual cement of associated life. It is the specious embodiment of a portion of this social custom in law, which has made law tolerable, and even sacred in the eyes of the people it exists to enthrall. But in proportion as the oppression of law is removed, the true binding force of the influence of social feeling upon individual responsibility becomes apparent and is increased. We look for the destruction of monopoly, not by the imposition of fresh artificial restraints, but by the abolition of all arbitrary restraints whatever. Without law, property would be impossible, and labor by man in any shape and under any pretext. The human freedom to which our eyes are raised is no negative abstraction of license for individual egoism, whether it be massed collectively as majority rule or isolated as personal tyranny. We dream of the positive freedom which is essentially one with social feeling; of free scope for the social impulses now distorted and compressed by Property, and its guardian the Law of free scope for that individual sense of responsibility, of respect for self and for others, which is vitiated by every form of collective interference, from the enforcing of contracts to the hanging of criminals of free scope for the spontaneity and individuality of each human being,

such as is impossible when one hard and fast line is fitted to all conduct. Science is teaching mankind that such crime as is not the manufacture of our vile economic and legal system, can only be rationally as well as humanely treated by fraternal medical care, for if it results from deformity or disease, and a hard and fast rule of conduct enforced by condign punishment is neither guide nor remedy, nothing but a perennial source of injustice among men.

We believe each sane adult human being to possess an equal and indefeasible claim to direct his life from within by the light of his own consciousness, to the sole responsibility of guiding his own action as well as forming his own opinions. Further, we believe that the acknowledgment of this claim is a necessary preliminary to rational voluntary agreement, the only permanent basis of harmonious life in common. Therefore, we reject every method of enforcing assent, as in itself a hindrance to effectual cooperation, and further, a direct incentive to antisocial feeling. We deprecate as a wrong to human nature, individually, and therefore collectively, all use of force for the purpose of coercing others; but we assert the social duty of each to defend, by force if need be, his dignity as a free human being, and the like dignity in others, from every form of insult and oppression.

We claim for each and all the personal right and social obligation to be free. We hold the complete social recognition and acknowledgment of such a claim to be the goal of human progress in the future, as its growth has been the gauge of development of Society in the past, of the advance of man from the blind social impulse of the gregarious animal to the conscious social feeling of the free human being.

Such, in rough outline, is the general aspect of the Anarchist Socialism our paper is intended to set forth, and by the touchstone of this belief we propose to try the current ideas and modes of action of existing Society.