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Individual or Common Property [Aug, 1890] : A Discussion, from an Individualist Correspondent

Freedom Press (London)

August, 1890

I shall endeavor in this communication to make as clear as possible the Anarchist view regarding Property.

I may start by saying that an Anarchist is a consistent, an all round, Individualist, one who believes that the faith in the divine power of governments to save humanity is nothing but the crudest superstition, which our State Socialist friends ought to be ashamed to perpetuate in people's minds. The Anarchist contends that if the people cannot emancipate themselves then their case is hopeless, and further that their present misery is due to nothing else than the foolish delegation of functions to governing bodies which State Socialists would perpetuate and extend.

An Anarchist is a democratic Individualist. He agrees with the Liberty and Property Defense League so far as they show up the follies of legislation and of State meddling with this and

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that sphere of human activity. He agrees with Herbert Spencer in his faith in the superiority of Natural over Human Law. But he differs from the thinkers of the so-called Individualist school, inasmuch as he carries their arguments to a logical conclusion.

Whereas most Individualists, so called, are in favor of the State "stereotyping" the distribution of wealth, the methods of paying debt, and the forms of "free" contract; the Anarchist would be in favor of freedom of judgment in all these matters, and would point out that it is not only democratic laws that are baneful (as the Individualist is so fond of showing) but that even property laws and monetary laws and contract laws are open to exactly the same objections.

The fact is the so-called Individualist is a humbug, and when he ceases to call himself an Individualist and frankly proclaims that he wants the State to govern everybody but himself, I shall cease also to apply that epithet to him.

Anarchists are not in favor of Property at all, in so far as it means the external protection and control of a man's possessions, and hence they take up a position of complete antagonism not only to avowed State Socialists, but also to the revolutionary Socialists who are always telling us that in the Free Society of the future they (whoever they are) are not going to allow a man to possess this, that and the other. I really believe that the present system of Property is preferable to such universal meddling with one's private affairs which Socialism would involve. Let me remind such Socialists that Proudhon (whom they occasionally quote) applied the term robbery not only to private but also to common property.

But Anarchists protest against the present system of Private Property so far as it means a legal right of robbery, as much as any Socialists do. They proclaim those economists to be liars who have the impudence to tell the people that private property means the protection of the laborer in the fruits of his labor and of his "abstinence." Any man who has spent his life anywhere but in an armchair can give the lie direct to such fools.

Usury of land, usury of houses, usury of tools, -all these forms of legal robbery called "Property"-are eternally condemning the worker to a state of slavery.

But how do we propose to abolish such usury? In answer, we point to laws which Radicals, Socialists, Communists, Individualists, alike seem to agree in ignoring, and on which only a few cranks perpetually harp. We mean laws relating to money, to property, to banking, to the methods of cooperation.

Money? What is there in it? Let us leave it to learned financiers to puzzle their heads over such a question. We workmen can't be bothered with it. Ah! my friends, hug your chains, for those chains are made of gold!

Why is the laborer a slave?

Because he cannot purchase with his own labor-force.

Here is the solution of the labor-problem-the abolition of all usury when labor knows its power. No need of Acts of Parliament, no need of strikes, no need of revolutions, no need of communism, the simple establishment of Free Money which will represent labor-force and be redeemable in the products of labor-this will destroy once and for all, all power of class and of capital, for labor is the source of all wealth.

Workmen can only be free, when each can pay in the services he can render; when the bootmaker pays in boots, the baker in bread, the carpenter in wood-work, the bricklayer in houses; and it is impossible for them to be free under any other circumstances.

All government is primarily established for robbery; would you have honesty you must abolish government.

A. Tarn