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Communism

Henry Addis

1901

There is one subject about which there is much confusion one which is much misunderstood, or which is unknown to the majority. That subject is Communism.

The most general conception of Communism is that of the small states, or societies, in which the tools, land, buildings and products of the society are the common property of the members, or of the government of the society. Usually in these societies, or states, a common kitchen is maintained; the vegetables are all raised together in a common garden by the united efforts of those assigned to that work by the management of the society; individual preference is supposed to give way to the preference of the majority, and a regulation of activities carried on by the central authority. This is the old-fashioned authoritarian Communism, which still prevails to a limited extent. This is the kind of Communism which most persons picture in their minds when the word is mentioned.

While this kind of Communism has many advantages, such as united effort and the increased productive power incident there to, the saving incident to the abolition of all the unnecessary weighing, measuring, accounting, bookkeeping, etc., yet it is objectionable on account of its authoritarianism.

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It is from this kind of effort that most persons draw their conception of Communism. Many who oppose Communism base their opposition on the assumption that these little socialistic states are the true models of Communism, hence their antipathy to such arrangements.

Fun is poked at the “community toothbrush, towel, bed,” etc, by those who answer argument by ridicule. No one believes that there would then be any greater communism in these things than now exists, if he will stop and think a minute. In every hotel and boarding house these tools of cleanliness are used by thousands of different people. In every city there are toilet supply companies who furnish a combination towel-rack, looking-glass, comb and brush-bolder, and take the dirty towels away; leaving clean ones every morning. In this way tens of thousands of hands and faces are wiped on the same towels in the run of a year. But the present promiscuity in the use of articles of various kinds is too apparent to need elaboration. Yet it is warmly championed by the ridiculers of the “community towel.”

Many imagine that all persons would live in big houses where the meals would be served in a common kitchen. This is another unfounded supposition. For that matter, see the millions who do eat in common dining-rooms, each getting his roast beef, maccaroni and cheese or ham and eggs, cooked in the same vessels, by the same cooks, cut from the same roast or ham. All these things occur, not because of the communistic genius of present institutions, but because of the opposite tendency. The desire to supply our needs or wants cheaply gives birth to such arrangements and customs. The one who can combine the efforts of a number of persons, in his given line, judiciously, can supply his wants more cheaply than can be done otherwise.

So we see the principal objections brought against Communism are invalid. The first, the charge of authoritarianism, cannot apply to true Communism, but only to miniature State So-

cialism, usually called Communism; that of promiscuity can be brought with terrible force against the present methods, or any other methods that propose cheapness as the guide to preference. Neither one can be laid at the door of Communism, as I propose to show.

In the first place, the Communism proposed as a social and economic arrangement by the Anarchists who no longer love the fierce struggle of competition, and the wasteful methods of commercialism, is a condition of affairs where all exercise of authority is absent. In such a condition association according to taste would be the rule. All the resources of the earth being then common to all—that is to say, free for all to use but not to monopolize—there would be no necessity to associate with others in productive work or in social matters when such association was not pleasant. Persons who, because of similarity of taste, desired to work in the same kind of undertakings would then associate in their occupation of production or distribution, because it would give them pleasure to do so. In social matters the likes and dislikes, attraction and repulsions which wield such an important influence in society to-day would have full play, and association of a social character would be pleasant because desired by all persons concerned. Under these conditions crime, vice and contentions of an unpleasant character would be reduced to the minimum, for all these things as they exist to-day are the direct outgrowth of the restriction of liberty, the strained and unpleasant association and relations resulting therefrom.

The common house, towel, etc., would be matters for each one to decide for him or herself. If any number of persons wished to unite their domestic affairs and live in one common house, using the same dishes, spoons, towels, etc. they could do so. Those who wished to live the most exclusive lives, having their own houses, towels, dishes, linen, etc., made expressly for him or her, and never used by or for anyone else, would be equally free to do so. Those who saw fit to go to neither

extreme, but desired to retain much of our present method in these arrangements could go on with their domestic relations as they are to-day.

Wherein, then, you may ask, is the Communism? Simply in this: Production would be carried on, as before stated, by those who voluntarily associated themselves together for that purpose, each according to his or her desire. The land and tools of production, buildings necessary for production and exchange, the means of transportation, communication and distribution, and the products of united effort would all be held in common, and the right of every one to use to the full extent of his needs and desires would be recognized. It is a well-known fact that if all able-bodied persons were occupied in production for a very few hours per day, an abundance of everything desirable could be produced. If all were assured of plenty, then no one would have an incentive to take more than they could use and enjoy.

In Communism, there being no money or other representative of value, there would be no opportunity to hoard; for the man who would carry home a hundred hats, or fifty umbrellas, or twenty suits of clothes, when the store was well supplied all the time and free for him to help himself, would be ridiculed and laughed at so much that he would surely refrain from any further exhibition of the hoarding proclivity. The sense of security which would prevail would be a sufficient safe-guard against anyone taking too much.

Cheapness would never be thought of. Utility and beauty would always be the objects sought to be attained in all lines of production. Shoddy would be unknown. No thought of adulteration of food would ever enter the head of anyone, and only the best of everything would be sought for. Buildings would be erected with the greatest care and substantial enough to last many generations. Roads would be made level, straight wide and with substantial foundations; their surface would be kept constantly in repair.

All the necessary and useful occupations of every description would be carried on by voluntary groups, each group doing that particular work for which it was formed. When any work has been accomplished, the group doing it would dissolve into its component parts, the various individuals that had composed it uniting with others in other groups for other and different purposes, as the necessities or expediencies of the times called for united action.

Thus the most infinite variety of combinations for specific purposes, either of utility or pleasure, could be formed, accomplish their purpose, and go out of existence, and all the necessities and luxuries of life could be provided without curtailing the liberty of any, and the highest individuality now conceivable be attained.