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Anarchy

Johann Most

1888

Anarchy is said to be general confusion, wild turmoil, which every civilization scorns. Since this condition renders both government and law unthinkable, anarchy means the atomization of society into isolated individuals, who with impunity attack others, until the strong subject the weak in a slavery more terrible than the world has ever seen. Abominable and absurd, the goal of the anarchist! Foul the means by which it is to be attained, namely theft, murder, arson, and all kinds of destruction! Anarchy is therefore a mixture of idiocy and crime. Against it society must defend with all power—legally so far as possible, violently when necessary. At all events, every lover of order is obliged to nip anarchy in the bud as well as eradicate anarchists root and branch from the face of the earth...

Now if people would only think... they would see: anarchy (autonomy or freedom) really means, not the criminal chaos just referred to, but the absence of the criminal chaos that archy (subjugation or government) has brought to mankind. Archy springs from the desire of the strong to oppress the weak; and up to the present day, whatever its form, oppression has been its goal. Archy, always the tool of the propertied, has forever put the screws to the unprop-

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ertied. The more barbaric the society, the harsher and more flagrant the archy. The higher the civilization, the more refined the cleverness of the archists in hiding the usurpation of power—without weakening the exercise of power...

If archy in all forms has brought mankind grief, it follows that the remedy is repudiation. The repudiation of archy is anarchy. Anarchy is therefore the goal of freedom-seeking mankind. Whoever seeks freedom, advances anarchy. If, among freedom-seekers, a multitude want no part of anarchy (having a false notion of it), that fact does not demean anarchy. The multitude simply do not know that, regardless of the route taken in the search for the rights of man, every route leads to anarchy. It cannot be otherwise; for either one accepts archy or one fights it and advances its opposite, anarchy. Something in between is unthinkable...

The truth that government (archy) is instituted to exploit the poor is a truth the opponents of anarchy blink at; and, counting on the ignorance they have created in the masses, they adduce a hundred bagatelles in archy's favor. They emphasize crime. Were government and law abolished, they say, unpunished crime would peril life and property until chaos rendered existence disagreeable at best.

These sorcerers! In broad daylight they ascribe to anarchy aberrations of their society, when the basis of anarchy is the absence of such aberrations. All crimes—except misbehavior of madmen, which, by definition, is the symptom of illness—all crimes are notoriously the offspring of the system of private property, archy's reason for being. This system mandates a struggle for existence, by all, against all. Greed and the lust for power flourish in the propertied and goad the propertied to crimes that as a rule go unpunished because archy enforces its laws against another kind of "crime": those deeds done out of necessity and in response to brutality. Turn the pages of the so-called civil law: the topic is "yours and mine"; the civil law is the natural result of a society of individuals who want to cheat as much as possible because cheating is the only way to

power and wealth. Today's society considers such behavior normal.

Freedom and equality, the conditions of anarchy, would end this ruinous struggle for existence... Law, purposeless, would no longer be needed, nor government... and they would disappear.

More important than the arguments of the archists are the arguments from a side that should have the least reason to oppose anarchy. Unconscious anarchists, particularly those called socialists, expend untold time and effort attacking anarchy, even though their goals are freedom and equality (anarchy)... These people maintain: anarchy is opposite to socialism. In truth, anarchy is socialism perfected. Because anarchists seek freedom for the individual—the greatest human happiness—other socialists say the anarchists contradict the brotherhood of man. As if the brotherhood of man did not presuppose the freedom of the individual!...

This wrongheadedness goes so far as to claim that the anarchists ignore technology and favor cottage industry... But... no anarchist wants to reverse technological advances; every anarchist wants more such advances. Accordingly, anarchists recognize, labor and production must be organized, their powers united. And since the lack of freedom today results from private property's control of the factors of production... those who want freedom (anarchy) want these things owned in common—that is they want communism...

Contrary to the old-style communists, however the anarchists declare for the organization with the greatest validity, federalism... From it, "over and under" structure—that is, authority concentrated in economic and political hierarchies, and power centralized in the state—would be excluded. Instead, voluntary association would give rise to thousands of special organizations, interconnected horizontally according to purpose or necessity...

Organization is paramount. Indeed, the enemies of the proletariat are so well organized, so unified, that the proletariat commit

crime by not gathering all forces and directing them at once at the destruction of the status quo by all possible means. For whether the propertied and ruling classes call themselves conservative or liberal, clerical or free-thinking, protectionist or free-trade, aristocrat or democrat, imperialist or republican—their differences hinder them not from seeing themselves as the propertied against the unpropertied... Nor should be overlooked the monstrous police, military, and legal apparatus that stands at the disposal of the bourgeoisie. Nor should be forgotten the machinations of the black constabulary of priests and the reactionary press; the bourgeoisie can turn them to its purpose, too...

If the rich stick together, why can't the poor stick together? Unfortunately, the cause of discord among those who should be of one heart and a single mind, and who need the profoundest of unity to achieve victory, is nothing but fear of the word anarchy. Yet all that a socialist has to get rid of, to be an anarchist, is the idea of the political state, to which socialists who are terrified hold fast, even though Marx and Engels taught that in a truly free society, the state would wither away.

What is the supreme joy of mankind? It is the greatest freedom possible, i.e., the opportunity to realize intellectual and physical potential. Of course, such freedom must not go beyond the point at which it hurts someone, for then a domination of some by others occurs. At the same time, in a civilized society, many goals are not attainable by individuals; they can be reached only by associations with a common purpose. But is that to say: a system must exist in which an individual has by dictate to exist tucked away in the bureau of a centralized state, put there by a higher power and told what to do from birth to death? ...

What is needed to produce a system in which the freedom of one and all is guaranteed is simply an agreement for a free society! No need for a Providence directing from above; it is only necessary that things are handled correctly from below...

reprisal, who orders and forbids, and rewards and punishes as he pleases, which behavior he calls legal... he makes law. Law did not create power, which law uses: power created law, and abuses it. At the side of power stands religion, which crowns power, blesses law, and curses crime. Unless basic changes are made, what if the doors of prisons be opened, the blood of officials flow, the flames crackle? The law will be carried out, crime atoned for, and divine order maintained until a new prison be built, a new scaffold raised, and a new pyre erected.”

We could fill a book with such citations, and prove that from time immemorial every great mind has proclaimed anarchy. Is anyone, therefore, narrowminded enough to be afraid of the ideal we call anarchy?”

What is the issue? Is it not whether besides society a state is needed? The answer, you see, is simpler than many think. We need only imagine what the state has been hitherto. Is it natural, an eternal verity? It is a creature of circumstance, used by a clique to dominate the masses. Let us therefore smash the state to bits... Nothing less must be the climax of the Revolution...

We do not stand alone. The really great minds have long been sure that, without freedom, no perfect society is possible, and that no government, not even a representative government, insures freedom.

John Stuart Mill [the British philosopher and economist, 1806-1873] has said that the only part of behavior for which anyone is accountable to society is that which concerns others; over himself, his own mind and spirit, the individual is supreme...

[Ludwig] Borne [the German journalist and outspoken liberal, 1786-1837] writes that as soon as a child is born, its mother, wet nurse, father, and governess surround it, and later its teachers, and then the policeman and the state. The mother brings sugar, the wet nurse a fairy tale, the governess a rod, the father a reproach, the teacher a cane, and the state chains and the axe. And if the child shows any resistance, it will be coaxed, harangued, or forced. Thus in childhood we become like... a goose fattened for its liver. Everything is sacrificed to the liver. We are locked in a stall, not able to move, so we grow fat; we are force-fed moral corn, and we wheeze and nearly choke on morality, erudition, and obedience; and then an old cook of a government paws us, praises us, slaughters us, and uses our liver... What does death find to take in us! But death is a poor dog, nothing but bones its life through-seldom does a whole person fall to him.

Asked what kind of government he preferred, [Pierre Joseph] Proudhon [the French political reformer, 1809-1865] denied monarchy, republicanism, democracy, constitutionalism, aristocracy, and a mixed form. Asked, in desperation, "What are you then?" he said: "I am an anarchist."

Victor Drury [American anarchist, Most's contemporary] rightly argues that freedom is the self-government (sovereignty) of the individual; freedom is order and security, without which no freedom. Freedom means the denial of all government, since it stands to reason that where authority exists, oppression must also exist—and with it all kinds of danger and disorder. It is not the word anarchy but the word government that means the absence of order and security. The admirer of authority would call that a paradox, but it is simply logical.

Otto Hotzen [German poet, 1830-1899] gets to the heart of things: A temple piled high with corpses Slain to build the state—Who asks if brick and mortar have feelings? The welfare of people is not a goal Of founding fathers or of slave drivers. The state, that Moloch, devours the people that "God" has made for this purpose.

Even Frederick Engels [Karl Marx's associate, 1820-1895] could not avoid breaking a lance for anarchism: "The state is not an eternal verity. There have been societies, finished in every way, but having no suspicion of state and state-power. With us, at a certain level of economic development, which was of necessity connected with the splitting of society into classes, the state became a necessity because of this splitting. We are rapidly nearing a stage of development of production at which these classes are no longer not merely unnecessary but are a hindrance to production. They will fall as inevitably as they rose. With them falls the state. The society that organizes production on the basis of free and equal associations of producers, displaces thereby the machinery of the state to where it belongs: the museum of antiquity, beside the spinning wheel and the bronze axe."...

Pythagoras [the Greek philosopher and mathematician, fl. 540-510 B.C.] said: a people that needs laws does not deserve freedom.

Thomas Paine [the British crusader for democratic rights and American patriot, 1737-1809] established the truth that a large part of what we call government is nothing more than arrogance and effrontery. The higher the civilization, the less reason for govern-

ment, because civilized people govern themselves. The Jews society should follow are the laws of nature, which require no human government. Whatever may seem the cause of insurrections, the true cause is dissatisfaction. The business of government, since the beginning, has been monopolized by the ignoramus and the rogue.

In the papers of Richard Wagner [the German composer, conductor, and author, 1813-1883] the following sentences occur: "Freedom means not to suffer authority that is against our purpose and desire... Only were we to consider ourselves ignorant and without will could we believe useful an authority that showed us the right thought and true purpose. To tolerate an authority that we realize does not know and do right is slavery."

Wagner also says: only blockheads and people without will—those in despair of character—can suffer domination (archy), while people of sound mind and of strong will resist it.

[Percy Bysshe] Shelley [the British poet, 1792-1822] says: the true man does not command or obey. Authority is a pestilence that devours everything it touches. Obedience is the death of genius, virtue, truth, freedom—obedience enslaves people—obedience is the true enemy of noble deeds and makes automatons of body and soul.

Karl Hemzen [the German publicist, 1809-1880] maintains: "Yes, man alone commits the crime called law, which in its perfection appears as penal law. What is this law? Simply a stipulation of conditions under which a person is to be imprisoned, exiled, or executed. Were an assembly of the best people to consider these punishments as ways of securing society against its worst enemies, these punishments would be exposed as tyrannical arbitrariness or bloodthirsty barbarity; but they are necessary and legal, under any conditions, when done in the name of the "law," which the worst people have made. Within the law, no crime; outside the law, no virtue. Be a monster and you can become a saint, if the law does not affect you. The law alone labels behavior. Again, who makes law? He who has the power to imprison and murder without danger of