Anarchism as Politico-Economic Criticism

Mark A. Sullivan

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Any philosophical view of society is based upon fundamental ideas about human nature and the human condition. Briefly sketched below are some basic observations underlying AN ANARCHIST CRITIQUE OF STATE-CAPITALISM.

The human being is a living organism, and must meet certain biological needs in order to survive. However, the human being (or individual, person, woman or man) cannot produce food directly as a plant, or seize it directly as do most animals, lacking the natural equipment for either process.

To obtain food, shelter, and a comfortable existence, an individual employs tools, the result of a prior process of tool making, the result of a prior process of perceiving and then conceptualizing the environment (by the same or other individual/s/). This total process from the perception of the environment to the application of appropriate tools to extract values from nature can be called the productive process. The human being is thus a productive animal who acts on the environment to transform it into material that will support his or her life.

Further, the only way an individual can survive, ultimately, is by employing the productive process (consider what would happen if alone on a deserted island, a person could not or would not do this). Whether we consider a single individual or the entire species— human welfare depends upon the development and use of human productive abilities.

Since the process of applying one's thought and labor is the only way a person can survive, then it is the appropriate, natural, or right way for a person to live. It follows that, accepting the impulse to survive as equally natural, every individual has a natural right derived from an inherent need to engage in productive action, and therefore to own and use the full fruits of such action. If a person cannot survive alone without producing, then it is self-undermining for a person to seek survival in society without producing. A man in society who consumes values without contributing any can only be considered an invader against other's rights to, and need to, own and consume the value of their labor (a voluntarily supported person obviously contributes some value to his or her supporter).

Contradictions are not always self-evident; thus there appears to be not one but two ways for an individual to survive (acquire values necessary— and not so necessary— to life) in the company of other individuals: the productive means of transforming the environment into useful values, and freely sharing or exchanging with other producers; and the reductive means of taking

values from their creators by employing violence, deception, or the pressure of circumstances, and giving nothing of value in return, while perhaps pretending to do just that.

In the long run the reductive means is self-defeating because the reducers could run out of victims, exhaust the producers, and be left helpless— not having developed any productive abilities in dealing with the environment. To the degree that the reductive means are employed in a society, it is caught up in internal conflicts between producers and reducers, and among the reducers, over the fruits of production. Productive energy is drained from all combatants, impoverishing everyone, but some sooner or more than others – the strongest being but the last to die.

Here is the paradox, here is the contradiction, here is the natural law of consequences made manifest. The exploiting non-producers, in seeking to escape the need to exert energy in producing, must eventually exert great amounts of energy in fighting off others who, perhaps seeing the immediate present gains of reductive processes, also take to robbing the producers and, as a result, competing for the dwindling output of a now more heavily exploited class of producers (many of whom will in turn be forced to employ reductive means just to survive or defend themselves). The end result is the collapse of the economy under the impossible burden of reductive demands— or an uprising of the exploited against their exploiters.

There is no escaping the demands of our own nature and the consequences of ignoring these demands. While it appears that there are two ways to preserve life in society, there is found to be only one— the way of production and equal exchange. The way of reduction, outright robbery or unequal exchange, destroys itself; it is by nature a contradiction and an impossibility.

In his analysis of THE STATE, sociologist Franz Oppenheimer labelled what is here called reduction the political means, because it is the method of survival adopted by the political institution, ie. the State. The methods of free production and exchange among social equals he labelled the economic means.

> I propose in the following discussion to call one's own labor and the equivalent exchange of one's own labor for the labor of others the "economic means" for the satisfaction of needs, while the unrequited appropriation of the labor of others will be called the "political means". (The State, Free Life Editions, pg.12)
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> The state is an organization of the political means. No state, therefore, can come into being until the economic means has created a definite number of objects for the satisfaction of needs, which objects may be taken away or appropriated by warlike robbery. (The State, pg.13)

Whenever a society was able to produce a surplus above the basic necessities of subsistence (due to the development of tools and the division of labor, ie. the productive or economic mean), it was likely for a state or government to be created by some members of the society in order to make decisions as to how the surplus would be distributed or used. As a society evolved its economic means, it appears that at first the surplus was shared equally by all members of the tribe. The chief, or ablest hunter, did not claim an extra portion of the yields from the hunt.

As the surplus increased, it allowed a few to leave the sphere of food production in order to communicate with the spirits of nature, to discover "the will of the gods". In such a manner were the religions born, and united to the function of ruling society, enabling its priests to claim the

divine right to consume the surplus product of the laborers (the "higher powers" have always demanded sacrifices from the people); the first states were theocracies.

Another major activity of government (besides intimidating its subjects) has been to initiate aggression against other societies in order to seize their surplusses and enslave their peoples, to appropriate more wealth or to supply the implements and manpower for further aggressions.

In order to motivate its subjects to support its rapacious ventures, in which the subjects would have nothing to gain, a state has to justify its aggression as a defense against an external and dehumanized "enemy"— in reality often another state preparing for its own aggression. Religion has also served well to legitimize sacrificing the stranger to the divine, as it has the sacrifice of the self.

Philosophical anarchist Benjamin R. Tucker summarized the State as follows:

> Seeking, then, the elements common to all the institutions to which the name State has been applied, they have found them two in number: first, aggression; second, the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it, exercised generally for the double purpose of more complete oppression of its subjects and extension of its boundaries. (Instead of a Book, pg.22)

Today, we do not have theocracies, we have democracies and people's republics in which the will of the people— well, some of the people, anyway— is made sacred so that "the People" becomes the new god to which the sacrifices are offered, and to which every individual must totally submit.

In the capitalist democracies the money-value of surplus labor is taxed in order to build and protect the now multinational military-industrial establishment. This establishment is nothing more nor less than government-created monopolies of private or "public" ownership of the resources essential to the production of economic values: natural, financial, and technical resources which are withheld from the workers until they agree to surrender their future surplusses to the monopolists, to the capitalists, in the forms of rent on land, interest on credit, and wages below the exchange-value of their services and products (because they cannot afford to obtain land or credits and do without the capitalists). In the capitalist democracies pressure-group warfare sets people against each other in a scramble to gain, or recover, monies taken in direct taxation of the producers/workers and the reducers/capitalists who invariably are the victors of the political pull, ie. money invested in politicians, ultimately decides the conflict).

In public schools children are taught that the government is their protector, the flag is sacred, society's rules are not to be questioned, and "God is on our side". such persona usually grow up as good victims— to be taxed, put into dept, drafted, produce more obedient young slaves for the system, and finally die of overwork, poisoned air, water, and food, or a broken will to enjoy life.

If our capitalist democracy was truly based on the free consent of sovereign individuals (and not intimidated spirits) we would be free to not pay taxes on our labor; not to fight a conflict against those whom we have no grievance with; not to fight a conflict against those whom we have no grievance with; not to patronize government schools and social services; not to pay hard-earned money for the "privilege" of having the space to live and work in (rent); not to pay for the innate ability to monetize our labor-power (interest) and not to work on someone elses terms (wages) when we could freely settle on unoccupied land, obtain credit, purchase tools not monopolized by government patents, and sell in a market where the inability to monopolize

would keep prices determined by the low costs of production and not the manipulation of needs and scarcities. The powers-that-be will not voluntarily demystify & disarm themselves — hence the need for anarchist criticism with which to inform anarchist activism. This critique is only a small step in that direction.

Further installments of ANARCHISM AS POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CRITICISM will follow in future issues of THE STORM! The theme is carried over, in this issue into the two short pieces which follow. ECONOMICS OF LIBERTY by Laurance Labadie (DISCUSSION, vol 1, #3, 1937) is now a classic outline of the forms of capitalist exploitation and an individualist alternative. Labadie criticizes those privileges which the present day "anarcho-capitalist" defends. Unlike the latter, the anarchist individualist does not propose to substitute private agencies to protect the capitalist privileges now supported by government agencies. AGAINST FINANCE CAPITALISM is a footnote (yes, footnote!) from Lysander Spooner's POVERTY: ITS ILLEGAL CAUSES AND LEGAL CURE (1846).[1] Spooner means "legal" in conformity with the natural law that to the laborer belongs the complete product of labor. To achieve this end Spooner advocated free banking in order to allow as many laborers as possible the opportunity for the rich. Spooner realized early on that monopoly ownership of the means of production enable the employer to exploit the worker by not paying back in wages the full value of the product, thus getting something for nothing. Spooner's emphasis upon the finance monopoly is seen, today, to be justified.

[1] "One of the greatest—probably the greatest—of all the evils resulting from the existing system of privileged corporations for banking purposes, is that these incorporations amass, or bring together, and place under the control of a single directory, the loanable capital that was previously scattered over the country, in small amounts, in the hands of a large number of separate owners. If this capital had been suffered to remain thus scattered, it would have been loaned by the separate owners, in small sums, to a large number of persons; each of whom would thus have been supplied with capital sufficient to employ his own hands upon, with the means of controlling his own labor, and thereby of securing to himself all the fruits of his labor, except what he should pay as interest. But when all this scattered capital is collected into one heap, and placed under the control of a single directory, it is usually loaned in large sums, to a few individuals—generally to the directors themselves and a few other favorites. It probably is not loaned to one tenth, one twentieth, or one fiftieth as many different Persons, as it would have been if it had been suffered to remain in its original state, and had been loaned by its separate owners. Individuals, instead of borrowing one, two, three, or five hundred dollars to employ their own bands upon, as would be the case but for these incorporations of capital, now borrow fives, tens, and hundreds of thousands of dollars, upon which to employ the labor of others. This process of concentration, monopoly, and incorporation, by means of which one man, a director, or a favorite of a bank, is enabled to borrow capital enough to employ the labor of ten, twenty, or an hundred men, of course deprives ten, twenty, or an hundred other men of the ability to borrow even capital enough to employ their own hands upon. Of consequence it compels them to sell their labor to him who has monopolized the capital. And they must sell their labor to him at a price that will give him a profit—generally a large profit. That is, they must sell it for much less than the amount of wealth it produces. In this way ten, twenty, or an hundred men are literally robbed of an important portion of the fruits of their labor, solely that a single monopolist may be gorged with wealth. It is thus that the legislation, which creates these large incorporations of privileged bankers, operates to plunder the many of the fruits of their labor, and pamper the few with the spoils." —Lysander Spooner, *Poverty: Its Illegal Causes and Legal Cure* (1846), p. 15–16

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