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Neither Capitalist nor Communist Anarchism

Mark A. Sullivan

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While the anarcho-communists and anarcho-capitalists try to convert each other and the unsuspecting human race to their respective eternal truths, there are a few anarchists who sit back and watch the display with an amusement tempered with slight disappointment. With amusement because these anarchists, who call themselves individualists to distinguish themselves from their comrades on the right and the left, see in the battle over the Idea a re-enactment of the authoritarian propagandisms of our witless society. With disappointment because the disputants who profess to be anarchists do not seem to understand the nature of anarchist philosophy — or an anarchist society, should such, in spite of their mutual and endless repudiations, ever come into existence.

An anarchist society is one where no person or group of persons is given authority (by obedient subjects) to enforce their will upon another person(s). An anarchist society is, therefore, one where there is a person or group of persons (usually called government or the State) whose will IS given the authority to be enforced upon any and all others. Naked force is not enough to constitute a state —

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the belief, support, and acquiescence of the populace is what gives to the forces of government their esteemed and protected position. As the anarchist individualist Enzo Martucci has pointed out:

Authority is a power that oppresses in the name of the Sacred (God, Morality, Society, etc.) which it pretends to represent. It is a power which all must adore and serve even if they possess the energy and capacity to overthrow it.¹

The anarchist situation depends upon the blind obedience of the many in order to enforce one general will (so-called) upon the few. A plurality of interests, which is as natural as individual differentiation among us humans, cannot be tolerated by a statist social structure. On the other hand, it is only anarchy that allows for a diversity of interests and does not escalate diversity into violent conflict by attempting to motivate everyone to sacrifice their individual interests to the general interests of the whole (ie. those interests which no individuals in particular hold, but which society holds in spite of the actual interests of its constituents). Unlike anarchy, statist society pushes one ideological outlook (with minor variations when the appearance of freedom of thought is helpful) in order to secure obedience to intellectual leaders in service to the (often hidden) power structure.

While it is expected that those who desire to rule others will invoke moral reprimands in an attempt to convert (or purge) the ideological deviationist or critical iconoclast, it is interesting to see that self-professed anarchists have also been acting out the same farce. It was such ideological bickering that split the anarchist movement here in New York at the Hunter Anarchist Festival of the Spring of '74. The anarcho-communists would have nothing to do with anarcho-capitalists, ignoring the cry of an attending Wobbly that

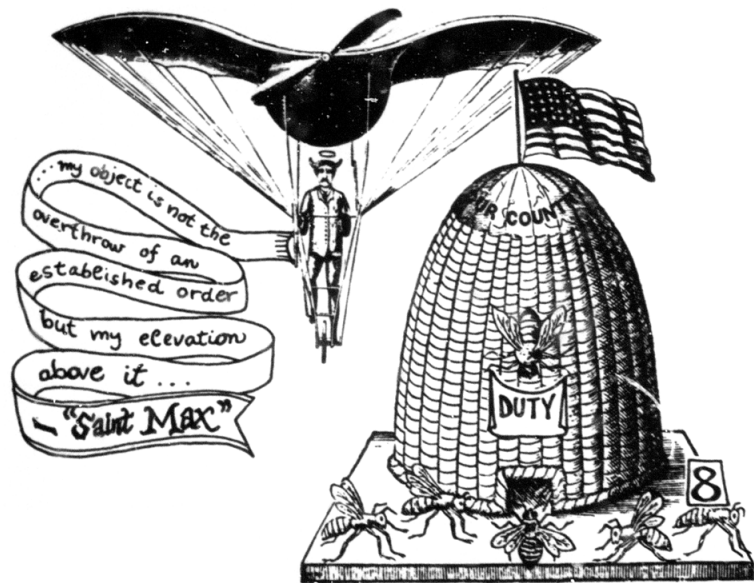
¹ Minus One #27, pg.11, "A Note On Authority"

“excommunication before the revolution means execution after the revolution”.

Despite claims on both sides that pure anarchy is the realization of a certain set of economic conditions, neither the anarcho-communists nor the anarcho-capitalists have the final solutions to the problems caused by the state. There are as many forms of anarchy as there are forms of authority to overcome. There are as many modes of anarchy as there are individuals who choose to live without authority: without the authority of national leaders, supernatural beings, parents, peers, gurus, chemistry, money, and of course, psychologists, sociologists, economists, and ideologists (including professional radicals and would-be anarchist leaders). The anarchist individualist places nothing and no one above the judgment of his or her experience and reason. The anarchist individualist may agree with certain economists, seek new insights in various philosophies, pursue wealth or bizarre experiences; any authority in and of themselves, and AS AN INDIVIDUALIST asserts the authority of the self over all those areas of life that directly affect the life of the individual. While most of those who rebel against the social system invoke some “higher authority” to justify their cause (the People, the dialectic, the Constitution, the scriptures, the Revolution, etc.), the anarchist individualist invokes only the desire and ability to be one’s own sovereign, as in the words of Max Stirner:

The divine is God’s concern; the human, man’s. My concern is neither the divine nor the human, not the true, good, just, free, etc., but solely what is *mine*, and it is not a general one, but is — unique, as I am unique.²

² The Ego and His Own, Libertarian Book Club Edition, page five.



upon anarchists as well as archists. Struggling with this perhaps unavoidable human condition, the anarchist movement is spinning in endless circles over concepts of society, property, capitalism, and communism — this essay is but another symptom of this condition. Drawing a line between the ideal and the real, there are a few anarchists who have taken (and no doubt will continue to take) playful delight in these battles over the Idea. Iconoclasts all, these anarchists choose to label their personal rejection of all authority and the state as INDIVIDUALIST.

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An anarchist society is one where the individual does not surrender personal authority to leaders, causes, or ideologies of any kind. Nothing outside the self is ultimately sacred or absolute in such a society — neither the all-embracing collective of the anarcho-communist, nor the all-producing corporation of the anarcho-capitalist. The absence of the legal mystification of the group, all persons would be left alone to pursue their own concerns alone or in free associations, and to produce, own, and dispose of the products of their labor on their own terms. The absentee ownership of natural and technological resources would collapse without the protection of the State, allowing for control and ownership to be exercised by the actual occupiers and users, ie. the productive workers. The absence of legal tender would allow for new forms of money and credit to be developed free from monopoly rates of interest. This would allow workers to easily obtain the capital to become their own employers — abandoning the capitalists, who in order to survive, would have to become their own workers! Finally, in the absence of restrictions on trade, ie. taxes, tariffs, patents, and copyrights, new knowledge would spread freely to all, improving living conditions while reducing the possibilities of the rise of the technocratic ruling class.

An anarchist society could be neither communist nor capitalist as there would be no legal mechanism to enforce the respective claims to property that these systems imply. In anarchy, de jure property would surrender to de facto property; that is, *legal title* would give way before tangible *possession*, occupancy, and use. Legal titles to property ensure that those who control valuable productive resources will be able to exact an exorbitant fee for the *loan* of, while still retaining ownership rights over, these resources. Hence the anarchist Proudhon declared property to be robbery committed by the non-using owners against the non-owning users of the means of production; and the exploitative income derived he called usury. The egoist Stirner responded by saying that if property is robbery, then it is about time for the robbed to engage in

their own robbery. He called upon the dispossessed producers, the proletariat, to repossess the means of production and extract the full value of labors for themselves. Neither Proudhon nor Stirner wanted to see the capitalist replaced by society as sole owner of the means of production — rather, they both railed against communism as a new (and very old) form of slavery of the individual.

If men reach the point of losing respect for property, every one will have property, as all slaves become free men as soon as they no longer respect the master as master. *Unions* will then, in this matter too, multiply the individual's means and secure his assailed property.

According to the Communists' opinion the commune should be proprietor. On the contrary, *I* am proprietor, and I only come to an understanding with others about my property. If the commune does not do what suits me, I rise against it and defend my property. I am proprietor, but property is *not sacred*.

Property, therefore, should not and cannot be abolished; it must rather be torn from ghostly hands and become *my* property; then the erroneous consciousness, that I cannot entitle myself to as much as I require, will vanish.

The Ego and His Own, pg.258–9

While anarchy would have no legal mechanism to protect peaceful people against “greedy” ones; more importantly there would be no legal mechanism to *facilitate* the invasions of those who would require more than they had contributed to society. There is no need to solve the problem of capitalistic monopoly by setting up a communistic one, which would eventually be taken over by the greedy ones it was designed to check. As social

ownership of the means of production is based upon the fiction of collective identity, it would require a professional class of administrators in order to operate with any efficiency — decisions must be made by thinking individuals, and cannot be made by abstractions such as “Society” and “the People.” So in the name of an abstraction, the communist anarchist would perfect the dispossession of the workers begun by capitalism. As they are against intellectual slavery to abstractions, the anarchist individualists are against economic slavery to monopolisms — advocating, instead, a pluralism of individual and freely associated worker-owners exchanging their products and services in an unrestricted market; which assumes free access to the means of production, negating the role of the capitalists as custodians (for their own good, of course) of both natural and financial resources.

In the final analysis, both anarcho-capitalism and anarcho-communism compromise their anarchism to their ideal conceptions regarding property. Both systems require everyone to respect *legal norms* defining property titles; thus, both require the surrender of the sovereignty of the individual to the sovereignty of an external agent of society. Whether this agent is called the corporation, the commune, the union, or the capitalist, in reality it is but another incarnation of sacred authority, of government, which Tucker defined as “the subjection of the non-invasive individual to an external will.”

Returning finally to Martucci, it is easy to see “To destroy authority, one must overthrow the Sacred.” But how can one overthrow authority by means of either Property or Community when these are considered above question, not to be tampered with, ie. sacred?! When such conceptual ABSOLUTES are invoked the purpose is usually to secure (otherwise it merely reflects) conformity to party lines and official ideology. Anarchism, one would think, is the denial of all social-isms which inevitably crystallize into legalisms and stifle freedom of action as well as freedom of thought. However, the deadening slavery to abstract absolutes has its grip