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Individualism and Property

Mildred J. Loomis

January 16, 1965

Dear Editors,

I welcome the attempt to distinguish between individualist and communist anarchism, but so far the discussions in your paper, have been too general. They spend too much time on generalities—on whether an individualist anarchist lacks altruism and whether the communist anarchist needs more self-expression, etc., etc.

I'm wondering whether others would agree that a major need is to discover the differences these two schools of anarchism have—both in philosophy and practice—toward land, money and goods. How do individualist anarchists propose to handle these *basic economic realities*; what plan do communist anarchists have? And is either group anywhere in the world actually implementing some anarchist policy regarding land, money and goods?

My friend Laurance Labadie, strong American individualist anarchist, points out the confusion in thought and practice from loosely lumping land, goods and money under the term “property”. Most of us think of property as a *thing*, and we commonly say, “This house, this land, this car, is my property”. But property correctly expresses a relationship between persons or

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between persons and objects. Property expresses a *social policy*, the essential fact of which is exclusion. It is more clear to say, “I have property *in* this land, *in* this car or this house”. By which I mean I am protected in excluding others from this land, car or house.

Is it true that individualist anarchists stress this right of exclusion—that they do want to emphasize this right to their land, their houses and their cars? And that communist anarchists prefer to combine with others in the use of land, of goods and of an exchange media? (It goes without saying of course, that both groups would want an equal access to these things. They would not want a monopolistic or privileged access to land, goods, or as exists in the capitalist world). But granted equal access, and freedom—is it a fact that communist anarchists prefer to hold property jointly and in combination? Is it true, as some individualist anarchists say, our sense of privacy, our individuality, our creativity and responsibility for our actions is better obtained if we have individual use of land, property and money?

In either case, we all face the crucial questions: What gives us the right to exclude others from our house, land, car? How is land different from houses and cars?

Most people will agree that if an individual puts energy into *producing* a house or car, or in producing the medium (money) through which he gives value for it—that he thus earns the right to exclude others from them.

But how can you earn, in this fashion, the right to exclude others from land? Since land is a given, nothing you can do will *produce* it. Is it not in our laws that implement exclusion from land—more than we are actually *using*—that we find the need for force? Is it not in granting privilege to persons to “enclose” more land than he actually needs that coercion is needed to exclude others who also “need” this basic source of life and sustenance?

American individualist anarchists have (and are) stressing a difference in the type of exclusion to produced goods from exclusion to land. In houses, cars and goods produced by human labour, this property or exclusion could be permanently at the discretion of the producer, or whoever had given acceptable value in exchange for it. In the case of non-man-made land, this exclusion would be contingent on the person’s occupancy and acceptable use of that land.

These concepts are examined and elaborated in two studies from The School of Living, Brookville, Ohio: a new 200-page book, *Go Ahead and Live!* (\$4) has chapters on it by Werkheiser and Labadie; and *Property and Trustery* by Ralph Borsodi is \$1.00.

Sincerely,

(MRS.) MILDRED J. LOOMIS.
Editor, *A Way Out*, Brookville, O.