

Theory and Practice

Oliver A. Verity

June 21, 1896

In digesting the different writings and criticisms in *The Firebrand*, I often think the efforts of the writers are mainly bent upon a discussion of the principles of Anarchy and its workings as they hope to see in the future. Now, while I would not wish to retard in the least educating humanity in the principles of a better system than any government can give us, it does seem to me, as to Comrade Bodendieck, that a few communes will give us practical hints and experiences that will tend to educate the average man and woman much faster than theory alone.

Two years ago I was a State Socialist, and their theories, to my mind, were right. I was one who helped to form a co-operative company in this (Washington) State on the principles advocated by [Edward] Bellamy. I believe colonies founded upon State Socialism carry with them the seeds of dissolution in the pow-wows of the various stockholders, directors and committees, with the usual by-laws that are always trying to regulate the actions of the other fellow, i.e., the minority; to say nothing of the petty squabbles that attend the election of the different superintendents, managers and officials commonly required to measure off the red tape commonly worn by a full fledged government, even though it be in miniature only.

It may be that Socialism will be the next step taken by the people. If so, Anarchists will be hastening their good time by aiding them; for I believe they will find Anarchy sooner through the domineering of State Socialism than through the present dictatorship of King Grover the First. Many of the principles that I now deem right found lodgment with me through the daily life in the colony of which I was a member, and through the aid of both theory and practice, with others, I am applying the today in a commune at this place.

Comrade Addis has thoroughly outlined, in a recent number of *The Firebrand*, the principles that we have here put in practice, i.e., perfect freedom for individuals to work and adopt any system they may choose, either collectively or singly. We have passed through State Socialism and reached the plane of entire absence of authority in any sense of the word. We simply unite our labors as our better judgment tells us from day to day is best. No rule is adopted but what can be changed without begging some one high in authority for the privilege of doing so. However, should men and women come among us wishing to adopt the ideas of Socialism, they would be welcomed here and have all the liberty of perfecting their system to its highest state. All we would ask is to be left free to adopt any course we might deem best.

To free the natural opportunities and secure the freedom of the individual, with the conditions that surround us today, can hardly be accomplished by theory alone. The average man must

have practical tests of a theory, and here Comrade Morris has the weak side when he says in his comment on Comrade Andrews' article: "They may, and many do, admit all your claims, but to them you are a dreamer, and they don't invest in dreams." When one puts his theories into practice and proves to humanity that they will accomplish all he claims for them, then the dream becomes reality. Men of means will then be found who will assist in perfecting the movement. Therefore let us unite theory and practice, and while we cannot expect to enjoy in a small commune what universal Anarchy would give, step by step we could feel our way and the result would be far more beneficial than to plunge headlong into a theory that the masses so little understand, and that through their ignorance would tend to establish some form of government instead.

The land with us is held in common, yet the individual can select and occupy his separately, or a group may hold collectively. All work co-operatively, though not compelled to do so. To any one interested in obtaining a home where better conditions prevail, I would say we are making a success of it here and invite all to join us.

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