

Anarchist Communism

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I.

The fast approaching downfall of capitalism, as shown by the worldwide economic debacle, is driving men to think about a new social order. It is generally admitted, even by conservatives, that capitalism is on its last legs. The greatest confusion prevails as to what should be done. Many so-called remedies are suggested, ranging from earnest prayer as recommended by the Pope, to fifty-seven varieties of dictatorship – as urged by Fascists, Communists, and Socialists.

The proposed remedies while differing in many respects, possess one quality which is common to all. They are based upon an abiding faith that *government* can remedy all evils. They would extend the functions of the State. The State would control and operate all the industries, would regulate the distribution of commodities, determine the conditions of labor, monopolize the sources of information and enlightenment – schools, newspapers, radio, etc. It would thrust itself into the life of every individual. No one would dare question its authority.

The delegation of power into the hands of an all omnipotent State cannot solve the problems which are facing the working class – the problems of exploitation, of monopoly, of inequality, of suppression of the individual. The State bureaucracy constitutes a class in itself. This privileged class, not being engaged in productive labor, must be supported by the workers. The tremendous waste, inefficiency, and corruption of present day government is well known. How much greater would this burden become, how much more entrenched would this bureaucracy become, should the powers of the State be multiplied a thousand fold?

The growth of a bureaucratic class endowed with special privileges must give rise to inequality. The interests of those who rule, and the interests of those who are ruled cannot be reconciled. The people finding themselves reduced to mere tools in the hands of the all-enveloping State machine would be compelled to check the ever-growing power of the bureaucracy. The Contradictions inherent in state socialism, far from being solved through the metaphysical “Withering away of the state” must result in a war between the privileged bureaucracy and the oppressed masses. It would lead to a social-revolution. The State cannot conduct the economic life of Society in the interests of all. The State cannot lose its class character. The abolition of capitalism is not sufficient as long as the State and its bureaucracy are maintained. The new social order must be based on entirely different principles. The need for a social philosophy which will avoid the pitfalls of state centralization is becoming more and more pressing in the face of the ever-growing tendencies toward dictatorship of one type or another. Anarchism is the only Social theory capable of filling this need. Anarchism aims to establish a society in which the economic activities will be conducted by voluntary groups and federations. It aims to institute mutual agreement in place of coercion as the guiding principle of human life. The development of the individual should be the sole aim of social life. A social system which does not provide for the development of the individual is a failure. A social system based upon exploitation and oppression cannot allow for the fullest development of the individual. We therefore believe in the abolition not only of Capitalism but also of the State.

Society is an organic whole intricately connected and bound by a thousand ties. Should one organ fail to function it will immediately affect the others. The tremendous complexity and interdependence of social life is leading to communism. Communism is a system whereby industry is operated for the benefit of the whole of society. Society must be conducted upon the basis of “*From each according to his ability and to each according to his needs.*” No man has the right to monopolize that which generations of men have labored to produce. The combined efforts of all

are necessary in order to produce the means of life, consequently all are entitled to share alike that which all have labored to produce. There is no room in such a society for privilege, inequality or dictatorship. Anarchist-communism combines freedom and equality. One is indispensable to the other.

The economic life of society should be conducted by those who are actually engaged in industry, through co-operatives, industrial unions, federations and voluntary societies of all kinds and for all purposes. The needs of mankind are so infinitely varied, the specific problems affecting a given industry or locality are so different that no single body, be it a bureaucratic state or a centralized administrative agency, can ascertain and efficiently attend to the needs of society, even if government would be impartial and wholly disinterested which it is not and cannot be. An all-seeing omnipotent governmental bureaucracy in Washington, cannot work the mines in Pennsylvania, or drill oil wells in Oklahoma, or can fruit in California. Only the people who do the work, who are intimately acquainted with the needs of a given industry or community can successfully solve the problems that constantly present themselves. The economic structure must be based upon the fullest possible amount of local autonomy and independent action. The economic basis of society must correspond to life itself, must reflect its many sidedness and its varied interests. This can be done only when every group and every individual is free to conduct his affairs in accordance with his needs. The decentralization of functions in the hands of those directly concerned will ensure freedom for the producers, and will prevent the monopoly, oppression, and inefficiency which are the distinguishing characteristics of centralized institutions.

An examination of present-day society will show the extent to which voluntary association and mutual co-operation are responsible for all that is constructive in modern life. The voluntary scientific societies of all types, without which the wonders of modern life would be impossible, the voluntary educational societies, producers' and consumers' co-operatives, labor unions, mutual benefit associations, and societies of all types embracing every field of human endeavor are indispensable to social life. Social life is impossible without mutual agreement. The need for mutual co-operation is so great that even centuries of governmental oppression and red-tape have been unable to crush them. Recent history fully bears out the contention that government is absolutely helpless in any emergency, that only the creative impetus of the masses is capable of responding to such situations. The abolition of the State and Capitalism will release the masses from the dead weight of exploitation and oppression. Voluntary associations, increased in scope and united by the impetus of mutual necessity, would be free to develop. The constructive genius of mankind would regenerate the social-organism.

The question of the economic structure of the future society will be further developed in the next article, which will also deal with the tactics to be pursued in realizing our Ideal.

II.

In the previous article, I stated that the tremendous complexity and interdependence of social life is leading to Communism.

The production of steel, for example, is dependent upon the production of iron ore, coal, machinery, railroad transportation, etc., whereas iron ore, coal, machinery or railroad transportation is impossible without the production of steel. The curtailment or suspension of operation of any industry immediately affects the others. The harmonious relationships of one industry

to another are indispensable to social life. Production of any article is no longer the individual task of a single artisan, but is the task of the whole of society. The evolution of industry shows a distinct tendency toward the co-ordination and integration of human effort. This change is well illustrated in the development of agriculture.

Agriculture has long since ceased to depend upon archaic methods of cultivation. The introduction of labor-saving machinery, the great contributions of chemistry in increasing the fertility of the soil, the facilities for storing and transporting perishable foods has made possible the cultivation of tremendous areas at a minimum of human labor. Gigantic farms covering thousands of acres are too well known to require further description. The rationalization of agriculture is spelling the doom of individualized farming and is placing the industry on a par with any other in technique and efficiency.

The growth of tenant farming, the inability of the individual farmer to pay heavy taxes and mortgages imposed by the capitalist and the state is placing the land in the hands of the bankers, leaving the dispossessed farmer in the same position as any other unemployed worker. The banking interests are establishing huge farms operating upon the principle of mass production. If a conflict of interests between the petty landed proprietor and the industrial worker exists, the antagonism is being liquidated by the rationalization of agriculture and the expropriation of the land into the hands of the self same class that controls the other basic industries.

The present development of society is due to the inter-dependence of industry.

The natural relations between producers and consumers are distorted by production for profit instead of for use. The contradiction between private ownership and monopoly, and the social nature of production is one of the principle factors in the break down of capitalism. Society must own and control industry. Society is being impelled to adopt communism as the economic form of the new society.

Production under Anarchist-Communism will be conducted by the workers themselves through their own organizations. The workers would be organized into industrial unions. The basic unit of production would be the factory council which would choose a factory committee composed of the representatives of the various departments to undertake the task of administration and co-ordination. Frequent meetings between the workers and the factory committee would give the benefit of the experience of all the workers for the better execution of the work at hand. The rotation of workers on the factory committee would develop their capacities to understand the problems of production and would preclude the possibility of any group monopolizing their functions.

The fullest amount of local autonomy would characterize each unit. The abolition of a centralized, coercive institution, and its inevitable abuse of power, the abolition of the wage system, the abolition of inequality and privilege destroys the leading motives for oppression. The factory committees would act only in an advisory capacity. No agency could be better acquainted with the needs and methods of production than those who are actually doing the work. Having no fear of being fired by the "boss," be that boss the state or a private individual, and having everything to gain by efficient administration, the workers would be compelled by their common interests, if by no other, to cooperate with one another.

The factory councils of a given industry would elect representatives to the regional federation of workers' councils in their industry. These regional councils would co-ordinate the work for that area. They would in turn choose delegates to the national and international union of their industry. The functions of these bodies would be to suggest ways and means of improving the

quality or quantity of work, to establish technical schools, to gather and publish statistical material, to conduct laboratories, etc. The congress of regional or national industrial unions would, like the factory committees, act only in an advisory capacity. It would not possess the power to compel any group to abide by their suggestions any more than scientific associations can compel any of its members to accept its findings. They merely submit them for discussion. The acceptance of their conclusions depends solely upon their validity.

The present administration of industry contains many examples of the principle of the suggestive body. The association of American Engineers, the American Association of Railway Managers, Trade Associations embracing practically every phase of industry voluntarily congregate and discuss the problems affecting the administration and development of their various industries. They publish trade journals, conduct research bureaus, etc. Their findings are not binding or compulsory. They act as a clearing house of information for mutual benefit.

The actual problems of administration of industry must be differentiated from the question of exploitation of industry. Administration requires the voluntary association of trade bodies and groups for the purpose of exchanging suggestions, and applying scientific methods to the production of commodities. The exploitative function in industry demands a rigid centralization based upon coercion. In order to exploit, it is necessary to keep the workers in ignorance, and to maintain an army of overseers whose function consists in seeing to it that the last ounce of energy is squeezed out of the workers. Workers' control and initiative cannot go hand in hand with exploitation.

The removal of exploitative functions of industry automatically increases the scope and creative impetus of the trade bodies. The energy and resourcefulness of mankind is directed toward constructive channels. It is not dissipated and warped in applying these abilities for the purpose of devising better ways of exploiting mankind. In advocating these principles, we extend the constructive tendencies in modern industry and at the same time eliminate the destructive features which are characteristic of capitalistic production.

The problem of distribution in an Anarchist-Communist Society would be successfully solved by an extensive system of consumers' societies, a network of co-operatives of all types which would reflect the myriad needs of mankind. Consumers' co-operatives would undertake the work of distribution. Agricultural co-operatives would undertake the task of supplying farm and dairy produce. The numerous class of artisans and handicraft workers which cannot fit into the general plan of a socialized industry could freely combine into artels. Housing societies, medical and health associations, etc. — each of the various co-operatives would be federated into national and international bodies similar in structure to that of the industrial unions. Local, national, and international confederations of co-operative societies would harmonize the work of the various co-operatives. Being in direct touch with the needs of the people, they would be able to accurately gauge the quantity of commodities to be consumed and would thereby supply the necessary statistics for a planned economy.

The fact that over fifty million people are now in the co-operative movement and that the movement attained such proportions in spite of the determined opposition of the state and the capitalists only serves to illustrate the vitality of the principle of voluntary association. Society is in reality nothing more than the grouping of individuals for the satisfaction of human needs. The state and the exploiter are a parasitic growth upon the social body. They are no more beneficial than a cancer.

The various organs of production and distribution meet in the free commune. The commune is the unit which reflects the interest of all. Through the commune the connection between the various associations is achieved. The commune, through its bodies, plans production to satisfy its needs. It utilizes all the resources at its command. It endeavors to eliminate waste. It is the exchange bureau wherein the particular service of each is made available to all. In the commune, the "factory hand," whose only function in capitalistic society is to turn bolt No.29 would become a MAN. For the city and the country would combine to give each person the opportunity to achieve that balance and variety of pursuits which makes for a healthy mind. Agriculture and manufacturing would go hand in hand. The factory would move to the people instead of the people moving to the factory. The development of electricity instead of steam, in addition to the development of high tension lines through which power can be transmitted to any section of the country, makes it possible to bring the factory to any community. Machinery can now be made available for decentralized production.

There is a tendency even in modern capitalistic society to decentralize production by establishing complete factories throughout the country. It has been proven that this method makes for greater efficiency and economy.

In an Anarchist-Communist Society the fullest extension of this principle would allow for the greatest amount of local autonomy. It would immeasurably increase the ability of the commune to become self sustaining. It would simplify and facilitate the task of co-ordination.

Anarchist-Communism is the only social theory that is all embracing. It provides for the fullest development of the best in man. Here he attains his fullest stature. He is represented as a producer in his factory or shop, as a consumer in his co-operative, as both in his commune, and as a happy creative human being in the liberty of thought and action, which only a free society can develop.

III.

Anarchist-Communism, being in direct contradiction to the institution of the state, cannot employ parliamentary tactics as a means towards its realization. It casts aside as useless and dangerous the idea that a series of gradual and legal changes can bring about the fall of Capitalism, or usher in a new society.

The great struggles in the First International between Marx and Bakunin represented two directly opposing points of view on the tasks and tactics of the working class. In the main, as far as tactics were concerned, they differed in the following respects.

The Marxian faction advocated political action, *ie.*, electing labor representatives who would support petty reforms. They believed in the centralization of the affairs of the labor bodies into a single directing agency. They advocated the alliance of trade unions with a political party. They conceived of the Socialist State as the necessary link between Capitalism and a free society.

The Bakuninist faction advocated the direct economic action of the working class, *ie.*, general strikes, sabotage, and armed resistance, through the organized power of the masses, such as revolutionary industrial unions, peasant organizations, etc. They conceived of the labor movement as a federation of workers and farmers bodies, possessing the greatest amount of local autonomy, and the federation of these decentralized units for common action and solidarity as the most desirable form of organization. They held that any state is in its very nature reactionary,

and therefore proposed that the mass organizations replace the state in the transitional period between the old and new society.

The history of the labor movement in every country and in every period, shows how well the Bakuninists understood the nature of reformism. What has become of the reformist labor movement? Why have they failed to live up to their "Historical Mission?" Despite the fact that the British labor movement was strong enough to paralyze England in the general strike of 1926, we see it reduced to beggary, chasing after doles, dominated by the politicians of the "labor" party, and advocating the most reactionary policies. The British labor movement is standing idly by while British Imperialism is crushing their brother workers in India, Ireland and other colonies.

The great labor movement of Germany, despite its numbers, is helpless in the face of the Fascist menace. Like the labor movement of England it is the plaything of the traitorous Social-Democratic Party. Deprived of its initiative and its revolutionary spirit at a low ebb, it has allowed the politicians to dupe them so that reaction has gained the upper hand. There is no doubt whatever that the World War would never have been fought were these self-same reformist unions revolutionary, and free from the deadening influence of opportunism.

Wherever we turn, in Italy, in Spain, in Germany, we see reaction in the saddle; the revolution thwarted. The greatest obstacle in the path of the revolution has been not so much the conservatives, as these Judases, the "socialists" who are in reality the last bulwark of Capitalism.

The Communist Party of Germany is in a large measure responsible for the rise of Fascism. When the crying need of the hour was a united front of all class conscious workers regardless of party, when only the united working class fighting on the economic field was important, when only the armed resistance of the workers was capable of crushing the reaction, the Communist Party of Germany, by the order of the Moscow bureaucrats, took a long step backward. Knowing that a united front was impossible without them, they laid down the law: either rule or ruin. They insisted upon dominating the entire labor movement of Germany. When the labor movement refused to accept what they called a "united front," the resulting lack of unity among the workers gave the fascists an opportunity to consolidate their forces. The situation was and still is most critical. Either the united front or fascism. The communists refused the united front. The interests of the bureaucracy outweighed the interests of the working class.

Even a revolutionary movement is rendered ineffective when it is dominated by a centralized bureaucracy. When the labor movement is dominated by a political party, it inevitably becomes the football of politics. It is clear to all except "those who will not see" that the downfall of Capitalism, and the establishment of a new society, cannot be accomplished by the use of such tactics. It is clear that political action is one of the greatest impediments in the path of the coming social revolution. Only a fundamental change in the political, economic and social relationships of man, only the social revolution can accomplish what the reformists have failed to do. Nor is a social revolution in itself a guarantee that Anarchist-Communism will be realized. A social revolution can stop short of its objectives, can like a stream, be diverted from its course. The failure to understand the goal of the revolution, or a labor movement brought up in the authoritarian school trained to leave all in the hands of a bureaucratic and corrupt leadership, can so distort the character of a revolution as to render it harmful to the further progress of mankind.

The Russian Revolution shows that despite the heroic struggle of the masses, the revolution failed to achieve its objectives – liberty and well being for all. The Russian labor unions have become blind pawns in the hands of a party dictatorship. The masses are being ground to dust by the Communist steam roller. The revolution failed because the labor movement was unprepared.

They did not understand that the delegation of power into the hand of the state meant the death of the revolution.

There is no record of any great change, any great victory of labor that was won through parliamentary means. The eight hour day, the right to organize, the right of free speech, were the triumphs of direct action.

The early history of the American labor movement is replete with examples of militant direct action. The struggles of the Knights of Labor, the struggles of the Black International which culminated in the Haymarket tragedy, the struggles of the Western Federation of Miners, and of the I.W.W., etc., were mainly responsible for whatever progress the movement has made in America. On the other hand, what has been accomplished by the reformist American Federation of Labor? The degeneration of the modern labor movement is nowhere so apparent as in the present happenings in the Illinois coal fields. The officialdom of the United Mine Workers of America has joined the bosses and the state in crushing the revolt of the militant rank and file against the bureaucracy of the A. F. of L. What really important victory was gained without the direct economic pressure of the working class? To this question history answers – none.

In the light of the struggles and hard won gains of the workers all over the world, the position taken by the Anarchist-Communists is basically sound and therefore fully justified.

The goal of the working class must be the social revolution. The workers must be prepared to overthrow Capitalism through a Social Revolution; must be prepared to conduct the economic life of the country when the time comes. In order to do this, they will be obliged to organize into mass movements such as industrial unions, artels, agrarian co-operatives, etc. The solidarity of the working class must be attained through the federation of autonomous bodies, instead of centralization from the top down. The tactics must correspond to the ends in view. The masses, permeated with the revolutionary spirit, must make use of the general strike, sabotage, armed resistance, expropriation, etc. The revolutionary labor movement must become the militant vanguard who by their deeds and intelligence will show the rest of the masses how to help themselves, how to establish a new society. The militant vanguard consisting of mass organizations of workers and peasants takes the place of the bureaucratic party and renders the state unnecessary in the transitional period.

The revolution will be successful to the extent that the workers are prepared for it. A good deal will depend upon the extent to which Anarchist ideas have permeated the social body. A period of intense propaganda and revolutionary struggle is necessary in order to influence the masses. Outside of the labor movement as such, Anarchist-Communism must be propagated among the intelligent youth through study groups, propaganda centers and through the dissemination of literature. The field of education, the co-operative movement, the anti-war leagues, every mass organization, must be invested with a revolutionary character. Anarchists must turn them into organs of successful social revolution.

In a very real sense, we are facing a momentous period in human history. The inevitable social revolution will determine the paths in which mankind will tread for a long time. All depends upon a correct conception of the nature of our tasks and the manner and spirit in which we approach them. "Anarchist-Communism," as Kropotkin so aptly said, "must be the goal of the revolution of the twentieth century."

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