

Letter to *Freedom* (February 27, 1971)

Anarchist Topics

Sidney E. Parker

February 27, 1971

Dear Editors,

Bill Dwyer gives a substantially correct report of what I recounted of my experiences as a member of a printing union 'chapel' (*Freedom*, 19.12.70). What he deduces from it, however, is wide of the mark.

Firstly, I do not maintain that 'the worker (whoever he is) is fitted only for obedience'. What I do maintain is that most workers (like most other people) have supported and defended authoritarianism and servility in the past, do so in the present and that, on the evidence of this, they will do so in the future. Every social upheaval so far has resulted in either the survival of the old authority or the creation of a new, and as far as I can see this is the inevitable outcome of all organized collectivities—no matter what names they are given. Bill Dwyer, like his utopian forebears, has confused 'the worker' as he is with 'the worker' as he would like him to be. He is, if you will pardon the philosophical pun, trying to deduce an 'is' from an 'ought'.

Because, however, this has been and is true of most workers, it by no means follows that all workers are incapable of transcending authoritarianism and becoming anarchists. A small minority in each generation do just this, as do a small minority of 'non-workers'. (Anarchism is an individual, not a class, phenomenon.) Secondly, what 'weakness' did Francis Ellingham show in my social pessimism? The only 'evidence' that he could offer to refute my view was that he believes that mankind can create the kind of world he would like to see by means of some unexplained (and, I suspect, unexplainable) process of concurrent and contagious spontaneity of the sort that will result in what Ellingham wants it to result in. Of course, any millenarian sect can claim the viability of their goal on this kind of 'evidence'. From Plymouth Brethren to Koreshanists—all can view the world as their oyster. More tough-minded folk, however, would demand better credentials than those so far offered.

Thirdly, I cannot see how I am being 'insulting' to point out what I think are the facts of the case. (F.E. is fond of derogatory labelling too. Because I have said most people appear to want a government of some kind or another he accuses me of saying they are 'stupid'. Not so. Some of the most ardent governmentalists are very intelligent persons. Intelligence is no more a monopoly of anarchists than is stupidity of anarchists.) If I claimed that on the basis of what I knew about Bill Dwyer I thought it unlikely he could run a mile in three minutes would he regard that as being insulting? Emotive labeling of this kind is simply begging the question.

Finally, I have never claimed that 'no change' is possible. The world I live in now is in many ways not the world I lived in twenty years ago, nor is it the kind of world I will live in twenty years from now. My point is that what changes will take place are, on the basis of what is and has been in the sphere of social constraint, unlikely to bring about anarchy as a universal condition. For this reason anarchist individualists, such as I claim to be, will shape their perspectives accordingly. Anarchism as an individualism can survive such a reshaping. I am quite prepared to admit that those who regard anarchism as a socialism will reject my view, since their ideas cannot.

Yours sincerely,

London, W.2.

S.E. PARKER.

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