

Review: Men Against The State by James J. Martin

Sidney E. Parker

Men Against The State: The Expositors Of Individualist Anarchism in America 1827–1908. By James J. Martin. Ralph Myles Publisher Inc. P.O. Box 1533, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80901, U.S.A. 12.50. Available in Britain from Freedom Press at 21/-.

This second edition of *Men Against The State* is most welcome. It comes at a time where there is a distinct revival of interest in the Warren-Tucker school of anarchism. In a model of historical scholarship, Dr. Martin details the growth and decline of the talented group of libertarian writers and publicists whose ideas found their ultimate synthesis in the work of Benjamin Tucker. He describes in depth the activities of Josiah Warren, Steven Pearl Andrews, Lysander Spooner, J.K. Ingalls, W.B. Greene, Ezra Heywood, and the Tucker associates. His story is a fascinating one, but it may well prove depressing for those whose perspectives are shaped by the belief that anarchism can be universalized.

Consider: here was a movement born at a time of social ferment and optimism in a country where the government was comparatively weak. It had capable theoreticians, practical exponents of "community living" and its supporters were virtually all "natives". Yet after eighty years of activity it petered out, despite the efforts of a few survivors.

Some reasons: Because of their desire to establish a future society on the basis of their ideas the Warrenites and Tuckerites tried to fit their anarchism into a societal context. They had to tailor their individualism in order to make it compatible with social engineering. As a result, their championing of individualism was deformed by the irons of utopia. Warren's experiments showed that anarchism could become at least a partial reality for a small minority of individuals. But this was all he accomplished in a positive sense. His belief that the example of his "equity villages" would convince the mass proved delusory. The mass remained a mass and the individualists remained "outsiders". Nor does the gulf between them today appear any more bridgeable.

Neither Warren nor Tucker seems to have really come to grips with the intractable problem of social organization. Robert Michels has outlined with somber effectiveness what is called the "iron law of oligarchy"—the invariable tendency of all organized efforts to give birth to an oligarchy. This means that any **social** application of anarchism—were it possible—would fall into

the hands of new oligarchs who would become—defacto if not de jure—rulers over the individual. At most it would result in what Estey called the “anarchism of groups”, but not the “anarchism of individuals”.

Later anarchist individualists have developed a more realistic perspective: the continual conflict of the individual with the social—the Unique against the Collective.

However, Josiah Warren’s concept of the **individualization of interests** as opposed to their **combination**, was one of the most fruitful contributions ever made to anarchism. Its eclipse by attempts to link anarchism with collectivism proved disastrous, and led to the idiotic identification of anarchism with “leftism”—even with such totalitarian monstrosities as Maoism.

The value of Warren’s concept remains, however. Properly used it is an effective weapon in the struggle for the individual. The “sovereignty of the individual” may never replace the sovereignty of governments, but it can always be opposed to them.

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