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What Anarchism Is

1895

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Editor Railway Conductor:

A correspondent writing from Fort Dodge, Iowa, finds much comfort in your editorial expression of the sentiment (certainly not peculiar to yourself) that: "He is no true friend of labor who argues that inasmuch as wrong has been done, wrong in return is justifiable." He is, nevertheless, much cast down in spirit by an outcropping of anarchism he seems to have discovered in some fraternal correspondence criticising the methods of politicians and corporations of capital working together, manipulating the functions of what your correspondent emphatically styles "*our* government." He says:

The influx of this anarchist element from the nations where the bayonet and the sword rule, has, to an alarming extent, poisoned the spirit of our Americanism in many a heart, unconsciously, let us charitably hope."

What does he mean by anarchist? Did he get his definition out of the Chicago newspapers in 1886? Did you ever know, up to that time, that we had such a word in our American dictionary? Don't you recollect how you hesitated about pronouncing it, fearing to make yourself ridiculous by placing the accent on the wrong end, not knowing even whether the "ch" ought

to be like k or chestnut? And what does he mean by our Americanism? Was the Declaration of Independence an exhibition of anarchism or Americanism? The abolitionists were not anarchists, but there were other epithets not less hateful then, perhaps, but stingless now.

He asks, "How it would look for members of the O. R. C. who happened to be dissatisfied with some of its laws, to be everlastingly kicking about it and accusing its officers of bribery and this, that, and the other" It certainly would not look so well as for such howling malcontents to walk quietly out of the Order and join another organization, or *make* another to suit themselves. But I can't see how that has anything to do with howling about the doings of the politicians, unless he wants to suppose also that your membership is

not a privilege to be relinquished at your own pleasure; that you can *not* step out and leave your boodler officers alone within; but that you were born in it, belong in it, and must remain and pay them your dues. Then, if there be nothing else to do, if you cannot get out except by buying a balloon, you *ought* to howl; something might come of it.

I know precisely what Americanism is—now in this last end of the nineteenth century, when we go to the newspapers for our definitions and not to the dictionary—and what anarchism is! Glorify the Declaration of Independence, and the fearless patriotism of its signers; that is *Americanism*. Recite one truth or all the truths enunciated by that document, and that is *anarchism*. Shout "we, the people," that is *Americanism*. Add to it "are the foolish builders of the ambitions of our betters," and that is *anarchism*. If a pickpocket rifles your pockets you knock him down if you can, and that is *Americanism*—an exhibition of violence, it is true, but all the more for that, *Americanism*. Put your hands behind your back and say "I won't" to a railway corporation, and that is *anarchism*. Fling a stone through the window of the banker who has closed his doors on your dollars and his own hundreds of thousands, and that, too, is *an-*

archism. Sing the splendors of our enormous national wealth, that is *Americanism*. Ask in a whisper, “Where is it?” and that is *anarchism*. Denounce either political set, accuse them of all the crimes in the catalogue and call upon all “decent voters” to join the patriotic opposition of the other party, that is *Americanism*. Accuse both gangs, and that is *anarchism*.

Let them fling their epithets. When “anarchist” will have lost its sting by constant, senseless use, let them select the next most hated word from their vocabulary and clothe it with the same significance. Its application is in a large measure a matter of local education, any way. A brother writing from Boston, appeals to Brother Clark to stop the gold money monopoly in its raid on our treasury, our liberties, and indeed, our very right to live, since life depends on work, and he signs the carefully indefinite “122.” What’s the need of his precaution? That isn’t anarchism—in Iowa. An Iowa man might sign his full name and part it in the middle. It’s different in Boston.

“122” is howling against probably the cruelest, certainly the greatest power of our overboasted civilization. Let him howl, and let them stigmatize him. If they suppress him, his howl will be taken up and carried on till American workmen will have recovered their right to work and eat regardless of the amount of gold in or cut of the coffers of a few extortionists, especially privileged by this (“our”) government and other governments, to corner the possibilities of our splendid productive ability.

“Two wrongs can never make a right.” It is undoubtedly wrong to appropriate to one’s self the right or property of another; then if to demand or compel restitution is another wrong, the last possessor is in rightful possession, and the first wrong is right. But is it wrong to demand restitution, even to howl for it? We have gone no further than that; we have said not a word of compulsion. All the worry about violence comes of the fear that our demand for restitution of our right, if it be sincerely persistent, and not a hypocritical cover of a “political reform” trick, will be answered in violence by the

wrongful possessors of our rights. But listen: In the United States senate, last week, this very question was debated and finally settled, by men, than whom there can be none in our generation better qualified to handle it. The proposition was that wrong had been done by an agreement to sell gold bonds to a certain European company of bankers for from five to eight millions less than American bankers eagerly(?) offered. But it was argued and held, that inasmuch as the secret, wrongful contract calling for the delivery of many millions in excess of the rightful necessities of the American taxpayers was signed by a servant of those taxpayers, the contract must be upheld and ratified to make the first wrong right, and there had been as yet no transference of any property between the parties concerned.

I wish every workman would hear and heed the howl of "122." The injunction scheme, the blacklist, the proposed arbitration law, all together in the aggregate of their importance to the workman's welfare, sink into insignificance as compared with his actual interest in this bond business. We, the workmen, must pay that unrighteous debt; whether we have work or not, while we live we pay; and the less we have the more we pay in proportion. We are the bondsmen, and so many of our masters are now in Europe

(Why?) that at the first sign of repudiation hundreds of thousands of European bayonets would clank together into a great big question mark. Why is it that these European bankers, with every army of Europe under their orders, if need be, have just added to their interest in the "honesty" of our dollars another hundred millions or so? Or why is it, do you suppose, they were allowed to do so? Can't we rake up as big an army as anybody? Is American patriotism dead?

Our leaders are studying up these things as they never did before. Let us hang together, that we may not be helpless in the hands of our servants. That isn't anarchism; and if it is, who cares? Yours truly in P F.,

Brother.