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Individual or Common Property [Oct, 1890] : A Discussion, a Letter from a Communist

Freedom Press (London)

October, 1890

It appears to me that Anarchy without Communism has no reason for its existence. For as Anarchy is the negation of Authority, so Communism is the negation of Property. He who says Authority says Property, and he who says Property says Authority.

If this proposition be admitted, the question is solved in favor of Communism, and this should be enough to bring round all those undecided people who, in their sincere love of freedom, are afraid of being false to Anarchy if they cut the "right of property" out of its program. Much the same sort of pretext as that on which certain Socialists wish to maintain authority.

The "right" of any man to anything depends on his co-existence with that thing. This "right" is only limited by the possibility of exercising it. If there were actually but one man in the world, that man would have every sort of "right" to every sort of thing in the

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world. If instead of this one man, whom we will call John, there happened to be another named Peter, Peter would in the same way be master of all things. But if both John and Peter are in existence, can the presence of one deprive the other of a part of his "right"?

Hitherto it has been contended that this was the case, and governments are based upon this very supposition. But we Anarchists cannot admit any such thing. We believe that all men have the same "rights" to all things. This is why these "rights" are not collective; one's share does not begin where another's leaves off; all rights are common and unlimited for all; the hypothesis set forth above, that the whole world belonged to one man, might be repeated for each particular individual. We have all the same "rights" to the universal banquet; but these rights are independent of one another, and we have not all the same needs. Communists are thus absolutely opposed to the theory which would have all products massed together and then re-divided. They would prefer to take freely what they need, without there being any strife on the subject, since everything is for everybody and everything belongs to everybody.

Thus harmony will come about naturally. Each will live more and more according to his personal tastes, taking care in no wise to restrain those of others. As Communism has no other object than equality, by means of freedom in its most complete sense, it is hardly to be imagined that say Anarchists can refuse to admit it.

It seems to me that Communism is the mother-idea of Anarchy, that Anarchy without it would be a vain theory, to which Collectivism might well be preferred. If Property partakes of the nature of Authority, how can anyone who calls himself an Anarchist wish to maintain it?

In the same way that the believers in Authority are convinced that by abolishing law we shall be giving criminals a free scope, the partizans of property seem to fancy that by abolishing it we shall be providing a career for the lazy and for robbers. Whereas if we add to "Do as thou wilt" its necessary completion, "To each according to his needs," we enunciate a principle which is at once the expression

and the result of absolute liberty. It is certain that there can be no true liberty whilst each has not all that he needs, and that it is only upon this system of perfect freedom that such close relations can be established between production and consumption that each can do, be, and have all that he desires. And then nothing more will remain but to develop our aims scientifically, to perfect ourselves, so to speak, into a superior sort of animal with boundless facilities of intelligence and boundless possibilities of happiness.