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Society on the Morrow of Revolution [Jan, 1890]

Freedom Press, Anonymous

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Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 4, No. 38, online
source RevoltLib.com, retrieved on May 2, 2020.

Translated from the French Of JEHAN LE VAGRE. Freedom Press,
London

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January, 1890

self-denial to the point of allowing anything to be printed which attacked their authority; especially as they would only have to give a simple refusal, and they would be able to urge as an excuse that as all the productive forces were fully occupied with the interests of co consumption, it would not be right for them to busy themselves with what was not a part of the immediate wants of society.

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centration of the social wealth which is taking place to-day in the higher capitalist circles, and to succeed in the end in placing the whole of the machinery and social property in the hands of a few.

To-day when the State possesses only a very small part of the public fortune, a crowd of individual interests have sprung up around it which are so many obstacles to our emancipation. What would it be like in a State which was at one and the same time employer and proprietor of all? An all-powerful State, which would be able at will to dispose of the whole social fortune and distribute it so as to best serve its own interests. A State, in short, which would be master not only of the present generation but also of those of the future, as it would undertake the education of the children, and would be able at pleasure either to help humanity along the path of progress by a wide and varied system of education or to hinder its development by a narrow system. We recoil in fear before an authority having such powerful means of action.

We complain because the present society hinders our forward march; we complain because it restrains our aspirations beneath the yoke of its authority. But what would it be like in a society where nothing could be produced unless it was authorized by the State, represented by so-called "commissions of statistics." In such a society, where nothing could be produced except by the will of the State, no new idea would be able to see the light if it did not succeed in obtaining recognition by the State as being of public utility. Now, as all new ideas have to struggle against the ideas that have gone before, this recognition would never be secured as the new idea would be completely crushed out and stilled long before it had any chance of coming before the public. Thus, to take only one example, printing-which up to now has been one of the most effective aids to progress, as it brings human knowledge within the reach of all-would be no longer available for new ideas; for however disinterested those who would form the Collectivist government might be, permit us to doubt that they would carry their

But what will prevent anyone from exchanging them for new ones at the time when they become due, for we cannot force people to consume immediately—unless we also insert in the program Compulsory Consumption. But if we admit that that can be avoided, there will nevertheless be some individuals who will produce more than they will consume and others who will want to consume more than they can produce. Now as each labor note—and we are supposing all the time that these have been made the medium of exchange will have to be represented in the warehouses by its equivalent in products, we shall have the anomaly of there being in a society calling itself a society of equals, through some individuals for lack of wants having allowed their labor notes to be canceled at maturity, some goods remaining in the warehouses; whilst other individuals will be unable to satisfy their wants because they could not produce accordingly.

We shall thus have arrived at a point where we shall either have to force people to consume or force them to give up their labor notes. Why not reestablish the Poor Law system? As, however, according to the collectivists, these commissions, of statistics are not an authority, there will be only one thing left for them to do—to restrict production and thus create some unemployed. Where will be the difference in that society from the society of to-day? In spite of all the contradictions it is evident that it is here that appears the object of these famous commissions of statistics which will regulate the hours of work by indicating to each individual what he is to do.

In other words, the individual in such a society would find himself restricted in all his sets; at each movement he would run up against a prohibitory law. That may be collectivism, but assuredly it is not liberty, still less is it equality. But beyond all these inconveniences there is still another, more dangerous than all the rest, it is that in instituting commissions of this and commissions of that, which will be nothing else but a government under another name, we shall simply have made a revolution in order to hasten the con-

I.—AUTHORITY AND ORGANIZATION.

Some Anarchists allow themselves to be led into confounding these two very different things. In their hatred of authority, they repel all organization, knowing that the authoritarians disguise under this name the system of oppression which they desire to constitute. Others whilst avoiding falling into this error, go to the other extreme of extolling a thoroughly authoritarian form of organization, which they style anarchist. There is, however, a fundamental difference to be made clear. That which the authoritarians have baptized with the name of organization is plainly enough a complete hierarchy, making laws, acting instead of and for all, or causing the mass to act, in the name of some sort of representation. Whereas what we understand by organization is the agreement which is formed, because of their common interests, between individuals grouped for a certain work, such are the mutual relations which result from the daily intercourse the members of a society are bound to have one with the other. But this organization of ours has neither laws nor statutes nor regulations, to which every individual is forced to submit, under penalty of punishment. This organization has no committee that represents it; the individuals are not attached to it by force, they remain free in their autonomy, free to abandon this organization, at their own initiative, when they wish to substitute another for it.

We are far from having the pretentious idea of drawing a picture of what society will be in the future, far from having the presumption to wish to build a complete plan of organization and put it forward as a principle. We merely wish to outline the main features and broad lines which ought to enlighten our propaganda, reply to objections which have been raised to the Anarchist idea, and demonstrate that a society is very well able to organize itself without either power or delegation if it is truly based on justice and social equality.

Yes, we believe that all individuals ought to be left free to seek for, and to group themselves according to, their tendencies and their affinities. To claim to establish a single method of organization by which everybody will have to be controlled, and which will be established immediately after the Revolution, is utopian, considering the diversity of the temperaments and characters of individuals; and to wish already to prepare a frame, more or less narrow, in which society will be called upon to move, would be to play the part of doctrinaires and conservatives, since nothing assures us that the ideal which fascinates us to-day will respond to-morrow to our wants, and above all to the wants of the whole of society. The powerlessness to sterility, with which the Socialist schools up to the present time have been stricken, is due precisely to the fact that in the society they wished to establish all was foreseen and regulated in advance, nothing was left to the initiative of individuals; consequently that which responded to the aspirations of some was objectionable to others, and thence the impossibility of creating, anything durable.

We have to refute here the affirmation of the reactionaries, who pretend that if Anarchy was triumphant it would be a return to the savage state and the death of all society. Nothing is more false. We recognize that it is association alone which can permit man to employ the machinery which science and industry put at his service; we recognize that it is by associating their efforts that individuals will succeed in increasing their comfort and their freedom. We are, then, partisans of association, but, we repeat it, because we consider it as a means to the well-being of the individual, and not under the abstract form in which it is presented to us even now, which makes of it a sort of divinity by which those who ought to compose it are annihilated.

Then if we do not wish to fall into the same errors and to meet with the same obstacles we ought to guard ourselves against believing that all men are cast in the same mold, and to recognize that what may agree very well with the disposition of one indi-

will enable them to continually measure and compare the expenditure of a man's muscular or brain force. On what basis will they establish their measure of exchange value so as to give to each, as they say, the whole product of his work, and, most important of all, who will set what the value in exchange shall be? It is in fact impossible to constitute this exchange value. It can only be arranged by friendly agreement among all the workers; unless, indeed, it is imposed by the commissions of statistics.

But as many collectivists deny that commissions of statistics are governments, we, believe this exchange value will be established by a common agreement between the workers. This, however, implies that the workers will have to abandon their exact claims and acquire that self-denial which it is said they cannot have in an Anarchist society. On the other hand if labor notes are created, how will their accumulation be prevented? It has been said in reply to this question that an accumulation could only be used in the purchase of articles for consumption, and as the land and machinery would be inalienable, the dangers of such accumulations could not be great.

Certainly so far as the reconstitution of private property in land and machinery is concerned, such an accumulation could not be dangerous, but it could very easily throw the whole organization into confusion. We will explain how. We will suppose these individuals to have bad intentions—this would be very easily imagined by our opponents, let us not forget, if an Anarchist society was in question—we will suppose that they are able to produce more than they need, and thus acquire an accumulation of notes. What is the result? On the one hand they deprive the market of a demand for products, whilst they increase the supply on the other. Thus not only are all the calculations of the commissions of statistics, upset, but other persons who have more wants than they have are prevented from producing according to their wants. It has been urged in reply to this objection that accumulations will be prevented by canceling these famous labor notes at certain periods.

II.—THE MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE AND THE COMMISSIONS OF STATISTICS.

The belief that we must continue to value the efforts of individuals and permit them to enjoy only according to what they have produced is another prejudice giving rise to the objection that it is impossible to, establish a communist society.

How strong is prejudice! People realize all the falsity of the present, commercial system; they see that we must abolish competition by destroying money, the medium of exchange which enables the capitalists, to deceive the worker so as to obtain in exchange for their money a greater amount of labor force than they pay, for. They comprehend that all that must be destroyed, and yet most of those who see thus far quite clearly can find no better remedy than to substitute for the present medium of exchange—money—another exchange medium.

What will this change? What does it matter that the exchange medium is a metal more or less precious? That is not the danger. The danger is that if, we establish an exchange of products in the new society it will be to everyone's interest to assess his own productions at a higher value than any others, and then we shall see all the evils of the existing society reproduced. This can only be avoided by the discovery of a basis which will give the exact value of every product. But this basis is lacking as we shall endeavor to show. Most of the authoritarian Socialists for want of a better have adopted as a measure of value an hour of work! But, as there are some kinds of work which require a very much larger expenditure of labor force than others, we want to know what they will do to make everyone agree? Everybody will be interested in having his hour of work or expenditure of labor force estimated at a higher rate than the average indeed it is already admitted by many Socialists that more ought to be paid for certain work than for certain other work. We want to know, also, what sort of a dynamometer

vidual may very indifferently accord with the feelings of all. This, it may be said in passing, applies equally to association in the period of propaganda and to the future society. If we desire to make a revolution which will come up to our ideal, to prepare this revolution we ought at once to organize ourselves according to our principles, to accustom individuals to act of themselves, and to be careful not to introduce into our organization the institutions that we attack in the existing society, lest we relapse into the same condition as before. Anarchists ought to be more practical than those they fight against, they ought to learn from the mistakes which are made, so as to avoid them. We ought to appeal to all those who wish to destroy the present society, and, instead of losing our time in discussing the utility of such or such means, to group ourselves for the immediate application of the means we think best, without preoccupying ourselves with those who are not in favor of it; in the same way that those who are in favor of another means should group themselves to put in practice that other means. After all what we all wish is the destruction of the present society; and it is evident that experience will guide us as to the choice of means. We should do practical work, instead of wasting our time at committee meetings, which are mostly sterile, where each wishes to make his own idea prevail, which very often break up without anything being decided, and which almost always result in the creation of as many dissenting factions as there are ideas put forward—factions which, having become enemies, lose sight of the common enemy, the middle-class society, to war upon each other.

Another advantage resulting from this is, that individuals habituating themselves to join the group which accords best with their own ideas, will accustom themselves to think and to act of their own accord, without any authority among them, without that discipline which consists in destroying the efforts of a group or of isolated individuals because the others are not of their opinion. Yet another advantage which results is, that a revolution made on this basis could not be other than Anarchist, for individuals who had

learned to act without any compulsion would not be silly enough to establish a power on the morrow of victory.

For some Socialists the ideal is to gather the workers in a party such as exists in Germany. The chiefs of this party on the day of the revolution would be carried into power, would thus form a new government who would decree the appropriation of machinery and property, would organize production, regulate consumption, and suppress—that goes without saying—those who were not of their opinion. We Anarchists believe that this is a dream. Decrees to take possession after the struggle will be illusory; it is not by decrees that the appropriation of capital will be accomplished, but by facts at the time of the struggle, by the workers themselves, who will enter into possession of houses and workshops by driving away the present possessors, and by calling the disinherited and saying to them, "This belongs to nobody individually; it is not a property that can belong to the fast occupant, and by him be transmitted to his descendants. No, these houses are the product of past generations, the heritage of the present and future generations. Once unoccupied, they are at the free disposition of those who need them, This machinery is put at the free disposition of the producers who wish to use it, but cannot become individual property."

Individuals will be so much the more unable to personally appropriate it, because they will not know what to do with machinery which they cannot utilize by means of wage-slaves. No one will be able to appropriate anything which he cannot work himself; and as the greater part of the present machinery can only be worked by the association of individual forces, it will be by this means that individual will come to an understanding. Once the appropriation has been made, we see no necessity for it to be sanctioned by any authority whatsoever.

We cannot foresee the consequences of the struggle in which we are engaged. In the first place, do we know how long it will last I what will be the immediate result of a general overthrow of

the existing institutions? what will be the immediate wants of the people on the morrow of the revolution! Certainly we do not.

We ought, then, not to waste our time in establishing in our imagination a society the wheels of which will all be prepared in advance, and which will be constructed, so to speak, like one of those boxes of play-things, all the pieces of which are numbered, and which, when placed together, start working directly the mechanism is wound up. All that we can do from the theoretical point of view of Organization will never be other than dreams, more or less complicated, which win invariably prove to be without basis when it is a question of putting them into practice. We certainly have not this ridiculous pretension, but we ought to guard ourselves also from that other mistake common to many revolutionaries, who say: Let us occupy ourselves first of all with destroying, and afterwards we will see what we ought to construct. Between these two ideas there is a Mattis. We certainly cannot say what the future society will be, but we ought to say what it will not be, or at least what we ought to prevent it from being.

We cannot say what will be the mode of Organization of the producing and consuming groups; they alone can be judges of that; moreover, the same methods are not suitable to all. But we can very well say, for instance, what we would do personally if we were in a society in which all the individuals had the opportunity to act freely, what we must do now, in fact, the revolution being only the complement of evolution. We can tell how a society might evolve without the help of those famous "commissions of statistics," "labor-notes," etc., etc., with which the Collectivists wish to gratify us; and we believe it is necessary to say this because it is in the nature of individuals not to wish to engage themselves to follow a certain course of action without knowing where it will take them, and besides, as we have already said, it is the end we ourselves propose to attain that ought to guide us in the employment of means of propaganda.