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Laurance Labadie and His Critics

Herbert C. Roseman

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Laurance Labadie, the last of the individualist anarchists, heir of Warren, Spooner, and Tucker has in recent months been dismissed as a veritable fossil by a young Wobbly (who feels that individualist anarchism is hopelessly bourgeois), characterized by a disciple of Ludwig Von Mises as being “incapable of reasoned thought,” denounced as a “cretin” by another young disciple of “Austrian” economics, and attacked for allegedly being “doctrinaire” by a Gandhi disciple.

That these attacks have been devious on the one hand and namby-pamby and incredibly naive on the other is a measure of the general decay of native American libertarian-radicalism in the last twenty or thirty years. Mr. Labadie is the first to admit that he is a “cantankerous old man” but he would dearly love to see his vilifiers come out with some of that good old “reasoned thought!” It seems it is terribly old-fashioned to declare for a just and equitable program for land and money nowadays. The socialist (& Gandhian) critics of Labadie would like to do away with the awful stuff (money) altogether—the Von Misians and

Objectivists want to hold on to all that “time preference” interest. Does our present economic system cause war? Heaven forbid!

That Mr. Labadie’s work will survive his critics this writer has no doubt. Tucked away in obscure journals, large reams of stuff virtually unread and unpublished are the makings of a mountain of a book demolishing all comers be they socialists, communists, phony free enterprisers and all the other fakirs who claim to speak for “humanity.”

For over forty years Labadie has done battle with socialists, communist anarchists, single taxers, equitists, Gesellites, Social Creditors and invariably come out the victor. However be it noted that he has rarely received thanks for his efforts. He has in fact usually been spat upon and dismissed as a killjoy and crank.

Although he envisages a world of economic freedom Laurance Labadie is no system-maker. He believes that *real* freedom of competition will show soon enough what’s what. He is no Utopian either seeing genuine freedom as a goal rather than a place.

Son of Jo Labadie of the famed Labadie Collection, Laurance Labadie has far outdistanced his father as a thinker and polemicist. Laurance Labadie has had the good luck to have been in contact most of his life with all the best that has been written by the libertarian-radical tradition, a tradition that has become as extinct as the dodo, a tradition that is now being plagiarized by spokesmen of the status quo who claim to be libertarians—but whose concept of liberty is actually liberty-by-permission which enables them to hold on to their ill-gotten gains.

Labadie is a prophet though no Messiah and the prognosis for prophets in any time or place has to be very good. However if we ever survive this Orwellian world I think the ideas of the “cranks” will bear fruit.