

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



Lizzie M. Swank
Abolition of Government
1886

Retrieved on March 31, 2023 from
<https://mgouldhawke.wordpress.com/2022/12/27/abolition-of-government-lizzie-m-swank-1886/>
The Alarm, Chicago, January 23, 1886

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

Abolition of Government

Lizzie M. Swank

1886

Many really sincere and radical people are as yet puzzled by the position the anarchists take, namely: The abolition of all governments. Such abolition suggests to them no idea, except that of disorder, confusion and inharmony, and they cannot conceive of a well regulated, peaceful society apart from some form of “government.” State socialists, whose idea of organization is, after all, scarcely different from that of anarchists, still insist in calling this organization “government,” and regard anarchists as advocates of chaos, because we see no use for authority on the word “government.”

But the general idea of State socialism in America today is not what it was five years ago. Then, the State was an organization of everything under one head, an entirety, a power. It owned everything, received rents, paid wages in the favor of labor certificates, and was the employer of every person within its limits. State socialism today seems to mean a general organization of the different departments of society, with a vague sort of centralization somewhere, that hasn’t much to do. It says through one of its advocates that the mail department has nothing to do with the local laws of Chicago, the revenue department with the school board of another

city, the Indian bureau with the New York water works, etc., under the present government and need not interfere with each other under any government.

So that the only difference between us is, that while we may admit the necessity of school boards, water works committees and bureaus of various works, we see no use for a power, a centralization above all these to which all the widely differing departments must be subject.

The words “the people” and “government” never have been identical in the whole history of the world and in their very nature never can be. “Government” means a power centered in one person or a set of persons, capable of making laws and punishing all violations of them. Whether born to this power, and regularly anointed by “the will of God,” or placed there by the so-called will of the people, is immaterial so far as results go. A government must consist of legislative and executive power, or it is no government. The most democratic form has its body of law-makers, passing laws for the control and guidance of every kind of people, in every department of industry, in almost every relation in life, whether it has any knowledge of these people and their interests or not. It has its courts, judges, lawyers and constables; back of these, and supporting them, its station-houses, bridewells, jails and prisons; and yet behind these, well-trained police, soldiers, Winchester rifles and Gatling guns.

If we examine ever so closely the nature and necessity of government – with all its inseparable machinery, we can trace it no further than its root and origin – *private property*. The first barbaric chieftain who wished to keep more property than he could protect with his own brute strength was the first to see the necessity of a government. And ever since, barons and lords who wanted to control more territory than their vassals could protect, kings and monarchs who wanted to “own the earth,” and great only in their ability to make the common people kill each other, land kings and capitalists who want to grasp a million times more of earth’s gifts

than they can use, all believe in the absolute necessity of government. It is a mighty machine made ready for their use, by which they can accomplish what they never could unaided and alone. Human beings could never have held millions of other human beings in bondage for ages without this ingenious contrivance; miles of fertile land could never be held out of the reach of idle hands and hungry stomachs without it; nor could rich mines, great factories, machinery and other triumphs of human labor and skill, stand unused and wasted while strong arms were aching to get at them, and needy humanity suffering for their productions.

The whole province and office of government is to protect private property – nothing else. Its relations to foreign powers always relate in some way to the private interest of its merchants and money kings. Its civil courts are merely to settle questions of private property; its criminal courts to punish people who want private property and haven't succeeded in getting any; its charters and grants are to enable individuals to monopolize nature's gifts and man's labor, as they could not possibly do without them; its prisons to terrify the people it has assisted in robbing.

What else is government? Strip it of authority; power to bestow privileges and ability to punish, and what is there left? There would be organization of the industries, production and distribution, national questions, etc., we will say.

Every necessary organization, committee or regulation which the welfare of communities demands, will naturally exist, but the different departments need not interfere with each other and there need be no higher power above and over them. The people of all the groups need not vote on questions concerning only one; and no one set of men need make laws to control the conduct of farmers, tailors, shoemakers, artists, authors, and all sorts of people indiscriminately.

“National questions” are myths. They are simply relics of sectional pride, founded on private property interests. As individuals are now placed where they must endeavor to gain advantages over

each other, so portions of the earth's territory have individualized themselves, and are constantly trying to outwit and conquer the rest; but it is all a part of the old private property competitive system. True internationalists have no room for such sentiments.

“National boundaries,” “state lines” etc., are only part of a cut-throat system – essential accompaniments to the feeling fostered by kings and rich despoilers, which makes the poor wretch on one side of the road willing to murder his equally wretched brother on the other side because they happen to have different masters.

Humanitarian questions there may be; national ones, never, when we once truly learn that throughout the world we are brothers. National questions with national boundary lines and governments will, in the coming new civilization be forever abolished, and in their place will be left universal, voluntary co-operation, local regulations and organization of the different groups of industry. With no *ownership* of the means of life there can be no poverty. Poverty banished, crime will become unknown, and the individual will be *free*, socially, economically and politically.