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Anarchy

From the Anarchist Encyclopedia, Vol. I.

Sébastien Faure

1934

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[Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur]

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ANARCHY n. (from the Greek: *a* privative and *archè*, command, power, authority)

Preliminary observation. The object of this Anarchist Encyclopedia being to make known the full range of conceptions—political, economic, philosophical, moral, etc.—that arise from the anarchist idea or lead there, it is in the course of this work and in the very place that each of them must occupy within it, that the multiples theses contained in the exact and complete study of this subject will be explained. So it is only by drawing and joining together, methodically and with continuity, the various parts of this Encyclopedia that it will be possible for the reader to achieve the complete understanding of Anarchy, Anarchism and the Anarchists.

Consequently, I will show here only in its outlines, in a narrow and synthetic fashion, what constitutes the very essence of Anarchy and Anarchism. For the details—and it is appropriate to note that none have a great importance—the reader should consult the various words to which this text will ask them to refer.

Etymologically, the word “Anarchy” (which should be spelled An-Archy) signifies: the state of a people and, more precisely still, of a social milieu without government.

As a social ideal and in its actual fulfillment, Anarchy answers to a *modus vivendi* in which, stripped of all legal and collective restraint having the public force at its service, the individual would have no obligations but those imposed on them by their own conscience. They would possess the ability to give themselves up to rational inspirations of their individual initiative; they would enjoy the right to attempt all the experiments that appear desirable or fruitful to them; they would freely commit themselves to contracts of all sorts—always temporary, and revocable or revisable—that would link them to their fellows and, not wishing to subject anyone to their authority, they would refuse to submit to the authority of anyone. Thus, sovereign master of themselves, of the direction that it pleases them to give their life, of the use that they will make of their faculties, of their knowledge, of their productive activity, of their relations of sympathy, friendship and love, the individual will organize their existence as it seems good to them: radiating in every sense, blossoming as they please, enjoying, in all things, a full and complete liberty, without any limits but those that would be allocated to them by the liberty—also full and complete—of other individuals.

This *modus vivendi* implies a social regime from which would be banished, in right and in fact, any idea of employer and employed, of capitalist and proletarian, of master and servant, of governor and governed.

You will see that, thus defined, the world “Anarchy” has been insidiously and over time distorted from its precise meaning, that it has been taken, little by little, in the sense of “disorder” and that, in the majority of dictionaries and encyclopedias, it is only mentioned in that sense: chaos, upheaval, confusion, waste, disarray, disorder.

Apart from the Anarchists, all the philosophers, all the moralists, all the sociologists—including the democratic theorists and the doctrinaire socialists—maintain that, in the absence of a Government, of a legislation and a repression that assures respect for the law and cracks down on every infraction of it, there is and can only be disorder and criminality.

And yet!... Don't the moralists and philosophers, men of State and sociologists perceive the frightful disorder that reigns, despite the Authority that governs and the Law that represses, in all domains? Are they so deprived of critical sense and the spirit of observation, that they are unaware that the more regulation increases, the more the more the web of legislation tightens, the more the field of repression extends, and the more immorality, disgrace, offenses and crimes increase?

It is impossible that these theorists of "Order" and these professors of "Morals" think, seriously and honestly, of confounding with what they call "Order" the atrocities, horrors, and monstrosities, the revolting spectacle of which observation places before our eyes.

And—if there are degrees of impossibility—it is still more impossible that, in order to diminish and *a fortiori* to make these infamies disappear, these learned doctors count on the virtue of Authority and the force of Law.

That pretention would be pure insanity.

The law has only a single aim: to first justify and then sanction all the usurpations and iniquities on which rest what the profiteers of these iniquities and usurpations call "the Social Order." The holders of wealth have crystallized in the Law the original legitimacy of their fortune; the holders of Power have raised to the level of an immutable and sacred principle the respect owed by the crowds to the privileged, the to power and majesty with which they are invested. We can search, to the bottom or even deeper, all of the monuments to hypocrisy and

violence that are the Codes, all the Codes, but we will never find a disposition that is not in favor of these two facts—facts of a historical and circumstantial order, which we tend to convert into facts of a natural and inevitable order—Property and Authority. I abandon to the official *tartuffes* and to the professionals of bourgeois charlatanism all that which, in the Legislation, deals with “Morals,” as that is, and can only be, in a social state based on Authority and Property, only the humble servant and brazen accomplice of those things.