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Sidney E. Parker
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Anarchism from the Right (Reviews)

Sidney E. Parker

1971

POWER AND THE MARKET: Government and the Economy, by Murray N. Rothbard. The Institute for Humane Studies Inc. 232 pp. 1970. \$6.

THE ART OF COMMUNITY, by Spencer H. MacCullum. The Institute for Humane Studies Inc. 112 pp. 1970. \$4.

SOME EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO I had the temerity to suggest in the columns of *Freedom* that if anarchists wished to look for allies they were more likely to find them among what in the USA is called the “libertarian Right” than among the assorted socialist sects. A minor storm burst about my head and letters were printed excoriating me for “heresy” and stridently maintaining that there could be no connection between anarchists and “right-wing” advocates of laissez-faire capitalism.

Undeterred by these excommunications in advance, the movement I had in mind has continued to grow in momentum and intellectual clarity and many of its adherents are now calling themselves “anarcho-capitalists” and urging the abolition of government. Such books as *The Market for Liberty*

by Morris and Linda Tannehill and *Radical Libertarianism: A Right Wing Alternative* by Jerome Tuccille, journals such as *Libertarian Connection* and *Protos*, and associations such as the Society for Individual Liberty, continue to push the line that the logical end of laissez-faire, free market economics, and its philosophical apologia, is an anarchist society. There are even those who want to combine with the New Left to make a violent revolution to abolish the State, and, as a consequence, have become sadly fixated on a variety of leftist socio-political myths ("Libertarian Leninism" for one).

The view that laissez-faire is incompatible with government is, of course, not a new one. Writers like Albert Jay Nock, Frank Chodorov and H. L. Mencken in the USA, or Auberon Herbert and Wordsworth Donisthorpe in Britain, reflected it in their various ways. And the whole school of Tuckerite anarchists who flourished in the eighties and nineties of the last century believed that free competition and free banking were the economic bases for anarchy, but they claimed that they were anti-capitalist, in the popular sense of the term.

The attempted identification of anarchism with "pure" capitalism, however, had to wait for the present time. Its advocates tend to draw their inspiration from two main sources : the philosopher/ novelist Ayn Rand and the economist Ludwig von Mises. Neither Rand nor von Mises consider themselves anarchists (they are, rather, "limited governmentalsists" in the Herbert Spencer tradition) but their more radical followers have extended the teachings beyond the teachers.

Amongst the most prominent of these "radical libertarians" is the New York economist Murray N. Rothbard, who edits *The Libertarian Forum* and heads the Radical Libertarian Alliance. His new book, *Power and the Market*, is a sequel to his two-volume study *Man, Economy and State* (1962) and puts the case for expelling government intervention not only from the economy, but also from society at large :

“This would imply the complete absence of a State apparatus or government, for the State, unlike all other persons and institutions in society, acquires its revenue not by exchanges freely contracted, but by a system of unilateral coercion called ‘taxation.’”

In common with other laissez-faire advocates, Dr. Rothbard believes that the slumps, poverty and privileged monopolies which socialists usually attribute to capitalism are, on the contrary, the proof government intervention in the economy (“the hegemonic principle”) and not the product of capitalism as such. Despite the denunciations of capitalism by the various schools of collectivism, it is “the hegemonic principle”, not “the market principle”, that creates “conflict, coercion, poverty and chaos”. “Pure” capitalism, Rothbard would argue, has never existed, since even the heyday of nineteenth-century laissez-faire was distorted and constrained by government.

Kropotkin, in his essay “Anarchist Communism”, claimed that what stopped the classical liberals from becoming out and out opponents of government was their belief that for private property to continue in existence it was necessary for government to remain in a policing capacity. Rothbard counters that the kind of protective services that classical liberals thought only government could provide can be far more efficiently provided by voluntary agencies operating on the free market principle. Those who did not want to pay for protective services would not be compelled to do so and could take their chances accordingly.

Whatever one may think of Rothbard’s economics (I, for one, do not find them acceptable), he certainly makes out as plausible a case to be called an anarchist as do many others who lay claim to the title. In order to refute him it will be necessary to do more than resort to anticapitalist sloganizing.

There is one point made by Rothbard, however, that leaves the door open to the re-introduction of authority into his capitalist “anarchy”. Discussing the advocates of voluntary taxation he remarks, *inter alia*, that:

“While ‘the government would cease to exist, the same cannot be said for a constitution or a rule of law, which, in fact, would take on in the free society a far more important function than at present. For the freely competing judicial agencies would have to be guided by a body of absolute law to enable them to *distinguish* objectively between defence and invasion.”

To advocate an “absolute” is to advocate the *unchangeable*. The unchangeable soon becomes the *unquestionable* and the unquestionable, in turn, becomes the sacred—that which is “right” in and of itself, that which one ought to do whatever one’s inclination may be. And *this* is *authority par excellence*. Along with authority comes the sanction necessary to compel respect for it on the part of those recalcitrants who want to go their own way, and the merry game of “tailoring” the individual to fit the demands of the “absolute” begins again under new management.

A critic of Ayn Rand’s conception of egoism acutely observed that while she advocates that men be egoists, *she* defines *who* are egoists and *what* they are to do by means of a *new* moral system. In other words, she urges the individual to act according to his self-interest, but reserves the right to determine what his self-interest is! Similarly, what is Dr. Rothbard’s “body of absolute law” but, at best, the projection of what certain individuals at a particular time think should or should not be done? He wants us to get rid of the spooks of statism and collectivism in order to submit to the spook of “law”. Small wonder, then, that although he claims to be sympathetic to an-

archist individualism, he has no time for the “Stirnerites”, for the “rule of law” would shatter against the Stirnerian “Unique”.

Nonetheless, his book presents a considerable challenge to those who accept the conventional image of anarchism as a species of socialism.

In *The Art of Community*, Spencer H. MacCullum, a social anthropologist, argues that in the Western Hemisphere there is an inchoate but significant social trend towards substituting “proprietary authority” for the sovereignty of the State. Drawing on his anthropological researches and his knowledge of real estate in the USA, he claims that if such a trend were clarified and acted on in a conscious manner it would result in a society of contract instead of a society of political coercion.

I do not find this prospect attractive. To look to real estate management for social organization is no guarantee that the individual would be any freer than under the State. This “new capability” might well “contain the empirical seed of a new social integration”, but where there is “social integration” there will be not only those who are “integrated”—there will also be those who do the “integrating”. This new effort at “socializing” individualism is no more to my taste than the old.

S.E. PARKER