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Individualism, Anarchism and the Police

Thoughts out of Season

Sidney E. Parker

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The Coptic Press recently published a pamphlet on the “Aims and Principles of Anarchism”. At least, this is what it purports to be, but in fact it is mostly & reiteration of the usual paternosters of anti-parliamentary socialist rhetoric. It also contains several distortions concerning individualist anarchists, particularly in regard to their attitude towards the police. Not all of these are worth a comment, since its anonymous author seems incapable of writing coherently on the subject of individualism, but three examples of his method are instructive.

First is his citing of an unnamed “super-individualist” as saying “of course I would call in the police to protect my individuality”. Who said it and in what context our “anarchist” does not state, but it is clear that the implication is that individualists are in favour of the police and therefore not anarchists. (Perhaps we should be in favour of syndicalist workers’ militias?) Where, in fact, do we stand?

Individualist anarchists are under no illusions regarding the police institution. They recognize it for what it is: an organ of government primarily designed to suppress any individuals whose words or actions violate the laws enacted by government and also to enforce the judgments of the civil courts. As such it is the antithesis of anarchism. As such it is the enemy of individualism. Individuality cannot be limited by legality. The individual is a particularity, the law is a generality, and conflict between the two is inevitable.

However, individualist anarchists are concrete entities living in present time. They acknowledge no sacred principles and place themselves at the centre of their lives. Self-survival, then, is the precondition for their being. If, therefore, their lives are endangered or their possessions threatened and they are not strong enough to defend themselves, and if they have no-one else on whom they can call, then they might well make use of the police as an expedient for defense and survival. And, I suspect, so would the anti-state collectivists of the Coptic Press, despite their show of moral righteousness. Only a possessed by the sacred would not, and he is under the sway of a stronger government than any the State can provide.

Second is an attempt, following in the footsteps of Nicolas Walter in "The Listener", to make Donald Room a spokesman for individualist anarchism. The anonymous author quotes a statement made by D.R. in a radio broadcast as a proof that individualists favour the police.

Now D.R., while calling himself a conscious egoist, is & libertarian communist, not an individualist. He has been known to make out a case for State comprehensive schools on socialist grounds, and to be surprised when asked what this had to do with anarchism! Yet our expert on "anarchism" says that Donald Room is "the honest voice of Individualism".....

Third is the malicious accusation that "the school of Benjamin Tucker – by virtue of their 'individualism' – accepted the need for police to break strikes so as to guarantee the employers' 'freedom'."

This is an accusation made before from the same quarter end it is time it was nailed, Tucker was not a consistent individualist. His attempt to synthesize Stirner and Proudhon and his concern with social engineering placed him in a kind of limbo between socialism and individualism, to the detriment of the latter. But he did some good work for individualism, nonetheless, especially his publication of the English translation of “The Ego and His Own”. For this reason alone, apart from that of intellectual honesty, his name deserves to be cleared of the mud thrown at it.

Tucker did *not* advocate the use of police to break strikes. What he said was something rather different and it can be found on page 259 of his book “Individual Liberty”, published by the Vanguard Press of New York in 1926, He wrote:

“Conspicuous among the scoundrels who have upheld these monopolies is the editor of the New York ‘Sun’. If he tells truth today, he tells it as the devil quotes scripture, – to suit his purpose. He will never consent to an application of equal liberty in the interest of labor, for he belongs to the brotherhood of thieves who prey upon labor. If he only would, we Anarchists would meet him with cheerful acquiescence in its fullest application to the interest of capital. Let Carnegie, Dana & Co. first see to it that every law in violation of equal liberty is removed from the statute-books. if, after that, any laborers shall interfere with the rights of their employers, or shall use force upon inoffensive “scabs,” or shall attack their employers’ watchmen, whether these be Pinkerton detectives, sheriff’s deputies, or the State militia, I pledge myself that, as an Anarchist and in consequence of my Anarchistic faith, I will be among the first to volunteer as a member of a force to repress these disturbers of order and, if necessary, sweep them from the earth.

But while these invasive laws remain, I must view every forcible conflict that arises as the consequence of an original violation of liberty on the part of the employing classes, and, if any sweeping is done, may the laborers hold the broom! Still, while my sympathies thus go with the under dog, I shall never cease to proclaim my conviction that the annihilation of neither party can secure justice, and that the only effective sweeping will be that which clears from the statute-book every restriction of the freedom of the market.”

No doubt a particularly obtuse type of mentality would construct this passage in the same way as does the author of “Aims and Principles of Anarchism”. But to any intelligent reader it will be clear that such a construction could only be made by deforming Tucker’s thoughts.

To finish, I cannot resist quoting our anonymous critic’s description of the individualist anarchist carrying out the path he lays down for individualists:

“...and so Super-Ego standing on its own right Men Defying The Universe I Myself The Outsider, Man Incarnate in his Own Destiny, recreates the old Mumbo-Jumbo of the State.”

Well, what are you laughing at? Shiver, damn you, shiver!

S.E. PARKER