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A Catechism of Anarchy

Social Science Club

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1902

Retrieved on 27th December 2024 from store.c4ss.org
Preface by the Alliance of the Libertarian Left.

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1902

Does Anarchism teach Violence?

Anarchism is the negation of violence. By removing the causes, it would make the recurrence of acts of violence almost, and in time wholly, obsolete.

Why, then, are Acts of Violence committed by Anarchists?

These are individuals who argue that under present conditions they are forced to compromise their principles daily, and in such a manner as to render any protest they make ineffectual; therefore they say: "If I can make, by one compromise, an effectual protest, being willing to bear all the consequences, that is my affair. I show my disapproval of present conditions."

To which Economic School do these belong?

To no one school, as there are both revolutionary and non-resistant anarchists in each school.

Why do not the Non-Resistants condemn the others?

An Anarchist cannot consistently condemn any one; he can only express his disapproval of what is said or done, and try to explain its cause to others.

Not so long as it is the free expression of individual as piration. It becomes evil only when it organizes itself into an attempt to force particular worldconcepts or moral codes upon those who do not accept them. In such organized form it is the worst of evils.

You do not, then, condemn the Doctrines of Christianity?

No: one of the greatest of Anarchists, Tolstoi, is also one of the greatest of Christians. Neither do we condemn Buddhism, Brahmanism, Confucianism, or any other religious doctrine, so long as it is a free expression of the individual's highest concepts. Nevertheless we hold that in perfect freedom yet higher aspirations than any of these may be evolved; and humanity is entitled to its best.

Do you believe in Love?

Yes: by love we hope to redeem the world. It is to the feeling of universal human love that Anarchism mostly appeals.

Do you believe in Marriage?

None which consists in forms or ceremonies. We believe love in itself sufficient. There is no greater pledge than love; a ceremony can add nothing to the perfection of such a union.

But who shall say when the Union is perfect?

No one can judge for another; the individuals concerned must decide for themselves.

But if they be mistaken, will they not separate?

Yes. We believe that the fact that they desired to do so would be sufficient cause.

Would not this mean the Disruption of the Family?

A family which is held together by external force had better be disrupted; it can produce nothing but misery.

Why are some called Philosophic Anarchists?

Anarchism being a philosophy, the expression is tautological; as well say "a philosophical philosophy"; the term, however, was adopted during a former period of popular excitement by certain passive resitants who wished to distinguish themselves from those who advocated forceful resistance to invasion, and continues to be so understood.

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for all, and no man wants more than he can use if he is always sure of that.

Do the Communists believe in Protective Association?

When men produce in common, what they produce belongs to any and all who care to use it; therefore, no need of Protective Association.

What do the Mutualists propose?

A combination of the principle of individualism with that of extensive cooperation of the workers. They regard the present Trades Union as the nucleus of the future producing group. The Bricklayers' Union, for instance, will undertake the work of constructing buildings; it will issue its own checks, representing so much time spent in labor, which checks will be received as money is now; similar organizations will undertake the work of their respective industries; worldwide federation of allied trades would, in course, develop. Thus the employer would be eliminated.

Do you believe these Different Systems could coexist?

Yes; in a free society each individual might try his own way, or each group, however large or small. Doubtless one system might be better adapted to certain localities and temperaments than others.

Supposing a Just System of Distribution prevalent, would you then have Anarchy?

No; Anarchism has a spiritual as well as an economic gospel; just distribution would simply be the groundwork.

For what?

For the free development of all those powers now lying dormant within the individual soul, dwarfed or crushed by civil and moral authorities.

What do you mean by Moral Authority?

That force exercised by the clergy, which pretends to settle for mankind what is right, good, and wrong, evil, commonly called religion.

Do you consider Religion evil?

The terms Anarchist and Socialist are not, then, contradictory?

Not in the least; it is only those who confuse socialism, which is a purely economic proposition, with the Socialist Party, which is an organization working for the realization of that proposition through political action, who conceive them to be contradictory.

What do Anarchist Socialists want?

That the economic program of Socialism shall be brought about through the direct action of the people, instead of through the trickeries of politics.

What is the Individualist Theory?

That a man has a right to the full amount of his product, whether earned by working alone or with the aid of others.

Is that not the Present Condition?

No. The present condition, through the three great monopolies of land, money, and invention, makes it impossible for any man to get what he produces; with the abolition of these, individual initiative would undertake all those great works which unreflecting persons now think possible only to government; but every individual having the chance to employ himself, none would work for another unless he could get as much as by working singly.

Would not this Right of Property in One's Product require government?

It would require voluntary Protective Association. No one would be compelled to accept such insurance if he did not want it, nor pay taxes to support it.

Who are the Communists?

Those who believe that the greatest justice will result from men's producing in common and consuming at will.

Why do they believe this better than Individualism?

Because they do not think it possible to measure the exact amount of any man's product; neither do they think it desirable to waste energy in attempting it, since there is enough and to spare

Preface

"A Catechism of Anarchy" was originally published anonymously in 1902 as a booklet of the Social Science Club in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This edition was first published by the Alliance of the Libertarian Left in December 2011. The text is based upon the original edition, as preserved in the Labadie Collection in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The Social Science Club was a working-class Anarchist reading and discussion group established in Philadelphia by Voltairine de Cleyre, and other members of the Philadelphia social movement. The group met every Sunday evening and included prominent defenders of Individualist, Mutualist, and Communist Anarchism, as well as other members who were interested in Anarchistic principles but did not identify themselves as Anarchists. The Club sponsored lectures, held discussions, and published both new works and translations of classic texts from the Anarchist tradition.

The "Catechism" was published by the group as a whole without a signature; the Labadie Collection attributes the work to the Individualist anarchist speaker and activist Voltairine de Cleyre. But Candace Falk et al. ("Social Science," in the Directory of Organizations, Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years) report an article from the Anarchist paper Free Society, in which the Danish-American anarchist Mary Hansen acknowledged that she had written the first draft. According to Hansen, the final essay was a project of the Club and was finished collectively by the membership, which included de Cleyre, Natasha Notkin, George Brown, Perle McLeod, and many others.

Special thanks are due to Brian Truncala of Chicago, Illinois, for bringing this booklet to our attention.

Anarchy

(Translated from the German by Harry Lyman Koopman.)

Ever reviled, accursed,—ne'er understood,
Thou art the grisly terror of our age.
“Wreck of all order”, cry the multitude,
“Art thou, and war and murder’s endless rage.”

O, let them cry! To them that ne'er have striven,
The truth that lies behind a word to find,
To them the word’s right meaning was not given.
They shall continue blind among the blind.

But thou, O word, so clear, so strong, so pure,
That sayest all which I for goal have taken,
I give thee to the future!—Thine secure
When each at last unto himself shall waken.

Comes it in sunshine? In the tempest’s thrill?
I cannot tell ... but it the earth shall see!
I am an Anarchist! Wherefore I will
Not rule, and also ruled I will not be!

John Henry Mackay.

A Catechism of Anarchy

What is Anarchism? - A social theory which regards the union of order with the absence of all direct government of man by man as the political ideal; absolute individual liberty.

-Century Dictionary.

Who are Anarchists?

Those who accept this ideal, believing that the highest social results will be obtained through the substitution of self-control for all outward authorities, civil or moral.

What is Civil Authority?

That force which interferes with our daily actions, making and punishing criminals, commonly called government.

How does Government make Criminals?

By fostering an unjust system of distribution, wherein one man is dependent on another for his subsistence; failing to secure it he is forced to resort to crime, for which, again, the government punishes him.

This accounts only for Thefts; what of Murder?

It is hunger, or dread of deprivation, which drives most men to acts of violence.

What of such as are prompted by Jealousy, Hatred, or Revenge?

Either they are the acts of derangement, temporary or permanent, and to be treated as such, or they are survivals of primitive instincts, which all social experience shows must be outgrown through education and the gradual extension of individual rights; repressive legislation only makes them more savage; revenge cannot be cured by revenge.

Since Anarchists claim that Crime results from Economic Injustice, how would the Abolition of Government effect Economic Justice?

The force which protects the owners of the great natural sources of production and means of exchange being removed, people would be free to experiment and discover what economic arrangement was best, instead of being compelled to accept the decision of the ruling majority or minority.

What Economic System do Anarchists propose?

There are different schools; mainly Socialist, Individualist, Communist, and Mutualist.