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Anarchism: Its Aims and Methods

Victor Yarros

1887

Those of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, who have familiarized yourselves with the constitution of the Boston Anarchists' Club — and we most earnestly request, all of you to bestow upon that document a candid and thoughtful consideration — have not failed to notice the contents of Article II, which reads as follows:

The purpose of the Club is the abolition of all government imposed upon man by man by holding public meetings, lectures, and debates, distributing Anarchistic literature, and all other agencies, methods, and measures not themselves partaking of the nature of such government.

The “abolition of government imposed upon man by man” is the definition of the term *An-archy*, which, in the form of a negation, is made to express the basic and central affirmation underlying our philosophy and system of thought, its equivalent, stated in positive form, being *Individual Sovereignty*, or Egoism.

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An address delivered at the first public meeting of the Boston Anarchists's Club, and adopted by that organization as its authorized exposition of its principles. Published as a pamphlet by Benjamin R. Tucker, 1887.

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This Club, then, is organized by individuals who refuse to sanction the existence of the *State*, and who are determined to labor for its overthrow and for the realization of individual liberty. It is essential that there should be no uncertainty in regard to our position. We reject all forms of government,— that is, external regulation,— and demand to be allowed full freedom in the exercise of all our faculties and powers without any interference or control whatever. And we hold that we are justified in employing any and all means not themselves partaking of the nature of government for the purpose of securing the desired ends,— that is to say, in trying to achieve freedom for ourselves, we are entitled to the use of all Anarchistic means and to none that, are in any sense Archistic. We do not presume to speak for others; consequently, when we declare war upon government, we do so only so far as it relates to our own interests and crosses our own paths. We do not propose to dictate to others and force them to accept our ideas of reform, for that would be equivalent to an attempt to impose *our* government upon them. We fully assume the cost and the responsibility of the exercise of our freedom, which ends immediately where the equal freedom of our fellow-man begins. Those who have no fault to find with the existing State may continue to support it; those who flatter themselves that they have discovered a more perfect State should be free to establish it for themselves and enjoy its blessings or suffer from its inherent evils; and all the various classes and sets of dreamers who have peculiar notions regarding things ought to be allowed to realize their dreams, provided that none of them infringe upon the liberties of outsiders. In the end only the fittest would survive, and intelligence and knowledge gained through observing and comparing the results of all the systems in operation would be the chief factors in determining that survival.

Vaguely conveyed in the language of the constitutional provision, the implication, once understood, cannot fail to impress the intelligent investigator with a profound sense of respect for this new departure in the world of reform. The unimpeachable

record of history fatally establishes the presence, in almost all reform movements to which a greater or smaller influence on man and society may be justly ascribed, of the common incriminating feature of unjustifiable coercion and extreme carelessness in the choice of methods. The ideal, the theory, the utopia, monopolized the attention; the mode of application had to be determined by other factors. The end justified the means: consequently, all that pertained to the practical sides of the divine and glorious ideas upon which alone the salvation of mankind rested was dismissed as too "material" and unworthy of consideration. To establish an undefinable "Right," nothing was wrong; to "fight" for "peace" was not thought paradoxical. Like orthodox Christianity, which is incapable of perceiving any inharmony between its avowed general mission of saving fallen humanity and bringing it heavenly bliss, and its cool and deliberate consignment of millions of beings to eternal tortures and anguish, nearly all reform movements, inspired by lofty aims and brilliant utopias, sought to materialize by and through means which could have no effect other than reactionary and evil-aggravating. For the first time in the history of great movements, "principle" and "policy" are made to conform to one and the same standard, and subject to the domination of one and the same guiding power, in the theory and practice of Anarchy. Whether looked upon as expounders of certain truths and apostles of a certain system of philosophy, or whether studied as practical rebels and conspirators against existing iniquitous institutions, the same consistency, plumb-line adherence to well-defined limits, and scrupulous regard for the rights of the non-Anarchists distinguish the Anarchist reformers. Theoretically defending individual liberty, and appealing to the intelligence of the people for endorsement of their scientific conclusions, the Anarchists are prepared to set the example of practical non-interference. They aspire to be teachers, but they have no intention of becoming dictators; they are ready to lead

the people out of the wilderness to the promised land, but they do not mean to drive them by force.

Having explained the meaning of the article quoted above, we are confronted with the necessity of stating our reasons for (1) our opposition and enmity toward the State and (2) for our confident belief that Anarchy would improve and elevate the world's condition.

This, as we all know, is a practical age. We have no patience with people who waste time and thought on the consideration of any but the most burning, vital, practical, and urgent questions of the hour; and we have nothing but contempt and ridicule for the reformers and social philosophers who invent impracticable schemes, offer puzzling solutions, and flood the world with utopias, sentimental effusions, and fanciful ideals. We seek immediate and tangible benefits from everything that makes claim to our attention, and our first question regarding anything we may be asked to look into is whether the matter is closely allied to material prosperity.

Before we proceed with the main argument, we must, in view of this circumstance, comment upon one current notion concerning the Anarchistic doctrine,— a notion which, because very plausible on the surface, is misleading and dangerous. Some kindly-disposed people, intending it as a compliment, frequently refer to Anarchy as that ideal and millennial state of society of which prophets spoke and philosophers wrote and poets sang and dreamers of all ages drew fantastic pictures. We are comforted by the admission that humanity is sure to attain that high perfection which will obliterate all distinctions and make laws unnecessary. Every man will be a law unto himself, and government a thing unknown.

While duly appreciating the generosity and benevolence of this view of Anarchy, we must make the disappointing declaration nevertheless that there is no more truth and intelligent comprehension of Anarchistic philosophy in it than there is in its antipode, which is entertained by a far greater number of people not distinguished for excessive liberality and toleration,— namely, the view which

that tend to deprive them of the opportunity to follow out their programme.

That the State may not be blessed by its enemies, and that society may not perish at the hands of its impetuous and indiscriminating friends, Anarchism raises the torch of Liberty, which illuminates the past, giving all social students a clear insight into the meaning of history and the laws of societary development, and which is destined to guide the human world through the chaotic present into the bright future.

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to the necessity of struggling for its existence unaided by its usual numerous allies. Such a state of things the Anarchists have in their power to bring about. The masses will not be practically enlisted in the reform movement, but they will be disinclined to exterminate those who shall be in the front line on the day of the opening of the campaign against the State.

As soon as numerical strength and other important considerations warrant it, the rebellious minority quietly establishes the new system and inaugurates an order based on Anarchy and equity. Practical teaching and application of new ideas to the various branches of activity and relations of life become the order of the day. The State, by its very efforts to suppress this movement, will insure its own speedy downfall. In its enfeebled state, any extravagant expenditure of energy and vitality will bring it nearer to the grave.

Thus, whatever their *rights* in this matter, the judgment, the natural sentiments, the necessities of the environment, all point to peaceable and constructive methods as the methods by which the great industrial problem is to be permanently solved. Such methods, fortunately, can be employed freely and openly. Were it otherwise, all revolutionary forces would unite in the defence of the elementary right of free discussion, and force would take the place of reason. That right recovered, force should be left a monopoly in the hands of the State, and reason be made the sole weapon of attack by the army of progress, except, perhaps, in some rare instances, when it may be found advisable and serviceable for purposes of propaganda to provoke the State, by some hostile demonstration, to ill-considered acts of repression, especially if the inherent injustice of the State should be strikingly exemplified by its conduct.

Authoritarians, basing their philosophy on force and artifice, have no need to investigate the question of methods, but can use all at once; Anarchists, proposing no compulsory reforms, but simply aiming to demonstrate the superiority of free association by object lessons, must be on their guard against any methods

can discover nothing in Anarchy except chaos and universal war. Anarchy brings peace, and brings it in the here and the now. Sickly sentimentalism and ferocious savagery are alike foreign to Anarchism, which is simply and objectively the Science of Society and the text-book of Justice, and which concerns itself very little about the remote future, but deals with the present and the very next step of progress.

What is it that absorbs and preoccupies the thinking mind of the world today? A multitude and variety of pressing problems. There are infinite abuses to be removed, evils to be abolished, maladies to be cured, grievances to be settled, wrongs to be righted. There are all sorts of movements on foot aiming at reform. Starting from the same point in earnest search for truth, reformers travel in all directions, and explore all roads and by-ways, in the end finding themselves in a circle, in the midst of a raging battle and hopeless confusion. Unguided by intelligence, the abundant crop of good intentions and noble impulses paves the road to the hell of modern universal uncertainty and insecurity. Anarchism throws a flood of light upon this wild scene, and clearly outlines the issue as well as the methods of settling it. It sums up the whole complicated situation in the following trenchant declaration:

Government Is the Father of All Social Evil;

while it reveals the true and perfect solution of the problem in the formula of Proudhon:

Liberty the Mother, Not the Daughter, of Order.

The Anarchists' motto is: "No more government of man by man," and their chief battle with the State,— "the State, that debases man; the State, that prostitutes woman; the State, that corrupts children; the State, that trammels love; the State, that stifles thought; the State, that monopolizes land; the State, that limits credit; the State, that restricts exchange; the State, that gives idle capital the power of increase and allows it, through interest, rent, and profits, to rob industrious labor of its products."

They do not claim that the mere abolition of the State would instantly result in the world's regeneration; but they assert that nothing short of such abolition will be sufficient to enable those factors and forces upon which the world's regeneration *does* depend to fully and freely enter into play. Not all the crimes with which the State is charged in the above indictment, which is copied verbatim from the first number of the Anarchists' organ, *Liberty*, have been directly and deliberately committed by it; but indirectly it is the cause of their continued existence, if not of their origin.

We need not attempt here to trace the growth of the social disease back to its prime source. It is inessential to the purport of our argument to undertake a search for the "cause of causes." When placing the responsibility for most of the modern social evils at the door of the State, we do not for a moment lose sight of the indisputable fact that the firm hold which the State has on the minds of the people is due to some general cause for which the State, being a result, cannot be held accountable. Later we shall have occasion to touch upon the fact of the people's fond nursing of the viper; at present we are concerned with the nature of the State, its past, and its effect on human relations.

The State, as Herbert Spencer says, is begotten of aggression and by aggression. It is essentially a war-institution. Both primitive and modern history abound with convincing evidence that coercive government owes its origin, as well as its preservation and opportunities for extension, to special climatic, geographical, and other physical conditions. War was the agent of evolution and the means whereby tribes unfavorably situated secured their survival. The political State, in whatever form, represents, in its main and unvarying features, that type of social organization which is best adapted to the necessities and emergencies of warlike people. On the other hand we read [See Spencer's "Political Institutions" and Tyler's "Anthropology"] and hear very frequently of tribes and small communities living in peace and contentment in the utter absence of a coercive power, or of what we call government.

considerable number of people. But despotism may rest in peaceful slumber so long as dense ignorance keeps watch over it and guards it against assault. It is the policy of the Anarchists to win the confidence and respect of the people and array them against the State, if not to the extent of fraternizing with the former in their battle against the latter, then, at least, to the extent of maintaining a neutral and indifferent position. This policy precludes the use of all but constructive and educational methods. To smash the idol is to excite the rage and hatred of the worshipper; to gently and gradually dissipate the fog of superstition and expose the worthlessness and impotency of the idol may require patience, time, and endurance, but the issue is certain and satisfactory. All Anarchist workers devote their energies in the direction of spreading the light of true social principles, popularizing political and economic science, and illustrating the beauty and excellence of voluntaryism and general recognition of the right of individual self-government. All forces are concentrated on the work of creating a strong anti-State tendency,— a tendency that shall prepare the conditions and pave the way for the carrying out, on an extensive scale, of the Anarchists' plan of passive resistance to the State, through which the emancipation is to be principally realized and the great change introduced.

Light and rational ideas can reach the masses but to a slight degree. The Anarchists do not delude themselves with the false expectation of converting the world and reorganizing society by mere theoretical propaganda. Intellectual development and sober thinking are luxuries which the poor, degraded, half-starved victims of ages of injustice can neither enjoy nor appreciate; consequently the social transformation, which can only be hastened by being thoroughly understood, can look for little encouragement and positive help from the masses. The intelligent and influential few are the sole *active* factors in reform, and they are formidable, unconquerable, when, by skilful diplomacy, they succeed in eliminating the sympathies of the masses from the State and subjecting the latter

trampled under foot individual rights, thereby forfeits all claim to consideration and no longer retains any rights which the aggrieved individuals are bound to respect. Being immoral itself, it cannot ask its victims to govern themselves by moral codes. In restraining and punishing the aggressor, therefore, the school referred to deems itself fairly entitled to the use of any and all means, guiding itself in the matter of practical choice of methods by considerations of expediency and wise strategy purely and solely. As to those Anarchists who are conscious only of the sovereignty of might, and can discover no rights in nature, of course nothing but wisdom and prudence can have any weight with them in deciding upon methods with which to assail the State. Thus the Anarchists claim that they would be entirely beyond reproach, so far as the principle of equal rights is concerned, were they to practise the latest discoveries in the science of revolutionary warfare on the direct agents of the State or even on the indirect defenders of it whom the plea of ignorance or honest motive do not save from being regarded as *particeps criminis*. But they realize that it would be suicidal for them to assume the offensive and make direct attack upon the State; for, being few in number, they would speedily be conquered and annihilated. While those blind slaves, the masses of the people, in their ignorance of true social principles, are worshipping the power which grinds them to powder, and stand ready to defend it with their last drop of blood, crucifying its antagonists and their own best well-wishers as fiends and enemies of society, to fight the State amounts to rendering it a great service and strengthening its evil power. Wisdom teaches that it is in the interest of the Anarchistic cause to accept methods which, though doing their work slowly and even imperceptibly, compensate for this drawback, if such it be, by the virtue of leading surely and safely to the final triumph. Premature change, or desperate attempts to make the world move onward in disregard of the laws of social growth, result in violent reaction. The practical abolition of the State would be a very easy matter, if the State *idea* were once abolished in the *minds* of a

They have their methods and agencies for restraining trespassers, and they find them entirely adequate. Recognizing thus that the State is not an accident in history, and conceding even that it was both necessary and serviceable to the progressive development of society, the Anarchists, however, maintain that its legitimate occupation is entirely gone, and that it is at present playing a very abnormal part in the social life of civilized and industrial nations, interfering with things which brook no interference, undertaking the management of affairs it knows nothing about, and assuming tasks for which it has not the least fitness. Disaster and failure follow its footsteps. It is an engine of destruction, constitutionally incapable of constructive functions. The smooth, regular, and unobstructed running of the social machine requires the annihilation and removal of the State, this immense wreck, which so many are seeking to remodel and reconstruct for the purpose of adapting it to new uses. The State must die, if society is to live. To attempt to cure society by State medicine is to intensify its suffering and make its recovery more and more doubtful.

No one will pretend at this late day that statute regulations and restrictions hold society together, either exclusively or largely. The growth of social ties necessitates the diminution of warlike propensities. The same causes that brought social life into existence, gaining strength and weight by constant activity, are operating to perfect both persons and environment and make the adaptation between them complete. This adaptation, the Anarchists assert, is hindered by the State. For what does the State do? Does it confine itself to the narrow function of restraining and punishing criminals? It does not. (And, besides, that could be done without its expensive and cumbersome machinery.) Is the State a handmaid to society, ministering to its wants and attending to its needs and conveniences? It is not. The State is industriously engaged in granting privileges, creating distinctions, and producing inequalities. These tend to disrupt society, and therefore the people, having no respect for them, violate them at every turn. To protect these

monopolies and to enforce the laws an army of public officials and police becomes necessary. Should the State be wiped out, with all its inequalities and inequities, very little motive for crime would be left. Our industrial civilization, with its two concomitants,— unconscious, automatic cooperation and conscious, voluntary association for various purposes, is powerfully conducive to mutual respect and defence. And no penalty for wrong-doing would be more dreaded or more effective than a temporary or permanent exclusion of the offender from the social benefits. The principles of the state are the principles, and its methods and tactics are the methods and tactics, of war. Just as peaceful industrial pursuits and the application of autonomous principles are incompatible with continuous warfare, or rigorous vigilance and preparation for war, so the existence of the State and its pernicious activities cripple the body social and extinguish the spontaneous spirit animating it.

Perhaps the distinction between the indirect influence of the principles of Society and the direct compulsion of the brutal State will be more firmly grasped when the effects of the application of both methods of regulation on a particular instance are studied and contrasted. Stephen Pearl Andrews uses this luminous illustration:

The highest type of human society in the existing social order is found in the parlor. In the elegant and refined reunions of the cultured classes there is none of the impertinent interference of legislation. The Individuality of each is fully admitted. Intercourse, therefore, is perfectly free. Conversation is continuous, brilliant, and varied. Groups are formed according to attraction. They are continually broken up, and re-formed, through the operation of the same subtle and all-pervading influence. Mutual deference pervades all classes, and the most perfect harmony ever yet attained in complex human relations prevails... If there are laws of etiquette at all, they are

govern themselves, or not govern themselves, as they please. Unavoidably the conclusion is forced on all thinking minds that the Anarchists are well supplied with arguments justifying their demand to be excused from further connection with the government. We stand here today to proclaim our determination to fight for the freedom which should be ours. We challenge the governmentalsists to show cause why we should not be released. And we warn the State that we will not consult its wishes as to the weapons to be used against it.

And here we have come to the point where a statement in regard to the highly important question of methods is in order. After having presented our conviction that the abolition of the State is absolutely indispensable to social evolution and the true solution of all the burning issues of the day, and after having cautioned you against identifying us with the world's worst enemies, the *missionaries*, whether social, political, or religious, who, devoted to the divine truth which they feel themselves to be possessed of and considering it a sacred obligation to reform society according to their infallible principles, become crusaders and convert the people by bullets or ballots, an answer may appropriately be made to the question what the Anarchists, for themselves, propose to do and how *they* mean to obtain their divorce from the faithless State.

Let no one be misled by the Anarchists' emphatic opposition to coercion into attributing to them the championship of the Christian non-resistance policy. All Anarchists believe, in accordance with the right of self-defence, that "against tyrants all means are justifiable," and that "all is fair in war." The Anarchists are at war with the State, and must regard as foes (though aiming to make them friends) all those who in any way uphold and strengthen its hands in its criminal career. The school believing in inalienable natural rights regard the State as an invader, who, having wantonly

concede that individuals have a perfect right to abolish the State for themselves, and must condemn all interference of the majority with them as contrary to the law of natural justice. As to those who hold might to be the only “right” in nature, and who know of no law of justice except such as enlightened self-interest seekers determine upon as most conducive to the happiness of all and each, certainly *they* cannot approve majority rule. Their desideratum being perfect peace, security, and social harmony, they cannot consciously admit any discord-breeding element. Minorities are not easily crushed, out in this enlightened age. Buckle said that natural science is democratic; it would be more correct to say that natural science is Anarchic. In proportion as men become liberated mentally from superstitious reverence for phantoms, spooks, and “clothes” — in the broad sense of Herr Teufelsdröckh — and learn to look upon might as the only guarantee of equal freedom and security do Anarchic principles begin to prevail and authority begin to decay. Dynamite has no respect for numbers. Majorities are taught to have some consideration for individual liberties when they are shown the practical uses of the “resources of civilization.” Gunpowder shook the thrones; dynamite paralyzes majorities. Growing intelligence, coupled with the increasing opportunities for successful resistance, is daily sweeping away the remnants of the despotism of the human world’s childhood. The sovereignty of the individual is becoming a reality. Majoritism, never sustained by principle, can no longer be defended on grounds of expediency.

Clearly, therefore, consent must mean individual consent, and a government claiming to be founded on consent which, by force of majoritism, denies the individual right of secession is violating its own constitutional safeguards and breaking faith with the citizens whom it induced to accept its services and protection.

But Anarchists have even greater cause to complain. They never delegated any offices to the government and never made any promises to support it. Consequently it is barefaced tyranny and transparent sophistry to deny them the original right to

mere suggestions of principles admitted into and judged of for himself by each individual mind.

Here, pertinently observes Mr. Andrews, we find circumstances which most men, including legislators and statesmen, would have us dread and avoid as invariably and inevitably productive of chaos, confusion, social war, and general demoralization, working but exactly opposite results, presenting a spectacle of ideal order. And he asks:

Suppose the intercourse of the parlor to be regulated by special legislation. Let the time which each gentleman shall be allowed to speak to each lady be fixed by law; the position in which they should sit or stand be precisely regulated; the subjects which they shall be allowed to speak of, and the tone of voice and accompanying gestures carefully defined,— all under pretext of preventing disorder and encroachment upon each other’s privileges and rights, and can anything be conceived better calculated or more certain to convert social intercourse into intolerable slavery and hopeless confusion?

All will unhesitatingly admit the beauty of *laissez faire* principles in the parlor; yet few will listen to the proposal to carry them into other branches of social existence, which fact convicts them of pitiful lack of appreciation of the real nature of the phenomena. Legislation in the parlor is not intolerable because the parlor requires no regulation, but because it requires another *kind* of regulation. And that kind of regulation is far more stringent and rigid than any Draconian code, which, however, does not prevent it from being cheerfully and gracefully complied with. Liberty is the mother of the order reigning in the parlor. When persons voluntarily unite for the purpose of carrying out a common design, or supplying a

want equally felt by all, little difficulty is experienced in maintaining harmony among the sovereign members of the association. As long as one finds it to his interest or pleasure to be a unit of a particular body, he is certain to zealously guard it against dissolution or partial derangement.

Mr. Andrews's illustration disposes with thoroughness of the quasi-philosophic argument often made against the central doctrine of Anarchy; to the effect that freedom is antisocial, and that Individual Sovereignty implies a return to barbarism. For the command of a man to himself is essentially different from the command of governor to governed. The freedom here contended for is freedom from arbitrary authority and compulsory regulation assumed by men against the will and interest of other men fully equal, if not superior, to them, and not freedom from natural limitations or restrictions imposed by conditions outside of the control of man. The cultured and refined member of society who, in order to command the respect of his peers, to win the confidence and love of his inferiors, and to gain self-approval, minutely analyzes his conduct and thoroughly disciplines himself, is in no sense less free than the isolated savage with his strong, uncontrollable passions and fierce instincts. The savage having become civilized, *savage* freedom no longer attracts him. But no change affects his aversion to dictatorial government; on the contrary, the deeper his social attachments, the more intense his hatred of direct coercion.

To abolish government and extend personal freedom, then, is not to endanger social stability, but to surround it with additional guarantees.

Next to the principle of voluntaryism, as a basis and condition of social existence, stands the principle of equality, Not the authoritarian equality of the paternal reformers, but natural equality. No society can maintain itself if it is divided into classes having distinct or antagonistic interests. Equality of opportunities and freedom of development of the faculties tend to produce an equality which is wholly consistent with variety. But governments set men against

taking care of him and taxing him for it. Yet we all know that this "government by consent" will no more allow Anarchists to live in their own way than the Czar of all the Russian would. What possible excuse is there for regulating the private life, habits, business affairs, etc., of persons who do not infringe upon anybody's rights? None whatever, and all the hypocritical twaddle about the dignity of the law, the interests of morality, and the rights of the collectivity, is nothing but a mask for irresponsible usurpation. This alternative no one can escape; either the individual is above all human institutions, and then no institution can forcibly exact his aid and allegiance, or man is subordinate to laws and institutions, and then popular government is a crime against divine law.

Doubtless there are many who, reconciled to majority rule as the least objectionable form of rule, interpret "government by consent" to mean the consent of a majority of the governed. But, in the first place, majorities never rule. It is a political maxim that power ever tends to concentrate in few hands, and the blind submission of unreasoning minds is mistaken for intelligent ratification. And assuming that the majority do have the proper qualifications to pronounce judgment upon legislative work, and actually do express their will, by what process of reasoning is the conclusion reached that minorities are bound to abide by the decision of majorities? Either majorities can govern minorities in all things or in absolutely none. That we do not meet any champions of the omnipotence of majorities shows that there is no principle behind majoritism. Those who believe in natural rights and natural justice can make no exception in favor of majority government. If we all have equal natural rights to life and liberty, and if no one can rightfully, under any pretext whatever, violate these individual rights, then it is impossible to understand how A and B, who could exercise no authority over C when acting independently and separately, find themselves possessed of rightful authority over him the moment they agree to act conjointly. Whatever their ideas of expediency, when pressed for a *just* solution, all believers in natural rights must

neither the desire, nor the idea of its being necessary or favorable to them, to suppress other forms of social organization. In fact, they could not pretend to be Anarchists, if they contemplated any forcible conversion of people to their beliefs; and they would show little confidence in the intrinsic strength of their practical system, if they feared the competition of other systems. No; the Anarchists do not propose to save people from folly and injury against their will. All they ask is to be let alone,— to be allowed to ignore or practically to abolish the State for themselves. If there are victims of the divinity spook among you, who still would preach the rendering unto Caesar what is alleged to be his by divine right, they will be “commended to cold oblivion.” We address ourselves exclusively to upholders of government by consent. How, we ask, can a government said to be founded on the consent of the governed consistently continue to govern people after they unequivocally declare their hostility to it and demand to be released from its chains? Surely no government can be based on consent which does not take the trouble to learn the people’s wishes; and surely no government can be more despicable, unprincipled, and cowardly than that which drowns the cries of anguish and of suffering of the slaves whom it crushes beneath its iron heel in loud boasts of popular choice and noisy celebrations of independence. Can there be any stronger evidence of the criminal and treasonable character of the State than the fact of its compelling people to support and obey it in spite of their protests? If this government is based on consent, then the Anarchists, who very emphatically do *not* consent to tolerate the abuses, knavery, incompetency, and ignorant folly of our law-makers, should be allowed to enjoy perfect peace, so far as the State is concerned, as long as they do not invade the liberties of such people as *do* consent to have the government act for them and over them. Consent, to mean anything, must be of course individual consent. Now, if an individual chooses to forego the “protection” which the government offers to his person and property, it is manifestly absurd for the government to insist upon

men and classes against classes by their favoritism, system of privileges, and special opportunities. This artificial inequality gives rise to class prejudices, jealousy, hatred, and discord. It tempts and forces some to commit crimes, while it reduces others to abject slavery. Thus it gradually undermines society. Soon comes revolution, and a civilization is in ruins. The modern conflict between the rich and the poor could not exist but for the State, which feeds on strife and strengthened in war. A solution of the labor problem would involve a dissolution of the State. For all that is required to such solution is State non-interference. Labor would reap its full reward, if the State did not furnish a special class of people with weapons and means whereby the latter is enabled to enslave and plunder the former. The State produces nothing and possesses nothing. If it is seen give something to anybody, that must have been taken forcibly or fraudulently from somebody else. In a state of freedom, nothing would command a price except labor, and the fact that idlers and non-producers find it possible to deprive labor of its due through rent, interest, and profits, which, being a reward of capital, could not exist under freedom, is sufficient to indicate to logical minds the real source of the labor troubles as well as their efficient cause.

Most of our eminent political and sociological writers, alive to the organic evils of government, concur in the opinion that the State ought to be deprived of all power to regulate industry, commerce, and morals, and restricted solely to the function of protecting persons and property against invasion and criminal aggression. Even if governments ever *could* be reduced to this modest occupation, the Anarchist would still decline to surrender into their keeping his person and property, because he knows that no monopoly ever remained faithful to its patrons. If protection is desirable, it can only be secured through the competition of various associations organized for that purpose and appearing in a free market to solicit the custom of the sovereign individuals. And there would be no more ground for compelling a man to support a protective

force which he has no use for or no confidence in than there is for forcing him to join a religious institution in the interest of his spiritual salvation. But government exhibits no willingness to narrow its circle; realizing that, after being reduced to a police-force, the tendency to reduce it further and further will continue (especially since it will inevitably fail to satisfactorily perform its office) till it teaches zero, government is bound to meddle with every detail of the citizen's life, slowly developing into an absolute despotism.

Be that as it may, the question of the scope and proportions of governmental power is a subordinate and purely practical question, which cannot be intelligently discussed in the absence of a definite understanding of first principles. When an association is organized on a voluntary basis, and members have the right to withdraw at any time, no limit need be put beforehand to the field of its operations. The members can increase and diminish its functions at will, and experience may safely be relied upon for demonstrating just what the amount of benefit there is to be derived from associative effort. The question is as to the recognition of government *in principle*. If it is fundamentally indefensible, then, no matter what good it may effect incidentally or accidentally, it can never compensate the individual for the outrage and injury inflicted upon him in stealing his freedom and personal rights in the first place. The principle of government once recognized, however partial and qualified the recognition, the practical irresistible tendency is toward absorption by the government of all functions that are not physically the exclusive property of the individual. For, this question of limits being a matter upon which opinions may differ, who but the government can finally decide? And is it likely to decide against itself and openly confess incapacity? It may be well for those who are favoring compromises and half-measures to carefully consider this point.

"There is a strange heterogeneity in our political faiths," says Herbert Spencer. "Systems that have had their day... are patched with modern notions utterly unlike in quality and color; and men

gravely display these systems, wear them and walk about in them, quite unconscious of their grotesqueness. This transition state of ours, partaking as it does equally of the past and the future, breeds hybrid theories exhibiting the oddest union of bygone despotism and coming freedom." Anarchists lay particular stress upon the vital truth that all reform, to be reform, must be in the line of the "coming freedom," or, rather, must be *the* freedom. Anything that conflicts with the tendency toward freedom, and contains the elements of the past,— of compulsion and governmental regulation, though it may seem to confer an advantage, and though it may in fact bring relief in a special instance, must inevitably produce a corresponding, if not a greater, amount of mischief in an unexpected quarter. The State may seem to prove a benefactor on some occasions; but its benefits, even if real, are purchased at too great an expense: for it is these trifling benefits that secure it perpetual reprieves and give it new leases of life. When not very narrowly viewed, these small benefits are seen to be fertile sources of misery. Buckle said that the only good legislation is that repealing other legislation. But the State has no intention of committing suicide; as fast as old laws are repealed new ones are manufactured, and each of these laws creates a market for a number of others. Being driven by artificially established barriers and iniquitous laws to the commission of crimes, more law, a "stronger government," are required to repress and punish the offenders so driven. Reformers who really strive for a freer and better future should beware of "looking back" to the infernal dominion of authority. One glance, a slight turn,— and all is lost. The straight path of liberty must be followed without hesitation, without reservation, without regret.

The question logically arising at this juncture is whether, seeing the State to be a solid fact, we are justified in immediately proceeding to attack it without waiting for the whole mass of citizens to join us in the engagement. Now, we have already warned you against the assumption that Anarchists seek to abolish the State *for all*, without consulting the preferences of all. Anarchists have