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Why I, an Anarchist, Work with Socialists

William Holmes

June 5, 1890

Why do I, an Anarchist, aid and abet State Socialists, Nationalists, and Single-tax advocates by distributing their literature and otherwise advancing their doctrines?

Before answering this question let us consider the nature of some of the reforms which the disciples of each of these respective schools seek to accomplish. Let us see if there are not one or more objects desired by them in common.

State Socialists and Nationalists, as well as Anarchists, desire the abolition of interest and profit, the two former by governmental management of business at cost, the last mentioned by the abolition of restrictive government and consequent play of free competition, while all three regard cooperation as the basis of anew civilization. Every Anarchist, of course, believes in absolute free trade, while Single-taxers also preach this doctrine and wage incessant warfare against monopoly and privilege. Again, Nationalists, Single-tax advocates, and State Socialists, unite in declaring that government would be less cumbersome and less costly than it now is. They are all strenuous advocates of more individual free-

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Retrieved on 2020-06-11 from www.libertarian-labyrinth.org

Twentieth Century 4 no. 23 (June 5, 1890): 3–4.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

dom, and each contend that this felicitous condition would result from the establishment of their system. "Plumb-line" Individualists may ridicule this idea, but I maintain that the declaration is born of ardent desire for liberty, and it is highly probable that the future system will mould itself in conformity with that desire, rather than to meet present programs and plans. Let it not be forgotten that sociology is largely an empirical science, and its realization is apt to develop unthought-of possibilities. To sum up, then, the common impulse which moves Anarchists, State Socialists, Nationalists, and Single-taxers to attack present systems and conditions, is to abolish them.

In this consideration of the common objects of a part or all of these schools, I find an excuse for making common cause with all of them.

Now, how do I know what system is going to immediately supersede the present? Does any one know? When I see the tendency toward centralization of all wealth in fewer and fewer hands, and the growing conviction that public interests would be better subserved by national, state, and municipal control of public franchises, I am almost led to believe we must first have State Socialism or Nationalism. When I think of the growing influence and popularity of the Single-tax scheme, its apparent simplicity, and the ease with which it might be practically put into operation, the probability seems great that the next step will be in that direction. I am inclined to believe that we shall pass through one and perhaps all of these changes, but we cannot stop there or go backward. I know that the direction of progress is, as Spencer puts it, through successive differentiations from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. What surprises me is that, believing in this indisputable law, Spencer and his numerous disciples should bewail the approach of "the coming slavery." It seems to me an obvious case of reasoning backward. I, as a believer in progress and as an Anarchist, hold that no matter what form of society shall follow the present system, it will be in conformity with natural law, it must be in the direct line of

progress. Beyond is liberty, toward which, in spite of projected systems, and notwithstanding the lugubrious cries of pessimists, we are constantly tending.

I disseminate that literature which, in a given direction, I have reason to believe will do the most good. By using a little judgment one can readily ascertain the mental calibre of the person approached, and his or her inclination toward radicalism. I have distributed "Looking Backward" where I would have found it impossible to even recommend a known work on Socialism or Anarchism. If I find a person really desirous of learning about the Single-tax, or State Socialism, I don't discourage him by ridiculing these doctrines; I endeavor to assist him to a fair understanding of them, and afterward try to lead him on to greater truths! But I don't waste any time on numskulls; I have learned by experience not to "throw pearls to swine," so when I find a person either disinclined to listen, or too dull to comprehend the simplest propositions' in social science, I let him alone. Henry George's doctrine has aptly been called the entering wedge to Socialism. It is the thin end of the wedge, but when driven into the tough plank of land monopoly there is a creaking and a snapping of the old timber, which augurs well for the possibilities of the whole wedge.

The great value to me, as an agitator, of such books as "Social Problems," "Looking Backward, and Rational Communism," is their power to stir up thought. To say that such books are "worthless" as factors in the solution of the social problem is sheer nonsense. Each is, in its own way, a terrible arraignment of existing institutions. Thousands of people owe their mental awakening to the true condition of society to these and kindred works. Thousands have for the first time felt their cheeks flush with shame at the awful wrongs committed against humanity, and their blood quicken with hope at the promise of a new and better civilization when reading these books.

Believing, as I do, that there is good in all things, that there are truths in every doctrine, and that no theory of social reform yet

discovered contains all truth why should I hesitate to promulgate the doctrines I have mentioned? But, above all, as an agitator, why should I not assist in creating and nourishing a spirit of discontent? Show me a work depicting the hypocrisy, the fraud, the rottenness, and the awful barbarities fostered and practiced under the present system, and I care not what plan or method is suggested as a remedy, I will do my utmost to increase its circulation. The remedy I will leave to the awakened consciences of the people and the evolutionary forces in nature.

Nor do I think there is anything in this course inconsistent with my belief in Anarchism, since as I have already said, I believe Anarchism to be inevitable. But while I believe in Anarchism as the highest truth yet evolved, and until I have more evidence of greater, shall disseminate its doctrines, I am not ready to say it contains no error. Perhaps, in the ever pregnant womb of nature there struggles a higher and grander truth which shall some day come to the world, uniting and harmonizing apparently conflicting theories making possible the quick realization of that noble dream of philosophers, prophets, and sages—the millennium on earth.