

FREEDOM

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ACT FOR YOURSELVES.

A QUESTION which we are often asked is: "How will you organise the future society on Anarchist principles?" If the question were put to Herr Bismarck, or to somebody who fancies that a group of men is able to organise society as they like, it would seem very natural. But in the ears of an Anarchist it sounds very strangely, and the only answer we can give to it is: "We cannot organise you. It will depend upon *you* what sort of organisation you will choose." If the masses continue to cherish the idea that a government can do everything, and reorganise economical relations—the growth of centuries—by a few laws, then we may well wait whole centuries until the rule of Capital is abolished. But if there is among the working-classes a strong minority of men who understand that no government—however dictatorial its powers—is able to expropriate the owners of capital, and this minority acquires sufficient influence to induce the workmen to avail themselves of the first opportunity of taking possession of land and mines, of railways and factories—without paying much heed to the talking at Westminster—then we may expect that some new kind of organisation will arise for the benefit of the commonwealth.

That is precisely the task we impose upon ourselves. To bring workmen and workmen's friends to the conviction that they must rely on themselves to get rid of the oppression of Capital, without expecting that the same thing can be done for them by anybody else. The emancipation of the workmen must be the act of the workmen themselves.

The very words Anarchist-Communism show in what direction society, in our opinion, is already going, and on what lines it can get rid of the oppressive powers of Capital and Government; and it would be an easy task for us to draw a sketch of society in accordance with these principles.¹ But what would be the use of such a scheme, if those who listen to it have never doubted the possibility of reorganising everything by homeopathic prescriptions from Westminster; if they have never imagined that they themselves are more powerful than their representatives; and if they are persuaded that everything can and must be settled by a government, most men having only to obey and never to act for themselves.

One of the first delusions to get rid of, therefore, is the delusion that a few laws can modify the present economical system as by enchantment. The first conviction to acquire is that nothing short of expropriation on a vast scale, carried out by the workmen themselves, can be the first step towards a reorganisation of our production on Socialist principles.

In fact, if we analyse the immense complexity of economical relations existing in a civilised nation; if we take into account the relatively small amount of real workmen in this country and the enormous number of parasites who live on their shoulders and are interested in the maintenance of parasitic conditions, we cannot but recognise that no government will be able ever to undertake the reorganisation of industry, unless the People begin themselves to do it by taking possession of the mines and factories, of the land and the houses,—in short, of all those riches which are the produce of their own labour. It is only when the masses of the people are ready to begin expropriating that we may expect that any government will move in the same direction.

Surely, it will not be the present Parliament which will ever take the initiative in dispossessing the owners of land and capital. Even if the workmen assume a really menacing attitude, our present middle-class rulers will not become Socialists. They will try, first, to crush the movement, to disorganise it; and if they are unable to do so, they will do what all governments have done on like occasions. They will try to gain time, until the masses, reduced to still more dreadful misery by the increased depression of industry, will be ready to accept any concessions, however delusive, rather than starve in the streets.

To expect that Socialist workmen will have a majority in Parliament is, again, to cherish a naive and vain delusion. We shall have long to wait before a Socialist majority is created in this country. But the thousands reduced to starvation by the enormities of the present social system cannot wait, and even if they could, events will be precipitated by partial conflicts. Last winter we saw the whole of one of the mining basins in Belgium in open rebellion against Capital. A few months ago we were very near to a general outbreak of workmen in

some parts of the United States. And although the treachery of a Powderly—the chief of the Knights of Labour—may have paralysed the outbreak, everybody in the United States—even the most stubborn politician—well understands that another time a Powderly may be powerless, especially in presence of the provocative attitude of the middle classes, who never fail on such occasions to increase the ranks of the discontented and to intensify the discontent.

The Social Question will be put to Europe, in all its immensity, long before the Socialists have conquered a few seats in Parliament, and thus the solution of the question will be actually in the hands of the workmen themselves. They will have no choice: either they must resolve it themselves, or be reduced to a worse slavery than before.

Under the influence of government worship, they may try to nominate a new government, instead of the old one which will be sent away, and they may entrust it with the solution of all difficulties. It is so simple, so easy, to throw a vote into the ballot-box, and to return home! So gratifying to know that there is somebody who will arrange your own affairs for the best, while you are quietly smoking your pipe and waiting for orders which you will have only to execute, not to reason about. An admirable way, indeed, to have your affairs left as they were before, even if you are not cheated by your trustees!

History is full of such examples. The revolted people of Paris in 1871 also nominated a government, and hoped that this government—which consisted, in fact, of the most devoted revolutionists belonging to all sections of the revolutionary world, all men ready to die for the emancipation of the people—would settle everything for the best.

They did the same thing at Paris in 1848, when they chose a Provisional Government by acclamation, and expected that this Government—which also consisted of honest men—would resolve the social question.

But we know how dreadful was the awakening of the Paris *proletaires*, and we know by what hecatombs of slaughtered men, women, and children they paid for their confidence.

There was, however, another epoch, when these same Frenchmen acted in another way. The peasants were serfs before 1789—in fact, if not by law. The land of their communes had been enclosed by landlords; and they had to pay these lords every possible kind of tax, survivals of, or redemption for, feudal servitude.

These peasants also voted in 1789, and nominated a government. But as they saw that this government did not respond to their expectations, they revolted; in fact, they did so even before they saw their government at work. They went to the landlords and compelled them to abdicate their rights. They burned the charters where these rights were written down; they burned some of the castles of the most hated nobles. And, on the night of the 4th of August, the nobility of France, moved by high patriotic feelings (so the historians say), which feelings were excited by the spectacle of burning castles, abdicated their rights for ever.

True that, four days later, they re-established the very same rights by imposing a redemption fee. But the peasants revolted again. They even took no notice at all of what the Chamber had voted. They took possession of the enclosed lands and began to till them. They paid no redemption taxes. And when the authorities intervened—in the name of the sacred law—they revolted against the authorities. They revolted—M. Taine says—six times in the course of four years, and their revolts were so successful that by the end of the fourth year the Convention—the great Convention, the ideal of all modern Jacobins—moved again by highest patriotic feelings (the middle-classes' historians say so), finally abolished all feudal rights, in 1793, and ordered all papers relating to the feudal epoch to be burnt.

But what the historians forget to say is, that the rights *were* already abolished by the peasants, and that most papers dealing with feudal rights *were* already burned.

The terrible revolutionary body thus sanctioned only the accomplished fact. Feudalism was actually no longer in existence; the Convention did nothing but pronounce its funeral oration.

The workmen of the nineteenth century probably will *not* burn the factories; but we fancy that their modes of action will bear a great likeness to those of the French peasants. They will not wait for orders from above before taking possession of land and capital. They will take them first; and *then*—already in possession of land and capital—they will organise their work. They will not consider these things as private property—it would be impossible in the present complicated, interwoven, and inter-dependent state of our production. They will nationalise them.

¹ Our Parisian brother-in-arms *Le Révolté* is now publishing a series of articles showing how a commune, inspired with Anarchist ideas, might organise itself as a communist society without government.

ANARCHISM AS CRITICISM AND RELIGION.

AN EPILOGUE.

Citizen. I'm off to town in the morning. But, over our last pipe, will you explain a thing or two that puzzles me? I've been brooding days and nights over your last words on the shore—"Criticism and Religion." They are a kind of magical incantation you use when cornered—an "Open Sesame" to let you out of a blind alley.

Seaborn. Cornered in a blind alley?

Cit. Yes, whenever you have pressed home upon you the impracticability or inapplicableness of Anarchist principles, at present, or within any assignable future, you seek refuge and escape in that sublime and highly philosophical phrase, "Meantime, Anarchism is at least CRITICISM and RELIGION." What does it mean? Is the Anarchist rôle to stand aloof, find fault, and say "Non possumus" to their Socialist brethren who are not Anarchists?

Sea. Certainly not. The true Anarchist will be no heretic or schismatic, fomenting divisions, and breaking up Socialist organisations that are as yet mainly or wholly Collectivist. He will never forget that he is a Socialist. He may be even ready to admit that an attempt at the establishment of the common equal life under majority-rule is the next, and perhaps necessary, stage in the evolution of the Anarchist ideal of entirely voluntary life together, just as the Collectivists might very well allow that the measures of sincere reformers and radicals are steps towards the realisation of Socialism as they understand it, though they may be feeble, faltering, and small. But he will, all the same, strenuously and unceasingly show these Radicals, Reformers, Collectivists, and Social Democrats, all alike, that every advance or improvement they propose or effect in human life, implies the Anarchist ideal, just as every advance, reform, or improvement of the Radicals implies the Socialist or Communist end. That is our critical attitude. Anarchism, then, is a criticism and protest, and the Anarchist is simply a self-criticising and protestant Socialist.

Cit. And is he to content himself with keeping this attitude, which I must say has a certain air of aloofness about it, and might easily be made an excuse for doing nothing? Is he to do nothing to further change of the economical conditions, to help on the common holding and using of capital? Can he not consistently work, say with co-operators, land restorers, or the Social Democratic Federation? Is his worship of the ideal of *Free Society* to paralyse him?

Sea. By no means. I do not see why we should not work altogether on friendly terms. Yet, there is such a thing as division of labour, and as Anarchist his business is criticism and protest. But these will be more effectual coming from a friend and fellow-worker. He will, therefore, stand and work within and not outside the Socialist organisation, and even within present Society at large, in so far as it is trying to progress towards Humanity. He will not frown upon Radicals, Home Rulers, or Social Democrats, but rather give them a hand when they appear to him to be going in the right direction. All this he may do, and ought to do, yet without derogation or compromise. His criticism will be as inexorable and absolute as ever.

Cit. How will he address his associates and friends?

Sea. He will say to them, "See how your improvements, great and small, your education of the people's children in Board Schools, Irish Land Acts, Home Rule for Ireland, your abolition of wage-slavery, profit-making, and private dominion over capital, etc., all imply Anarchism as their end and goal. These changes you have effected, or seek to effect, by democratic methods, i.e., majority overruling, are only good and sound advances because and in so far as they make for the abolition of all kinds of majority-ruling whatever. And even if the Social Democracy is ever fairly established, its one central essential business will be to render itself unnecessary and gradually efface itself. The essence and nature of every social reform, what constitutes its progress, is its tendency to abolish the policeman, the penalty, the prison, the soldiers, and every other form of physical force, without which there can be no overruling or imposition of alien will. Willy nilly, therefore, consciously or unconsciously, every reformer, improver, Social Democrat, and every Socialist, is Anarchist, and you are all working for the realisation of that unity of Freedom and unanimity in Society, which is our ideal. Knowing that is so, we are your friends, and we are with you shoulder to shoulder. But equally aware that the power within you and your movement would work more effectually, if you recognised it and were fully conscious of your aim, we persist in our criticism and protest. It is a kind of coughing and eye-opening. You do not see the goal, and we want you to see it for all sakes. Become aware of what you are really doing, give to the ideal end a clear, steady, and worshipful recognition, and we shall move much more rapidly and surely towards pureness and completeness of common life. Purge every measure of those soiling and hindering elements that will not stand before the grand and infallible test of Individual Freedom and Integrity conjoint with Unanimity, and there will be less halting, wandering, and harking back. We are always troubling you for our common good, because we must insist on always applying our ideal as universal criterion to every proposal." That is something like what we Anarchists have to say to our friends. We are *self-criticising* Socialists, and call upon our fellows to criticise themselves and their activities, and we provide them with the Universal Criterion.

Cit. Your protestantism is not so obviously useful now, when Socialists have need to show an undivided front to the enemy, Mis-

rule. You give the adversary cause to blaspheme, and say, "See how those Socialists love one another!"

Sea. Not so obviously useful now, perhaps, as when Socialism shall have taken a wider hold upon men's minds; but yet not, as you seem to think, pernicious, provided we caution and reprove in all brotherly kindness and without breach of the unity of the Socialist faith.

Cit. "Faith!" Ah, that brings us to your "religion." Now, I am inclined to admit the importance, for sure-footed, swift, and straight progress, of the explicit and fully conscious recognition of your aim, but why "worshipful"?

Sea. Because our aim is an ideal, that is to say, the farthest off state of common life we can see to aim at, and so far away and uplifted that, except when filling the eye and soul fully facing it, it tends to seem all but or even quite unattainable. Now, all other schemes of conjoint life—and they are all equally dependent on majority-overruling—appear to be comparatively easy of attainment, and we can think of them as over-passed. They cannot, therefore, because of this finitude, become objects of worshipful regard. They cannot command our entire obedience and willing service. They do not absorb us. We cannot love them with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Not so with the conception of a society that is at once free in every member and unanimous in the whole. This unity of wills in humane life appears attainable to the devotee, when in the act of worshipping, and compels his entire devotion, yet it can never be thought of as passed by and left behind. It is the least that may truly be called human, and it is, *in outline*, the most that Humanity can ever hope or think to be. Hence Anarchism is religion; and, again, as criticism, it will prevail because it is religious. Men with such religious conviction dare all things. They even dare withstand their friends to their face, when need be. Such pious daring is no breach of the unity of brothers. And when all Socialists are conscious Anarchists, with eyes wide open and fixed in worship upon the End, we shall find that our deliberate, reasonable, and religious regard for that End, will impart vast increase of momentum to all our Socialist endeavours.

But my pipe is out. So, good night.

GOVERNMENT BY JOURNALISM.

THE future rôle of journalism, according to the opinion expressed by Mr. Stead in a recent article in the *Contemporary Review*, is to supplement if not supersede the impotence of our present system of government by representation. Both Parliament and Executive are, he contends, out of touch with the people. They do not even care to test and stimulate public opinion with reference to the questions of the day. The press, he thinks, must step into the breach. Each considerable newspaper must keep a member of its staff in every important town in the country, whose business it will be to gather round him a little group of gratuitous feeders, and also to employ paid travelling news collectors. On every important public question the editor, by means of this local machinery, should interrogate all sorts and conditions of official persons, from mayors to churchwardens, and tabulate the replies. In accordance with the statistics of opinion thus collected, "responsible" ministers and irresponsible editors working hand and glove are to head the democracy, not as its servants but as its masters.

The picture of bewildered Bumbledom, besieged for its "opinion" by a crowd of rival news purveyors, is sufficiently comic, and the resultant legislation would be likely to furnish Herbert Spencer with a new text from which to preach the fatuous inconsistencies of governments; nevertheless Mr. Stead founds his contention on an underlying truth of the utmost value. It is well when the editor of a popular middle-class journal is forced to recognise the plain fact that Constitutional Governments do not, and in so far as experience goes, cannot in the least represent public opinion. A minority singled out for the exercise of the franchise, party discipline in the country and in Parliament, personal and class interests mingling with matters of general concern, first and foremost the individual ambition of public men creeping on to power by bribery and treachery, the ignorance in which the people are kept of what most deeply and immediately affects them, the sybil-line nature of the electoral *fiat* which endows a few men for years with the disposal of the destiny, the interests and liberties of the whole nation, and lastly the centralisation of the powers and resources of the community—all these contribute to make representation in practice nothing better than a farce.

All this is true enough, but the said farce will be driven from the stage of history by something of sterner mould than a newspaper government. All rulers, whether they be called Emperors or Editors, have one end and aim by which to justify their existence, namely, the supposed necessity to force the masses of the people to respect the property of a few. Mr. Stead proposes to find out from the local rulers how this may best be done, instead of continuing the present rough and ready plan of deciding the fate of the masses by compromise between the personal interests of a few noisy politicians. But how long do these gentlemen suppose that the people are going to put up with rulers and ruling in any shape? Just so long as they fail to perceive that this imagined necessity is simply the selfish desire of the Haves to keep the Have nots in misery and degradation; no longer. With the on coming of Socialism the occupation of governments will vanish.