

What's Anarchism?

Hippolyte Havel

Contents

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Preface | 3 |
| What's Anarchism? | 4 |

Preface

Every great movement since the beginning of history has been a movement to lift the bottom dog and put him on his feet. And every such movement has been led by extremists. All the great names of history have been the names of extremists. The brave pioneers who blazed the trail through the unknown forest had to fight their way against the many dangers of wild nature, wild beasts, and wilder men. The heroic men who first raised their voices in the cause of religious liberty had to pass through years of cruel persecution. They were hounded to the scaffold or the state with execration and abuse. The wheel slowly turns full circle, and the malefactor of yesterday become the hero-martyr of to-day, and the faithful tread weary miles to his shrine to pay homage to his memory. Those who dared to raise a protest against political slavery had to face a tempest of slander and vituperation. To-day the market-places that witnessed their humiliation are adorned with cherished monuments in their honor, and their names glow from the pedestals with an added brilliance bought by their belated recognition.

But the greatest, the bitterest, the fiercest fight of all the ages is now being fought. The struggle for economic freedom is being waged in every country, race and nation. Compared with this conflict, the contests of the past are as the mimic warfare of happy children marshalling their tiny tin warriors on the nursery floor. No passion is too sordid, no cruelty is too severe, no persecution is too fierce to find its place and use in this campaign. It began when the first chattel slave raised his voice in protest against a corroding chain. Right down the ages the din of its conflict has kept time like a Greek chorus to the discordant jazz that mars the harmony of the world's advance.

* * *

The working-class does not need leadership so much as it needs comradeship. The world has had enough of leaders. The hero and the leader, even the teacher and the prophet, will in time go the way of the king, the baron, and the capitalist. In the last analysis, it is the friend and companion that the people need; it is the co-operation and fellowship of all people working together for the exaltation of the common life.

What's Anarchism?

The spectre of Communism is haunting the world. Not only the powers of Europe, but those of America and Asia as well have entered into a holy alliance to exercise this spectre and — oh, cruel irony of history — the erstwhile followers of Marx and Engels, the Socialists of all countries, join the holy alliance against Communism. “Whence this Communism?” they cry out in despair, and exercising the spectre they murmur pitifully **mea culpa, mea maxima culpa**.

What is this terrible spectre of Communism? Is Communism a state of Society to be established and managed by the people themselves or a new form of government over them? Is it Communism of the people when a political party captures the State power and decrees a set of laws for others to obey? Is it even a “Transition Stage” as Engels and Lenin prophesied?

State Capitalism — a Transition Stage from private Capitalism — is evolving right now in all countries. But will this transition period usher in a Communist society? On the contrary, we witness a gradual evolution of the State, wherein an all powerful political bureaucracy controls the life of the producers, by controlling the means of production and the products for consumption.

The Bolshevik State Communism is the last form of reaction fooling the workers. Anarchist-Communism is the antidote and protection against bureaucratic State slavery, and the only theory of a free society recognizing the just claim of each to the fullest satisfaction of all his needs, physical, moral and intellectual.

Anarchism is no hypocritical scheme. It cannot dupe men in the manner of political parties which pretend to be saviors of the working class, promising to do wonders if the workers will only give them their confidence. The Anarchists have the far more difficult mission of making the workers realize that neither this nor that political party can do naught for their salvation, and that the sole hope lies in their own insight and energy.

Anarchism may be briefly defined as the negation of all government and all authority of man over man; Communism as the recognition of the just claim of each to the fullest satisfaction of all his needs, physical, moral and intellectual. The Anarchist, therefore, whilst resisting as far as possible all forms of coercion and authority, repudiates just as firmly even the suggestion that he should impose himself upon others, realizing as he does that this fatal propensity in the majority of mankind has been the cause of nearly all the misery and bloodshed in the world.

He understands just as clearly that to satisfy his needs without contributing, to the best of his ability, his share of labor in maintaining the general well-being, would be to live at the expenses of others — to become an exploiter and to live as the rich drones live today. Obviously, then, government on the one hand and private ownership of the means of production on the other, complete the vicious circle — the present social system — which keeps mankind degraded and enslaved.

There will be no need to justify the Anarchist's attack upon all forms of government, history teaches the lesson he has learned on every page. But that lesson being concealed from the mass of the people by interested advocates of “law and order”, and even by Social Democrats and the

Bolsheviks, the Anarchist deals his hardest blows at the sophisms that uphold the State, and urges workers in striving for their emancipation to confine their efforts to the economic field.

It follows, therefore, that politically and economically his attitude is purely revolutionary; and hence arises the vilification and misrepresentation that Anarchism, which denounces all forms of social injustice, meets with in the press and from public speakers.

Rightly conceived, Anarchism is no mere abstract ideal theory of human society. It views life and social relations with eyes disillusioned. Making an end of all superstitions, prejudices and false sentiments it tries to see things as they really are; and without building castles in the air it finds by the simple correlation of established facts that the grandest possibilities of a full and free life can be placed within the reach of all, once that monstrous bulwark of all our social iniquities – the State – has been destroyed, and common property declared.

Modern jurists frequently speak of the atomization of the State in the Middle Ages. In reality it was not atomic. The truth is that the Middle Ages were atomized in the centuries that followed them. The characteristic fact of European societies between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries was that the corporations were abandoned by their most energetic members. And from this dissolution of the corporate life has arisen the modern unitary state, as an historic and temporal necessity; not as a category of social life. But if the State is not a category, if it is purely an historic institution which arises at the bidding of a momentary necessity, it runs the risk of vanishing from history with the necessity which has called it into existence. And that, in fact, was what occurred in the mentality of thinkers and was on the point of happening in reality.

When the war of 1914 broke out the institution of the State was on the point of disappearing from among the peoples of Western Europe. The thinkers, at least, had already ceased to believe in the necessity for it. It was defended only by the politicians; but there did not remain a single public man who enjoyed the confidence placed in his predecessors. This was not the fault of the men. Personally, they may have been as clever and good then as were the statesmen of old. But we called them politicians and not statesmen, for we no longer believed in the State.

What, after all, is this State idea, this idea of the organized Community to which the individual has to be immolated? Theoretically it is the subordination of the individual to the good of all that is demanded; practically it is his subordination to a collective egoism, political, military, economic, which seeks to satisfy certain collective aims and ambitions shaped and imposed on the great mass of the individuals by a smaller or larger number of ruling persons who are supposed in some way to represent the community. It is immaterial whether these belong to a governing class or emerge as in modern States from the mass partly by force of character, but much more by force of circumstances; are imposed more by hypnotism of verbal persuasion than by overt and actual force. In either case there is no guarantee that this ruling class or ruling body represents the best minds of a nation or its noblest or its highest instincts.

Nothing of the kind can be asserted of the modern politician in any part of the world; he does not represent the soul of the people or its aspirations; what he does usually represent is all the average pettiness, selfishness, egoism, self-deception that is about him and these he represents well enough as well as a great deal of mental incompetence and moral conventionality, timidity and pretence. Great issues often come to him for decision but he does not deal with them greatly; high words and noble ideas are on his lips, but they are only the clap-trap of a party. The disease and falsehood of modern political life is present in every country of the world and only the hypnotized acquiescence that men yield to everything that is habitual and makes the present atmosphere of their lives, cloaks and prolongs the malady. Yet it is by such minds that the good

of all had to be decided, to such hands that it has to be entrusted, to such an agency calling itself the State the individual is being more and more called upon to give up his entire activity.

* * *

Even if the governing instrument were better constituted and of a higher and moral character, still the State would not be what the State idea pretends to be. Theoretically, it is the collective wisdom and force of the community as the particular machinery of the State organization will allow to come to the surface which uses that machine but is also caught in it and hampered by it, and hampered also by the large amount of folly and selfish weakness that comes up in the same wave. Things would be much worse if there were not a field left for a less trammled individual effort doing what the State cannot do, employing and using the sincerity, energy, idealism of the best individuals to attempt that which the State has not the wisdom or courage to attempt, getting that done which a collective conservatism and imbecility leave undone or actively oppose and suppress. It is this which is the really effective agent of collective progress. But we are now tending towards such an increase of organized State-power and such a huge irresistible and complex State activity as will either eliminate or leave it dwarfed and cowed into helplessness. Thus the necessary corrective to the defects, limitations and inefficiency of the State machine is rapidly disappearing.

The State is neither the best mind of the nation or is it even the sum of the communal energies. It leaves out voluntary action, suppresses the working force and thinking mind of important minorities often of those which represent that which is best in the present State of Society.

The regeneration of Society, or better still, the formation of a new Society, is possible along through Anarchism, i.e. through the re-establishment of natural relations of men to one another. This can be accomplished by Anarchist Communism, guaranteeing to each individual full liberty. Each member of such a Society stands free and equal among his fellow beings, and any attempt to establish other standards will constitute an act of violence against the principle of a free Society. There is no natural right for the possession of private property, nor for authoritarian leadership; once permitted they inevitably destroy the peace and general welfare. The whole history of mankind proves this statement.

Let us consider Anarchism as the scientific teaching of the natural relationship of men. Realizing that our knowledge of the world reaches no further than our senses can reach the Anarchist rejects all fruitless dreams. All that takes place in the universe is the result of activity inherent in matter. Upon this view, is based our moral doctrine, which may be summarized as follows:

Every living being strives unceasingly for enjoyment of life; this endeavor is the basis of all his actions. Each human being seeks to learn by what ways and means he can attain the highest purpose of life.

Through experience and observation one arrives at the conclusion that the individual separated from the society of his fellow-men, produces the mere necessities of life by the utmost wearisome labor, but that through the common labor of many, these necessities are wearily readily obtained, allowing leisure for the pursuit of arts and sciences, by which life is made pleasanter and richer; this knowledge imposes upon one the duty of working for the common well, since each individual welfare is assured only through universal well being.

The fact that the gifts, powers and dispositions of men are very different, leads one to the conclusion that the participation in the various labors of a group or community must be entirely

voluntary, free from outward pressure, as free as the right to use and enjoy in unlimited measure the goods produced by common labor.

By experience and clear knowledge of the qualities of man, we arrive at the firm conviction that a lasting welfare of Society can be established only through free fellowship, i.e. through Communistic-Anarchist Society.

By what means can such a Society be accomplished? Through the propaganda in word and deed, i.e. through the distribution of Anarchist literature and the courageous determination of a sufficient number of men and women not to participate in the present system of exploitation and slavery.

Anarchism is not only a beautiful philosophy of life but it is also the only logical theory for an economically and intellectually free society. It is not the careless thinker or a wild theorizer who can appreciate the ideal of a society based on free agreements of equals without law and bureaucracy. It is the Socialist politician who believes that rule and laws are a necessary part of life.

At the back of every law is the element of coercion. It is impossible to escape from that fact. Politicians and bureaucrats may argue that it is coercion for the good of underdeveloped workers. This means that coercion is not merely pure despotism but something even worse — the driving about of helpless human sheep. All tyrants and priests use the same arguments.

Anarchism alone embodies these days social revolutionary ideals, without trimming or compromising. It does not aim at success that spells Dictatorship; it does not seek to gain the reins of government, nor strives to rule workers organizations. It works for the real enlightenment of the toilers, aiding them to that mental maturity which will enable them to accomplish their won emancipation.

By education, by free organization, by individual and associated resistance to economic and political tyranny, the Anarchists hope to achieve their aims. The task may seem hopeless to many, but it should be remembered that our movement is spreading in all countries. Modern science, art and literature are imbued with distinct anarchist tendencies.

There are certain things that cannot be left to other, to be attended to by proxy. One of them is thinking. Man had issued to divide Providence the mandate to direct fate — and came to grief as a result. Political providence has now crowded the divine into the background, and the subjects, citizens, voters are again the duped.

Man will have to recover the power with which his ignorance has invented gods, statesmen, priests, and politicians, before he can achieve maturity and independence. That is the ABC of Anarchism.

The educated man is revolted by the thought that men and women are such ill-mannered beings that they can only be kept in order by a system of rules which might be fairly tolerable inside the boundary walls of a lunatic asylum.

We can imagine a reasonable man thinking that there are so many lunatics and financiers, lazy gentlefolk, as present in the world, that it may be necessary to continue a system of laws until we have got rid of them all or reduced them to some kind of social discipline. But it seems utterly preposterous that anyone of education could believe that these temporary laws can be part of a permanent and ultimate ideal of life.

Men are very quick to repudiate submission to a man; but when the slavery comes in guise of submission to law or custom or to a government not directly personal, they are very likely not to recognize it. The divinity which was formerly thought to hedge a king is now thought to hedge

laws and to sanction them. But a life minutely regulated by laws and customs may be essentially as far from a free life as one regulated by the will of a depot. The statement frequently put forward as an axiom that men must sacrifice many of their liberties in order that they may live together is not true; that they **have** sacrificed them is certain; but to say that they **must**, betrays a confusion of thought. A man cannot walk through a crowded street as he would walk through one that is deserted, but neither can he walk through a tangled forest with the same freedom with which he would walk through an open meadow; and yet he can hardly be said to sacrifice his freedom in walking through a tangled forest. His liberty would be restricted in any of these places if another man should approach him and force him to turn back, whether the man happened to be a private citizen or a public officer, and the act would be tyrannical whether the officer acted in accordance with the will of a depot or with the will of the people or with the law.

Freedom implies that if a man is doing anything which does not threaten the freedom of others, no man and no body of men have any right to interfere with him. "What," cry many of our philanthropic friends, "If we are fully persuaded that a certain act is for a man's own advantage and for that of society, while another act is greatly for his disadvantage, shall we not compel him to do the one and to abstain from doing the other?" No, for it is of more importance that the principle of freedom shall be preserved than that what you are persuaded is for the best shall be enforced.

This, of course, simply amounts to saying that freedom will yield better results in the long run than slavery.

Civilization and progress are words much conjured with. We boast of our industrial development and speak with pride of our commercial growth and even our intellectual achievements. We point the finger of scorn at the "backward" nations and enlarge upon our own steady progress. But **what is progress?** Giants of stone and steel, reared on human bones; mills and factories, slaughter-houses of body and mind; successful corners in the necessities of life; multiplied volumes of statue books; the perfection of man-killing weapons; increased navies and armies — are these the meaning of civilization, the acme of progress? We seem to have lost all sense of criterion. Scarlet piles of stone or gold upon the ruins of human souls are the measure of our success. We have been stricken with blindness by the glare of Mammon. We have lost our path on the Broadway of Success. Yet Life is more, far more than mere success. And Life is individual. The one purpose of being is development; in free expression alone is satisfaction. Expression is growth; growth in freedom, progress. In man alone is progress. The external and the social must but indicate the inner. Woe to them when they hinder instead of reflecting the soul. That is barbarism, slavery.

Freedom, liberty, and such words are found in dictionaries, but each year marks a decrease of the original article. As a man surcingle or puts a band around a horse, and draws it till he kills the horse or breaks the band, so are the people of this country, by the chain of legislation, denying liberty and paving the way for the clouds of evil that arise from too much law. In this country it is already a fact that, when a man cannot personally force his ideas into the life of a neighbor, he sets about rigging up a legislative propellant that shall bind the victim, and then, with the help of those who skin on shares or work for fees, pump the objectionable in or draw the milk out. If you wish an appliance that will sorten the freedom of our neighbor, go to the legislature and have it made, — that is, if there are none already in stock. There are some places on the skin not yet covered by some kind of legislative plaster. A very few breathing pores left open. A few places where the stomach pump of taxation has not been inserted for the benefit of the inserter, but

these spots or places are fast disappearing under the operation of the legislative cauterizer and puncturer.

From the respect paid to property flow, as from a poisoned fountain, most of the evils and vices which render this world such a dreary scene to the contemplative mind. For it is in the most polished society that noisome reptiles and venomous serpents lurk under the rank herbage; and there is voluptuousness pampered by the still sultry air, which relaxes every good disposition before it ripens into virtue.

One class presses on another, for all are aiming to procure respect due only to talents and virtue. Men neglect the duties incumbent on man, yet are treated like demi-gods. The world is almost, literally speaking, a den of sharpers or oppressors.

There is a homely proverb, which speaks a shrewd truth, that whoever the devil finds idle he will employ. And what but habitual idleness can hereditary wealth and titles produce? For man is so constituted that he can only attain a proper use of his faculties by exercising them, and will not exercise them unless necessity of some kind first set the wheels in motion. Virtue likewise can only be acquired by the discharge of relative duties; but the importance of these sacred duties will scarcely be felt by the being who is cajoled out of his humanity by the flattery of sycophants. There must be more equality established in society or morality will never gain ground, and this virtuous equality will not rest firmly even when founded on a rock, if one-half of mankind be chained to its bottom by fate, for they will be continually undermining it through ignorance or pride.

No man or woman who has looked at society with open, honest eyes can blind the fact that crime, like all other human actions, is the inevitable product of existing causes; that it springs up in poverty-stricken surroundings as surely as the cactus blooms in the desert. But "society," the propertied class that for the moment dominated the situation, steadily refuses to acknowledge this most obvious of facts, although it bends the knee weekly to a teacher who said, with all the emphasis language could afford, that men cannot gather figs of thorns, or grapes of thistles.

This deliberate blindness will continue until the eyes that now remain obstinately closed are forced to open; and the opening can come only as the result of education — learned stupidly by the whip of events or wisely by voluntary acceptance of the truth.

Were it possible for some one to secure full control of the air, leaving mankind the alternative of paying tribute or strangling or want of breath, we should all of us become the serfs of the air monopoly. We should be forced to comply with its conditions, or die. Our dependence would be most absolute. This unbearable situation would be further aggravated by irony and scorn if the constitution of the land contained the solemn proviso: "All citizens are equal before the law; their liberty must not be abridged by special privileges." Could anyone but a fool believe in this constitution-guarantee liberty, always remembering the command of the air monopolist: Submit or die! The liberty of choosing between submission and strangulation is but a two-edged slavery with destruction at either end.

It is this kind of liberty that the people of the "most progressive countries" enjoy. Instead of air read food, shelter, clothing, and you have the same terrible dependence of the people on the monopolists of land, production and money. The existence of the great majority is today made possible only by their slavish submission to the conditions of these masters of the earth.

Private property with its thousand and one corrupting influences is today the ruling power on earth. It dictates to the propertyless masses the compulsory statutes, to refuse to submit or to

sacrifice one's independence, means the loss of the means of existence. That is the punishment visited upon those who, though poor, strive to preserve their manhood and their individuality.

But — unfortunately? Fortunately? — almost everyone adapts himself to the slavery of existence, even though many suffer, hesitate, tremble, and frit their teeth. Some go insane; many — men and women without number — are crippled bodily or mentally or both; others — and those by no means the worst — resort to suicide. Statistics throw considerable light upon these results of our profit-civilization.

The “justice” of this civilization depends neither upon court nor judges; it works “of itself”, quietly, but is more merciless and inexorable than the most hard-hearted judge. It is the fate of the modern man under the rule of a production-system which is not intended to satisfy the needs of mankind, but which blindly works for the enrichment of the few.

Whether you work with your hands or your brain, if you refuse to offer yourself for sale, this “inner justice” will immediately reduce your rations, will rob you of shelter and home, and finally deprive you even of the small means necessary to secure mere bread or a ten-cent lodging. Before long you will have become an outcast, because you have offended against the discipline of this order which demands absolute economic submission.

Therefore try hard to sell yourself somehow or other; else you're lost and you will become a pauper, or — if you possess courage enough — you will turn criminal.

Sell your labor, ability, and intelligence; lie, cheat and swindle for your existence. What matters manhood, personality, self-respect. You are a mere cog in the machine of the “higher powers”; you are a bond serf who hates his task, or — if you are a brain worker — an intellectual helot who propagates opinions not his own, and teaches “facts” he knows nothing of, but which in some way serve the interests of his bread-givers. All this must be borne if you are to “do well” in the world. Why not? Must not the prostitute also follow her business? The same conditions which force her to sell her body, cause also the journalist to write what he does not believe, the teacher to teach what he himself refuses to accept, or the physician to perform operations to which he would not submit himself.

The difference between the slavery of former days and the existence-bondage of today is that formerly the slaves were forcibly driven to the market, while the serfs of today offer themselves for sale of “their own free will.” It is ironically called “free competition”; but behind each miserable free competitor stand want, hunger, and anxiety, more effective and compelling than the slave-driver's whip.

The marketability of men and things impresses upon society the character of prostitution. It is prostitution to be forced, for mere existence, to sell oneself, physically or mentally, to manufacturers or publishers.

Under such conditions who can speak of the dignity of labor? Work which is forced and hateful, and of the products of which the worker is deprived, is shameful and unworthy of the thinking man.

This boundless general venality comprises all the vice, evil, and crime which is the despair of the moralist and reformer, and which serve as a text to exhort man to honesty, righteousness, and neighborly love. Empty phrases! Mankind does not live up to the moral laws down on paper, because the very conditions of existence are based on the principle of taking advantage of our fellow-men.

* * *

In place of the domination of private property, in place of the shameless tyranny of profit, we would put Anarchist Communism. Its basic principle is, first of all, to guarantee to each man the right of existence, making the necessities of life as accessible and free as air and sunshine. Without this fundamental right man is a pariah, a pauper at the mercy of those who own the means of existence.

The propertyless masses forever plead with the lords of the earth for compassion, for mercy and reforms, instead of depriving them of their robber-monopoly and proclaiming the earth the free homestead and storehouse of mankind. It is just as if the calves would plead with the tanner not to tan their skins too deep a hue. The tanners would ignore their plea, as the owners of the earth will continue their usury in human flesh so long as they are not deprived of their monopoly of property.

It is not the bitterest irony that under the domination of sacred private property the majority of mankind lack all property? Under Anarchist Communism, which strives to abolish private possession, there would be no millionaires, billionaires, or stockholders, but every one would enjoy the means necessary to a wholesome life. If we wished to express it in a paradox we should say: only Communism will secure a man the possession of the earth.

Lack of clarity, pusillanimity, and compromise are the worst curse of the American Labor movement. Of what benefit, for instance, can it be to the social or economic improvement of the workers if they are represented in the political dens of the plutocracy? The sole effect of such "successes" is to supply capitalist exploitation and governmental tyranny with new supporters bearing the label of Labor or Socialist parties.

Of what use is it to the workers what here and there some branch strike is occasionally won? Capitalism possesses no end of means to nullify the success of such strikers. Its power to revenge itself economically upon the workers, to intensify exploitation, raise the cost of living, and so forth, is practically limitless. Local strikes, if conducted in a revolutionary spirit, with an eye to the ultimate destruction of the robber system of private property, have propagandistic value. But as a means to the essential, fundamental emancipation of the toilers, they can not be seriously considered by the intelligent student.

The solution of the problem of labor — the abolition of wage slavery — is not to be found within the State regime. Our thoughts and actions must transcend these narrow boundaries, we must attack the very sources of wage slavery. These sources are private property, the State and — the third in the holy trinity — the Church. The rule of this trinity absolutely excludes the producers from well-being justice and liberty. No diplomatizing and politicianizing can help in this matter. So long as this trinity is not overthrown, misery, dependence and slavery are unavoidable.

That is the point where Anarchists and the labor movement must finally meet on common ground. If the workers are not to turn utter traitors to the ideal of the emancipation, they must prepare for the final struggle with this trinity, and in that struggle the Anarchists will be their staunchest fellow fighters. The movement that the social revolutionary philosophy of Anarchism will combine with the intelligence of the workers, with their energy and strength, the doom of the dominant institution will be sealed.

In the face of the many dangerous errors and false conceptions dominating the labor movement, we shall neither bless nor curse, but persistently continue our agitation toward the hour when the more intelligent element of the proletariat will learn to understand us and will hold out to the Anarchists the hand of brotherhood, together to battle with the common enemy.

Investigations so loudly clamored for by the politicians can only have the effect of pacifying and weakening labor. These proceedings and their reports can tell nothing new to the proletarian, even if the investigations be honest and sincere, which is rarely the case. On the other hand, their tendency is to arouse vain hopes and false conceptions of the character of the governmental machinery. And that is highly injurious to the growth of the revolutionary spirit, in which alone there is guarantee that the people themselves will conquer industrial and social Justice.

The workers, grown to maturity, will energetically call "Hands off" to the politicians, wherever these may seek to fish for voter in the troubled waters of strikes and other large struggles. Politicians are to be measured with the same yardstick as priests, — augurs all, who for thousands of years have been betraying the trust of the people and exploiting them to further their own personal interests and ambitions.

Among the encouraging signs of the time the most important is that legislatures, with their statutes and laws, are continually falling into greater contempt with the people. The sentiment is steadily growing in larger circles that the legal machinery is perfectly useless for the necessary social and economic improvement of the masses. The struggle of the toilers for better conditions takes place outside the halls of legislation. Wherever the workers have gained comparatively better living conditions, they did so not because of any laws or politicians, but exclusively as a result of their own efforts, courage, and solidarity.

This experience impresses itself daily with greater force upon the observation of the thinking proletarian. Step by step he is led to the conclusion that the final emancipation of labor can never come through any political Providence, but that on the contrary it must be the work of this initiative and determination.

He learns still more. He grows to understand that government and legislation are not only useless for the proletarian, but that they are positively harmful, the conscious enemies of labor, against whose emancipation they systematically rear new obstacles. Their purpose is to work for the greater development and glory of capitalism. They divide the spoils among its sycophants, and cover every injustice and brutality with the cloak of legal authority.

It is of utmost importance that the workers thoroughly realize all this. For only clarity of understanding can save them from again and again becoming the prey of politicians, which signifies the crippling and paralysis of the labor movement.

In the House of Commons Oliver Cromwell once said: "There is one general grievance, and that is the law." A splendid motto for the revolutionary workers of today.

It is easy to understand why politicians of all parties look askance at the enlightenment of the masses in this direction. They feel themselves in danger of becoming superfluous; their inflated dignity and blustering importance is going to the devil. The more intelligent among them may occasionally even catch a glimpse of the day when the doors of the law factories will be closed, and the people will regulate their own affairs through free co-operative associations.

'Tis no promising outlook for the politicians, and they must therefore seek new ways and means to justify their existence.

One of these means, to which Socialist politicians resort to in particular, consist in playing the tail end on the occasion of the larger strikes. From that safe background they make a great noise, in order to impress the people with their importance as the "leaders of the vanguard" of the movement. The smallest factory boy knows that strikes can be fought and won only by the workers, but these superfluous politicians put on a very wise look, as though they were about to perform a great miracle for the strike, and then solemnly shout — legislative investigation!

That's just their line. Conferences with professional politicians, bureaucrats and would-be statesmen, exchange of conventional phrases, committee sessions, great waste of good paper and — much ado about nothing. The main thing is that the newspapers should herald the tireless activity of the Messrs. politicians. They are off — they have departed for the strike regions — ah, how they sacrifice themselves for the people, at the same time keeping a sharp eye for a chance to increase their own political prestige among the ignorant.

If the workers accept as leader one of the intellectuals of self-appointed reformers in place of a man risen from their ranks, they are as badly off as ever. The intellectual has his own definite set of interests, and though they may coincide with those of the proletariat in calm and sunny weather, they are bound to separate in time of storm and stress. Artists, scientists, thinkers, in a word of the intellectuals, do not have an ingrained class consciousness. They have interests which labor has not yet had the leisure to cultivate; they have possessions, material and spiritual, which they dare not run the risk of losing. They are the neutrals, as it were, in the conflict between the capitalists and the workers. If they favor the proletariat they can render valuable aid. Labor should never disdain their aid but it should never deliver to them its independence.

Workers should be less sheep and more like men. Then if their leaders deserted them their onward movement would not cease. Each man should learn to think for himself, to arrive at opinions independently of his fellows. If each man reached a certain conclusion in his mind played upon by the logic of events, and all these individual conclusions happened to shape themselves toward a common end, there would arise in their collective action, a strength and power that no amount of money and no force of government could defy.

It is not surprising that investigating the conditions in strike districts becomes ever more popular with politicians of all shades. Investigations are well calculated to cover up the rottenness of our social conditions. The people indeed feel that something is wrong; they notice the fearful stench coming from somewhere. But the politicians are immediately at hand to perfume the obnoxious spot with the investigation disinfectant. And the good citizen thanks them, "Ah, after all, something is being done to purify the air." To be sure, something is being done: the good people are being hoodwinked by the politicians. If anything of vital importance is to be emasculated of its significance, all that is necessary is to order a legislative investigation, and the matter will quickly be demagogically distorted beyond all recognition. Investigations are the cheapest trick of the masters to get around the pressing social and economic problems.

* * *

The masters argue that because we cannot have equality in a silk factory we cannot have it anywhere. Because we cannot have good-fellowship in business we cannot have it at all. They argue that society cannot do without "labor," meaning servitude — without the bossing and the firing and the too old at forty and all the rest of their filth. If society cannot do without masters and wage slaves, so much the worse for society. For we are prepared to sacrifice our machines, our wheels and tunnels and wires and systems and slave lines for one hour of happiness.

Do not be led astray by the towering materialism which dominates the mind of the wage earners today which rests upon the false assumption that because a few generations go on doing the same thing over and over again, we all live in a system of clock-work evolution. Do not let fear prevent you from leading a free life. Live up to your own ideal and to the standard inscribed on the banner — No Gods, No Masters.

The development of consciously intelligent units among the working class is the only factor toward genuine progress. To make labor conscious of itself, of its tremendous inherent strength and of its limitations, to foster its sense of critical judgment, its examination into the cogs of things, to impress upon it the secret of the vast power of concerted action, to do these things is to emancipate labor from the bondage, not only of society, but also of itself.

The leaders usually desert the rank and file in an issue of emergency. They become better educated, adopt a higher standard of living, and get out of touch with their fellow workmen; they rise in the social scale, they go into politics, hobnob with the capitalists and compromise the interests of labor.

Powerful as the master class is depicted to be, owing to the apparent acquiescence and ignorance of its victims, it is inherently in a weak and dangerous position. For its very life it now depends upon the divisions and delusions which sway the working class. And these divisions and delusions are fostered and maintained by paid union officials, writers, and politicians, aided by a venal press.

* * *

Perhaps the most popular and enervating idea accepted by the majority of workers today, is the doctrine of economic evolution, a doctrine which was formulated by the 'sociologists' and which asserts that the capitalist system of production for profit cannot be broken by any conscious effort on the part of the workers; that we must have masters and recognize the authority of masters until the dawn of some 'ism. The one thing the sociologists like to talk about is "Evolution," i.e., expansion and development.

The evolutionist, like the madman, is in a prison — the prison of one idea. These people seem to think it singularly surprising if the worker suddenly flings to the wind all social theories and raises the banner "No Masters." They system must go on, they say. The time is not yet "ripe" for a change. The "machinery of government" and the "machinery of production" must be captured and so on.

To tell the workers that they must wait for the accumulation of capital and for the "economic development" of the capitalist regime is like telling a prisoner in the penitentiary that he would be glad to hear that the jail now covers the state of New York. The jailer would have nothing to show the prisoner except more and more long corridors of stones lit by ghastly lights and empty of all that is human. So these expanders and evolutionists have nothing to show us except more and more infinite multitudes of wage slavery empty of all individuality, courage, idealism, humanity and spirit, and hopelessly submissive to the demigods of Capital.

No one doubts that the ordinary worker can get on with the capitalist system as it is — at a price. The demand of the class-conscious worker however, is not strength enough to get along with it, but to destroy it.

Under Anarchist Communism work will not be for profit but for use. The products of free co-operative labor will not be steadily handed over to speculation, but would be directly at the disposal of the consumer. Production and consumption would go hand in hand, eliminating the parasitism for the middle-man and trader. There would be neither room nor desire for "cold storage", to create artificial scarcity of necessities, to advance prices for the enrichment of the speculator. Shoes, clothing, and other necessary articles will then not be manufactured for the trade, but for the needs of the community, for the men, women and children requiring those articles. Agriculture and cattle raising will not be for the purpose of giving some speculator a corner

of the products at the cost of human misery and want, but for the sake of human well-being, to satisfy the physical needs of the people. Under such a social arrangement men would no longer be the miserable products of material conditions; they would possess the power and intelligence to order society in harmony with individual independence, and cease to be the helpless subjects of environment.

On the basis of assured existence individual liberty will flourish. For now man need no more prostitute his labor and ability, each free to follow his inclination and enjoy life to his full capacity.

Labor, science, love will no more be degraded by being sold to the highest bidder. They are freed from servitude. The place of the institutions of force and of the whip of hunger is now taken by the production-associations of free men and women.

We call ourselves Anarchists Communists because we consider the economics of Communism as the indispensable fundamental condition for social harmony and of the liberty and independence of the individual.

The hopes of the Anarchists for a grand future are based upon the exercise of the feeling of solidarity of free individuals. We do not wish to catechize people. The business of making man uniform we leave to military drillers. Anarchism recognizes the diversity of life, the differentiation of individuality in its fullest sense. It finds in voluntary communism — free enjoyment of commodities — the safest material basis for the highest development of diversity, which after all is the only creative source of life. Social institutions can have but one reason for existence, to lift man out of his bondage; but in the name of various deities, man had ever been subjugated, he was ever to lose himself for the sake of something foreign to his real nature. In Anarchism, however, the individual is to refind himself, and to become a conscious molder of the conditions of life.

* * *

Leave men free and the needs of the moment will enforce cordial unison. Man is a social being and in the absence of coercive interference his own interests would lead him to closer unison with his fellows, to a kinder regard for their necessities, to a warmer interest in their welfare and a clearer conception that their distress relieved would be his own social advancement. This is not the view of a sect, but founded upon the fundamental principles of human nature. Remove restrictions and the incentive to greed and selfishness disappears. Proclaim liberty and the better nature of man will assume control and in the genial warmth of an emancipated race a closer social feeling would be engendered, in which disputes relative to the different merits of deeds and needs would sink into insignificance and deserved derision.

The most oft-quoted objection with by the anarchist is that pertaining to violence.

It would seem, were one to take this objection seriously, that any form of government, no matter how despotic, is preferable to no government at all. To the casual observer this reason is sufficient to preclude any further investigation of the subject. And yet, if even the superficially inclined would give but passing thought to the question they would be bound to admit that all government either in theory or practice depends finally upon physical force; upon violence for its continuance. The law of a nation is in itself nothing but a paper threat depending entirely upon coercion and violence to enforce it.

To say that without authority or the fear of authority, all sorts of crimes would continually be indulged in is not entirely true. This is provable, not by mere theory, but by practical observations of facts.

The per capita protection of urban communities in the person of police is much less on the whole than that of the large cities. Nevertheless the number of crimes committed in the thickly populated districts far exceeds those committed in the rural communities. Not only is the excess actual, but it is also proportional. There are extenuating circumstances and contributing causes, no doubt, which make for this abnormal lawlessness in the cities as compared to the villages, but the fact remains that fewer crimes are committed where fewer minions of force and brutality patrol the by-ways in their continual hunt for trouble.

Not even the lowest slum proletarian can vie in corruption with the most successful policeman. The very nature of his calling deprives him of all sense of justice. Modern society has no competitor with the policeman and detective in viciousness unless it is the politician — the master and maker of both. The individual police officer necessarily different from any other member of society when he first assumes the role of public guardian. But the close and continual association with all that is base inhumanity produces an environment that even educated men would eventually succumb to, let alone the policeman who is seldom ever over-intelligent.

If the average quality of what is considered good citizenship were of no finer degree than the personnel of the forces of law and order we would each and every one have to be officers to protect ourselves from our friends. The truth is apparent that all peoples are naturally peaceful or it would not be possible for a comparatively handful of policemen to control multitudes of the people and hold them in check.

* * *

Sincerity of purpose always expresses itself in action. Such sincerity never fails to compel attention. So long as you merely talk about your ideals, they will remain mere ideals. But if your talk is no mere lip-service, if you feel your convictions, if they permeated your being, they will inevitably express themselves in your daily life, in your attitude toward things, in your every action. They will then shape your life; they will make you different from other people, in proportion as your ideal is different from theirs. Then your ideal will cease to be merely an ideal. It will have become a part of yourself; and to that extent, materialized. Thus, and thus only, are ideals propagated and transmitted into life.

Anarchy is such an ideal. It expresses the highest conception of individual liberty and social solidarity. It is not a mere theory to be realized in some distant future. It is a mode of living, to be practiced right **here** and **now**.

Anarchist library
Anti-Copyright



Hippolyte Havel
What's Anarchism?
1932

Retrieved on October 8, 2010 from dwardmac.pitzer.edu

en.anarchistlibraries.net