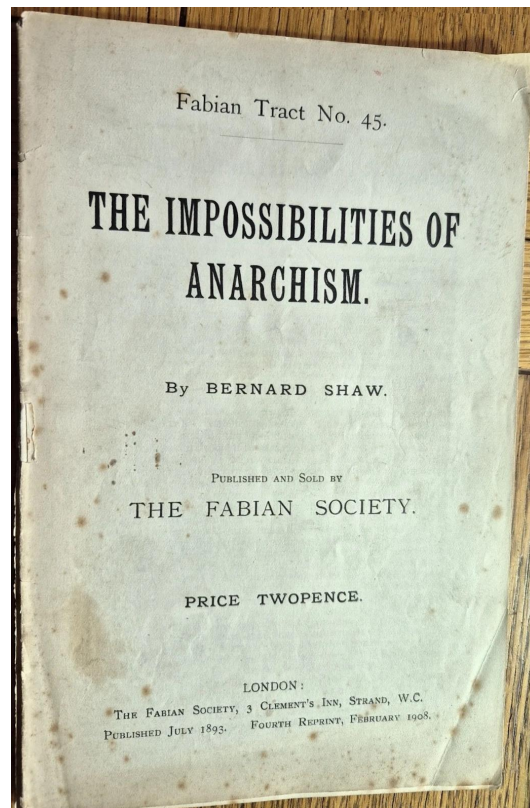


# The Impossibilities of Anarchism

Bernard Shaw



1895

# Contents

Title Page . . . . . 3  
Anarchists and Socialists. . . . . 3  
Individualist Anarchism. . . . . 5  
Communist Anarchism. . . . . 11  
Democracy. . . . . 17  
The Anarchist Spirit. . . . . 23  
Publisher Advert . . . . . 26

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BERNARD SHAW

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## **Anarchists and Socialists.**

Some years ago, as the practical policy of the Socialist party in England began to shape itself more and more definitely into the program of Social-Democracy, it became apparent that we could not progress without the gravest violations of principles of all sorts. In particular, the democratic side of the program was found to be incompatible with the sacred principle of the Autonomy of the Individual. It also involved a recognition of the State, an institution altogether repugnant to the principle of Freedom. Worse than that, it involved compromise at every step; and principles, as Mr. John Morley once eloquently showed, must not be compromised. The result was that many of us fell to quarrelling; refused to associate with one another; denounced each other as trimmers or Impossibilists, according to our side in the controversy; and finally succeeded in creating a considerable stock of ill-feeling. My own side in the controversy was the unprincipled one, as Socialism to me has always meant, not a principle, but certain definite economic measures which I wish to see taken. Indeed, I have often been reproached for limiting the term Socialism too much to the economic side of the great movement towards equality. That movement, however, appears to me to be as much an Individualist as a Socialist one; and though there are Socialists, like Sir William Harcourt, to whom Socialism means the sum total of humanitarian aspiration, in which the transfer of some millions of acres of property from private to public ownership must seem but an inessential and even undesirable detail, this sublimer shade of Socialism suffers from such a lack of concentration upon definite measures, that, but for the honor and glory of the thing, its professors might as well call themselves Conservatives. Now what with Socialists of this sort, and persons who found that the practical remedy for white slavery was incompatible with the principle of Liberty, and the practical remedy for despotism incompatible with the principle of Democracy, and the practical conduct of politics incompatible with the principle of Personal Integrity (in the sense of having your own way in everything), the practical men were at last

driven into frank Opportunism. When, for instance, they found national and local organization of the working classes opposed by Socialists on the ground that Socialism is universal and international in principle; when they found their Radical and Trade Unionist allies ostracized by Socialists for being outside the pale of the Socialist faith one and indivisible; when they saw agricultural laborers alienated by indiscriminate denunciations of allotments as “individualistic”; then they felt the full force of the saying that Socialism would spread fast enough if it were not for the Socialists. It was bad enough to have to contend with the conservative forces of the modern unsocialist State without also having to fight the seven deadly virtues in possession of the Socialists themselves. The conflict between ideal Socialism and practical Social-Democracy destroyed the Chartist organization half a century ago, as it destroyed the Socialist League only the other day. But it has never gone so far as the conflict between Social-Democracy and Anarchism. For the Anarchists will recommend abstention from voting and refusal to pay taxes in cases where the Social-Democrats are strenuously urging the workers to organize their votes so as to return candidates pledged to contend for extensions of the franchise and for taxation of unearned incomes, the object of such taxation being the raising of State capital for all sorts of collective purposes, from the opening of public libraries to the municipalization and nationalization of our industries. In fact, the denunciation of Social-Democratic methods by Anarchists is just as much a matter of course as the denunciation of Social-Democratic aims by Conservatives. It is possible that some of the strangers present may be surprised to hear this, since no distinction is made in the newspapers which support the existing social order between Social-Democrats and Anarchists, both being alike hostile to that order. In the columns of such papers all revolutionists are Socialists; all Socialists are Anarchists; and all Anarchists are incendiaries, assassins and thieves. One result of this is that the imaginative French or Italian criminal who reads the papers, sometimes declares, when taken red-handed in the commission of murder or burglary, that he is an Anarchist acting on principle. And in all countries the more violent and reckless temperaments among the discontented are attracted by the name Anarchist merely because it suggests desperate, thorough, uncompromising, implacable war on existing injustices. It is therefore necessary to warn you that there are some persons abusively called Anarchists by their political opponents, and others ignorantly so described by themselves, who are nevertheless not Anarchists at all within the meaning of this paper. On the other hand, many persons who are never called Anarchists either by themselves or others, take Anarchist ground in their opposition to Social-Democracy just as clearly as the writers with whom I shall more particularly deal. The old Whigs and new Tories of the school of Cobden and Bright, the “Philosophic Radicals,” the economists of whom Bastiat is the type, Lord Wemyss and Lord Bramwell, Mr. Herbert Spencer and Mr. Auberon Herbert, Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Arthur Balfour, Mr. John Morley, Mr. Leonard Courtney: any of these is, in England, a more typical Anarchist than Bakounin. They distrust State action, and are jealous advocates of the prerogative of the individual, proposing to restrict the one and to extend the other as far as is humanly possible, in

opposition to the Social-Democrat, who proposes to democratize the State and throw upon it the whole work of organizing the national industry, thereby making it the most vital organ in the social body. Obviously there are natural limits to the application of both views; and Anarchists and Social-Democrats are alike subject to the fool's argument that since neither collective provision for the individual nor individual freedom from collective control can be made complete, neither party is thoroughly consistent. No dialectic of that kind will, I hope, be found in the following criticism of Anarchism. It is confined to the practical measures proposed by Anarchists, and raises no discussion as to aims or principles. As to these we are all agreed. Justice, Virtue, Truth, Brotherhood, the highest interests of the people, moral as well as physical: these are dear not only to Social-Democrats and Anarchists, but also to Tories, Whigs, Radicals, and probably also to Moonlighters and Dynamitards. It is with the methods by which it is proposed to give active effect to them that I am concerned here; and to that point I shall now address myself by reading you a paper which I wrote more than four years ago on the subject chosen for to-night. I may add that it has not been revived from a wanton desire to renew an old dispute, but in response to a demand from the provincial Fabian Societies, bewildered as they are by the unexpected opposition of the Anarchists, from whom they had rather expected some sympathy. This old paper of mine being the only document of the kind available, my colleagues have requested me to expunge such errors and follies as I have grown out of since 1888, and to take this opportunity of submitting it to the judgment of the Society. Which I shall now do without further preamble.

## Individualist Anarchism.

The full economic detail of Individualist Anarchism may be inferred with sufficient completeness from an article entitled "State Socialism and Anarchism: how far they agree, and wherein they differ," which appeared in March, 1888, in *Liberty*, an Anarchist journal published in Boston, Mass., and edited by the author of the article, Mr. Benjamin R. Tucker. An examination of any number of this journal will shew that as a candid, clear-headed, and courageous demonstrator of Individualist Anarchism by purely intellectual methods, Mr. Tucker may safely be accepted as one of the most capable spokesmen of his party.

"The economic principles of Modern Socialism," says Mr. Tucker, "are a logical deduction from the principle laid down by Adam Smith in the early chapters of his *Wealth of Nations*—namely, that labor is the true measure of price. From this principle, these three men [Josiah Warren, Proudhon and Marx] deduced 'that the natural wage of labor is its product.'"

Now the Socialist who is unwary enough to accept this economic position will presently find himself logically committed to the Whig doctrine of *laissez-faire*. And here Mr. Tucker will cry, "Why not? *Laissez-faire* is exactly what we want. Destroy

the money monopoly, the tariff monopoly, and the patent monopoly. Enforce then only those land titles which rest on personal occupancy or cultivation;<sup>1</sup> and the social problem of how to secure to each worker the product of his own labor will be solved simply by everyone minding his own business.”<sup>2</sup>

Let us see whether it will or not. Suppose we decree that henceforth no more rent shall be paid in England, and that each man shall privately own his house, and hold his shop, factory, or place of business jointly with those who work with him in it. Let everyone be free to issue money from his own mint without tax or stamp. Let all taxes on commodities be abolished, and patents and copyrights be things of the past. Try to imagine yourself under these promising conditions with life before you. You may start in business as a crossing sweeper, shopkeeper, collier, farmer, miller, banker, or what not. Whatever your choice may be, the first thing you find is that the reward of your labor depends far more on the situation in which you exercise it than on yourself. If you sweep the crossing between St. James’s and Albemarle Streets you prosper greatly. But if you are forestalled not only there, but at every point more central than, say, the corner of Holford Square, Islington, you may sweep twice as hard as your rival in Piccadilly, and not take a fifth of his toll. At such a pass you may well curse Adam Smith and his principle that labor is the measure of price, and either advocate a democratically constituted State Socialist municipality, paying all its crossing sweepers equally, or else cast your broom upon the Thames and turn shopkeeper. Yet here again the same difficulty crops up. Your takings depend, not on yourself, but on the number of people who pass your window per hour. At Charing Cross or Cheapside fortunes are to be made: in the main street at Putney one can do enough to hold up one’s head: further out, a thousand yards right or left of the Portsmouth Road, the most industrious man in the world may go whistle for a customer. Evidently retail shopkeeping is not the thing for a man of spirit after Charing Cross and Cheapside have been appropriated by occupying owners on the principle of first come first served. You must aspire then to wholesale dealing—nay, to banking. Alas! the difficulty is intensified beyond calculation. Take that financial trinity, Glyn, Mills and Currie; transplant them only a few miles from Lombard Street; and they will

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<sup>1</sup> This is an inference from the following paragraph in Mr. Tucker’s article:

“Second in importance comes the land monopoly, the evil effects of which are seen principally in exclusively agricultural countries, like Ireland. This monopoly consists in the enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest on personal occupancy and cultivation. It was obvious to Warren and Proudhon that as soon as individuals should no longer be protected by their fellows in anything but personal occupation and cultivation of land, ground rent would disappear, and so usury have one less leg to stand on.”

See also Mr. Tucker’s article entitled “A Singular Misunderstanding,” in *Liberty* of the 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1892. “Regarding land,” writes Mr. Tucker, “it has been steadily maintained in these columns that protection should be withdrawn from all land titles except those based on personal occupancy and use.”

<sup>2</sup> “Nor does the Anarchistic scheme furnish any code of morals to be imposed on the individual. ‘Mind your own business,’ is its only moral law.”

soon be objects of pity to the traditional sailor who once presented at their counter a cheque for £25 and generously offered to take it in instalments, as he did not wish to be too hard on them all at once. Turning your back on banking, you meddle in the wheat trade, and end by offering to exchange an occupying ownership of all Salisbury Plain for permission to pay a rack rent for premises within hail of "The Baltic" and its barometer.

Probably there are some people who have a blind belief that crossing sweepers, "The Baltic," Lombard Street, and the like, are too utterly of the essence of the present system to survive the introduction of Anarchism. They will tell me that I am reading the conditions of the present into the future. Against such instinctive convictions it is vain to protest that I am reading only Mr. Tucker's conditions. But at least there will be farming, milling, and mining, conducted by human agents, under Anarchism. Now the farmer will not find in his perfect Anarchist market two prices at one time for two bushels of wheat of the same quality; yet the labor cost of each bushel will vary considerably according to the fertility of the farm on which it was raised, and the proximity of that farm to the market. A good soil will often yield the strongest and richest grain to less labor per acre or per bushel than must be spent on land that returns a crop less valuable by five shillings a quarter. When all the best land is held by occupying owners, those who have to content themselves with poorer soils will hail the principle that labor is the measure of price with the thumb to the nose. Among the millers, too, there must needs be grievous mistrust of Proudhon and Josiah Warren. For of two men with equally good heart to work and machinery to work with, one may be on a stream that will easily turn six millstones; whilst the other, by natural default of water, or being cut off by his fellow higher up stream, may barely be able to keep two pairs of stones in gear, and may in a dry season be ready to tie these two about his neck and lie down under the scum of his pond. Certainly, he can defy drought by setting to work with a steam engine, steel rollers, and all the latest contrivances for squashing wheat into dust instead of grinding it into flour; yet, after all his outlay, he will not be able to get a penny a sack more for his stuff than his competitor, to whose water-wheel Nature is gratuitously putting her shoulder. "Competition everywhere and always" of his unaided strength against that of his rival he might endure; but to fight naked against one armed with the winds and waves (for there are windmills as well as watermills) is no sound justice, though it be sound Anarchism. And how would occupying ownership of mines work, when it is an easier matter to get prime Wallsend and Silkstone out of one mine than to get slates and steam fuel out of another, even after twenty years' preliminary shaft-sinking? Would Mr. Tucker, if he had on sale from a rich mine some Silkstone that had only cost half as much labor as steam coal from a relatively poor one, boldly announce:—"Prices this day: Prime Silkstone, per ton, 25s.; best steam ditto, 50s. Terms, cash. Principles, those of Adam Smith—see 'Wealth of Nations' *passim*?" Certainly not with "competition everywhere and always," unless custom was no object to him in comparison with principle.

It is useless to multiply instances. There is only one country in which any square foot of land is as favorably situated for conducting exchanges, or as richly endowed by nature for production, as any other square foot; and the name of that country is Utopia. In Utopia alone, therefore, would occupying ownership be just. In England, America and other places, rashly created without consulting the Anarchists, Nature is all caprice and injustice in dealing with Labor. Here you scratch her with a spade; and earth's increase and foison plenty are added to you. On the other side of the hedge twenty steam-diggers will not extort a turnip from her. Still less adapted to Anarchism than the fields and mines is the crowded city. The distributor flourishes where men love to congregate: his work is to bring commodities to men; but here the men bring themselves to the commodities. Remove your distributor a mile, and his carts and travellers must scour the country for customers. None know this better than the landlords. Up High Street, down Low Street, over the bridge and into Crow Street, the toilers may sweat equally for equal wages; but their product varies; and the ground rents vary with the product. Competition levels down the share kept by the worker as it levels up the hours of his labor; and the surplus, high or low according to the fertility of the soil or convenience of the site, goes as high rent or low rent, but always in the long run rack rent, to the owner of the land.

Now Mr. Tucker's remedy for this is to make the occupier—the actual worker—the owner. Obviously the effect would be, not to abolish his advantage over his less favorably circumstanced competitors, but simply to authorize him to put it into his own pocket instead of handing it over to a landlord. He would then, it is true, be (as far as his place of business was concerned) a worker instead of an idler; but he would get more product as a manufacturer and more custom as a distributor than other equally industrious workers in worse situations. He could thus save faster than they, and retire from active service at an age when they would still have many years more work before them. His ownership of his place of business would of course lapse in favor of his successor the instant he retired. How would the rest of the community decide who was to be the successor—would they toss up for it, or fight for it, or would he be allowed to nominate his heir, in which case he would either nominate his son or sell his nomination for a large fine? Again, his retirement from his place of business would leave him still in possession, as occupying owner, of his private residence; and this might be of exceptional or even unique desirability in point of situation. It might, for instance, be built on Richmond Hill, and command from its windows the beautiful view of the Thames valley to be obtained from that spot. Now it is clear that Richmond Hill will not accommodate all the people who would rather live there than in the Essex marshes. It is easy to say, Let the occupier be the owner; but the question is, Who is to be the occupier? Suppose it were settled by drawing lots, what would prevent the winner from selling his privilege for its full (unearned) value under free exchange and omnipresent competition? To such problems as these, Individualist Anarchism offers no solution. It theorizes throughout on the assumption that one place in a country is as good as another.

Under a system of occupying ownership, rent would appear only in its primary form of an excess of the prices of articles over the expenses of producing them, thus enabling owners of superior land to get more for their products than cost price. If, for example, the worst land worth using were only one-third as productive as the best land, then the owner-occupiers of that best land would get in the market the labor cost of their wares three times over. This 200 per cent premium would be just as truly ground rent as if it were paid openly as such to the Duke of Bedford or the Astors. It may be asked why prices must go up to the expenses of production on the very worst land. Why not ascertain and charge the average cost of production taking good and bad land together?<sup>3</sup> Simply because nothing short of the maximum labor cost would repay the owners of the worst land. In fact, the worst land would not be cultivated until the price had risen. The process would be as follows. Suppose the need of the population for wheat were satisfied by crops raised from the best available land only. Free competition in wheat-producing would then bring the price down to the labor cost or expenses of production. Now suppose an increase of population sufficient to overtax the wheat-supplying capacity of the best land. The supply falling short of the demand, the price of wheat would rise. When it had risen to the labor cost of production from land one degree inferior to the best, it would be worth while to cultivate that inferior land. When that new source came to be overtaxed by the still growing population, the price would rise again until it would repay the cost of raising wheat from land yet lower in fertility than the second grade. But these descents would in nowise diminish the fertility of the best land, from which wheat could be raised as cheaply as before, in spite of the rise in the price, which would apply to all the wheat in the market, no matter where raised. That is, the holders of the best land would gain a premium, rising steadily with the increase of population, exactly as the landlord now enjoys a steadily rising rent.<sup>4</sup> As

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<sup>3</sup> This would of course be largely practicable under a Collectivist system.

<sup>4</sup> English readers need not baulk themselves here because of the late fall of agricultural rents in this country. Rent, in the economic sense, covers payment for the use of land for any purpose, agricultural or otherwise; and town rents have risen oppressively. A much more puzzling discrepancy between the facts and the theory is presented by the apparent absence of any upward tendency in the prices of general commodities. However, an article may be apparently no less cheap or even much cheaper than it was twenty years ago; and yet its price may have risen enormously relatively to its average cost of production, owing to the average cost of production having been reduced by machinery, higher organization of the labor of producing it, cheapened traffic with other countries, etc. Thus, in the cotton industry, machinery has multiplied each man's power of production eleven hundred times; and Sir Joseph Whitworth was quoted by the President of the Iron and Steel Institute some years ago as having declared that a Nottingham lace machine can do the work formerly done by 8,000 lacemakers. The articles entitled "Great Manufacture of Little Things," in Cassell's *Technical Educator*, may be consulted for examples of this sort in the production of pins, pens, etc. Suppose, then, that an article which cost, on the average, fivepence to make in 1850, was then sold for sixpence. If it be now selling for threepence, it is apparently twice as cheap as it was. But if the cost of production has also fallen to three-halfpence, which is by no means an extravagant supposition, then the price, considered relatively to the cost of production, has evidently risen prodigiously, since it is now twice the cost, whereas the cost was formerly five-sixths of the price. In other words, the surplus, or rent, per article, has risen from 16⅔ per cent. to 100 per cent.,

the agricultural industry is in this respect typical of all industries, it will be seen now that the price does not rise because worse land is brought into cultivation, but that worse land is brought into cultivation by the rise of price. Or, to put it in another way, the price of the commodity does not rise because more labor has been devoted to its production, but more labor is devoted to its production because the price has risen. Commodities, in fact, have a price before they are produced; we produce them expressly to obtain that price; and we cannot alter it by merely spending more or less labor on them. It is natural for the laborer to insist that labor *ought to be* the measure of price, and that the *just* wage of labor is its average product; but the first lesson he has to learn in economics is that labor is not and never can be the measure of price under a competitive system. Not until the progress of Socialism replaces competitive production and distribution, with individual greed for its incentive, by Collectivist production and distribution, with fair play all round for its incentive, will the prices either of labor or commodities represent their just value.

Thus we see that “competition everywhere and always” fails to circumvent rent whilst the land is held by competing occupiers who are protected in the individual ownership of what they can raise from their several holdings. And “the great principle laid down by Adam Smith,” formulated by Josiah Warren as “Cost is the proper limit of price,” turns out—since in fact price is the limit of cost—to be merely a preposterous way of expressing the fact that under Anarchism that small fraction of the general wealth which was produced under the least favorable circumstances would at least fetch its cost, whilst all the rest would fetch a premium which would be nothing but privately appropriated rent with an Anarchist mask on.

We see also that such a phrase as “the natural wage of labor is its product” is a misleading one, since labor cannot produce subsistence except when exercised upon natural materials and aided by natural forces external to man. And when it is so produced, its value in exchange depends in nowise on the share taken by labor in its production, but solely to the demand for it in society. The economic problem of Socialism is the just distribution of the premium given to certain portions of the general product by the action of demand. As Individualist Anarchism not only fails to distribute these, but deliberately permits their private appropriation, Individualist Anarchism is the negation of Socialism, and is, in fact, Unsocialism carried as near to its logical completeness as any sane man dare carry it.

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in spite of the apparent cheapening. This is the explanation of the fact that though the workers were probably never before so monstrously robbed as they are at present, it is quite possible for statisticians to prove that on the whole wages have risen and prices fallen. The worker, pleased at having only to pay threepence where he formerly paid sixpence, forgets that the share of his threepence that goes to an idler may be much larger than that which went out of each of the two threepences he paid formerly.

## Communist Anarchism.

State Socialism and Anarchism, says Mr. Tucker, “are based on two principles, the history of whose conflict is almost equivalent to the history of the world since man came into it; and all intermediate parties, including that of the upholders of the existing society, are based upon a compromise between them.” These principles are Authority—the State Socialist principle, and Liberty—the Anarchist principle. State Socialism is then defined as “the doctrine that all the affairs of men should be managed by the government, regardless of individual choice,” whereas Anarchism is “the doctrine that all the affairs of men should be managed by individuals or voluntary associations, and that the State should be abolished.”

Now most revolutionists will admit that there was a stage in the growth of their opinions when the above seemed an adequate statement of the alternatives before them. But, as we have seen, when the Individualist Anarchist proceeds to reduce his principle to practice, he is inevitably led to Mr. Tucker’s program of “competition everywhere and always” among occupying owners, subject only to the moral law of minding their own business. No sooner is this formulated than its effect on the distribution of wealth is examined by the economist, who finds no trouble in convicting it, under the economic law of rent, of privilege, monopoly, inequality, unjust indirect taxation, and everything that is most repugnant to Anarchism. But this startling reverse, however it may put the Anarchist out of conceit with his program, does not in the least reconcile him to State Socialism. It only changes his mind on one point. Whilst his program satisfied him, he was content to admit that State Socialism was the only possible alternative to Individualist Anarchism—nay, he rather insisted on it, because the evils of the State Socialist alternative were strong incentives to the acceptance of the other. But the moment it becomes apparent that the one is economically as bad as the other, the disillusioned Individualist Anarchist becomes convinced of the insufficiency of his analysis of the social problem, and follows it up in order to find out a *tertium quid*, or third system which shall collect and justly distribute the rent of the country, and yet prevent the collecting and distributing organ from acquiring the tyrannous powers of governments as we know them. There are two such systems at present before the world: Communism and Social-Democracy. Now there is no such thing as Anarchist Social-Democracy; but there is such a thing as Anarchist Communism or Communist Anarchism. It is true that Mr. Tucker does not recognize the Communist Anarchist as an Anarchist at all: he energetically repudiates Communism as the uttermost negation of true Anarchism, and will not admit any logical halting place between thoroughgoing State Socialism and thoroughgoing Individualist Anarchism. But why insist on anybody occupying a logical halting place? We are all fond of shewing that on any given subject there are only two of these safe spots, one being the point of agreement with us, and the other some inconceivable extremity of idiocy. But for the purposes of the present criticism it will be more practical to waive such crude rationalizing, and

concede that to deal with Mr. Tucker without also dealing with Peter Kropotkine is not to give Anarchism fair play.

The main difficulty in criticising Kropotkine lies in the fact that, in the distribution of generally needed labor products, his Communism is finally cheap and expedient, whereas Mr. Tucker's Individualism, in the same department, is finally extravagant and impossible. Even under the most perfect Social-Democracy we should, without Communism, still be living like hogs, except that each hog would get his fair share of grub. High as that ideal must seem to anyone who complacently accepts the present social order, it is hardly high enough to satisfy a man in whom the social instinct is well developed. So long as vast quantities of labor have to be expended in weighing and measuring each man's earned share of this and that commodity—in watching, spying, policing, and punishing in order to prevent Tom getting a crumb of bread more or Dick a spoonful of milk less than he has a voucher for, so long will the difference between Unsocialism and Socialism be only the difference between unscientific and scientific hoggishness. I do not desire to underrate the vastness of that difference. Whilst we are hogs, let us at least be well-fed, healthy, reciprocally useful hogs, instead of—well, instead of the sort we are at present. But we shall not have any great reason to stand on the dignity of our humanity until a just distribution of the loaves and fishes becomes perfectly spontaneous, and the great effort and expense of a legal distribution, however just, is saved. For my own part, I seek the establishment of a state of society in which I shall not be bothered with a ridiculous pocketful of coppers, nor have to waste my time in perplexing arithmetical exchanges of them with booking clerks, bus conductors, shopmen, and other superfluous persons before I can get what I need. I aspire to live in a community which shall be at least capable of averaging the transactions between us well enough to ascertain how much work I am to do for it in return for the right to take what I want of the commoner necessities and conveniences of life. The saving of friction by such an arrangement may be guessed from the curious fact that only specialists in sociology are conscious of the numerous instances in which we are today forced to adopt it by the very absurdity of the alternative. Most people will tell you that Communism is known only in this country as a visionary project advocated by a handful of amiable cranks. Then they will stroll off across the common bridge, along the common embankment, by the light of the common gas lamp shining alike on the just and the unjust, up the common street, and into the common Trafalgar Square, where, on the smallest hint on their part that Communism is to be tolerated for an instant in a civilized country, they will be handily bludgeoned by the common policeman, and haled off to the common gaol.<sup>5</sup> When you suggest to these people that the application of Communism to the bread supply is only an extension, involving no new principle, of its application to street lighting, they are bewildered. Instead of picturing the Communist man going to the common store, and thence taking his

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<sup>5</sup> Written in the 1887–92 period, during which Trafalgar Square was forcibly closed against public meetings by the Salisbury administration.

bread home with him, they instinctively imagine him bursting obstreperously into his neighbor's house and snatching the bread off his table on the "as much mine as yours" principle—which, however, has an equally sharp edge for the thief's throat in the form "as much yours as mine." In fact, the average Englishman is only capable of understanding Communism when it is explained as a state of things under which everything is paid for out of the taxes, and taxes are paid in labor. And even then he will sometimes say, "How about the brainwork?" and begin the usual novice's criticism of Socialism in general.

Now a Communist Anarchist may demur to such a definition of Communism as I have just given; for it is evident that if there are to be taxes, there must be some authority to collect those taxes. I will not insist on the odious word taxes; but I submit that if any article—bread, for instance—be communized, by which I mean that there shall be public stores of bread, sufficient to satisfy everybody, to which all may come and take what they need without question or payment, wheat must be grown, mills must grind, and bakers must sweat daily in order to keep up the supply. Obviously, therefore, the common bread store will become bankrupt unless every consumer of the bread contributes to its support as much labor as the bread he consumes costs to produce. Communism or no Communism, he must pay or else leave somebody else to pay for him. Communism will cheapen bread for him—will save him the cost of scales and weights, coin, book-keepers, counter-hands, policemen, and other expenses of private property; but it will not do away with the cost of the bread and the store. Now supposing that voluntary co-operation and public spirit prove equal to the task of elaborately organizing the farming, milling and baking industries for the production of bread, how will these voluntary co-operators recover the cost of their operations from the public who are to consume their bread? If they are given powers to collect the cost from the public, and to enforce their demands by punishing non-payers for their dishonesty, then they at once become a State department levying a tax for public purposes; and the Communism of the bread supply becomes no more Anarchistic than our present Communistic supply of street lighting is Anarchistic. Unless the taxation is voluntary—unless the bread consumer is free to refuse payment without incurring any penalty save the reproaches of his conscience and his neighbors, the Anarchist ideal will remain unattained. Now the pressure of conscience and public opinion is by no means to be slighted. Millions of men and women, without any legal compulsion whatever, pay for the support of institutions of all sorts, from churches to tall hats, simply out of their need for standing well with their neighbors. But observe, this compulsion of public opinion derives most of its force from the difficulty of getting the wherewithal to buy bread without a reputation for respectability. Under Communism a man could snap his fingers at public opinion without starving for it. Besides, public opinion cannot for a moment be relied upon as a force which operates uniformly as a compulsion upon men to act morally. Its operation is for all practical purposes quite arbitrary, and is as often immoral as moral. It is just as hostile to the reformer as to the criminal. It hangs Anarchists and worships Nitrate Kings. It insists on a man

wearing a tall hat and going to church, on his marrying the woman he lives with, and on his pretending to believe whatever the rest pretend to believe; and it enforces these ordinances in a sufficient majority of cases without help from the law: its tyranny, in fact, being so crushing that its little finger is often found to be thicker than the law's loins. But there is no sincere public opinion that a man should work for his daily bread if he can get it for nothing. Indeed it is just the other way: public opinion has been educated to regard the performance of daily manual labor as the lot of the despised classes. The common aspiration is to acquire property and leave off working. Even members of the professions rank below the independent gentry, so called because they are independent of their own labor. These prejudices are not confined to the middle and upper classes: they are rampant also among the workers. The man who works nine hours a day despises the man who works sixteen. A country gentleman may consider himself socially superior to his solicitor or his doctor; but they associate on much more cordial terms than shopmen and car-men, engine drivers and railway porters, bricklayers and hodmen, barmaids and general servants. One is almost tempted in this country to declare that the poorer the man the greater the snob, until you get down to those who are so oppressed that they have not enough self-respect even for snobbery, and thus are able to pluck out of the heart of their misery a certain irresponsibility which it would be a mockery to describe as genuine frankness and freedom. The moment you rise into the higher atmosphere of a pound a week, you find that envy, ostentation, tedious and insincere ceremony, love of petty titles, precedences and dignities, and all the detestable fruits of inequality of condition, flourish as rankly among those who lose as among those who gain by it. In fact, the notion that poverty favors virtue was clearly invented to persuade the poor that what they lost in this world they would gain in the next.

Kropotkine, too optimistically, as I think, disposes of the average man by attributing his unsocialism to the pressure of the corrupt system under which he groans. Remove that pressure, and he will think rightly, says Kropotkine. But if the natural man be indeed social as well as gregarious, how did the corruption and oppression under which he groans ever arise? Could the institution of property as we know it ever have come into existence unless nearly every man had been, not merely willing, but openly and shamelessly eager to quarter himself idly on the labor of his fellows, and to domineer over them whenever the mysterious workings of economic law enabled him to do so? It is useless to think of man as a fallen angel. If the fallacies of absolute morality are to be admitted in the discussion at all, he must be considered rather as an obstinate and selfish devil, who is being slowly forced by the iron tyranny of Nature to recognize that in disregarding his neighbor's happiness he is taking the surest way to sacrifice his own. And under the present system he never can learn that lesson thoroughly, because he is an inveterate gambler, and knows that the present system gives him a chance, at odds of a hundred thousand to one or so against him, of becoming a millionaire, a condition which is to him the summit of earthly bliss, as from it he will be able to look down upon those who formerly bullied and patronized him. All this may sound harsh,

especially to those who know how wholesomely real is the workman's knowledge of life compared to that of the gentleman, and how much more genuinely sympathetic he is in consequence. Indeed, it is obvious that if four-fifths of the population were habitually to do the utter worst in the way of selfishness that the present system invites them to do, society would not stand the strain for six weeks. So far, we can claim to be better than our institutions. But the fact that we are too good for complete Unsocialism by no means proves that we are good enough for Communism. The practical question remains, Could men trained under our present system be trusted to pay for their food scrupulously if they could take it for nothing with impunity? Clearly, if they did not so pay, Anarchist Communism would be bankrupt in two days. The answer is that all the evils against which Anarchism is directed are caused by men taking advantage of the institution of property to do this very thing—seize their subsistence without working for it. What reason is there for doubting that they would attempt to take exactly the same advantage of Anarchist Communism? And what reason is there to doubt that the community, finding its bread store bankrupt, would instantly pitch its Anarchism to the four winds, and come down on the defaulters with the strong hand of a law to make them pay, just as they are now compelled to pay their Income Tax? I submit, then, to our Communist Anarchist friends that Communism requires either external compulsion to labor, or else a social morality which the evils of existing society shew that we have failed as yet to attain. I do not deny the possibility of the final attainment of that degree of moralization; but I contend that the path to it lies through a transition system which, instead of offering fresh opportunities to men of getting their living idly, will destroy those opportunities altogether, and wean us from the habit of regarding such an anomaly as possible, much less honorable.

It must not be supposed that the economic difficulties which I pointed out as fatal to Individualist Anarchism are entirely removed by Communism. It is true that if all the bread and coal in the country were thrown into a common store from which each man could take as much as he wanted whenever he pleased without direct payment, then no man could gain any advantage over his fellows from the fact that some farms and some coal-mines are better than others. And if every man could step into a train and travel whither he would without a ticket, no individual could speculate in the difference between the traffic from Charing Cross to the Mansion House and that from Ryde to Ventnor. One of the great advantages of Communism will undoubtedly be that huge masses of economic rent will be socialized by it automatically. All rent arising from the value of commodities in general use which can be produced, consumed, and replaced at the will of man to the full extent to which they are wanted, can be made rent free by communizing them. But there must remain outside this solution, first, the things which are not in sufficiently general use to be communized at all; second, things of which an unlimited free supply might prove a nuisance, such as gin or printing; and thirdly, things for which the demand exceeds the supply. The last is the instance in which the rent difficulty recurs. It would take an extraordinary course of demolition, reconstruction, and landscape gardening to make every dwelling house

in London as desirable as a house in Park Lane, or facing Regent's Park, or overlooking the Embankment Gardens. And since everybody cannot be accommodated there, the exceptionally favored persons who occupy those sites will certainly be expected to render an equivalent for their privilege to those whom they exclude. Without this there would evidently be no true socialization of the habitation of London. This means, in practice, that a public department must let the houses out to the highest bidders, and collect the rents for public purposes. Such a department can hardly be called Anarchistic, however democratic it may be. I might go on to enlarge considerably on the limits to the practicability of direct Communism, which varies from commodity to commodity; but one difficulty, if insurmountable, is as conclusive as twenty.

It is sufficient for our present purpose to have shewn that Communism cannot be ideally Anarchistic, because it does not in the least do away with the necessity for *compelling* people to pay for what they consume; and even when the growth of human character removes that difficulty there will still remain the question of those commodities to which the simple Communist method of so-called "free distribution" is inapplicable. One practical point more requires a word; and that is the difficulty of communizing any branch of distribution without first collectivizing it. For instance, we might easily communize the postal service by simply announcing that in future letters would be carried without stamps just as they now are with them, the cost being thrown entirely upon imperial taxation. But if the postal service were, like most of our distributive business, in the hands of thousands of competing private traders, no such change would be directly possible. Communism must grow out of Collectivism, not out of anarchic private enterprise. That is to say, it cannot grow directly out of the present system.

But must the transition system therefore be a system of despotic coercion? If so, it will be wrecked by the intense impulse of men to escape from the domination of their own kind. In 1888 a Russian subject, giving evidence before the Sweating Inquiry in the House of Lords, declared that he left the Russian dominion, where he worked thirteen hours a day, to work eighteen hours in England, *because he is freer here*. Reason is dumb when confronted with a man who, exhausted with thirteen hours' toil, will turn to for another five hours for the sake of being free to say that Mr. Gladstone is a better man than Lord Salisbury, and to read Mill, Spencer, and *Reynold's Newspaper* in the six hours left to him for sleep. It brings to mind the story of the American judge who tried to induce a runaway slave to return to the plantation by pointing out how much better he was treated there than the free wage-nigger of the Abolitionist states. "Yes," said the runaway; "but would you go back if you were in my place?" The judge turned Abolitionist at once. These things are not to be reasoned away. Man will submit to fate, circumstance, society, anything that comes impersonally over him; but against the personal oppressor, whether parent, schoolmaster, overseer, official chief, or king, he eternally rebels. Like the Russian, he will rather be compelled by "necessity" to *agree* to work eighteen hours, than ordered by a master to work thirteen. No modern nation, if deprived of personal liberty or national autonomy, would stop to think of its

economic position. Establish a form of Socialism which shall deprive the people of their sense of personal liberty; and, though it double their rations and halve their working hours, they will begin to conspire against it before it is a year old. We only disapprove of monopolists: we *hate* masters.

Then, since we are too dishonest for Communism without taxation or compulsory labor, and too insubordinate to tolerate task work under personal compulsion, how can we order the transition so as to introduce just distribution without Communism, and maintain the incentive to labor without mastership? The answer is, by Democracy. And now, having taken a positive attitude at last, I must give up criticizing the Anarchists, and defend Democracy against *their* criticisms.

## Democracy.

I now, accordingly, return to Mr. Tucker's criticism of State Socialism, which, for the sake of precision, had better be called Social-Democracy. There is a Socialism—that of Bismarck; of the extinct young England party; of the advocates of moralized feudalism; and of mob contemners generally—which is not Social-Democracy, but Social-Despotism, and may be dismissed as essentially no more hopeful than a system of Moralized Criminality, Abstemious Gluttony, or Straightforward Mendacity would be. Mr. Tucker, as an American, passes it over as not worth powder and shot: he clearly indicates a democratic State by his repeated references to the majority principle, and in particular by his assertion that “there would be but one article in the constitution of a State Socialistic country: ‘The right of the majority is absolute.’” Having thus driven Democracy back on its citadel, he proceeds to cannonade it as follows:

“Under the system of State Socialism, which holds the community responsible for the health, wealth and wisdom of the individual, the community, through its majority expression, will insist more and more on prescribing the conditions of health, wealth, and wisdom, thus impairing and finally destroying individual independence and with it all sense of individual responsibility.

“Whatever, then, the State Socialists may claim or disclaim, their system, if adopted, is doomed to end in a State religion, to the expense of which all must contribute and at the altar of which all must kneel; a State school of medicine, by whose practitioners the sick must invariably be treated; a State system of hygiene, proscribing what all must and must not eat, drink, wear and do; a State code of morals, which will not content itself with punishing crime, but will prohibit what the majority decide to be vice; a State system of instruction, which shall do away with all private schools, academies and colleges; a State nursery, in which all children must be brought up in common at the public expense; and, finally, a State family, with an attempt at stirpiculture, or scientific breeding, in which no man or woman will be allowed to have children if the State prohibits them, and no man or woman can refuse to have children if the State

orders them. Thus will Authority achieve its acme and Monopoly be carried to its highest power.”

In reading this one is reminded of Mr. Herbert Spencer’s habit of assuming that whatever is not white must be black. Mr. Tucker, on the ground that “it has ever been the tendency of power to add to itself, to enlarge its sphere, to encroach beyond the limits set for it,” admits no alternative to the total subjection of the individual, except the total abolition of the State. If matters really could and did come to that I am afraid the individual would have to go under in any case; for the total abolition of the State in this sense means the total abolition of the collective force of Society, to abolish which it would be necessary to abolish Society itself. There are two ways of doing this. One, the abolition of the individuals composing society, could not be carried out without an interference with their personal claims much more serious than that required, even on Mr. Tucker’s shewing, by Social-Democracy. The other, the dispersion of the human race into independent hermitages over the globe at the rate of twenty-five to the square mile, would give rise to considerable inequality of condition and opportunity as between the hermits of Terra del Fuego or the Arctic regions and those of Florida or the Riviera, and would suit only a few temperaments. The dispersed units would soon re-associate; and the moment they did so, goodbye to the sovereignty of the individual. If the majority believed in an angry and jealous God, then, State or no State, they would not permit an individual to offend that God and bring down his wrath upon them: they would rather stone and burn the individual in propitiation. They would not suffer the individual to go naked among them; and if he clothed himself in an unusual way which struck them as being ridiculous or scandalous, they would laugh at, him; refuse him admission to their feasts; object to be seen talking with him in the streets; and perhaps lock him up as a lunatic. They would not allow him to neglect sanitary precautions which they believed essential to their own immunity from zymotic disease. If the family were established among them as it is established among us, they would not suffer him to intermarry within certain degrees of kinship. Their demand would so rule the market that in most places he would find no commodities in the shops except those preferred by a majority of the customers; no schools except those conducted in accordance with the ideas of the majority of parents; no experienced doctors except those whose qualifications inspired confidence in a whole circle of patients. This is not “the coming slavery” of Social-Democracy: it is the slavery already come. What is more, there is nothing in the most elaborately negative practical program yet put forward by Anarchism that offers the slightest mitigation of it. That in comparison with ideal irresponsible absolute liberty it is slavery, cannot be denied. But in comparison with the slavery of Robinson Crusoe, which is the most Anarchistic alternative Nature, our taskmistress, allows us, it is pardonably described as “freedom.” Robinson Crusoe, in fact, is always willing to exchange his unlimited rights and puny powers for the curtailed rights and relatively immense powers of the “slave” of majorities. For if the individual chooses, as in most cases he will, to believe and worship as his fellows do, he finds temples built and services organized at a cost to himself which he hardly feels.

The clothes, the food, the furniture which he is most likely to prefer are ready for him in the shops; the schools in which his children can be taught what their fellow citizens expect them to know are within fifteen minutes' walk of his door; and the red lamp of the most approved pattern of doctor shines reassuringly at the corner of the street. He is free to live with the women of his family without suspicion or scandal; and if he is not free to marry them, what does that matter to him, since he does not wish to marry them? And so happy man be his dole, in spite of his slavery.

“Yes,” cries some eccentric individual; “but all this is untrue of me. I want to marry my deceased wife’s sister. I am prepared to prove that your authorized system of medicine is nothing but a debased survival of witchcraft. Your schools are machines for forcing spurious learning on children in order that your universities may stamp them as educated men when they have finally lost all power to think for themselves. The tall silk hats and starched linen shirts which you force me to wear, and without which I cannot successfully practice as a physician, clergyman, schoolmaster, lawyer, or merchant, are inconvenient, unsanitary, ugly, pompous, and offensive. Your temples are devoted to a God in whom I do not believe; and even if I did believe in him I should still regard your popular forms of worship as only redeemed from gross superstition by their obvious insincerity. Science teaches me that my proper food is good bread and good fruit: your boasted food supply offers me cows and pigs instead. Your care for my health consists in tapping the common sewer, with its deadly typhoid gases, into my house, besides discharging its contents into the river, which is my natural bath and fountain. Under color of protecting my person and property you forcibly take my money to support an army of soldiers and policemen for the execution of barbarous and detestable laws; for the waging of wars which I abhor; and for the subjection of my person to those legal rights of property which compel me to sell myself for a wage to a class the maintenance of which I hold to be the greatest evil of our time. Your tyranny makes my very individuality a hindrance to me: I am outdone and outbred by the mediocre, the docile, the time-serving. Evolution under such conditions means degeneracy: therefore I demand the abolition of all these officious compulsions, and proclaim myself an Anarchist.”

The proclamation is not surprising under the circumstances; but it does not mend the matter in the least, nor would it if every person were to repeat it with enthusiasm, and the whole people to fly to arms for Anarchism. The majority cannot help its tyranny even if it would. The giant Winkelmeier must have found our doorways inconvenient, just as men of five feet or less find the slope of the floor in a theatre not sufficiently steep to enable them to see over the heads of those in front. But whilst the average height of a man is 5ft. 8in. there is no redress for such grievances. Builders will accommodate doors and floors to the majority, and not to the minority. For since either the majority or the minority must be incommoded, evidently the more powerful must have its way. There may be no indisputable reason why it ought not; and any clever Tory can give excellent reasons why it ought not; but the fact remains that it will, whether it ought or not. And this is what really settles the question as between

democratic majorities and minorities. Where their interests conflict, the weaker side must go to the wall, because, as the evil involved is no greater than that of the stronger going to the wall,<sup>6</sup> the majority is not restrained by any scruple from compelling the weaker to give way.

In practice, this does not involve either the absolute power of majorities, or “the infallibility of the odd man.” There are some matters in which the course preferred by the minority in no way obstructs that preferred by the majority. There are many more in which the obstruction is easier to bear than the cost of suppressing it. For it costs something to suppress even a minority of one. The commonest example of that minority is the lunatic with a delusion; yet it is found quite safe to entertain dozens of delusions, and be generally an extremely selfish and troublesome idiot, in spite of the power of majorities; for until you go so far that it clearly costs less to lock you up than to leave you at large, the majority will not take the trouble to set itself in action against you. Thus a minimum of individual liberty is secured, under any system, to the smallest minority. It is true that as minorities grow, they sometimes, in forfeiting the protection of insignificance, lose more in immunity than they gain in numbers; so that probably the weakest minority is not the smallest, but rather that which is too large to be disregarded and too weak to be feared; but before and after that dangerous point is weathered, minorities wield considerable power. The notion that they are ciphers because the majority could vanquish them in a trial of strength leaves out of account the damage they could inflict on the victors during the struggle. Ordinarily an unarmed man weighing thirteen stone can beat one weighing only eleven; but there are very few emergencies in which it is worth his while to do it, because if the weaker man resists to the best of his ability (which is always possible) the victor will be considerably worse off after the fight than before it. In 1861 the Northern and Southern States of America fought, as prize-fighters say, “to a finish”; and the North carried its point, yet at such a heavy cost to itself that the Southern States have by no means been reduced to ciphers; for the victorious majority have ever since felt that it would be better to give way on any but the most vital issues than to provoke such another struggle. But it is not often that a preemptory question arises between a majority and minority of a whole nation. In most matters only a fragment of the nation has any interest one way or the other; and the same man who is in a majority on one question is in a minority on another, and so learns by experience that minorities have “rights” which must be attended to. Minorities, too, as in the case of the Irish Party in the English Parliament, occasionally hold the balance of power between majorities which recognize their rights and majorities which deny them. Further, it is possible by decentralization to limit the

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<sup>6</sup> The evil is decidedly *less* if the calculation proceeds by the popular method of always estimating an evil suffered by a hundred persons as a hundred times as great as the same evil suffered by only one. This, however, is absurd. A hundred starving men are not a hundred times as hungry as one starving man, any more than a hundred five-foot-eight men are each five hundred and sixty-six feet eight inches high. But they are a hundred times as strong a political force. Though the evil may not be cumulative, the power to resist it is.

power of the majority of the whole nation to questions upon which a divided policy is impracticable. For example, it is not only possible, but democratically expedient, to federate the municipalities of England in such a manner that Leicester might make vaccination penal whilst every other town in the island made it compulsory. Even at present, vaccination is not in fact compulsory in Leicester, though it is so in law. Theoretically, Leicester has been reduced to a cipher by the rest of England. Practically, Leicester counts twelve to the dozen as much as ever in purely local affairs.

In short, then, Democracy does not give majorities absolute power, nor does it enable them to reduce minorities to ciphers. Such limited power of coercing minorities as majorities must possess, is not given to them by Democracy any more than it can be taken away from them by Anarchism. A couple of men are stronger than one: that is all. There are only two ways of neutralizing this natural fact. One is to convince men of the immorality of abusing the majority power, and then to make them moral enough to refrain from doing it on that account. The other is to realize Lytton's fancy of *vril* by inventing a means by which each individual will be able to destroy all his fellows with a flash of thought, so that the majority may have as much reason to fear the individual as he to fear the majority. No method of doing either is to be found in Individualist or Communist Anarchism: consequently these systems, as far as the evils of majority tyranny are concerned, are no better than the Social-Democratic program of adult suffrage with maintenance of representatives and payment of polling expenses from public funds—faulty devices enough, no doubt, but capable of accomplishing all that is humanly possible at present to make the State representative of the nation; to make the administration trustworthy; and to secure the utmost power to each individual and consequently to minorities. What better can we have whilst collective action is inevitable? Indeed, in the mouths of the really able Anarchists, Anarchism means simply the utmost attainable thoroughness of Democracy. Kropotkine, for example, speaks of free development from the simple to the composite by “the free union of free groups”; and his illustrations are “the societies for study, for commerce, for pleasure and recreation” which have sprung up to meet the varied requirements of the individual of our age. But in every one of these societies there is government by a council elected annually by a majority of voters; so that Kropotkine is not at all afraid of the democratic machinery and the majority power. Mr. Tucker speaks of “voluntary association,” but gives no illustrations, and indeed avows that “Anarchists are simply unterrified Jeffersonian Democrats.” He says, indeed, that “if the individual has a right to govern himself, all external government is tyranny”; but if governing oneself means doing what one pleases without regard to the interests of neighbors, then the individual has flatly no such right. If he has no such right, the interference of his neighbors to make him behave socially, though it is “external government,” is not tyranny; and even if it were they would not refrain from it on that account. On the other hand, if governing oneself means compelling oneself to act with a due regard to the interests of the neighbors, then it is a right which men are proved incapable of exercising without external government. Either way, the

phrase comes to nothing; for it would be easy to show by a little play upon it, either that altruism is really external government or that democratic State authority is really self-government.

Mr. Tucker's adjective, "voluntary," as applied to associations for defence or the management of affairs, must not be taken as implying that there is any very wide choice open in these matters. Such association is really compulsory, since if it be foregone affairs will remain unmanaged and communities defenceless. Nature makes short work of our aspirations towards utter impunity. She leaves communities in no wise "free" to choose whether they will labor and govern themselves. It is either that or starvation and chaos. Her tasks are inexorably set: her penalties are inevitable: her payment is strictly "payment by results." All the individual can do is to shift and dodge his share of the task on to the shoulders of others, or filch some of their "natural wage" to add to his own. If they are fools enough to suffer it, that is their own affair as far as Nature is concerned. But it is the aim of Social-Democracy to relieve these fools by throwing on all an equal share in the inevitable labor imposed by the eternal tyranny of Nature, and so secure to every individual no less than his equal quota of the nation's product in return for no more than his equal quota of the nation's labor. These are the best terms humanity can make with its tyrant. In the eighteenth century it was easy for the philosophers and for Adam Smith to think of this rule of Nature as being "natural liberty" in contrast to the odious and stupid oppression of castes, priests, and kings—the detested "dominion of man over man." But we, in detecting the unsoundness of Adam Smith's private property and *laissez-faire* recipe for natural liberty, begin to see that though there is political liberty, there is no natural liberty, but only natural law remorselessly enforced. And so we shake our heads when we see *Liberty* on the title-page of Mr. Tucker's paper, just as we laugh when we see *The Coming Slavery* on Mr. Herbert Spencer's "Man and the State."

We can now begin to join the threads of our discussion. We have seen that private appropriation of land in any form, whether limited by Individualist Anarchism to occupying owners or not, means the unjust distribution of a vast fund of social wealth called rent, which can by no means be claimed as due to the labor of any particular individual or class of individuals. We have seen that Communist Anarchism, though it partly—and only partly—avoids the rent difficulty, is, in the condition of morals developed under existing Unsocialism, impracticable. We have seen that the delegation of individual powers by voting; the creation of authoritative public bodies; the supremacy of the majority in the last resort; and the establishment and even endowment, either directly and officially or indirectly and unconsciously, of conventional forms of practice in religion, medicine, education, food, clothing, and criminal law, are, whether they be evils or not, inherent in society itself, and must be submitted to with the help of such protection against their abuse as democratic institutions more than any others afford. When Democracy fails, there is no antidote for intolerance save the spread of better sense. No form of Anarchism yet suggested provides any escape. Like bad weather in winter, intolerance does much mischief; but as, when we have done our best in the way

of overcoats, umbrellas, and good fires, we have to put up with the winter; so, when we have done our best in the way of Democracy, decentralization, and the like, we must put up with the State.

## **The Anarchist Spirit.**

I suppose I must not leave the subject without a word as to the value of what I will call the Anarchist spirit as an element in progress. But before I do so, let me disclaim all intention of embarrassing our Anarchist friends who are present by any sympathy which I may express with that spirit. On the Continent the discussion between Anarchism and Social-Democracy is frequently threshed out with the help of walking-sticks, chair-legs, and even revolvers. In England this does not happen, because the majority of an English audience always declines to take an extreme position, and, out of an idle curiosity to hear both sides, will, on sufficient provocation, precipitately eject theorists who make a disturbance, without troubling itself to discriminate as to the justice of their views. When I had the privilege some time ago of debating publicly with Mr. G. W. Foote on the Eight Hours question, a French newspaper which dealt with the occasion at great length devoted a whole article to an expression of envious astonishment at the fact that Mr. Foote and I abstained from vilifying and finally assaulting one another, and that our partisans followed our shining example and did not even attempt to prevent each other's champions from being heard. Still, if we do not permit ourselves to merge Socialism, Anarchism, and all the other isms into rowdyism, we sometimes debate our differences, even in this eminently respectable Fabian Society, with considerable spirit. Now far be it from me to disarm the Anarchist debater by paying him compliments. On the contrary, if we have here any of those gentlemen who make it their business to denounce Social-Democrats as misleaders of the people and trimmers; who declaim against all national and municipal projects, and clamor for the abolition of Parliaments and County Councils; who call for a desperate resistance to rent, taxes, representative government and organised collective action of every sort: then I invite them to regard me as their inveterate opponent—as one who regards such doctrine, however sincerely it may be put forward, as at best an encouragement to the workers to neglect doing what is possible under pretext of waiting for the impossible, and at worst as furnishing the reactionary newspapers in England, and the police agents on the Continent, with evidence as to the alleged follies and perils of Socialism. But at the same time, it must be understood that I do not stand here to defend the State as we know it. Bakounine's comprehensive aspiration to destroy all States and Established Churches, with their religious, political, judicial, financial, criminal, academic, economic and social laws and institutions, seems to me perfectly justifiable and intelligible from the point of view of the ordinary "educated man," who believes that institutions make men instead of men making institutions. I fully admit and vehemently urge that the State at present is simply a huge machine for robbing and slave-driving the poor by brute

force. You may, if you are a stupid or comfortably-off person, think that the policeman at the corner is the guardian of law and order—that the gaol, with those instruments of torture, the treadmill, plank bed, solitary cell, cat o’ nine tails, and gallows, is a place to make people cease to do evil and learn to do well. But the primary function of the policeman, and that for which his other functions are only blinds, is to see that you do not lie down to sleep in this country without paying an idler for the privilege; that you do not taste bread until you have paid the idler’s toll in the price of it; that you do not resist the starving blackleg who is dragging you down to his level for the idler’s profit by offering to do your work for a starvation wage. Attempt any of these things, and you will be haled off and tortured in the name of law and order, honesty, social equilibrium, safety of property and person, public duty, Christianity, morality, and what not, as a vagrant, a thief, and a rioter. Your soldier, ostensibly a heroic and patriotic defender of his country, is really an unfortunate man driven by destitution to offer himself as food for powder for the sake of regular rations, shelter and clothing; and he must, on pain of being arbitrarily imprisoned, punished with petty penances like a naughty child, pack-drilled, flogged or shot, all in the blessed name of “discipline,” do anything he is ordered to, from standing in his red coat in the hall of an opera house as a mere ornament, to flogging his comrade or committing murder. And *his* primary function is to come to the rescue of the policeman when the latter is overpowered. Members of Parliament whose sole qualifications for election were £1000 loose cash, an “independent” income, and a vulgar strain of ambition; parsons quoting scripture for the purposes of the squire; lawyers selling their services to the highest bidder at the bar, and maintaining the supremacy of the moneyed class on the bench; juries of employers masquerading as the peers of proletarians in the dock; University professors elaborating the process known as the education of a gentleman; artists striving to tickle the fancy or flatter the vanity of the aristocrat or plutocrat; workmen doing their work as badly and slowly as they dare so as to make the most of their job; employers starving and overworking their hands and adulterating their goods as much as *they* dare: these are the actual living material of those imposing abstractions known as the State, the Church, the Law, the Constitution, Education, the Fine Arts, and Industry. Every institution, as Bakounine saw, religious, political, financial, judicial, and so on, is corrupted by the fact that the men in it either belong to the propertied class themselves or must sell themselves to it in order to live. All the purchasing power that is left to buy men’s souls with after their bodies are fed is in the hands of the rich; and everywhere, from the Parliament which wields the irresistible coercive forces of the bludgeon, bayonet, machine gun, dynamite shell, prison and scaffold, down to the pettiest centre of shabby-genteel social pretension, the rich pay the piper and call the tune. Naturally, they use their power to steal more money to continue paying the piper; and thus all society becomes a huge conspiracy and hypocrisy. The ordinary man is insensible to the fraud just as he is insensible to the taste of water, which, being constantly in contact with his mucous membrane, seems to have no taste at all. The villainous moral conditions on which our social system is based are necessarily in

constant contact with our moral mucous membrane, and so we lose our sense of their omnipresent meanness and dishonor. The insensibility, however, is not quite complete; for there is a period in life which is called the age of disillusion, which means the age at which a man discovers that his generous and honest impulses are incompatible with success in business; that the institutions he has revered are shams; and that he must join the conspiracy or go to the wall, even though he feels that the conspiracy is fundamentally ruinous to himself and his fellow-conspirators. The secret of writers like Ruskin, Morris and Kropotkine is that they see the whole imposture through and through, in spite of its familiarity, and of the illusions created by its temporal power, its riches, its splendor, its prestige, its intense respectability, its unremitting piety, and its high moral pretension. But Kropotkine, as I have shewn, is really an advocate of free Democracy; and I venture to suggest that he describes himself as an Anarchist rather from the point of view of the Russian recoiling from a despotism compared to which Democracy seems to be no government at all, than from the point of view of the American or Englishman who is free enough already to begin grumbling over Democracy as “the tyranny of the majority” and “the coming slavery.” I suggest this with the more confidence because William Morris’s views are largely identical with those of Kropotkine: yet Morris, after patient and intimate observation of Anarchism as a working propaganda in England, has definitely dissociated himself from it, and has shewn, by his sketch of the communist folk-mote in his *News from Nowhere*, how sanely alive he is to the impossibility of any development of the voluntary element in social action sufficient to enable individuals or minorities to take public action without first obtaining the consent of the majority.

On the whole, then, I do not regard the extreme hostility to existing institutions which inspires Communist Anarchism as being a whit more dangerous to Social-Democracy than the same spirit as it inspires the peculiar Toryism of Ruskin. Much more definitely opposed to us is the survival of that intense jealousy of the authority of the government over the individual which was the mainspring of the progress of the eighteenth century. Only those who forget the lessons of history the moment they have served their immediate turn will feel otherwise than reassured by the continued vitality of that jealousy among us. But this consideration does not remove the economic objections which I have advanced as to the practical program of Individualist Anarchism. And even apart from these objections, the Social-Democrat is compelled, by contact with hard facts, to turn his back decisively on useless denunciation of the State. It is easy to say, Abolish the State; but the State will sell you up, lock you up, blow you up, knock you down, bludgeon, shoot, stab, hang—in short, abolish you, if you lift a hand against it. Fortunately, there is, as we have seen, a fine impartiality about the policeman and the soldier, who are the cutting edge of the State power. They take their wages and obey their orders without asking questions. If those orders are to demolish the homestead of every peasant who refuses to take the bread out of his children’s mouths in order that his landlord may have money to spend as an idle gentleman in London, the soldier obeys. But if his orders were to help the police

to pitch his lordship into Holloway Gaol until he had paid an Income Tax of twenty shillings on every pound of his unearned income, the soldier would do that with equal devotion to duty, and perhaps with a certain private zest that might be lacking in the other case. Now these orders come ultimately from the State—meaning, in this country, the House of Commons. A House of Commons consisting of 660 gentlemen and 10 workmen will order the soldier to take money from the people for the landlords. A House of Commons consisting of 660 workmen and 10 gentlemen will probably, unless the 660 are fools, order the soldier to take money from the landlords for the people. With that hint I leave the matter, in the full conviction that the State, in spite of the Anarchists, will continue to be used against the people by the classes until it is used by the people against the classes with equal ability and equal resolution.

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