

This file archived at UnionOfEgoists.com.

Union of Egoists

This item was scanned by UoE from Libertarian Microfiche Publishing Peace Plans films. John Zube's LMP project preserved thousands of documents that would otherwise be lost.

More information can be found at our website under "contributors."

-Kevin I. Slaughter

What is a UnionOfEgoists.com?

This is an informational resource provided by Kevin I. Slaughter of Underworld Amusements and Trevor Blake of OVO, initiated in February and publicly launched April 1st of 2016. The website initially focuses on providing historical, biographical and bibliographical details of a few their favorite Egoist philosophers. It is also integrating the archives of egoist website i-studies.com, the former project of Svein Olav Nyberg, and the EgoistArchives.com project of Dan Davies. Further, it will be home to Der Geist, a Journal of Egoism in print 1845 – 1945. UnionOfEgoists.com will be the best resource for Egoism online.

What is a Union of Egoists?

"We two, the State and I, are enemies. I, the egoist, have not at heart the welfare of this "human society," I sacrifice nothing to it, I only utilize it; but to be able to utilize it completely I transform it rather into my property and my creature; i. e., I annihilate it, and form in its place the Union of Egoists."

– Max Stirner, The Ego and Its Own

What is Egoism?

"Egoism is the claim that the Individual is the measure of all things. In ethics, in epistemology, in aesthetics, in society, the Individual is the best and only arbitrator. Egoism claims social convention, laws, other people, religion, language, time and all other forces outside of the Individual are an impediment to the liberty and existence of the Individual. Such impediments may be tolerated but they have no special standing to the Individual, who may elect to ignore or subvert or destroy them as He can. In egoism the State has no monopoly to take tax or to wage war."

-Trevor Blake, Confessions of a Failed Egoist

NEITHER EAST NOR WEST !

In the countries of the so-called free world life is insufferable.

The liberals and democrats praise these countries and say that in them there exists the opportunity for private initiative and economic and political competition. But this is not so. There are many different points of departure for the individual and if I go hunting with a bow and arrow and you have to catch your bird or hare with your bare hands then it is certain that I will eat and you, even if you have superior qualities to mine, will go hungry. Nor will you be able to take my arms (my capital) from me, because the herd of rich and poor are united in their intention of imposing respect for the law upon you or anyone else who would violate the sacred right of private property (which has itself arisen through the use of violence or cunning). If you try to do this they will kill you or throw you into prison. Property? Yes, but not the natural, egoistic, "Stirnerian" property of the individual who seizes and keeps all that his power permits him to take. Rather the property of the hypocrite who has snatched it without being seen and then presents it as the fruit of his labour which is guaranteed as inviolable by society and morality. And many slimy priests unctuously repeat that a non-existent god, who, if he existed, would be responsible for all the torments of those he had created, wills this to be so.

Freedom in the western world? Yes, freedom for the rich to be happy, for the poor to suffer - or to end in prison if, rather than suffer, they try to take anything from the rich. A disgusting freedom!

Then there is the communist world - a galley of slaves condemned to forced labour in which the land belongs to the State which, in theory, stands for the organized mass, but which, in practice, is identified with the demagogues, the bureaucrats, and the party leaders who hold the power. And the State, that Nietzsche justly called "the coldest of all monsters", compels men and women to produce, exploits them as the sole capitalist, gives them a minimum of wages, denies them the possibility of going on strike or using other means to better their lot, and puts them in concentration camps or prison if they refuse to adapt themselves to this blood-sucking system of oppression.

In the bolshevik hell the individual has his peculiarities, his personal mode of being, crushed and all have to feel, think and act in the way that the State, the absolute master and guardian of all, decides. This is the product of a nightmare in which men are reduced to a phantom equality, insensible and cold, and move mechanically to the orders of their leaders in order to create a perfect world. This is the aberration of a lunatic science which would kill the anthropoid in order to bring forth from its skeleton a robot in which the fierce Mongol of Genghis Khan - the only man surviving - will exercise tyrannical power. Thus the slow treachery of a lucid madness

tends towards the creation of a stupid uniformity, a heavy grayness, over which shine, like far-off, bloodshot suns, the hateful faces of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao.

or
East or West, one finds only fetters, lies, suffocation and emasculation. In this state of things a man who feels and thinks can find no other way of liberation than to rebel against society and civilization. And to send to hell those who want to impose a new social organization on the free individual! "Guard against those who want to introduce orders - warned Diderot - to order always means to set one man over another, to place obstacles in their way."

ENZO MARTUCCI
(Translated by S.M.)

A THOUGHT OUT OF SEASON

What can one make of so-called anarchists who demonstrate in favour of archist regimes? This was the case in Grosvenor Square, London, on March 17, 1968. The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign had called a demonstration on that day in support of Ho Chi Min and his mob. Up turned our eager campaigners for "freedom" to get their heads cracked and themselves arrested in the cause of solidarity with a gang of communist cut-throats! If the object of the demonstration were ever attained and the Viet Cong came to power among the first victims would be anyone who demonstrated against the authorities. And there some who talk of capitalists being their own grave-diggers!

Two regular contributors to "Freedom", John Rety and Wynford Hicks, tried to justify these antics on the grounds that when "the people" are on the streets and in conflict with "authority" then the place of the anarchist is with them. Does this apply if they want the suppression of free speech, jews or anarchists? This blind belief that "the people" are the incarnation of virtue ignores the fact that "the people" have supported every oppressive regime known to historians. But no doubt our populist mystagogues have in mind some idealized, mythical "people", that, like the equally mythical "revolutionary proletariat", can do no wrong, even when negating the individual in the name of "freedom".

As if to add insult to irony, shortly after the Grosvenor Square affair there occurred another example of the stupidity of the populist moonshiners. Several thousand authentic proletarians (dockers and industrial workers) came out on strike in protest against the sacking of Enoch Powell from the "shadow cabinet" of the Conservative Opposition because of a speech he had made about immigration. What a farce! Here were some of the cream of British workers, the red hopes of the mass revolutionaries, downing tools and marching the streets in support of a "right-wing" tory (not even a "progressive"!) who is supposed to be one of their worst enemies. I do not know if Messrs. Rety and Hicks took part, but if they believe what they write they should have.

against freedom of movement across all borders! jz

O gods of Hippel's, Sils-Maria, Arcola and Montmartre, come out from your shadows - the laughs on them!

The people's freedom is not my freedom!

S.E.PARKER

Freedom is the will to be responsible for oneself.

Nietzsche.

PERMANENT PROTEST: IS IT ANARCHISM?

S.E. Parker's article "Enemies of Society" - published in "Minus One", number 20, as an open letter to the Editors of "Freedom" - was a brilliant exposition of the case for "permanent protest"; but it made me wonder whether Parker is right in classing permanent protest as "individualist anarchism". Individualist it may well be; but is it really anarchism? Is Parker himself, strictly speaking, an anarchist?

Let me briefly recapitulate his article.

Parker began by pointing out that "Freedom", ever since it first appeared in 1886, has constantly stressed the need for a social revolution; this revolution is to be brought about by the direct action of the workers and peasants - the masses; and it is seen as the only practicable means of creating a new, free, anarchist society. Social salvation through social revolution - that, Parker showed, has always been the great hope and aim of "Freedom", the main theme of all its propaganda during the past eighty years. But what - he went on to ask - has "Freedom" got to show for all those years of propaganda? Practically nothing. True, since 1886 there have actually been, in various parts of the world, a number of social revolutions; but none of them has led to a free society; and authoritarian social systems, of one kind or another, still flourish practically everywhere. It seems, then, that "Freedom" has failed.

The reasons for the failure of "Freedom" - Parker went on to argue - are twofold. In the first place, direct action, to be effective against the well-organized forces at the disposal of a modern State, must itself be well-organized; but, in the words of Simone Weil, "organized action almost automatically secretes an administrative apparatus which, sooner or later, becomes oppressive"; so that in no circumstances could the direct action of the masses ever lead to a free society. Secondly (and this is the more important reason), the masses as such are just not interested in creating a free society; they never have been interested - even when actually engaged in direct action - and they never will be interested. All they really want is security, not freedom; and if they ever turn against one master it is only - as Eric Hoffer contended - in order to get a stronger one. Anarchist ideas, according to Parker, are the property of an infinitesimal minority of intellectuals; this will always be the case; and therefore the whole concept of a free society is totally unrealistic.

Parker concluded that anarchists must always be enemies of society - insofar as "society" means "an organized collectivity having one basic norm of behaviour". Between society, in that sense, and the true anarchist - whose only essential concern is with "ego-sovereignty" - he sees an inevitable and everlasting conflict of interests. The true anarchist, in Parker's view, must recognize the existence of that conflict, and accept the role of a "permanent protester": that is, he must abandon hope of social salvation - either through social revolution or through "the progressive revelation of gradual enlightenment"; he must regard existing society as a permanent enemy, which can to some extent be resisted, but can never be finally defeated or radically changed; and he must make himself - "his living ego" - the "bedrock" of his life. - *He ignores the secessionist, anarchist, experimental freedom & consumer sovereignty options - although, in other spheres they are already widely practised.* Such, very briefly, is S.E. Parker's position, as set out in his article. Let us now look at some authoritative definitions of anarchism, and see how Parker's position measures up to them: J.Z.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica (1966) begins its article on anarchism with the following definition:-

"Anarchism is the belief that it is practicable and desirable to

abolish all organized government, laws and machinery for law-enforcement."

Now, does Parker share that belief? Evidently not: he regards existing society - based as it is on government, laws, and machinery for law-enforcement - as a permanent and fundamentally unchangeable enemy; and the fact that he regards it as an enemy in no way detracts from the fact that he regards it as permanent - and unchangeable.

"Anarchists," the Britannica goes on, "aim at a stateless society in which harmony is maintained by voluntary agreements among individuals and groups. They envisage a social order without prisons, armies, police or other organized force to maintain property rights, collect taxes or enforce such personal obligations as contracts, debts, or alimony."

Does Parker aim at such a stateless society, or envisage such a social order? On the contrary; according to him, the true anarchist must actually abandon all such aims and visions as totally unrealistic.

The Encyclopædia Americana (1959) begins its article on anarchism as follows:-

"Anarchism.....a theory of social organization. Its doctrines represent the extreme of individualism. It looks upon all law and government as invasive, the twin sources whence flow nearly all the evils existent in society. It therefore advocates the abolition of all government as we today understand the term, save that originating in voluntary co-operation."

Parker would agree, presumably, that anarchism "represents the extreme of individualism", and that all law and government are "invasive"; but would he therefore advocate the abolition of all government "save that originating in voluntary co-operation"? No - for, to him, that would mean advocating the impossible. Nor would he agree that anarchism is "a theory of social organization": to him, anarchism is exclusively concerned with the individual as such. Except insofar as it is the permanent enemy of all existing social systems, Parker's anarchism has no bearing on social organization at all.

"Anarchists," the Americana continues, "do not conceive of a society without order, but of an order arising out of the law of association, preferably through self-governing groups, for it may be said that, with here and there an exception, anarchists regard mankind as gregarious. 'Our object is to live without government and without law,' said Elisee Reclus, the eminent geographer, and in his day the leading anarchist of France..."

Parker, I would imagine, would repudiate any talk of a "law of association", whether that law was thought to govern relations between groups or between non-gregarious individuals: as far as Parker is concerned, the only "law" is that of his own "sovereign ego". Nor does Parker conceive of any kind of society - with or without order - apart from the traditional, authoritarian kind. Nor is his object "to live without government and without law": rather, it is to live in a state of permanent, defensive war against them - a distinction of some importance.

And so one could go on. Everyman's Encyclopedia says: "Anarchism may be defined as the negation of government, as a state of society without central government, and in which individual autonomy is allowed its fullest development"; but there never can be such a state of society, according to Parker. Paul Eltzbacher, in his well-known book "Anarchism", concluded that the one common feature of all anarchist doctrines is that they "negate

the State for our future"; but Parker makes no such negation, and seems, rather, to affirm the State for our future. George Woodcock, in his book "Anarchism", defines ~~anarchism~~ as "a system of social thought, aiming at fundamental changes in the structure of society and particularly - for this is the common element uniting all its forms - at the replacement of the authoritarian State by some form of non-governmental co-operation between free individuals"; but no such replacement of the State can possibly occur, according to Parker; and anarchism, as he conceives it, seems to be a system of individual, rather than social thought.

*but he does not emphasize the
potential of individualistic anarchism.*

The fact is, I think, that S.E. Parker's conception of anarchism would not correspond to a single ~~authoritative~~ definition of anarchism that has ever been formulated. It is true that some elements in his position correspond to the definitions I have quoted: take, for example, his criticism of the existing social structure, and his emphasis on individual autonomy. It is also true that not every definition of anarchism, however authoritative, has to be accepted without question: the Encyclopedia Americana, for instance, is wrong in implying that all anarchists believe in a "law of association" - Max Stirner, for one, did not; and there are several issues on which I would side with Parker against the definitions. But, even when all such allowances have been made, the definitions still show one thing pretty clearly: a belief in the practicability and desirability of some kind of radical transformation of existing social systems, is an essential part of any form of anarchism; and therefore Parker's position, which denies the practicability (though not, indeed, the desirability) of any such transformation, cannot be strictly classed as anarchism.

It might be argued, on Parker's behalf, that even if his position cannot strictly be called anarchism, this is not a very serious matter. After all, Parker himself, by calling his position "individualist-anarchism", perhaps means to show that it differs in some important way from anarchism in the true sense; and, in any case, what really matters is not whether his position is anarchism in the true sense, but whether it is valid. If Parker is right, and the idea of transforming existing social systems is quite unrealistic, anarchism in the true sense is a waste of time, and we might as well admit it; but if we still want to go on resisting the encroachments of the State and governmental society (which is a perfectly reasonable policy, even if we accept the inevitability and permanence of "the establishment"), then we must, in practice, come round to something like Parker's position - whatever it should strictly be called.

These points are well taken. But, in the first place, Parker does not use the term "individualist-anarchism" to show that his position differs from anarchism in the true sense; on the contrary, he maintains that all true anarchism is necessarily "individualist". (In his vocabulary the term "individualist-anarchism" is logically similar to such expressions as "round circle" - a mere pleonasm; and he justifies his use of this pleonasm on the grounds that he needs it to distinguish true anarchism - his own - from the false varieties propagated by others.) Secondly, it is surely a serious matter, however valid Parker's position might be, that he presents it as anarchism - indeed, as the only true form of anarchism - when really it is not anarchism at all; for such a total misnomer could lead to a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding.

But where, then, it may be asked, has Parker gone wrong? What precisely has caused him to label his position in such a misleading way? The answer is to be found, I think, on the last page of

LES AMIS DE JULES BONNOT meet every fortnight in Chelsea, London. Those willing to attend are asked to contact them any Sunday night at The Marquis of Granby, Cambridge Circus, London, W.C.2. Or write to them c/o 44 Stanhope Gardens, London, S.W.7.

his article. There, addressing the editors of "Freedom", he writes:

"The trouble is that what you call 'anarchism' is at best merely a hodge-podge, halfway position precariously suspended between socialism and anarchism. You yearn for the ego-sovereignty, the liberating individualism, that is the essence of anarchism, but remain captives of the democratic-collectivist-proletarian myths of socialism."

Now it is true that anarchism (as defined by, say, the Encyclopedia Britannica) is based by many of its supporters upon purely socialist principles, with which anarchism has no necessary connection; and it is also true, I would say, that the only valid form of anarchism has nothing whatever to do with socialist principles. But the idea of abolishing existing social systems, and replacing them with a radically different kind of human relationship, is not a purely socialist idea: it is an essential element in both socialism and all forms - even the Stirnerite form - of anarchism. (Even Max Stirner, Parker's especial hero, believed in a "Union of Egoists" as a new type of human relationship which could replace all existing social systems.) Moreover, to describe "liberating individualism" as "the essence of anarchism" is surely an oversimplification. It may be true that all forms of anarchism spring from a yearning for "ego-sovereignty"; but unless, in addition to that yearning, there is some hope of seeing a new kind of social environment - in which "ego-sovereignty" would be enjoyed by all - there is no anarchism in the strict sense of the word.

The fact is that S.E. Parker has rejected every idea of social change, not just the "democratic-proletarian-collectivist" idea; and in doing so, he has thrown out the anarchist baby with the socialist bathwater. But, since his definition of anarchism is oversimplified, and since it is he who has really confused anarchism with socialism, the absence of the baby has gone unnoticed; or rather, Parker has mistaken something else for the baby.

Permanent protest, then, is not anarchism. But the question remains: which is right? Are the permanent protesters actually as realistic as they claim to be? Or is there - despite all the depressing historical evidence adduced by Parker - some reasonable hope of a great, radical, anarchist transformation of existing social systems? Let us now take another look at Parker's position, and try to see just how realistic it is.

As we have seen, Parker's position is based on two main arguments. First (as Simone Weil contended), direct action by the masses would have to be so well organized, in order to stand any chance of overthrowing a modern State, that that very organization would inevitably generate new forms of authoritarianism; and therefore mass direct action, even if it succeeded in overthrowing the State, could never lead to a free society. Secondly, (as Eric Hoffer contended), history shows that the masses, in any case, have never really wanted a free society; and therefore, again, even if mass direct action destroyed one authoritarian social system, it is virtually certain that the only outcome would be the formation of another.

Now, the question I would ask here is this: even if we admit that both those arguments are foolproof, do they really validate Parker's position as a permanent protester? That is, do they really show that no radical social change - in particular, no great, universal change from authoritarian to libertarian human relationships - is practicable?

The answer, surely, is No. For Parker (oddly enough for a professed individualist) only discusses the potentialities of organized, collective, mass action; he never considers the potentialities of a totally different kind of action - the spontaneous, unorganized action of the individual as such.

(And although he values Stirner, he never mentions Stirner's useful distinction between "revolution", or an armed rising of the masses, and - what Stirner himself favoured - "insurrection", or a rising or "getting up" of individuals.) Parker makes a very good case, I would say, against the collectivist policies and methods advocated by the Editors of "Freedom"; but he seems to believe, no less firmly than they do, in the collectivist myth that the individual is powerless - that nothing can be done except by the masses. In order to validate his position, Parker needs to prove that individuals acting as such are just as incapable as the masses - i.e. individuals acting as a mass or herd - of causing a radical change in the nature of human relationships; yet he never attempts such a proof.

Parker just assumes that the masses, like the poor, will always be with us: that is, that the vast majority of human beings - everybody except a tiny minority of "protesters" - will always be content to be the masses, and never grow out of the herd-mentality. Yet the very existence of protesters shows that some individuals have already grown out of the herd-mentality; and if some can do that, why not, in time, everybody? Parker never gives any reason for his assumption that the protesters must always remain a minority; he merely points out that the masses, "historically and actually", are extremely authoritarian, and are composed mainly of dull and boorish "herd-animals". Well, of course they are - otherwise they would not be the masses: it is a self-evident fact, for which no historical evidence is needed, that without herd-animals no herd is possible. But the question is, why should we accept Parker's basic assumption that the herd, or the masses, will always be with us?

Quite spontaneously, without any bureaucratic organization or direction, the individual can leave the ranks of the masses - psychologically if not physically - and rely on his own under-standing and intuition to guide him through life. That can happen, and does happen, all over the world. If it goes on happening, and if more and more people leave the ranks, then, in the end, "the masses" as such will cease to exist: there will only be a number of mature, psychologically autonomous human beings. Moreover, since mature, autonomous human beings would never create or support an authoritarian social system, the disappearance of the masses would mean the disappearance of every such system - including all governments, laws, and machinery for law-enforcement - and the development of libertarian anarchistic human relationships. Thus it seems that radical social change, without any kind of mass action, but purely through individual action, is perfectly practicable.

But - one imagines Parker asking - is it likely? Up to now, those individuals who have actually left the ranks of the masses have always been an infinitesimally small minority. Surely that proves that the chances of a majority leaving the ranks - let alone everybody - are so remote as to be, for all practical purposes, negligible?

I do not think so. That large numbers of people should grow out of the herd-mentality, and reach psychological maturity, may seem an unlikely development; but in human history the unlikelyest things can happen, and often do. Indeed, great changes are almost bound to seem unlikely before they take place; and throughout history arguments based on the apparent unlikelihood of change could have been advanced to "prove" the impossibility of any change at all. "Up to now," men in neolithic times might have argued, "we have never lived in communities larger than a village; therefore, the chances of our ever living in larger communities are so remote as to be negligible." Nevertheless, the city and the city-state came into being - forms of organization which, to the neolithic mind would have seemed fantastic; and the modern

industrial nation-state would have seemed no less fantastic, no less wildly improbable, to the inhabitants of an ancient city. Surely the lesson of history is that hardly anything is impossible, and that what almost always happens is - the unexpected. Many anarchists, I imagine, would agree with Parker that the kind of radical social change they desire does seem unlikely; but they would not conclude, as he does, that it is so unlikely as to be virtually out of the question; nor is there any compelling historical or logical reason why they should.

There remains, however, one other argument which Parker might use, and I think would use, to validate his position (in fact I suspect it is the real basis of his whole outlook): this is the argument, or theory, that human nature is just not good enough. The masses, with their herd-mentality and their authoritarian attitudes, will always be with us, Parker would probably say, because by nature - with a few honourable exceptions - human beings are ignoble, weak-minded creatures, incapable of rising to any great heights either intellectually, morally, or spiritually. To be a member of a herd is easier, less demanding mentally and psychologically, than to be an independent individual with a mind and a life of one's own; and even if they suffer for it in the long run, human beings almost always take the easy course; for nature has simply not endowed them with the breadth of vision, or the nobility of character, that are needed to choose the more arduous path.

Well, of course, such a pessimistic view of human nature has been taken by many philosophers - generally authoritarian philosophers - from Plato onwards. But its correctness has never been objectively or scientifically proved; and it is hard to see how it could be proved. In the first place, such a statement as "human beings are ignoble" is a value-judgement, a matter of subjective opinion, and therefore not amenable to scientific investigation. Secondly, laws of nature are universal in application: water, for instance, always boils at 100 degrees Centigrade, not just in a majority of cases; so if it were a natural law that human nature as such is ignoble, how could we explain those occasions, however rare, when human beings display nobility? How, indeed, could the very distinction between nobility and ignobility have come to be made? It may be true that history shows more evidence of man's folly, meanness, and brutality, than of his wisdom, generosity, and kindness; but surely, even so, the evidence of his more desirable qualities is not negligible, and should not be overlooked. (For example, in times of emergency, quite ordinary individuals and groups have been known to display qualities of character, and a degree of intelligence, that nobody would have thought they possessed.) Surely mankind is still in its infancy, and we are still so ignorant about human nature that to take any definite view of it, pessimistic or optimistic, would be - to say the least - premature. Nor is there any need for us to take a definite view - unless, like authoritarian philosophers, we have some political axe to grind. ? ^{disproving} ^{spoke} ^{pressure.}

What, then, is the most realistic course for a libertarian, or an anarchist? Surely it involves neither pessimism nor optimism. Surely it is just to be a mature, psychologically autonomous individual: doing, within the limits imposed by circumstances, whatever one really wants to do; co-operating with others as and when co-operation seems expedient; never succumbing to any inducement or pressure to follow the herd, or to join the ranks of the masses; helping, wherever an opportunity may arise, and according to one's ability, to end the whole hierarchical, authoritarian attitude to life, and making no assumptions about the final outcome - of which nothing can be known. (take)

Apart from his undue pessimism, S.E. Parker, it seems to me, is very realistic; and his individualist, Stirnerite position is very sound. He is right to expose the vanity of all anarchist hopes

based on the dream of a libertarian mass revolution; he is right to point out that anarchists must always be enemies of society, in the sense of "an organized collectivity having one basic norm of behaviour that must be accepted by all"; and, above all, he is right to stress the need for the individual - if he is to enjoy any real freedom - to stand on his own feet, psychologically, and dare to be himself. All those things are very true and very important. But there are other kinds of action than mass revolution (in particular, there is Stirnerite "insurrection"); there are other forms of human relationship than "society" in Parker's sense (in particular, there is the Stirnerite "Union of Egoists"); and there is no known reason why the enjoyment of real, psychological freedom should always be restricted to a tiny minority of the human race.

Of course, even so, Parker may well be right in thinking that the anarchist millenium will never come. But since we cannot be certain, why should we assume it? Why should we shackle our imagination, douse our best hopes, and confine the possible scope of our action within purely speculative bounds? In the end, "permanent protest" seems to be little more than permanent pessimism; and undue pessimism, no less than undue optimism, is surely an undesirable frame of mind, an unpromising temperamental basis for realistic and effective action. To be prepared for the worst, to hope and work for the best, and to let the outcome settle itself - that, surely, is complete realism.

FRANCIS ELLINGHAM

IN DEFENCE OF SOCIAL PESSIMISM

Anarchy and Anarchists

Can one call oneself an anarchist, yet not believe in the practibility of an anarchist society? I believe one can; Francis Ellingham believes one cannot.

This question has arisen because the defining of an anarchist has become so bound up with what Ellingham once called the "socialised mind" ("Anarchy", May, 1966) that few can think of anarchism apart from some concept of social transformation. This is because the socialised mind means that "we tend to think more and more in terms of society as a whole, less and less in terms of the unique human individual. Confronted with any economic or social problem, we tend to look for a solution which will best enable society to go on functioning, smoothly and efficiently, according to some ideal plan."

As result an anarchist tends to be thought of not as one who negates authority for himself, but as one who negates authority for everybody, and therefore has to postulate the possibility of a future state of affairs in which this universal negation will be realized. But because this latter view has been accepted up to now by almost all commentators on anarchism - including some individualists - I do not see why I have to accept it.

On the other hand, I do not, as Ellingham suggests, think there is any necessary contradiction between being an anarchist and believing in the possibility of a generalized anarchy. Because I am pessimistic about this possibility, it does not follow that I have to rule out of court those who are optimistic. (By "anarchy", in this context, I mean the anarchy defined and defended by a Malatesta, not the socialised heaven of a

Social Change

Since my open letter was addressed to the editors of a paper dedicated to the concept of mass revolution, I naturally dealt with the relevance of such a concept to anarchism, rather than with the "one-by-one" concept which is much more to my taste and which would be the royal road to an individualist "order" - if such were possible. But what is desirable is not necessarily possible and the evidence offered by Francis Ellingham is not convincing.

Indeed, all the "evidence" he does offer is that since some individuals have seceded from the herd, all can. Of course, it is thinkable that they can, just as it is thinkable that all can become Jehovah's Witnesses, flat-earthers, poets or dialectical materialists. Of course, a miracle may happen, an unknown factor may suddenly appear from nowhere and act as a precipitate to dissolve the mass into individualities, but I have only one short life to live and I am not interested in wagering it on odds so long that they are meaningless.

Ellingham is mistaken in believing that I regard existing society as permanent and unchangeable. Societies can and do change, but not in an anarchist direction. Every change in social organization so far has been, in effect, nothing but a restructuring of the ruling apparatus. As I asked the editors of "Freedom" (who have made no reply): where is the evidence that future changes will be different? Evidence - not hopes....

Human Nature

I do not know what "human nature" is, although I can guess something of the "nature" of individuals I knew, or know of, from their way of going on. And what I know is that most people behave in such a fashion as to show a marked preference for submitting to authority in one form or another. It may be the "nature" of some individuals not to have this preference, but this is clearly not the case with "most people". Again, because some do not have this preference, it does not follow that all do not (as for "natural law" - a natural law is simply the formulation of observed phenomena. If the phenomenon of the preference of the mass for submission to authority is one that has been repeated in every kind of society so far known, then it may be called a "natural law").

The notion of the "nobility" or "ignobility" of human beings was introduced by Ellingham, not by me. I do not see what is has got to do with what I wrote. Anyway, it is quite possible for an authoritarian to behave in a noble manner (e.g. Spartacus) without ceasing to be an authoritarian.

As for his claim that "mankind is still in its infancy" - what does this mean? One might just as usefully say that it was in its senescence. Either view implies a teleological attitude which reduces the individual to nothing.

The State, The Union of Egoists, and Insurrection.

I negate the State for myself now, not for everybody in the future. Only the present is of importance to me and I want to get what profit I can from my anarchy today, not in some indefinite "morrow of the revolution" which even its advocates are not sure will come.

Certainly, a union of egoists is not the same as a "society". By the same token, such unions can be formed by conscious egoists without waiting for any "radical" social transformation. An individualist anarchist does not have to depend on the generalization of his ideas before he can live his own life.

To the extent of his power and opportunities he can make his own insurrection against the State and Society - without troubling about the arrangements that will spring from it, as Stirner pointed out.

he
But if/is concerned with new "social orders" and bringing about radical social changes to this end, then individual insurrection has to be tailored and tamed to fit into the efforts of "all" to reach the common goal of an ideal life. It has, in other words, to be transformed into social revolution, a process in which the realization of the ego is made dependent upon the "realization" of the "social organism".

S.E.PARKER

LETTERS.

In commenting on my article in Minus One, No. 20, Mrs Loomis and Mr Pastorello raise some interesting and important questions. With Mr Pastorello I have no basic disagreement. I do respect and admire voluntary poverty, but I think that it is too much to paint poverty in quite such a good light as does Mr Pastorello. I find that having a fairly good and regular salary has somewhat the same effect that poverty seems to have for him. It gives me freedom. Besides I must admit to enjoying some degree of comfort.

With Mrs Loomis, though, I find I am in very fundamental disagreement. One the one hand, I do admit the appeal of the Green Revolution to a part of me. One cannot read, for example, Morris "News From Nowhere" or Wright's "Islandia" without being affected by the beauty of life on the land (Of course, many aspects of the social and political system of Islandia are not as appealing) But, on the other hand, until our urban civilization destroys itself through pollution, etc., the economic system draws men to the city and the cities provide many things that exist nowhere else, great music, great art, etc. The basic disagreement probably stems from my belief that any revolution is dead in the developed countries of the world. If anarchism ever comes, which I think is doubtful, some will choose to join the Green Revolution, but even under anarchism it, and the individualist, would be in the position of a minority group. Perhaps I was wrong to say that the Green Revolution was dead, but at the same time I still believe that it is not likely to last. If population continues to grow at the present rate and the cities expand at the present rate there will soon be little land left for its continued existence.

LYLIAN TOWER SARGENT

(The following letter was sent to the Editors of "Freedom" appropos of "Black Power", but was not published by them)

Dear Comrades,

I am surprised to see that there^{is?} no rejoicing in Freedom - by the usual admiring sycophants - over the most recent victory of Black Power. I refer, of course, to the hounding out of Kenya of a large number of people whose skin is only a light shade of brown instead of the proper African ebony. This success of black racialism must surely gladden the hearts of all those who revere such figures as Michael Malik and Stokeley Carmichael, and who somehow imagine that their brand of political bombast has got something to do with anarchism.

24.2.68

TONY GIBSON

MINUS ONE is edited and published by S.E.Parker, 2, Orsott Terrace, London, W.2., England. 6/- for 6 issues (1 U.S. doll.) inc. post.

ENDPIECE...

Now that the cry of "social alienation" is on so many tongues and it is deprecated in so many academic treatises, it is a refreshing change to find someone in favour of it. In the Spring 1967 issue of the "New Individualist Review" (A journal of classical liberal thought) the editors write:

"There is much to be said in defence of social alienation..... It is difficult to conceive, for example, the revival of classical liberal opinion towards government without the breeding ground of alienated hostility towards 'those in power'. Classical liberalism was born in an era of alienation and hostility towards kings; what choked and almost killed it at the end of the century was an optimistic trust in The People and popular government. This trust in government - 'we are the government' - is the foundation of social democracy and the welfare state ideal, and if the Right (or Left, maybe) is ever going to succeed in dismantling the deadening hand of the state it might be better to encourage social alienation."

To take the defence of "social alienation" to its logical conclusion, however, would lead straight into the camp of individualist anarchism. Socialists are wrong when they say that classical (i.e. 19th. century) liberalism and individualist anarchism are the same thing, but it is true that one of the easier routes to individualism is through this kind of liberalism.

EGOIST

Publications received include "La desobeissance civile" by Henry David Thoreau published by Editions Jean-Jacques Pauvert, Paris and "15-18" by Domenico Pastorello published by the author, 13, Fos sur Mer, France. And "La Caverna dei Reprobi", edited by Enzo Martucci, Via Carducci, 98, Pescara, Italy.

LITERATURE

0 Idios - three essays on individualist anarchism by Jean-Pierre Schweitzer. 1/3
Anarchism and Individualism by E. Armand. 1/3
Individualist Anarchism - an outline by S.E.Parker. 3d.

James J. Martin is sending a supply of "The False Principle of Our Education" by Max Stirner for sale for the benefit of MINUS ONE. The price to readers outside the U.S.A. will be 3/6, inc. postage. Readers in the U.S.A should obtain their copies from the publisher Ralph Myles, P.O.Box 1533, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80901, U.S.A. Price 60 cents.

Copies of "The Ego and His Own" by Max Stirner are again available at Freedom Press, c/o 84a Whitechapel High Street, London, E.1. Price 19/-, inc. postage.

Apologies are due to E.Bertran for holding his article over to the next issue. The new format of MINUS ONE is limited to 12 pages per issue and space is consequently limited.