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# Charlotte Wilson

## THREE ESSAYS ON ANARCHISM



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# THREE ESSAYS ON ANARCHISM

by  
Charlotte Wilson



**New Anarchist Library IV**



## New Anarchist Library IV

Wilson, Charlotte

Charlotte Wilson on anarchism,

- (New anarchist library).

I. Anarchism and anarchists

I. Series

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ISBN 0-904564-26-6

Published in 1979 by Cienfuegos Press,  
Over the Water, Sanday, Orkney, KW17 2BL, UK  
(First published 1886)

Jacket designed by Les Prince

Printed by Little "A"

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Charlotte Wilson by Nicolas Walter

Anarchism

The Principles and Aims of Anarchists

Social Democracy and Anarchism



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## CHARLOTTE WILSON

CHARLOTTE WILSON was the best-known of the group of middle-class intellectuals who played an important part in the emergence of the British anarchist movement during the 1880s.

Charlotte Mary Martin came from a professional family. She was born on 6 May 1854 at Kemerton, a village near Tewkesbury on the Gloucestershire-Worcestershire border. Her father was a surgeon who belonged to a prominent local family. She received the best education then available to girls, becoming one of the first to go to Cambridge University. During 1873-1874 she attended the new institution at Merton Hall which was run by Jemima Clough (sister of the poet Arthur Hugh Clough), and she took the Higher Local Examination (roughly equivalent to a GCE A level). Contrary to statements repeated by successive historians, she was neither a "Girton girl" nor a "Cambridge graduate": the former mistake derives from E. Nesbit's contemporary description, but Miss Clough's institution actually became Newnham College in 1880; the latter mistake ignores the facts that she took no Tripos examination and that anyway women weren't given degrees at Cambridge until 1923.



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After leaving Cambridge she married Arthur Wilson, a London stockbroker, and they settled in Hampstead. After a process of political development which remains obscure, she became a socialist and then an anarchist, and adopted the fashionable "simple life" by moving to a cottage in what was then open country at North End on the edge of Hampstead Heath. (Her home was a well-known old farmhouse called Wyldes, which has been occupied by several other prominent people, including William Blake's friend John Linnell, Charles Dickens, and Raymond Unwin who designed the Hampstead Garden Suburb in the neighbourhood, and which still stands on the edge of the heath — see Charlotte Wilson's own article, "Wyldes and Its Story" in *Transactions of the Hampstead Antiquarian and Historical Society*, 1902-1903, and Philip Venning's recent pamphlet, *Wyldes: A New History*, 1977.)

Charlotte Wilson joined the Fabian Society soon after it was formed in January 1884, and she was the only woman elected to its first executive in December 1884. It was at first a group of progressive intellectuals with ambitious ideas but no particular line. Her fellow-members included such people as Annie Besant, Hubert Bland, Sydney Olivier, Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas, and Sidney Webb, and she had no difficulty in holding her own with them. In the later memoirs of early Fabians she is remembered mainly as a hostess, like F. Nesbit, but she was in fact a leading member of the society for a couple of years.

In October 1884 she formed a study group later

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called the Hampstead Historic Society, which met at her house to read and discuss the work of Continental socialists such as Marx and Proudhon and the history of the international labour movement, and which provided much of the early philosophical and factual background for the lectures and pamphlets which became the Fabian contribution to socialist propaganda.

One of the elements in Charlotte Wilson's political development had been the mass trial of anarchists at Lyon in January 1883, at which Peter Kropotkin and dozens of French comrades were sent to prison, and which was widely reported in the British press. At the end of 1884 she began to argue for anarchism in particular as well as socialism in general. In November 1884 she contributed a series of articles on "Anarchism" to *Justice*, the paper of the Social Democratic Federation (the main socialist organisation in the country), which were signed "An English Anarchist." In 1885 she contributed material to *The Anarchist*, the paper produced by Henry Seymour. In 1886 she wrote three separate essays on anarchism in the left-wing press which are reprinted here.

"Social Democracy and Anarchism" appeared in the first issue of the *Practical Socialist*, the short-lived paper of the Fabian Society, in January 1886. "The Principles and Aims of Anarchists" appeared in one of the last issues of the *Present Day*, a short-lived secularist paper, in July 1886. In June 1886 the Fabian Society published as the fourth in its famous



series of Fabian Tracts a pamphlet called *What Socialism Is*. This consisted of two parts — a section on “Collectivism” (i.e. state socialism), which Engels was invited but declined to write and which was instead extracted by Bernard Shaw from August Bebel’s book *Women Under Socialism* (published in Germany in 1883); and a section on “Anarchism,” which was “drawn up by C. M. Wilson on behalf of the London Anarchists.” An anonymous introduction pointed out that on the Continent socialism had tended to fall into two schools of thought, following “the ineradicable Tory and Whig instincts in human nature” (what we would call authoritarian and libertarian tendencies), but that because of its undeveloped nature “English Socialism is not yet Anarchist or Collectivist.” The pamphlet was therefore designed to explain “the theories and ideals of both parties” for British socialists to consider and choose.

Charlotte Wilson was by that time the best-known native anarchist intellectual in Britain, but it is not clear how far she spoke for the growing anarchist movement. She doesn’t seem to have had much contact with the working-class militants in the trade unions and socialist organisations. Henry Seymour, a former secularist who had become an anarchist individualist, with whom she collaborated on his paper *The Anarchist* but with whom she quarrelled in summer 1886, discounted her contact with anyone. When she attended a Fabian Congress in June 1886 as a representative of the “London Anarchist Group of Freedom”, he suggested that she probably did so

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only in the sense that she had written her contribution to the Fabian Tract “on behalf of the London Anarchists”; and he commented: “Unfortunately she admitted in my presence that she wrote on her own behalf only, and without consulting the London Anarchists at all.”

But it is clear that she was the leader of the anarchist fraction in the Fabian Society. As Shaw put it, with his customary exaggeration, in the first of his unreliable histories of the society, when she joined “a sort of influenza of Anarchism soon spread through the Society” (*The Fabian Society: What It Has Done, and How It Has Done It*, 1892). In fact the fraction didn’t have much influence, and it didn’t last long. On 17 September 1886 the Fabian Society organised a meeting at Anderton’s Hotel in Fleet Street, where the representatives of the various socialist organisations in London debated the question of forming an orthodox political party on the Continental model. A motion to this effect was proposed by Annie Besant (the former colleague of Charles Bradlaugh in the National Secular Society, and later successor of Madame Blavatsky in the Theosophical Society) and seconded by Hubert Bland (husband of E. Nesbit). William Morris (the leading member of the Socialist League and best-known socialist in Britain) proposed and Charlotte Wilson seconded the following amendment:

But whereas the first duty of Socialists is to educate the people to understand what their present position is and what the future might



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be, and to keep the principles of socialism steadily before them; and whereas no Parliamentary party can exist without compromise and concession, which would hinder that education and obscure those principles: it would be a false step for Socialists to attempt to take part in the Parliamentary contest.

The parliamentarians defeated the anti-parliamentarians by a two-to-one majority, and the Fabian Society — and the bulk of the British socialist movement — was set on the course it has followed ever since. Charlotte Wilson resigned from the Fabian executive in April 1887, and although she maintained her membership she took no active part in the society for twenty years.

By that time she had anyway committed herself entirely to the anarchist movement. In January 1886 Kropotkin was released from prison in France, and in March he settled in England, partly as the result of an invitation from Charlotte Wilson's group. This group, which contained both British and Continental intellectuals, and which included several other women, decided to start an anarchist paper on the model of Kropotkin's own paper *Le Révolté* (which started in Geneva in 1879, moved to Paris in 1885, and as *La Révolte* and *Les Temps Nouveaux* remained the leading French anarchist paper until the First World War.) For a few months, however, the group tried to work with Seymour, and the April and May issues of *The Anarchist* were produced jointly as an organ of anarchist communism. But the experiment failed,

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*The Anarchist* reverted to individualism in June, and Seymour published his attack on Charlotte Wilson in July. Relying on Kropotkin's cooperation and prestige and on Wilson's contacts and ability, the group started its own paper. The first issue of *Freedom* appeared in October 1886, just after the Anderton's meeting, and Charlotte Wilson's group became the Freedom Press, which for nearly a century has remained the main publisher of anarchist literature in Britain.

Charlotte Wilson was the editor and publisher of *Freedom*, and its main supporter and contributor, from 1886 to 1894, with a gap caused by illness from 1889 to 1891. As well as the paper, she produced several pamphlets, including her translations of Kropotkin and her own *Anarchism and Outrage* (this explanation of the anarchist view of terrorism was reprinted from a *Freedom* editorial of December 1893, at the time of the bomb scare on the Continent, and was republished in 1909, at the time of the judicial murder of Francisco Ferrer in Spain.) During her ten years of activity in the anarchist movement she steered her way between the militants and the moderates, but she was definitely a communist rather than an individualist (*Freedom* began as "A Journal of Anarchist Socialism" and soon became "A Journal of Anarchist Communism"). Her work as a writer and speaker was distinguished by reticence, reliability and respectability; she always remained very much an intellectual, and very much in the background.



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At the beginning of 1895 Charlotte Wilson dropped out of the anarchist movement for domestic reasons, and never came back. She did eventually return to activity in the Fabian Society, under the influence of the suffrage movement. In 1908 she formed the Fabian Women's Group and became its secretary. In 1911 she was again elected to the executive, but in 1914 she again resigned, and left politics altogether for reasons of health. By then she had settled in the country near Reading; at the end of the First World War she was honorary secretary of the Prisoner of War Fund of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Regiment. The rest of her life remains obscure, and she died in unknown circumstances at Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, on 28 April 1944, just before her ninetieth birthday.

Charlotte Wilson is little more than mentioned by historians of British socialism, but she was a familiar figure on the left for a decade. She was frequently reported in the socialist and liberal press at the time, and she frequently appears in subsequent memoirs of the period. Socialists were generally hostile but respectful, but liberals tended to be patronising as well. A good example is an anonymous report of her contribution to the meeting commemorating the Paris Commune on 17 March 1887:

... a slender person, bordering on middle age, but on the right side of the border, dressed becomingly in black, and with hair trained forward in an ordered mass to form a sort of frame of jet for a thin thoughtful face. The

type is the South Kensington or British Museum art-student, the aesthete with "views", and Mrs. Wilson quite realised it as to the views. She was decidedly anarchical . . . . What she did say was delivered with great clearness of enunciation, with great purity of accent, with a certain appearance of effort, not to say of fatigue, as though the hall taxed her voice beyond its powers, and with the monotonous calm that is perhaps the most common outward sign of the born fanatic. She was quite womanly and lady-like to use the good old-fashioned word . . .  
(*Daily News*, 18 March 1887)

Charlotte Wilson also became the model for characters in several political novels. The best-known of these is Gemma in *The Gadfly* (1897) a romantic evocation by Ethel Voynich of the Italian risorgimento, in which she is an Englishwoman living in Italy who is small and dark, quiet and calm, and the heart and soul of a Republican group in Florence; but the book says nothing interesting about her true character. (Incidentally, according to an anonymous note in the Mayflower paperback edition, published in 1973, Charlotte Wilson was "mistress of the great anarchist Prince Peter Kropotkin," a claim which was repeated by Anne Fremantle in *History Today* in September 1975; but this story derives only from the memories of Ethel Voynich in old age.)

A more direct but very brief portrait appears in *A Girl Among the Anarchists* (1903), a satirical evocation by "Isobel Meredith" — the pseudonym of



Helen and Olivia Rossetti — of the bomb era of the early 1890s in which the authors were involved. Charlotte Wilson is introduced as Mrs. Trevillian, “an aesthetic, fascinating little lady,” but she plays no part in the plot.

The most striking portrait appears in *The Anarchists* (1891), an ideological “Picture of Civilisation at the Close of the Nineteenth Century” by John Henry Mackay, a German-Scottish follower of Max Stirner who was active in the British anarchist movement during the 1880s. The autobiographical hero Auban describes the various tendencies and personalities in the movement, and includes in his account of the meeting of 14 October 1887 protesting against the impending execution of the Chicago anarchists the following description of Charlotte Wilson:

Beside the table on the platform was standing a little woman dressed in black. Beneath the brow which was half hidden as by a wreath by her thick, short-cropped hair, shone a pair of black eyes beaming with enthusiasm. The white ruffle and the simple, almost monk-like, long, undulating garment, seemed to belong to another century. A few only in the meeting seemed to know her; but whoever knew her, knew also that she was the most faithful, the most diligent, and the most impassioned champion of Communism in England . . . . She was not a captivating speaker, but her voice had that iron ring of unalterable conviction and honesty which often moves the listener more

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powerfully than the most brilliant eloquence. Nearly a century later, that epitaph may stand unchanged.

Nicolas Walter

### NOTE

ALL the available material about Charlotte Wilson which has been published in studies of British anarchism or Fabianism is incomplete and/or inaccurate. Apart from the information in contemporary publications, there are useful but unreliable references in letters, memoirs or biographies of Peter Kropotkin, William Morris, E. Nesbit, Sydney Olivier, Henry Seymour, Bernard Shaw, and Sidney Webb; in accounts of the Fabian Society by Edward Pease, Anne Fremantle, Margaret Cole, A. M. McBriar, Willard Wolfe, and Norman and Jean MacKenzie; and in accounts of British anarchism by Max Nettlau, George Woodcock, and John Quail.

Fabian Tract 4 was never reprinted by the Fabian Society, but Charlotte Wilson's contribution was reprinted as the first Free Commune pamphlet in 1900 and has occasionally been reprinted by the anarchist press since then; the articles in the *Practical Socialist* and the *Present Day* don't seem to have been reprinted before now.

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## ANARCHISM

ANARCHISM is a theory of human development which lays no less stress than Collectivism upon the economic or materialistic aspect of social relations; but, whilst granting that the immediate cause of existing evils is economic, Anarchists believe that the solution of the social problem can only be wrought out from the equal consideration of the whole of the experience at our command, individual as well as social, internal as well as external. Life in common has developed social instinct in two conflicting directions, and the history of our experience in thought and action is the record of this strife within each individual, and its reflection within each society. One tendency is towards domination; in other words, towards the assertion of the lesser, sensuous self as against the similar self in others, without seeing that, by this attitude, true individuality impoverishes, empties and reduces itself to nonentity. The other tendency is towards equal brotherhood, or to the self-affirmation and fulfilment of the greater and only true and human self, which includes all nature, and thus dissolves the illusion of mere atomic individualism.

Anarchism is the conscious recognition that the first of these tendencies is, and always has been, fatal



to real social union, whether the coercion it implies be justified on the plea of superior strength or superior wisdom, of divine right or necessity, of utility or expedience; whether it takes the form of force or fraud, of exacted conformity to an arbitrary legal system or an arbitrary ethical standard, of open robbery or legal appropriation of the universal birth-right of land and the fruits of social labour. To compromise with this tendency is to prefer the narrower to the wider expediency, and to delay the possibility of that moral development which alone can make the individual one in feeling with his fellows, and organic society, as we are beginning to conceive of it, a realisable ideal.

The leading manifestations of this obstructive tendency at the present moment are Property, or domination over things, the denial of the claim of others to their use; and Authority, the government of man by man, embodied in majority rule; that theory of representation which, whilst admitting the claim of the individual to self-guidance, renders him the slave of the simulacrum that now stands for society.

Therefore, the first aim of Anarchism is to assert and make good the dignity of the individual human being, by his deliverance from every description of arbitrary restraint — economic, political and social; and, by so doing, to make apparent in their true force the real social bonds which already knit men together, and, unrecognised, are the actual basis of such common life as we possess. The means of doing this rest

## ANARCHISM

with each man's conscience and his opportunities. Until it is done, any definite proposals for the reorganisation of society are absurd. It is only possible to draw out a very general theory as to the probable course of social reconstruction from the observation of the growing tendencies.

Anarchists believe the existing organisation of the State only necessary in the interests of monopoly, and they aim at the simultaneous overthrow of both monopoly and State. They hold the centralised "administration of productive processes" a mere reflection of the present middle-class government by representation upon the vague conception of the future. They look rather for voluntary productive and distributive associations utilising a common capital, loosely federated trade and district communities practising eventually complete free communism in production and consumption. They believe that in an industrial community in which wealth is necessarily a social, not an industrial, product, the claims which any individual can fairly put forward to a share in such wealth are: firstly, that he needs it; secondly, that he has contributed towards it to the best of his ability; thirdly (as regards any special article), that he has thrown so much of his own personality into its creation that he can best utilise it.

When this conception of the relation between wealth and the individual has been allowed to supersede the idea now upheld by force, that the inherent advantage of possessing wealth is to prevent others from using it, each worker will be entirely free to do



as nature prompts — i.e., to throw his whole soul into the labour he has chosen, and make it the spontaneous expression of his intensest purpose and desire. Under such conditions only, labour becomes pleasure, and its produce a work of art. But all coercive organisation working with machine-like regularity is fatal to the realisation of this idea. It has never proved possible to perfectly free human beings to cooperate spontaneously with the precision of machines. Spontaneity or artificial order and symmetry must be sacrificed. And as spontaneity is life, and the order and symmetry of any given epoch only the forms in which life temporarily clothes itself, Anarchists have no fears that in discarding the Collectivist dream of the scientific regulation of industry, and inventing no formulas for social conditions as yet unrealised, they are neglecting the essential for the visionary.

The like reasoning is applicable to the moral aspect of social relations. Crime as we know it is a symptom of the strain upon human fellowship involved in the false and artificial social arrangements which are enforced by authority, and its main cause and sanction will disappear with the destruction of monopoly and the State. Crime resulting from defective mental and physical development can surely be dealt with both more scientifically and more humanely, by fraternal medical treatment and improved education, than by brute force, however elaborated and disguised.

As for the expression of the common life of the

community, and the practical persuasion and assistance desirable to raise those who have lagged behind the average of moral development, it is enough to note the marvellous growth of public opinion since the emancipation of platform and press to become aware that no artificial machinery is needful to enforce social verdicts and social codes of conduct without the aid of written laws administered by organised violence. Indeed, when arbitrary restraints are removed, this form of the rule of universal mediocrity is, and always has been, a serious danger to individual freedom; but as it is a natural, not an artificial, result of life in common, it can only be counteracted by broader moral culture.

Anarchism is not a Utopia, but a faith based upon the scientific observation of social phenomena. In it the individualist revolt against authority, handed down to us through Radicalism and the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, and the Socialist revolt against private ownership of the means of production, which is the foundation of Collectivism, find their common issue. It is a moral and intellectual protest against the unreality of a society which, as Emerson says, "is everywhere in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." Its one purpose is by direct personal action to bring about a revolution in every department of human existence, social, political and economic. Every man owes it to himself and to his fellows to be free.

(from *What Socialism Is*, Fabian Tract 4,  
June 1886)



not work without the monopolised instruments of production. Hence the monopoly of social wealth is the main agent of domination.

Its justification on the ground of its social necessity as an inducement to labour, unless forced labour is to be substituted, is contradicted by the experience of the possibility of voluntary labour for a common object, whether sustenance or social improvements in the common labour of all primitive peoples, of such historical associations as the guilds of the Middle Ages, of the innumerable spontaneous societies and associations for every variety of social effort of the present day. It is also contradicted by scientific observations as to the pleasure experienced by all healthy animals in the exercise of function, and the obvious preference of healthy and free human beings for such occupations as produce a tangible result, satisfy the whole nature morally and physically, and win the approbation of their fellows. Work which is the result of free choice is best done. But the desire to obtain the largest possible share of wealth by labour, injures workmanship and leads to the choice of the most profitable rather than the fittest sort of work.

The monopoly of wealth would have no chance against the sense of social justice and the needs of mankind, unless sanctioned and protected by law.

The kernel of law, which commends it to the respect of the moral sense of men, is the crystallised social custom — result of common experience, social feeling spontaneously called forth by life in common

## THE PRINCIPLES AND AIMS OF ANARCHISTS

— which our written law contains. But this reasonable respect has been twice converted into superstitious awe by the dominators of men, who have pretended for law the origin of a divine revelation, and who have used the reverence thus inspired to cover the whole of the enactments they have made for their own advantage, and the maintenance of their supremacy.

The manufacture and administration of law by the delegates of a majority, changes nothing of its oppressive character; its only purpose remains to impose the will of certain individuals upon the rest, and to maintain certain privileges and distinctions. With the resignation of claim and monopoly of every sort, its occasion is gone.

Apart from this, law is essentially the attempt on the part of certain persons to draw a hard and fast line for the conduct of others; and as the circumstances, motives and personal inspiration of no two individuals is the same, it is a perennial source of injustice and wrong. The pressure and the inspiration which is the natural and inevitable action of the surrounding social atmosphere upon the social sensibilities of the individual, are in all normal cases more than sufficient to secure the possibility of agreement and corporate action. With the removal of arbitrary bonds and hard and fast restraints their strength is more fully recognised, and the aroused sense of responsibility which follows the absence of coercion, tends to make opposition to social claims a matter of conscience rather than of caprice. In



abnormal cases, the want of social feeling can be more humanely and more effectually met by an active display of brotherly care and attention; the spirit of resistance to all aggression in the name of human dignity, not of personal self-assertion, and the generous attempt to relieve the physical deformity or disease, or the moral blindness which has led to the aggression.

Anarchism is a protest against the government of man by man in every shape or form as the disturber of social life, an assertion that the free play of the social nature of free and equal human beings is the only solid basis of society.

(This is an abstract of paper read before the London Dialectical Society on the 2nd June [1886])

*(The Present Day, July 1886).*

## SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND ANARCHISM

IT HAS NOT been yet recognised in England that the Socialism which is being put forward throughout the civilised world as a remedy for the acknowledged evils of modern society — wears two distinct faces.

When it is said that a man is a Socialist, it is implied that he regards the monopoly of private property in the means of production as the cause of the existing unequal distribution of wealth and its attendant ills; but the philosophical grounds of his belief, and his practical deductions from them remain indefinite as ever. Putting aside those so-called Socialists, who only aim at reforming our present social arrangements so as to relieve, for the moment, the misery, without an attempt to fathom either its ultimate cause, or its ultimate issue; Socialists are divided into the centralising and decentralising parties, the party of the State and the party of the federative commune, and this political difference is the outward sign of a grave difference of principle.

It is needless to dwell here at great length upon the beliefs of the Socialists of the State, the Social Democrats: their views are already familiar to the English Public through the publications of the Social Democratic Federation.

Roughly speaking they may be summed up as



follows:— Man, is the creature of his conditions. His moral, social, and political state at any given time is exactly what his economic circumstances have made it. Human progress means increasing ability to derive from Nature the largest amount of subsistence with the smallest expenditure of energy, and the discovery of the best social arrangements for the distribution of what is so obtained. The problem now before us, is, how to modify the external conditions of human existence so as to secure to all men the most complete enjoyment. The means for working it out, lie ready to our hands. Misery has resulted from individual monopoly of the means of production, let us therefore, transfer land and capital to the State. The State, as it is now, is the engine of class rule; it can only reflect the economic phase through which we are passing. True Democracy — the government of the people by themselves — can only advance hand in hand with Socialism. The advance of the people to political power will serve us as a lever to bring about their economic salvation. We can make use of the organised force of the State as it is to transform the machinery of Government into that, and the State as it ought to be. The main business of society, organised for self-government, should be the regulation of the business of production and exchange in such a manner that each citizen shall be obliged to perform his fair share of social labour and receive in return a corresponding share of social produce

Thus men are to be freed from wrong and oppres-

## SOCIAL DEMOCRACY AND ANARCHISM

sion by the alteration of their external conditions, and their external conditions must be altered by organised force: i.e., by seizing upon the State as it is. To obtain a hold on the State we must enter in the political arena and use political methods: political methods in a democracy mean the art of obtaining command over the strength of numbers, and these numbers must be won by an appeal that the masses can understand. The lofty ideal of the socialised State appeals to the moral sense of the thoughtful few: but to the ignorant masses in their bitter need, must be preached the gospel of hate and spoliation. The people supply both the dynamic force and the raw material essential to eager social reconstructors, and so each one scrambles for a place in the popular favour that he may have opportunities to work out his scheme in his own way. As in other political conflicts — other things being equal — the man who wins is he with the loudest voice, the readiest flow of words, the quickest wit and the most self-assertive personality. Immediately it becomes the business of the minor personalities to drag him down, and the old struggle for place and power repeats itself within the very socialistic societies themselves. There is authority on one side and revolt on the other, and the very forms which are supposed to be the safeguards of liberty are made engines of personal enmities.

Social democracy in every land is thus setting out for the new Jerusalem, along the same old muddy political tracks, of which some of us are so weary,



and the Holy City to which it aspires, is to be built up of the old bricks and mortar of property and authority: but the bricks are to be set the other way up and refaced so as to look smart from the outside. In economics, in the renunciation of the individual monopoly of capital, social democracy belongs to the future; but in politics, in its conception of the community organised administratively, it belongs to the past.

The history of men living in a social state is one long record of a never-ending contest between certain opposing natural impulses developed by the life in common. The slow development, the contest between these opposing instincts, within each man, has repeated itself within each society. As the one set of impulses or the other have triumphed in the individual man or woman, he or she has sided with one party or other in the community. But in the vast majority of cases no definite triumph has been won: the man or woman has been swayed hither and thither between social and anti-social desires, without conscious realisation of their nature. Looked at for short periods the life of society seems to bear the same impress of fluctuation and uncertainty, but regarded as a whole, it becomes distinctly apparent that the slow course of evolution is tending to eliminate the one sort of impulse and to develop the other into increasing activity.

The struggle of which we are beginning to be dimly conscious within our own nature and in the world of men around us, is that between the anti-social

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desire to monopolise and dominate, and the social desires which find their highest expression in fraternity — the equal brotherhood of men. This distinction is not equivalent to that often drawn between altruism and egoism, between the self-regarding impulses and those which regulate our relations with our fellows — neither is it another mode of expressing the difference in human relations commonly expressed in the words *selfish* and *unselfish*. A selfish man may find it more for his own ease and interest not to attempt to dominate or monopolise, and an unselfish man may be honestly convinced that it is his painful duty to rule his neighbours for their own good.

The desire to dominate is the desire to make oneself superior to one's fellows, to be distinguished from them or placed above them by some acknowledgement of superiority. It is the desire to take and keep whatever may conduce to one's own superiority or importance. The social impulses and desires summed up in *fraternity* are the reverse of all this. They prompt the wish to be on terms of equal companionship with our fellow-men, to share with them all gifts of nature or circumstances, to exchange ideas or opinions on their own merits, and to decide on common action by mutual agreement and sufferance.

The increasing consciousness of self which marks our age, is revealing to us more clearly these opposing currents of desire, both in ourselves and others. We are often keenly aware within ourselves



of a desire to rule some fellow-creature, who tempts us by his servility or his feeble defiance: of a sense of equal social relationship towards another who meets us on a ground of equality and equal self-respect; or of an instinct of self-defence called out by the aggressive personality of a third. It is this personal experience which is leading us to a clearer conception of the true meaning of the strife we see around us.

The battle is for freedom, for the deliverance of the spirit of each one of us, and of humanity as a whole, from the government of man by man; whether such coercion justify itself on the plea of superior strength or superior wisdom, of divine light or necessity, of utility or expedience; whether it take the form of force or fraud, of exacted conformity to an arbitrary moral code, or an arbitrary social system, of the open robbery of the means of subsistence, or the legal appropriation of the universal birthright of land, and the fruit of social labour.

This freedom is the necessary preliminary to any true and equal human association, and until this is recognised in theory as the basis of human relationship, state social union is impossible.

Anarchism is the conscious recognition of this naked truth. It stands face to face with the spirit of greed and domination, and declares a moral compromise out of the question. In the light of past victories, won upon many a changing and ill-defined battle-ground, it confronts the enemy of today in the latest of his protean shapes, and demands the

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destruction of the monopoly of property, and of its guardian — the law. Slavery and serfdom are past, political despotism is shrinking away towards the East, and constitutional monarchy is withering before our eyes. Wage slavery and class supremacy is doomed, and our Bourgeois Parliaments are on the high road to talk themselves out of existence, but property and law are still hedged about by that divinity which has ceased to smile on kings.

*Property* is the *domination* of an individual, or a coalition of individuals, over things; it is not the claim of any person or persons to the use of things — this is, usufruct, a very different matter. Property means the monopoly of wealth, the right to prevent others using it, whether the owner needs it or not. Usufruct implies the claim to the use of such wealth as supplies the user's needs. If any individual shuts off a portion of it (which he is not using, and does not need for his own use) from his fellows, he is defrauding the whole community. The only claims which any member of a community can fairly put forward to a share of the social wealth are: first, that he requires it to develop and maintain in efficiency all his faculties and powers; second, that he has contributed towards the production of that wealth to the best of his ability; third, that (as regards any particular article) he has put so much of his personal labour into it as to have a prior claim to its first use. The first claim is a part of that larger claim that each individual has upon the social feeling of the community of which he is a member; the claim that



he shall — as far as the means of the community will admit — have space and opportunity for the fullest development of which his nature is capable. What is required for such development only the individual himself can judge, it varies in every particular instance. But not only is such opportunity pleaded for by the social feelings of such of us as believe the highest development to lead to the highest happiness, but it is urged by the self-interest of the community; for the best developed members of a community are certainly the most useful to it as a whole. It is the highly developed who feel most strongly that healthy desire for the exercise of their faculties which leads to the doing of the best and most earnest work, and this is the most effectual stimulant to exertion. That stimulant which is afforded by the desire to appropriate as much wealth as possible from the general produce — is not only inferior to intensity but it leads a man to choose — not that work which is most useful or for which he has most natural appetite, but rather such work as pays best: a choice which naturally results in “scamping” and inferior workmanship. The utilitarian arguments for the monopoly of property would not suffice to uphold it against the sense of justice which has grown up in humanity, were it not for the guardianship of law. Law encircles private property with some of its own sanctity — a sanctity arising from the fact that it is supposed to represent — in some mysterious manner — that which is in the abstract eternally right. “Thou shalt not steal” as embodied in the statute book is supposed to afford a special sanction to monopolists

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in possession, however their wealth may have been come by, or is used.

This reverence has a foundation, in fact, there is a certain small kernel of written law that does represent the social code of habits, customary and desirable in daily life, habits the utility of which has commended itself to the common moral sense of mankind, as a rough generalisation from experience. But men have forgotten that the conditions to which that experience applies vary slightly in each individual case, and in each succeeding generation. To have this social morality — written and fixed is an obstacle to social progress, to enforce it upon the individual by price is an insult to humanity. It is to suppose men suddenly deprived of those higher self-regarding and social instincts, from the free play of which all such morality has sprung, and to deprive them of that sense of responsibility for their own conduct, which is at once the safeguard of life in common, and the earnest of its future development.

But even this inner kernel of law, as it now exists, has been so fatally vitiated by admixtures introduced by the desire to dominate that it is more often opposed to than in accordance with the social sentiments it professes to represent. Take one instance in which the advance of knowledge has come to the aid of struggling social feeling and enlarged our moral sense. I mean the case of so-called criminals. We are now perfectly aware that individuals who commit an outrage upon their fellows are in the majority of cases, the victims of a defective



organisation, or of social arrangements which are a disgrace to our humanity. Yet some of them we brutally murder in cold blood because, in a moment of homicidal mania, they have destroyed human life; others, to whom we have troubled ourselves to give no opportunities of mental or physical development, and who have consequently felt the force of no social obligations, we consign to the tender mercies of a system described by Michael Davitt — after his personal experience of it — as follows:

Penal servitude has become so elaborated that it is now a huge punishing machine, destitute through centralised control and responsibility, of discrimination, feeling, or sensitiveness, and its non-success as a deterrent from crime, its complete failure in reformative affect upon criminal character, are owing to its essential tendency to deal with erring human beings — who are still men despite their crimes — in a manner which mechanically reduces them to a uniform level of disciplined brutes.

(*Contemporary Review*, August 1883).

And all this we acquiesce in, stifling our natural sensations of horror and pity, because it is the work of the law. We confound the fact that the individual who is ignorant enough to run counter to any natural law, whether it be an observed series of sequences in an inanimate nature, or in the social relationships of men must necessarily suffer for his want of understanding; with a sort of crude instinct of retaliation for the infliction of personal inconveni-

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ence which still unhappily survives amongst us, and is exactly that which leads a cat to scratch the person who treads upon her tail. Thus we talk with approval of society avenging itself upon the criminal, or rewarding him according to his misdeeds, when the one just attitude of his brother-men towards him, would be that sense of sorrowing sympathy which would lead them to feel themselves in part responsible for the injury done to himself and others, and for its reparation.

This instance is enough to show what I mean by the vitiation of that small portion of existing law which represents the social sentiments. In truth it has fallen into the hands of the dominators of mankind. It has been formulated by priests, and administered by fighting-men with all the narrowness and cruelty of their crafts until it has practically ceased to represent the moral sense of the people, and become the possession of the privileged classes, who claim the exclusive right of expounding it and carrying it into effect. Moreover they have taken advantage of the respect it commanded to overlay it with a vast mass of regulations in their own interests, for which they have claimed equal reverence, and which exist purely (first) to support, define, and defend the monopoly of property, (second) to regulate the machinery which upholds it, i.e., Government.

This then is the position of Anarchism at the present moment. It finds itself confronted by the spirit of domination in the concrete form of



Property, guarded by law, upheld by the organised force of Government, and backed by the yet undestroyed desire to dominate in certain individuals, ignorance of the issues involved in others (the majority), and the cowardice, folly, idleness, and selfishness, of mankind in general. In this position what are the practical measures to be taken? What are we Anarchists to do?

To answer this question fully would be to out-step the limits of the present article, for it would be necessary to trace out the relation of the conviction I have been describing to the economic and social tendencies at present existing in society. Now I can only summarise as briefly as possible — necessarily omitting many important considerations.

As a preliminary, we endeavour to discard the principle of domination from our own lives. In the next place, we associate ourselves with others in working for that social revolution, which for us means the destruction of all monopoly and all government, and the direct seizure by the workers of the means of production. It is our aim to give conscious expression to the voiceless cry of the oppressed, believing that as the knowledge of the real causes of their distress slowly dawns upon the victims of despair, with fuller consciousness will come the energy of hope. It is only the incomprehensible which is paralysing. As to the means to be employed — besides the free association of those who share one hope and one belief — they rest with each man's conscience and his opportunities. The

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employment of force to coerce others is unjustifiable: but as a means of escaping from coercion, if it is available when other means have failed, it is not only excusable, it is a moral obligation. Each man owes it to himself and to society to be free.

Society can relieve itself of monopoly by force; but social re-formation is the work of silent growth, not of conscious, sudden effort, and it may fairly be predicted, that the old will not be thrown off until the new is sufficiently developed to take its place. Already, for the careful and unbiased observer of present tendencies, it is possible to form some conception of the free community of the future. Federated, self-organised, and self-directed trade and distributing societies, voluntary associations of workers, utilising a common capital, and sharing amongst themselves and with one another the produce of their labour, amongst themselves and with the produce of their labour, are no startling innovations. But delivered from the yoke of property, which exacts interest, creates monopoly value and competition in consumption, and makes its possessor arbiter of the destiny of his fellows, such associations will obviously exist in a new atmosphere. When each person directs his own life, then, and then only, he throws his whole soul into the work he has chosen, and makes it the expression of his intensest purpose and desire, then, and then only, labour becomes pleasure, and its produce a work of art.

With the cessation of the luxury and misery, which are the exciting causes of crime and vice, and the



substitution of a free scope for human energy, it will become possible to treat the decreasing number of criminals, as science and humanity dictate, i.e., as patients suffering from mental or physical aberration, needing the voluntary attention of skilful physicians and nurses. As for the expression of the collective life of the community, and the raising of such members of it as have lagged behind the social standard of conduct, it is enough to note the marvellous growth of public opinion since the emancipation of speech and the press, to become aware that social expressions of opinion and social codes of morality, unsupported by law or Government, are able to exercise a pressure so strong as to be overwhelming, and to take action with a rapidity unrivalled by any police officer. Indeed, they constitute a serious danger to individual freedom, which, as it is a natural result of life in common, can only be met by a higher moral culture.

It follows from what has been said that Anarchism is not a system, but a theory of human development; not a Utopian dream of the future, but a faith for the present; not a nostrum for the cure of all human ills, but a protest against certain definite evils, pointed out by reason and experience, as entrenched behind the prejudices of our moral blindness. This protest, this theory, this faith, it carries into every department of life as it is, confident that men will one day see the beauty of life as it might be.

*(The Practical Socialist, January 1886).*