

Anarchy

Errico Malatesta

1891

Contents

1	3
2	6
3	8
4	14
5	17
6	19
7	25
8	28
9	30

1

The word Anarchy comes from the Greek and its literal meaning is *without government*: the condition of a people who live without a constituted authority, without government.

Before such an organisation had begun to be considered both possible and desirable by a whole school of thinkers and accepted as the objective of a party, which has now become one of the most important factors in the social struggles of our time, the word anarchy was universally used in the sense of disorder and confusion; and it is to this day used in that sense by the uninformed as well as by political opponents with an interest in distorting the truth.

We will not enter into a philological discussion, since the question is historical and not philological. The common interpretation of the word recognises its true and etymological meaning; but it is a derivative of that meaning due to the prejudiced view that government was a necessary organ of social life, and that consequently a society without government would be at the mercy of disorder, and fluctuate between the unbridled arrogance of some, and the blind vengeance of others.

The existence of this prejudice and its influence on the public's definition of the word anarchy, is easily explained. Man, like all living beings, adapts and accustoms himself to the conditions under which he lives, and passes on acquired habits. Thus, having being born and bred in bondage, when the descendants of a long line of slaves started to think, they believed that slavery was an essential condition of life, and freedom seemed impossible to them. Similarly, workers who for centuries were obliged, and therefore accustomed, to depend for work, that is bread, on the goodwill of the master, and to see their lives always at the mercy of the owners of the land and of capital, ended by believing that it is the master who feeds them, and ingenuously ask one how would it be possible to live if there were no masters.

In the same way, someone whose legs had been bound from birth but had managed nevertheless to walk as best he could, might attribute his ability to move to those very bonds which in fact serve only to weaken and paralyse the muscular energy of his legs.

If to the normal effects of habit is then added the kind of education offered by the master, the priest, the teacher, etc., who have a vested interest in preaching that the masters and the government are necessary; if one were to add the judge and the policeman who are at pains to reduce to silence those who might think differently and be tempted to propagate their ideas, then it will not be difficult to understand how the prejudiced view of the usefulness of, and the necessity for, the master and the government took root in the unsophisticated minds of the labouring masses.

Just imagine if the doctor were to expound to our fictional man with the bound legs a theory, cleverly illustrated with a thousand invented cases to prove that if his legs were freed he would be unable to walk and would not live, then that man would ferociously defend his bonds and consider as his enemy anyone who tried to remove them.

So, since it was thought that government was necessary and that without government there could only be disorder and confusion, it was natural and logical that anarchy, which means absence of government, should sound like absence of order.

Nor is the phenomenon without parallel in the history of words. In times and in countries where the people believed in the need for government by one man (monarchy), the word republic, which is government by many, was in fact used in the sense of disorder and confusion — and this meaning is still to be found in the popular language of almost all countries.

Change opinion, convince the public that government is not only unnecessary, but extremely harmful, and then the word anarchy, just because it means absence of government, will come to mean for everybody: natural order, unity of human needs and the interests of all, complete freedom within complete solidarity.

Those who say therefore that the anarchists have badly chosen their name because it is wrongly interpreted by the masses and lends itself to wrong interpretations, are mistaken. The error does not come from the word but from the thing; and the difficulties anarchists face in their propaganda do not depend on the name they have taken, but on the fact that their concept clashes with all the public's long established prejudices on the function of government, or the State as it is also called.

Before going on, it would be as well to make oneself clear on this word State, which in our opinion is the cause of the real misunderstanding.

Anarchists, including this writer, have used the word State, and still do, to mean the sum total of the political, legislative, judiciary, military and financial institutions through which the management of their own affairs, the control over their personal behaviour, the responsibility for their personal safety, are taken away from the people and entrusted to others who, by usurpation or delegation, are vested with the powers to make the laws for everything and everybody, and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be, by the use of collective force.

In this sense the word State means government, or to put it another way, it is the impersonal abstract expression of that state of affairs, personified by government: and therefore the terms abolition of the State, Society without the State, etc., describe exactly the concept which anarchists seek to express, of the destruction of all political order based on authority, and the creation of a society of free and equal members based on a harmony of interests and the voluntary participation of everybody in carrying out social responsibilities.

But the word has many other meanings, some of which lend themselves to misunderstanding, especially when used with people whose unhappy social situation has not given them the opportunity to accustom themselves to the subtle distinctions of scientific language, or worse still, when the word is used with political opponents who are in bad faith and who want to create confusion and not understanding.

Thus the word State is often used to describe a special kind of society, a particular human collectivity gathered together in a particular territory and making up what is called a social unit irrespective of the way the members of the said collectivity are grouped or of the state of relations between them. It is also used simply as a synonym for society. And because of these meanings given to the word State, opponents believe, or rather they pretend to believe, that anarchists mean to abolish every social bond, all collective work, and to condemn all men to living in a state of isolation, which is worse than living in conditions of savagery.

The word State is also used to mean the supreme administration of a country: the central power as opposed to the provincial or communal authority. And for this reason others believe

that anarchists want a simple territorial decentralisation with the governmental principle left intact, and they thus confuse anarchism with cantonalism and communalism.

Finally, State means the condition of being, a way of social life, etc. And therefore we say, for instance, that the economic state of the working class must be changed or that the anarchist state is the only social state based on the principle of solidarity, and other similar phrases which, coming from us who, in another context, talk of wanting to abolish the State can, at first hearing, seem fantastic or contradictory.

For these reasons we believe it would be better to use expressions such as *abolition of the State* as little as possible, substituting for it the clearer and more concrete term *abolition of government*.

Anyway, it is what we shall do in the course of this pamphlet.

2

We said that anarchy is society without government. But is the abolition of governments possible, desirable or foreseeable?

Let us see.

What is government? The metaphysical tendency¹ which, in spite of the blows it has suffered at the hands of positive science, still has a strong hold on the minds of people today, so much so that many look upon government as a moral institution with a number of given qualities of reason, justice, equity which are independent of the people who are in office. For them government, and in a more vague way, the State, is the abstract social power; it is the ever abstract representative of the general interest; it is the expression of the rights of all considered as the limits of the rights of each individual. And this way of conceiving of government is encouraged by the interested parties who are concerned that the principle of authority should be safeguarded and that it should always survive the shortcomings and the mistakes committed by those who follow one another in the exercise of power.

For us, government is made up of all the governors; and the governors — kings, presidents, ministers, deputies, etc. — are those who have the power to make laws regulating inter-human relations and to see that they are carried out; to levy taxes and to collect them; to impose military conscription; to judge and punish those who contravene the laws; to subject private contracts to rules, scrutiny and sanctions; to monopolise some branches of production and some public services or, if they so wish, all production and all public services; to promote or to hinder the exchange of goods; to wage war or make peace with the governors of other countries; to grant or withdraw privileges ... and so on. In short, the governors are those who have the power, to a greater or lesser degree, to make use of the social power, that is of the physical, intellectual and economic power of the whole community, in order to oblige everybody to carry out their wishes. And this power, in our opinion, constitutes the principle of government, of authority.

But what reason is there for the existence of government? Why give up one's personal liberty and initiative to a few individuals? Why give them this power to take over willy nilly the collective strength to use as they wish? Are they so exceptionally gifted as to be able to demonstrate with some show of reason their ability to replace the mass of the people and to safeguard the interests, all the interests, of everybody better than the interested parties themselves? Are they infallible and incorruptible to the point that one could, with some semblance of prudence, entrust the fate of each and all to their knowledge and to their goodness?

And even if men of infinite goodness and knowledge existed, and even supposing, what has never been observed in history, that governmental power were to rest in the hands of the most able and kindest among us, would government office add anything to their beneficial potential? Or would it instead paralyse and destroy it by reason of the necessity men in government have of dealing with so many matters which they do not understand, and above all of wasting their

¹ which is a disease of the mind in which Man, once having by a logical process abstracted an individual's qualities, undergoes a kind of hallucination which makes him accept the abstraction for the real being.

energy keeping themselves in power, their friends happy, and holding in check the malcontents as well as subduing the rebels?

Furthermore, however good or bad, knowledgeable or stupid the governors may be, who will appoint them to their exalted office? Do they impose themselves by right of conquest, war or revolution? But in that case what guarantee has the public that they will be inspired by the general good? Then it is a clear question of a coup d'état and if the victims are dissatisfied the only recourse open to them is that of force to shake off the yoke. Are they selected from one particular class or party? In which case the interests and ideas of that class or party will certainly triumph, and the will and the interests of the others will be sacrificed. Are they elected by universal suffrage? But in that case the only criterion is in numbers, which certainly are proof neither of reason, justice nor ability. Those elected would be those most able to deceive the public; and the minority, which can well be the other half minus one, would be sacrificed. And all this without taking into account that experience has demonstrated the impossibility of devising an electoral machine where the successful candidates are at least the real representatives of the majority.

3

Many and varied are the theories with which some have sought to explain and justify the existence of government. Yet all are based on the prejudiced view, whether admitted or not, that men have conflicting interests, and that an external, higher, authority is needed to oblige one section of the people to respect the interests of the other, prescribing and imposing that rule of conduct by which opposing interests can best be resolved, and by which each individual will achieve the maximum satisfaction with the least possible sacrifice.

The Authoritarian theoreticians ask: if the interests, tendencies and aspirations of an individual are at odds with those of another or even those of society as a whole, who will have the right and the power to oblige each to respect the other's interests? Who will be able to prevent an individual from violating the general will? They say that the freedom of each is limited by the freedom of others; but who will establish these limits and who will see to it that they are respected? The natural antagonisms of interests and temperament create the need for government and justify authority which is a moderating influence in the social struggle, and defines the limits of individual rights and duties.

This is the theory; but if theories are to be valid they must be based on facts and explain them — and one knows only too well that in social economy too often are theories invented to justify the facts, that is to defend privilege and make it palatable to those who are its victims. Let us instead look at the facts.

Throughout history, just as in our time, government is either the brutal, violent, arbitrary rule of the few over the many or it is an organised instrument to ensure that dominion and privilege will be in the hands of those who by force, by cunning, or by inheritance, have cornered all the means of life, first and foremost the land, which they make use of to keep the people in bondage and to make them work for their benefit.

There are two ways of oppressing men: either directly by brute force, by physical violence; or indirectly by denying them the means of life and thus reducing them to a state of surrender. The former is at the root of power, that is of political privilege; the latter was the origin of property, that is of economic privilege. Men can also be suppressed by working on their intelligence and their feelings, which constitutes religious or “universitarian” power; but just as the spirit does not exist except as the resultant of material forces, so a lie and the organisms set up to propagate it have no *raison d'être* except in so far as they are the result of political and economic privileges, and a means to defend and to consolidate them.

In sparsely populated primitive societies with uncomplicated social relations, in any situation which prevented the establishment of habits, customs of solidarity, or which destroyed existing ones and established the domination of man by man — the two powers, political and economic, were to be found in the same hands, which could even be those of a single man. Those who by force have defeated and intimidated others, dispose of the persons and the belongings of the defeated and oblige them to serve and to work for them and obey their will in all respects. They are at the same time the landowners, kings, judges and executioners.

But with the growth of society, with increasing needs, with more complex social relations, the continued existence of such a despotism became untenable. The rulers, for security reasons, for convenience and because of it being impossible to act otherwise, find themselves obliged on the one hand to have the support of a privileged class, that is of a number of individuals with a common interest in ruling, and on the other to leave it to each individual to fend for himself as best he can, reserving for themselves supreme rule, which is the right to exploit everybody as much as possible, and is the way to satisfy the vanity of those who want to give the orders. Thus, in the shadow of power, for its protection and support, often unbeknown to it, and for reasons beyond its control, private wealth, that is the owning class, is developed. And the latter, gradually concentrating in their hands the means of production, the real sources of life, agriculture, industry, barter, etc., end up by establishing their own power which, by reason of the superiority of its means, and the wide variety of interests that it embraces, always ends by more or less openly subjecting the political power, which is the government, and making it into its own gendarme.

This phenomenon has occurred many times in history. Whenever as a result of invasion or any military enterprise physical, brutal force has gained the upper hand in society, the conquerors have shown a tendency to concentrate government and property in their own hands. But always the government's need to win the support of a powerful class, and the demands of production, the impossibility of controlling and directing everything, have resulted in the re-establishment of private property, the division of the two powers, and with it the dependence in fact of those who control force — governments — on those who control the very source of force — the property-owners. The governor inevitably ends by becoming the owners' gendarme.

But never has this phenomenon been more accentuated than in modern times. The development of production, the vast expansion of commerce, the immeasurable power assumed by money, and all the economic questions stemming from the discovery of America, from the invention of machines, etc., have guaranteed this supremacy to the capitalist class which, no longer content with enjoying the support of the government, demanded that government should arise from its own ranks. A government which owed its origin to the right of conquest (divine right as the kings and their priests called it) though subjected by existing circumstances to the capitalist class, went on maintaining a proud and contemptuous attitude towards its now wealthy former slaves, and had pretensions to independence of domination. That government was indeed the defender, the property owners' gendarme, but the kind of gendarmes who think they are somebody, and behave in an arrogant manner towards the people they have to escort and defend, when they don't rob or kill them at the next street corner; and the capitalist class got rid of it, or is in the process of so, doing by means fair or foul, and replacing it by a government of its own choosing, consisting of members of its own class, at all times under its control and specifically organised to defend that class against any possible demands by the disinherited. The modern Parliamentary system begins here.

Today, government, consisting of property owners and people dependent on them, is entirely at the disposal of the owners, so much so that the richest among them disdain to take part in it. Rothschild does not need to be either a Deputy or a Minister; it suffices that Deputies and Ministers take their orders from him.

In many countries workers nominally have a more or less important say in the election of the government. It is a concession made by the bourgeoisie, both to avail itself of popular support in its struggle against the monarchical and aristocratic power as well as to dissuade the people from thinking of emancipation by giving them the illusion of sovereignty. But whether

the bourgeoisie foresaw it or not when they first gave the people the vote, the fact is that that right proved to be entirely derisory, and served only to consolidate the power of the bourgeoisie while giving the most active section of the working class false hopes of achieving power. Even with universal suffrage — and we could well say even more so with universal suffrage — the government remained the bourgeoisie's servant and gendarme. For were it to be otherwise with the government hinting that it might take up a hostile attitude, or that democracy could ever be anything but a pretence to deceive the people, the bourgeoisie, feeling its interests threatened, would be quick to react, and would make use of all the influence and force at its disposal, by reason of its wealth, to recall the government to its proper place as the bourgeoisie's gendarme.

The basic function of government everywhere in all times, whatever title it adopts and whatever its origin and organisation may be, is always that of oppressing and exploiting the masses, of defending the oppressors and the exploiters: and its principal, characteristic and indispensable instruments are the police agent and the tax-collector, the soldier and the gaoler — to whom must be invariably added the trader in lies, be he priest or schoolmaster, remunerated or protected by the government to enslave minds and make them docilely accept the yoke.

It is true that to these basic functions, to these essential organs of government, other functions, other organs have been added in the course of history. Let us even also admit that never or hardly ever has a government existed in any country with a degree of civilisation which did not combine with its oppressive and plundering activities others which were useful or indispensable to social life. But this does not detract from the fact that government is by its nature oppressive and plundering, and that it is in origin and by its attitude, inevitably inclined to defend and strengthen the dominant class; indeed it confirms and aggravates the position.

In fact government takes the trouble to protect, more or less, the lives of citizens against direct and violent attack; it recognises and legalises a number of basic rights and duties as well as usages and customs without which social life would not be possible; it organises and manages a number of public services, such as the post, roads, cleansing and refuse disposal, land improvement and conservation, etc.; it promotes orphanages and hospitals, and often it condescends to pose as the protector and benefactor of the poor and the weak. But it is enough to understand how and why it carries out these functions to find the practical evidence that whatever governments do is always motivated by the desire to dominate, and is always geared to defending, extending and perpetuating its privileges and those of the class of which it is both the representative and defender.

A government cannot maintain itself for long without hiding its true nature behind a pretence of general usefulness; it cannot impose respect for the lives of privileged people if it does not appear to demand respect for all human life, it cannot impose acceptance of the privileges of the few if it does not pretend to be the guardian of the rights of all. "The law" — says Kropotkin, and by which is meant those who have made the law, that is, the government — "has used Man's social feelings to get passed not only the moral precepts which were acceptable to Man, but also orders which were useful only to the minority of exploiters against whom he would have rebelled."

A government cannot want society to break up, for it would mean that it and the dominant class would be deprived of the sources of exploitation; nor can it leave society to maintain itself without official intervention, for then the people would soon realise that government serves only to defend the property owners who keep them in conditions of starvation, and they would hasten to rid themselves of both the government and the property owners.

Today, governments, faced with the pressing and threatening demands of the workers, show a tendency to arbitrate in the dealings between masters and workers; in this way they seek to sidetrack the workers' movement and, with a few deceptive reforms, to prevent the poor from taking for themselves what is their due, that is a part of wellbeing equal to that enjoyed by others.

Furthermore, one must bear in mind that on the one hand the bourgeoisie (the property owners) are always at war among themselves and gobbling each other up and that on the other hand the government, though springing from the bourgeoisie and its servant and protector, tends, as with every servant and every protector, to achieve its own emancipation and to dominate whoever it protects. Thus the game of the swings, the manoeuvres, the concessions and withdrawals, the attempts to find allies among the people against the conservatives, and among the conservatives against the people, which is the science of the governors, and which blinds the ingenuous and the phlegmatic who always wait for salvation to come down to them from above.

Despite all this, the nature of government does not change. If it assumes the role of controller and guarantor of the rights and duties of everyone, it perverts the sentiment of justice; it qualifies as a crime and punishes every action which violates or threatens the privileges of the rulers and the property owners, and declares as just and legal the most outrageous exploitation of the poor, the slow and sustained material and moral assassination perpetrated by those who have, at the expense of those who have not. If it appoints itself as the administrator of public services, again, as always, it looks after the interests of the rulers and the property owners and does not attend to those of the working people except where it has to because the people agree to pay. If it assumes the role of teacher, it hampers the propagation of truth and tends to prepare the minds and the hearts of the young to become either ruthless tyrants or docile slaves, according to the class to which they belong. In the hands of government everything becomes a means for exploitation, everything becomes a policing institution, useful only for keeping the people in check.

And it had to be thus. For if human existence is a struggle between men, there must obviously be winners and losers, and government, which is the prize in the struggle and a means for guaranteeing to the victors the results of victory and for perpetuating them, will certainly never fall into the hands of those who lose, whether the struggle is based on physical force, is intellectual, or is in the field of economics. And those who have struggled to win, that is, to secure better conditions for themselves than others enjoy, and to win privileges and power, will certainly not use it to defend the rights of the vanquished and set limits on their own power as well as that of their friends and supporters.

The government, or as some call it, the judiciary State, as moderator in the social struggle and the impartial administrator of the public interest, is a lie — an illusion, an utopia never achieved and never to be realised.

If Man's interests were really mutually antagonistic, if the struggle between men was indeed a basic essential law of human societies and if the liberty of the individual were to be limited by the liberty of others, then everyone would always seek to ensure that his interests prevailed, everyone would try to increase his own freedom at the expense of other people's freedom, and one would have a government, not just because it would be more or less useful to all members of society to have one, but because the victors would want to make sure of the fruits of victory by thoroughly subjecting the vanquished, and so free themselves from the trouble of being permanently on the defensive, entrusting their defence to men specially trained as professional gendarmes. In that case mankind would be condemned to perish or be for ever struggling between the tyranny of the victors and the rebellion of the vanquished.

But fortunately the future of mankind is a happier one because the law governing it is milder. This law is solidarity.

Man's fundamental essential characteristics are the instinct of his own preservation, without which no living being could exist, and the instinct of the preservation of the species, without which no species could have developed and endured. He is naturally driven to defend his individual existence and wellbeing, as well as that of his offspring, against everything and everybody.

In nature living beings have two ways of surviving and of making life more pleasant. One is by individual struggle against the elements and against other individuals of the same or other species; the other is by mutual aid, by cooperation, which could also be described as association for the struggle against all natural factors antagonistic to the existence, the development and wellbeing of the associates.

Apart from considerations of space, there is no need to examine in the pages that follow the relative role in the evolution of the organic world played by these two principles: of struggle and of cooperation. It will suffice to state that so far as Man is concerned, cooperation (voluntary or compulsory) has become the only means towards progress, advancement and security; and that struggle – a relic of our ancestors – has not only proved useless in ensuring individual wellbeing, but also is harmful to everybody, victors and vanquished alike.

The accumulated and communicated experience of the generations taught men that by uniting with other men their individual safety and wellbeing were enhanced. Thus, as a result of the very struggle for existence waged against the natural environment and against individuals of the same species, a social feeling was developed in Man which completely transformed the conditions of his existence. And on the strength of this, Man was able to emerge from the animal state and rise to great power, and so lift himself above other animals that antimaterialist philosophers thought it necessary to invent an immaterial and immortal soul for him.

Many concurrent causes have contributed to the development of this social feeling which, starting from the animal basis of the instinct of preservation of the species (which is the social instinct limited to the natural family), has reached great heights both in intensity and in extent, so much so that it constitutes the very basis of man's moral nature.

Man, though he had emerged from the lower order of animal life, was weak and unequipped to engage in individual struggle against the carnivorous beasts. But with a brain capable of great development, a vocal organ capable of expressing with a variety of sounds different cerebral vibrations, and with hands specially suitable for fashioning matter to his will, must have very soon felt the need for, and the advantages to be derived from, association; indeed one can say that he could only emerge from the animal state when he became a social being and acquired the use of language, which is at the same time a consequence of, and an important factor in, sociability.

The relatively small number of human beings, because it made the struggle for existence between men, even without association, less bitter, less prolonged, less necessary, must have greatly facilitated the development of feelings of sympathy, and allowed time to discover and appreciate the usefulness of mutual aid.

Finally, Man's ability to modify his external environment and adapt it to his needs, which he acquired thanks to his original qualities applied in cooperation with a smaller or larger number of associates; the increasing number of demands which grow as the means of satisfying them grow and become needs; the division of labour which is the outcome of the systematic exploitation of nature to Man's advantage, all these factors have resulted in social life becoming the necessary

environment for Man, outside of which he cannot go on living, or if he does, he returns to the animal state.

And by the refinement of feelings with the growth of relations, and by customs impressed on the species through heredity over thousands of centuries, this need of a social life, of an exchange of thoughts and feelings, has become for mankind a way of being which is essential to our way of life, and has been transformed into sympathy, friendship, love, and goes on independently of the material advantages that association provides, so much so that in order to satisfy it one often faces all kinds of sufferings and even death.

In other words, the enormous advantages that accrue to men through association; the state of physical inferiority, in no wise comparable to his intellectual superiority, in which he finds himself in relation to the animal kingdom if he remains isolated; the possibility for men to join with an ever growing number of individuals and in relationships ever more intimate and complex to the point where the association extends to all mankind and all aspects of life, and perhaps more than anything, to the possibility for Man to produce, through work in cooperation with others, more than he needs for survival, and the affective sentiments that spring from all these — all have given to the human struggle for existence quite a different complexion from the struggle that is generally waged by other members of the animal kingdom.

Although we now know — and the findings of contemporary naturalists are daily providing us with new evidence — that cooperation has played and continues to play a most important role in the development of the organic world unsuspected by those who sought, quite irrelevantly anyway, to justify bourgeois rule with Darwinian theories, yet the gulf separating the struggle of man from that of the animal kingdom remains enormous, and in direct ratio to the distance between man and the other animals.

Other animals fight either individually or, more often, in small permanent or transitory groups against all nature including other individuals of the same species. The more social creatures among them, such as the ants, bees, etc., are loyal to all the individuals within the same ant-hill or swarm, but are at war with or indifferent to other communities of the same species. Human struggle instead tends always to widen the association among men, their community of interests, and to develop the feeling of love of man for his fellows, of conquering and overcoming the external forces of nature by humanity and for humanity. Every struggle aimed at gaining advantages independently of or at the expense of others, is contrary to the social nature of modern Man and tends to drive him back towards the animal state.

Solidarity, that is the harmony of interests and of feelings, the coming together of individuals for the wellbeing of all, and of all for the wellbeing of each, is the only environment in which Man can express his personality and achieve his optimum development and enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing. This is the goal towards which human evolution advances; it is the higher principle which resolves all existing antagonisms, that would otherwise be insoluble, and results in the freedom of each not being limited by, but complemented — indeed finding the necessary *raison d'être* in — the freedom of others.

4

Michael Bakunin said that “No individual can recognise his own humanity, and consequently realise it in his lifetime, if not by recognising it in others and cooperating in its realisation for others. No man can achieve his own emancipation without at the same time working for the emancipation of all men around him. My freedom is the freedom of all since I am not truly free in thought and in fact, except when my freedom and my rights are confirmed and approved in the freedom and rights of all men who are my equals.

“It matters to me very much what other men are, because however independent I may appear to be or think I am, because of my social position, were I Pope, Tzar, Emperor or even Prime Minister, I remain always the product of what the humblest among them are: if they are ignorant, poor, slaves, my existence is determined by their slavery. I, an enlightened or intelligent man am, for instance – in the event – rendered stupid by their stupidity; as a courageous man I am enslaved by their slavery; as a rich man I tremble before their poverty; as a privileged person I blanch at their justice. I who want to be free cannot be because all the men around me do not yet want to be free, and consequently they become tools of oppression against me.”

Solidarity is therefore the state of being in which Man attains the greatest degree of security and wellbeing; and therefore egoism itself, that is the exclusive consideration of one’s own interests, impels Man and human society towards solidarity; or it would be better to say that egoism and altruism (concern for the interests of others) become fused into a single sentiment just as the interests of the individual and those of society coincide.

Yet Man could not in one leap pass from the animal state to the human state, from the brutish struggle between man and man to the joint struggle of all men united in comradeship against the outside forces of nature.

Guided by the advantages which association and the consequent division of labour offer, Man developed towards solidarity; but his development met with an obstacle which led him away from his goal and continues to do so to this day. Man discovered that he could, at least up to a certain point and for the material and basic needs which only then did he feel, achieve the advantages of cooperation by subjecting other men to his will instead of joining with them; and in view of the fact that the fierce and anti-social instincts inherited from his animal ancestry were still strong in him, he obliged the weakest to work for him, preferring domination to association. Perhaps too, in most cases, it was in exploiting the vanquished that Man learned for the first time to understand the advantages of association, the good that Man could derive from the support of his fellows.

Thus the realisation of the usefulness of cooperation, which should have led to the triumph of solidarity in all human relations, instead gave rise to private property and government, that is to the exploitation of the labour of the whole community by a privileged minority.

It was still association and cooperation, outside which there is no possible human life; but it was a way of cooperation, imposed and controlled by a few for their own personal interest.

From this fact has arisen the great contradiction, which fills the pages of human history, between the tendency to association and comradeship for the conquest and adaptation of the external world to Man's needs and for the satisfaction of sentiments of affection — and the tendency to divide into many units separate and hostile as are the groupings determined by geographic and ethnographic conditions, as are the economic attitudes, as are those men who have succeeded in winning an advantage and want to make sure of it and add to it, as are those who hope to win a privilege, as are those who suffer by an injustice or a privilege and rebel and seek to make amends.

The principle of each for himself, which is the war of all against all, arose in the course of history to complicate, to sidetrack and paralyse the war of all against nature for the greatest wellbeing of mankind which can be completely successful only by being based on the principle of all for one and one for all.

Mankind has suffered great harm as a result of this intrusion of domination and exploitation in the midst of human association. But in spite of the terrible oppression to which the masses have been subjected, in spite of poverty, in spite of vice, crime and the degradation which poverty and slavery produce in the slaves and in the masters, in spite of accumulated antagonism, of wars of extermination, in spite of artificially created conflicting interests, the social instinct has survived and developed. Cooperation having always remained the essential condition for man to wage a successful war against external nature, it also remained the permanent cause for bringing men close together and for developing among them sentiments of sympathy. The very oppression of the masses created a feeling of comradeship among the oppressed; and it is only because of the more or less conscious and widespread solidarity that existed among the oppressed that they were able to endure the oppression and that mankind survived the causes of death that crept into their midst.

Today the immense development of production, the growth of those requirements which can only be satisfied by the participation of large numbers of people in all countries, the means of communication, with travel becoming a commonplace, science, literature, businesses and even wars, all have drawn mankind into an ever tighter single body whose constituent parts, united among themselves, can only find fulfilment and freedom to develop through the wellbeing of the other constituent parts as well as of the whole.

The inhabitant of Naples is as concerned in the improvement to the living conditions of the people inhabiting the banks of the Ganges from whence cholera comes to him, as he is in the drainage of the fondaci of his own city. The wellbeing, the freedom and the future of a highlander lost among the gorges of the Apennines, are dependent not only on the conditions of prosperity or of poverty of the inhabitants of his village and on the general condition of the Italian people, but also on workers' conditions in America or Australia, on the discovery made by a Swedish scientist, on the state of mind and material conditions of the Chinese, on there being war or peace in Africa; in other words on all the circumstances large and small which anywhere in the world are acting on a human being.

In present day conditions in society, this vast solidarity which joins together all men is for the most part unconscious, since it emerges spontaneously out of the friction between individual interests, whereas men are hardly if at all concerned with the general interest. And this is the clearest proof that solidarity is a natural law of mankind, which manifests itself and commands respect in spite of all the obstacles, and the dissensions created by society as at present constituted.

On the other hand the oppressed masses who have never completely resigned themselves to oppression and poverty, and who today more than ever show themselves thirsting for justice, freedom and wellbeing, are beginning to understand that they will not be able to achieve their emancipation except by union and solidarity with all the oppressed, with the exploited everywhere in the world. And they also understand that the indispensable condition for their emancipation which cannot be neglected is the possession of the means of production, of the land and of the instruments of labour, and therefore the abolition of private property. And science, the observation of social manifestations, indicates that this abolition of private property would be of great value even to the privileged minority, if only they were to want to give up their domineering attitude and work with everybody else for the common good.

So therefore if the oppressed masses were to refuse to work for others, and were to take over the land and the instruments of work from the landowners, or were to want to use them on their own account or for their own benefit, that is the benefit of all, if they were to decide never again to put up with domination and brute force, nor with economic privilege, and if the sentiment of human solidarity, strengthened by a community of interests, were to have put an end to wars and colonialism — what justification would there be for the continued existence of government?

Once private property has been abolished, government which is its defender must disappear. If it were to survive it would tend always to re-establish a privileged and oppressing class in one guise or another.

And the abolition of government does not and cannot mean the breakdown of the social link. Quite the contrary, cooperation which today is imposed and directed to the benefit of a few, would be free, voluntary and directed to everybody's interests; and therefore it would become that much more widespread and effective.

Social instinct, the sentiment of solidarity, would be developed to the highest degree; and every man would strive to do his best for everybody else, both to satisfy his intimate feelings as well as for his clearly understood interest.

From the free participation of all, by means of the spontaneous grouping of men according to their requirements and their sympathies, from the bottom to the top, from the simple to the complex, starting with the most urgent interests and arriving in the end at the most remote and most general, a social organisation would emerge the function of which would be the greatest wellbeing and the greatest freedom for everybody, and would draw together the whole of mankind into a community of comradeship, and would be modified and improved according to changing circumstances and the lessons learned from experience.

This society of free people, this society of friends is Anarchy.

5

So far we have considered government as it is, as it must of necessity be in a society based on privilege, exploitation and the oppression of man by man, on the conflict of interests, on the intrasocial struggle, in a word, on individual property.

We have seen how this state of conflict, far from being a necessary condition in Man's existence, is against the interests both of individuals and mankind; we have seen how cooperation, solidarity, is the law of human progress, and have concluded that by abolishing private property and all rule over man, government loses its reason for existing and must be abolished.

We might be told however: "But once the principle on which social organisation is based today were to be changed, and solidarity were to replace struggle, and common property were to take over from private property, government would change its nature and from being the protector and the representative of the interests of a class, since classes would no longer exist, would become the representative of the interests of society as a whole. Its role would be to provide and regulate social cooperation in the interests of all; to defend society from any direct attempts to reintroduce privilege, to forestall and suppress attempts from whatever quarter against the life, the wellbeing and freedom of each one of us.

"There are in society some offices too important and requiring too much attention and continuity, for them to be left to the free will of individuals, without the danger of seeing everything thrown into confusion.

"Who would organise and guarantee, if there were no government, food supplies, distribution, health services, the post and telegraph services and the railways, etc.? Who would look after public education? Who would undertake those vast exploratory projects, land drainage schemes, scientific research, which transform the face of the earth and increase Man's power a hundredfold?

"Who would watch over the conservation and development of social wealth to pass it on enriched and improved for future generations?

"Who would have a mandate to prevent and punish crime, that is anti-social actions?

"And what of those who fall short of the law of solidarity and don't want to work? And those who were to spread disease in a country and refused to take the kinds of hygienic precautions recognised as useful by science? And supposing there were some people, sane or insane, who wanted to set fire to the harvest, sexually assault children, or take advantage of their strength to assault the weak?

"To destroy private property and abolish existing governments, without then creating a government which would organise social life and ensure social solidarity, would not mean abolishing privilege and ushering in a world of peace and wellbeing; it would instead mean the destruction of all social ties, and drive mankind to barbarism, towards the rule of each for himself, which is the triumph firstly of brute force and secondly of economic privilege."

Such are the objections the authoritarians face us with, even when they are socialists, that is when they want to abolish private property and the class government which it gives rise to.

We can answer that in the first place it is not true that once the social conditions are changed the nature and the role of government would change. Organ and function are inseparable terms. Take away from an organ its function and either the organ dies or the function is re-established. Put an army in a country in which there are neither reasons for, nor fear of, war, civil or external, and it will provoke war or, if it does not succeed in its intentions, it will collapse. A police force where there are no crimes to solve or criminals to apprehend, will invent both, or cease to exist.

In France there has existed for centuries an institution, the *louveterie* now incorporated in the Forestry Administration, the officials of which are entrusted with the task of destroying wolves and other harmful creatures. No one will be surprised to learn that it is just because this institution exists that there are still wolves in France and in exceptional winters they play havoc. The public hardly worries about the wolves as there are the wolf-exterminators who are there to deal with them, and these certainly hunt the wolves but they do so intelligently, sparing the dens long enough for them to rear their young and so prevent the extermination of an interesting animal species. French peasants have in fact little confidence in these wolf-catchers, and consider them more as wolf-preservers. And it is understandable: what would the "Lieutenants of the *louveterie*" do if there were no more wolves?

A government, that is a group of people entrusted with making the laws and empowered to use the collective power to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class and cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put in a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of.

In any case, even if a government wanted to, it could not please everybody, even if it did manage to please a few. It would have to defend itself against the malcontents, and would therefore need to get the support of one section of the people to do so. And then the old story of the privileged class which arises through the complicity of the government starts all over again and, in this instance, if it did not seize the land would certainly capture key posts, specially created, and would oppress and exploit no less than the capitalist class.

The rulers accustomed to giving orders, would not wish to be once more members of the public, and if they could not hold on to power they would at least make sure of securing privileged positions for when they must hand over power to others. They would use every means available to those in power to have their friends elected as the successors who would then in their turn support and protect them. And thus government would be passed to and fro in the same hands, and democracy, which is the alleged government of all, would end up, as usual, in an oligarchy, which is the government of a few, the government of a class.

And what an all-powerful, oppressive, all-absorbing oligarchy must be one which has at its service, that is at its disposal, all social wealth, all public services, from food to the manufacture of matches, from the universities to the music-halls!

6

But let us even suppose that the government were not in any case a privileged class, and could survive without creating around itself a new privileged class, and remain the representative, the servant as it were, of the whole of society. And what useful purpose could this possibly serve? How and in what way would this increase the strength, the intelligence, the spirit of solidarity, the concern for the wellbeing of all and of future generations, which at any given time happen to exist in a given society?

It is always the old question of the bound man who having managed to live in spite of his bonds thinks he lives because of them. We are used to living under a government which takes over all that energy, intelligence and will which it can direct for its own ends; and it hinders, paralyses and suppresses those who do not serve its purpose or are hostile — and we think that everything that is done in society is carried out thanks to the government, and that without the government there would no longer be any energy, intelligence or goodwill left in society. Thus (as we have already pointed out), the landowner who has seized the land gets others to work it for his profit, leaving the worker with the bare necessities so that he can and will want to go on working — and the enslaved worker imagines that he could not live without the master, as if the latter had created the land and the forces of nature.

What can government itself add to the moral and material forces that exist in society? Would it be a similar case to that of the God of the Bible who creates from nothing?

Since nothing is created in what is usually called the material world, so nothing is created in this more complicated form of the material world which is the social world. And so the rulers can only make use of the forces that exist in society — except for those great forces which governmental action paralyses and destroys, and those rebel forces, and all that is wasted through conflicts; inevitably tremendous losses in such an artificial system. If they contribute something of their own they can only do so as men and not as rulers. And of those material and moral forces which remain at the disposal of the government, only a minute part is allowed to play a really useful role for society. The rest is either used up in repressive actions to keep the rebel forces in check or is otherwise diverted from its ends of the general good and used to benefit a few at the expense of the majority of the people.

Much has been said about the respective roles of individual initiative and social action in the life and progress of human societies, and by the usual tricks of the language of metaphysics, the issues have become so confused that in the end those who declared that everything is maintained and kept going in the human world thanks to individual initiative appear as radicals. In fact this is a commonsense truth which is obvious the moment one tries to understand the significance of words. The real being is man, the individual. Society or the collectivity — and the State or government which claims to represent it — if it is not a hollow abstraction, must be made up of individuals. And it is in the organism of every individual that all thoughts and human actions inevitably have their origin, and from being individual they become collective thoughts and acts when they are or become accepted by many individuals. Social action, therefore, is neither the

negation nor the complement of individual initiative, but is the resultant of initiatives, thoughts and actions of all individuals who make up society; a resultant which, all other things being equal, is greater or smaller depending on whether individual forces are directed to a common objective or are divided or antagonistic. And if instead, as do the authoritarians, one means government action when one talks of social action, then this is still the resultant of individual forces, but only of those individuals who form the government or who by reason of their position can influence the policy of the government.

Therefore in the age-long struggle between liberty and authority, or in other words between socialism and a class state, the question is not really one of changing the relationships between society and the individual; nor is it a question of increasing the independence of the individual at the expense of social interference or vice versa. But rather is it a question of preventing some individuals from oppressing others; of giving all individuals the same rights and the same means of action; and of replacing the initiative of the few, which inevitably results in the oppression of everybody else. It is after all a question of destroying once and for all the domination and exploitation of man by man, so that everyone can have a stake in the commonweal, and individual forces, instead of being destroyed or fighting among themselves or being cut off from each other, will find the possibility of complete fulfilment, and come together for the greater benefit of everybody.

Even if we pursue our hypothesis of the ideal government of the authoritarian socialists, it follows from what we have said that far from resulting in an increase in the productive, organising and protective forces in society, it would greatly reduce them, limiting initiative to a few, and giving them the right to do everything without, of course, being able to provide them with the gift of being all-knowing.

Indeed, if you take out from the law and the entire activity of a government all that exists to defend the privileged minority and which represents the wishes of the latter themselves, what is left which is not the result of the action of everybody? Sismondi said that “the State is always a conservative power which legalises, regularises and organises the victories of progress” (and history adds that it directs them for its own ends and that of the privileged class) “but never introduces them. These victories are always started down below, they are born in the heart of society, from individual thought which is then spread far and wide, becomes opinion, the majority, but in making its way it must always meet with and combat in the powers-that-be, tradition, habit, privilege and error.”

Anyway, in order to understand how a society can live without government, one has only to observe in depth existing society, and one will see how in fact the greater part, the important part, of social life is discharged even today outside government intervention, and that government only interferes in order to exploit the masses, to defend the privileged minority, and moreover it finds itself sanctioning, quite ineffectually, all that has been done without its intervention, and often in spite of and even against it. Men work, barter, study, travel and follow to the best of their knowledge moral rules and those of wellbeing; they benefit from the advances made in science and the arts, have widespread relations among themselves — all without feeling the need for somebody to tell them how to behave. Indeed it is just those matters over which government has no control that work best, that give rise to less controversy and are resolved by general consent so that everybody feels happy as well as being useful.

Nor is the government specially needed for the large-scale enterprises and public services requiring the full-time employment of a large number of people from different countries and

conditions. Thousands of these undertakings are, even today, the result of individual associations freely constituted, and are by common accord those that work best. Nor are we talking of capitalist associations, organised for the purpose of exploitation, however much they too demonstrate the potentialities and the power of a free association and how it can spread to include people from every country as well as vast and contrasting interests. But rather let us talk about those associations which, inspired by a love of one's fellow beings, or by a passion for science, or more simply by the desire to enjoy oneself and to be applauded, are more representative of the groupings as they will be in a society in which, having abolished private property and the internecine struggle between men, everybody will find his interest in that of everybody else, and his greatest satisfaction in doing good and in pleasing others. Scientific Societies and Congresses, the international life-saving association, the Red Cross, the geographical societies, the workers' organisations, the voluntary bodies that rush to help whenever there are great public disasters, are a few examples among many of the power of the spirit of association, which always manifests itself when it is a question of a need or an issue deeply felt, and the means are not lacking. If the voluntary association is not world-wide and does not embrace all the material and moral aspects of activity it is because of the obstacles put in its path by governments, by the dissensions created by private property, and the impotence and discouragement felt by most people as a result of the seizure of all wealth by a few.

For instance, the government takes over the responsibilities of the postal services, the railways and so on. But in what way does it help these services? When the people are enabled to enjoy them, and feel the need for these services, they think about organising them, and the technicians don't need a government licence to get to work. And the more the need is universal and urgent, the more volunteers will there be to carry it out. If the people had the power to deal with the problems of production and food supplies, oh! have no fear that they might just die of hunger waiting for a government to make the necessary laws to deal with the problem. If there had to be a government, it would still be obliged to wait until the people had organised everything, in order then to come along with laws to sanction and exploit what had already been done. It is demonstrated that private interest is the great incentive for all activities: well, when the interest of all will be that of each individual (and this would obviously be the case if private property did not exist) then everyone will act, and if we do things now which only interest a few, we will do them that much better and more intensively when they will be of interest to everybody. And it is difficult to understand why there should be people who believe that the carrying out and the normal functioning of public services vital to our daily lives would be more reliable if carried out under the instructions of a government rather than by the workers themselves who, by direct election or through agreements made with others, have chosen to do that kind of work and carry it out under the direct control of all the interested parties.

Of course in every large collective undertaking, a division of labour, technical management, administration, etc., is necessary. But authoritarians clumsily play on words to produce a *raison d'être* for government out of the very real need for the organisation of work. Government, it is well to repeat it, is the concourse of individuals who have had, or have seized, the right and the means to make laws and to oblige people to obey; the administrator, the engineer, etc., instead are people who are appointed or assume the responsibility to carry out a particular job and do so. Government means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few; administration means the delegation of work, that is tasks given and received, free exchange of services based on free agreement. The governor is a privileged person

since he has the right to command others and to make use of the efforts of others to make his ideas and his personal wishes prevail; the administrator, the technical director, etc., are workers like the rest, that is, of course, in a society in which everyone has equal means to develop and that all are or can be at the same time intellectual and manual workers, and that the only differences remaining between men are those which stem from the natural diversity of aptitudes, and that all jobs, all functions give an equal right to the enjoyment of social possibilities. Let one not confuse the function of government with that of an administration, for they are essentially different, and if today the two are often confused, it is only because of economic and political privilege.

But let us hasten to pass on to the functions for which government is considered, by all who are not anarchists, as quite indispensable: the internal and external defence of a society, that is to say war, the police and justice.

Once governments have been abolished and the social wealth has been put at the disposal of everybody, then all the antagonisms between people will soon disappear and war will no longer have a *raison d'être*. We would add, furthermore, that in the present state of the world, when a revolution occurs in one country, if it does not have speedy repercussions elsewhere it will however meet with much sympathy everywhere, so much so that no government will dare to send its troops abroad for fear of having a revolutionary uprising on its own doorstep. But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible; and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies composed of conscripts or mercenaries, disappear.

And what of the police and of justice? Many suppose that if there were no carabineers, policemen and judges, everyone would be free to kill, to ravish, to harm others as the mood took one; and that anarchists, in the name of their principles, would wish to see that strange liberty respected which violates and destroys the freedom and life of others. They seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the freedom of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas! ... of course it is easier to brush them off with a shrug of the shoulders than to take the trouble of confuting them.

The freedom we want, for ourselves and for others, is not an absolute metaphysical, abstract freedom which in practice is inevitably translated into the oppression of the weak; but it is real freedom, possible freedom, which is the conscious community of interests, voluntary solidarity. We proclaim the maxim *do as you wish*, and with it we almost summarise our programme, for we maintain — and it doesn't take much to understand why — that in a harmonious society, in a society without government and without property, each one will want what he must do.

But supposing that as a result of the kind of education received from present society, or for physical misfortune or for any other reason, someone were to want to do harm to us and to others, one can be sure that we would exert ourselves to prevent him from so doing with all the means at our disposal. Of course, because we know that man is the consequence of his own organism as well as of the cosmic and social environment in which he lives; because we do not confuse the

inviolable right of defence with the claimed ridiculous right to punish; and since with the delinquent, that is with he who commits anti-social acts, we would not, to be sure, see the rebel slave, as happens with judges today, but the sick brother needing treatment, so would we not introduce hatred in the repression, and would make every effort not to go beyond the needs of defence, and would not think of avenging ourselves but of seeking to cure, redeem the unhappy person with all the means that science offered us. In any case, irrespective of the anarchists' interpretation (who could, as happens with all theorists, lose sight of reality in pursuing a semblance of logic), it is certain that the people would not allow their wellbeing and their freedom to be attacked with impunity, and if the necessity arose, they would take measures to defend themselves against the anti-social tendencies of a few. But to do so, what purpose is served by people whose profession is the making of laws; while other people spend their lives seeking out and inventing law-breakers? When the people really disapprove of something and consider it harmful, they always manage to prevent it more successfully than do the professional legislators, police and judges. When in the course of insurrections the people have, however mistakenly, wanted private property to be respected, they did so in a way that an army of policemen could not.

Customs always follow the needs and feelings of the majority: and the less they are subject to the sanctions of law the more are they respected, for everyone can see and understand their use, and because the interested parties, having no illusions as to the protection offered by government, themselves see to it that they are respected. For a caravan travelling across the deserts of Africa the good management of water stocks is a matter of life and death for all; and in those circumstances water becomes a sacred thing and no one would think of wasting it. Conspirators depend on secrecy, and the secret is kept or abomination strikes whoever violates it. Gambling debts are not secured by law, and among gamblers whoever does not pay up is considered and considers himself dishonoured.

Is it perhaps because of the gendarmes that more people are not killed? In most of the villages in Italy the gendarmes are only seen from time to time; millions of people cross the mountains and pass through the countryside far from the protecting eye of authority, such that one could strike them down without the slightest risk of punishment; yet they are no less safe than those who live in the most protected areas. And statistics show that the number of crimes is hardly affected by repressive measures, whereas it changes dramatically with changes in economic conditions and in the attitudes of public opinion.

Anyway, punitive laws are only concerned with exceptional, unusual occurrences. Daily life carries on beyond the reach of the codicil and is controlled, almost unconsciously, with the tacit and voluntary agreement of all, by a number of usages and customs which are much more important to social life than the Articles of the Penal Code, and better respected in spite of being completely free from any sanction other than the natural one of the disesteem in which those who violate them are held and the consequences that arise therefrom.

And when differences were to arise between men, would not arbitration voluntarily accepted, or pressure of public opinion, be perhaps more likely to establish where the right lies than through an irresponsible magistrature which has the right to adjudicate on everything and everybody and is inevitably incompetent and therefore unjust?

Since, generally speaking, government only exists to protect the privileged classes, so the police and the magistrature exist only to punish those crimes which are not so considered by the public and only harm the privileges of the government and of property-owners. There is nothing more pernicious for the real defence of society, for the defence of the wellbeing and freedom

of all, than the setting up of these classes which exist on the pretext of defending everybody but become accustomed to consider every man as game to be caged, and strike at you without knowing why, by orders of a chief whose irresponsible, mercenary ruffians they are.

7

That's all very well, some say, and anarchy may be a perfect form of human society, but we don't want to take a leap in the dark. Tell us therefore in detail how your society will be organised. And there follows a whole series of questions, which are very interesting if we were involved in studying the problems that will impose themselves on the liberated society, but which are useless, or absurd, even ridiculous, if we are expected to provide definitive solutions. What methods will be used to teach children? How will production be organised? Will there still be large cities, or will the population be evenly distributed over the whole surface of the earth? And supposing all the inhabitants of Siberia should want to spend the winter in Nice? And if everyone were to want to eat partridge and drink wine from the Chianti district? And who will do a miner's job or be a seaman? And who will empty the privies? And will sick people be treated at home or in hospital? And who will establish the railway timetable? And what will be done if an engine-driver has a stomach-ache while the train is moving? ... And so on to the point of assuming that we have all the knowledge and experience of the unknown future, and that in the name of anarchy, we should prescribe for future generations at what time they must go to bed, and on what days they must pare their corns.

If indeed our readers expect a reply from us to these questions, or at least to those which are really serious and important, which is more than our personal opinion at this particular moment, it means that we have failed in our attempt to explain to them what anarchism is about.

We are no more prophets than anyone else; and if we claimed to be able to give an official solution to all the problems that will arise in the course of the daily life of a future society, then what we meant by the abolition of government would be curious to say the least. For we would be declaring ourselves the government and would be prescribing, as do the religious legislators, a universal code for present and future generations. It is just as well that not having the stake or prisons with which to impose our bible, mankind would be free to laugh at us and at our pretensions with impunity!

We are very concerned with all the problems of social life, both in the interest of science, and because we reckon to see anarchy realised and to take part as best we can in the organisation of the new society. Therefore we do have our solutions which, depending on the circumstances, appear to us either definitive or transitory – and but for space considerations we would say something on this here. But the fact that because today, with the evidence we have, we think in a certain way on a given problem does not mean that this is how it must be dealt with in the future. Who can foresee the activities which will grow when mankind is freed from poverty and oppression, when there will no longer be either slaves or masters, and when the struggle between peoples, and the hatred and bitterness that are engendered as a result, will no longer be an essential part of existence? Who can predict the progress in science and in the means of production, of communication and so on?

What is important is that a society should be brought into being in which the exploitation and domination of man by man is not possible; in which everybody has free access to the means

of life, of development and of work, and that all can participate, as they wish and know how, in the organisation of social life. In such a society obviously all will be done to best satisfy the needs of everybody within the framework of existing knowledge and conditions; and all will change for the better with the growth of knowledge and the means.

After all, a programme which is concerned with the bases of the social structure, cannot do other than suggest a method. And it is the method which above all distinguishes between the parties and determines their historical importance. Apart from the method, they all talk of wanting the wellbeing of humanity and many really do; the parties disappear and with them all action organised and directed to a given end. Therefore one must consider anarchy above all as a method.

The methods from which the different non-anarchist parties expect, or say they do, the greatest good of one and all can be reduced to two, the authoritarian and the so-called liberal. The former entrusts to a few the management of social life and leads to the exploitation and oppression of the masses by the few. The latter relies on free individual enterprise and proclaims, if not the abolition, at least the reduction of governmental functions to an absolute minimum; but because it respects private property and is entirely based on the principle of each for himself and therefore of competition between men, the liberty it espouses is for the strong and for the property owners to oppress and exploit the weak, those who have nothing; and far from producing harmony, tends to increase even more the gap between rich and poor and it too leads to exploitation and domination, in other words, to authority. This second method, that is liberalism, is in theory a kind of anarchy without socialism, and therefore is simply a lie, for freedom is not possible without equality, and real anarchy cannot exist without solidarity, without socialism. The criticism liberals direct at government consists only of wanting to deprive it of some of its functions and to call on the capitalists to fight it out among themselves, but it cannot attack the repressive functions which are of its essence: for without the gendarme the property owner could not exist, indeed the government's powers of repression must perforce increase as free competition results in more discord and inequality.

Anarchists offer a new method: that is free initiative of all and free compact when, private property having been abolished by revolutionary action, everybody has been put in a situation of equality to dispose of social wealth. This method, by not allowing access to the reconstitution of private property, must lead, via free association, to the complete victory of the principle of solidarity.

Viewed in this way, one sees how all the problems that are advanced in order to counter anarchist ideas are instead an argument in their favour, because only anarchy points the way along which they can find, by trial and error, that solution which best satisfies the dictates of science as well as the needs and wishes of everybody.

How will children be educated? We don't know. So what will happen? Parents, pedagogues and all who are concerned with the future of the young generation will come together, will discuss, will agree or divide according to the views they hold, and will put into practice the methods which they think are the best. And with practice that method which in fact is the best, will in the end be adopted.

And similarly with all problems which present themselves.

It follows from what we have said so far, that anarchy, as understood by the anarchists and as only they can interpret it, is based on socialism. Indeed were it not for those schools of socialism which artificially divide the natural unity of the social question, and only consider some aspects

out of context, and were it not for the misunderstandings with which they seek to tangle the path to the social revolution, we could say straight out that anarchy is synonymous with socialism, for both stand for the abolition of the domination and exploitation of man by man, whether they are exercised at bayonet point or by a monopoly of the means of life.

Anarchy, in common with socialism, has as its basis, its point of departure, its essential environment, equality of conditions; its beacon is solidarity and freedom is its method. It is not perfection, it is not the absolute ideal which like the horizon recedes as fast as we approach it; but it is the way open to all progress and all improvements for the benefit of everybody.

8

Having established that anarchy is the only form of human society which leaves open the way to the achievement of the greatest good for mankind, since it alone destroys every class bent on keeping the masses oppressed and in poverty; having established that anarchy is possible and since, in fact, all it does is to free mankind from the government and obstacles against which it has always had to struggle in order to advance along its difficult road, authoritarians withdraw to their last ditches where they are reinforced by many who though they are passionate lovers of freedom and justice, fear freedom and cannot make up their minds to visualise a humanity which lives and progresses without guardians and without shepherds and, pressed by the truth, they pitifully ask that the matter should be put off for as long as possible.

This is the substance of the arguments that are put to us at this point in the discussion.

This society without government, which maintains itself by means of free and voluntary cooperation; this society which relies in everything on the spontaneous action of interests and which is entirely based on solidarity and love, is certainly a wonderful ideal, they say; but like all ideals it lives in the clouds. We find ourselves in a world which has always been divided into oppressors and oppressed; and if the former are full of the spirit of domination and have all the vices of tyrants, the latter are broken by servility and have the even worse vices that result from slavery. The feeling of solidarity is far from being dominant in contemporary society, and if it is true that men are and become always more united, it is equally true that what one sees increasingly, and which makes a deeper impression on human character, is the struggle for existence which each individual is waging daily against everybody else; it is competition which presses on everybody, workers and masters alike, and makes every man into an enemy in the eyes of his neighbour. How will these men, brought up in a society based on class and individual conflict, ever be able to change themselves suddenly and become capable of living in a society in which everyone will do as he wishes and must do, and without outside coercion and through the force of his own will, seek the welfare of others? With what single-mindedness, with what common sense would you entrust the fate of the revolution and of mankind to an ignorant mob, weakened by poverty, brainwashed by the priest, and which today will be blindly bloodthirsty, while tomorrow it will allow itself to be clumsily deceived by a rogue, or bow its head servilely under the heel of the first military dictator who dares to make himself master? Would it not be more prudent to advance towards the anarchist ideal by first passing through a democratic or socialist republic? Will there not be a need for a government of the best people to educate and to prepare the generations for things to come?

These objections also would not have a *raison d'être* if we had succeeded in making ourselves understood and in convincing readers with what we have already written; but in any case, even at the risk of repeating ourselves, it will be as well to answer them.

We are always faced with the prejudice that government is a new force that has emerged from no one knows where which in itself adds something to the total forces and capacities of those individuals who constitute it and of those who obey it. Instead all that happens in the world is

done by people; and government qua government, contributes nothing of its own apart from the tendency to convert everything into a monopoly for the benefit of a particular party or class, as well as offering resistance to every initiative which comes from outside its own clique.

To destroy authority, to abolish government, does not mean the destruction of individual and collective forces which operate in society, nor the influences which people mutually exert on each other; to do so would reduce humanity to being a mass of detached and inert atoms, which is an impossibility, but assuming it were possible, would result in the destruction of any form of society, the end of mankind. The abolition of authority means, the abolition of the monopoly of force and of influence; it means the abolition of that state of affairs for which social power, that is the combined forces of society, is made into the instrument of thought, the will and interests of a small number of individuals, who by means of the total social power, suppress, for their personal advantage and for their own ideas the freedom of the individual; it means destroying a way of social organisation with which the future is burdened between one revolution and the next, for the benefit of those who have been the victors for a brief moment.

Michael Bakunin in an article published in 1872, after pointing out that the principal means of action of the International were the propagation of its ideas and the organisation of the spontaneous action of its members on the masses, adds that:

“To whoever might claim that action so organised would be an assault on the freedom of the masses, an attempt to create a new authoritarian power, we would reply that he is nothing but a sophist and a fool. So much the worse for those who ignore the natural and social law of human solidarity, to the point of imagining that an absolute mutual independence of individuals and of the masses is something possible, or at least desirable. To wish it means to want the destruction of society, for the whole of social life is no other than this unceasing mutual dependence of individuals and masses. All individuals, even the most intelligent and the strongest, indeed above all the intelligent and strong, each at every moment in his life is at the same time its producer and its product. The very freedom of each individual is no other than the resultant, continually reproduced, of this mass of material, intellectual and moral influences exerted on him by all who surround him, by the society in the midst of which he is born, develops, and dies. To want to escape from this influence in the name of a transcendental, divine, freedom that is absolutely egoistic and sufficient unto itself, is the tendency of non-being. This much vaunted independence of the idealists and metaphysicians, and individual freedom thus conceived, are therefore nothingness.

“In nature, as in human society, which is no other than this same nature, all that lives, only lives on the supreme condition of intervening in the most positive manner, and as powerfully as its nature allows, in the lives of others. The abolition of this mutual influence would be death. And when we vindicate the freedom of the masses, we are by no means suggesting the abolition of any of the natural influences that individuals or groups of individuals exert on them; what we want is the abolition of influences which are artificial, privileged, legal, official.”

9

Obviously, in the present state of mankind, when the vast majority of people, oppressed by poverty and stupefied by superstition, stagnate in a state of humiliation, the fate of humanity depends on the action of a relatively small number of individuals; obviously it will not be possible suddenly to get people to raise themselves to the point where they feel the duty, indeed the pleasure from controlling their own actions in such a way that others will derive the maximum benefit therefrom. But if today the thinking and directing forces in society are few, it is not a reason for paralysing yet more of them and of subjecting many others to a few of them. It is not a reason for organising society in such a way that (thanks to the apathy that is the result of secured positions, thanks to birth, patronage, esprit de corps, and all the government machinery) the most lively forces and real ability end up by finding themselves outside the government and almost without influence on social life; and those that attain to government, finding themselves out of their environment, and being above all interested in remaining in power, lose all possibilities of acting and only serve as an obstacle to others.

Once this negative power that is government is abolished, society will be what it can be, but all that it can be given the forces and abilities available at the time. If there are educated people who wish to spread knowledge they will organise the schools and make a special effort to persuade everybody of the usefulness and pleasure to be got from an education. And if there were no such people, or only a few, a government could not create them; all it could do would be what happens now, take the few that there are away from their rewarding work, and set them to drafting regulations which have to be imposed with policemen, and make intelligent and devoted teachers into political beings, that is useless parasites, all concerned with imposing their whims and with maintaining themselves in power.

If there are doctors and experts in public health, they will organise the health service. And if there were none, the government could not create them: all it could do would be to cast doubts on the abilities of existing doctors which a public, justifiably suspicious of all that is imposed from above, would seize upon to get rid of them.

If there are engineers, engine drivers and so on, they will organise the railways. And if there were none, once again, a government could not create them.

The revolution, by abolishing government and private property, will not create forces that do not exist; but it will leave the way open for the development of all available forces and talents, will destroy every class with an interest in keeping the masses in a state of brutishness, and will ensure that everyone will be able to act and to influence according to his abilities, his enthusiasm and his interests.

And this is the only way that the masses can raise themselves, for it is only through freedom that one educates oneself to be free, just as it is only by working that one can learn to work. A government, assuming it had no other disadvantages, would always have that of accustoming the governed to timidity, and of tending to become always more oppressive and of making itself ever more necessary.

Besides, if one wants a government which has to educate the masses and put them on the road to anarchy, one must also indicate what will be the background, and the way of forming this government.

Will it be the dictatorship of the best people? But who are the best? And who will recognise these qualities in them? The majority is generally attached to established prejudices, and has ideas and attitudes which have already been superseded by a better endowed minority; but among the thousand minorities all of which believe themselves to be right, and can all be right on some issues, by whom and with what criterion will the choice be made to put the social forces at the disposal of one of them when only the future can decide between the parties in conflict? If you take a hundred intelligent supporters of dictatorship, you will discover that each one of them believes that he should be if not the dictator himself, or one of them, at least very close to the dictatorship. So dictators would be those who, pursuing one course or another, succeed in imposing themselves; and in the present political climate, one can safely say that all their efforts would be employed in the struggle to defend themselves against the attacks of their enemies, conveniently forgetting any vague intentions of social education, assuming that they ever had such intentions.

Will it be instead a government elected by universal suffrage, and thus the more or less sincere expression of the wishes of the majority? But if you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing the election of a genius from the votes of a mass of fools? And what will happen to the minorities which are still the most intelligent, most active and radical part of a society?

In order to solve the social problem for the benefit of everybody there is only one means: to crush those who own social wealth by revolutionary action, and put everything at the disposal of everybody, and leave all the forces, the ability, and all the goodwill that exist among the people, free to act and to provide for the needs of all.

We struggle for anarchy, and for socialism, because we believe that anarchy and socialism must be realised immediately, that is to say that in the revolutionary act we must drive government away, abolish property and entrust public services, which in this context will include all social life, to the spontaneous, free, not official, not authorised efforts of all interested parties and of all willing helpers.

Of course there will be difficulties and drawbacks; but they will be resolved, and they will only be resolved in an anarchist way, by means, that is, of the direct intervention of the interested parties and by free agreements.

We do not know whether anarchy and socialism will triumph when the next revolution takes place; but there is no doubt that if the so-called programmes of compromise triumph, it will be because on this occasion, we have been defeated, and never because we believed it useful to leave standing any part of the evil system under which mankind groans.

In any case we will have on events the kind of influence which will reflect our numerical strength, our energy, our intelligence and our intransigence. Even if we are defeated, our work will not have been useless, for the greater our resolve to achieve the implementation of our programme in full, the less property, and less government will there be in the new society. And we will have performed a worthy task for, after all, human progress is measured by the extent government power and private property are reduced.

And if today we fall without compromising, we can be sure of victory tomorrow.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Errico Malatesta
Anarchy
1891

Retrieved on December 9, 2009 from
onebigtorrent.org/torrents/1598/Errico-Malatesta-Anarchy
Freedom Press 1974, 1994. ISBN 0 900384 74 3.

L'Anarchia was written in 1891, appeared in English translation in the monthly journal *Freedom* (September 1891–June 1892) and was reprinted as a pamphlet by Freedom Press in 1892.

On the translation: This is a new 1973, 1994 translation from the Italian original by Vernon Richards, that, according to the translator, “makes no ‘cuts’ in the original text and seeks to render Malatesta’s thought and way of expressing himself as literally as possible.”

theanarchistlibrary.org