

GOVERNMENT -- THE COMMUNIST VIEWPOINT

— By Linn A. E. Gale —

Anarchism has a lure and fascination that often attract almost irresistibly even the hard-headed. Its uncompromising spirit of revolt, its impatient, irrational longing for that absolute freedom which is an impossibility on an earth inhabited by human beings and circumscribed by limitations of mundane existence, its fierce chafing at the leash of laws, be they just or unjust, — all these things find almost unconscious response in many of us.

There is a strong appeal in this philosophy that would abolish all forms of restraint and leave us "free" to unite in voluntary cooperative groups or live individually, as we might wish. It is so easy to forget that this is a relative world, not an absolute one, and that "absolute freedom" is an impossibility, to attempt which would only produce an extreme reaction that would result in a tyranny worse than that from which we seek escape. The Hermetic axiom that extremes meet is literally true with regard to Anarchism. The fierce desire for liberation which would end all government, would send us back into a slavery more intolerable than ever by the unrepressed force of the extreme reaction.

"If it is wrong for an individual to rob, murder or interfere with another's liberty, is it any less wrong for a group or class to do these things?" asks K. B. E. Yes, most emphatically. Morality is not an abstract thing, a blue-print of human actions, some of which are forever and inherently right and some of which are forever and inherently wrong. That which is right under some circumstances is wrong under others. Conditions are the determining factor. As a general proposition, it may be wrong to steal, but if it were necessary to steal to save the life of a starving man, I would say, "To hell with the rights of property!" and take what has needed to prevent starvation.

Notwithstanding what Edmund Burke says, government can be used for good as well as for ill. K. B. E. directs his artillery against the uses to which government is put under capitalism. He ignores the point that government resting on exploitation and legalized robbery must necessarily be evil,

whereas if government rested on the ownership of wealth by its producers, it would be just and beneficent.

It is true that one has a right to the product of his own labor. It is also true that capitalistic governments do not assure that right, but instead, deprive the worker of what he creates and give it to capitalists. But under Anarchism and without a central governing authority, the chances of a man keeping the fruits of his work would be far less than they are now. "Absolute freedom" would be nothing of the kind, at least so long as the present qualities of greed and selfishness have not been bred out of human nature. Instead of people living like brothers and sisters, and exchanging their products in equitable, fraternal fashion, the erstwhile profiteers and money-lords would get together, pounce upon the well-disposed of the community and try to make slaves out of them. The "absolute freedom" wouldn't last 10 days. Either those who formerly exploited the masses would regain their dominance by raw resort to brute force, or the masses would have to unite economically, establish a proletarian dictatorship just as Russia did, and ruthlessly expropriate the expropriators.

In either case, Anarchism would be short-lived. Autocracy would succeed it or the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Government, much-despised tho it were, would come back to curse or bless, depending on the kind of government established.

The Anarchist comrade asks, "Since the only just title to the ownership of anything arises from its production by its owner, is it not just as much robbery for a majority to take property from an individual as for an individual or a minority to do so?" Certainly, but under Communism the majority won't take property from an individual. Communism will give to the individual what he produces and eliminate the class which has hitherto lived on the labor of others. That is the difference between Communism and capitalism. That is the purpose of Communist government. It will be an industrial government, not a political one. When there are no cap-

italists and all are useful workers, and when those useful workers are the government, functioning collectively in industries, government won't be a means of oppression. Government can only oppress when there is a rich, privileged class that owns the resources of the country. Strip that class of land, mines, factories, industries, etc., and give them to the People don't rob themselves. K. B. E. is constantly thinking of a bourgeois government which, of course, is owned by a few people. His criticisms don't apply to a proletarian democracy at all, for the simple reason that under Soviets, the people are the government. They are not exploited because they have no reason for picking their own pockets.

Instead of Communism aiming to steal from the worker and give the products of his toil to a different set of people than those receiving these products under capitalism, it would provide the force necessary to protect the worker in the enjoyment of those products. Anarchism wants the worker to get the fruit of his labor, too, but it would provide nothing to guarantee him in its possession, nothing to stop a bigger fellow from snatching it away from him. It would leave the laborer at the mercy of the economic highwayman, just as capitalism does. But Communism, realizing that "right without might is moonshine," would back up this unquestionable right of the worker, with a new kind of government, an economic one, which could crush the robber the minute he began to ply his old trade.

If, however, when K. B. E. speaks of the majority taking property from the individual, he refers to taxation under Soviets, his reasoning is equally defective. True, the worker would not get quite all that he produces, for a small percentage of it would have to be deducted to help defray the expenses of government. You can't maintain a government on nothing. Neither could you do so with a factory, even if that factory were run by its workers in voluntary cooperation under Anarchism. They would have to set aside a little of what they produced to pay for secretarial work, upkeep, etc... wouldn't they?

If this is "robbery", then there always will be robbery, and Anarchism — assuming it were successful, which is inconceivable — would be no exception to the rule. The only difference is that under Communism the taxation would be imposed by a central authority elected by the workers, while under voluntary cooperation, it would be imposed by each separate industrial group, independently of every other group. In order to gain the benefits of collective action, we must surrender a little, at least, of what we might receive if each worked alone and received the total result of his efforts. The "absolute freedom" of the Anarchist is like the personal liberty" of the hoosefighter, a farce and a fantasm. The isolated inhabitant of the desert comes as near having "absolute freedom" as anybody can in a relative world, and even he doesn't have it, entirely. And the minute he enters into relationship with other human beings, he has still less. All we can enjoy, at the most, is a maximum of liberty consistent with the liberty of others. Communism, by taking away from the bourgeois class some of the "liberty" it possesses to steal from the proletariat, would give every man a larger share of liberty than any other system yet proposed.

"The absolute inviolability of person and property to every man a larger share of liberty than any other we all want — Anarchists and Communists alike. But we won't get it by throwing off all government, laying aside all weapons and going on in the blind and blissful delusion that because we don't rob others, they won't rob us.

We must have power. The master class has power to day — economic power, from which comes political power, its offspring. Let the workers take that power away from the masters, appropriate it to themselves, and be the government. Then — and not till then — will the workers retain the nearest possible approach to all that they create.

workers in each unit — subjecting each industrial group to control by a central body elected by themselves — and it will be an impossibility for that government to be used for robbery and tyranny.