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**Freedom without Socialism is Privilege, Injustice
Socialism without Freedom is Slavery, Brutality - BAKUNIN**

ANARCHISM AND FREEDOM

BY ERICO MALATESTA

The concept of freedom for all, which inevitably involves the precept that one's freedom is limited by the equal freedom of others, is a human concept; it is probably mankind's greatest achievement and victory. It is only too true that the interests, the passions and tastes of Man are not naturally harmonious, and that having to live together in society it is necessary that each individual should seek to adapt himself and reconcile his desires with those of others, in order to arrive at a *modus vivendi* which satisfies him as well as others. This involves a limitation on freedom, and shows that *freedom*, in its absolute sense, could not solve the question of a happy and voluntary co-existence.

The question can only be resolved by solidarity, brotherhood and love, as a result of which the sacrificing of desires that are irreconcilable with those of others, is voluntarily and willingly made.

But when one talks of freedom politically, and not philosophically, nobody thinks of the metaphysical bog of abstract man who exists outside the cosmic and social environment and who, like some god, *could do what he wishes* in the absolute sense of the word.

When one talks of freedom one is speaking of a society in which no one could constrain his fellow beings without meeting with vigorous resistance, in which, above all, nobody could seize and use the collective force to impose his own wishes on others and on the very groups that are the source of power.

Man is not perfect, agreed. But this is one reason more, perhaps the strongest reason, for not giving anyone the means to "put the brakes on individual freedom."

Man is not perfect. But then where will one also find men who are not only good enough to live at peace with others, but also capable of controlling the lives of others in an authoritarian way? And assuming that there were, who would appoint them? Would they impose themselves? But who would protect them from the resistance and the violence of the "criminals"? Or would they be chosen by the "sovereign people", which is considered too ignorant and too wicked to live in peace, but which suddenly acquires all the necessary good qualities when it is a question of asking it to choose its rulers? ...

The harmonious society cannot arise other than from free wills co-operating freely under the pressure of the necessities

of life and in order to satisfy that need for brotherhood and love, which always flourishes among men once they are freed from the fear of being imposed upon and of lacking the necessities of life for themselves and their dependents.

We pride ourselves with being, first and foremost, advocates of freedom; freedom not for us alone, but for everybody; freedom not only for that which seems to us to be the truth, but also for that which might be or appears to be error...

Our demand is simply for what could be called social freedom, which is equal freedom for all, an equality of conditions such as to allow everybody to do as they wish, with the only limitation, imposed by inevitable natural necessities and the equal freedom of others...

The freedom we want is not the abstract right, but the power, to do as one wishes; it therefore presupposes that everybody has the means to live and to act without being subjected to the wishes of others. And since to maintain life it is essential to produce, the prerequisite of freedom is that all land, raw materials and the means of production should be at the free disposal of all.

Indeed it is not a question of right or wrong; it is a question of freedom for everybody, freedom for each individual so long as he respects the equal freedom of others.

None can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is nearest to the truth, or which is the best way to achieve the greatest good for each and everyone. Freedom coupled with experience, is the only way of discovering the truth and what is best; and there can be no freedom if there is a denial of the freedom to err.

Who, in any case, is to tell us what is truth and what error? Shall we have to establish a ministry of public education with its qualified teachers, recognised textbooks, school inspectors, etc.? And all this in the name of the "people", just as with the social democrats, who want to get power in the name of the "proletariat"? And the corruption that is exercised by power, that is, the fact of thinking that one has the right, and is in a position, to impose one's own wishes on others?

With good reason we say that when the social democrats go to Parliament they virtually cease to be socialists. But this, surely, does not stem from the material action of taking



a seat in an Assembly that is called Parliament; it is the power that goes with the title of Member of Parliament [which corrupts],

If we, in any way, dominate the lives of others and prevent them from doing what they wish to do, then for all practical purposes we cease to be anarchists.

By all means let them go on calling us pure sentimentalists as long as they like but we cannot do otherwise than protest loudly against the reactionary, authoritarian, destructive theory which states that freedom is a good principle for a future society but not for the present. It is in the name of this theory that existing tyrannies have been established, and will be established, if the people allow themselves to be taken in.

Louis Blanc, the historian of the Great French Revolution, wanting to explain and justify the contradictions between the alleged humanitarian and liberal aspirations of the Jacobins, and the fierce tyranny they imposed once they were in power, in fact drew a distinction between the "republic" which was then an institution still to come, in which principles would be applied in full measure, with the "revolution" which was the present, and served to justify all tyrannies as a means to achieve the triumph of freedom and justice. What followed was the use of the guillotine upon the best revolutionaries as well as upon a vast number of unfortunates, consolidation of the bourgeois power, the Empire and the Restoration....

To fight our enemies effectively, we do not need to deny the principle of freedom, not even for one moment: it is sufficient for us to want real freedom and to want it for all, for ourselves as well as for others.

We want to expropriate the property-owning class, and with violence, since it is with violence that they hold on to social wealth and use it to exploit the working class. Not because freedom is a good thing for the future, but because it is, at all times, a good thing, today as well as tomorrow, and the property-owners, by denying us the means for exercising our freedom, in effect, take it away from us.

We want to overthrow the government, all governments - and overthrow them with violence since it is by the use of violence that they force us into obeying- and once again, not because we sneer at freedom when it does not serve our interests but because governments are the negation of freedom and it is not possible to be free without being rid of them.

By force we want to deprive the priests of their privileges, because with these privileges, secured by the power of the State, they deny others the right, that is, the means, of equal freedom to propagate their ideas and beliefs.

The freedom to oppress, to exploit, to oblige people to take up arms, to pay taxes, etc., is the denial of freedom; and the fact that our enemies make irrelevant and hypocritical use of the word freedom is not enough to make us deny the principle of freedom which is the outstanding characteristic of our movement and a permanent, constant and necessary factor in the life and progress of humanity.

Equal freedom for all and the right, therefore, to resist every violation of freedom, and resist with brute force when the violation is maintained by brute force and there is no better way to oppose it successfully.

And this principle is true today and remains true at all times, since in any future society if anyone wished to oppress another human being, the latter would have the right to resist and to use force to resist force.

And furthermore, when does the present society cease to exist and the future society begin? When will it be possible to say that the revolution has definitely ended and the unopposed triumph of a free and equalitarian society started? If some people will have assumed the right to violate anybody's freedom on the pretext of preparing the triumph of freedom, they will always find that the people are not yet sufficiently mature, that the dangers of reaction are ever-present, that the education of the people has not yet been completed. And with these excuses they will seek to perpetuate their own power - which could begin as the strength of a people up in arms, but which, if not controlled by a profound feeling for the freedom of all, would soon, become a real government, no different from the governments of today.

But, we shall be told, you therefore want the priests to go on brain-washing the young with their lies?

No, we believe it is necessary, and urgent, to destroy the harmful influence of the priest, but we also believe that the only means to achieve success is freedom - freedom for ourselves and for them. By the use of force we want to deprive the priests of all the privileges and advantages which they owe to the protection they receive from the State and to the conditions of poverty and subjection under which the workers live; but once this has been achieved, we rely and can only rely on the power of truth, that is, on argument. We are anarchists because we believe that no good comes from authority, or if some relative good could come from it, the consequent harm done would be a hundred times greater.

Some talk of the right to prevent the dissemination of error. But with what means?

If the strongest current of opinion supports the priests, then it is the priests who will obstruct our propaganda; and if, instead, opinion is on our side, what need is there to deny freedom in order to combat an influence on the wane, and run the risk that people will feel sympathy for it because it is being persecuted? All other considerations apart, it is in our interest always to be on the side of freedom, because, as a minority proclaiming freedom for all, we would be in a stronger position to demand that others should respect our freedom; and if we are a majority we will have no reason, if we really do not aspire to dominate, to violate the freedom of others. ... So freedom for everybody and in everything, with the only limit of the equal freedom for others; which does *not* mean - it is almost ridiculous to have to point this out - that we recognise, and wish to respect, the "freedom" to exploit, to oppress, to command, which is oppression and certainly not freedom.

This lovely message was bought to you by Zabalaza Books, an Anarchist publication and mail-order book service. What is Anarchism you ask? Well, basically, an Anarchist society is a voluntary, non-hierarchical Society in which the political and social structures are organised so that all people have free and equal access to the wealth and decision making power of that Society.

You can contact us for more information at:

Post: Postnet Suite 244, Private Bag X10, Musgrave, 4062

E-mail: zabalaza@union.org.za

Phone (Leave Message): 0731674581

