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November 11, 2012



Arthur Ranc

Anarchy

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1871

Arthur Ranc, "Anarchy", in *L'Encyclopédie générale*,
1871. (translated from the French by Michael Shreve)
Retrieved on November 10, 2012 from michaelshreve.wordpress.com

Likewise, freedom and order are two correlative terms that transform into a third more general term, that of anarchy, such as Proudhon defined it, that is in the radical elimination of the principle of authority in all its forms.

D'Alembert, after defining anarchy as "a disorder in the State that has no one with enough authority to command and make the laws respected and consequently the people do as they want, without subordination and without police," concludes thus: "We can be assured that every government generally tends to either despotism or anarchy."

At first glance this thought, which seems to place political societies between two equally pitiful alternatives, is basically, on closer examination, just a careless conception of the theory formulated by Proudhon thus: "The first term of the governmental series being *Absolutism* and the final term, inevitably, is *Anarchy*."

Alembert's apparent error comes from the fact that he conceived Authority as a principle of order whereas in modern societies order can only result from the successive and carefully thought out elimination of Authority. "Anarchy, or the absence of masters and sovereigns," Proudhon says, "such is the form of government that we are approaching every day and that an inveterate habit of mind makes us see as the height of disorder and the expression of chaos." Thus Proudhon expresses himself in his first *On Property*. Later, developing his thought and formulating it with his customary rigor, he affirmed that the goal of the Revolution was the very suppression of Authority, that is of government.

Anarchy, therefore, is understood in two not only different but absolutely contradictory senses. On the one hand it is the absence of government, authority, principle, rule, and consequently it is disorder in thoughts and deeds. On the other hand it is the elimination of authority in its three political, social and religious aspects; it is the dissolution of the government in the natural organism; it is the contract substituted for sovereignty, arbitration for judicial power; it is labor not organized by an outside power but organizing itself; it is religion disappearing as a social function and becoming appropriate to the individual manifestations of free conscience; it is citizens entering freely into contracts not with the government but between themselves; it is, finally, freedom; it is order.

Proudhon said elsewhere, "Freedom that is adequate and identical with order, that is all that is real in power and politics."

The problem is not to know how we will be better governed, but how we will most free.

We can see now that the theory of d'Alembert was perfectly just. Yes, every government must necessarily end up in despotism or anarchy, either in the common sense of the word or in the philosophical meaning. Between absolutism and freedom there is no possible reconciliation, no middle ground, such is the conclusion we are forced to accept through theory and practice, through philosophy and history. Disorder is an act of rulers; trouble in society, turmoil in the State comes from the unjust resistance that the two-pronged temporal and spiritual power oppose, with the help and support of the privileged, to the legitimate demands of the citizens, of free thinkers and the proletariat.

For the idle, for the exploiters, for the privileged, for the gluttons, every idea of justice is an idea of disorder; every attempt against their privilege is an anarchist act. Just the thought of escaping exploitation is a guilty thought. The idle and the privileged want to enjoy their peace and quiet. The best government is the one that guarantees the most security for their pleasures. Speculators, golden boys, dandies, friends of order, business sharks—this is the cursed race that for almost eighty years has surrendered to despotism, a race of prostitutes that needs pimps. The ideal Paris for them is a city of pleasures, a huge Corinth, with very expensive girls, since they have a lot of money, and an obedient police force. They are the ones who after 9 Thermidor [27 July 1794] whipped the women and clubbed the patriots—ten against one—on the public square. They are the ones who in June after the battle shot the vanquished in the broken streets. They are the true anarchists, if by anarchists you mean creators of disorder. They are the ones who, to satisfy their base passions in peace, to wallow carefree in the orgy of revelers, terrifying the common interests, inflaming the bourgeois with fear, organizing panic and finally dragging with them the unconscious masses and prostrating themselves before the absolute power.

Now, Despotism is powerless even to guarantee the security of common interests. What did we see during the first Empire? A few months of prosperity that we paid dearly for and then the tyranny fell silent, the despotism became cunning; the police were the absolute

masters over the lives and freedoms of the citizens; the survivors of the revolutionary ideal were hunted down by an implacable hatred; the ancient regime was reestablished; France was given over to the clergy; the aristocracy reconstructed; patriotic customs destroyed in the army; the republican cohorts sent to [the colony of] Saint Domingue as if to their death; “lettres de cachet” [royal orders] resumed; State prisons filled up; three million men turned into cannon fodder; commerce destroyed; agriculture ruined; the countryside surrendering its last man; and after all this to crown it all off, the invasion!

Yes, if by anarchy we understand disorder pushed to its limits, despotism and anarchy are the same thing because despotism cuts off the best part of human nature, stops social development, sacrifices everything to the material order, creates a conflict of interests and keeps society in a state of latent war.

Is there not, for example, disorder and anarchy in a country where the civil servants are set outside the common law and cannot be brought to trial, where the principle of equality before the law is unrecognized, where the judicial and executive power are mixed up? Is there not anarchy when the legislative power, reduced to a advisory body, does not have the ability to introduce laws and can only amend those that have been drawn up by a council whose members have been nominated by the executive power? When the Constitution can only be modified with the consent of the executive, which alone has the right to appeal to the nation while the nation has no legal or constitutional means to make their will known *ex tempore* without being asked by the executive? When the principle of executive responsibility has no sanction and when no procedure exists whereby action for damages can be constitutionally introduced?

Is there not anarchy, trouble and disorder when the electoral body is organized so that the urban groups are divided into sections, each of which is arbitrarily united to a larger group of voters in the countryside, when through this system their votes are canceled out and the cities and countryside are violently opposed to each other?

Therefore, absolutism is synonymous with disorder and also synonymous with anarchy in the common sense of the word.