

Section G - Is individualist anarchism capitalistic?

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Section G - Is individualist anarchism capitalistic?

The short answer is, no, it is not. All the individualist anarchists were opposed to the exploitation of labour and all forms of non-labour income (such as profits, interest and rent) and property. As such it is deeply **anti**-capitalist and many individualist anarchists, including Benjamin Tucker, considered themselves as socialists (indeed, Tucker often called his theory "*Anarchistic-Socialism*").

So, in this section of our anarchist FAQ we indicate why the individualist anarchists cannot be classified as "ancestors" of the bogus libertarians of the "anarcho"-capitalist school. Instead they must be (due to their opposition to wage slavery, capitalist property, interest, rent and profit as well as their concern for equality and co-operation) classified as libertarian **socialists**, albeit being on the liberal wing of anarchist thought. So while **some** of their ideas do overlap with those of the "anarcho"-capitalist school they are not capitalistic, no more than the overlap between their ideas and anarcho-communism makes them communistic.

In this context, the creation of "anarcho"-capitalism may be regarded as yet another tactic by capitalists to reinforce the public's perception that there are no viable alternatives to capitalism, i.e. by claiming that "even anarchism implies capitalism." In order to justify this claim, they have searched the history of anarchism in an effort to find some thread in the movement that can be used for this purpose. They think that with the individualist anarchists they have found such a thread.

However, as we've already seen, by its very definition -- as opposition to hierarchical authority -- **all** threads of anarchism are **incompatible** with capitalism. As Malatesta argued, "*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 consider some aspects out of context . . . 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 exercised at bayonet point or by a monopoly of the means of life.*" Without socialism, liberty (i.e. liberalism) is purely "*liberty . . . for the strong and the property owners to oppress and exploit the weak, those who have nothing . . . [so] lead[ing] to exploitation and domination, in other words, to authority . . . for freedom is not possible without equality, and real anarchy cannot exist without solidarity, without socialism.*" [**Anarchy**, p. 47 and p. 46]

Nevertheless, in the individualists we find anarchism coming closest to "classical" liberalism and being influenced by the ideas of Herbert Spencer, a classical liberal and proto-libertarian capitalist. This influence, as was noted by Peter Kropotkin at the time (e.g. in **Modern Science and Anarchism**), led individualist anarchists like Benjamin Tucker to support contract theory in the name of freedom, apparently without being aware of the authoritarian social relationships that could be implied by it, as can be seen under capitalism. Therefore, this section can also be considered, in part, as a continuation of the discussion begun in [section A.3](#).

Few thinkers are completely consistent. Given Tucker's adamant anti-statism and anti-capitalism, it is likely that had he realised the statism implicit in contract theory, he would have modified his views in such a way as to eliminate the contradiction. It is understandable why he failed to do so, however; for he viewed individualist anarchism as a society of workers, not one of capitalists and workers. His opposition to usury logically implies artisan and co-operative labour -- people

selling the products of their labour, as opposed to the labour itself -- which itself implies self-management in production (and so society), not authoritarianism. Nevertheless, it is this inconsistency -- the non-anarchist aspect of individualist anarchism -- which right "libertarians" like Murray Rothbard select and concentrate on, ignoring the anti-capitalist context in which this aspect of individualist thought exists within. As David Wieck points out:

*"Out of the history of anarchist thought and action Rothbard has pulled forth a single thread, the thread of individualism, and defines that individualism in a way alien even to the spirit of a Max Stirner or a Benjamin Tucker, whose heritage I presume he would claim -- to say nothing of how alien is his way to the spirit of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, and the historically anonymous persons who through their thoughts and action have tried to give anarchism a living meaning. Out of this thread Rothbard manufactures one more bourgeois ideology." ["Anarchist Justice", **Nomos XIX**, pp. 227-228]*

It is with this in mind that we discuss the ideas of people like Tucker. As this section of the FAQ will indicate, even at its most liberal, individualist, extreme anarchism was fundamentally **anti-capitalist**. Any concepts which "anarcho"-capitalism imports from the individualist tradition ignore both the theoretical underpinnings of their ideas as well as the social context of self-employment and artisan production within which those concepts arose, thus turning them into something radically different from what was intended by their originators.

Needless to say, "anarcho"-capitalists are well aware of the fact that individualist anarchists were extremely hostile to capitalism while supporting the "free market." Unsurprisingly, they tend to downplay this opposition, often arguing that the anarchists who point out the anti-capitalist positions of the likes of Tucker and Spooner are quoting them out of context. The truth is different. In fact, it is the "anarcho"-capitalist who takes the ideas of the individualist anarchists from both the historical and theoretical context.

It is not a fitting tribute to the individualist anarchists that their ideas are today being associated with the capitalism that they so clearly despised and wished to abolish. As one modern day Individualist Anarchist argues:

*"It is time that anarchists recognise the valuable contributions of . . . individualist anarchist theory and take advantage of its ideas. It would be both futile and criminal to leave it to the capitalist libertarians, whose claims on Tucker and the others can be made only by ignoring the violent opposition they had to capitalist exploitation and monopolistic 'free enterprise' supported by the state." [J.W. Baker, "Native American Anarchism," **The Raven**, pp. 43-62, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 61-2]*

G.1 Are individualist anarchists anti-capitalist?

Yes, for two reasons.

Firstly, the Individualist Anarchists opposed profits, interest and rent as forms of exploitation (they termed these non-labour incomes "*usury*"). To use the words of Ezra Heywood, the Individualist Anarchists thought "*Interest is theft, Rent Robbery, and Profit Only Another Name for Plunder.*" [quoted by Martin Blatt, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 29] Their vision of the good society was one in which

"the usurer, the receiver of interest, rent and profit" would not exist and labour would "secure its natural wage, its entire product." [Benjamin Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 82 and p. 85] As communist-anarchist Alexander Berkman noted, "[i]f labour owned the wealth it produced, there would be no capitalism." [**What is Communist Anarchism?**, p. 37] Thus the Individualist Anarchists, like the social anarchists, opposed the exploitation of labour and desired to see the end of capitalism by ensuring that labour would own what it produced.

Secondly, the individualist anarchists desired a society in which there would no longer be capitalists and workers, only workers. The worker would receive the full product of his/her labour, so ending the exploitation of labour by capital. In Tucker's words, a free society would see "each man reaping the fruits of his labour and no man able to live in idleness on an income from capital" and so society would "become a great hive of Anarchistic workers, prosperous and free individuals" combining "to carry on their production and distribution on the cost principle." [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 276] Moreover, such an aim logically implies a society based upon artisan, not wage, labour and workers would, therefore, not be separated from the ownership and control of the means of production they used and so sell the product of their labour, not the labour power itself.

For these two, interrelated, reasons, the Individualist Anarchists are clearly anti-capitalist. While an Individualist Anarchy would be a market system, it would not be a capitalist one. As Tucker argued, the anarchists realised "the fact that one class of men are dependent for their living upon the sale of their labour, while another class of men are relieved of the necessity of labour by being legally privileged to sell something that is not labour. . . . And to such a state of things I am as much opposed as any one. But the minute you remove privilege. . . every man will be a labourer exchanging with fellow-labourers . . . What Anarchistic-Socialism aims to abolish is usury . . . it wants to deprive capital of its reward." [Benjamin Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 404] As noted above, the term "usury," for Tucker, was a synonym for "the exploitation of labour" [**Ibid.**, p. 396] and included capitalist profits as well as interest, rent, and royalties. Little wonder Tucker translated Proudhon's **What is Property?** and subscribed to its conclusion that "property is robbery" (or theft).

Such opposition to exploitation of labour was a common thread in Individualist Anarchist thought, as it was in the social anarchist movement. Moreover, as in the writings of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin opposition to wage slavery was also a common thread within the individualist anarchist tradition -- indeed, given its regular appearance, we can say it is almost a **defining** aspect of the tradition (and, as we argue in the [next section](#), it has to be for Individualist Anarchism to be logically consistent). For example, taking Josiah Warren (the "father" of individualist anarchism) we find that "[t]o men like [him] . . . chattel slavery was merely one side of a brutal situation, and although sympathetic with its opponents, refused to take part in the struggle [against slavery] unless it was extended to a wholesale attack on what they termed 'wage slavery' in the states where Negro slavery no longer existed." [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 81] Such a view, we may add, was commonplace in radical working class journals and movements of the time. Thus we find George Henry Evans (who heavily influence Individualist Anarchists like Warren and Ingalls with the ideas of land reform based on "occupancy and use") writing:

"I was formally, like yourself, sir, a very warm advocate of the abolition of (black) slavery. This was before I saw that there was white slavery. Since I saw this, I have

materially changed my views as to the means of abolishing Negro slavery. I now see clearly, I think, that to give the landless black the privilege of changing masters now possessed by the landless white, would hardly be a benefit to him in exchange for his surety of support in sickness and old age, although he is in a favourable climate." [quoted by Kenneth R. Gegg, Jr., **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 113]

Similarly, William Greene (whose pamphlet **Mutual Banking** had a great impact on Tucker) pronounced that "[t]here is no device of the political economists so infernal as the one which ranks labour as a commodity, varying in value according to supply and demand." [**Mutual Banking** quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 130] In the same work he also noted that "[t]o speak of labour as merchandise is treason; for such speech denies the true dignity of man. . . . Where labour is merchandise in fact . . . there man is merchandise also, whether in England or South Carolina." [quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 112] Here we see a similar opposition to the commodification of labour (and so labourers) within capitalism that also marks social anarchist thought (as Rocker notes, Greene "rejected . . . the designation of labour as a commodity." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 111-2]). Moreover, we discover Greene had a "strong sympathy for the **principle of association**. In fact, the theory of Mutualism is nothing less than co-operative labour based on the cost principle." [Rudolf Rocker, **Op. Cit.**, p. 109] Martin also indicates Greene's support for co-operation and associative labour:

"Coming at a time when the labour and consumer groups were experimenting with 'associated workshops' and 'protective union stores,' Greene suggested that the mutual bank be incorporated into the movement, forming what he called 'complementary units of production, consumption, and exchange . . . the triple formula of practical mutualism.'" [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 134-5]

This support for producers' associations alongside mutual banks is identical to Proudhon's ideas - which is unsurprising as Greene was a declared follower of the French anarchist's ideas.

Looking at Lysander Spooner, we discover a similar opposition to wage labour. Spooner argued that it was state restrictions on credit and money (the "money monopoly" based on banks requiring specie to operate) as the reason why people sell themselves to others on the labour market. As he put it, "a monopoly of money . . . put[s] it wholly out of the power of the great body of wealth-producers to hire the capital needed for their industries; and thus compel them . . . -- by the alternative of starvation -- to sell their labour to the monopolists of money . . . [who] plunder all the producing classes in the prices of their labour." [**A Letter to Grover Cleveland**, p. 20] Spooner was well aware that it was capitalists who ran the state ("the employers of wage labour . . . are also the monopolists of money." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 48]). In his ideal society, the "amount of money capable of being furnished . . . is so great that every man, woman, and child . . . could get it, and go into business for himself, or herself -- either singly, or in partnerships -- and be under no necessity to act as a servant, or sell his or her labour to others. All the great establishments, of every kind, now in the hands of a few proprietors, but employing a great number of wage labourers, would be broken up; for few, or no persons, who could hire capital, and do business for themselves, would consent to labour for wages for another." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 41] In other words, a society without wage labour and, instead, based upon peasant, artisan and associated/co-operative labour (as in Proudhon's vision). In other words, a **non-capitalist** society or, more positively, a (libertarian) socialist one as the workers' own and control the means of

production they use.

The individualist anarchists opposed capitalism (like social anarchists) because they saw that profit, rent and interest were all forms of exploitation. They thought that liberty meant that the worker was entitled to "*all the fruits of his own labour*" (Spooner) and recognised that working for a boss makes this impossible as a portion is diverted into the employer's pockets. [Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 172] Like social anarchists they opposed usury, to have to pay purely for access/use for a resource (a "*slice of their daily labour us taken from them [the workers] for the privilege of using these factories*" [Alexander Berkman, **What is Communist Anarchism?**, p. 6]).

This opposition to profits, rent and interest as forms of exploitation, wage labour as a form of slavery and property as a form of theft clearly makes individualist anarchism anti-capitalist and a form of (libertarian) socialism. In addition, it also indicates well the common ground between the two threads of anarchism, in particular their common position to capitalism. The social anarchist Rudolf Rocker indicates well this common position when he argues:

"it is difficult to reconcile personal freedom with the existing economic system. Without doubt the present inequality of economic interests and the ruling class conflicts in society are a continual danger to the freedom of the individual. . . One cannot be free either politically or personally so long as one is in economic servitude of another and cannot escape from this condition. This was recognised by men like Godwin, Warren, Proudhon, Bakunin, [and women like Goldman and de Cleyre, we must add!] and many others who subsequently reached the conviction that the domination of man over man will not disappear until there is an end of the exploitation of man by man." [**Nationalism and Culture**, p. 167]

In addition to this opposition to capitalist usury, the individualist anarchists also expressed opposition to capitalist ideas on property (particularly property in land). J.K. Ingalls, for example, considered that to reduce land to the status of a commodity was an act of "*usurpation.*" Indeed, "*the private domination of the land*" originated in "*usurpation only, whether of the camp, the court or the market. Whenever such a domination excludes or deprives a single human being of his equal opportunity, it is a violation, not only of the public right, and of the social duty, but of the very principle of law and morals upon which property itself is based. . .*" [**Social Wealth**, quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 148f]

These ideas are identical to Proudhon's and Ingalls continues in this Proudhonian "*occupancy and use*" vein when he argues that possession "*remains **possession**, and can never become **property**, in the sense of absolute dominion, except by positive statue [i.e. state action]. Labour can only claim **occupancy**, and can lay no claim to more than the usufruct.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 149] In other words, capitalist property was created by "*forceful and fraudulent taking*" of land, which "*could give no justification to the system*" [**Ibid.**] (as we argued in [section B.3.4](#)) and was protected by the state. And like Warren and Greene he opposed wage labour, and "*considered the only 'intelligent' strike [by workers as] one which would be directed against wage work altogether.*" [**Ibid.**, p. 153]

Therefore we see that the individualist anarchists, like social anarchists, opposed capitalist exploitation, wage slavery and property rights. Instead of capitalism, they maintained that workers should own what they produced or its equivalent (rather than what they were paid in wages). Such a position necessarily implies that they should own and control the means of

production they use, thus ensuring the "abolition of the proletariat" (to use Proudhon's term) and so the end of capitalism as society would no longer be divided into two classes, those who worked and those who owned. In an individualist anarchy, "there should be no more proletaires" as "everybody" would be "proprietor." This would result in "The land to the cultivator. The mine to the miner. The tool to the labourer. The product to the producer." [Ernest Lesigne quoted approvingly by Tucker at the end of his essay "State Socialism and Anarchism" in **Instead of a Book**, p. 17, p. 18] Ernest Lesigne considered "co-operative production" as "a solution to the great problem of social economy, -- the delivery of products to the consumer at cost" and as a means of producers to "receive the value of your product, of your effort, without having to deal with a mass of hucksters and exploiters." [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 123] As Charles A. Dana put it (in a work published by Tucker and described by him as "a really intelligent, forceful, and sympathetic exposition of mutual banking"), "[b]y introducing mutualism into exchanges and credit we introduce it everywhere, and labour will assume a new aspect and become truly democratic." [**Proudhon and His "Bank of the People"**, p. 45] In other words, a classless socialist society of self-employed workers without exploitation and oppression.

As Wm. Gary Kline correctly summarises:

"Their proposals were designed to establish true equality of opportunity . . . and they expected this to result in a society without great wealth or poverty. In the absence of monopolistic factors which would distort competition, they expected a society of largely self-employed workmen with no significant disparity of wealth between any of them since all would be required to live at their own expense and not at the expense of exploited fellow human beings." [**The Individualist Anarchists: A Critique of Liberalism**, pp. 103-4]

Thus Individualist anarchy would "[m]ake capital free by organising credit on a mutual plan, and then these vacant lands will come into use . . . operatives will be able to buy axes and rakes and hoes, and then they will be independent of their employers, and then the labour problem will be solved." This would result in the "emancipation of the workingman from his present slavery to capital." [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 321 and p. 323]

Moreover, like the social anarchists, the Individualist Anarchists were aware that the state was not some neutral machine or one that exploited society purely for its own ends. They were aware that it was a vehicle of **class rule**, namely the rule of the capitalist class over the working class. As noted above, Spooner thought that that "holders of this monopoly [the money monopoly] now rule and rob this nation; and the government, in all its branches, is simply their tool" and that "the employers of wage labour . . . are also the monopolists of money." [Spooner, **Op. Cit.**, p. 42 and p. 48] Tucker recognised that "capital had so manipulated legislation" that they gained an advantage on the capitalist market which allowed them to exploit labour. [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 82-3] He was quite clear that the state was a **capitalist** state, with "Capitalists hav[ing] placed and kept on the statute books all sorts of prohibitions and taxes" to ensure a "free market" skewed in favour of themselves. [quoted by Don Werkheiser, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 218] A.H. Simpson argued that the Individualist Anarchist "knows very well that the present State . . . is simply the tool of the property-owning class." [**Op. Cit.**, p. 92] Thus both wings of the anarchist movement were united in their opposition to capitalist exploitation and their common recognition that the state was a tool of the capitalist class used to allow them to exploit the working class.

In addition, as a means of social change, the individualists suggested that activists start "*inducing the people to steadily refuse the payment of rents and taxes.*" [**Instead of a Book** pp. 299-300] This non-payment of rent included rented accommodation as "*tenants would not be forced to pay [landlords] rent, nor would [landlords] be allowed to seize their [the tenants] property.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 162] These are hardly statements with which capitalists would agree. Tucker, as noted, also opposed interest, considering it usury (exploitation and a "*crime*") pure and simple and one of the means by which workers were denied the full fruits of their labour. Indeed, he looked forward to the day when "*any person who charges more than cost for any product [will] . . . be regarded very much as we now regard a pickpocket.*" This "*attitude of hostility to usury, in any form*" hardly fits into the capitalist mentality or belief system. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 155] Similarly, Ezra Heywood considered profit-taking "*an injustice which ranked second only to legalising titles to absolute ownership of land or raw-materials.*" [James J. Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111] Opposition to profits, rent or interest is hardly capitalistic -- indeed, the reverse.

As regards equality, we discover that the Individualist Anarchist's saw their ideas as resulting in more equality. Thus we find Tucker arguing that that the "*happiness possible in any society that does not improve upon the present in the matter of distribution of wealth, can hardly be described as beatific.*" He was clearly opposed to "*the inequitable distribution of wealth*" under capitalism and equally clearly saw his proposals as a means of reducing it substantially. ["*Why I am an Anarchist*", p. 135, contained in **Man!**, M. Graham (ed.), pp. 132-6] John Beverley Robinson agreed:

"When privilege is abolished, and the worker retains all that he produces, then will come the powerful trend toward equality of material reward for labour that will produce substantial financial and social equality, instead of the mere political equality that now exists." [**Patterns of Anarchy**, pp. 278-9]

As did Lysander Spooner, who argued that under his system "*fortunes could hardly be represented by a wheel; for it would present on such height, no such depth, no such irregularity of motion as now. It should rather be represented by an extended surface, varied somewhat by inequalities, but still exhibiting a general level, affording a safe position for all, and creating no necessity, for either force or fraud, on the part of anyone to secure his standing.*" Thus Individualist anarchism would create a condition "*neither of poverty, nor riches; but of moderate competency -- such as will neither enervate him by luxury, nor disable him by destitution; but which will at once give him and opportunity to labour, (both mentally and physically) and stimulate him by offering him all the fruits of his labours.*" [quoted by Stephan L. Newman, **Liberalism at Wit's End**, p. 72 and p. 73]

Hence, like social anarchists, the Individualist Anarchists saw their ideas as a means towards equality. By eliminating exploitation, inequality would soon decrease as wealth would no longer accumulate in the hands of the few (the owners). Rather, it would flow back into the hands of those who produced it (i.e. the workers). Until this occurred, society would see "*[o]n one side a dependent class of wage-workers and on the other a privileged class of wealth-monopolisers, each become more and more distinct from the other as capitalism advances.*" This has "*resulted in a grouping and consolidation of wealth which grows apace by attracting all property, no matter by whom produced, into the hands of the privileged, and hence property becomes a social power, an economic force destructive of rights, a fertile source of injustice, a means of enslaving the dispossessed.*" [William Ballie, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 121]

Tucker, like other individualist anarchists, also supported labour unions, and although he opposed violence during strikes, he recognised that it was caused by frustration due to an unjust system. Indeed, like social anarchists, he considered *"the labourer in these days [as] a soldier. . . His employer is . . . a member of an opposing army. The whole industrial and commercial world is in a state of internecine war, in which the proletaires are massed on one side and the proprietors on the other."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 460] The cause of strikes rested in the fact that *"before. . . strikers violated the equal liberty of others, their own right to equality of liberty had been wantonly and continuously violated"* by the capitalists using the state, for the *"capitalists . . . in denying [a free market] to [the workers] are guilty of criminal invasion."* [**Ibid.**, p. 454] He agreed with Ezra Heywood when he *"scoffed at supporters of the status quo, who saw no evidence of the tyranny on the part of capital, and who brought up the matter of free contract with reference to labourers. This argument was no longer valid. Capital controlled land, machinery, steam power, waterfalls, ships, railways, and above all, money and public opinion, and was in a position to wait out recalcitrancy at its leisure."* [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 107] Likewise, Tucker advocated and supported many other forms of non-violent direct action such as boycotts and rent strikes, seeing them as important means of radicalising the working class and creating an anarchist society. However, like social anarchists the Individualist Anarchists did not consider labour struggle as an end in itself -- they considered reforms (and discussion of a *"fair wage"* and *"harmony between capital and labour"*) as essentially *"conservative"* and would be satisfied with no less than *"the abolition of the monopoly privileges of capital and interest-taking, and the return to labour of the full value of its production."* [Victor Yarros, quoted by James J. Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 206f]

However, while Tucker believed in direct action, he opposed the "forceful" expropriation of social capital by the working class, instead favouring the creation of a mutualist system to replace capitalist companies with co-operative ones. Tucker was therefore fundamentally a **reformist**, thinking that anarchy would evolve from capitalism as mutual banks spread across society, increasing the bargaining power of labour. This idea of reforming capitalism over time (and, by implication, tolerating boss's control during that time) was primarily due to the influence of Herbert Spencer and not Max Stirner. Little wonder that Peter Kropotkin termed Tucker's doctrine *"no force"* and considered such a reformist position to be similar to Spencer's and so little more than *"an excuse for supporting landlord and capitalist domination."* [**Act For Yourselves**, p. 98]

Be that as it may, it is clear that both social and Individualist Anarchists share much in common, including an opposition to capitalism. In other words, Individualist Anarchism is, indeed, opposed to capitalism. As Carole Pateman points out, *"[t]here has always been a strong radical individualist tradition in the USA. Its adherents have been divided between those who drew anarchist, egalitarian conclusions, and those who reduced political life to the capitalist economy writ large, to a series of exchanges between unequally situated individuals."* [**The Problem of Political Obligation**, p. 205] As can be seen, what right-libertarians do is to confuse these two traditions. The Individualist Anarchists may have been in favour of free exchange but between equally situated individuals. Only given a context of equality can free exchange benefit both parties equally and not generate growing inequalities which benefit the stronger of the parties involved which, in turn, skews the bargaining position of those involved in favour of the stronger (also see [section F.3](#)).

G.1.1 Why is the social context important in evaluating Individualist

Anarchism?

When reading the work of people like Tucker and Warren, we must remember the social context of their ideas, namely the transformation of America from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist society (see Eunice Minette Schuster, **Native American Anarchism**, pp. 135-137). The individualist anarchists viewed with horror the rise of capitalism and its imposition on an unsuspecting American population, supported and encouraged by state action (in the form of protection of private property in land, restricting money issuing to state approved banks using specie, government orders supporting capitalist industry, tariffs and so on).

The non-capitalist nature of the early USA can be seen from the early dominance of self-employment (artisan production). At the beginning of the 19th century, around 80% of the occupied population were self-employed. The great majority of Americans during this time were farmers working their own land, primarily for their own needs. Most of the rest were self-employed artisans, merchants, traders, and professionals. Other classes -- employees/wage workers and employers/capitalists in the North, slaves and planters in the South -- were relatively small. The great majority of Americans were independent and free from anybody's command. They controlled they owned and controlled their means of production. Thus early America was, essentially, a pre-capitalist society. However, by 1880, the year before Tucker started **Liberty**, the number of self-employed had fallen to approximately 33% of the working population. Now it is less than 10% [Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, **Schooling in Capitalist America**, p. 59]. It is **only** in this context that we can understand individualist anarchism, namely as a revolt against the destruction of working-class independence and the growth of wage-labour, accompanied by the growth of two opposing classes, capitalists and proletarians.

Given the commonplace awareness in the population of artisan production and its advantages, it is hardly surprising that the individualists supported "free market" solutions to social problems. For, given the era, this solution implied workers' control and the selling of the product of labour, not the labourer him/herself. As Tucker argues, individualist anarchism desires "[n]ot to abolish wages, but to make *every* man dependent upon wages and to secure every man his *whole* wages" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 404] and this, logically, can only occur under workers control (i.e. when the tool belonged to the worker, etc. -- see [section G.2](#)).

Indeed, the Individualist Anarchists were part of a wider movement seeking to stop the transformation of America. As Bowles and Gintis note, this "*process has been far from placid. Rather, it has involved extended struggles with sections of U.S. labour trying to counter and temper the effects of their reduction to the status of wage labour.*" They continue by noting that "*with the rise of entrepreneurial capital, groups of formerly independent workers were increasingly drawn into the wage-labour system. Working people's organisations advocated alternatives to this system; land reform, thought to allow all to become an independent producer, was a common demand. Worker co-operatives were a widespread and influential part of the labour movement as early as the 1840s . . . but failed because sufficient capital could not be raised. . .*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 59 and p. 62] It is no coincidence that the issues raised by the Individualist Anarchists (land reform via "*occupancy-and-use*", increasing the supply of money via mutual banks and so on) reflect these alternatives raised by working class people and their organisations. Little wonder Tucker argued that:

"Make capital free by organising credit on a mutual plan, and then these vacant lands

will come into use . . . operatives will be able to buy axes and rakes and hoes, and then they will be independent of their employers, and then the labour problem will solved.
[**Instead of a Book**, p. 321]

Thus the Individualist Anarchists reflect the aspirations of working people facing the transformation of an society from a pre-capitalist state into a capitalist one. As Morgan Edwards notes:

*"The greatest part [of **Liberty's** readers] proves to be of the professional/intellectual class: the remainder includes independent manufacturers and merchants, artisans and skilled workers . . . The anarchists' hard-core supporters were the socio-economic equivalents of Jefferson's yeoman-farmers and craftsmen: a freeholder-artisan-independent merchant class allied with freethinking professionals and intellectuals. These groups -- in Europe as well as in America -- had socio-economic independence, and through their desire to maintain and improve their relatively free positions, had also the incentive to oppose the growing encroachments of the capitalist State."* [**Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 85]

This transformation of society by the rise of capitalism explains the development of **both** schools of anarchism, social and individualist. "American anarchism," Frank H. Brooks argues, "*like its European counterpart, is best seen as a nineteenth century development, an ideology that, like socialism generally, responded to the growth of industrial capitalism, republican government, and nationalism. Although this is clearest in the more collectivistic anarchist theories and movements of the late nineteenth century (Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, communist anarchism, anarcho-sindicalism), it also helps to explain anarchists of early- to midcentury such as Proudhon, Stirner and, in America, Warren. For all of these theorists, a primary concern was the labour problem' -- the increasing dependence and immiseration of manual workers in industrialising economies.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 4]

Changing social conditions also explains why Individualist Anarchism must be considered socialistic. As Murray Bookchin notes:

*"Th[e] growing shift from artisanal to an industrial economy gave rise to a gradual but major shift in socialism itself. For the artisan, socialism meant producers' co-operatives composed of men who worked together in small shared collectivist associations, although for master craftsmen it meant mutual aid societies that acknowledged their autonomy as private producers. For the industrial proletariat, by contrast, socialism came to mean the formation of a mass organisation that gave factory workers the collective power to expropriate a plant that no single worker could properly own. These distinctions led to two different interpretations of the 'social question' . . . The more progressive craftsmen of the nineteenth century had tried to form networks of co-operatives, based on individually or collectively owned shops, and a market knitted together by a moral agreement to sell commodities according to a 'just price' or the amount of labour that was necessary to produce them. Presumably such small-scale ownership and shared moral precepts would abolish exploitation and greedy profit-taking. The class-conscious proletariat . . . thought in terms of the complete socialisation of the means of production, including land, and even of abolishing the market **as such**, distributing goods according to needs rather than labour . . . They advocated **public** ownership of the means of*

production, whether by the state or by the working class organised in trade unions." [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 2, p. 262]

So, in this evolution of socialism we can place the various brands of anarchism. Individualist anarchism is clearly a form of artisanal socialism (which reflects its American roots) while communist anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism are forms of industrial (or proletarian) socialism (which reflects its roots in Europe). Proudhon's mutualism bridges these extremes, advocating as it does artisan socialism for small-scale industry and agriculture and co-operative associations for large-scale industry (which reflects the state of the French economy in the 1840s to 1860s). Hence Individualist Anarchist support for "*the cost principle*" (or "*cost the limit of price*") and artisanal production ("*The land to the cultivator. The mine to the miner. The tool to the labourer. The product to the producer*"), complemented by "*the principle of association*" and mutual banking.

In other words, there have been many schools of socialism, all influenced by the changing society around them. In the words of Proudhon "*[m]odern Socialism was not founded as a sect or church; it has seen a number of different schools.*" [**Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 177] As Frank H. Brooks notes, "*before Marxists monopolised the term, socialism, was a broad concept, as indeed Marx's critique of the 'unscientific' varieties of socialism in the Communist Manifesto indicated. Thus, when Tucker claimed that the individualist anarchism advocated in the pages of Liberty was socialist, he was not engaged in obfuscation or rhetorical bravado.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 75] Looking at the society in which their ideas developed (rather than a-historically projecting modern ideas backward) we can see the socialist core of Individualist Anarchism. It was, in other words, an un-Marxian form of socialism (as was communist-anarchism).

Thus, to look at the Individualist Anarchists from the perspective of "modern socialism" (say, communist-anarchism or Marxism) means to miss the point. The social conditions which produced Individualist Anarchism were substantially different from those existing today and what was a possible solution to the "*social problem*" **then** may not be one suitable **now** (and, indeed, point to a different kind of socialism than that which developed later). Moreover, Europe in the 1870s was distinctly different than America (although, of course, the USA **was** catching up). For example, there was still vast tracks of unclaimed land (once the Native Americans had been removed, of course) available to workers (which explains the various acts the US state to control land access -- see [section F.8.5](#)). In the towns and cities, artisan production "*remained important . . . into the 1880s*" [David Montgomery, **The Fall of the House of Labour**, p. 52] Until the 1880s, the possibility of self-employment was a real one for many workers, a possibility being hindered by state action (for example, by forcing people to buy land via Homestead Acts, restricting banking to those with specie, and so on). Little wonder that Individualist Anarchism was considered a real solution to the problems generated by the creation of capitalism in the USA and that, by the 1880s, Communist Anarchist (and later anarcho-syndicalism) became the dominant forms of anarchism. By the 1880s, the transformation of America was nearing completion and self-employment was no longer a real solution for the majority of workers.

As Peter Sabatini points out:

"The chronology of anarchism within the United States corresponds to what transpired in

Europe and other locations. An organised anarchist movement imbued with a revolutionary collectivist, then communist, orientation came to fruition in the late 1870s. At that time, Chicago was a primary centre of anarchist activity within the USA, due in part to its large immigrant population. . .

The Proudhonist anarchy that Tucker represented was largely superseded in Europe by revolutionary collectivism and anarcho-communism. The same changeover occurred in the US, although mainly among subgroups of working class immigrants who were settling in urban areas. For these recent immigrants caught up in tenuous circumstances within the vortex of emerging corporate capitalism, a revolutionary anarchy had greater relevancy than go slow mutualism." [Libertarianism: Bogus Anarchy]

Murray Bookchin argues that the development of communist-anarchism "*made it possible for anarchists to adapt themselves to the new working class, the industrial proletariat, . . . This adaptation was all the more necessary because capitalism was now transforming not only European [and American] society but the very nature of the European [and American] labour movement itself.*" [Op. Cit., p. 259] With the changing social conditions in the US, the anarchist movement changed to. Hence the rise of communist-anarchism in addition to the more native individualist tradition and the change in Individualist Anarchism itself:

*"Green emphasised more strongly the **principle of association** than did Josiah Warren and more so than Spooner had done. Here too Proudhon's influence asserts itself. . . In principle there is essentially no difference between Warren and Proudhon. The difference between them arises from a dissimilarity of their respective environments. Proudhon lived in a country where the sub-division of labour made co-operation in social production essential, while Warren had to deal with predominantly small individual producers. For this reason Proudhon emphasised the **principle of association** far more than Warren and his followers did, although Warren was by no means opposed to this view." [Rudolf Rocker, **Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 108]*

This social context is essential for understanding the thought of people like Greene, Spooner and Tucker. For example, as Stephen L. Newman points out, Spooner "*argues that every man ought to be his own employer, and he envisions a world of yeoman farmers and independent entrepreneurs.*" [Liberalism at Wit's End, p. 72] This sort of society was in the process of being destroyed when Spooner was writing. However, the Individualist Anarchists did not think this transformation was unstoppable and proposed, like other sections of US labour, various solutions to problems society faced. Moreover, they adjusted their own ideas to changing social circumstances as well, as can be seen by Greene's support for co-operatives ("*the principle of association*") as the only means of ending exploitation of labour by capital.

Therefore Rocker was correct when he argued that Individualist Anarchism was "*above all . . . rooted in the peculiar social conditions of America which differed fundamentally from those of Europe.*" [Op. Cit., p. 155] As these conditions changed, the viability of Individualist Anarchism's solution to the social problem decreased. Individualist Anarchism, argues Morgan Edwards, "*appears to have dwindled into political insignificance largely because of the erosion of its political-economic base, rather than from a simple failure of strategy. With the impetus of the Civil War, capitalism and the State had too great a head start on the centralisation of economic and political life for the anarchists to catch up. This centralisation reduced the*

independence of the intellectual/professional and merchant artisan group that were the mainstay of the Liberty circle." [Op. Cit., pp. 85-6]

By not taking into account these conditions, the ideas of the likes of Tucker and Spooner will be distorted beyond recognition. Similarly, by ignoring the changing nature of socialism in the face of a changing society and economy, the obvious socialistic aspects of their ideas will be lost. Ultimately, to analyse the Individualist Anarchists in an a-historic manner means to distort their ideas and ideals. Moreover, to apply those ideas in a non-artisan economy without the intention of radically transforming the socio-economic nature of that society towards one based on artisan production one would mean to create a society distinctly different than one they envisioned (see [section G.3](#)).

G.2 Why does individualist anarchism imply socialism?

Here we present a short summary of why individualist anarchism implies socialism and not capitalism. While it is true that people like Tucker and Warren placed "property" at the heart of their vision of anarchy, this does not make them supporters of capitalism (see sections [G.2.1](#) and [G.2.2](#)). Unlike capitalists, the individualist anarchists identified "property" with simple "possession," or "*occupancy and use*" and considered profit, rent and interest as exploitation. Indeed, Tucker explicitly stated that "*all property rests on a labour title, and no other property do I favour.*" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 400] Because of this and their explicit opposition to usury (profits, rent and interest) and capitalist property, they could and did consider themselves as part of the wider socialist movement, the libertarian wing as opposed to the statist Marxist wing.

Individualist anarchists like Tucker strongly believed that a truly free (i.e. non-capitalist) market would ensure that the worker would receive the "*full product*" of his or her labour. Nevertheless, in order to claim Tucker as a proto-"anarcho"-capitalist, "anarcho"-capitalists may argue that capitalism pays the "market price" of labour power, and that this price **does** reflect the "*full product*" (or value) of the worker's labour.

As Tucker supported the Labour Theory of Value we doubt that he would have agreed with the "anarcho"-capitalist argument that market price of labour reflected the value it produced (see [Section C](#)). He, like the other individualist anarchists, was well aware that labour produces the "surplus wealth" which was appropriated in the name of interest, rent and profit. In other words, he very forcibly rejected the idea that the market price of labour reflects the value of that labour, considering "*the natural wage of labour is its product*" and "*that this wage, or product, is the only just source of income.*" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 6]

However, assuming that we accept the capitalist economic apologetics at their face value, such an argument fails to place Individualist Anarchism in the capitalist tradition. This is because the argument ignores the need to replace and improve upon existing capital. In the context of a market economy, the replacement and improvement of capital is important, as accumulation allows the reduction of labour costs (either directly or indirectly) by investing in new machinery or processes and so improving market position. In addition, capital investments are required in order to offer new services to the customer (for example, in banking, a network of auto-tellers). Either way, new capital is required. But new capital comes from value created by labour and realised as profits. And this means that in order to ensure that labour receives its due, companies **must** be co-operatives so that workers will have a say in how the profits they create are used,

otherwise they do not get their "*natural wage*." In addition, the ability to influence one's own destiny by having a voice in investment decisions is certainly another "value" that one's labour can produce beyond the exchange value to be invested. We might call it "self-determination value," which individualist anarchists certainly regarded as a benefit of the artisan/co-operative labour they favoured (and their system implies). But workers will not be able to realise the full self-determination value of their labour nor receive its "*full product*" if investment decisions are not in their hands. Logically, therefore, individualist anarchism **must** tend towards co-operative, not capitalist, labour in order for them to receive the full value of their labour.

In addition, while it is true that in an economy with a very low degree of monopoly within industries prices **do** tend towards the production cost of a commodity, this cannot be said to occur instantaneously. This means that in an economy without oligopolies and without interest or rent, prices would tend, in the long run, towards Tucker's their "*labour cost of production*" this cannot be said to occur in the short run. Given that in the long run "*we are all dead*" (to use Keynes' words) -- i.e. that we may never see it -- any form of wage labour can lead to usury being recreated as workers would not receive their entire product back. That is, due to short term changes in price workers market wage may not equal what they produce. They **only** solution to this problem is workers' ownership and control as this ensures workers remain control of the product of their labour at all times (as well as the labour itself). **If**, as Tucker argued, "*the object of Anarchism . . . [is] to let every man [or woman] 'control self and the results of self-exertion'*" then this is only possible under workers' self-management and ownership. [**Occupancy and Use versus the Single Tax**] This, we must note, was Proudhon's argument and part of the reason he supported workers' co-operatives (we will discuss the problem of natural barriers to competition in [section G.4](#) along with the dangers associated with a lack of workers' control in a free society).

More importantly, wage labour violates two key aspects of Individualist Anarchist thought, namely its support for "*occupancy and use*" and its opposition to the state. We will discuss each in turn.

Obviously wage labour violates the idea that those who use something automatically own it. In the case of land and housing, the Individualist Anarchists argued that the person who lives or works on it (even under lease) would be regarded "*as the occupant and user of the land on which the house stands, and as the owner of the house itself,*" that is they become "*the owner of both land and house as soon as he becomes the occupant.*" [**Ibid.**] Now, to take a concrete example from Tucker's time, the 3 800 workers locked out by Carnegie at Homestead in 1892 definitely occupied and used the works from which they were barred entry by the owners. The owners, obviously, did not use the workplace themselves -- they hired **others** to occupy and use it **for** them. Now, why should "*occupancy and use*" be acceptable for land and housing but not for workplaces? There is no reason and so wage labour, logically, violates "*occupancy and use*" -- for under wage labour, those who occupy and use a workplace do not own or control it. Hence "*occupancy and use*" logically implies workers' control and ownership.

The reason why wage labour violates Individualist Anarchist opposition to the state for a related reason. If the workers who use a workplace do not own it, then someone else will (i.e. the owner). This in turn means that the owner can tell those who use the resource what to do, how to do it and when. That is, they are the sole authority over the workplace and those who use it. However, according to Tucker, the state can be defined (in part) as "*the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it.*" Tucker considered this element as "*common to all*

States." [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 24] Thus wage labour creates a situation which is similar to the state, namely the assumption of sole authority over a given area and those who use it. Hence opposition to the state logically implies support for workers' control and ownership for only in this case can people govern themselves during the working day.

Therefore, as far as the employer/employee social relationship goes, it does not fit in well with Tucker's statement that "*if the individual has the right to govern himself, all external government is tyranny.*" [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 151] As we have argued in Section B.4 ([How does capitalism affect liberty?](#)), wage labour produces a very specific form of "*external government*" in the workplace, namely hierarchical management structures. Therefore, logically, Individualist Anarchism (like Social Anarchism) must oppose all forms of wage labour in favour of self-government in production (i.e. co-operative, not wage, labour).

That this the case can be seen from Proudhon's argument in **The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century**. There he argues that employees are "*subordinated, exploited*" and their "*permanent condition is one of obedience,*" a "*slave.*" [p. 216] Indeed, capitalist companies "*plunder the bodies and souls of wage workers*" and they are "*an outrage upon human dignity and personality.*" [p. 218] However, in a co-operative the situation changes and the worker is an "*associate*" and "*forms a part of the producing organisation . . . [and] forms a part of the sovereign power, of which he was before but the subject.*" [p. 216] Without co-operation and association, "*the workers . . . would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society.*" [p. 216] As Robert Graham notes, "*Proudhon's market socialism is indissolubly linked to his notions of industry democracy and workers' self-management.*" ["Introduction", **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xxxii]

And we must add that John Stuart Mill (who agreed with the Warrenite slogan "*Individual Sovereignty*") faced with the same problem that wage labour made a mockery of individual liberty came to the same conclusion. He thought that if "*mankind is to continue to improve*" (and it can only improve within liberty, we must add) then in the end one form of association will predominate, "*not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and workpeople without a voice in management, but the association of the labourers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations, and working under managers elected and removable by themselves.*" [quoted by Carole Pateman, **Participation and Democratic Theory**, p. 34]

Therefore, logically, individualist anarchism must support co-operatives and self-employment in order to ensure the maximum individual self-government and labour's "*natural wage.*" That this is the case can be seen from Tucker's quoting Ernest Lesigne that anarchistic socialism aims for "*The land to the cultivator. The mine to the miner. The tool to the labourer. The product to the producer.*"

It can also be seen from Tucker's description of what would replace the current system of statism (and note he calls it "*scientific socialism*" thus squarely placing his ideas in the anti-capitalist camp):

"we have something very tangible to offer , . . We offer non-compulsive organisation. We offer associative combination. We offer every possible method of voluntary social union by which men and women may act together for the furtherance of well-being. In short, we

offer voluntary scientific socialism in place of the present compulsory, unscientific organisation which characterises the State and all of its ramifications. . ." [quoted in Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 218]

Tucker himself pointed out that *"the essence of government is control. . . He who attempts to control another is a governor, an aggressor, an invader."* [**Instead of a Book**, p. 23] However, in places in **Instead of a Book** Tucker suggests that (non-exploitative, and so non-capitalist) wage labour could exist in individualist anarchy. Unlike wage labour under capitalism, workers would employ other workers and all workers would receive the full product of their labour. As such, this relationship is **non-capitalist** as it does not involve usury. Be that as it may, such relationships are not libertarian and so contradict Tucker's own theories on individual liberty (as Proudhon and Mill recognised with their own, similar, positions). Wage labour is based on the control of the worker by the employer; hence Tucker's contract theory can lead to a form of "voluntary" and "private" government within the workplace. This means that, while outside of a contract an individual is free, within it he or she is governed. This violates Tucker's concept of *"equality of liberty,"* since the boss has obviously more liberty than the worker during working hours.

This result, as noted in [section A.3](#), could **only** be avoided by workers' control, which is in fact the logical implication of Tucker's and other individualists' proposals (as we have proven above, and can be seen from Tucker's famous essay *"State Socialism and Anarchism"* for example). This is hardly a surprising implication, since as we've seen, artisan production was commonplace in 19th-century America and its benefits were extolled by the individualists. Without workers' control, individualist anarchism would soon become a form of capitalism and so statism -- a highly unlikely intention of individualists like Tucker, who hated both.

Therefore, given the assumptions of individualist anarchism in both their economic and political aspects, it is forced along the path of co-operative, not wage, labour. In other words, individualist anarchism is a form of socialism as workers receive the full product of their labour (i.e. there is no non-labour income) and this, in turn, logically implies a society in which self-managed firms compete against each other on the free market, with workers selling the product of their labour and not the labour itself. As this unites workers with the means of production they use, it is **not** capitalism and instead a form of socialism based upon worker ownership and control of the places they work.

For individualist anarchists not to support co-operatives results in a contradiction, namely that the individualist anarchism which aims to secure the worker's *"natural wage"* cannot in fact do so, while dividing society into a class of order givers and order takers (which violates individual self-government). It is this contradiction within Tucker's thought which the self-styled "anarcho"-capitalists take advantage of in order to maintain that individualist anarchism in fact implies capitalism (and so private-statism), not workers' control. In order to reach this implausible conclusion, a few individualist anarchist ideas are ripped from their social context and applied in a way that makes a mockery of them. That it was never Tucker's intention to deny workers' control can be inferred from his argument that mutualism would give workers the bargaining power to obtain equality in the workplace, which clearly points to the end of capitalist authority relations, as will be explained further in [section G.5](#).

However, due to problems inherent in the nature of a market economy, even the assumption of

workers' control may not be enough to ensure that individualistic anarchism does not become a new form of archy, as will be discussed in section G.4 (["Why do social anarchists reject individualist anarchism ideas?"](#)).

G.2.1 What about their support of the free market?

Many, particularly on the libertarian right, would dismiss claims that the Individualist Anarchists were socialists. By their support of the "free market" the Individualist Anarchists, they would claim, show them as really supporters of capitalism. Most, if not all, anarchists would reject this claim. Why is this the case?

This because such claims show an amazing ignorance of socialist ideas and history. The socialist movement has had a many schools, many of which, but not all, opposed the market and private property. Given that the right-libertarians who make such claims are not well informed of the ideas they oppose (i.e. of socialism, particularly **libertarian** socialism) it is unsurprising they claim that the Individualist Anarchists are not socialists (of course the fact that many Individualist Anarchists argued they **were** socialists is ignored). Coming from a different tradition, it is unsurprising they are not aware of the fact that socialism is not monolithic. Hence we discover right-libertarian guru von Mises claiming that the *"essence of socialism is the entire elimination of the market."* [**Human Action**, p. 702] This would have come as something of a surprise to, say, Proudhon, who argued that *"[t]o suppress competition is to suppress liberty itself."* [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 50] Similarly, it would have surprised Tucker, who called himself a socialist while supporting a freer market than von Mises ever dreamt of.

Part of the problem, of course, is that the same word often means different things to different people. Both Kropotkin and Lenin said they were "communists" and aimed for "communism." However, it does not mean that the society Kropotkin aimed for was the same as that desired by Lenin. Kropotkin's communism was decentralised, created and run from the bottom-up while Lenin's was fundamentally centralised. Similarly, both Tucker and the Social-Democrat (and leading Marxist) Karl Kautsky called themselves a "socialist" yet their ideas on what a socialist society would be like were extremely different. As J.W. Baker notes, *"Tucker considered himself a socialist . . . as the result of his struggle against 'usury and capitalism,' but anything that smelled of 'state socialism' was thoroughly rejected."* [*Native American Anarchism*, **The Raven**, pp. 43-62, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 60] This, of course, does not stop many "anarcho"-capitalists talking about "socialist" goals as if all socialists were Stalinists (or, at best, social democrats). In fact, "socialist anarchism" has included (and continues to include) advocates of truly free markets as well as advocates of a non-market socialism which has absolutely nothing in common with the state capitalist tyranny of Stalinism. Similarly, they accept a completely ahistorical definition of "capitalism," so ignoring the massive state violence and support by which that system was created and is maintained.

The same with terms like "property" and the "free market," which by the "anarcho"-capitalist assumes the individualist anarchist means the same thing as they do. We can take land as an example. The individualist anarchists argued for an *"occupancy and use"* system of "property" (see [section G.2.2](#)). Thus in their "free market," land would not be a commodity as it is under capitalism. Thus, under individualist anarchism, absentee landlords would be considered as aggressors (and under capitalism, using state coercion to back up their collection of rent against the actual occupiers of property). Tucker argued that local defence associations should treat the

occupier and user as the rightful owner, and defend them against the aggression of an absentee landlord who attempted to collect rent. An "anarcho"-capitalist would consider this as aggression **against** the landlord and a violation of "free market" principles. Similarly, if we apply the mutualist understanding of land to the workplace, we would treat the workers in a factory as the rightful owners, on the basis of occupation and use; at the same time, we could treat the share owners and capitalists as aggressors for attempting to force their representatives as managers on those actually occupying and using the premises. Again, such a system of "occupancy and use" would involve massive violations of what is considered normal in a capitalist "free market."

In other words, an individualist anarchist would consider an "anarcho"-capitalist "free market" as nothing of the kind and vice versa. For the "anarcho"-capitalist, the individualist anarchist position on "property" would be considered as forms of regulation and restrictions on private property and so the "free market." The individualist anarchist would consider the "anarcho"-capitalist "free market" as another system of legally maintained privilege, with the free market distorted in favour of the wealthy.

Therefore it should be remembered that "anarcho"-capitalists at best agree with Tucker, Spooner, et al on fairly vague notions like the "free market." They do not bother to find out what the individualist anarchists meant by that term. Indeed, the "anarcho"-capitalist embrace of different economic theories means that they actually reject the reasoning that leads up to these nominal "agreements." It is the "anarcho"-capitalists who, by rejecting the underlying economics of the mutualists, are forced to take any "agreements" out of context. It also means that when faced with obviously anti-capitalist arguments and conclusions of the individualist anarchists, the "anarcho"-capitalist cannot explain them and are reduced to arguing that the anti-capitalist concepts and opinions expressed by the likes of Tucker are somehow "out of context." In contrast, the anarchist can explain these so-called "out of context" concepts by placing them into the context of the ideas of the individualist anarchists and the society which shaped them.

The "anarcho"-capitalist usually admits that they totally disagree with many of the essential premises of Spooner's and Tucker's analyses. The most basic difference is that the individualist anarchists rooted their ideas in the labour theory of value while the "anarcho"-capitalists favour the subjective theory. It does not take much thought to realise that advocates of labour theories and those of subjective theories of value will naturally develop differing notions of what is and what should be happening within a given economic system. One difference that **has** in fact arisen is that the notion of what constitutes a "free market" has differed according to the theory of value applied. Many things can be attributed to the workings of a "free" market under a subjective analysis that would be considered symptoms of economic unfreedom under most labour-theory driven analyses.

This can be seen if you look closely at the case of Tucker's comments that anarchism was simply "consistent Manchesterianism." If this is done then a simple example of this potential confusion can be found. Tucker argued that anarchists "*accused*" the Manchester men "*of being inconsistent,*" that while being in favour of laissez faire for "*the labourer in order to reduce his wages*" they did not believe "*in liberty to compete with the capitalist in order to reduce his usury.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 83] To be consistent in this case is to be something other -- and more demanding in terms of what is accepted as "freedom" -- than the average Manchesterian (i.e. a supporter of "free market" capitalism). Partisans of the subjective theory see things differently, of course, feeling justified in calling many things "free" that anarchists

would not accept, and seeing "constraint" in what they simply thought of as "consistency."

Therefore it should be pretty clear that a "free market" will look somewhat different depending on your economic presuppositions. Ironically, therefore, "anarcho"-capitalists admit they do not agree with the likes of Spooner and Tucker on key premises, but then claim -- despite all that -- that it is anarchists who "reject" them. Moreover, the "anarcho"-capitalist simply dismisses all the reasoning that got Tucker there -- that is like trying to justify a law citing Leviticus but then saying "but of course all that God stuff is just absurd." You cannot have it both ways. And, of course, the "anarcho"-capitalist support for non-labour based economics allow them to side-step (and so ignore) much of what anarchists -- communists, collectivists, individualists, mutualists and syndicalists alike -- consider authoritarian and coercive about "actually existing" capitalism. But the difference in value theories is critical. No matter what they are called, it is pretty clear that individualist anarchist standards for the freedom of markets are far more demanding than those associated with even the freest capitalist market system.

In summary, the "free market" as sought by (say) Tucker would not be classed as a "free market" by right-wing "libertarians." So the term "free market" (and, of course, "socialism") can mean different things to different people. As such, it would be correct to state that **all** anarchists oppose the "free market" by definition as all anarchists oppose the **capitalist** "free market." And, just as correctly, "anarcho"-capitalists would oppose the mutualist "free market," arguing that it would be no such thing as it would be restrictive of property rights (**capitalist** property rights of course). For example, the question of resource use in a mutualist society is totally different than in a capitalist "free market" as landlordism would not exist. This is a restriction on capitalist property rights and a violation of a capitalist "free market." So a mutualist "free market" would not be considered so by right-wing "libertarians" due to the substantial differences in the rights on which it would be based (with no right to capitalist private property being the most important).

All this means that to go on and on about Tucker's (or Spooner's et al) feelings about a free market simply misses the point. No one denies that Tucker (or Spooner) was in favour of the "free market" but he did not mean the same kind of "free market" desired by "anarcho"-capitalism or that has existed under capitalism. For example, as we note in [section G.4](#), Tucker was well aware of the impact of inequalities in wealth in the economy. In 1911 he argued that economic inequality was so large that it meant individualist anarchism was impossible. If, as "anarcho"-capitalists claim, Tucker supported the "free market" above all else then he would not have argued this point. Clearly, then, Tucker's support for the "free market" cannot be abstracted from his fundamental principles nor can it be equated with a "free market" based on capitalist property rights and massive inequalities in wealth (and so economic power). Thus individualist anarchist support for the free market does not mean support for a **capitalist** "free market."

Little wonder, then, that the likes of Tucker considered themselves socialists and stated numerous times that they were.

It could be argued that these self-proclaimed socialists did not, in fact, understand what socialism "really meant." For this to be the case, **other**, more obviously socialist, writers and thinkers would dismiss them as socialists. This, however, is not the case. Thus we find Karl Marx, for example, writing of *"the socialism of Proudhon."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 161f] Engels talked about Proudhon being *"the Socialist of the small peasant and master-craftsman"* and of *"the Proudhon*

school of Socialism." [Marx and Engels, **Selected Works**, p. 254 and p. 255] Bakunin talked about Proudhon's "*socialism, based on individual and collective liberty and upon the spontaneous action of free associations.*" [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 100] These renown socialists did not consider Proudhon's position to be in any way anti-socialist.

Looking at Tucker and the Individualist anarchists we discover that other socialists considered them socialists. Looking at Rudolf Rocker we discover him arguing that "*it is not difficult to discover certain fundamental principles which are common to all of them and which divide them from all other varieties of socialism. They all agree on the point that man be given the full reward of his labour and recognise in this right the economic basis of all personal liberty. They all regard the free competition of individual and social forces as something inherent in human nature . . . They answered the socialists of other schools who saw in **free competition** one of the destructive elements of capitalist society that the evil lies in the fact we have too little rather than too much competition, since the power of monopoly has made competition impossible.*" [Pioneers of American Freedom, p. 160]

Adolph Fischer, one of the Haymarket Martyrs and contemporary of Tucker, argued that "*every anarchist is a socialist, but every socialist is not necessarily an anarchist. The anarchists are divided into two factions: the communistic anarchists and the Proudhon or middle-class anarchists . . .*" The former "*advocate the communistic or co-operative method of production*" while the latter "*do not advocate the co-operative system of production [i.e. communism], and the common ownership of the means of production, the products and the land.*" [The Autobiographies of the Haymarket Martyrs, p. 81] However, while not being communists (i.e. aiming to eliminate the market), he obviously recognised the Individualists Anarchists as fellow socialists (we should point out that Proudhon **did** support co-operatives, as did the Individualist Anarchists, but they did not carry this to communism as do most social anarchists -- as is clear, Fischer means communism by the term "*co-operative system of production*" rather than co-operatives as they exist today and Proudhon supported).

Thus claims that the Individualist Anarchists were not "really" socialists because they support competition are false. The simple fact is that those who make this claim are ignorant of the socialist movement, its ideas and its history (or desire, like many Marxists, to write out of history competing socialist theories). As Tucker argued, "*the fact that State Socialism . . . has overshadowed other forms of Socialism gives it no right to a monopoly of the Socialistic idea.*" [Instead of a Book, pp. 363-4] It is no surprise that the authoritarian left and "libertarian" right have united to define socialism in such a way as to eliminate anarchism from its ranks -- they both have an interest in removing a theory which exposes the inadequacies of their dogmas, which explains how we can have both liberty **and** equality, have freedom in work **and** outside it and have a decent, free and just society.

So why is Individualist Anarchism and Proudhon's mutualism socialist? Simply because they opposed the exploitation of labour by capital and proposed a means of ending it. Therefore, if socialism is, to quote Kropotkin, "*understood in its wide, generic, and true sense*" as "*an effort to abolish the exploitation of labour by capital*" [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 169] then the Individualist Anarchists and Proudhon must be considered socialists (of course **libertarian** socialists) due to their opposition to usury. It is for this reason we discover Rudolf Rocker arguing that Stephan P. Andrews was "*one of the most versatile and significant exponents of libertarian socialism*" in the USA in spite of his belief that "*the specific cause of the*

economic evil [of capitalism] is founded not on the existence of the wage system" but, rather, on the exploitation of labour, "on the unjust compensation of the worker" and the usury that "deprives him of a part of his labour." [**Pioneers of American Freedom**, p. 85 and pp. 77-8] His opposition to exploitation meant he was a socialist, an opposition which individualist anarchism was rooted in from its earliest days and the ideas of Josiah Warren:

"The aim was to circumvent the exploitation inherent in capitalism, which Warren characterised as a sort of 'civilised cannibalism,' by exchanging goods on co-operative rather than supply and demand principles." [J.W. Baker, "Native American Anarchism," **The Raven**, pp. 43-62, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 51]

The individualist anarchists considered it as a truism that in their society the exploitation of labour could not exist. Thus even if some workers did sell their liberty, they would still receive the full product of their labour. Thus accumulation of capital would be non-existent, so a general equality would prevail and so economic power would not undermine liberty. Remove this underlying assumption, assume that profits could be made and capital accumulated, assume that land can be monopolised by landlords (as the "anarcho"-capitalists do) and a radically different society is produced. One in which economic power means that the vast majority have to sell themselves to get access to the means of life. A condition of "free markets" may exist, but as Tucker argued in 1911, it would not be anarchism. The *deus ex machina* of invisible hands takes a beating in the age of monopolies.

G.2.2 What about their support of "private property"?

The notion that because the Individualist Anarchists supported "property" they supported capitalism is distinctly wrong. This is for two reasons. Firstly, private property is not the distinctive aspect of capitalism -- exploitation and wage labour is. Thus support of private property does not indicate a support for capitalism. Even use of John Locke's arguments in favour of private property could be used against capitalism. As Murray Bookchin makes clear regarding early American society:

"Unknown in the 1640s, the non-bourgeois aspects of Locke's theories were very much in the air a century and a half later . . . [In an artisan/peasant society] a Lockean argument could be used as effectively against the merchants . . . to whom the farmers were indebted, as it could against the King [or the State]. Nor did the small proprietors of America ever quite lose sight of the view that attempts to seize their farmsteads and possessions for unpaid debts were a violation of their 'natural rights,' and from the 1770s until as late as the 1930s they took up arms to keep merchants and bankers from dispossessing them from land they or their ancestors had wrestled from 'nature' by virtue of their own labour. The notion that property was sacred was thus highly elastic: it could be used as effectively by pre-capitalist strata to hold on to their property as it could by capitalists strata to expand their holdings." [**The Third Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 187-8]

What right-libertarians do is to confuse two very different kinds of "property," one of which rests on the labour of the producer themselves and the other on the exploitation of the labour of others. They do not analyse the social relationships between people which the property generates and, instead, concentrate on **things** (i.e. property). Thus, rather than being interested in people and the relationships they create between themselves, the right-libertarian focuses on property (and,

more often than not, just the word rather than what the word describes). This is a strange position for someone seeking liberty to take, as liberty is a product of social interaction (i.e. the relations we have and create with others) and not a product of things (property is not freedom as freedom is a relationship between people, not things). In effect, they confuse property with possession (and vice versa).

And if quoting Karl Marx is not **too** out of place, we discover that he did not consider property as being identical with capitalism. *"The historical conditions of [Capital's] existence are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities. It arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free worker available on the market, as the seller of his own labour-power."* This wage-labour is the necessary pre-condition for capitalism, **not** "private property" as such. Thus artisan/peasant production is not capitalism as *"the means of production and subsistence, while they remain the property of the immediate producer, are not capital. They only become capital under circumstances in which they serve at the same time as means of exploitation of, and domination over, the worker."* [**Capital**, vol. 1, p. 264 and p. 938] We quote Marx simply because as authorities on socialism go, he is one that right-libertarians (or Marxists, for that matter) cannot ignore or dismiss. Needless to say, he is essentially repeating Proudhon's distinction between property and possession. The former is theft and despotism, the latter is liberty. In other words, for anarchists, "property" is a **social relation** and that a key element of anarchist thinking (both social and individualist) was the need to redefine that relation in accord with standards of liberty and justice.

Thus artisan production is not capitalist. It does not generate relationships of exploitation and domination as the worker owns and controls their own means of production. It is, in effect, a form of socialism (a "*petit bourgeois*" form of socialism, to use the typical Marxist phrase). Thus support for "private property" need not mean support for capitalism (as shown, for example, by the Individualist Anarchists). To claim otherwise is to ignore the essential insight of socialism and totally distort the socialist case against capitalism.

Secondly, and more importantly, what the Individualist Anarchists meant by "private property" (or "property") was distinctly different than what is meant by theorists on the libertarian right. Basically, the libertarian right exploit, for their own ends, the confusion generated by the use of the word "property" by the likes of Tucker to describe a situation of "possession." Proudhon recognised this danger. He argued that *"it is proper to call different things by different names, if we keep the name 'property' for the former [individual possession], we must call the latter [the domain of property] robbery, repine, brigandage. If, on the contrary, we reserve the name 'property' for the latter, we must designate the former by the term **possession** or some other equivalent; otherwise we should be troubled with an unpleasant synonym."* [**What is Property?**, p. 373] Unfortunately Tucker, who translated this work, did not heed Proudhon's words of wisdom and called possession in an anarchist society by the word "property."

Looking at Tucker's arguments, it is clear that the last thing Tucker supported was capitalist property rights. For example, he argued that *"property, in the sense of individual possession, is liberty"* and contrasted this with capitalist property. [**Instead of a Book**, p. 394] That his ideas on "property" were somewhat different than that associated with right-libertarian thinkers is most clearly seen with regards to land. Here we discover him advocating *"occupancy and use"* and rejecting the "right" of land owners to bar the landless from any land they owned but did not **personally** use. Rent was *"due to that denial of liberty which takes the shape of land monopoly,*

*vesting titles to land in individuals and associations which do not use it, and thereby compelling the non-owning users to pay tribute to the non-using owners as a condition of admission to the competitive market." Anarchist opposition of rent did "not mean simply the freeing of unoccupied land. It means the freeing of all land not occupied **by the owner**. In other words, it means land ownership limited by occupancy and use." [Tucker, **The Individualist Anarchists**, p. 130 and p. 155] This would result in a "system of occupying ownership . . . accompanied by no legal power to collect rent." [**Instead of a Book**, p. 325]*

A similar position was held by John Beverley Robinson. He argued that there "*are two kinds of land ownership, proprietorship or property, by which the owner is absolute lord of the land, to use it or to hold it out of use, as it may please him; and possession, by which he is secure in the tenure of land which he uses and occupies, but has no claim upon it at all of he ceases to use it.*" Moreover, "*[a]ll that is necessary to do away with Rent is to away with absolute property in land.*" [**Patterns of Anarchy**, p. 272]

Thus the Individualist Anarchists definition of "property" differed considerably from that of the capitalist definition. As they themselves acknowledge. Robinson argued that "*the only real remedy is a change of heart, through which land using will be recognised as proper and legitimate, but land holding will be regarded as robbery and piracy.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 273] Tucker, likewise, indicated that his ideas on "property" were not the same as existing ones when he argued that "*the present system of land tenure should be changed to one of occupancy and use*" and that "*no advocate of occupancy-and-use tenure of land believes that it can be put in force, until as a theory it has been as generally . . . seen and accepted as is the prevailing theory of ordinary private property.*" [**Occupancy and Use verses the Single Tax**]

Hence to claim that the Individualist Anarchists supported capitalist property rights is false. As can be seen, they advocated a system which differed significantly to the current system, indeed they urged the restriction of property rights to a form of possession. Unfortunately, by generally using the term "property" to describe this new system of possession they generated exactly the confusion that Proudhon foretold. Sadly, right-libertarians use this confusion to promote the idea that the likes of Tucker supported capitalist property rights and so capitalism.

For these two reasons it is clear that just because the Individualist Anarchists supported (a form of) "property" does not mean they are capitalists. Indeed, Kropotkin argued that a communist-anarchist revolution would **not** expropriate the tools of self-employed workers who exploited no-one (see his **Act for Yourselves** pp. 104-5). Malatesta argued that in a free society "*the peasant [is free] to cultivate his piece of land, alone if he wishes; free is the shoe maker to remain at his last or the blacksmith in his small forge.*" Thus these two very famous communist-anarchists also "supported" "property" but they are recognised as obviously socialists. This apparent contradiction is resolved when it is understood that for communist-anarchists (like all anarchists) the abolition of property does not mean the end of possession and so "*would not harm the independent worker whose real title is possession and the work done*" unlike capitalist property. [Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 103] In other words, **all** anarchists (as we argue in [section B.3](#)) oppose private property but support possession.

That many of the Individualist Anarchists used the term "property" to describe a system of possession (or "*occupancy-and-use*") should not blind us to the anti-capitalist nature of that "property." Once we move beyond looking at the words they used to what they meant by those

words we clearly see that their ideas are distinctly different from those of supporters of capitalism.

G.3 What about "anarcho"-capitalists' support of Tucker's "defence associations"?

The individualist anarchists advocated individual possession of land and tools and the free exchange of the products of labour between self-employed people. Therefore they also supported the idea of "defence associations" to ensure that the fruits of an individual's labour would not be stolen by others. Again, the social context of individualist anarchism -- namely, a society of self-employed artisans (see sections [G.1](#) and [G.2](#)) -- is crucial for understanding these proposals. However, as in their treatment of Tucker's support for contract theory, "anarcho"-capitalists (e.g. Murray Rothbard) remove the individualists' ideas about free-market defence associations and courts from the social context in which they were proposed, using those ideas in an attempt to turn the individualists into defenders of capitalism.

As indicated in [section G.1](#), the social context in question was one in which an economy of artisans and peasant farmers was being replaced by a state-backed capitalism. This context is crucial for understanding the idea of the "defence associations" that Tucker suggested. For what he proposed was clearly **not** the defence of capitalist property relations. This can be seen, for example, in his comments on land use. Thus:

"The land for the people' . . . means the protection by . . . voluntary associations for the maintenance of justice . . . of all people who desire to cultivate land in possession of whatever land they personally cultivate . . . and the positive refusal of the protecting power to lend its aid to the collection of any rent, whatsoever." [Op. Cit., p. 299]

There is no mention here of protecting **capitalist** farming, i.e. employing wage labour; rather, there is explicit mention that only land being used for **personal** cultivation -- thus **without** employing wage labour -- would be defended. In other words, the defence association would defend "*occupancy and use*" (which is a clear break with capitalist property rights) and not the domination of the landlord over society or those who use the land the landlord claims to own.

Refusal to pay rent on land is a key aspect of Tucker's thought, and it is significant that he explicitly rejects the idea that a defence association can be used to collect it. In addition, as a means towards anarchy, Tucker suggests "*inducing the people to steadily refuse the payment of rent and taxes*" [Op. Cit., p. 299]. It is hard to imagine that a landowner influenced by Murray Rothbard or David Friedman would support such an arrangement or a "defence association" that supported it.

The various economic proposals made by the individualist anarchists were designed to eliminate the vast differences in wealth accruing from the "*usury*" of industrial capitalists, bankers, and landlords. For example, Josiah Warren "*proposed like Robert Owen an exchange of notes based on labour time. . . He wanted to establish an 'equitable commerce' in which all goods are exchanged for their cost of production. . . . In this way profit and interest would be eradicated and a highly egalitarian order would emerge.*" [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 385] Given that the Warrenites considered that both workers and managers would receive equal payment for equal hours worked, the end of a parasitic class of wealthy capitalists was

inevitable.

In the case of Benjamin Tucker, he was a firm adherent of the labour theory of value, believing that a free market and interest-free credit would reduce prices to the cost of production and increase demand for labour to the point where workers would receive the full value of their labour. In addition, recognising that gold was a rare commodity, he rejected a gold-backed money supply in favour of a land-backed one, as land with "*permanent improvements on [it]. . . [is] an excellent basis for currency.*" [**Instead of a Book**, p. 198] Given that much of the population at the time worked on their own land, such a money system would have ensured that entry into the banking market was easier as well, by allowing easy credit secured by land. Mutualism replaced the gold standard (which, by its very nature would produce an oligarchy of banks) with money backed by other, more available, commodities.

Rothbard rejects all of this, the social context of Tucker's ideas on "defence associations." In fact, he attacks what he considers the "bad economics" of the individualists without realising it is **precisely** these "bad" (i.e. anti-capitalist) economics which will make "defence associations" irrelevant as workers' received the full product of their labour (so destroying usury) and workers' control spreads and replaces the irrational authority of the capitalist-labourer social relationship with the egalitarian relationships of co-operative and artisan production. Unless this social context exists, any defence associations will soon become mini-states, serving to enrich the elite few by protecting the usury they gain from, and their power and control (i.e. government) over, those who toil. In other words, the "defence associations" of Tucker and Spooner would not be private states, enforcing the power of capitalists upon wage workers. Instead, they would be like insurance companies, protecting possessions against theft (as opposed to protecting capitalist theft from the dispossessed as would be the case in "anarcho"-capitalism -- an important difference lost on the private staters).

In addition, the emphasis given by Tucker and Lysander Spooner to the place of juries in a free society is equally important for understanding how their ideas about defence associations fit into a non-capitalist scheme. For by emphasising the importance of trial by jury, they knock an important leg from under the private statism associated with "anarcho"-capitalism. Unlike a wealthy judge, a jury made up mainly of fellow workers would be more inclined to give verdicts in favour of workers struggling against bosses or of peasants being forced off their land by immoral, but legal, means. It is hardly surprising that Rothbard rejects this in favour of the mysticism and authoritarianism of "*natural law.*" As Lysander Spooner argued in 1852, "*[i]f a jury have not the right to judge between the government and those who disobey its laws, and resist its oppressions, the government is absolute, and the people, legally speaking, are slaves. Like many other slaves they may have sufficient courage and strength to keep their masters somewhat in check; but they are nevertheless known to the law only as slaves.*" [**Trial by Jury**] And "Natural Law" implies a body, a "Natural Government" perhaps, which determines what it is -- in Rothbard's case a system of professional and wealthy "arbitrators" who determine what is and what is not "custom" and "reason."

As Individualist Anarchist Laurance Labadie (the son of Joseph Labadie) argues against Rothbard's misrepresentation of the idea that there would be "*no rational or objective body of law*" in Individualist Anarchy:

"Mere common sense would suggest that any court would be influenced by experience;

and any free market court or judge would in the very nature of things have some precedents guiding them in their instructions to a jury. But since no case is exactly the same, a jury would have considerable say about the heinousness of the offence in each case, realising that circumstances alter cases, and prescribing penalty accordingly. This appeared to Spooner and Tucker to be a more flexible and equitable administration of justice possible or feasible, human beings being what they are . . .

*"But when Mr. Rothbard quibbles about the jurisprudential ideas of Spooner and Tucker, and at the same time upholds **presumably in his courts** the very economic evils which are at the bottom the very reason for human contention and conflict, he would seem to be a man who chokes at a gnat while swallowing a camel."* [quoted by Mildred J. Loomis and Mark A. Sullivan, **Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of Liberty**, Coughlin, Hamilton and Sullivan (eds.), p. 124]

By focusing selectively on a few individualist proposals taken out of their social context, Murray Rothbard and other "anarcho"-capitalists have turned the potential libertarianism of the individualist anarchists into yet another ideological weapon in the hands of (private) statism and capitalism. As Peter Sabatini argues (in **Libertarianism: Bogus Anarchy**):

"in those rare moments when [Murray] Rothbard (or any other [right-wing] Libertarian) does draw upon individualist anarchism, he is always highly selective about what he pulls out. Most of the doctrine's core principles, being decidedly anti-Libertarianism, are conveniently ignored, and so what remains is shrill anti-statism conjoined to a vacuous freedom in hackneyed defence of capitalism. In sum, the 'anarchy' of Libertarianism reduces to a liberal fraud."

G.4 Why do social anarchists reject individualist anarchism?

As James J. Martin notes, *"paralleling" European social anarchism "chronologically was a kindred but nearly unconnected phenomenon in America, seeking the same ends through individualistic rather than collectivistic dynamics."* [**Men Against the State**, p. ix]

When the two movements meet in American in the 1880s, the similarities and differences of both came into sharp relief. While both social and individualist anarchists reject capitalism as well as the state and seek an end to the exploitation of labour by capital (i.e. to usury in all its forms), both schools of anarchism rejected each others solutions to the social problem. The vision of the social anarchists was more communally based, urging social ownership of the means of life. In contrast, reflecting the pre-dominantly pre-capitalist nature of post-revolution US society, the Individualist Anarchists urged small-scale possession of the means of life, co-operatives and mutual banking to remove interest and give every worker access to capital.

Thus their vision of a free society and the means to achieve it were somewhat different (although, we stress, **not** mutually exclusive as communist anarchists supported artisan possession of the means of possession for those who rejected communism and the Individualist Anarchists supported voluntary communism). Tucker argued that a communist could not be an anarchist and the communist-anarchists argued that Individualist Anarchism could not end the exploitation of capital by labour. Being social anarchists, here we indicate why social anarchists reject individualist anarchism (see [section A.3.1](#) for a summary of why Individualist Anarchists reject social anarchism).

Malatesta summarises the essential points of difference:

"The individualists assume . . . that the (anarchist) communists wish to impose communism, which of course would put them right outside the ranks of anarchism.

"The communists assume . . . that the (anarchist) individualists reject every idea of association, want the struggle between men, the domination of the strongest -- and this would put them not only outside the anarchist movement but outside humanity.

"In reality those who are communists are such because they see in common freely accepted the realisation of brotherhood, and the best guarantee for individual freedom. And individualists, those who are really anarchists, are anti-communist because they fear that communism would subject individuals . . . to the tyranny of the collectivity . . . Therefore they want each individual, or each group, to be in a position to enjoy freely the product of their labour in conditions of equality with other individuals and groups, with whom they would maintain relations of justice and equity.

"In which case it is clear that there is no basic difference between us. But, according to the communists, justice and equity are, under natural conditions impossible of attainment in an individualistic society, and thus freedom too would not be attained.

"If climatic conditions throughout the world were the same, if the land were everywhere equally fertile, if raw materials were evenly distributed and within reach of all who needed them, if social development were the same everywhere in the world . . . then one could conceive of everyone . . . finding the land, tools and raw materials needed to work and produce independently, without exploiting or being exploited. But natural and historical conditions being what they are, how is it possible to establish equality and justice between he who by chance finds himself with a piece of arid land which demand much labour for small returns with him who has a piece of fertile and well sited land?"

[**Life and Ideas**, pp. 31-2]

Thus, while Individualist Anarchists argue for the "*cost principle*" (i.e. cost being the limit of price) the cost of creating the same commodity in different areas or by different people is not equal. Thus the market price of a good **cannot** really equal the multitude of costs within it (and so price can only equal a workers' labour in the minority of cases where that labour was used in the least favourable circumstances). It was for this reason that Proudhon argued that a portion of income from agricultural produce be paid into a central fund which would be used to make equalisation payments to compensate farmers with less favourably situated or less fertile land. As he put it, economic rent "*in agriculture has no other cause than the inequality in the quality of land . . . if anyone has a claim on account of this inequality . . . [it is] the other land workers who hold inferior land. That is why in our scheme for liquidation [of capitalism] we stipulated that every variety of cultivation should pay a proportional contribution, destined to accomplish a balancing of returns among farm workers and an assurance of products.*" [**The General Idea of the Revolution**, p. 209]

This problem was recognised by Tucker, who argued that "*economic rent . . . is one of nature's inequalities. It will probably remain with us always. Complete liberty will every much lessen it; of that I have no doubt.*" ["*Why I am an Anarchist*", pp. 135-6, **Man!**, M. Graham (ed.), pp. 132-6] Unlike Proudhon, however, he proposed no scheme to equalise income. Perhaps Tucker was

correct and the differences would be slight, but in a market situation exchanges tend to magnify differences, **not** reduce them. The actions of self-interested individuals in unequal positions will tend to exacerbate differences. Over time these slight differences would become larger and larger, subjecting the weaker party to relatively increasingly worse contracts. As Proudhon argued:

"I have shown the contractor, at the birth of industry, negotiating on equal terms with his comrades, who have since become his workmen. It is plain, in fact, that this original equality was bound to disappear through the advantageous position of the master and the dependent position of the wage-workers. In vain does the law assure the right of each to enterprise . . . When an establishment has had leisure to develop itself, enlarge its foundations, ballast itself with capital, and assure itself a body of patrons, what can a workman do against a power so superior?" [System of Economical Contradictions, p. 202]

Moreover, *"there is a remarkable correlation between competitiveness in a society and the presence of clearly defined 'have' and 'have-not' groups."* [Alfie Kohn, **No Contest**, p. 38] As the communist-anarchist paper **Freedom** argued:

"Are not the scandalous inequalities in the distribution of wealth today merely the culminative effect of the principle that every man is justified in securing to himself everything that his chances and capacities enable him to lay hands on?"

"If the social revolution which we are living means anything, it means the destruction of this detestable economic principle, which delivers over the more social members of the community to the domination of the most unsocial and self-interested." [**Freedom**, vol. 2, no. 19]

While state action may have given the modern capitalist an initial advantage on the market, it does not follow that a truly free market will not create similar advantages naturally. And if it did, then surely a similar system would develop? That it developed without state aid would make it no less unfree and unjust. It is of little use to point out that such a situation is **not** what the Individualist Anarchists desired (after all, Stalin was hardly what most Marxists desired). It is a question of whether their ideas would actually result in what they wanted.

Which brings us to the corrosive effects of the market itself on human personalities. As noted in earlier sections, individualists mostly base their economic ideas on the free market. However, as we have argued elsewhere (see [section B.1](#)), competition for profits in a free market creates numerous problems -- for example, the creation of an *"ethics of mathematics"* and the strange inversion of values in which things (property) become more important than people. Competition, as Alfie Kohn points out, *"itself is responsible for the development of a lower moral standard"* which places winning at any cost above fairness and justice [**Op. Cit.**, p. 163]. In addition, the *"strife of competition reduces empathic sympathy, distorts communication, impairs the mutuality of support and sharing, and decreases the satisfaction of personal need."* [Nathan Ackerman, quoted by Alfie Kohn, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 142-3] Thus, by supporting the free market, Individualist Anarchists help to make us less human and more a robot. In contrast, social anarchists stress community and co-operation in order to develop us as fully rounded individuals. As Kropotkin put it, *"the individualisation they so highly praise is not attainable by individual efforts."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 297]

Ultimately, Individualist Anarchists lose sight of the fact that success and competition are not the same thing. One can set and reach goals without competing. That we may lose more by competing than by co-operating is an insight which social anarchists base their ideas on. In the end, a person can become a success in terms of business but lose sight of their humanity and individuality in the process.

Returning to economic issues, the accumulation needs of a competitive market economy do not disappear just because capitalism has been replaced by co-operatives and mutual credit banks -- a fact that implies the inevitable development of big business (and so natural barriers to entry). In any market economy, firms will try to improve their market position by investing in new machinery, reducing prices by improving productivity and so on. This creates barriers to new competitors who have to expend more money in order to match the capital of existing firms. Such amounts of money may not be forthcoming for even a mutual bank and so certain firms would enjoy a privileged position on the market. Given that Tucker defined a monopolist as "*any person, corporation, or institution whose right to engage in any given pursuit of life is secured, either wholly or partially, by any agency whatsoever -- whether the nature of things or the force of events or the decree of arbitrary power -- against the influence of competition*" we may suggest that due to **natural** barriers, an individualist anarchist society would not be free of monopolists and so of usury. [quoted by James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 210]

For this reason, even in a mutualist market certain companies would receive a bigger slice of profits than (and at the expense of) others. This means that exploitation would still exist as larger companies could charge more than cost for their products. In addition, the free market in banking would also result in **its** market being dominated by a few big banks, with similar results.

This problem of natural barriers to competition also effects the possibility of mutual banking being able to abolish capitalism. While mutual banks would undoubtedly aid the position of workers under capitalism (which is why Bakunin and other social anarchists recommended them), they cannot undermine capitalism. This is because capitalism, due to its need to accumulate, creates **natural** barriers to entry into a market (see section C.4, "[Why does the market become dominated by Big Business?](#)"). Thus the physical size of the large corporation would make it immune to the influence of mutual banking and so usury could not be abolished.

This problem was recognised by Tucker himself in the postscript to a 1911 London edition of his famous essay "*State Socialism and Anarchism.*" While arguing that when he wrote his essay 25 years earlier "*the denial of competition had not effected the enormous concentration of wealth that now so gravely threatens social order*" and so a policy of mutual banking might have stopped and reversed the process of accumulation, the way in 1911 was "*not so clear.*" This was because the tremendous capitalisation of industry now made the money monopoly a convenience, but no longer a necessity. Admitted Tucker, "*The trust is now a monster which . . . even the freest competition, could it be instituted, would be unable to destroy*" as the "*concentrated capital*" could set aside a sacrifice fund to bankrupt smaller competitors and continue the process of expansion of reserves. Thus natural barriers to entry, resulting from the process of capitalist production and accumulation, had ensured that mutualism could no longer reform capitalism away and the problem of the trusts "*must be grappled with for a time solely by forces political or revolutionary.*" [quoted by James J. Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 273]

In other words, the economic power of "*concentrated capital*" and "*enormous concentration of*

wealth" placed an insurmountable obstacle to the realisation of anarchy. Which means that the abolition of usury and relative equality were considered **ends** rather than side effects for Tucker and if free competition could not achieve these then such a society would **not** be anarchist.

(As an aside, Tucker's comments here indicate well how far he actually was from "anarcho"-capitalism. The "anarcho"-capitalism desires free markets no matter their result or the concentration of wealth existing at their introduction. As can be seen, Tucker sees the existence of concentrations of wealth as a problem and a hindrance towards anarchy. Thus Tucker was well aware of the dangers to individual liberty of usury, inequality and economic power).

Also, we may note, in the slow transition towards anarchism, we would see the rise of pro-capitalist "defence associations" which **would** collect rent from land, break strikes, attempt to crush unions and so on. Tucker seemed to have assumed that the anarchist vision of "*occupancy-and-use*" would become universal. Unfortunately, landlords would resist it and so, ultimately, an Individualist Anarchist society would have to either force the minority to accept the majority wishes on land use (hence his comments on there being "*no legal power to collect rent*") or the majority are dictated to by the minority who are in favour of collecting rent and hire "defence associations" to enforce those wishes. With the head start big business and the wealthy have in terms of resources, conflicts between pro- and anti-capitalist "defence associations" would usually work against the anti-capitalist ones (as trade unions often find out). In other words, reforming capitalism would not be as non-violent or as simple as Tucker maintained. The vested powers which the state defends will find other means to protect themselves when required (for example, when capitalists and landlords backed fascism and fascist squads in Italy after workers "occupied and used" their workplaces and land workers and peasants "occupied and used" the land in 1920). We are sure that economists will then rush to argue that the resulting law system that defended the collection of rent and capitalist property against "occupancy and use" was the most "economically efficient" result for "society."

In addition, even if individualist mutualism **did** result in an increase in wages by developing artisan and co-operative ventures that decreased the supply of labour in relation to its demand, this would not eliminate the subjective and objective pressures on profits that produce the business cycle within capitalism (see sections [C.7](#) and [C.8](#) for more on these pressures). This means that an increase in the bargaining power of labour would soon see capital moving to non-anarchist areas and using its financial power to buy up any resources in the anarchist areas. Because individualist anarchists assume an evolution towards anarchy, this is a distinct possibility. And co-operatives in a market economy will be as influenced by the business cycle as capitalist firms. This could mean that during an economic slump, when workers' savings and bargaining position were weak, the gains associated with mutualism could be lost as co-operative firms go bust and mutual banks find it hard to generate credit in a hostile environment.

Mutual banks would not, therefore, undermine modern capitalism, as recognised by social anarchists from Bakunin onward (they placed their hopes in a social revolution organised by workplace and community organisations). Moreover, social anarchists would argue that any individualist system could revert back to capitalism and wage labour, for two reasons.

Firstly, there is a possibility that **possession** would be replaced by **property** as individuals sell their means of production to others voluntarily or to repay loans in bad times and these new owners create "defence associations" to enforce their claims. In addition (and this may seem

ironic), wage labour does have the advantage that people can move to new locations and work without having to sell their old means of living. Often moving somewhere can be a hassle if one has to sell a shop or home. Many people prefer not to be tied down to one place. This is a problem in a system based on self-employed artisan labour, but not in social anarchism as access to the means of life is guaranteed to all members of the free society.

Secondly, there is the problem associated with natural barriers to entry in an industry. This could help generate wage labour (and so a new class of exploiters) as workers face the unpleasant choice of working for a successful firm, being unemployed or working for low wages in an industry with lower barriers to entry. This process can be seen under capitalism when co-operatives hire wage workers and not include them as members of the association (i.e. they exercise their ownership rights to exclude others).

While state action may **increase** the degree of monopoly in an industry, the natural tendency for any market is to place barriers ("natural" barriers) to new entries in terms of set-up costs and so on. This means that if the relation between capital and labour was abolished **within** the workplace (by their transformation into co-operatives) but they remained the property of their workers, it would only be a matter of time before the separation of the producers from their means of production reproduced itself. This is because, within any market system, some firms fail and others succeed. Those which fail will create a pool of unemployed workers who will need a job. The successful co-operatives, safe behind their natural barriers to entry, would be in a stronger position than the unemployed workers and so may hire them as wage labourers -- in effect, the co-operative workers would become "collective capitalists" hiring other workers. This would end workers' self-management (as not all workers are involved in the decision making process) as well as workers' ownership, i.e. "*occupancy and use*," (as not all workers' would own the means of production they used).

The individual workers involved may "consent" to becoming wage slaves, but that is because it is the best option available rather than what they really want. Which, of course, is the same as under capitalism. Little wonder Proudhon argued that "*every worker employed in the association*" must have "*an undivided share in the property of the company*" in order to ensure workers' self-management. [Op. Cit., p. 223] Only this could ensure "*occupancy and use*" and so self-management in a free society (i.e. keep that society free).

Looking wider afield, unless there is some form of community control, a free market in banks may soon lead to the growth of purely capitalist firms. For in order to survive, banks -- like any company -- will have to make money, and so they will wish to lend to the most profitable firms. Capitalist firms are exploitative, thus allowing them to expand faster than co-operative firms. Hence even mutual banks will wind up preferring to lend to capitalist firms in order to survive on the market. This will enforce the division of labour (as opposed to work) as the most "efficient" way of exploiting workers, and this practice will spread across the economy like an oil slick as more and more co-operatives find themselves needing to introduce similar working practices in order to survive. Thus competition will soon result in like competing against like, not only in the market but also in production.

If we take the creation of employer-employee relationships within an anarchy, we see the danger of private statism arising (as in "anarcho"-capitalism) and so the end of anarchy. Such a development can be seen when Tucker argues that if, in an anarchy, "*any labourers shall*

interfere with the rights of their employers, or shall use force upon inoffensive 'scabs,' or shall attack their employers' watchmen . . . I pledge myself that, as an Anarchist and in consequence of my Anarchistic faith, I will be among the first to volunteer as a member of a force to repress these disturbers of order, and, if necessary, sweep them from the earth." [Instead of a Book, p. 455]

In such a situation, these defence associations would be indeed "private states" and here Tucker's ideas unfortunately do parallel those of the "anarcho"-capitalists (although, as the employees would not be exploited by the employer, this does not suggest that Tucker can be considered a proto-"anarcho"-capitalist). As Kropotkin warned, "[f]or their self-defence, both the citizen and group have a right to any violence [within individualist anarchy] . . . Violence is also justified for enforcing the duty of keeping an agreement. Tucker . . . opens . . . the way for reconstructing under the heading of the 'defence' all the functions of the State." [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 297]

However, as we have argued above (see [section G.2](#)), his opposition to usury in all forms implies co-operative labour, not wage labour, and if such a strike did occur in individualist anarchy it indicates that it was turning back into capitalism. And we may note this "love it or leave it" attitude of Tucker in regards firms in an anarchy ignores the fact that following orders is **not** a form of liberty and is degrading even when you get the full product of your labour. Ironically, by placing so much stress in opposing capitalist **exploitation**, instead of capitalist **oppression**, Tucker is actually closer to (the "authoritarian") Marx than (the "libertarian") Proudhon (Tucker's terms) and like Marx opens the door to various kinds of domination and restrictions on individual self-government within "scientific socialism" (one of Tucker's expressions for individualist anarchy!). Again we see a support for contract theory creating authoritarian, not libertarian, relationships between people.

So Tucker's comments on strikers brings to light an interesting contradiction in his ideas. After all, he favoured a system of "property" generally defined by use and occupancy, that is whoever uses and possesses is to be consider the owner. Based on this theory of "property" Tucker opposed landlords and rent, arguing that anarchy "means the freeing of all land not occupied by the owner" that is, "land ownership limited by occupancy and use." [The Individualist Anarchists, p. 155] He extends this principle to housing, arguing that "Anarchic associations" would "not collect your rent, and might not even evict your tenant" and "tenants would not be forced to pay you rent, nor would you be allowed to seize their property. The Anarchic Associations would look upon your tenants very much as they would look upon your guests." [Op. Cit., p. 162]

Now, in a strike those who **use** the given property are in dispute with those who **own** it. If individualist anarchy **was** based on "occupancy and use" then the argument for housing and land must extend to workplaces. Hence, if "the land should be free to all, and no one would control more than he [or she] used." [Op. Cit., p. 114] then it is clear that the boss controls more land than he can use (simply because he hires **others** to use it, and what is on it, for him). Thus "Anarchic associations" could not defend the property owner against those who use his/her property. If landlordism is unjust, then so is the ownership of capital by those who do not use it. In other words, "occupancy and use" implies co-operatives and **not** wage-labour. And Tucker's comments about strikers show an inconsistency in his basic ideas (see also [section G.1](#)). This conclusion is not surprising. As Malatesta argued:

"The individualists give the greatest importance to an abstract concept of freedom and fail to take into account, or dwell on the fact, that real, concrete freedom is the outcome of solidarity and voluntary co-operation. . . They certainly believe that to work in isolation is fruitless and that an individual, to ensure a living as a human being and to materially and morally enjoy all the benefits of civilisation, must either exploit -- directly or indirectly -- the labour of others . . . or associate with his [or her] fellows and share their pains and the joys of life. And since, being anarchists, they cannot allow the exploitation of one by another, they must necessarily agree that to be free and live as human beings they have to accept some degree and form of voluntary communism." [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 16]

Occupancy and use, therefore, implies the collective ownership of resources used by groups which, in turn, implies associative labour and self-management. In other words, *"some degree and form of voluntary communism."*

Moreover, if we look at Tucker's definition of the State, namely that it based on *"aggression"* and *"the assumption of sole authority over a given area and all within it,"* then it is clear that the capitalist has sole authority over their workplace (*"a given area"*) and all within it. And, as Tucker notes, no State *"has ever tolerated a rival State within its borders"* then the same can be said of the boss -- they rarely, through choice, allow unions to organise on their workplace (they sometimes agree if they have no choice or if the union in question will not question their authority -- as with the state). Given that the major rationale for the Homestead strike of 1892 **was** (to use the words of a company historian) that management decisions were *"subject to the interference of some busybody from the Amalgamated Association"* its clear that the boss does not like to tolerate a rival within his/her borders (i.e. workplace). Moreover, according to David Brody in his work **The Steel Workers**, after the union was broken *"the steel workers output doubled in exchange for an income rise of one-fifth . . . The accomplishment was possible only with a labour force powerless to oppose the decisions of the steel men."* [quoted by Katherine Stone, *"The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry"*, **Root and Branch**, p. 127 and p. 132] In other words, the boss is both the monopoly of authority in a given area and tolerates no other within it -- just like the state.

Thus Tucker's comments on strikers indicates a distinct contradiction in his ideas. It violates both his support for *"occupancy and use"* and his opposition to the state. It could, of course, be argued that the contradiction is resolved because the worker consents to the authority of the boss by taking the job. However, it can be replied that, by this logic, the citizen consents to the authority of the state as a democratic state allows people to leave its borders and join another one. That the citizen does not leave indicates they consent to the state. In other words, consent of and by itself does not justify hierarchy for if it did, the current state system would be anarchistic. This indicates the weakness of contract theory as a means of guaranteeing liberty and its potential to generate, and justify, authoritarian social relationships rather than libertarian and liberty enhancing ones. Hence Kropotkin's comment that *"anarchism . . . refuses all hierarchical organisation and preaches free agreement."* [**Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 137] To do otherwise is to contradict the basic ideas of anarchism.

In addition, we must note another contradiction within Tucker's viewpoint highlighted by this diatribe against strikes in an anarchy. If, as Tucker maintained, in an individualist anarchy the demand for workers exceeded supply (unlike under capitalism) so ensuring that *"labour will. . .*

be in a position to dictate its wages, and will thus secure its natural wage, its entire product" [The Anarchist Reader, p. 150], how will the employer attract enough scabs? There would be few if any workers willing to swap jobs and work for an employer whose management style provoked strikes by fellow workers. And in such a situation the power of labour would be so strong that workers' control would have occurred long before!

Peter Kropotkin recognised the statist implications of some aspects of anarchist individualism which Tucker's strike example highlights. Tucker's anarchism, due to its uncritical support for contract theory, could result in a few people dominating economic life, because "no force" would result in the perpetuation of authority structures, with freedom simply becoming the "right to full development" of "privileged minorities." But, Kropotkin argued, "as such monopolies cannot be maintained otherwise than under the protection of a monopolist legislation and an organised coercion by the State, the claims of these individualists necessarily end up in a return to the State idea and to that same coercion which they so fiercely attack themselves. Their position is thus the same as that of Spencer and of the so-called 'Manchester school' of economists, who also begin by a severe criticism of the State and end up in its full recognition in order to maintain the property monopolies, of which the State is the necessary stronghold." [Op. Cit., p. 162]

Such would be the possible (perhaps probable) result of the individualists' contract theory of freedom without a social background of communal self-management and ownership. As can be seen from capitalism, a society based on the abstract individualism associated with contract theory would, in practice, produce social relationships based on power and authority (and so force -- which would be needed to back up that authority), **not** liberty. As we argued in [section A.2.14](#), voluntarism is **not** enough in itself to preserve freedom.

Therefore, social anarchists have to part company with individualists when the latter apply **to bosses** the maxim, "[t]o coerce the peaceful non-co-operator is to violate equality of liberty." [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 42] A boss not only "attempts to control another" but **succeeds** in doing so every day at work. To "coerce" bosses by those subject to it removing their authority to control (i.e. to govern) them is not itself coercion but a blow struck for liberty. It is not coercive to prevent others from coercing! Therefore, social anarchists favour direct actions by those subject to authority, such as strikes, boycotts, the occupation of workplaces, picketing, etc., irrespective of whether such measures are desired by the boss. However, as already indicated in [section A.3.1](#), social anarchists reject attempts to coerce other workers into joining a co-operative. Freedom cannot be given, it must be taken and social anarchism, like all forms of anarchy, cannot be imposed. As Kropotkin argued:

"Communist organisations . . . must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free." [Op. Cit., p. 140]

Which indicates that Tucker did not really understand communist-anarchism when he argued that communism is "the force which compels the labourer to pool his product with the products of all and forbids him to sell his labour or his products." [Instead of a Book, p. 400] Rather, communist-anarchists argued that communism must be free and voluntary. In other words, a communist-anarchist society would not "forbid" anything as those who make it up must be in favour of communism for it to work. The option of remaining outside the communist-anarchist

society is there, as (to again quote Kropotkin) expropriation would *"apply to everything that enables any man [or woman] . . . to appropriate the product of others' toil."* [**The Conquest of Bread**, p. 61] Thus communist-anarchism would "forbid" exactly what Individualist Anarchism would "forbid" -- property, not possession (i.e. any form of "ownership" not based on "occupancy and use").

Free contracts are not sufficient to ensure freedom. Therefore, social anarchists reject the individualists' conception of anarchy, simply because it can, unfortunately, allow hierarchy (i.e. government) back into a free society in the name of "liberty" and "free contracts." Freedom is fundamentally a social product, created in and by community. It is a fragile flower and does not fare well when bought and sold on the market.

As we noted in the [last section](#), Individualist "defence associations" would not be the private states of "anarcho"-capitalism only if the land and housing they protected were based on *"occupancy and use"* and the workplaces they protected were co-operatives (and we have indicated why Individualist Anarchism logically implies co-operative labour -- see [section G.2](#)). Tucker's example about strikers only drives home the contradictions in his views, contradictions resulting from his liberal slant on anarchism. If we agree with Kropotkin that Tucker's ideas are a combination of the anarchist Proudhon's and the liberal capitalist Herbert Spencer's, we see where the contradiction lies. If we reject Proudhon's support for association/co-operation as the basis of an anarchist economy, we are left with liberal capitalism and the need to protect the power of the employer over the employee, and so some form of statism ("anarcho"-capitalists, by ignoring Proudhon's argument from the start, miss the contradiction by jumping straight to capitalism and so private statism). Moreover, even assuming that such "defence associations" did protect a co-operative economy, they would still suffer from the problems of collusion which "anarcho"-capitalist "defence associations" face (as described in [section F.6.3](#)). If "self-defence" does become a commodity on the market, there is a distinct danger that the "defence associations" would (in time) become a new public state, due to the unique market forces within that specific market.

Also, Kropotkin saw that Tucker's argument against the forced expropriation of social capital by the working class would lead to a continuation of authoritarian relations in production, which would need to be maintained by coercion through some kind of state (aka "anarcho"-capitalist private states). In addition, Kropotkin seriously doubted that capitalism could be reformed away as Tucker maintained.

In addition, even assuming a fully individualist economy, co-operatives would still be controlled or influenced by market forces, which would drive them to increase working hours, create a division of labour, and implement a host of other dehumanising working practices in order to compete successfully against other co-operatives, and thus to "survive" economically. Hence **survival**, not **living**, would be the norm within such a society, just as it is, unfortunately, in capitalism.

So, taken as a whole, individualist anarchism would tend to revert back to capitalism. Moreover, it would not eliminate the tendency of a market economy to reduce people to commodities, as can be seen from Tucker's argument that children are "owned" by their parents until such time as they are able to make contracts -- an argument that led him, for the sake of logical consistency, to tolerate child labour. Therefore, because of the forces and tendencies at work within the any

market system, social anarchists recognise the need to communalise, and so decentralise, production and finance in order to ensure that freely associated and co-operative labour is the basis of a free society.

Finally, as to its means of activism, individualist anarchism exaggerates the potential of mutual banks to fund co-operatives. While the creation of community-owned and -managed mutual credit banks would help in the struggle for a free society, such banks are not enough in themselves. Unless created as part of the social struggle against capitalism and the state, and unless combined with community and strike assemblies, mutual banks would quickly die, because the necessary social support required to nurture them would not exist. Mutual banks must be part of a network of other new socio-economic and political structures and cannot be sustained in isolation from them. This is simply to repeat our earlier point that capitalism cannot be reformed away.

However, while social anarchists disagree with the proposals of individualist anarchists, we do still consider them to be a form of anarchism -- one with many flaws and one perhaps more suited to an earlier age when capitalism was less developed and its impact upon society far less than it is now (see [section G.1.1](#)). John Quail, in his history of British Anarchism, puts his finger on the contextual implications and limitations of Tucker's ideas when he writes:

"Tucker was a Proudhonist and thus fundamentally committed to a society based on small proprietorship. In the American context, however, where the small landowner was often locked in battle with large capitalist interests, this did not represent the reactionary position it often did later. . . Tucker had a keen sense of the right of the oppressed to struggle against oppression." [**The Slow Burning Fuse**, p. 19]

G.5 Benjamin Tucker: Capitalist or Anarchist?

Benjamin Tucker was against "capitalism" in the sense in which he defined it: namely, as a state-supported monopoly of social capital (tools, machinery, etc.) which allows owners to avoid paying workers the full value of their labour [see **Instead of a Book**]. Indeed, he thought that the *"labouring classes are deprived of their earnings by usury in its three forms, interest, rent and profit."* [quoted by James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 210f] This stance puts him squarely in the libertarian socialist tradition.

Indeed, Tucker referred to himself many times as a socialist. It is true that he also sometimes railed against "socialism," but in those cases it is clear that he was referring to **state** socialism. As he argues himself there are two kinds of socialism based upon two different principles:

"The two principles referred to are Authority and Liberty, and the names of the two schools of Socialistic thought which fully and unreservedly represent one or the other of them are, respectively, State Socialism and Anarchism. Whoso knows what these two schools want and how they propose to get it understands the Socialistic movement. For, just as it has been said that there is no half-way house between Rome and Reason, so it may be said that there is no half-way house between State Socialism and Anarchism." [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 150]

He also made it clear that he was against private property and so supported Proudhon's argument that *"property is theft,"* and even translated Proudhon's *"What is Property?"*, where that phrase

originated. Tucker advocated **possession** but not private property, believing that empty land, houses, etc. should be squatted by those who could use them, as labour (i.e. use) would be the only title to "property" (Tucker opposed all non-labour income as usury).

This was because Tucker did not believe in a "*natural right*" to property nor did he approve of unlimited holdings of scarce goods. He clearly recognised that allowing "absolute" rights to private property, when land was scarce, would result in the liberty of non-owners being diminished. As he put it:

"It should be stated, however, that in the case of land, or of any other material the supply of which is so limited that all cannot hold it in unlimited quantities, Anarchism undertakes to protect no titles except such as are based on actual occupancy and use."

[**Instead of a Book**, p. 61]

This, he thought, would reduce the evils of capitalism and increase liberty. For those who own no property have no room for the soles of their feet unless they have the permission of those who do own property, hardly a situation that would increase, nevermind protect, freedom for all.

Therefore, Tucker considered private property in land use (which he called the "*land monopoly*") as one of the four great evils of capitalism. According to Tucker, "*the land monopoly. . . consists in the enforcement by government of land titles which do not rest upon personal occupancy and cultivation. . . the individual should no longer be protected by their fellows in anything but personal occupation and cultivation of land*" [**The Anarchist Reader**, p. 150]. The other capitalist monopolies were based on credit, tariffs and patents and all were reflected in (and supported by) the law.

Tucker believed that bankers' monopoly of the power to create credit and currency is the linchpin of capitalism. Although he thought that all forms of monopoly are detrimental to society, he maintained that the banking monopoly is the worst, since it is the root from which both the industrial-capitalist and landlordist monopolies grow and without which they would wither and die. For, if credit were not monopolised, its price (i.e. interest rates) would be much lower, which in turn would drastically lower the price of capital goods, land, and buildings -- expensive items that generally cannot be purchased without access to credit. The freedom to squat empty land and buildings would, in the absence of a state to protect titles, further contribute to the elimination of rent:

"Ground rent exists only because the State stands by to collect it and to protect land titles rooted in force or fraud. Otherwise land would be free to all, and no one could control more than he used." [quoted by James J. Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 210]

Following Proudhon, Tucker argued that if any group of people could legally form a "mutual bank" and issue credit based on any form of collateral they saw fit to accept, the price of credit would fall to the labour cost of the paperwork involved in issuing and keeping track of it. He claimed that banking statistics show this cost to be less than one percent of principal, and hence, that a one-time service fee which covers this cost and no more is the only **non-usurious** charge a bank can make for extending credit. This charge should not be called "interest," since, as it represented the labour-cost in providing, it is non-exploitative.

Tucker believed that under mutual banking, capitalists' ability to extract surplus value from

workers in return for the use of tools, machinery, etc. would be eliminated because workers would be able to obtain zero-interest credit and use it to buy their own instruments of production instead of "renting" them, as it were, from capitalists. Easy access to mutual credit would result in a huge increase in the purchase of capital goods, creating a high demand for labour, which in turn would greatly increase workers' bargaining power and thus raise their wages toward equivalence with the value their labour produces.

It's important to note that because of Tucker's proposal to increase the bargaining power of workers through access to mutual credit, his individualist anarchism is not only compatible with workers' control but would in fact **promote** it (as well as logically requiring it). For if access to mutual credit were to increase the bargaining power of workers to the extent that Tucker claimed it would, they would then be able to: (1) demand and get workplace democracy; and (2) pool their credit to buy and own companies collectively. This would eliminate the top-down structure of the firm and the ability of owners to pay themselves unfairly large salaries as well as reducing capitalist profits to zero by ensuring that workers received the full value of their labour. Tucker himself pointed this out when he argued that Proudhon (like himself) "*would individualise and associate*" workplaces by mutualism, which would "*place the means of production within the reach of all.*" [quoted by Martin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 228] Proudhon used the word "*associate*" to denote co-operative (i.e. directly democratic) workplaces (and given Proudhon's comments - quoted in section [G.2](#) - on capitalist firms we can dismiss any attempt to suggest that the term "*individualise*" indicates support for capitalist rather than artisan/peasant production, which is the classic example of individualised production).

Thus the logical consequence of Tucker's proposals would be a system equivalent in most important respects to the kind of system advocated by other left libertarians - a system without wage slavery (and so exploitation) and with "*the greatest amount of liberty compatible with equality of liberty.*" [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 131]

Tucker's ideal society was one of small entrepreneurs, farmers, artisans, independent contractors and co-operative associations based around a network of mutual banks. He looked to alternative institutions such as co-operative banks and firms, schools and trade unions, combined with civil disobedience in the form of strikes, general strikes, tax and rent strikes and boycotts to bring anarchism closer - "*strikes, whenever and wherever inaugurated, deserve encouragement from all the friends of labour. . . They show that people are beginning to know their rights, and knowing, dare to maintain them.*" [Tucker, **Liberty**, 15/4/1881] Echoing Bakunin's thoughts on the subject, Tucker maintained that strikes should be supported and encouraged because "*as an awakening agent, as an agitating force, the beneficent influence of a strike is immeasurable. . . with our present economic system almost every strike is just. For what is justice in production and distribution? That labour, which creates all, shall have **all.***" [Tucker, **Liberty**, #19, 1882]

Like the anarcho-syndicalists and many other social anarchists, Tucker considered Labour unions as a positive development, being a "*crude step in the direction of supplanting the State*" and involved a tendency "*for self-government on the part of the people, the logical outcome of which is ultimate revolt against those usurping political conspiracies*" and so "*a potent sign of emancipation.*" Indeed, he called the rise of the unions "*trades-union socialism,*" saw in it "*an intelligent and self-governing socialism*" and indicated that they "*promise the coming substitution of industrial socialism for usurping legislative mobism.*" [**The Individualist Anarchists**, pp. 283-284] Hence we see the co-operative nature of the voluntary organisations

supported by Tucker and a vision of socialism being based on self-governing associations of working people.

In this way working people would reform capitalism away by non-violent social protest combined with an increase in workers' bargaining power by alternative voluntary institutions and free credit. Exploitation would be eliminated and workers would gain economic liberty (i.e. the full value of their labour and workers' control). He firmly believed that the *"most perfect Socialism is possible only on the condition of the most perfect individualism."* [cited by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 390] In other words, Tucker *"remained a left rather than a right-wing libertarian."* [Peter Marshall, **Op. Cit.**, p. 391]

There are, of course, many differences between the anarchism of, say, Bakunin and Kropotkin and that of Tucker. Tucker's system, for example, does retain some features usually associated with capitalism, such as competition between firms in a free market. However, the fundamental anarchist objection to capitalism is not that it involves markets but that it involves private property and wage slavery. Tucker's system was intended to eliminate both, which is why he called himself a socialist. This fact is overlooked by "anarcho"-capitalists who, in seeking to make Tucker one of their "founding fathers," point to the fact that he spoke of the advantages of owning "property." But it is apparent that by "property" he was referring to simple "possession" of land, tools, etc. by independent artisans, farmers, and co-operating workers (he used the word property *"as denoting the labourer's individual possession of his product or his share of the joint product of himself and others."* [Tucker, **Instead of a Book**, p. 394]. For, since Tucker saw his system as eliminating the ability of capitalists to maintain exploitative monopolies over the means of production, it is therefore true **by definition** that he advocated the elimination of "private property" in the capitalist sense.

Therefore, as can be seen, his views are directly opposed to those of right libertarians like Murray Rothbard, who advocate "absolute" property rights which are protected by laws enforced either by private security forces or a "night watchman state." This clearly indicates that Rothbard's claim to have "modernised" Tucker's thought is **false** -- "ignored" or "changed" would be more appropriate.

Thus, Tucker is clearly a left libertarian rather than a forefather of right libertarianism. In this he comes close to what today would be called a market socialist, albeit a non-statist variety.

G.6 What are the ideas of Max Stirner?

To some extent, Stirner's work **The Ego and Its Own** is like a Rorschach test. Depending on the reader's psychology, he or she can interpret it in drastically different ways. Hence, some have used Stirner's ideas to defend capitalism, while others have used them to argue for anarcho-syndicalism. For example, many in the anarchist movement in Glasgow, Scotland, took Stirner's *"Union of Egoists"* literally as the basis for their anarcho-syndicalist organising. Similarly, we discover the noted anarchist historian Max Nettlau stating that *"[o]n reading Stirner, I maintain that he cannot be interpreted except in a socialist sense."* [**A Short History of Anarchism**, p. 55] In this section of the FAQ, we will indicate why, in our view, the latter, syndicalistic, interpretation of egoism is far more appropriate than the capitalistic one.

It should be noted, before continuing, that Stirner's work has had a bigger impact on individualist

anarchism than social anarchism. Ben Tucker, for example, considered himself an egoist after reading **The Ego and Its Own**. However, social anarchists have much to gain from understanding Stirner's ideas and applying what is useful in them. This section will indicate why.

So what is Stirner all about? Simply put, he is an Egoist, which means that he considers self-interest to be the root cause of an individual's every action, even when he or she is apparently doing "altruistic" actions. Thus: *"I am everything to myself and I do everything **on my account**."* [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 162]. Even love is an example of selfishness, *"because love makes me happy, I love because loving is natural to me, because it pleases me."* [**Ibid.**, p. 291] He urges others to follow him and *"take courage now to really make **yourselves** the central point and the main thing altogether."* As for other people, he sees them purely as a means for self-enjoyment, a self-enjoyment which is mutual: *"For me you are nothing but my food, even as I am fed upon and turned to use by you. We have only one relation to each other, that of **usableness**, of utility, of use."* [**Ibid.**, pp. 296-7]

For Stirner, all individuals are unique (*"My flesh is not their flesh, my mind is not their mind,"* **Ibid.**, p. 138) and should reject any attempts to restrict or deny their uniqueness. *"To be looked upon as a mere **part**, part of society, the individual cannot bear -- because he is **more**; his uniqueness puts from it this limited conception."* [**Ibid.**, p. 265] Individuals, in order to maximise their uniqueness, must become aware of the **real** reasons for their actions. In other words they must become conscious, not unconscious, egoists. An unconscious, or involuntary, egoist is one *"who is always looking after his own and yet does not count himself as the highest being, who serves only himself and at the same time always thinks he is serving a higher being, who knows nothing higher than himself and yet is infatuated about something higher."* [**Ibid.**, p. 36] In contrast, egoists are aware that they act purely out of self-interest, and if they support a "higher being," it is not because it is a noble thought but because it will benefit themselves.

Stirner himself, however, has no truck with "higher beings." Indeed, with the aim of concerning himself purely with his own interests, he attacks all "higher beings," regarding them as a variety of what he calls *"spooks,"* or ideas to which individuals sacrifice themselves and by which they are dominated. Among the *"spooks"* Stirner attacks are such notable aspects of capitalist life as private property, the division of labour, the state, religion, and society itself. We will discuss Stirner's critique of capitalism before moving onto his vision of an egoist society (and how it relates to social anarchism).

For the egoist, private property is a spook which *"lives by the grace of **law**. . . [and] becomes 'mine' only by effect of the law"* [**Ibid.**, p. 251]. In other words, private property exists purely *"through the **protection of the State**, through the State's grace."* [**Ibid.**, p. 114] Recognising its need for state protection, Stirner is also aware that *"[i]t need not make any difference to the 'good citizens' who protects them and their principles, whether an absolute King or a constitutional one, a republic, if only they are protected. And what is their principle, whose protector they always 'love'?. . . interesting-bearing possession. . .labouring capital. . ."* [**Ibid.**, pp. 113-114] As can be seen from capitalist support for fascism this century, Stirner was correct - - as long as a regime supports capitalist interests, the 'good citizens' (including many on the so-called "libertarian" right) will support it.

Stirner sees that not only does private property require state protection, it also leads to exploitation and oppression. As he points out, private property's *"principle"* is *"labour certainly,*

yet little or none at all of one's own, but labour of capital and of the subject labourers." [Ibid., pp. 113-114] In addition, Stirner attacks the division of labour resulting from private property for its deadening effects on the ego and individuality of the worker (see section D.10, "[How does capitalism affect technology?](#)"). However, it is the exploitation of labour which is the basis of the state, for the state *"rests on the slavery of labour. If labour becomes free, the State is lost."* [Ibid., p.116] Without surplus value to feed off, a state could not exist.

For Stirner, the state is the greatest threat to his individuality: *"I am free in no State."* [Ibid., p.195] This is because the state claims to be sovereign over a given area, while, for Stirner, only the ego can be sovereign over itself and that which it uses (its *"property"*): *"I am my own only when I am master of myself."* [Ibid., p.169] Therefore Stirner urges insurrection against all forms of authority and **dis**-respect for property. For *"[i]f man reaches the point of losing respect for property, everyone will have property, as all slaves become free men as soon as they no longer respect the master as master"* [Ibid., p. 258]. And in order for labour to become free, all must have *"property."* *"The poor become free and proprietors only when they rise."* [Ibid., p. 260]

Stirner recognises the importance of self-liberation and the way that authority often exists purely through its acceptance by the governed. As he argues, *". . . no thing is sacred of itself, but my declaring it sacred, by my declaration, my judgement, my bending the knee; in short, by my conscience."* [Ibid. p. 72] It is from this worship of what society deems *"sacred"* that individuals must liberate themselves in order to discover their true selves. And, significantly, part of this process of liberation involves the destruction of **hierarchy**. For Stirner, *"Hierarchy is domination of thoughts, domination of mind!,"* and this means that we are *"kept down by those who are supported by thoughts"* [Ibid., p. 74], i.e. by our own willingness to not question authority and the sources of that authority, such as private property and the state.

For those, like modern-day "libertarian" capitalists, who regard "profit" as the key to "selfishness," Stirner has nothing but contempt. Because "greed" is just one part of the ego, and to spend one's life pursuing only that part is to deny all other parts. Stirner called such pursuit *"self-sacrificing,"* or a *"one-sided, unopened, narrow egoism,"* which leads to the ego being possessed by one aspect of itself. For *"he who ventures everything else for one thing, one object, one will, one passion. . . is ruled by a passion to which he brings the rest as sacrifices."* [Ibid., p. 76] For the true egoist, capitalists are *"self-sacrificing"* in this sense, because they are driven only by profit. In the end, their behaviour is just another form of self-denial, as the worship of money leads them to slight other aspects of themselves such as empathy and critical thought (the bank balance becomes the rule book). A society based on such "egoism" ends up undermining the egos which inhabit it, deadening one's own and other people's individuality and so reducing the vast potential "utility" of others to oneself. In addition, the drive for profit is not even based on self-interest, it is forced upon the individual by the workings of the market (an alien authority) and results in labour *"claim[ing] all our time and toil,"* leaving no time for the individual *"to take comfort in himself as the unique."* [Ibid., pp. 268-9]

Stirner also turns his analysis to "socialism" and "communism," and his critique is as powerful as the one he directs against capitalism. This attack, for some, gives his work an appearance of being pro-capitalist, while, as indicated above, it is not. Stirner did attack socialism, but he (rightly) attacked **state** socialism, not libertarian socialism, which did not really exist at that time (the only well known anarchist work at the time was Proudhon's **What is Property?**, published in 1840 and this work obviously could not fully reflect the developments within anarchism that

were to come). He also indicated why moralistic (or altruistic) socialism is doomed to failure, and laid the foundations of the theory that socialism will work only on the basis of egoism (communist-egoism, as it is sometimes called). Stirner correctly pointed out that much of what is called socialism was nothing but warmed up liberalism, and as such ignores the individual: "*Whom does the liberal look upon as his equal? Man! . . . , In other words, he sees in you, not you, but the species.*" [Ibid., p. 123] A socialism that ignores the individual consigns itself to being state capitalism, nothing more. "Socialists" of this school forget that "society" is made up of individuals and that it is individuals who work, think, love, play and enjoy themselves. Thus: "[t]hat society is no ego at all, which could give, bestow, or grant, but an instrument or means, from which we may derive benefit. . . of this the socialists do not think, because they -- as liberals -- are imprisoned in the religious principle and zealously aspire after -- a sacred society, such as the State was hitherto." [Ibid., p. 123]

So how could Stirner's egoist vision fit with social anarchist ideas? The key to understanding the connection lies in Stirner's idea of the "*union of egoists*," his proposed alternative mode of organising modern society. Stirner believes that as more and more people become egoists, conflict in society will decrease as each individual recognises the uniqueness of others, thus ensuring a suitable environment within which they can co-operate (or find "*truces*" in the "*war of all against all*"). These "*truces*" Stirner termed "*Unions of Egoists*." They are the means by which egoists could, firstly, "*annihilate*" the state, and secondly, destroy its creature, private property, since they would "*multiply the individual's means and secure his assailed property.*" [Ibid., p. 258]

The unions Stirner desires would be based on free agreement, being spontaneous and voluntary associations drawn together out of the mutual interests of those involved, who would "*care best for their welfare if they unite with others.*" [Ibid., p. 309] The unions, unlike the state, exist to ensure what Stirner calls "*intercourse*," or "*union*" between individuals. To better understand the nature of these associations, which will replace the state, Stirner lists the relationships between friends, lovers, and children at play as examples (see **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 25). These illustrate the kinds of relationships that maximise an individual's self-enjoyment, pleasure, freedom, and individuality, as well as ensuring that those involved sacrifice nothing while belonging to them. Such associations are based on mutuality and a free and spontaneous co-operation between equals. As Stirner puts it, "*intercourse is mutuality, it is the action, the commercium, of individuals*" [Ibid., p. 218], and its aim is "*pleasure*" and "*self-enjoyment*."

In order to ensure that those involved do not sacrifice any of their uniqueness and freedom, the contracting parties have to have roughly the same bargaining power and the association created must be based on self-management (i.e. equality of power). Otherwise, we can assume that some of the egoists involved will stop being egoists and will allow themselves to be dominated by another, which is unlikely. As Stirner himself argued:

"But is an association, wherein most members allow themselves to be lulled as regards their most natural and most obvious interests, actually an Egoist's association? Can they really be 'Egoists' who have banded together when one is a slave or a serf of the other? . . .

Societies wherein the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of the rest, where, say, some may satisfy their need for rest thanks to the fact that the rest must work to the point

of exhaustion, and can lead a life of ease because others live in misery and perish of hunger . . . [such a society or association] is more of a religious society [than a real Egoist's association]" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 24]

Therefore, egoism's revolt against all hierarchies that restrict the ego logically leads to the end of authoritarian social relationships, particularly those associated with private property and the state. Given that capitalism is marked by extensive differences in bargaining power outside its "associations" (i.e. firms) and power within these "associations" (i.e. the worker/boss hierarchy), from an egoist point of view it is in the self-interest of those subjected to such relationships to get rid of them and replace them with unions based on mutuality, free association, and self-management.

Given the holistic and egalitarian nature of the union of egoists, it can be seen that it shares little with the so-called free agreements of capitalism (in particular wage labour). The hierarchical structure of capitalist firms hardly produces associations in which the individual's experiences can be compared to those involved in friendship or play, nor do they involve equality. An essential aspect of the "*union of egoists*" for Stirner was such groups should be "owned" by their members, not the members by the group. That points to a **libertarian** form of organisation within these "unions" (i.e. one based on equality and participation), **not** a hierarchical one. If you have no say in how a group functions (as in wage slavery, where workers have the "option" of "love it or leave it") then you can hardly be said to own it, can you? Indeed, Stirner argues, "*[a]s a unique individual you assert yourself alone in association, because the association does not own you, because you are the one who owns it*" and "*I have no wish to become a slave to my maxims, but would rather subject them to my ongoing criticism.*" [**Op.Cit.**, p. 17] Thus, Stirner's "*union of egoists*" cannot be compared to the employer-employee contract as the employees cannot be said to "own" the organisation resulting from the contract (nor do they own themselves during work time, having sold their time/liberty to the boss in return for wages -- see [section B.4](#)). Only within a participatory association can "*assert*" yourself freely and subject your maxims, and association, to your "*ongoing criticism*" -- in capitalist contracts you can do both only with your bosses' permission.

And by the same token, capitalist contracts do not involve "leaving each other alone" (a la "anarcho"-capitalism). No boss will "leave alone" the workers in his factory, nor will a landowner "leave alone" a squatter on land he owns but does not use. Stirner rejects the narrow concept of "property" as private property and recognises the **social** nature of "property," whose use often affects far more people than those who claim to "own" it: "*I do not step shyly back from your property, but look upon it always as **my** property, in which I 'respect' nothing. Pray do the like with what you call my property!*" [**The Ego and Its Own**, p. 248]. This view logically leads to the idea of both workers' self-management and grassroots community control (as will be discussed more fully in [section I](#)) as those affected by an activity will take a direct interest in it and not let "respect" for "private" property allow them to be oppressed by others.

Moreover, egoism (self-interest) must lead to self-management and mutual aid (solidarity), for by coming to agreements based on mutual respect and social equality, we ensure non-hierarchical relationships. If I dominate someone, then in all likelihood I will be dominated in turn. By removing hierarchy and domination, the ego is free to experience and utilise the full potential of others. As Kropotkin argued in **Mutual Aid**, individual freedom and social co-operation are not only compatible but, when united, create the most productive conditions for all

individuals within society.

Therefore Stirner's union of egoists has strong connections with social anarchism's desire for a society based on freely federated individuals, co-operating as equals. His central idea of "property" -- that which is used by the ego -- is an important concept for social anarchism, because it stresses that hierarchy develops when we let ideas and organisations own us rather than vice versa. A participatory anarchist community will be made up of individuals who must ensure that it remains their "property" and be under their control; hence the importance of decentralised, confederal organisations which ensure that control. A free society must be organised in such a way to ensure the free and full development of individuality and maximise the pleasure to be gained from individual interaction and activity. Lastly, Stirner indicates that mutual aid and equality are based not upon an abstract morality but upon self-interest, both for defence against hierarchy and for the pleasure of co-operative intercourse between unique individuals.

Stirner demonstrates brilliantly how abstractions and fixed ideas ("*spooks*") influence the very way we think, see ourselves, and act. He shows how hierarchy has its roots within our own minds, in how we view the world. He offers a powerful defence of individuality in an authoritarian and alienated world, and places subjectivity at the centre of any revolutionary project, where it belongs. Finally, he reminds us that a free society must exist in the interests of all, and must be based upon the self-fulfilment, liberation and enjoyment of the individual.

G.7 Lysander Spooner: right-Libertarian or libertarian socialist?

Murray Rothbard and others on the "libertarian" right have argued that Lysander Spooner is another individualist anarchist whose ideas support "anarcho"-capitalism's claim to be part of the anarchist tradition. As will be shown below, however, this claim is untrue, since it is clear that Spooner was a left libertarian who was firmly opposed to capitalism.

That Spooner was against capitalism can be seen in his opposition to wage labour, which he wished to eliminate by turning capital over to those who work it. Like Benjamin Tucker, he wanted to create a society of associated producers -- self-employed farmers, artisans and co-operating workers -- rather than wage-slaves and capitalists. For example, in his **Letter to Cleveland** Spooner writes:

"All the great establishments, of every kind, now in the hands of a few proprietors, but employing a great number of wage labourers, would be broken up; for few or no persons, who could hire capital and do business for themselves would consent to labour for wages for another." [quoted by Eunice Minette Schuster, **Native American Anarchism**, p. 148]

This preference for a system based on simple commodity production in which capitalists and wage slaves are replaced by self-employed and co-operating workers puts Spooner squarely in the **anti-capitalist** camp with other individualist anarchists, like Tucker. And, we may add, the rough egalitarianism he expected to result from his system indicates the left-libertarian nature of his ideas, turning the present "*wheel of fortune*" into "*extended surface, varied somewhat by inequalities, but still exhibiting a general level, affording a safe position for all, and creating no necessity, for either force or fraud, on the part of anyone, to enable him to secure his standing.*" [Spooner quoted by Peter Marshall in **Demanding the Impossible**, pp. 388-9]

Right "libertarians" have perhaps mistaken Spooner for a capitalist because of his claim that a "free market in credit" would lead to low interest on loans or his "*foolish*" (to use Tucker's expression) ideas on intellectual property. But, as noted, markets are not the defining feature of capitalism. There were markets long before capitalism existed. So the fact that Spooner retained the concept of markets does not necessarily make him a capitalist. In fact, far from seeing his "free market in credit" in capitalist terms, he believed (again like Tucker) that competition between mutual banks would make credit cheap and easily available, and that this would lead to the **elimination** of capitalism! In this respect, both Spooner and Tucker follow Proudhon, who maintained that "*reduction of interest rates to vanishing point is itself a revolutionary act, because it is destructive of capitalism*" [cited in Edward Hyams, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Revolutionary Life, Mind and Works**, Taplinger, 1979]. Whether this belief is correct is, of course, another question; we have suggested that it is not, and that capitalism cannot be "reformed away" by mutual banking, particularly by competitive mutual banking.

Further evidence of Spooner's anti-capitalism can be found his book **Poverty: Its Illegal Causes and Legal Cure**, where he notes that under capitalism the labourer does not receive "*all the fruits of his own labour*" because the capitalist lives off of workers' "*honest industry*." Thus: ". . . almost all fortunes are made out of the capital and labour of other men than those who realise them. Indeed, except by his sponging capital and labour from others." [quoted by Martin J. James, **Men Against the State**, p. 173f] Spooner's statement that capitalists deny workers "*all the fruits*" (i.e. the full value) of their labour presupposes the labour theory of value, which is the basis of the **socialist** demonstration that capitalism is exploitative (see [section C](#)).

This interpretation of Spooner's social and economic views is supported by various studies in which his ideas are analysed. As these works also give an idea of Spooner's ideal world, they are worth quoting :

"Spooner envisioned a society of pre-industrial times in which small property owners gathered together voluntarily and were assured by their mutual honesty of full payment of their labour." [Corinne Jackson, **The Black Flag of Anarchy**, p. 87]

Spooner considered that "*it was necessary that every man be his own employer or work for himself in a direct way, since working for another resulted in a portion being diverted to the employer. To be one's own employer, it was necessary for one to have access to one's own capital.*" [James J. Martin, **Men Against the State**, p. 172]

Spooner "*recommends that every man should be his own employer, and he depicts an ideal society of independent farmers and entrepreneurs who have access to easy credit. If every person received the fruits of his own labour, the just and equal distribution of wealth would result.*" [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 389]

"Spooner would destroy the factory system, wage labour [and the business cycle]. . . by making every individual a small capitalist [sic!], an independent producer." [Eunice Minette Schuster, **Native American Anarchism**, p. 151]

It is quite apparent, then, that Spooner was against wage labour, and therefore was no capitalist. Hence we must agree with Marshall, who classifies Spooner as a **left** libertarian with ideas very close to Proudhon's mutualism. Whether such ideas are relevant now, given the vast amount of capital needed to start companies in established sectors of the economy, is another question. As

noted above, similar doubts may be raised about Spooner's claims about the virtues of a free market in credit. But one thing is clear: Spooner was opposed to the way America was developing in the mid 1800's. He viewed the rise of capitalism with disgust and suggested a way for non-exploitative and non-oppressive economic relationships to become the norm again in US society, a way based on eliminating the root cause of capitalism -- wage-labour -- through a system of easy credit, which he believed would enable artisans and peasants to obtain their own means of production. This is confirmed by an analysis of his famous works **Natural Law and No Treason**.

Spooner's support of "Natural Law" has also been taken as "evidence" that Spooner was a proto-right-libertarian (which ignores the fact that support for "Natural Law" is not limited to right libertarians). Of course, most anarchists do not find theories of "natural law," be they those of right-Libertarians, fascists or whatever, to be particularly compelling. Certainly the ideas of "Natural Law" and "Natural Rights," as existing independently of human beings in the sense of the ideal Platonic Forms, are difficult for anarchists to accept per se, because such ideas are inherently authoritarian (as highlighted in section [F.7](#)). Most anarchists would agree with Tucker when he called such concepts "*religious*."

Spooner, unfortunately, did subscribe to the cult of "*immutable and universal*" Natural Laws and is so subject to all the problems we highlight in section [F.7](#). If we look at his "defence" of Natural Law we can see how weak (and indeed silly) it is. Replacing the word "*rights*" with the word "*clothes*" in the following passage shows the inherent weakness of his argument:

"if there be no such principle as justice, or natural law, then every human being came into the world utterly destitute of rights; and coming so into the world destitute of rights, he must forever remain so. For if no one brings any rights with him into the world, clearly no one can ever have any rights of his own, or give any to another. And the consequence would be that mankind could never have any rights; and for them to talk of any such things as their rights, would be to talk of things that had, never will, and never can have any existence." [**Natural Law**]

And, we add, unlike the "Natural Laws" of "*gravitation, . . . of light, the principles of mathematics*" to which Spooner compares them, he is perfectly aware that his "Natural Law" can be "*trampled upon*" by other humans. However, unlike gravity (which does not need enforcing) it's obvious that Spooner's "Natural Law" has to be enforced by human beings as it is within human nature to steal. In other words, it is a moral code, **not** a "Natural Law" like gravity.

Interestingly, Spooner did come close to a **rational**, non-religious source for rights when he points out that "*Men living in contact with each other, and having intercourse together, cannot avoid learning natural law.*" [**Ibid.**] This indicates the **social** nature of rights, of our sense of right and wrong, and so rights can exist without believing in religious concepts as "Natural Law."

In addition, we can say that his support for juries indicates an unconscious recognition of the **social** nature (and so evolution) of any concepts of human rights. In other words, by arguing strongly for juries to judge human conflict, he implicitly recognises that the concepts of right and wrong in society are **not** indelibly inscribed in law tomes as the "true law," but instead change and develop as society does (as reflected in the decisions of the juries). In addition, he states that "*Honesty, justice, natural law, is usually a very plain and simple matter, . . . made up of a few*

simple elementary principles, of the truth and justice of which every ordinary mind has an almost intuitive perception," thus indicating that what is right and wrong exists in "ordinary people" and not in "prosperous judges" or any other small group claiming to speak on behalf of "truth."

As can be seen, Spooner's account of how "natural law" will be administered is radically different from, say, Murray Rothbard's, and indicates a strong egalitarian context foreign to right-libertarianism.

As far as "anarcho"-capitalism goes, one wonders how Spooner would regard the "anarcho"-capitalist "protection firm," given his comment in **No Treason** that "*[a]ny number of scoundrels, having money enough to start with, can establish themselves as a 'government'; because, with money, they can hire soldiers, and with soldiers extort more money; and also compel general obedience to their will.*" Compare this to Spooner's description of his voluntary justice associations:

"it is evidently desirable that men should associate, so far as they freely and voluntarily can do so, for the maintenance of justice among themselves, and for mutual protection against other wrong-doers. It is also in the highest degree desirable that they should agree upon some plan or system of judicial proceedings" [**Natural Law**]

At first glance, one may be tempted to interpret Spooner's justice organisations as a subscription to "anarcho"-capitalist style protection firms. A more careful reading suggests that Spooner's actual conception is more based on the concept of mutual aid, whereby people provide such services for themselves and for others rather than buying them on a fee-per-service basis. A very different concept.

These comments are particularly important when we consider Spooner's criticisms of finance capitalists, like the Rothschilds. Here he departs even more strikingly from all "Libertarian" positions. For he believes that sheer wealth has intrinsic power, even to the extent of allowing the wealthy to coerce the government into behaving at their behest. For Spooner, governments are *"the merest hangers on, the servile, obsequious, fawning dependents and tools of these blood-money loan-mongers, on whom they rely for the means to carry on their crimes. These loan-mongers, like the Rothschilds, [can]. . . unmake them [governments]. . . the moment they refuse to commit any crime"* that finance capital requires of them. Indeed, Spooner considers *"these soulless blood-money loan-mongers"* as *"the real rulers,"* not the government (who are their agents). [**No Treason**].

If one grants that highly concentrated wealth has intrinsic power and may be used in such a Machiavellian manner as Spooner claims, then simple opposition to the state is not sufficient. Logically, any political theory claiming to promote liberty should also seek to limit or abolish the institutions that facilitate large concentrations of wealth. As shown above, Spooner regarded wage labour under capitalism as one of these institutions, because without it *"large fortunes could rarely be made at all by one individual."* Hence for Spooner, as for social anarchists, to be anti-statist also necessitates being anti-capitalist.

This can be clearly seen for his analysis of history, where he states: *"Why is it that [Natural Law] has not, ages ago, been established throughout the world as the one only law that any man, or all men, could rightfully be compelled to obey?"* Spooner's answer is given in his interpretation of how the State evolved, where he postulates that the State was formed through the initial

ascendancy of a land-holding, slave-holding class by military conquest and oppressive enslavement of a subsistence-farming peasantry.

"These tyrants, living solely on plunder, and on the labour of their slaves, and applying all their energies to the seizure of still more plunder, and the enslavement of still other defenceless persons; increasing, too, their numbers, perfecting their organisations, and multiplying their weapons of war, they extend their conquests until, in order to hold what they have already got, it becomes necessary for them to act systematically, and coöperage with each other in holding their slaves in subjection.

"But all this they can do only by establishing what they call a government, and making what they call laws. ...

*"Thus substantially all the legislation of the world has had its origin in the desires of one class of persons to plunder and enslave others, **and hold them as property.**" [Natural Law]*

Nothing too provocative here; simply Spooner's view of government as a tool of the wealth-holding, slave-owning class. What is more interesting is Spooner's view of the subsequent development of (post-slavery) socio-economic systems. Spooner writes:

*"In process of time, the robber, or slaveholding, class -- who had seized all the lands, and held all the means of creating wealth -- began to discover that the easiest mode of managing their slaves, and making them profitable, was **not** for each slaveholder to hold his specified number of slaves, as he had done before, and as he would hold so many cattle, but to give them so much liberty as would throw upon themselves (the slaves) the responsibility of their own subsistence, and yet compel them to sell their labour to the land-holding class -- their former owners -- for just what the latter might choose to give them." [Ibid.]*

Here Spooner echoes the standard anarchist critique of capitalism. Note that he is no longer talking about slavery but rather about economic relations between a wealth-holding class and a 'freed' class of workers/labourers/tenant farmers. Clearly he does **not** view this relation --wage labour -- as a voluntary association, because the former slaves have little option but to be employed by members of the wealth-owning class.

Spooner points out that by monopolising the means of wealth creation while at the same time requiring the newly 'liberated' slaves to provide for themselves, the robber class thus continues to receive the benefits of the labour of the former slaves while accepting none of the responsibility for their welfare.

Spooner continues:

"Of course, these liberated slaves, as some have erroneously called them, having no lands, or other property, and no means of obtaining an independent subsistence, had no alternative -- to save themselves from starvation -- but to sell their labour to the landholders, in exchange only for the coarsest necessities of life; not always for so much even as that." [Ibid.]

Thus while technically "free," the liberated working/labouring class lack the ability to provide

for their own needs and hence remain dependent on the wealth-owning class. This echoes not right-libertarian analysis of capitalism, but left-libertarian and other socialist viewpoints.

"These liberated slaves, as they were called, were now scarcely less slaves than they were before. Their means of subsistence were perhaps even more precarious than when each had his own owner, who had an interest to preserve his life." [Ibid.]

This is an interesting comment. Spooner suggests that the liberated slave class were perhaps **better off as slaves**. Most anarchists would not go so far, although we would agree that employees are subject to the power of those who employ them and so are no long self-governing individuals -- in other words, that capitalist social relationships deny self-ownership and freedom.

"They were liable, at the caprice or interest of the landholders, to be thrown out of home, employment, and the opportunity of even earning a subsistence by their labour." [Ibid.]

Lest the reader doubt that Spooner is actually discussing employment here (and not slavery), he explicitly includes being made unemployed as an example of the arbitrary nature of wage labour.

"They were, therefore, in large numbers, driven to the necessity of begging, stealing, or starving; and became, of course, dangerous to the property and quiet of their late masters." [Ibid.]

And thus:

*"The consequence was, that these late owners found it necessary, for their own safety and the safety of their property, to organise themselves more perfectly as a government **and make laws for keeping these dangerous people in subjection**. . . ." [Ibid.]*

In other words, the robber class creates legislation which will protect its power, namely its property, against the dispossessed. Hence we see the creation of "law code" by the wealthy which serves to protect their interests while effectively making attempts to change the status quo illegal. This process is in effect similar to the right-libertarian concept of a "general libertarian law code" which exercises a monopoly over a given area and which exists to defend the "rights" of property against "initiation of force," i.e. attempts to change the system into a new one.

Spooner goes on:

"The purpose and effect of these laws have been to maintain, in the hands of robber, or slave holding class, a monopoly of all lands, and, as far as possible, of all other means of creating wealth; and thus to keep the great body of labourers in such a state of poverty and dependence, as would compel them to sell their labour to their tyrants for the lowest prices at which life could be sustained." [Ibid.]

Thus Spooner identifies the underlying basis for legislation (as well as the source of much misery, exploitation and oppression throughout history) as the result of the monopolisation of the means of wealth creation by an elite class. We doubt he would have considered that calling these laws "libertarian" would in any change their oppressive and class-based nature.

"Thus the whole business of legislation, which has now grown to such gigantic

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proportions, had its origin in the conspiracies, which have always existed among the few, for the purpose of holding the many in subjection, and extorting from them their labour, and all the profits of their labour." [Ibid.]

Characterising employment as extortion may seem rather extreme, but it makes sense given the exploitative nature of profit under capitalism, as left libertarians have long recognised (see [section C](#)).

In summary, as can be seen, there is a great deal of commonality between Spooner's ideas and those of social anarchists. Spooner perceives the same sources of exploitation and oppression inherent in monopolistic control of the means of production by a wealth-owning class as do social anarchists. His solutions may differ, but he observes exactly the same problems. In other words, Spooner is a left libertarian, and his individualist anarchism is just as anti-capitalist as the ideas of, say, Bakunin, Kropotkin or Chomsky.

Spooner was no more a capitalist than Rothbard was an anarchist.