

EDITORIAL

“THREE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

HE who has ever tried to clear up a wild blackberry patch knows it would be unwise for him to begin by applying the pruning shears to the root. His hands and face would be pricked and scratched from all sides, due to the tangled and luxuriant growth of the shoots. His course is to clip off the most conspicuous tips, and thus clear his way by little and little till the bush can safely be tackled at the root.

The “Three Fundamental Principles of Government,” published elsewhere,¹ and here reviewed upon the request of the New Haven correspondent who sent the article, is of the nature of a patch of Anarchistically tangled and luxuriantly growing wild blackberry. It will have to be handled by the same method.

The conception of a governmental system that “leaves each of its members to do precisely that which he or she deems proper to do, in view of the regulations (mark that!) which he or she knows to have been adopted” and to do so “under all circumstances, in all conditions and in whatever locations”—such conception is irrational, it is self contradictory. If a member may act “under all circumstances” “as he or she pleases,” then there are no “regulations” to be observed; if, on the other hand, there are “regulations” to which a member submits, then it would follow that he or she might not be doing “precisely that which he or she deems proper to do,” and this conclusion is all the more unavoidable in view of that subsequent and equally sweeping passage to the effect that “the instant a best government is constructed, the next instant every person should strive to outgrow it.” The instant the Ego of a he or she should deem she or he had outgrown the existing government

¹ [See Appendix.]

(of course, “regulations”), that instant submission to such “regulations” would do violence to the “principle” according to which he or she is to do “precisely that which he or she deems proper to do,” “under all circumstances, in all conditions, and in whatever locations.” Finally, if the word “proper” in the passage “that which he or she deems proper to do,” is a sort of saving term, to be construed to mean that he or she would not “deem proper” to act contrary to the “regulations” until these are changed, then the sentences, now held between the blades of the pruning shears, would be simply a jumble of and a juggling with words.

Another rank and thorny shoot is the “fixed principle,” without which “a wise, harmonious, complete system can not be constructed”—the “elemental principle” that “all things are male and female.”

In the first place, sweepingly expressed as the view is in the text—“All Nature exhibits the phenomenon,—extending to the smallest atom, and to all the fluids—namely, that all things are male and female”—the statement is untrue. All “things” are not divided into sexes, not even all animate “things.” Among these there are in lower life some “things” that are hermaphrodite, and others altogether sexless.

In the second place, even if by “things” is meant the higher animals—that is no “principle,” elemental, or otherwise. It is a material fact.

In the third place the material fact—vital tho’ it be in physiology, or in matters concerning the perpetuation of the race, is foreign to the domain of “government.” It is so, for the reason that the elements that go into the framing of government are the interdependence of the members of society in the production (including, of course, the distribution) of the necessaries and the luxuries of life. In this respect man is dependent upon man, and woman upon woman, and both upon each other. Production and Distribution know not Sex. The injection of the Sex Question into matters governmental is sociologically unscientific. See address on *Woman’s Suffrage*.

A third wild shoot is the sweeping assertion that each person has “a perfect right to do as he or she pleases.”

Rights that are unenforcible are matters to amuse children, or pipe-dreams to entertain idle minds. The right to do as one pleases depends upon the material

ability to do so. The time never was when man enjoyed any such “freedom.” Unless the day should arrive when the Individual shall be in such perfect control of the secrets of Nature that, with the mere exercise of will-power concentrated upon a wish, forthwith whatever necessary or luxury of life, including transportation and communication, and also including Haggard Rider’s “She”-like electric sparks to annihilate aggressors, shall be at his individual disposal—until that day arrive the Individual can not escape dependence upon other Individuals; consequently, is compelled to curb his wishes, and adapt his conduct to the “regulations” enacted by the collectivity.

There is still a fourth straggling shoot that should be clipped. It is a shoot that branches off in all directions on the wild blackberry patch of the “Three Fundamental Principles”—the talk about “principles” as “fundamental” in “government..”

The conception from which such language flows is a purely Anarchistic conception, and one at that, that pointedly points to the kinship of Bourgeois and Anarch philosophy—the heels-over-head philosophy that imagines Ideas precede Material Facts, and which, as a consequence of so false a principle, squeezes Facts or stretches them to suit Theory, instead of conforming Theory to Facts.

Governments are not established upon “principles.” They are established upon material facts. These material facts reflect certain principles which shallow thinkers consider as “fundamental,” seeing they know not that the fundamentals are the material facts upon which the principles stand. Hence such people, who think they think, and who proceed from the notion that principles are fundamentals, are ever seen trying to substitute “undesirable” principles with “desirable” ones, regardless of all material basis,—and are ever in the air.

Enough straggling shoots have now been clipped to handle the main stock and tear it up by the root.

The main stock appears in the last of the three questions. It should not escape the reader that, whereas the writer of the “Three Fundamental Principles” first refers to government as the skin of some reptiles, which is cast off periodically when worn out; consequently, that, whereas, the writer of the article’s first references to government are in line with the Socialist position, nevertheless and, presto,

government, as used in that last question suddenly appears in a new aspect. Whereas, just before, each succeeding specific government was admitted to be necessary as the reptile’s skin, now it is no longer any specific government that is to be outgrown in favor of a better, but government itself is to be cast off—Anarchy pure and simple.

As repeatedly stated, and as can not be stated too often:—

The trend of society is towards such an increase of the productivity of labor as to cause labor to yield an abundance without toil, and thus rescue the race from the brute state of having to devote its life to grubbing for existence;

Second. Such productivity is impossible without co-operation on a large scale;

Third. Mass co-operation requires organization;

Fourth. He who says “organization” must say “government.” No government, no mass organization; no mass organization, no mass co-operation; no mass co-operation, no plentifulness of production.

Government is no temporary arrangement. Forms of government may and must change. The Socialist government, that is, the Central Directing Administrative powers of the Industrial Commonwealth, is a permanent necessity.

ARTICLE

THREE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT.

[The below article is sent by a New Haven, Conn., correspondent, who notifies us he is not its author, and asks, "What would be the objections, if any, to the establishment of these principles under Socialism?" The article is reviewed editorially in this issue.]

ALL Nature exhibits this phenomenon,—extending to the smallest atom, and to all the fluids,—namely, that all things are male and female. Whoever overlooks this elementary principle, is to that extent disqualified for constructing a government. Differently organized though the sexes are, in some respects, yet in a true sense the two constitute man. Each possesses certain qualifications, which qualifications, when harmoniously combined, form one complete being. This, in laying the foundations of a government, must be recognized as a fixed principle. Without it, a wise, harmonious, complete system can not be constructed.

2. Each person is a distinct individual, a sovereign, having a perfect right to do as he or she pleases, in respect to his or her person, his or her property, to follow his or her pursuits, to seek his or her happiness in his or her own individual way.

Each person should act on his or her own individual responsibility. Persons may give counsel—they may express their opinions with the greatest freedom relative to the opinions or acts of others; but there should be none of that interference which says, "You must follow me, without regard to your individual preferences, reason, or judgment." In this way, and only in this way, can the conscience be free, can the individual pursue his or her own happiness. A government, founded on this principle, can not therefore, frame a penal code. It leaves each of its members to do precisely that which he or she deems proper to do, in view of the regulations (mark that!) which he or she knows to have been adopted.

Thus is instituted, in harmony with the highest individual freedom, a voluntary government, such as the individuals themselves choose from time to time to construct, precisely as a person manufactures or purchases a pair of shoes for his own feet. He is at liberty to put his feet into the shoes and wear them, if they meet his wants; or if they pinch his toes, he has a perfect right to withdraw his feet, and no person may compel him to do otherwise.

3. A government must be founded with a clear comprehension of the following points, namely: That it is a temporary organization; that, being temporary, as man progresses in

the acquirement of knowledge, in the unfolding of wisdom, the institutions of to-day are to be outgrown,—to become old, infirm, dilapidated, superannuated, useless. As certain reptiles cast off, from time to time, their temporary coverings, so the best government that can now be constructed, must in time be repudiated, to give place to a higher and yet more perfect system. The instant a best government is constructed, the next instant every person should strive to outgrow it. It is but a temporary scaffolding by which the individual may pass on to a more perfect condition.

One of the grandest mistakes which man makes, governmentally speaking, is in supposing that a form of government is to be perpetual, and is not to be outgrown. One might as well say that a pair of shoes which he wears to-day must last forever; or, that the edifice of to-day must remain without improvement, in either exterior or interior, as the true pattern for all ages. A government is but a house into which persons enter for temporary habitation. The moment they are able to form a better structure, they are justified in so doing.

Therefore, in view of the above, I ask,

1st. Do you understand that it requires two persons, male and female, to constitute a whole man?

2nd. Do you understand that each man and each woman, if you please, has a perfect right under all circumstances, in all conditions, and in whatever locations, to do as he or she pleases?

3rd. Do you allow that government is but a temporary arrangement, to be outgrown with greatest possible speed?

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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slpns@slp.org