



The English Individualists As They Appear In *Liberty*



By Carl Watner

The leading English individualists as they appear in Benjamin R. Tucker's journal, *Liberty*, are Auberon Herbert, Wordsworth Donisthorpe, Joseph Hiam Levy, Joseph Greevz Fisher, John Badcock, Jr., Albert Tarn, and Henry Seymour. Ranked approximately according to their contributions and involvement in *Liberty*, this group also includes M.D. O'Brien, J.M. Armsden, W.C. Crofts, A.E. Porter and J.C. Spence.¹ *Liberty*, being an international clearinghouse for libertarian ideas during the almost three decades of its existence (1881-1908), reported on and editorialized about the ideology and politics of the English individualist movement. The purpose of this paper is to bring to light some of the little known history and ideas of the movement, based on articles in *Liberty* and other sources.

The English individualist-anarchist movement was no more or less unified than its ideological counterpart in the United States. Auberon Herbert (1838-1906), a one-time member of Parliament, called his philosophy "voluntaryism" and was the world's leading advocate of voluntary taxation. For over a decade, he edited and published an individualist journal, called *Free Life*. One of his supporters, M.D. O'Brien went to jail for refusing to send his children to school.² Wordsworth Donisthorpe was a near-anarchist barrister and small-time coal mine owner, who with his cousin,

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

W.C. Crofts (1846-1894), formed the State Resistance Union in 1880. He edited a journal called *Jus* and his organization was the forerunner of The Liberty and Property Defense League. Joseph Hiam Levy (1838-1913) was a teacher of economics at Birkbeck College who became involved with the Personal Rights Association in 1878. He eventually became secretary of this organization and edited its journals for many years. Levy was the leading individualist advocate of limited government with compulsory rights of taxation and was often the critical gadfly to the more anarchistic Englishmen. J. Greevz Fisher, John Badcock, Henry Seymour, and J.H. Levy were all involved in the Legitimation League, which was formed in London around 1892, for the purpose of changing the bastardy laws, so that offspring out of wedlock were not deprived of their rightful inheritances. Fisher formed a league, called the Parents' Defense League, whose apparent purpose was to passively resist compulsory schooling of children.³ Although little else is known about Fisher, he was a clear economic thinker, as his contributions to **Liberty** demonstrate. He presented one of the two well known refutations of money-crankism during the 19th Century.⁴ John Badcock, Jr. was an egoist and follower of the doctrines of Max Stirner. He was an accountant by profession and later became a dealer in Chinese art.⁵ Albert Tarn was one of Tucker's agents for **Liberty** in England. He published the **Herald of Anarchy** and **Free Trade** magazine during the early 1890's.⁶ Henry Seymour, John Armsden, and Badcock were associated in the Free Currency Propaganda movement, which advocated repeal of the Bank Charter Act of 1844, repeal of the legal tender laws, and destroying the Bank of England's monopoly hold on the money supply. By increasing the supply of money in circulation, the propagandists hoped to lower the rate of interest and diminish the capitalists' profits. Their ideas on interest, the causes of poverty, wealth, and capital were well-outlined in contributions appearing in **Liberty**. Henry Seymour was a free-thinker and friend of Charles Bradlaugh. In the mid 1880s he published a journal called **The Anarchist** and was well acquainted with the London anarchists of all persuasions.

This disparate group of activists and thinkers were truly individualists; no two were wholly alike philosophically. What united them was their general adherence to a doctrine of individual freedom in economic enterprise and social relations, which they

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

believed should not be restricted by governmental regulations. Every one of the group mentioned had, at least, minor differences with Tucker and the editorial doctrines of **Liberty**. Although some of the English individualists refused to call themselves anarchists, their doctrines were perilously close to anarchism. Benjamin R. Tucker defined anarchism as the doctrine that the State should be abolished and all the affairs of men be carried out on a voluntary basis.⁷ More than likely, Herbert, Donisthorpe, Tarn, Seymour, and Badcock would have accepted this statement as an expression of their own political beliefs. J.H. Levy definitely would not have.

In an appendix on "Political Terminology", appearing in his debate with Herbert on **Taxation And Anarchism**, Levy charted out the differences among the English individualists. Both the Communist-Anarchist and the Individualistic-Anarchist, wrote Levy, are "opposed to the existence of government; and, though they differ as to what should be done when the State had been got rid of, and would probably be at each other's throat the moment the authority which they both assail was removed, the range of their agreement entitled them equally to the general designation of Anarchists."⁸ True individualism, according to Levy, asserts that "compulsory co-operation is good up to the point at which freedom is maximized," and that "it is harmful when pushed beyond that point. It affirms that government can promote happiness only by maintaining the widest practicable liberty, which it regards as the political — as distinguished from the ethical — *summum bonum*; and it judges all political measures by then tendency to promote or impede the attainment of this end."⁹ Referring indirectly to Herbert, Levy claimed that no individualist would ever dub himself an anarchist, "though some Anarchists call themselves Individualists".¹⁰

The main bone of contention between Herbert and Levy was illustrated in their exchange of views in **Taxation And Anarchism**, which appeared as a publication of The Personal Rights Association. Herbert opened his attack on Levy by rebutting Levy's challenge that his concept of 'voluntary taxation' was a contradiction in terms. He claimed that Levy's use of the concept 'compulsory co-operation' was even a 'greater' contradiction than his use of 'voluntary taxation.' Summarizing his position, Herbert argued as follows:

What I contend for is that no force-system should over-ride

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

the consent of a man who has not aggressed against the person or property of his neighbour. I say that a man's consent as regards his own actions is the most sacred thing in the world, and the one foundation on which all human relations must be built. To me it seems idle to talk of Individualism where this consent is not held sacred. . . . [T]he moment I am told that the individual may be caught by the collar and compelled to form a society, may be compelled to share in making laws, may be compelled to maintain these laws, I feel that I am no longer standing on Individualistic ground,....

Believing, then, that the judgment of every individual who has not himself aggressed against his neighbour is supreme as regards his own actions, and that this is the rock on which Individualism rests - I deny that A and B can go to C and force him to form a State and extract from him certain payments and services in the name of such State; The only difference between the tax-compelling Individualist and the State-Socialist is that whilst they both have vested the ownership of C in A and B, the tax-compelling Individualist proposes to use the powers of ownership in a very limited fashion, the Socialist in a very complete fashion. I object to the ownership in any fashion.¹¹

The discussion between Mr. Levy and Herbert largely revolved around the way in which they each formulated their views of Individualism. Herbert held that compulsory taxation was opposed to the principles of Individualism, to such an extent that the two could never be reconciled in any satisfactory way. He also rejected Levy's claim that he was an Anarchist. According to his own understanding, Anarchists would not retain any form of organization to repress aggression or crime. They would not maintain any sort of defense agencies to function as police or courts. The difference between him and Mr. Levy was that he would retain such organization in his ideal society, but whereas he would not force those disapproving of the police or courts to pay for them, Mr. Levy would compel the conscientious objectors to pay for them just the same.¹² "We agree that there must be a central agency to deal with crime - an agency that defends the liberty of all men, and employs force against the uses of force; but my central agency rests upon voluntary support, whilst Mr. Levy's central agency rests on compulsory support."¹³

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

Viewing himself, not as an anarchist, but, as an individualist, Herbert maintained that in an anarchistic society no such central agency for the repression of crimes and aggressions could exist. "My charge against Anarchism is that it sees many forms of crime existing in the world, and it refuses to come to any settled opinion as to what it will do in the matter. If it says it will do nothing, then we must live under the reign of the murderer, tempered by Judge Lynch; if it says it will have some form of local jury, then we are back into government again at once."¹⁴ The dividing line between statism and anarchism was, according to Herbert: "Do you intend to provide an agency for dealing with crime according to fixed rules and methods, or not? The way in which you pay your agency — though a very important matter in itself, must be looked upon as a non-essential element in the difference between the two systems."¹⁵

Levy, for his part, was a perceptive critic. Barring confusion over the labels, 'individualism' and 'anarchism,' Levy realized that taxation was the very essence of government as it had always existed. "A voluntary association for defense could exist without it; but such an association would not be government."¹⁶ Nor could he accept Herbert's analysis of the essential distinction between individualism and anarchism, as being based on whether or not a central agency of defense was retained in their respective ideal societies. Levy rightfully claimed "that there is nothing in Anarchism to prevent those who hold it from retaining any sort of organization for the repression of invasive conduct, so long as that organization is a voluntary one; and in this proviso they do not differ from Mr. Herbert."¹⁷

Levy was correct in asserting that Herbert had not thought through the problems of voluntary taxation. Would Herbert and the proponents of voluntary taxation have used force to compel people not to use a freely competing defense agency within the same geographic area that was monopolized by a defense agency ascribing to itself the qualities of a State? "The voluntary taxationists have never attempted to answer this problem; they have rather stubbornly assumed that no one would set up a competing defense agency within a State's territorial limits."¹⁸ Clearly if the government of a voluntary taxation society chose to outlaw all competing defense agencies, it would not function as the voluntary society sought by its proponents. "It would not force payment of

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

taxes," but it would monopolize the provision of defense services. "On the other hand, if the government *did* permit free competition in defense service, there would soon no longer be a central government over the territory. Defense agencies, police and judicial, would compete with one another in the same uncoerced manner as the producers of any other service on the market. . . . Defense service would at last be made fully marketable."¹⁹ Despite these flaws in Herbert's theory, he realized that Levy's theory of individualism was marred by the existence of compulsory taxation in a society trying to maximize freedom. Herbert understood that compulsion was a contradictory element in such a society and that taxation had to be eliminated.

In discussions of voluntary taxation with the English individualists, Tucker threw out a series of challenges to his correspondents. Around the same time that Levy and Herbert were beginning to exchange views, Tucker reprinted several paragraphs written by Levy in the **Personal Rights Journal**. In these paragraphs, Levy plainly stated that Anarchism implies the right of an individual to stand aside and see a man murdered or a woman raped. In contrast, Levy asserted that individualism would not only restrain the active invader but would also coerce the man who would otherwise be a passive witness of aggression into cooperation. Tucker accepted this judgment and pointed out that to coerce the peaceful non-cooperator is to violate the law of equal liberty. It is just as "impossible to attain the maximum of liberty by depriving people of their liberty as to attain the maximum of wealth by depriving people of their wealth.... [T] he means is absolutely destructive of the end." Tucker understood that with compulsory taxation abolished, there could be no State. "[T] he defensive institution that will succeed it will be steadily deterred from becoming an invasive institution through fear that the voluntary contribution will fall off. This constant motive for a voluntary defensive institution to keep itself trimmed down to the popular demand is itself the best possible safeguard against the bugbear of multitudinous rival political agencies...."

Tucker concluded his editorial by citing his chief interest in Mr. Levy's article. Tucker was excited by Levy's "valid criticism of those Individualists who accept voluntary taxation but stop short, or think they stop short of Anarchism, and I shall wait with much curiosity to see what Mr. Greevz Fisher, and especially Mr.

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

Auberon Herbert, will have to say in reply. Mr. Donisthorpe probably will be heard from also, but he really does not fall within Mr. Levy's criticism. He is, as Mr. Levy says, more of an Anarchist than anything else. . . . On the whole Anarchists have more reason to be grateful to Mr. Levy for his article than to complain of it. It is at least an appeal for intellectual consistency on this subject, and as such it renders unquestionable service to the cause of plumb-line Anarchism."²⁰

Four issues later, Tucker published a letter from Donisthorpe to the editor of *Free Life*, which he captioned "Discrepant Boundaries." In the letter, Donisthorpe claimed that he saw no contradiction in the expression 'voluntary taxation.' Addressing Auberon Herbert, Donisthorpe wrote:

My quarrel with your Individualism is that the world is not ready for it. My individualism is absolute Anarchy qualified by a regard for social evolution.... Mr. Levy seems to me to hold with us moderate Anarchists that at present we require a residuum of State action. But where I think he errs is in supposing that this is the necessary and permanent condition. In the perfect (or more perfect) state of social development, I agree with your view. In the present state Mr. Levy and I are more in line, looking on the State as a necessary institution. We diverge when he insists on regarding it as a permanent institution. Perhaps I should even outrun you a little in the future. I am inclined to think with Tucker, that even the administration of justice will fall into private hands, though it is hard to foresee the construction of the judicial system.²¹

Several months later, Tucker published another article taken from Herbert's *Free Life*. It was titled "Justice and Taxation" and was written by one of Herbert's associates, M.D. O'Brien. In it, O'Brien set forth both his and Herbert's view of voluntary taxation. Opening on the note that all individualists are in agreement that it is right to restrain by force the man who aggresses by force upon another man, O'Brien chided the "Taxation-Individualists" ("to use a 'Free Life' term") for thinking it right to coerce a peaceful non-invader. Tucker had no disagreement with O'Brien when he wrote:

A man's non-aggressive earnings are his own, and that there is no other warrant, save force, for a majority confiscating any portion of them.... We are only justified in using force when

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

force is used to us, and all the helpers we got should be volunteers, not people whom we have impressed, or, what is the same thing, the impressed earnings of those people.²²

In a much earlier piece (which was subsequently reprinted in **Instead of a Book**) Tucker referred to "some very interesting and valuable discussion" which "is going on in the London **Jus** concerning the question of compulsory versus voluntary taxation." F.W. Read had written to Donisthrope, editor of **Jus**, that voluntary taxation implied the existence of five or six voluntary states in England. Tucker pointed out that he saw nothing wrong or unusual with such a situation. After all, Tucker explained, there were more than five or six churches in England and many more than five or six insurance companies. "Though Mr. Read has grasped one idea of the voluntary taxationists," he had failed to see the other important idea behind it: "the idea that defense is a service, like any other service; that it is labor both useful and desired, and therefore an economic commodity subject to the law of supply and demand; . . . that, competition prevailing, patronage would go to those who furnished the best article at the lowest price; that the production and sale of this commodity are now monopolized by the State; . . . and, finally, that the State exceeds all its fellow-monopolists in the extent of its villainy because it enjoys the unique privilege of compelling all people to buy its product whether they want it or not." Tucker concluded that only by five or six states hanging out their shingles and competing with one another could people be assured of quality service at reasonable rates. "And what is more, the better their services, the less they would be needed; so that the multiplication of 'States' involves the abolition of the State."²³

As we have seen, the editors of **Jus**, **Personal Rights**, **Free Life**, and **Liberty** all had significant differences among themselves. Levy commented on this in his discussion on "Political Terminology." With respect to land ownership, Levy called Herbert a conservative-anarchist. "The Conservative Anarchist would retain private property in land very much as it is in England at the present day, merely abolishing the obstacles to its free sale and purchase. The Individualist Anarchist would laugh at this pretension to sell or let land and would recognize only the right of the squatter to the land in his use or productive occupation." The Communist-Anarchist would decline to recognize any rights of property in land.²⁴ **Liberty's** and

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

Tucker's position was that of the individualist-anarchist, who advocated the doctrine of occupation and use as the sole basis for land holding.²⁵ Levy's position on land ownership is not clearly spelled out, although Tucker claimed that he was an advocate of land nationalization in England.²⁶

These differences regarding land ownership were aired in the pages of *Liberty*, many times over. In one of the earlier references in *Liberty*, referring to the "Solutions of the Land Problem" and the English individualists, Victor Yarros noted that although he agreed with Auberon Herbert's conclusions, as far as they went, he did not reach these conclusions by the same logic. Quoting from an 1889 symposium on the land question held by the Personal Rights Association, Yarros quotes Herbert as follows: "The free and open market is the one system that does most justice among individuals, being the only impartial institution that exists, and at the same time is the only system that gives the evolutionary forces free play. . . . I scarcely need add that at present we have not a truly free and open market for land. All artificial impediments should be removed, and no new ones invented."²⁷ Subsequent issues were raised in *Liberty* about a year later, when Tucker reprinted correspondence which had appeared in *Free Life*. Albert Tarn, whom Tucker describes as an "Anarchistic correspondent," had addressed a letter to *Free Life* in which he tried to combat Herbert's assertion that anarchism would throw property titles, especially land titles, into hopeless confusion. Herbert attacked the doctrine of occupancy and use for being vague and indefinite in terms of establishing how ownership would be established and transferred in an anarchist society. Editorializing, Tucker rejoined that it would be up to "municipalities" (based on voluntary associations) to "formulate and enforce this view" of occupancy and use. According to Tucker, "under Anarchism all rules and laws will be little more than suggestions for the guidance of juries, and that all disputes, whether about land or anything else, will be submitted to juries which will judge not only the facts but the law, . . ."²⁸

Several months later, under the headline "Private Property and Freedom," Victor Yarros picked up the argument again. According to Yarros, the difference between *Liberty* and Mr. Herbert was: he believes in allowing people to retain all their possessions, no matter how unjustly and basely acquired, while getting them, so to speak, to swear off stealing and usurping and to

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

promise to behave well in the future. We, on the other hand, while insisting on the principle of private property, in wealth honestly obtained under the reign of liberty, do not think it either unjust or unwise to dispossess the landlords who have monopolized natural wealth by force and fraud. We hold that the poor and disinherited toilers would be justified in expropriating, not alone the landlords, who notoriously have no equitable titles to their lands, but *all* the financial lords and rulers, all the millionaires and very wealthy individuals. . . . Almost all possessors of great wealth enjoy neither what they nor their ancestors rightfully acquired (and if Mr. Herbert wishes to challenge the correctness of this statement, we are ready to go with him into a full discussion of the subject).... If he holds that the landlords are justly entitled to their lands, let him make a defense of the landlords or an attack on our unjust proposal.²⁹

Unfortunately, Herbert never defended his position in **Liberty**.

Auberon Herbert was a hybrid; neither fully acceptable to Levy, the individualist, or to Tucker, the anarchist. Though often criticized for his positions on voluntary taxation, property and self-ownership, Herbert was not without his supporters. John Badcock, in a letter to the **Personal Rights Journal**, wrote: "The most valuable part of Auberon Herbert's teaching, to my mind, is the destruction which he gives to the artificial distinctions that have been set up between the acts of government and the acts of individuals, and the placing on par of all aggressions, whether individually or collectively perpetrated, whether sanctified by statute law or not so sanctified."³⁰

Herbert's differences with Tucker and **Liberty** were not limited to property matters alone. Within a year after he had serialized and reprinted Herbert's **A Politician in Sight of Haven**, Tucker chastised Herbert for not realizing the importance of economic equity to anarchist thinking. "Mr. Herbert proves beyond question that the government of man by man is utterly without justification, but is quite ignorant of the fact that interest, rent, and profits will find no place in the perfect economic order." Tucker's comments not only illustrate his own economic thinking, but criticize Herbert at the same time. Tucker complained that Herbert had never called attention to the importance of free trade in banking:

If he would only dwell upon the evils of the money-issuing

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

monopoly and emphasize with his great power the fact that competition, in this as in other matters, would give us all that is needed of the best possible article at the lowest possible price, thereby steadily reducing interest and rent to zero, putting capital within the comfortable reach of all deserving and enterprising people, and causing the greatest liberation on record of heretofore restricted energies. . . ."³¹

In turn, Herbert eventually asked in his **Free Life** how Tucker could justify a campaign against the right of men to lend and borrow. Tucker, of course, denied that he had ever campaigned on such an issue, but pointed out that he hoped that lending and borrowing might one day disappear in an anarchist society, since there would be no restrictions on people monetizing their own credit. Tucker asserted that:

interest, however it may have originated, exists today only by virtue of the legal monopoly of the use of credit for currency purposes, . . . Mr. Herbert never stops to analyze this process that he may find the weak spot in it and point it out; he simply declares that interest, instead of resting on monopoly, is the natural, inevitable outcome of human convenience and the open market, . . . If it be true that interest will exist in the absence of monopoly, then there is some flaw in the reasoning by which the Anarchists argue from the abolition of monopoly to the disappearance of interest. . .

The pages of **Liberty** were peppered with arguments over economic issues, especially those issues concerned with money, banking, and interest. There were disputes in all directions; American anarchists arguing with other Americans; Americans arguing with the English individualists; and even the English individualists using the pages of the American **Liberty** to dispute among themselves. Of all the English individualists, J. Greevz Fisher was probably the most prolific writer on these topics. Fisher was embroiled in at least three sets of debates appearing in **Liberty**. Beginning in 1891, Fisher and Tucker engaged in a spirited exchange over the power of government over values and free trade in banking. This exchange was included in **Instead of a Book**. Then in 1894, Hugo Bilgram and Fisher had it out in a lengthy series of letters regarding the justification of interest. Finally, in late 1896 and early 1897, John Badcock and Fisher went at one another over the alleged money famine and the value and volume of money. In most of these de-

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

bates, Fisher criticized the anarchists from the point of view of sound economics.³³

In the first series of these debates, Tucker and Fisher discussed the merits of mutual banking. Fisher maintained that there was no legal obstacle to the introduction and circulation of promises of all types (such as promises to deliver wheat, cotton, or oil) which might then take the place of the Bank of England promises which circulated as money. Since there was no restriction on the types of money that might circulate, along with gold and promises to pay gold, Fisher claimed that government, in general, had little power to affect the purchasing power of gold. Tucker, on the other hand, alleged that the laws of England did not allow the workingmen to form mutual banks; that is, banks designed to issue paper money against any property that it may see fit to accept as security and such money not being redeemable in gold or silver. If mutual banks were not outlawed, then Tucker suggested that his English compatriots had nothing to complain of in the way of finance and had only to go out and start up their own banks in order to monetize their own credit.

In his rebuttal, Fisher asserted that "Schemes to bring about the abolition of interest, especially when the authors promulgate this as a necessary consequence of free trade in banking, are pernicious. . . . What is called free trade in banking actually means only unlimited liberty to create debt. It is the erroneous labelling of debt as money which begets most of the fallacies of the currency-fadists. . . . Tucker responded by quoting from Colonel William Greene's *Mutual Banking* and claiming that mutual banking would reduce the value of gold because "it would thereby be stripped of that exclusive monetary utility conferred upon it by the State." Tucker added that "the percentage of this reduction no one can tell in advance, any more than he can tell how much whiskey would fall in price if there were unrestricted competition in the sale of it."³⁵

In his third letter in this series of exchanges, Fisher restated his contention that Tucker was wrong in thinking that the law of England did not permit mutual banks. In Fisher's opinion, the concern of Tucker and the American anarchists was misplaced because they greatly overestimated the evils of the State banking system.³⁶

In 1893, Tucker reprinted an address delivered by Hugo Bilgram

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

on the subject of interest: "Is Interest Just?" In turn, J. Greevz Fisher had written the Manchester **Times** criticizing Bilgram's presentation. Finally, in 1894, **Liberty** carried a letter from Bilgram answering Fisher's attack.³⁷ This was the beginning of a lengthy exchange between these two correspondents. Fisher claimed that "what is necessary in order to establish the justice of interest is to show that in the absence of any restriction upon the issue of instruments of credit, and in the utter absence of laws of legal tender, interest would still be paid." Mr. Bilgram, on his part, contended that government policies, such as "legal regulation of the volume of currency," are "the cause of crises and business stagnation, of the existence of squalid poverty among those unable to find employment."³⁸

In Fisher's next letter to **Liberty** he outlined the core of his arguments against Bilgram:

Free and wholly unrestricted issue of all sorts of paper by all sorts of people to the utmost extent to which they could get it into circulation would certainly have as one of its results the development of a greater caution in accepting promises from those calling themselves bankers, and the elaboration of a system of voluntary audits and mutual guarantee of each other's notes by many of these bankers. . . . Mr. Bilgram appears to take no notice of the argument that the rate of interest upon loans . . . [would still exist] under a system of barter. . . . Interest is the hire of commodities separated from their owner and entrusted to another person. The time of separation is a privation to one party (in marginal cases, which rule all cases) and a benefit to the other party.³⁹

In later letters, Fisher stressed the importance of understanding the purchasing power of money.⁴⁰ Bilgram admitted that to the extent that interest "is a payment for risk . . . interest is just," but he continued to assail "as unjust that part of interest which is said to be paid for being 'deprived of a day's pleasure'. . . ."⁴¹ In Bilgram's view, interest was a monopoly privilege created by the laws forbidding the circulation of banknotes other than those by legally recognized banks. Thus interest was paid to holders of these notes only because of this exclusive monopoly privilege, which in effect restricted the amount of currency in circulation and on loan. Although Tucker was sympathetic to Bilgram's arguments, he left it to his readers "to judge between the arguments that have been

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

advanced," when this debate closed in 1895.

During the time that these arguments were appearing in *Liberty*, several of the English individualists in London organized a new movement which they termed "The Free Currency Propaganda." The society was formed for the purpose of assaulting the monopoly of money issue. Their prospectus set forth the following views:

We affirm that the equitable payment of labor... is its entire product . . . and that the prevailing monstrous departure from this self-evident principle of justice, the sole and sufficient cause of social discontent and oppression, is due to the monopolies of land and capital. . . . We furthermore affirm that the monopoly of capital is solely due to the monopoly of monetary credit, which necessarily and essentially result from the arbitrary and exclusive adoption of gold-or specie-value as the basis of the circulating medium. . . . The tyranny of the money monopoly thus operates not only positively by exacting the tribute of interest and monopoly profits, but also negatively by barring the working classes from self-help and association.⁴³

Among the names appearing at the end of this prospectus were those of Henry Seymour, John Armsden, Alfred E. Porter and John Badcock, Jr. Although J. Greevz Fisher could not support The Free Currency Propaganda movement, he realized that there was an element of truth in its assertions. He could support the idea of "free banking" based on property rights. This was summed up by G.O. Warren, one of the founding members of the movement, writing under the name of T.L. M'Cready:

The right to private property necessarily includes the right to exchange that property, and the right to exchange it includes the right to determine what it shall be exchanged for, be it any article or commodity, or a piece of paper with an inscription on it, be that inscription written or printed, and from whatever source. And, therefore, that any restriction upon, or interference with, exchange is a denial of the right of private property, and should be resisted. . . ,⁴⁴

In 1896, John Badcock, Jr. wrote an article appearing in *Liberty* on "The Money Famine" in which he supported these ideas. The main thrust of his argument was to oppose State monopolization of the money issue: "Let us have free trade in the issue of money. Only under freedom can the merits or demerits of

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

any particular monies and instruments of credit have a chance to be demonstrated, and that the fittest survive. Good money may be left to drive out bad money unaided."⁴⁵ However, his argument was not limited to this point. Badcock considered that there was a true 'money famine' caused by restrictive banking laws and legal tender laws, and much like Bilgram, claimed that if the supply of money were increased, interests, profits, and rent would disappear. In his first of a series of attacks on these ideas, which Tucker printed soon after the appearance of Badcock's original article, Fisher maintained that the 'money famine' was an allegation and not a true fact. He termed the expectation that interest, profits, and rent would disappear under a regime of free banking as "positively puerile." "Under complete monetary freedom the delusion that debts are money would vanish. The benefits to be expected [from complete monetary freedom] lie in the direction of increased activity, competition, and *stability* of bankers, money-lenders, and borrowers."⁴⁶ He also stressed the importance of understanding that the quantity of money in circulation was not of paramount concern because the purchasing power of money was not fixed and was changeable in accord with the supply of money on the market. The discussions and rejoinders between Badcock and Fisher continue in several later issues of **Liberty**. They revolved around the formation of mutual banks in England and the exact form which the notes of such banks might take. This exchange ended finally in April 1897.⁴⁷

None of these arguments were ever settled once and for all in **Liberty**. Over two years after the Badcock-Fisher debate, in September 1899, Wordsworth Donisthorpe sent a letter to Tucker on "Currency; Money and Credit; Coinage."⁴⁸ Not to be outdone, Fisher addressed a letter to **Liberty** on "Mr. Donisthorpe on Currency." This was his last contribution to **Liberty** on the subject of money. In it he made two very interesting observations. First of all, he supported the arguments of those advocating perfect freedom to issue money. "Liberty would enable the markets and force the issuers [of money] automatically and continuously to correct and improve the money or tokens. Gresham's law as to the superior potency of inferior money applies only to fiat made money."⁴⁹ Secondly, he summarized his views on the significance of monetary freedom in England, should it be instituted sometime in the future:

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

What then would be the advantages of liberty in relation to the currency? They would be great, but not at all overwhelming. They could only remedy evils which exist in consequence of State action. These, from an economic point of view, are not all so great as many Socialists, Anarchists, and Individualists imagine, at least in England. The main advantage would be in disabusing the public mind of the opposite superstition that State interference is very good and absolutely necessary. The fact is that it is no good at all.⁵⁰

Badcock's interests were not only limited to financial matters. He was author of *Slaves to Duty*, a lecture he delivered in London in 1894. Tucker reported on it in *Liberty*, thusly:

In this lecture Mr. Badcock lays the spook of duty most effectively. He takes up, one by one, the various kinds of duties — political, social, martial, filial, etc. — discusses them as to their merits and demerits, and demonstrates that the subordination of self on the part of the individual to their requirements prevents him from appreciating the full value of existence and realizing the promises it originally holds out. In the place of duty, Mr. Badcock puts nothing 'as superstition never want replacing,' but simply counsels people to study where their true and lasting interests lie and to turn all their energies to the furtherance of those regardless of codes, moral and political.⁵¹

Badcock and his English individualist friends displayed their contempt for society when they founded the Legitimation League in 1892 or 1893. J.H. Levy, J. Greevz Fisher, Donisthorpe, Badcock, along with Gladys and Oswald Dawson were all originally involved with the League. Its stated purpose was "To create machinery for acknowledging offspring born out of wedlock, and to secure for them equal rights with legitimate children."⁵² In 1893, Fisher published a pamphlet entitled "Illegitimate Children: An Inquiry Into Their Personal Rights and a Plea for the Abolition of Illegitimacy." Wordsworth Donisthorpe published a review of this pamphlet in *Liberty* in 1894.⁵³ In 1897, according to *Liberty*, the League took on "A New Departure" as described by William Gilmour: "The Legitimation League, of London, which has had a somewhat passive existence since its formation four years ago, has now entered upon a 'new crusade.' . . . viz., the advocacy of the principle of sexual freedom, or freedom in sexual relationships."

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

Gilmour reported that Fisher and Donisthorpe had left the league, but that "Oswald, Dawson, George Bedorough, Louie Bedorough, Seymour, Badcock, Rockell, and Wastall are still within its ranks."⁵⁴ Henry Seymour became editor of its new journal, known as **The Adult: A Journal for the Advancement of Freedom in Sexual Relationships**, which had a short-lived existence during the late 1890's.⁵⁵

This same group of English individualists was active in discussing the question of children-parental relations.⁵⁶ J. Greevz Fisher took the position that the child was a self-owner, who during its early years fell under the guardianship of the mother. Badcock maintained the same position. Tucker, on the other hand, opposed parental guardianship and claimed that the mother was the owner of her baby and had an absolute right to treat the baby as her own property.

Another aspect of the individualist-anarchist movement in London during the last decades of the 19th Century and the first decade of the 20th, is the Personal Rights Association. The extensive discussions between its secretary, J.H. Levy, and Auberon Herbert, over compulsory taxation have already been examined. The Personal Rights Association has an interesting background and stems almost directly from the activities of a late Victorian reformer, Josephine Butler. A critic has described her as "the single individual most responsible for the spread of syphilis in Europe and perhaps the world."⁵⁷ Josephine Butler was largely responsible for sparking the campaigns in England which led to the repeal of the Contagious Disease Acts. In 1864, the first of three Contagious Disease laws was passed by Parliament which made provisions for the surgical examination of prostitutes and for their confinement in 'lock' hospitals if found diseased. The Act was limited to areas around eleven military garrisons and naval stations. The second Act of 1866 required prostitutes in these army towns to submit to medical examinations at least once every twelve months. A consolidating act was passed in 1868. In short the Contagious Disease Acts attempted to introduce the continental methods of regulating prostitution into England.⁵⁸

Josephine Butler's organized activities against the Contagious Disease Acts began in 1869 or 1870, with the formation of the Ladies National Association for Repeal of the Contagious Disease Acts. Mrs. Butler did not advocate State suppression of vice, but

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

rather believed in voluntary efforts to deal with the problem. In March 1871, she was on the organizing committee of The Vigilance Association for the Defense of Personal Rights and for the Amendment of the Law Wherein It Is Injurious to Women.⁵⁹ The membership of this latter organization reflects its origins in the Contagious Disease Acts controversy as well as in its overall anti-statist inclinations. Under J.H. Levy's leadership, the group became even more anti-statist. Beginning about 1881, such individualists as Donisthorpe, Herbert, and W.C. Crofts, became involved in the organization. Through the medium of the Personal Rights Association, Levy "worked on the frontiers of liberal individualism in pursuit of the full application of the classical ideal of perfect equality before the law." He "also worked in the neglected areas of personal rights, pioneering in lunacy law reform, participating in the anti-vivisection campaign and thereby extending liberal individualism . . . to its ultimate limits: the world of the helpless and the animal kingdom."⁶⁰

The participation of the English individualists in *Liberty* was only one aspect of its international appeal. The ideals of liberty, individualism, and anarchism were as much an English heritage as native to the United States. The Englishmen discussed here shared many topics of interest in common with Tucker and his American readers, but they were also faced with providing answers to local English problems. As we have seen, there existed a wide range of opinions among those calling themselves individualists or individualist-anarchists in England. Despite the differences among themselves, as well as doctrinal differences with Tucker, they would all probably subscribe to Tucker's eloquent summation of his own creed. This was written in response to Wordsworth Donisthorpe's essay of 1890, entitled "Woes of an Anarchist":

. . . There are some troubles from which mankind can never escape. . . . They [the anarchists] have never claimed that liberty will bring perfection; they simply say that its results are vastly preferable to those that follow from authority. . . . As a choice of blessings, liberty is the greater; as a choice of evils, liberty is the smaller. Then liberty always says the Anarchist. No use of force except against the invader. . . .⁶¹

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

Footnotes

1. J.C. Spence was a follower of Herbert's Voluntarist movement and wrote a very libertarian analysis of the land question entitled, *Property in Land: A Defense of Individual Ownership* (London: Liberty and Property Defense League, 1897). According to Edward Jay Bristow, *The Defense of Liberty and Property in Britain, 1880-1914* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1970, p. 180), Spence was a prominent naval architect. William Gilmour is not listed since he was originally a Scottish anarchist, but he did contribute to *Liberty*. Little is known of Porter besides his involvement in *The Free Currency Propaganda*. His contributions to *Liberty* are listed in McElroy's Index.
2. Bristow, *The Defense of Liberty*, p. 180.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Murray N. Rothbard, "The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist's View," in *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature and Other Essays* (Washington, D.C.: Libertarian Review Press, 1974), p. 133.
5. S.E. Parker, "Introduction," in John Badcock, Jr., *Slaves to Duty* (Colorado Springs, Co.: Ralph Myles Publisher, 1973), p. 3.
6. Bristow, *The Defense of Liberty*, p. 178.
7. Benjamin R. Tucker, *Liberty* 120(1888):2.
8. *Taxation and Anarchism: A Discussion Between the Hon. Auberon Herbert and J.H. Levy* (London: The Personal Rights Association, 1912), pp. 63-64.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 63. This is also confirmed by Tucker's evaluation of Herbert's philosophy. See *Liberty* 396(1906):75. For a "Selective Bibliography" of Herbert's works, see Eric Mack, ed., *The Right and Wrong of Compulsion by the State and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Classics, 1978), pp. 27-29.
11. *Taxation and Anarchism*, pp. 2-3.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 52. Although it is not absolutely clear from the quotations, the implication is that Herbert believed there would be only one (*central*) defense agency operating in his ideal society.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
16. *Ibid.*, p.44.
17. *Ibid.*, p.45
18. Murray N. Rothbard, *Power and Market* (Menlo Park: Institute for Humane Studies, 1970), p. 122.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
20. Tucker, *Liberty* 170(1890):4.
21. Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Liberty* 174(1890):3.
22. M.D. O'Brien, *Liberty* 182 (1891):3.
23. Tucker, *Liberty* 104(1887):4.
24. *Taxation and Anarchism*, pp. 64-66.
25. For a discussion of the occupation and use doctrine in *Liberty*, see Carl Watner, "A Question of Property," *The Dandelion*, Nos. 1 and 2 (Spring and Summer, 1977).
26. Tucker, *Liberty* 169(1890):1. Also see Roland K. Wilson, *The Province of the State* (London: P.S. King and Son, 1911), p. 274.
27. Victor Yarros, *Liberty* 149 (1889):5.
28. Tucker, *Liberty* 162(1890):5.
29. Yarros, *Liberty* 171(1890): 4-5.

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

30. John Badcock, Jr., *Liberty* 277(1893):3.
31. Tucker, *Liberty* 62(1885):4.
32. Tucker, *Liberty* 169(1890):4. Herbert's only justification for interest was that it "is both moral and useful." *Liberty* 172(1890):4.
33. Rothbard, "The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine," p. 133.
34. J. Greevz Fisher, *Liberty* 188 (1891):3.
35. Tucker, *Liberty* 188(1891):4.
36. For the rest of the letters in this series of exchanges between Fisher and Tucker, see *Liberty* 129(1891):3 and 193 (1891):2-3.
37. For the original Fisher letter, see *Liberty* 268(1893):1. For Hugo Bilgram's reply, see 282 (1894):11.
38. Bilgram, *Liberty* 287(1890):8.
39. Fisher, *Liberty* 292(1894):8.
40. Fisher, *Liberty* 300(1894):4.
41. Bilgram, *Liberty* 300(1894):5.
42. Tucker, *Liberty* 308(1890):5. See also letters at 304(1895):4-5.
43. Henry Seymour, *Liberty* 286 (1894):11.
44. T.L. McCreedy, *Liberty* 295 (1894):9.
45. Badcock, *Liberty* 343(1896):7.
46. Fisher, *Liberty* 346(1896):6. Note the similarity to Rothbard: "Thus, a system of free banking, such as envisioned by Spooner and Tucker, far from leading to an indefinite increase of the supply of money and a disappearance of interest would lead to a far 'harder' and more restricted money supply.", p. 133 of "The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine."
47. For the rest of the letters in this series of exchanges between Badcock and Fisher, see *Liberty* 349(1897):5-6 and 352(1897):7.
48. Donisthorpe, *Liberty* 363 (1899):6-8.
49. Fisher, *Liberty* 364(1899):7.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
51. Tucker, *Liberty* 300(1894):4. Now in print. See Footnote 5 above.
52. "The Penman," *Liberty* 276 (1893):3.
53. Donisthorpe, *Liberty* 286 (1894):8-9.
54. William Gilmour, *Liberty* 353 (1897):7.
55. Bristow, *The Defense of Liberty*, p. 181. According to Bristow, "The resigning members — Donisthorpe and the Voluntarist J.C. Spence and Greevz Fisher - held essentially the same view on the sex question as the anarchist group: monogamous relationships easily terminated and unregulated by the state."
56. For additional discussion of the children issue, see Wendy McElroy's essay in this volume. Also, see *Liberty* 312-322.
57. Glen Petrie, *A Singular Inquiry. The Campaigns of Josephine Butler* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 94, quoting from Lujo Basser-mann, *The Oldest Profession* (1967).
58. *Ibid.*, "Prologue," pp. 11-21.
59. Bristow, *The Defense of Liberty*, pp. 61, 67.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 75. Some of Levy's pamphlets were titled: *Vivisection and Moral Evolution*, and "Our Duty to the Animal World" (1913). In "Vivisection and Personal Rights," (London: P.S. King, 1902), Levy equates animal rights and personal rights: "[T]his question of animal rights cannot be evaded by the Personal Rights Association: for they are inseparable from personal rights. If animals have no rights which it is our duty, as a political body to defend,

Benjamin R. Tucker and the Champions of *Liberty*

then every prosecution for cruelty to animals is an aggression on personal rights. We must, therefore, either condemn every effort of the State to prevent torture of any sentient being outside of the human race, or we must acknowledge that rights do not belong exclusively to our own sweet selves, . . ." (p. 15) Also see the concern of John Badcock in suppressing cruelty to animals, *Liberty* 319(1895):

7-8. Bristow adds, "As a founder of the Dialectical Society, Professor of Logic and Economics at Birkbeck College and the City of London College, colleague of Mill's on the council of the Land Tenure Reform Association, and contributor to Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*, Levy was a well-known figure in metropolitan and radical circles."

61. Tucker, *Liberty* 154(1890):4.