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A visit to L'anarchie

Alain Sergent

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Translated from the posthumous memorial book, "É. Armand: Sa vie, sa oeuvre" (La Ruche Ouvrier. 1964)

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“I did not know Bonnot, I did not know Garnier. I knew Carouy, who had frequented “L’Anarchie”. We do not ask of those who come around us if they live on society’s margins or not. We are concerned only with knowing whether they are good or bad comrades. As for me”, finished Armand, “I was a Tolstoyan at first. Within me remains a loathing of bloodshed.”

And he added:

“Oh! It is not to protect myself that I say that. It is because I think it.”

Mr. Armand explains the ideas of the different schools of anarchism to us, from “Les Temps Nouveau” edited by Jean Grave, to Sébastien Faure’s “Libertaire” to Lorulot’s “Idée Libre”, he speaks about the foreign groups, the Italian individualists and their organ “Le Novatore”, the “illegalists” of the United States. etc.

“L’Anarchie”, he says, “was founded in 1905; its first number appearing on April 13. It provoked a sort of reaction against the traditional anarchism of Kropotkin and Jean Grave, against sentimental anarchism.

Around us was found Libertad, a man of action, with a violent temperament and who sought in public meeting to urge the individual to rebel. At the beginning it was marked by the influence of Paraf-Javal, who was himself preoccupied with scientific education.”

“At the same time, L’Anarchie was anti-syndicalist.”

“Then comrades knew of Stirner and Nietzsche. One was not concerned with a future society always promised and which never came; the economic and social point of view was put to the side. Individualism was a permanent struggle between the individual and their surroundings, the negation of authority, law and exploitation and its corollary, authority.”

“But all this is theoretical. How can one reject authority and exploitation in practical life? Very simply — by living without authority and exploitation.”

The name of the bandits entered into our conversation.

“Bonnot?”, said Monsieur Armand to us. “It is very possible that Bonnot and his comrades could have been a product of anarchist-individualism. They were not satisfied with the social contract and they rebelled against its arbitrariness. They were outsiders, illegalists.”

An anarchist who was assisting with our interview interjected:

“At the bottom, they were caught in an impasse. They could not get out of it any other way.”

Monsieur Armand continued:

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É. Armand assumed the editorship of L'Anarchie from April 4th, 1912 to September of the same year.

These dates are inscribed in his own handwriting on a questionnaire which he had filled out at the request of Alain Sergent (André Mahe) at the time when Sergent was gathering documentation to write his "Histoire de 'Anarchie", of which one volume has so far appeared.

Here is a picturesque public report by the "Temps" of May, 1912, where this brief period in É. Armand's life is captured. It is not without interest to see how the anarchists of 1912 are depicted in one of the best-known journals of the time.

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A Visit to L'Anarchie

"L'Anarchie" is located in the quartier Saint-Paul on an old and narrow street which bears the picturesque name rue du Grenier-sur-l'Eau. Above the door hangs a sign, "L'Anarchie: On both sides of the door are leaflets announcing "a great and controversial public meeting" on a current subject: "Bandits: those high and those on low" by André Lorulot, one of the anarchists arrested last week and immediately released.

The storefront where one enters is dimly lit. Two men are occupied with typesetting. Four young women, in a kitchen to the right, are preparing the mid-day meal. In the back of the room is a bed. The scene has a family-like atmosphere of intimacy.

A man, bare-headed with long locks of hair pulled back, clean shaven with blue eyes and a gentle expression peering behind a set of small wire-frame glasses is seated in front of a cabinet filled with brochures, books and journals. This is Monsieur Armand, the director — if this title can be used in a libertarian milieu — of the journal "L'Anarchie".