

Anarchism in Germany

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The writings of German anarchists such as Max Stirner (a.k.a. Johann Kaspar Schmidt, 1806–56) and Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) have had a profound impact on anarchist movements from New York to Paris, Moscow, Tel Aviv, and Buenos Aires. Even as exiles or emigrants, anarchists from Germany left their mark on history, as in the United States, where they accounted for five of the eight sentenced to death for the Haymarket bombing of 1886, or in the East End of late Victorian London, where Rudolf Rocker (1873–1958) became a preeminent leader among the Jewish immigrant workers. Within Germany, anarchist ideas – if not a coherent anarchist movement – predate the foundation of the German nation-state.

EARLY HISTORY

While perhaps prefigured by the premodern popular movements of the Reformation as well as by ideas emerging from Enlightenment rationalism and Romanticism alike, anarchism in Germany first appears within the Young Hegelian circle, where Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were forced to grapple with the ideas of three of the most important figures in early anarchist history: Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Max Stirner, and Mikhail Bakunin. From abroad, Proudhon found sympathizers in Young Hegelians Arnold Ruge (1802–80) and Karl Grün (1817–87), who introduced his ideas to Germany. Stirner, a sometime contributor to Marx’s *Rheinische Zeitung*, went perhaps farthest of all the Young Hegelians in overturning the master philosopher’s thought in his book *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Ego and His Own*, 1844), where he set the singularity of the individual ego (*der Einzige*) in place of the abstract universality of Hegel’s “Absolute.” As for Bakunin, it was in Dresden, writing for Ruge’s newspaper, the *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, in 1842, that he penned his memorable line, “Die Lust der Zerstörung ist zugleich eine schaffende Lust” (“the passion for destruction is a creative passion, too”), a maxim he tested in the streets a few years later during the revolutionary conflagration of 1848–9.

DECLINE AND REBIRTH OF GERMAN ANARCHISM

The first attempts at organizing an anarchist movement in Germany were halting, coinciding with a disastrous experiment in the tactic of “propaganda by the deed,” which meant bombings and assassinations. Failed anarchist plots to assassinate the Kaiser in 1878 (in Berlin) and 1883 (at Niederwald) gave the government license for a crackdown, and German anarchist organizations were largely destroyed. By the end of the nineteenth century, Ernst Viktor Zenker observed that the spread of anarchism there had been hampered not only by state repression, but by “the strength of the party of Social Democracy.” The German working classes appeared to place more hope in the reformist Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany) (SPD), newly legalized in 1890, than in a seemingly apocalyptic promise of revolutionary change. Nonetheless, the gradualist ideology of the SPD did not satisfy everyone, and a new generation of anarchists emerged from an anti-parliamentarist faction, “Der Jungen” (Youth), expelled from the party in 1892. At the same time, a revolt was brewing among members of the SPD-affiliated trade unions, called Lokalisten (Localists), who advocated a federalist organizational structure over strong centralized control. Influenced by revolutionary syndicalist currents, they broke away in 1897 to form an alternative labor federation, the Freie Vereinigung deutscher ewerkschaften (Free Association of German Unions) (FVdG) in 1903.

In the decades immediately prior to World War I, Stirner's individualist anarchism was newly championed by John Henry Mackay (1864–1933), while Proudhonian mutualism was revived by Landauer's Sozialistischer Bund (Socialist Federation), intended to foster cooperative alternatives to capitalism and the state. Along with fellow declassé intellectuals such as Erich Mühsam (1878–1934), Benedikt Friedländer (1866–1908), and Senna Hoy (a.k.a. Johannes Holzmann, 1882–1914), they broadened the concerns of German anarchism beyond class struggle *per se* to struggles against anti-Semitism, militarism, heterosexism, and conventional sexual mores. However, anarchosyndicalists such as Peter Ramus (a.k.a. Rudolf Grossman, 1882–1942) criticized these forms of anarchism as irrelevant to proletarian concerns. In 1903, seeking closer ties to the workers' movements, militants formed an Anarchistische Föderation Deutschlands (German Anarchist Federation) (AFD).

The SPD's increasing nationalism and militarism prompted further upheavals within German socialism. Left-wing socialists and communists allied with the FVdG, which survived World War I in clandestine form, launched a revolution in 1918–19 based on workers' spontaneous self-organization into directly democratic Räten (councils, analogous to the Soviets created in Russia in 1917). While broader than any one ideology, several of the revolution's phases featured notable anarchist participation, such as that of Landauer, Mühsam, and Ernst Toller (1893–1939) in the Bavarian Räterepublik (Council Republic) of 1919.

During the chaos following the 1919 defeat of the Räterepubliken, anarchists continued to organize. At a September 1919 congress, the FVdG reconstituted itself as the Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands (Free Workers' Union of Germany) (FAUD), Germany's first anarchosyndicalist union, and was quickly joined by members of the AFD. In 1920 FAUD militants entered an anti-Fascist militia, the Rote Ruhrarmee (Red Army of the Ruhr Region), to help fight off a right-wing coup. At the same time, anarchists such as Milly Witkop-Rocker (1877–1955) were part of an effort within the FAUD to organize women workers, founding in Düsseldorf in 1921 a Syndikalistische Frauenbund (Syndicalist Women's Union) (SFB). Incorporating some of the strengths of the old Sozialistischer Bund (as well as the French idea of Bourses du Travail or Arbeitsbörsen, workers' cultural centers), the FAUD extended its efforts beyond the workplace, sponsoring communes, cooperatives, newspapers, and libertarian schools, and fighting for access to contraception and abortion. Perhaps most ambitiously, FAUD leaders were instrumental in building a new global organization named, after the example of the first International Workingmen's Association, the Internationale Arbeiter Assoziation (International Workers' Association) (IWA). At the same time, however, local struggles for political survival grew desperate; while continuing to participate in strikes and food riots, the FAUD had shrunk from a peak of over 100,000 members in 1919 to a mere quarter of that size in 1925.

RESISTANCE TO NAZISM, POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTION, AND THE NEW LEFT

In the last years of the Weimar Republic, FAUD militants formed anti-fascist street-fighting groups called Schwarzen Scharen (Black Crowds). However, the FAUD's decline proved irreversible. In 1933 the burning of the Reichstag provided the Nazis with an excuse to clamp down on left-wing opposition. Prominent anarchists such as Mühsam were jailed and killed, while others, such as Rocker and Augustin Souchy (1892–1984), managed to escape the country; others

joined underground resistance movements, like Düsseldorf's Schwarzrotgruppe. Attempts of a few surviving FAUD activists to revive the anarchosyndicalist movement both in East and West Germany in the late 1940s and early 1950s proved unsuccessful.

Interest in anarchism experienced a certain revival in the 1960s, especially among students and intellectuals, albeit often overshadowed by neo-Marxist tendencies. Despite the anti-authoritarian and even anarchist sympathies of prominent activists of the generation of 1968 (such as Rudi Dutschke, 1940–79), elements of the Außerparlamentarische Opposition or “extra-parliamentary opposition” (like West Berlin's Kommune 1, 1967–9) and some of the urban guerilla organizations (such as the Bewegung 2. Juni or June 2nd movement, ca. 1972–80, and Revolutionäre Zellen/Rote Zora, ca. 1975–95), no large-scale anarchist organization would reemerge in Germany until 1977, when the Freie Arbeiterinnen- und Arbeiter-Union (Free Workers' Union) (FAU), intended as a successor to the old FAUD, was founded.

AFTER 1968

In 1972, inspired by the Swiss journal *Anarchisme et Nonviolence*, the first issue of the anarcho-pacifist Graswurzelrevolution (Grassroots Revolution) appeared in Augsburg; it has since become the anarchist journal with the highest circulation in the German-speaking countries. In the late 1970s and 1980s Horst Stowasser's Projekt A sought to bring anarchists out of the “self-imposed ghetto” of sectarianism to engage in concrete, small-scale initiatives. The mid-1980s also saw the emergence of the Autonomen, a political subculture with strong anarchist tendencies. In its early years the militant politics of the Autonomen strongly revolved around the defense of squatted houses and youth centers. Resistance to neo-Nazism, in the form of “Antifa” (antifascist) politics, remains an essential part of the Autonomen movement to this day.

Anarchist ideas and practices have continued to gain currency within the “Sponti” (spontaneous) left since the 1970s, producing new forms of movement that may be called anarchic, if not necessarily anarchist. Suspicious of the very idea of “revolution” as a future event to which a vanguard holds the key, these new anti-authoritarians prefer to change life here and now through tactics of playful disruption that enlist “non-activist” bystanders.

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