

Anarchism and Revolution

Pëtr Kropotkin

Contents

Social Revolution	4
Prepare the way	4
Peasants and workers	4
Demands of the people	5
Words and deeds	5

If each member of society is to have the opportunity of earning his living by his own labor - without as a result enslaving himself to anyone else, either to a private individual, or to a company, or to a union - he must obviously always have the opportunity of acquiring that spade with which he wishes to dig, that cotton from which he wishes to spin thread or weave cloth, that bread, those clothes, that room to live in, that place to work in, before he can manufacture anything having an exchange value for society. It is apparent that in previous times production was so simple that an this did not require a vast accumulation of the initial products of personal labor, that anyone, though working only with the instruments of labor available in his family, only on those raw materials which he took free of charge from nature, could produce useful exchange values. But now - and the progress of society consists of this - the preliminary accumulation of the products of labor for the creating of instruments of labor and the storing of raw material must be so great that it can no longer be the business of a private individual or a group of individuals.

It is therefore clear that if it is desirable that a person setting to work should not enthralled himself, should not give up part of his labor, his strength, his independence, either temporarily or permanently, to private individuals whose arbitrary power will always determine how great that part shall be, then it is necessary that private individuals should control neither the instruments of labor (tools, machines, factories), nor the places of cultivation of raw materials (the earth), nor the raw materials previously stored up, nor the means of storing and transporting them to particular places (the means of communication, warehouses, and so on), nor the means of existence during work (the supplies of the means of subsistence and housing).

So we arrive at the elimination in that future system whose realization we desire, of any property of individuals, of any property of an incorporated company, a union, and so on.

Those writers of previous times who came to this conclusion saw no other way out than the transfer of all the capital of society to the state - that is, to a powerful organization representing in itself the interests of society and managing all affairs which concern the whole of society.

It was left to it to guarantee each member of society the opportunity of obtaining the necessary instruments of labor, and so on; it was also left to it to distribute among the members of society those goods made by them. But precisely because of this, the brilliant dreams of the followers of these thinkers did not find enough adherents among those people who would have to put these dreams into practice. In the ideal of these thinkers only one aspect of life is considered - the economic. Those who were used to thinking in a concrete way understood very well that no matter what combination of conditions was worked out so that this government should express the views of the majority, that no matter how mobile, flexible and susceptible to change its composition might be, the group of individuals to whom society gives up its rights would always be a power separate from society, trying to widen its influence, its interference in the affairs of each separate individual. And the wider the sphere of activity of this government, the greater the danger of the enslavement of society, the greater the probability that the government would stop being: the expression of the interests and desires of the majority.

So both the masses and many individual thinkers long ago realized that the transfer of this most essential element of the life of society into the hands of any elected government at all would be the source of the most crucial inconvenience, if not the actual suicide of society. ...

Social Revolution

In our opinion the realization of our ideal must be brought about through a social revolution. Here we do not flatter ourselves at all with the hope that the ideal will be put completely into effect in the first revolution; indeed we are convinced that for the realization of the equality we have sketched, many years are still needed, and so many limited - perhaps even general - outbursts. But we are also convinced that the more completely, the more widely the demands of the masses are set out from the very first revolution: the more clearly and concretely these demands are expressed - then the more the first step will destroy those cultural forms which hinder the realization of the socialist system, the more disorganized those forces and attitudes which present social and state life cling to; then the successive upheavals will be more peaceful and successively large-scale improvements in the attitude of the people will follow.

So our goals must be to apply our strength to hastening this outburst, so as to illuminate those hopes and aspirations which exist in the great majority in vague forms, so that in time we shall be able to take advantage of the circumstances in which an outburst may have the most favorable outcome, so that in the end the outburst itself will occur in the name of clearly expressed demands, and exactly in the name of those we have stated...

Prepare the way

We are profoundly convinced that no revolution is possible if the need for it is not felt among the people themselves. No handful of individuals, however energetic and talented, can arouse a popular insurrection if the people themselves through their best representatives do not come to the realization that they have no other way out of the situation they are dissatisfied with except insurrection. Therefore the task of any revolutionary party is not to call for insurrection but only to prepare the way for the success of the approaching insurrection - that is, to unite the dissatisfied elements, to increase the knowledge of individual units or groups about the aspirations and actions of other such groups, to help the people in defining more clearly the real causes of dissatisfaction, to help them in identifying more clearly their real enemies, stripping the mask from enemies who hide behind some respectable disguise, and, finally, to contribute to the illumination of both the immediate practical ends and the means of putting them into practice.

...

Peasants and workers

Where should our activity be directed, where should we mainly spread our ideas and look for like-minded people - among the student youth and upper classes, or among the peasants and workers?

We can answer this question categorically, and we consider this answer to be the fundamental position in our practical program: undoubtedly among the peasants and workers. Here we must spread our ideas, here we must look for comrades who will help in the further dissemination of these ideas; with these comrades we must enter into a friendly and closely united organization. We do not wish to break off relations with the educated section of society, and especially not with the section of student youth; but refusing to take on the permanent role of instructing this youth

in a given direction, we shall enter into close relations only with those groups or individuals who immediately inspire the confidence or the almost certain hope that they will direct their future activity among the peasants and workers. For the mass of educated youth we are prepared to do only one thing: to disseminate, and – ‘if the cause cannot be spread without our assistance, and also if we have enough energy to spare - to prepare those books which directly assist the explanation of our ideals and our ends, which make available those facts which show the complete inevitability of the social upheaval and the necessity to unite, to organize the awakened strength of the people.

Demands of the people

The insurrection must take place among the peasants and workers themselves. Only then can it count on success. But no less necessary for the success of the insurrection is the existence among the insurrectionists themselves of a strong, friendly, active group of people who, acting as a link between the various areas, and having clearly worked out how to express the demands of the people, how to avoid the various traps, how to bring about their victory, are agreed on the means of action. It is moreover clear that such a party must not stand outside the people, but among them, but act not as the champion of outside ideas elaborated in isolation, but merely as a more distinct, more complete expression of the demands of the people themselves; in short, it is clear that such a party cannot be a group of people outside the peasants and workers, but must be the focus of the most conscious and decisive forces of the peasants and workers. Any party standing outside the people - especially one that come from the upper class - however much it is inspired with a wish for the welfare of the people, however well it expresses the demands of the people, will inevitably be doomed to failure, like all the rest, as soon as the insurgent people with their first actions open up the gulf between the upper and lower classes. And we can see in this a completely deserved retribution for the fact that the members of this party were previously unable to become the comrades of the people, but instead remained superior leaders. Only those whose previous way of life and previous actions are entirely of a kind which deserves the faith of the peasants and workers will be listened to; and these will be only the activists among the peasants themselves, and those who wholeheartedly give themselves up to the people's cause, and prove themselves not with heroic deeds in a moment of enthusiasm but with the whole previous ordinary life; those who, discarding any tinge of the upper class, enter into close relations with the peasants and workers, linked by personal friendship and confidence...

Words and deeds

We consider it to be a crucial mistake to set up as an end the creation of agitators among the people who keep themselves at a distance from the people and move in the sphere of their colleagues of the intelligentsia. It is impossible suddenly to cross at a given moment from the sphere of the intelligentsia to the environment of the people, just as one pleases. The sphere of the intelligentsia permanently leaves a characteristic stamp on those who have moved in it, and it is necessary to renounce this first to have success among the people. It is impossible to become a populist agitator in a few days; it is necessary to be trained in this work. For this reason, We consider that the best means for the achievement of our aim is to proceed immediately to activity

among the people, no matter how small the circle of individuals who have come to this conclusion. We are also convinced that it is impossible to rally the people in the name of future activity, or at least extremely difficult, and that it is much easier to rally the people in the name of an activity whose feasibility and appropriateness everyone can believe in now, and in which one can engage immediately. By showing results which have been achieved, and by acting on people not only through words, but through both words and deeds, it is considerably easier to convert them of the things one is oneself convinced of...

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Pëtr Kropotkin
Anarchism and Revolution

retrieved on October 3, 2019, from RevoltLib.com.

theanarchistlibrary.org