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The Anarchist Movement Today

Alexander Berkman

January, 1934

The history of human civilization is not a straight, continuously forward-moving line. Its diagram is a zigzag, now advancing, now retreating. Progress is measured by the distance separating man from his primitive conditions of ignorance and barbarism.

At the present time mankind seems to be on the retreat. A wave of reaction is sweeping the countries of Europe; its effects and influence are felt all over the world. There is fascism in Italy, Hitlerism in Germany, despotism in Russia, destructive dictatorship in other countries.

Every progressive and radical party, every revolutionary movement has suffered from the present reaction. In some countries they had been entirely crushed; in others their activities are paralyzed for the time being. It is the essence of all tyrannies and dictatorship, of whatever name or color, to suppress and eradicate everything that stands in the wake of its exclusive domination and triumph. Thus in Russia, for instance, the active anarchist elements (as also the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries) have either been

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shot or are being kept in prison and exile for indefinite periods. A similar fate has overtaken them in Italy and Germany.

But though anarchism has suffered from the reaction, as have all other liberal and revolutionary movements, it is fundamentally and essentially lost much less than the socialist parties. The reason for it is to be found in certain causes underlying the worldwide reaction. It is generally believed that the war, with its brutalization of man and destruction of higher values, the financial bankruptcy which followed, and the great crisis have brought about the present situation. But these immediate causes are entirely insufficient to explain the incredibly rapid development and success of fascism in Italy and Germany and its spread throughout the civilized world. Other and more potent factors have been at work, resulting in the great reaction.

Those factors are of a psychologic rather than a political or economic character. Broadly speaking, there were two of them. One was the Russian Revolution; the other, Marxism.

The Russian Revolution flamed across the world as a beacon of promise and hope to the oppressed and disinherited. It filled the hearts of the masses in every country with inspiration and enthusiasm. The workers of Germany even tried to follow the example of the Russian brothers. But that beacon was soon extinguished. The Bolsheviki, Marxists par excellence by Lenin's interpretation, curbed the popular aspirations of the people and perverted the revolutionary aims and purposes into one of the bloodiest dictatorships the world had ever seen. The despotism of a political party, of a clique, took the place of Czarist autocracy. The result brought bitter disillusionment to millions of workers in every land, a disillusionment that has proven a powerful aid to the reactionary forces in every land.

Yet that disillusionment would not have necessarily become such an effective lever in the hands of reaction but for another important factor. It was the spirit of authority, of Statism, the worship of government, with which the masses have for years been imbued

by Marxism and by the Socialist political parties everywhere. It served to weaken their self-reliance, robbed them of independence in thought and action, and deepened their revolutionary faith and ardor. The Social Democracy of Germany, in particular, has done the greatest harm in this regard. For more than two generations it trained the proletariat in parliamentary inactivity, in systematic compromise, in reliance upon political leaders and in blind authoritarianism. This training lamed the initiative and revolutionary efforts of labor, destroyed the workers' faith in their economic power, and made them dependent on the Marxist Messiah who was to lead them into the promised land of Socialism.

At a certain psychologic moment the Messiah came, and the expectant people "heard him gladly". He was not indeed kosher Marxist, but the odor of "socialist" was strong about him and his Nazi party. That sufficed, particularly after the bitter experiences of the German workers with their Socialist governments, which betrayed labor, oppressed and exploited the workers the same as the Junker régimes had done before them.

It is tragic that Socialism, which originated as a liberating movement, has in the course of time become so emasculated of all revolutionary spirit and purpose as to fall a victim to the reactionary Frankenstein it had itself helped to create. If history teaches anything at all, it is this: all progress has been a getting away from authority, a liberation from it — liberation from the authority of the village chief and of the tribal totem: from God, Church and the State. The essence of progress is anti-authoritarian. Man's historic advance has been along the line of more and ever more individual liberty and popular freedom, of greater independence in thought and action, higher culture and improved social well-being. Everything that retarded or hindered that process has served to enthralled man and resulted in regress and reaction.

It is because of the above basic truths that the Anarchist movement has suffered much less from the present reaction than have the Socialist parties. The latter now see their organizations annih-

lated and the millions of their voters become the obedient and submissive followers of the Mussolinis and Hitlers. They did not have enough revolutionary resistance even to put up a fight. More: the very foundations of Socialism are broken, its theories proved false, its methods condemned by experience. *Socialism has lost not only its followers but also its ideology.* No wonder the Socialist Parties of America, of Sweden and Belgium, the neo-Socialists of France and other countries have now decided to turn from the proletariat to the bourgeoisie for the realization of Socialism!

The Anarchist movement, on the contrary, has sustained only physical, superficial losses. It preserves what is the most vital thing in the life and growth of a world-liberating movement: its ideology, its ideal. Indeed, Anarchism is, essentially, strengthened and verified now by life itself. Parliamentarism has failed utterly. Marxist dogmas have been refuted by experience. Socialist panaceas have been tried and found wanting. The masses will never return to Socialism any more. The experience of Russia and betrayal by Socialist governments in other countries have embittered the workers and made the very name of political Socialism synonymous with treachery and failure.

The present wave of reaction will pass. Experience will teach the people that emancipation from tyranny, oppression and exploitation can be achieved only through Anarchism — in a social organization based on free, solidaric cooperation without any admixture of the vitiating and destructive spirit of authoritarianism. Solidarity without freedom is impossible; it inevitably leads back to slavery, open or masked. The future belongs to Anarchism.

Regarding the condition of the Anarchist movement at the present, the following may be said:

Anarchism is not a political party. Its strength cannot be measured by counting heads or ballots. The Anarchist movement is a vital factor of life, based on man's inherent love of liberty and desire for well-being. Anarchism finds expression in every form of human

ety based on individual liberty, equal opportunity and social well-being. The propaganda of Anarchist ideas will help to enlighten the people and enable them the clearer and more intelligently to find the way out of the present stupid and criminal pseudo-civilization. It is therefore that the life, example and propagandistic work of Anarchist individuals and groups are so necessary and vital in furthering the cause of Anarchism.

(Alexander Berkman)

January, 1934

France

Dawn); Bulgaria (*Misal i Volya; Rabotnik*, etc.), and other European countries, as well as in Japan and China, most of those papers being issued underground.

In Spain there are *Tierra y Libertad; Solidaridad Obrera* (daily); *C. N. T.* (the daily of the National Confederation of Labor); *La Revista Blanca; El Libertario; Estudios*, and a number of others. The NEWS SERVICE and BULLETINS of the International Working Men's Association (I.W.M.A. or A. I. T.), issued in Spanish, French, German and English, are also published in Spain.

In South America there appear numerous Anarchist and Anarcho-Syndicalist papers and magazines. Frequently suppressed, they as frequently reappear, sometimes under different names. In Buenos Aires is published the daily, *La Protesta*, founded in June, 1897, as *La Protesta humana; Nervio* an Anarchist journal of criticism, art and letters; and other papers, like the weekly *Il Pensiero* (Anarcho-Communist), *Culmine* (Individualist), *Sorgiamo*, etc. In Uruguay Luigi Fabbri issues the Anarchist review *Studi Sociali* (Montevideo). And so on. In Melbourne (Australia) appears *L'Avanguardia Libertaria*.

Anarchist papers in the Italian language are published in the United States, among them *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*, in Newark, New Jersey; *Cronaca Sovversiva* in New London Conn., and other publications. Also *Cultura Proletaria*, in Spanish; *Dielo Truda* and other journals in Russian. Among the English-language publications are *Freedom* (formerly weekly, now monthly, in New York; *Vanguard, Clarion, Man!* (San Francisco), and others.

In conclusion I want to say that the Anarchist movement will get bigger and stronger in proportion as the masses will become familiar with Anarchist ideals and ideas and will realize the necessity of putting them into practice. Historic experience and growing disillusionment with all forms of parliamentarism, authoritarianism and dictatorship will gradually make the people understand that emancipation from political oppression, economic slavery and cultural decadence is not possible except under Anarchism — in a soci-

endeavor — in the economic and social, as well as in the cultural and artistic phases of existence.

As a movement, Anarchism may be considered in its two-fold aspect: First, as a determining factor in the activities of the masses; and second, as work within the Anarchist organizations themselves, in the groups and federations. As an illustration of mass activity inspired by the ideal and methods of revolutionary Anarchism that [sic] serve the labor movement of Spain. Within one year (in February and December, 1933) two revolutionary uprisings have taken place in that country, both of a predominantly Anarcho-Syndicalist character, as expressed by the I.W.M.A. (the International Working Men's Association, known in the European countries as the A.I.T.)

Anarchist groups and federations exist in every country, including Japan, Korea and China. Their work consists in spreading Anarchism by means of the spoken and written word. An approximation of this activity can be gained from the appended list of Anarchist publications in the various countries and languages.

It must be noted, however, that the literature of a great philosophy and social movement like Anarchism is not limited to the newspapers and magazines of Anarchist tendency existing at a given moment. That is accidental, depending on greater or lesser persecution. A true estimate must include, basically, the entire literature on the subject, and its continuous development up to the present.

Anarchist literature does not deal with the superficial, local political or economic conditions of life. It deals with the foundations — social, ethical, cultural, as well as political and economic — that underlie present-day society, and it is idealist in character. It is therefore that Anarchist literature does not go out of date. It keeps its social and practical value, as does philosophy and art, whatever the shallow surface changes in our authoritarian, capitalist civilization.

The finest expression of Anarchist thought and sentiment is to be found in works like William Godwin's "Inquiry concerning political Justice and its Influence on general virtue and happiness

(1793); in the many works of Proudhon, like the keen analysis of 1848 French governmentalism in “Les Confessions d’un Révolutionnaire” (1849); in Max Stirner’s “Der Einzige und sein Eigentum” (1845); in the numerous writings of Michael Bakunin, some of which are collected in *Oeuvres*, 6 volumes (Paris, 1895–1913); in the “Idées sur l’Organisation sociale”, by James Guillaume (1876); in the works of the Italian Anarchist, Errico Malatesta, practical theoretician and active militant from the seventies up to his death in 1932; in “Les paroles d’un Revolté”, (composed 1879–1882) by Peter Kropotkin, as well as in the many other works of this Anarchist thinker and scientist; in “L’Evolution, la Révolution et l’Idéal anarchique” by Elisée Reclus (1897); in the “Collected Essays” of Voltairine de Cleyre, (New York, 1914); in the writings of numerous Spanish Anarchists, such as Ricardo Mella, A. Pellicer Paraire, Tarrida del Marmol, Francisco Ferrer, and others; in the “Aufbruch zum Sozialismus”, by Gustav Landauer (1911); in the works of Benjamin Tucker, the Individualist Anarchist of America, a man of clear and analytical mind; in those of Josiah Warren, Stephen B. Andrews, Lysander Spooner, Dyer D. Lum, Albert Parsons, C. L. James, Thoreau, William Morris, Edward Carpenter — to name but a few Anglo-Saxon thinkers of Anarchist tendency; in the books and other publications of Ernest Coeurderoy, Carlo Caferra, Steinlen, Ibsen, Johann Most, Emma Goldman, Rudolf Rocker, Max Nettlau, Luigi Galleani, and in many other writers, including some memorable pages of Leo Tolstoy.

The Anarchist literature of the world is exceedingly rich. An approximate figure would comprise over 20,000 titles, of which about 3,000 would cover periodicals of longer or shorter duration, issued in 30 or 40 languages in about 40 countries.

“By efficient investigation and careful work on existing materials”, writes Dr. Max Nettlau, the erudite Anarchist historian, “a list of this extent could be compiled, with a margin of inaccessible or lost publications, not counting the tens of thousands of smaller

items, brochures, leaflets, pictures, etc., and not even referring to the evidence of Anarchist influence in literature, art, the drama”.

In the face of these figures, the greater or smaller output of Anarchist literature at a given moment is of little account. The persecution and suppression of Anarchist publications here and there are incidents in a never-ceasing propaganda which has produced efforts of the greatest *continuity*.

Thus, to cite but a few instances. The New York Yiddish Anarchist weekly, *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*, has been appearing uninterruptedly since October, 1899. The Geneva *Le Reveil* and *Il Résveglio*, edited by Luigi Bertoni, was first issued in July, 1900. *Le Libertaire* (Paris) was founded in Feb. 1895 by Sébastien Faure, a militant Anarchist since 1888, who is not publishing the *Encyclopédie Anarchiste*, of which 2,592 immense pages have already appeared. Peter Kropotkin started *Le Révolté* in Geneva in February, 1879; later, after his imprisonment and expulsion, the paper was continued by other comrades with Jean Grave as editor (January, 1884), — the same Jean Grave who issues now, fifty years later, his periodical *Anarchist cahiers*, *Publications de “La Révolté” et des “Temps Nouveaux”*. *La Revista Blanca*, founded by Frederico Urales in Madrid in 1898, is still appearing under his editorship in Barcelona, having weathered even the storms of last December (1933).

These are but a few of the various forces that carry on the Anarchist ideal in unbroken continuity, and they by far outweigh the meager list to which persecution reduces at times the Anarchist press. At present there appear, in France: *Le Libertaire*, *plus loin*, *Le Semeur*, *La Voix libertaire*, *l’en dehors*, *Action Libertaire*, *Le Combat Syndicaliste*, *Le Refractaire*, *La Brochure Manuelle*, *Le Flambeau*, *Germinal*, etc. In Switzerland: *Le Reveil* et *Il Resveglio*. In England: *Freedom*, and *Freedom Bulletin*. In Belgium: *L’Emancipateur*; *Pensée et Action*.

A number of Anarchist and Anarcho-Syndicalist publications appear in Holland (*Grondslagen*, *Syndicalist*, etc.); Sweden (*Arbetaren*, and others); in Norway; in Lithuania (*Auszrina*, the