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Erich Mühsam
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1907

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Declaration of principles

Erich Mühsam

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The Mannheim Conference has decided to present an exemplary declaration of principles to the international anarchist congress in Amsterdam. At the risk of causing discomfort to the comrades who agreed to this decision, I personally make the following declaration of principles.

Anarchism means nothing other than the rejection of any form of rule. Expressed positively, this means the unlimited autonomy of the individual.

It can be useful for people who approve of this tendency to agree on a specific tactic under which the purely negative demand of anarchism, i.e. the revolutionary struggle against existing states of rule, is pursued.

What this tactic is depends on the respective constellation, but has nothing to do with the principle of anarchism.

How could the comrades in Mannheim come to such an adventurous decision? Have they not considered that the commitment to a declaration of principles, which could just as well be called a party program, combined with the constitution of an organization that smells suspiciously of centralization, means nothing other than the founding of an anarchist party, which of course is in direct contra-

diction to the only anarchist principle, that of the unconditional autonomy of the individual.

Comrades! It is high time to rethink the reasons that have led to such a regrettable derailment. The intrusion of democratic desires into the anarchist movement seems to be due only to a somewhat too lively accommodation of elements who, disappointed by the social democratic weakness, have fled with their radical views from the camp of the socialist centralists to the anarchists.

As gratifying as Friedeberg's actions within the Social Democratic Party were, and as happy as we were to agree with his battle cry for better and more powerful workers' tactics, we should have taken a firm stand from the outset against the amalgamation of anarchist and social democratic ideas that he intended. The historical psychism that Friedeberg wants to replace Marx's historical materialism is nothing other than the replacement of one constructed law with another, very similar one.

The moment we jointly swear allegiance to a philosophical law and make membership of anarchism dependent on this oath, we confess ourselves to being dogmatists.

Just as questionable as a declaration of philosophical principles would be the same side's commitment to a particular tactic. No matter how firmly we are convinced of the necessity of the general strike, anti-militarist agitation, etc., we cannot possibly claim these tactical insights as attributes exclusively of anarchism.

I warn against confusing practical measures with world views. And I must express the fear that the topic of Friedeberg's lecture, the phrase "tactics and world view of the proletariat" which has gradually become a slogan, has already caused a great deal of confusion in the minds of our comrades.

But it is not only concern for the basic anarchist ideas that dictates this attack against "anarcho-socialism"; I fear that this new direction in our movement will weaken the revolutionary spirit. The new and extremely unpleasant wording itself betrays a timid

concession to certain anxious minds for whom the good, strong word anarchism does not seem sufficiently attractive.

A single such concession raises the suspicion that we are trying to join less revolutionary groups by making concessions. I believe I can demonstrate how justified this fear is by referring to Friedeberg's report in "Vorwärts" and "Zukunft", where he does not treat his arrest as a symptom of the state situation in general, but expresses moral indignation about the way in which the arrest took place, about the undignified treatment, which he tried to put in an even darker light by emphasizing who he was. If we begin to highlight our position in civil society, our good reputation in the scientific world, our personal relationships with high state officials on such an occasion, we are putting ourselves in the same dangers that threaten to suffocate authoritative social democracy.

One might object that this reference to Friedeberg's publication has nothing to do with the fears expressed above. I wanted to show how much even freer people who come to us from the camp of social democracy are still caught up in the delusion that the existing society must respect them as a link in the great chain.

If we agree on a program, we thereby group ourselves into the ranks of the parties. Whether we want to or not, we replace the undermining of society through the anarchistic work of the individual with positive work within society. In doing so, we cease to be anarchists.

I have nothing against Friedeberg and the anarcho-socialists. I am sympathetic to occasional tactical cooperation with this extreme wing of social democracy. But I consider it disastrous to make concessions to their ideas, which are still very different from anarchism. I recognize such concessions in the creation of the planned organization and even more so in the substitution of a "legally binding" anarchist declaration of principles.

The slightest deviation from the most imaginable radicalism means the first step towards turning towards bourgeois or even social democratic paths.

I ask the anarchist newspapers to print my comments and to put them up for discussion.