

Letter to Soil of Liberty

Esther Dolgoff

n.d. (July 1976—beni)

Dear Comrades,

We are very happy to tell you that each issue of your publication, *Soil of Liberty*, is better than the last. We have been showing it off around our neck of the woods with pride. I have even gotten out of my general lethargy about answering letters.

From our way of thinking the letter of Kathy E. Ferguson misses the point about anarchist ideas concerning human nature. Bakunin thought that we all had a little bit of "the devil in us" and therefore he wanted power to be divided up in so many parts as would be commensurate with the greatest possible amount of freedom for the individual and for communal living. One is impossible without the other. Bakunin thought that power should be shared—divided up by many groups which would then voluntarily get together—federate—for common needs. In such an organization of society, man would at least be able to cope with the evils in society even though he would not be able to eliminate them entirely.

The Russian *mir* (village), idealized by many radicals, was analyzed by Bakunin with cold and realistic eyes, as miniature autocratic states, made up of male-dominated families. The drunken *mujik* (peasant), the dictatorial father and head of the family, could be bought off with a bottle of vodka. How could it be otherwise in a despotic Czarist male set-up?? The Russian left idealized the *mujik* as the savior of his society. But Bakunin saw him as a victim and a product of the despotic, exploitive society. Unless the *mujik* is radicalized and moved by a sense of injustice, the social revolution is far off. Even though there may be desperate uprisings, often ending in terrible feelings of despondency and hopelessness.

Kropotkin pointed out that although the law of tooth and claw—"survival of the fittest"—exists in society, mutual aid (cooperation) is also a great factor for survival. It exists throughout all of nature. Darwin also observed this factor of mutual aid even though he could not transcend his middle-class, English psychology and found an apology for the crimes of the English industrialists in the law of tooth and claw. Sigmund Freud found that even among one-celled animals there was a clumping together of individuals from which the colony and the individual was strengthened.

Anarchists accept their animal origins and try to understand what is our basic nature; what is necessary for survival. Mutual aid comes with life itself. Throughout the history of life on this planet, life has been an adjustment of the physical body for survival to the surroundings of the individual and of his species. The evolution of his societies were for greater efficiency toward

that end. Kropotkin's observations have been corroborated by a great number of anthropologists and animal behaviorists quite independently of him. As in the natural physical world there is also a natural evolution of society. Our ethics and our culture has not come from a preordained prescription from on high. It has, through trial and error, come from the necessity for survival.

Fortunately for the human being, his behavior in his society, is not let us say, like the behavior of the insects in their mechanistic society, so interestingly described by the French naturalist Jean Henry Fabre. The insect, if he is disturbed in his rigid course of action, in the cycle of his behavior in his society by external factors, has no control of events. He cannot go beyond negative or positive preordained reactions.

But given the brain of the human being, his use of the thumb, his voice box, his upright posture, his ability to say yes or no, the human being has the capacity to change events within his human gamut. The anarchist, reinforced in his ideas by scientists in the fields of ecology, conservation, atomic science and management says that for the survival of the human race and for life in general, there must be decentralization, federation and their concomitant ethics—"From Each According to His Ability; To Each According to His Need." Without this principle we wipe ourselves off the face of the earth.

The role of the anarchist is to reinforce these factors in society which bring more freedom to allow for mutual aid to become the dominant factor in society. Our ethics is based on mutual aid. Woe unto the social movement that does not base itself on justice and mutual aid.

Yours for a better world,
Esther J. Dolgoff
New York

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Soil of Liberty, vol. 2 no. 4 (nd [July 1976])—beni] pp. 21-22. Accessed February 4, 2024 from
.pdf on Libcom: <https://files.libcom.org/files/Scan5967.pdf>

Original source: Letters, Soil of Liberty: Put out by north country anarchists and
anarcha-feminists [Minneapolis, vol. 2 no. 4 (nd [July 1976])—beni] pp. 21-22

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