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Anarchists in Greenwich Village

Guido Bruno

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Have you ever seen a real live anarchist? Just to be honest, you never wanted to see one. Is it because the B follows the A in the alphabet or because of a close association of ideas for which you are not responsible, you think immediately of bombs? Bombs and anarchists are inseparable in the minds of most of us. Mysterious destroyers of life and of property, merciless men who have pledged their lives, their knives, or their guns to some nefarious cause or another, who assemble in cellars lighted with candles or in road-houses which seem uninhabited and in reality are dynamite storehouses and bomb factories—aren't these the anarchists of your imagination? Aren't these the men of whom you think if you read that a king or a prince has been killed by an anarchist or that anarchists plan to blow up the Cathedral on Fifth Avenue?

An anarchist, to you, means a criminal and being an anarchist is his crime. Is it possible today to explain Christianity to one who knows the term alone but not its meaning? And just as many denominations, constitute the Christendom of the world, just as many

kinds of anarchists are existing. It is not absolutely necessary to go out and kill Jews to earn the title, Christian. Millions of us would not even think it possible that Jews were and are being killed in the name of Christianity. And millions of anarchists today will deny stoutly and firmly that the real anarchist would manufacture a bomb, destroy other people's property or murder a fellow-being.

Millions of anarchists? Of course. There are millions among us. Some say they are anarchists and usually are not, and others would be shocked to be called such, yet they really are. It is just like with Christianity, and the same country that shocked Christian civilization with outrages in the name of Christianity put a bloody meaning in the spelling of anarchism. To judge a creed by extreme actions of fanatics cannot lead to an understanding. The religious maniac who is seized by temporary insanity and murders his wife and his children is a mere incident of everyday life and does not cast reflections upon the religious belief which is more or less responsible for his delusion. To take the essence of a religion or a political creed or of anarchism and to compare it with the lives that men actually live, with their actions and the results of their actions, is a scientific and humane way in which to pass judgment.

Some of the biggest men in our public life are anarchists by their actions and they would protest vigorously against being called anarchists. Others confess they are anarchists and nobody would believe them. The men and women whom we are accustomed to call anarchists who are proclaimed as the apostles of anarchism and are supposed to be dangerous individuals recommended to the special care of police surveillance, are in reality harmless creatures, living a conventional life—professional preachers of anarchy, evangelists like Billy Sunday who are passing the plate. They might be sincere, but they surely get their share out of it.

Romance is more essential to everyday life than most of us imagine. Anarchism has all the qualities of romance a twentieth century man or woman could possibly look for. The moving picture screen is their source of information. Here they see the Russian anarchist

lieutenants of Emma Goldman in the beginning of her career, he was delegate to numerous international anarchistic congresses in Europe and in America. He knows everybody in the “movement” and everybody knows him. What does he think about anarchists and anarchism, in New York?

“To be an anarchist means to be an individualist. To be an individualist means to walk your own way, do the thing you want to do in this life—do it as well as you can. You must never impose on your fellowmen; you must never be in their way; you must help everybody as well as you can; the good you derive through your life belongs, in the first place, to you, but you have to share it with the world if the world can benefit by it.

“About throwing bombs and killing other people? No true anarchist could destroy something that is existing. It would mean to deny his own existence, if he would not grant the right of existence to everybody and everything created.”

How does that sound for the leader of the anarchists in our city?

To know anarchy, to really know it as it is, takes away its chief attraction; the romance of a melodrama.

who sacrifices his life for the sake of the cause. Meetings in cellars, exquisitely dressed society women, girls in rags, aristocrats, drunkards, statesmen, rich and poor, well educated and know-nothings, all are sitting around the same table, all take the same oath, all social differences erased, the motto is “all for one and one for all.” This romance is so colossal as to be beyond the ken of ordinary mortals. Not the overthrow of the government, not the planning of a murder, interest the hundreds of onlookers; but this comradeship among people, who under ordinary circumstances would hardly ever meet, spurns the craving for comradeship and equalization of all.

Jack London, who declares himself *as* a revolutionist says: “It is comradeship that all these masses want. They call themselves comrades. Nor is the word empty and meaningless—coined of mere lip service. It knits men together who stand shoulder to shoulder under the red banner of revolt. This red banner, by the way, symbolizes the brotherhood of man, and does not symbolize the incendiaryism that instantly connects itself with the red banner.”

It is this craving for comradeship, for relations free of the masks and limitations necessitated by our society that brings men, and women together under the banner of anarchism, at least what they call anarchism in New York. And that longing for adventure and romance plays a big part in these circles is evident in the fact that since the start of the European struggles certain elements, regular habitués of anarchistic circles found a new field in their activities abroad in different capacities, or here, working for the benefit and the propaganda of universal peace and immediate help for the sufferers in the war zone.

Emma Goldman has a national reputation. She is a professional anarchist. She is doing it year in and year out, like an actress playing the big circuit. Did you ever meet Emma Goldman? Did you ever see her? You could never believe all the things you have read of her. Her home life is very similar to that of any other woman who is lecturing and writing. I saw her some time ago as hostess

to many thousands of her followers and admirers. It was at the anarchists' ball, *Bed Revel*, they called it. It was red all right, but not the red that stands for dynamite and shooting and murder. It was the red Jack London speaks of, the red of comradeship. They danced and laughed and were happy and if anyone would want to call a gathering of young men and women like that dangerous, it wouldn't be safe to attend an opera performance or to enter a subway train. But London claims there are ten million anarchists in the United States. That would make one of each ten persons we meet.

The anarchists in New York mostly drink tea. They are men and women like you and me. They work for their living. Of course they would rather prefer not to work but so would every one of us. Anarchism in eighty out of a hundred cases is the only luxury of their lives. There are certain places in our metropolis which are known to the elect as anarchists meeting places. But mighty little anarchism do they talk about. They usually plan something. Something that any other club or any other society could also plan—an outing, a picnic, or a dance. They attend lectures and musicals and as a whole spend their time just as uselessly as most of us do after working hours.

Old Greenwich Village is the home par excellence of anarchism. On Bleecker Street still stands the building where the *Chat Noir* used to open its doors every evening about seven o'clock and shelter revolutionists of all nations. Here it was that the man who subsequently killed King Humbert of Italy, predicted his deed in the presence of many. But nobody took his utterances seriously, because he was known as a fanatic whose fanaticism bordered on mania. The *Chat Noir* closed her doors long ago. "Mazzini's" is today in the same building. "Anarchists" assemble there every night and have dinner, anarchists from lower Fifth Avenue who arrive in their limousines, have a footman to open the door of their car. They talk anarchism. Here are bits of the table conversation: An elderly lady in black silk evening dress, deep décolletée, diamonds

in her ears, and around her neck and on six fingers, speaking to a gentleman in evening dress. He is immaculate like his shirt front: "I went to Emma's lecture last night. Isn't she a dear? She spoke about those darling children of the Colorado miners and she really made me cry. I'm so sentimental. I remember the time the pastor spoke about the poor Chinese and how they haven't even rice for their little children. It affected me so I could not attend Mrs. R.'s reception and she hasn't forgiven me yet." At another table. Two men, the one looks rather prosperous; the other fellow looks like an artist. "I say," he says, "this fellow Berkman makes me sick. Imagine a man being fourteen years in prison and living the balance of his life in telling his fellowmen of his experiences in prison." A fat Italian plays on the harpsicord. Everybody eats roast chicken, drinks red ink and enjoys being in an anarchistic place.

In a basement nearby is an Italian place. Rough-looking individuals sit around small wooden tables. It would amuse you to understand the conversation of these "anarchists" about the last letter they received from home and when the long expected Anita is coming over to become Antonio's wife.

In the houses of Mystery on Washington Square are bushels of anarchists living. They write anarchism, they draw, and paint anarchism. You can see it on the newsstands or on the book shelves in the book stores.

Let us cross Fourteenth Street and enter that mysterious house on Fifteenth, between Fifth Avenue and Broadway. It looks like a monastery and was one, about sixty years ago. It later was a gambling house, a house of ill fame, and its rooms are utilized at present as studios. It is the property of the Van Buren estate, and the renting agent doesn't bother to send collectors if his tenants do not pay promptly. He knows that if they do not appear themselves, little good will it do to send collectors. Let us walk past the beautifully carved wooden doors of the ancient monk cells and enter Hippolyte Havel's abode, right under the roof. Hippolyte Havel is *the* anarchist of New York. He looks the part. He was one of the