

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Anarchism in Germany

Gustav Landauer

Why do so many of today's skeptics and rebels, these humanists and futurists, among whom I count myself identify themselves as anarchists? Why do these apostles of enlightenment who wish not only to cultivate a new consciousness but also to create a new social form, have the closest ties to the most radical group which advocates relentless class war? What are the characteristics of Anarchism in Germany? In particular, is it a working class movement; and will it remain so? I've decided to answer these particular questions here. Not in order to propagandize for Anarchism; both the publishers and the readers of *Die Zukunft*, a publication with a different agenda, have the right to oppose any such attempt. I do not consider it my calling to play gatecrasher or to sow the seeds of dissension. My sole purpose is to dispel false impressions and to provide an accurate picture of the ideas held by the better part of German anarchists.

The conscious, willful, methodical formation of a personal stake and collective fate of both smaller and larger communities is a major attribute of the *Kultur Mensch*. This virtue manifests itself in humanity's fight, first against the humbling and oppressive force of nature and then against humanity's self-obstructive qualities and

Gustav Landauer
Anarchism in Germany

Retrieved on February 9, 2011 from libcom.org

theanarchistlibrary.org

bad faith. History to this point has been comprised of two things: first, the countless, isolated events of an unconscious, stifling, and deterministic evolution, for which, just as for all other natural phenomena, the so-called laws of nature can be construed. Second, there are the conscious actions of individuals or communities, often resulting in effects bearing little relation to their original intent. Unquestionably, the various phenomena on the spectrum can be slotted into different categories of truth. Thus, the phenomena of desire and motivated action lend themselves, even when less certain, to the establishment of axioms.

I'll state here: civilization has arrived at the point where it can be successful in overcoming these so-called laws of nature, whose development emerged from the general aggregation of many small coincidences. Humans now have the capacity to freely and independently create a life that is their own. The battle against this hostile environment has not stopped and cannot stop. But now it is consciously waged against the one foe that bars humanity's path to great fulfillment.

In the past, two internally related factors hindered humanity's ascension. First, a lack of consciousness, a certain torpor, and the narrow-mindedness of the masses, as opposed to smaller groups, even though there is no natural difference between the two. Certainly, nature produces both the intelligent and the dim, the strong and the weak. The contention that the neglected masses are essentially populated by dolts, while the smart and strong reside only among the fortunate few, however, would not occur to any honest person. Second, Humanity has been oppressed not because disunited people struggled against a natural and hostile environment, but rather because they fought and oppressed one another. To be sure, it has been the tiny privileged elite, who have used every physical and spiritual means at their disposal — using the ignorance of the great mass of people, to keep them gagged and oppressed — right up to the present day.

Anarchism's lone objective is to reach a point at which the beligerence of some humans against humanity, in whatever form, comes to a halt. And with this end point in mind, people must transcend themselves in the spirit of brother and sisterhood, so that each individual, drawing on natural ability, can develop freely.

Homo homini lupus — man is a wolf to man. That was, as a practical matter, mankind's motto in the 1800 years that passed since Jesus spoke the words: love your neighbor as you love yourself. Anarchism isn't interested in postulating a God, or setting up another inflexible moral code, since we despise all coercion. Once the events of history and advances in technology have been analyzed once and tested again, Anarchism seeks just one thing: the forging of alliances among all those advocating a common interest when one needs to wrest concessions from nature by engaging in difficult, daily struggle. And when interests among people diverge, individuals will simply follow their own discretion; and it is again the union of various confederations that will protect the individual from the harmful actions of any individuals. It should be guarded against, however, that these confederations take on disproportionate power. It is in this sense that we call ourselves anarchists: we are for the benefit of the multitude because we detest all violence which deprives the enjoyment and autonomy as a result of deeply seeded cultural factors.

We repudiate, above all, the colossal image that impresses the delusive stamp of authority, leaving only the imprint of docile adoration behind. We are talking in particular about the rigid institutions of long historical standing, into which people are born and to which they accommodate themselves, whether they regard them as reasonable and beneficial or not. Especially when it comes to the organs of coercive state power, the individual has ultimately but one choice: submission. The lone justification being that those who came before acquiesced in the same way as their descendants now do. The alternative is to radically depart from the terra firma of received life, for today there remains hardly a corner where the

state hasn't laid its peremptory hands. The power of the church, admittedly still monstrous, nevertheless finds itself in a most timely state of decay. Thus, many are finding it possible to extract themselves, even if with difficulty. The state, resting on the same legitimate foundation as its sister, the church, namely the blind faith in authority, will decompose just as the religious orders have. Currently, humanity's real redemption lies not in compulsion and spiritual tutelage, were it even with the best intentions, but rather in freedom.

On the basis of state-imposed servitude, reinforced by the blind faith the masses devote to musty traditionalists and other remnants of a bygone era — above all to dynasties and patriarchies — the oppressive system of privileged private wealth rests. No world traditions, not even those with the weight of millennia behind them, can make justify before anarchists the custom that so few are able to lay real claim to ownership of land. Those who enjoy the fruits of its bounty play no actual role in harvesting it, yet they deny its yield to their toiling fellow man. No earthly power or widespread prejudice will deter anarchists from the conviction that the deprived and destitute must name what is theirs, that which is due the last and most wretched among them: land on which to stand, to stroll, to rest, and to work. He who complacently enjoys custody of inherited "rights" and privilege, (a custody secured only by enclosure behind high walls) reposing on moneybags, has once and for all alms to pay. These alms are paid to the oppressive regime, and its armed footsoldiers — deployed as they are against the enemy within — whose continued power is secured by the dull patience and dis-solute will of the masses. All this while enormous masses of people — who have the same talents and needs as the oppressors themselves — must eke out a pittance for such necessities as the clothing on their backs.

Anarchists do not even claim, however, that the majority of oppressed people today even consider themselves victims. It may also be the case that among our own ranks, compassion and love are not

this won't be true much longer. With respect to our ghastly inheritance, we retain the right of checking its inventory, and so shall the demand ring ever more imperatively: to shunt aside the old plundering order, while salvaging what we can from the debris of the now obsolescent rot. This is the gauntlet that Anarchism throws down. The lower orders of society will never — in light of recent and mounting evidence of injustice — be brought so low as to accept a cease-fire in striving for the formation of a society which does everyone justice and therefore deserves the title 'just.'

Anarchists do not comprise a political party, since our scorn for the state forecloses our treading on the same ground with it and especially since we despise bargaining and haggling. We Anarchists want to be preachers: a revolution of spirit is, for us, the first order. What end can come from the obstinacy of today's elite when they repress the aspirations and desires of the masses of our people? We shall not abdicate responsibility, rather, we will quietly take it on, safe in the knowledge that future generations will thank us for helping them respect themselves once again. The consciousness that we will not only not see the culmination of our victory, but rather will suffer fresh disappointments and setbacks — to say nothing of persecution — will not hold us back. In spite of this, we will devote ourselves to our life's work and to the expansion of enlightenment to all layers of society. We think, along with Schopenhauer: "Life is short and even though truth appears remote, the truth lives long: so tell the truth!" Of course, most anyone, after a bit of honest and courageous study, can name his own truth. Whoever believes it is in order to demand the imposition of "his Truth" along with the violent suppression of those with a divergent belief, may wish to wander down that road. The anarchists will walk down theirs.

place in the coming society. It is, obviously, no more a scandal to have been born a bourgeois than a proletarian. More to the point, we anarchists are ready to regard anyone, regardless of their social class of origin, who considers our perspective correct and is willing to live a life that comports with the consequences of this belief, as a comrade.

However, the person who has recognized the truth in Anarchism, will certainly not spend all his time in clubs or conventions disputing which method the future society will employ for the washing of dishes or the efficacious cleaning of boots. Rather, this person, as far as personal courage and station in life allow, will without doubt demand the step-by-step improvement of his life's condition. Insight alone tells him that the improvement of his economic lot, as present circumstances dictate, remains intimately linked with the success of vigorous mass actions by workers. As long as the owners and the powerful have at their disposal all of the means they allow themselves to uphold the wretched conditions of today, so too will organized people fight back with all allowable methods for the comprehensive improvement of their lot. We don't preach class war but we acknowledge that it is often forced on the persons who desire an improvement in their condition. It isn't a matter of the destruction of modern culture, it's rather a matter of a vast army of those previously locked out, and who have by now acquired an appetite to also sit at the table and feast.

Those barely keeping their heads above water, to say nothing of the jobless and down-trodden are not well served by talk of revolution and future paradise. That's why relentless class struggle remains self-evident for those whose only recourse for the betterment of their life station, in today's society, is the determination of solidarity and the energy of engagement. And not to be misunderstood, I do not necessarily hold any particular enmity for many among the bourgeoisie. Just as Mr. von Egidy saw fit to call out: "all of us are among the guilty," so too could the bourgeoisie, product of millennia as they are, declare, "No one is guilty!" However,

necessarily the right words to describe our deepest motives. As for my animating force, it lies in the repugnance at the humanity that encircles us, a rage at the indolence of the rich who blithely build their happiness on the ruins of the joyless existence of the dehumanized multitude. My rage dissipates not one iota when I consider the extent of the squalor to which the oppressed are subjected. As they emerged from the mother's womb, the haves and the have-nots are as distinguishable as one egg is from another. And then, at the end of their miserable lives, spent as it is among the outcasts of society: slogging, these skeletons — the shadow remaining from an exhausting struggle for life — have scarcely enough money to bury their kin with dignity.

This assessment of our time and our future ideal of lives lived fully through free association is agreed upon by many among Germany's educated classes; yet they remain too remote to feel a true solidarity with us. The basis for this essentially rests on two elements. First on the incorrect, if also explainable, condemnation of the anarchist party (there is no anarchist party) and its tactics (there are no specifically anarchist tactics). Second, it depends on the widespread dispersion of general despair and skepticism with respect to the prospect of any such future ever emerging out of our present. To these men, Schopenhauer provides solace during their sleepless nights. Their daily work is the amelioration of the suffering which meets their eyes; they see it as just hopeless social reform that comprises a drop in the ocean. These skeptics, at least those of consequence, do not claim that they and those equally-privileged are actually superior from the standpoint of spirituality or morality. Certainly they concede — and we are of completely like mind here — that today in some districts material conditions are so squalid that some are born deprived of a healthy start to life. Fortunately, this perspective today remains an exception to the rule. By nature and with respect to their innate talent, however, the proletarian cultural world remains poor. Yet we think that both this degradation on the one hand and the pampered privilege on the

other have begun to enter the flesh and blood of mankind; in fact they have begun to enter the sphere of the body and soul, whose qualities will be inherited by the coming generation. We contend that no language can be loud and decisive enough for the uplifting of our compatriots, so that they may be incited out of their engrained daily drudgery. A renewed social form must be spurred on, through the transcendence of the present spiritual inertia, in pursuit of energetic action, designed to break barriers, and to prepare new ground for our seed. That is the propaganda of the deed, as I understand it. Everything else is passion, despair, or a great misconception. It hasn't a thing to do with killing people; rather, it regards the rejuvenation of human spirit and will along with the productive energies unleashed by large communities.

Large-scale communities, I say. For, it is a great mistake, one not even overcome by the usually insightful Professor Stammler, who derives anarchist theory from the writings of Proudhon and Stirner — that anarchism means individualism and therefore stands, when so misunderstood, in opposition to socialism. Certainly, socialism for us means something quite different from the “abolition of the private ownership of the means of production.” Our socialism doesn't speak even of collective property, since behind it hides nothing other than the domination of a bureaucratic cabal. No, we speak rather of, to use Benedikt Friedländer's delightful expression, the “ownerlessness of nature's bounty.” This means, once people have recognized their real interests, they will develop strong alliances that will guarantee everyone a share of the Earth's plenty. And when individuals or groups claim the means of production for their own purposes, then those remaining shall receive equitable compensation. I note here that Bruno Wille expands on this line of argument in his *Philosophy of Freedom*. One of the first, in contrast to the obscurantism of earlier and some present day anarcho-communists, to soberly espouse the ideas of anarchism, was indeed Benedikt Friedländer, in his rather suggestive pamphlet *Free Socialism Contra Marxist State Servi-*

tude. This clearheaded thrust, recognizable in Paul Kampffmeyer's earlier pamphlet, *The Meaning of Unions*, represents, as I see it, the principle of the young anarchist tendency, on which Eugen Dühring and Henry George have exercised particularly strong influence, and not only here in Germany. Friedländer's pamphlet, even though it comes off as most modest and lacking in presumption, seems to me of much greater significance than, for instance, the works of Mackay, as referred to by Professor Stammler, as they are heavy on imprecision and pretension. Moreover, the Communist Kropotkin has the merit of having freed Anarchism from cliché by his detailed vision of a free society.

I have no misgivings in saying that strong organizations will exist in anarchist society too, just as I am certain that some already existing organizations will “grow into” Anarchism. Indeed, this terminology is suitable here — by that I mean, the organizations of real producers, namely, the workers. I allude in passing to the exceedingly suggestive state in which our language exists with respect to the words producer and worker. The worker isn't a producer per se, for where then do the proceeds of his work collect? And the producer is often no worker because — where is his work? I absolutely include among the ranks of the workers, whose unification shall be the basis for creating a free society, the leading lights of science, those experienced in exchanging goods, be they today called engineers, directors, salespeople, railroad bureaucrats or whatever else.

Of course, it absolutely doesn't occur to us to construct an artifice of historical development, by which — as a matter of material necessity — the working class, to one extent or another, is called by Providence to take for itself the role of the present day ruling class, to say nothing of the founding of the dictatorship of the proletariat. I have no hesitation in clarifying that class struggle fails to have this meaning for me. I am in no way of the opinion that once an individual has passed a certain threshold of wealth, that he then becomes an irredeemable reprobate, undeserving of any