

Why I Am an Anarchist

Louise Michel

March 1896

I am an Anarchist because Anarchy alone, by means of liberty and justice based on equal rights, will make humanity happy, and because Anarchy is the sublimest idea conceivable by man. It is, today, the summit of human wisdom, awaiting discoveries of undreamt of progress on new horizons, as ages roll on and succeed each other in an ever widening circle.

Man will only be conscious when he is free. Anarchy will therefore be the complete separation between the human flocks, composed of slaves and tyrants, as they exist to day, and the free humanity of tomorrow. As soon as man, whoever he may be, comes to power, he suffers its fatal influence and is corrupted; he uses force to defend his person. He is the State; and he considers it a property to be used for his benefit, as a dog considers the bone he knows. If power renders a man egotistical and cruel, servitude degrades him. A slave is often worse than his master; nobody knows how tyrannous he would be as a master, or base as a slave, if his own fortune or life were at stake.

To end the horrible misery in which humanity has always dragged a bloody and painful existence incites brave hearts more and more to battle for justice and truth. The hour is at hand: hastened by the crimes of governors, the law's severity, the impossibility of living in such circumstances, thousands of unfortunates without hope of an end to their tortures, the illusory amelioration of gangrened institutions, the change of power which is but a change of suffering, and man's natural love of life; every man, like every race, looks around to see from which side deliverance will come.

Anarchy will not begin the eternal miseries anew. Humanity in its flight of despair will cling to it in order to emerge from the abyss. It is the rugged ascent of the rock that will lead to the summit; humanity will no longer clutch at rolling stones and tufts of grass, to fall without end.

Anarchy is the new ideal, the progress of which nothing can hinder. Our epoch is as dead as the age of stone. Whether death took place yesterday or a thousand years ago, its vestiges of life are utterly lost. The end of the epoch through which we are passing is only a necropolis full of ashes and bones.

Power, authority, privileges no longer exist for thinkers, for artists, or for any who rebel against the common evil. Science discovers unknown forces that study will yet simplify. The disappearance of the order of things we see at present is near at hand. The world, up till now divided among a few privileged beings, will be taken back by all. And the ignorant alone will be astonished at the conquest of humanity over antique bestiality.

I became definitely an Anarchist when sent to New Caledonia, on a state ship, in order to bring me to repentance for having fought for liberty. I and my companions were kept in cages like lions or tigers during four months. We saw nothing but sky and water, with now and then the white sail of a vessel on the horizon, like a bird's wing in the sky. This impression and the expanse were overwhelming. We had much time to think on board, and by constantly comparing things, events, and men; by having seen my friends of the Commune, who were honest, at work, and who only knew how to throw their lives into the struggle, so much they feared to act ill; I came rapidly to the conclusion that honest men in power are incapable, and that dishonest ones are monsters; that it is impossible to ally liberty with power, and that a revolution whose aim is any form of government would be but a delusion if only a few institutions fell, because everything is bound by indestructible chains in the old world, and everything must be uprooted by the foundations for the new world to grow happy and be at liberty under a free sky.

Anarchism is today the end which progress seeks to attain, and when it has attained it will look forward from there to the edge of a new horizon, which again as soon as it has been reached will disclose another, and so on always, since progress is eternal.

We must fight not only with courage but with logic; that the disinherited masses, who sprinkle every step of progress with their blood, may benefit at last by the supreme struggle soon to be entered upon by human reason together with despair. It is necessary that the true ideal be revealed, grander and more beautiful than all the preceding fictions. And should this ideal be still far off it is worth dying for.

That is why I am an Anarchist.

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