



An early manuscript

Max Nettlau

19 May 1895

Whilst our conviction of the rightness of our anarchist opinions remains unaltered, we may at times feel disheartened at the comparatively small number of our active propagandists and it becomes every so much more important that no energy shall be lost and all action turned in the right direction.

After all, on looking closer, we are more numerous than we may think; ours is not a superficial movement attracting the biggest crowd by pandering to the prejudices of people with a view to their exploitation—it is a movement of so high and noble aims that it can attract at the beginning only the best and most unselfish and their number is always small. Still they are working away in an unpretending way in numerous places, needing no organization, no direction, no visible cohesion save friendly natural aid and cooperation.

To us who believe to have grasped the fundamental ideas of anarchism, these ideas appear so simple, so just, so self-evident; we see them expressed in a numerous and thoughtful literature, and in everyday's life, every advancement of science and research gives us new proofs of their soundness. We can hardly understand that serious and open-minded people, once they are put before them, do not embrace them at once; yet this is

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not the case and moreover the great mass of men are neither serious nor open-minded but ready to be attracted just by what is most repulsive to us.

We do not pretend to stand above the people and be proud of any intellectual or moral superiority: for such things are the most sterile abstractions and humbug in general; we are the outcome and victims of the present system as everybody is and only a new system, new surroundings of freedom for all, a society in which toil and idleness shall not divide men in mutual enemies but work and leisure shall harmoniously embrace all,—only under such conditions can we become superior to what they are not, and then that will be everybody's share, equality of conditions being a prime condition to an achievement of any value.

But the question remains, in what way can we impress the indifferent or hostile masses with the ideas of anarchism?

Some think we are not practical enough, too theoretical, too abstract, that we isolate ourselves by uncompromising ideas and acts and advocate to take part in the organized popular movements as trade-unionism,—others believe in spending all our energy on the propaganda of our ideas pure and simple; they recall the fact that a weight placed on the arm of a lever exerts the more pressure the more it is removed from the point on which the lever turns,—and also the fact that an advanced movement should be measured not only by its own effects but by the propelling influence it exercises on the next following and all other movements. In any case the best practical solution of this question will always be, that each follows his own inclinations, for no good could come from half-hearted work against our own conviction.

The question then is: in what sense can we be practical to reach best the masses?

It cannot be by simply identifying ourselves with their tendencies and trying to divert them in the direction of freedom. By this we would be swamped over and disappear before one

socialism and that disgraceful spirit of interference with other people's affairs in general.

Some symptoms of the coming revolution are all sorts of ideas and schemes, none of which is a real remedy by itself but which show the volcanic character of our time: such are the general strike, the miners' international strike, the labor army and the idea of the seizure of a territory of America; the fasci of Sicily—and even large masses cooperate with anarchists in local revolts as those of Xeres in 1892 and of Massa Carrara in 1894.

Anarchists are to be found in such movements when they have a revolutionary character as at Xeres, at Massa Carrara, on the first of May 1891 in Rome, in May 1886 in Chicago, etc; or they act for themselves (France, Spain); they propagate their ideas; at election times they carry on an abstentionist propaganda; modern literature is penetrated with their ideas (chiefly in France), etc.

All these factors cooperate and this means the construction of a new world full of life which will soon outgrow and cast away the empty shell of the old world which was young and vigorous in its time, but is now only kept alive by force and fraud.

I think if we fully throw ourselves in this movement, it should be done with the full and everlasting force that we have got, that is the advocacy of anarchism before all and that communism—being in our eyes inseparable from anarchism but being a less wide conception—be kept in the second place, the first being, so to speak, a natural, the second a human factor. Under this aspect our propaganda will reach the greatest possible mass and if some become individualists, this is a smaller evil than if by a general communist and socialist propaganda we provide but new subjects for State socialist governments.

I should like to hear the opinions of comrades on this subject and before all the experience of propagandists.

got any hold of them or, if succeeding, we would be their leaders and in that position we must needs be as worthless as any other leaders and dead for our cause of anarchy. What can the next years bring us? If they bring not the social revolution, they bring a debased kind of State socialism and municipal socialism intimately linked with growing capitalism and growing misery. A State socialist revolution is out the question and were it possible, we should have to fight the same struggle and to suffer the same persecutions from State socialism as from Capitalism. Hence nothing with which we could have any sympathy is before us and to waste our forces on the general labor movement is like imitating the action of all the radical, semi-socialist or even socialist politicians who, under the last Tory administration, helped the liberal opposition to with the general election and once they had placed the liberals into power, nothing was heard of the promises of those who were "all socialists" before the elections.

Thus when we omit to fight this coming State socialist and, in general, authoritarian tendency today, we shall have to fight it all the same in a few years when its hold on the people will be stronger than it is now.

To do this efficiently we must before all insist on insist on the propaganda *against authority, for freedom* in every sphere and domain of life. This alone will hold good against the slavery of today and the slavery of tomorrow.

Whether one who is imbued, by our propaganda, with the hatred of authority in all forms, is at once convinced of our *economic* ideas, is in my opinion, a matter of secondary interest. To me it is sufficient that this man will not uphold any existing nor coming authority—and he is certainly entitle to the right to examine our economic ideas before he adopts them.

I mean to say: anarchism, or the rejection of authority, and communism are not notions of exactly the same character. Anarchism is a general principle of free, natural development which is underlying for all times the immense majority of

natural phenomena which acknowledge no master nor exploiter and follow only the dictations of their own nature; our own body is an anarchist organization, a sample of the value of anarchist communism; our language and its history and development are modes of anarchist developments. And only we ourselves have fallen under the slavery of ignorance and brute force, will their results religion and property and their hateful upholder: the State?

Communism, on the other side, is but the means or the chief means by which we mean to lay the most solid basis of anarchism. I am fully convinced of the soundness of our arguments for communism; still I feel that these arguments represent the present historical phase of our conception of the economic relations, the best results of present research and studies—whilst anarchism is something far wider, it is the recognition of the necessity to assimilate the ways of human development to those of natural development.

From this I conclude that the principle of anarchism as rejection of every authority is fully worthy of a propaganda by itself and that it would be wise to place it in the foreground and when we have a real confidence in the truth of communism, those who by the rejection of authority have become independent searchers for truth will be sure to adopt communism a little later.

Thus I think that by insisting on communism over anarchism we merge in the general socialist current and waste our efforts—and by absolutely amalgamating communism and anarchism we enforce on others whom we want to convert a theory which they cannot properly examine (for to do that they would have to be anarchists first.) But it seems logical to start with anarchism which is the larger conception.—

We have to fight economic exploitation held up by the force of prejudice which provides it with physical force. The prejudices of the people (submission to authority, religion, patriotism, etc.) can never be removed by propaganda of words nor

of acts, but only by new facts; they are absorbed by their misery and toil, which exercise such pressure on them that they can hardly realize any hopes, much less a belief and confidence in better times coming. Only after the social revolution we can speak to them as *men*: now they are and consider themselves only as particles of an immense machine for human (and their own) oppression and exploitation.

To them as a mass we can only expose authority in whatever old or new disguise and advocate revolt for freedom and well-being for all; we have to demonstrate the failure of past revolutions when the people know nothing better to do than to leave property untouched and elect a new popular government which a few months afterwards massacred them as the French government did in June 1848 the Parisian workers. We tell them that the destruction of existing and prevention of new authority and the seizure of all wealth by the people as well as its immediate free use by the people according to their own arrangements are inseparable and the only guarantees of success.

We can do but little better than advocate these principles by words and acts; we cannot make the social revolution which however is rapidly coming, accelerated by the growing misery, the disorganization of the present industrial system by the decentralization of industry (new industries created in all countries destroy home industries, increase the unemployed and make everything unsettled, moreover breeding war), the increasing inefficiency of trade unions and strikes as well as of labor legislation to deal with these problems, the growing gulf between the new labor-bureaucracy and the people, the corruption of the governing classes who lose faith in their own iniquitous monopoly, the destruction of some prejudices at any rate by increasing popular instruction which all State control of education cannot prevent, etc.—against the social revolution are arrayed the forces of capitalism and religion and of State