

The Preacher

Johann Most, Terrorist of the Word

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Radicalism in America is no longer dismissed as the “lunatic fringe of the labor movement,” as one of the famous presidents of a generation ago called it. The depression, the Russian Revolution, and to a certain extent the liberalism of the New Deal Administration have done their bit to relegate that term to oblivion. The “lunatics,” or at least the most important group among them, have grown in numbers. They have become a factor in the labor movement; and they are, not without success, attempting to play an important part in the nation’s domestic and foreign policy. They have ceased to be “lunatics” in the process, and they are as reasonable and as moderate as the author of that famous invective ever was. In fact, as their leader Earl Browder put it in his pamphlet *Traitors in American History*, they are ready to help “crush, by all proper and democratic means, any clique, group, circle, faction or party which conspires or acts to subvert, undermine, weaken or overthrow, any or all institutions of American democracy.”

Such has not always been the language of American radicalism. Time was when crowds, almost as large as those which now listen to the leader of American Communism, were hailing a gospel every tenet of which was a challenge to “all institutions of American democracy.” True, the language of the radical speakers was at that time more often German than English. But then, the German-speaking element constituted a very considerable section of America’s organized labor. It was the time when “rugged individualism” marched rough-shod over the native and immigrant workers alike; and when those of the latter who could effect no escape into the gradually vanishing open spaces of economic independence were seeking solace in millennial dreams of social justice or in a sweet intoxication of a gospel of revenge. During the last two decades of the past century that gospel found an inspired preacher in the person of a German immigrant, Johann Most, who was to become the foremost exponent of revolutionary anarchism on American soil. It was not up-to-date anarchism that he was offering his enthusiastic followers. The anarchism of the post-Bakunin period, the gospel of Peter Kropotkin with its faith in the goodness of man and its touching naivete, pertaining to the communism of the first Christian dreamers, was not to his taste, though eventually he had to pay lip-homage to it. Singled out for suffering by an exceptionally cruel fate and a subhuman brutality of his fellow men, he remained all his life faithful to the old gospel of “an eye for an eye”; and it was this feature of his propaganda that was to cast a deep shadow both upon his person and upon the idea which he impersonated.

Johann Most was born in 1846, in the Bavarian city of Augsburg. His father, a copyist in some office, was barely able to support his family. Hans’ early privations were accentuated by the heartlessness of his stepmother and by his own physical sufferings. As a small boy he had contracted a vicious inflammation of the left jawbone, which proved the bane of his life. After five years of experimentation and botching by various quacks, he finally underwent a thorough operation. His life was saved, but the removal of two inches of his jawbone left him forever with a cruelly disfigured face.

The boy’s rebellious spirit thwarted the father’s hopes to see his son some day a member of the educated and respectable middle class. At the age of twelve Hans organized a strike against one of the particularly brutal teachers and was expelled from school. He had to learn a trade and became an apprentice in the workshop of a bookbinder. At the age of seventeen he obtained his journeyman’s “diploma,” and he started out on the “Wanderschaft” — that long tramp which until the end of the past century was well-nigh compulsory for all skilled workers under the old medieval tradition of the German guilds.

That trek lasted for five years and brought him into practically every city of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and parts of Northern Italy. He tramped on foot from place to place, working whenever he could find a job, and begging when there was no work to do.

Finding a job was not so easy for him as it was for the other workers. With that callousness which characterizes so many specimens of the human race, he was told more often than not that a man with his face was not wanted; that customers would object to such a sight; that the wife of the employer was with child and could give birth to a monster if she saw him; that he really belonged in an asylum for incurables — and similar pieces of popular humor.

Such humiliations encountered him at every step. They filled him with that bitterness which was to pervade his whole life. A bitterness which during his active years found its expression in a fanatical hatred of the privileged classes. In his later years, when all hope was gone, it took the shape of an all-embracing contempt for the human race. Rebuffs of this kind certainly did not encourage him to look for work; for everywhere he could expect similar insults and threats of arrest if he answered in kind. At his lowest moments he thought of suicide, and when his urge to live prevailed, he practically made up his mind to abandon all ambitions and to squander his life as a vagabond.

There was one great hope that for many years kept him from that final surrender. Since his school days he had shown great histrionic abilities. At the age of fourteen, when he started his apprenticeship as a bookbinder, he was firmly convinced that someday he would become a famous actor. With that persistence with which so many people are prone to believe in the miraculous, he hoped that the ugly scar and his misshapen face would lose their horrors both for the directors and for the public. Once, when asking for a try-out, he was told that his face was more fit for a clown than for an actor. But he was not discouraged. During his years of tramping his antics had often attracted attention and admiration among his fellow sufferers. It took years before he finally gave up his great ambition.

The Convert

In 1867, at the age of twenty-one, the young vagrant worked in Le Locle, in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. By that time he had accumulated a certain fund of knowledge which raised him above most of his fellow workers. While the others were gambling or playing, the young bookbinder would usually retire into his little room and read. Not the literature of escape which might make him forget his personal misery; he chose more solid stuff — classics, history, natural sciences. The smattering of culture which he thus obtained compensated in part for his physical inferiority of which he never ceased to be conscious.

One Sunday he went to La Chaux-de-Fonds, an industrial community which was only a few miles away. A branch of the International Workingmen's Association — the First International — had recently been founded there. The young organization was fortunate to have in its midst a number of enthusiastic preachers. Ernest Renan once said that if anyone wanted to get an idea of the spirit prevailing among the early Christian communities, he should look into the various branches of the International Workingmen's Association. At that time the International had no uniform program. True, Karl Marx, its guiding spirit, was trying to impregnate it with his own ideas. But the various branches often professed the most divergent views. Underlying it all, however, was a passionate protest against the injustices of the existing system. A year or two later these organizations were to become the scene of bitter internecine struggles. But at the time when Most listened to the speeches at the Sunday labor festival, there was still harmony — at least in that branch. The young man went home filled with an enthusiasm that was to shape the destinies of his life.

His conversion cost him his job at Le Locle. With the eagerness of a man who has suddenly "got religion," he undertook his missionary work in the local German workers' society. His zeal was soon rewarded. Not only was he elected secretary of the association, but his eloquence and restless activity soon increased its membership fourfold, from seventeen to seventy-two. He lost all notion of time. Staying up until late at night did not increase his working efficiency. His employer objected to Most's personal contribution to the law of diminishing returns, and the young agitator went on the tramp again.

He finally reached Zurich, where he found work and new inspiration. The radical workers of that city were, like those of Le Locle, organized in a branch of the International Working-men's Association. It was in their midst that Most met Hermann Greulich, for the next fifty years the outstanding figure in the Swiss labor movement. Like Most, Greulich was a German bookbinder who had tramped his way to Zurich, where he decided to stay. He later became the author of a famous revolutionary poem on Dante's theme *Segui il tuo corso e lascia dir le genti* (Follow thy path and let the people talk). Greulich actually stuck to that maxim. Unswerved by the radical jibes of the younger generation, he followed the traditional path of the socialist movement, from a revolutionary sect to a respectable party of patriotic labor politicians and Government job-holders.

Most remained about a year in Zurich, where he completed his apprenticeship as a propagandist, so to speak. He learned a good deal from Greulich, and the two men became very good friends. But the further developments of the socialist movement were to part them forever.

In the Austrian Capital

In the fall of 1868, Most left Switzerland and tried his luck in Vienna. Political liberties had been granted only two years before, after the defeat the Hapsburg monarchy had suffered at the hands of the Prussians. During those two years socialist ideas made great headway among the Austrian workers. The family quarrel which disturbed the labor movement in Germany found no echo in Vienna. Yet all was not harmony on the blue Danube either. A bitter fight was going on between two sets of militants — the intellectuals and those who were either working or had worked at the bench. This perennial conflict within the radical movement usually assumes the guise of doctrinal divergencies concerning theoretical or tactical matters. Such, however, was not the case in Vienna. There it was a frank, undisguised, unsophisticated rivalry over leadership. Typical representatives of Austria's university youth began to flock to the nascent labor movement with the well-nigh unveiled intention of using it to further their own ambitions for power and influence as against the feudal and capitalist beneficiaries of the existing system. It was this somewhat suspicious friendship which in the end made the workers prefer the championship of their horny-handed brothers to that of their white-collared sympathizers.

Johann Most soon became a well-known figure at workers' gatherings. His humorous and satirical pieces, recited with inimitable cleverness, won him the admiration of all those who attended workers' festivals or other affairs. He was not yet sufficiently trained to deliver lectures, or to be a sort of independent orator. But at meetings he would invariably take the floor and his sharp sarcastic remarks were always received with great applause. His mastery of invective, which was later to make him famous in both Germany and the United States, was showing already, and one of his little speeches called forth newspaper attacks against the "impudent bookbinder." As a result, he spent a month in prison — a comparatively brief introduction to his later sentences, which eventually totaled up to the respectable size of ten years — one sixth of his life.

In the latter part of 1869 the Viennese Socialists sent delegates to a German Socialist Convention. The Austrian authorities became alarmed. They had heard of Karl Marx and of the International, and were terror-stricken. The extremely moderate "Liberal" Government — its Minister of the Interior, Dr. Giskra, was an ardent revolutionist in 1848 — issued orders which to all intents and purposes meant the suppression of all civil liberties, at least as far as workers' organizations were concerned. In protest the Socialists organized a demonstration. Between thirty and forty thousand workers quit their factories and appeared before the Chamber of Deputies, whose opening session was scheduled for that day. A delegation was sent to the Prime Minister presenting the demands of the masses. In the meantime the most popular orators — Most was of course among them — were addressing the assembled crowd.

At first the Government was not certain how it should react toward this show of strength on the part of the radicals. After five days it decided to strike hard. All members of the delegation that had visited the Prime Minister were arrested. A few weeks later the other well-known agitators suffered the same fate. On March 2, 1870, young Most, twenty-four years old, was again in prison.

“High Treason”

They were all indicted for “high treason,” for which the highest penalty was death. But the prisoners, or at least Most, did not take that indictment very seriously. Bail was not given in those days, and the “traitors” had to await the trial in their cells. There Most had a fling at revolutionary verse which turned out to be as good or as bad as most of the “proletarian” poetry that may be found in various radical publications. He himself, in referring to the children of his Muse, puts the word “poetry” in quotation marks. One of them, *Die Arbeitsmanner*, survived, and has been sung for more than two generations by German workers of every radical denomination. But it brought him no fame. For as soon as he embraced the gospel of anarchism, the Socialist publishing houses, while including his *Arbeitsmanner* in every songbook, made it a practice to omit the name of its author.

The conviction of the indicted men was a foregone conclusion. Johann Most, considered as one of the four chief culprits, was given a five-year sentence. He did not have to serve his full term. About a year after his arrest Austria switched over to a conservative regime. The new Cabinet wanted to play off the workers against the Liberal bourgeoisie. To achieve that end it declared a general political amnesty which released ninety-three prisoners.

Young Most left the prison with a greatly enhanced ego. The heavy penalty for which he had been singled out from among a few scores of other prisoners was a distinct flattery. He was not only a popular speaker and entertainer, but a dangerous man as well, threatening the existence of one of the great empires. The judge, in motivating the sentence, had particularly emphasized “Most’s unusual intelligence and determined character,” adding that his appearance in Austria meant “the personified propaganda for the Republic.” And one of the important dailies wrote that while “At first one might believe oneself confronted with a comical figure,” — this referred to Most’s twisted face, — “one is unwittingly reminded of the first French Revolution ... and one must admit that this seemingly insignificant little man must be taken very seriously.”

What they wrote about the French Revolution was not purely journalistic imagination. The active militants of those days were all manual workers. Even if officially they were opposed to violence — for all meetings were held under the surveillance of a police officer — they actually dreamed of, and longed for, a violent revolution. As Most puts it in his *Memoirs*, they all “felt, so to speak, like ‘Jacobins’ who would soon be placed in a position where they would not only be able to square accounts with all enemies of the human race, but to make a clean sweep of them as well.” This revolutionary spirit of the militants was of course only a passing phase. Extension of civil liberties soon enabled the militants-from-the-bench to engage in the safe endeavor of organizing the workers on a large scale. And that spelled the doom of all their revolutionary ambitions. Thousands of soft jobs were created for labor agitators, organizers, journalists, and politicians. The former horny-handed would-be Jacobins became ordinary labor leaders, British or American style. Their traditional “scientific” and “proletarian” vocabulary of Marxism changed nothing in the substance.

Out of prison, Most immediately rose considerably in the hierarchy of the movement. Up to that time he had been only a minor prophet, so to speak. He had never been entrusted with addressing meetings as the main speaker. The Government, in singling him out as one of the most dangerous men, had shown more acumen than the party leadership. The latter, no doubt impressed by the ready wit he displayed during the trial — as well as by the versatility which he had shown as an editor of a prison paper — now decided to utilize his great powers for spreading the gospel in the provinces. His propaganda tour was a great success. Old branches of the party which had been dissolved were reorganized, new groups were formed. That young bookbinder with the twisted face was truly one of the founders of the Socialist movement in most of the territory now called the Ostmark of Germany. Upon his return to Vienna, they planned to send him on a similar tour to the German-speaking (Sudeten) sections of Bohemia. But the Government had become alarmed. The Paris Commune of March-May, 1871, was still holding out in its heroic struggle. The “specter of Communism” was again stalking over Europe. The “impudent foreigner,” as the newspapers referred to him, was notified by the authorities that he was forever expelled from all Austrian lands. “Forever?” he asked with his sardonic smile. “Is it certain that Austria is going to exist forever?” Twelve years after his death the Hapsburg monarchy was broken to pieces.

Home Again

The Socialist movement in Germany was at that time torn by factional strife. The issues that had divided the followers of Lassalle from the group which drew its inspiration from Marx were dead now. They had been settled by the unification of Germany in 1871. Yet the fight continued, largely as an unsavory struggle of personalities, of petty ambitions, and jealousies. Most joined the faction of Bebel and Liebknecht, the father of the German revolutionary martyr of 1919. His rise in the party was meteoric, and in 1874 he was elected to the Berlin Reichstag.

Most's parliamentary activity was not a success. When after many efforts he was finally given the floor, it was on a minor question of compulsory smallpox vaccination. In those years, as in our days, there were abroad a number of enthusiastic half-educated "cranks" who opposed vaccination. Their arguments were similar to those later to be used by Bernard Shaw and his co-religionists of the chiropractic denomination. Johann Most was of the opinion that smallpox vaccination meant "forcible mass poisoning and possible syphilization." He, therefore, opposed the establishment of new vaccination stations and suggested an increase in the number of public bath-houses. That speech did not add to his prestige in the Chamber. In fact, on his own admission, he was looked upon as a "comic figure." His activity in the Reichstag was not permitted to last long. During the first recess, late in April, 1874, he was arrested in connection with a speech which he had delivered on the third anniversary of the Paris Commune of 1871.

While serving his sentence between 1874 and 1876, Most enjoyed comparative liberty. During a shorter term which he had served before, he studied Marx's *Kapital* and made a popular abstract of what was to become the Bible of modern socialism. He fared no better than so many other students of Marx. He did not understand what it was all about — and Friedrich Engels, Marx's closest friend and collaborator, was extremely harsh in his criticism, which he expressed in a private letter. As a result, that abstract, which had been published under the title of *Capital and Labor*, was never reprinted. Now, Most plunged into the study of pre-Marxian and non-Marxian socialism. The result was a popular pamphlet entitled *The Solution of the Social Problem*. Large sections of it were written in that careless tone of cocksure superiority which often renders young "Marxist" converts of a few months' standing both amusing and obnoxious. Proudhon was "the most confused" among the "third-rate social quacks"; Babeuf's equalitarian gospel "was not based on any new economic idea and was altogether lower middle class," and so on.

On the other hand, there was no trace yet in his conceptions of the gospel of terrorism which was to become associated with his name. On the contrary, in his public utterances at least, he was still opposed to violence as long as socialism was accepted by a minority only. And he believed that violence would be unnecessary as soon as the majority had been won over. Which was as mild as the socialism of MacDonald, of Leon Blum and of the American "Old Guard" ever was. His rabid ultra-radicalism of two years later was a violent reaction to the scrapping of all civil liberties, which rendered peaceful propaganda impossible. In a similar mood, Morris Hillquit, outstanding leader of American law-abiding socialism, once declared his readiness "to fight like

a tiger on the barricades” if the right to vote, the workers’ chief weapon, were threatened by the reactionaries.

Before the Storm

Most's release from prison was the occasion for a stormy celebration on the part of the Berlin workers. He was now one of the most popular socialist agitators, and the welcome he received in the capital was one of the glorious moments of his career. It was the most active period of his life. He published several pamphlets and essays — forgotten now, it is true, but widely read in those days. He engaged in public debates with various celebrated opponents of socialism — foremost among them was the court preacher, Pastor Adolf Stöcker. This “second Luther,” as he was called in his time, was in some respects the forerunner of Hitler. The platform of his “Christian-Social Party” represented a “radical” hodge-podge similar to that of the Nazis of two generations later. In the words of the historian Franz Mehring, the new prophet became a “magnet for all kinds of derelicts who sought the full fleshpots which were not available in the Socialist Party.” Stöcker's attempt to stop the progress of Socialist propaganda among the workers proved a failure. Most's popular oratory was more than a match for the high-class demagoguery of the embattled pastor. The reconciliation of the two hostile socialist parties, effected in 1875, had likewise enhanced the prestige of the movement.

At the same time a struggle of ideas was going on within the ranks of the Socialists themselves. A new star had appeared on the radical firmament, a blind university professor named Eugen Dühring, who was beginning to attract some of the younger party militants. His books are forgotten and of no interest at present, and his name has survived only as part of the title of one of the great Marxist classics, namely Friedrich Engels' *Anti-Dühring*. Dühring himself greatly contributed to the obliteration of his early fame by retreating from his revolutionary position and becoming a hide-bound reactionary and anti-Semitic mono-and-megalomaniac.

The popularity achieved at that time by Dühring did not fail to arouse the great anger of Marx and Engels. That anger turned against practically the entire party leadership that was so easily influenced, and Engels, in one of his letters, spoke of the “curse of the paid agitators, of the semi-educated, [which] rests heavily upon our party in Germany.” Did Marx and Engels expect the movement to be carried on exclusively by self-supporting savants?

The Red Scare

Bismarck was becoming uneasy at the progress of the Socialist movement. The Red vote was continually growing. In a decade or more it might constitute a very substantial section of the total electorate. In time the army might become affected as well. That democratic tide had to be stemmed if the power of the Junkers was to survive.

A pretext for decisive action offered itself in 1878. At an interval of three weeks two men made attempts upon the life of the octogenarian emperor. The Social-Democratic Party¹ had nothing to do with the two desperadoes. Neither were the ranks of the classical terrorists greatly honored by these additions to their special Pantheon. One of the two men, Max Hödel, had come from the “lowest depths.” A poor devil of subnormal intelligence, at best a sort of political butterfly, he had at short intervals given his allegiance to the Socialists, the Anarchists, and to Dr. Stöcker’s “Christian Socialists.” The other would-be regicide, Dr. Karl Nobiling, was a non-political failure, bent upon a spectacular suicide.

Bismarck immediately seized upon this opportunity for carrying out his intention to outlaw the Social-Democratic Party. Nine days after the shooting, the Reichstag was dissolved and new elections decreed. A campaign of persecution was started even before the new Reichstag passed a bill outlawing all Socialist activities. An atmosphere of hysteria was created that can be compared with that of the American “Red scare” of 1919–1920.

Bismarck’s victory at the polls was a foregone conclusion. He obtained a majority willing to endorse his most reactionary proposals. The Social-Democratic Party lost several seats. Johann Most was among those who were not re-elected. He was expelled from Berlin and had to look for a livelihood elsewhere.

¹ This was the official party name of the German Socialists.

Expatriate

That was a rather difficult matter. Most of the Socialist Party papers had been suppressed. Those which had escaped the axe did not want him — his association with them would have meant immediate suppression. And public lecturing in his vein was simply *verboten*.

True there was one way out: underground propaganda and organization. However, the party leaders were opposed to that idea from the very start. As the official party historian put it, “Any underground activity was out of the question for a broad and powerful mass movement, and had it been attempted it would have been merely a welcome service rendered to the police.” In other words, it was too risky. The very practical champions of the German working class preferred the policy of patience and good behavior. Sooner or later, they hoped, the angry gods would relent and permit them to ply their trades as labor organizers and politicians. This was the prosaic aspect of what Franz Mehring, their official historian and apologist, called the modern labor movement’s “freedom from all bourgeois romanticism.”

Johann Most had no choice but to follow the advice of his friends who urged him to emigrate. He went to London first, where a group of radical German workers supported his idea of founding an outspoken Socialist paper for secret circulation in Germany. As a result, the first issue of the *Freiheit* appeared on January 3, 1879.

In the beginning the *Freiheit* was still in full agreement with the official Socialist Party program. Yet the very appearance of the paper was an act of revolt against the discipline required of all members of a political party. To be quite exact, the party was officially nonexistent. Even before those oppressive laws of Bismarck were enacted, the party directorate published a statement announcing its own dissolution and calling upon the membership to disband. The actual leadership was now vested in the Socialist members of the Reichstag, who identified themselves with the party. Johann Most had not consulted the party about his journalistic venture, and the leaders were afraid lest the revolutionary tone that might be expected from him should call forth still greater persecutions. About two months after the appearance of the first issue, old Liebknecht gave expression to the leaders’ heroic mood by declaring in Parliament that “many of the most influential party members disapproved of the founding of the *Freiheit*.” It was in the same speech that the father of Karl Liebknecht declared his organization to be a law-abiding party of reformers who would respect all laws, including those which had outlawed them. It almost seemed as if those ultra-Left scoffers were right when they claimed that, barring a few exceptions, the German Socialists had evolved into an agglomeration of lower middle class would-be politicians and job-holders, promising the workers the pie-in-the-sky of a Socialist Beyond in return for their votes, their membership dues, and subscription fees; and that they were ready to throw all dignity to the winds in order to be forgiven by the authorities and permitted to continue their business.

Both Marx and Engels were greatly displeased with the attitude of their followers in Germany. Their resentment was not entirely placated when in 1879 the party began to publish in Zurich an uncensored organ, *Der Sozialdemokrat*. For the tone of the paper remained as law-abiding as the policy of the party itself. Engels was quite naturally indignant when one of its editors, in

referring to the events of 1848, wrote that in that year “unfortunately there was no other way out than a violent revolution.”

Civil War

Most's paper was successfully smuggled into Germany, each new issue bearing another title, so as to escape the attention of the customs service. His way of writing had an irresistible appeal to the workers. It was altogether devoid of that scientific jargon which is the bane of many radical publications. A sort of revolutionary tabloid style, it was popular, "low-brow," but not exactly vulgar, at least not during its first years.

The party, though fearing the repercussions of his propaganda, at first took no official steps against him. Instead, an insidious whispering campaign was launched with the object of discrediting him among the more active members. It was a rather difficult thing to present him as an *agent provocateur*. Nobody would have believed it, for he had suffered and spent more years in prison than any of the other leaders. So aspersions were cast upon his mental sanity and, as Rudolf Rocker puts it in his biography of Most, "The fairy tale was spread that Most had suddenly been seized by a mania of persecution, that he was always running about London wearing a red scarf and armed with a dagger, and that he was aping Marat of the French Revolution by editing the *Freiheit* in a damp cellar," and so on. His constant appeals to violence earned him the nickname of "General Bumbum" and the Zurich *Sozialdemokrat* seldom missed an opportunity of exaggerating his bibulous habits, by treating his political attitude as one of the manifestations of delirium tremens.

Slander and ridicule — aside from the numerous prison sentences in England and the United States — were from now on to become the main weapons in an effort to destroy him. Both the capitalist and the Socialist press concurred in this campaign. And it must be said that in this game his enemies succeeded only too well.

The very unsavory mudslinging between the *Freiheit* and the *Sozialdemokrat* created within the movement an atmosphere of ever-growing bitterness. The arguments of the official party leadership were sometimes incredible. Replying to those who favored the imitation of Russian revolutionary methods, the author of *Trutz-Eisenstirn*, an official party pamphlet, actually stated that "Life is valuable to civilized man [i.e. to the German] though it may have no value to the uncivilized [the Russian]." On the other hand Most's attacks, justified on the whole, were not always in the best taste. Very often he would become quite personal, and what was still worse, very imprudent. To carry a point, he would publicly refer to matters which in the interest of the movement had to be kept secret, thus endangering both his friends and his opponents.

About a year and a half after the foundation of the *Freiheit*, Most was expelled from his party, which held a secret convention in Switzerland.

Transition

Most's expulsion from the Social-Democratic Party was the great tragedy of his life. Despite his opposition to the tactics of the leadership, in many respects he still fundamentally agreed with those who had excommunicated him. Like the rest of the Socialist leadership, he was at bottom not a man of immediate revolutionary action. However, he was not a politician. He was an inspired preacher of the ultra-revolutionary word. There was no place for a man like him under a semi-absolutist system that was still afraid of slogans. In a country enjoying civil liberties and imposing no restrictions upon the trade in revolutionary "hot air," such as France was to become with the beginning of the Eighties, he would have been the highly valued ornament for any party of radical politicians. In such countries the dispensers of revolutionary enthusiasm have their special function, which is highly appreciated by the powers that be. Often quite unconsciously they prevent the masses from realizing that they are merely the steppingstones in the political careers of cunning and unscrupulous climbers of the Briand or MacDonald type, and of their lesser satellites. A cruel fate had placed Most in a semifeudal, semiabsolutist country like Germany, which had not yet grown up to the Western wisdom of free speech. Most's unwillingness and inability to play the part of a smooth politician made him impossible in the party. He wanted to howl like a wolf when only a low growl was permitted. Tolerated for a while because of his popularity with the masses, he was mercilessly eliminated as soon as his howling became dangerous to the safety of the leadership.

His excommunication had the desired effect. Many party members who were ready to brave Bismarck's police were unwilling to challenge the authority of their party and risk complete isolation. The *Freiheit* lost many readers. Its editor saw himself gradually deserted by most of his former admirers. Even his following in London was rent by a split, a considerable part of the radical German workers on the Thames preferring conformity to heresy.

Most was not the only rebel who was expelled by the party. His fate was shared by Wilhelm Hasselmann, a member of the Reichstag, who had given up his professional career as a chemist to join the labor movement. Disgusted with the spirit prevailing in his party, he had sought inspiration in the socialist movements of Russia and France. He found it in the camp both of the French Blanquists and of the Russian terrorists, then mistakenly called "Nihilists" outside of Russia. The Blanquists impressed him with their insistence upon a strictly conspiratorial organization, while the "Nihilists" — whom he himself erroneously took for anarchists — filled him with admiration for the courage displayed in their terrorist acts.

Hasselmann was soon forced to follow Most's example and leave his country. He had been expelled from his party for his stand in favor of the Russian terrorists, with whom the party leadership had forsworn all relationship. Moreover, he had the misfortune of confiding in a man who turned out to be a spy. He went to the United States, where after a few years of propaganda he disappeared from public view. But before he left his country he had greatly influenced Most through his plan of a secret organization in the Blanquist fashion: groups of four or five men, each of whom was to form similar groups, and to know only the members of his group, so as

to avoid the possibility of too much damage in case of treason. It was this form of organization which, to a certain extent, the Social-Democratic Party itself, however reluctantly, had to adopt a few years later when Bismarck's persecutions rendered any open party activity altogether impossible. Blanqui's ideas of secret organization, aiming at the violent seizure of power and the establishment of a revolutionary dictatorship, had been likewise conveyed to Most by Edouard Vaillant, a refugee of the Paris Commune living in London. At the same time the editor of the *Freiheit* was greatly impressed by the halo of heroism surrounding the Russian terrorists. In those years the political philosophy of these foremost representatives of Russia's radical intelligentsia was a mixture of Jacobin-Blanquist and democratic-liberal ideas.

By embracing all of these ideas, Most was not really turning his back upon his old Marxist convictions. Marx's political ideas during 1849–1850 were entirely permeated with Blanquist conceptions. But what Most believed and preached in those days was a sort of *inverted Blanquism: a Blanquism of words, whereas the essence of Blanquism was action*. And this was the main reason why Marx and Engels, while dissatisfied with the attitude of their followers in Germany, refused to support Most's opposition. To them he was chiefly a dealer in "revolutionary phrases"; and apparently they did not think much of his stability in matters of theory. Even before Most's conflict with the party, Marx, in a letter written in 1877, had expressed the opinion that "the workers who, like Herr Most and company, give up work and become professional *litterateurs*, always cause trouble in matters of 'theory.' " And that "trouble" in the Seventies usually found its expression in one of the anarchist or near-anarchist heresies.

Anarchist?

From the time he had left Germany, Most repeatedly came in contact with men who called themselves Anarchists. These were the followers of Bakunin who had died in 1876. In London the German exile met almost daily a young Belgian intellectual, named Victor Dave, who was a capable apostle of Bakunin's ideas. Most, who at that time was in close contact with exiled French Blanquists, was not easy to convert. Was it his indifference as to what shape society was to take on after the successful revolution? Or did Most realize that the "abolition of the State" on the morrow after the revolution, was at bottom only a camouflaged expression of the old basic aspiration of all revolutionists: the seizure of power by the victorious radical organization? He might also have been reluctant to adopt a name which constituted a serious obstacle to successful propaganda. For though "anarchy" meant "no-government" and the highest ideal of freedom to its believers, it spelled nothing but "disorder" to everybody else. And while surrounding himself largely with Anarchists who helped him in the distribution of his paper, he was inwardly still worshipping at the shrine of Auguste Blanqui, whose Jacobinism was, outwardly at least, the very antithesis of his friends' libertarian philosophy. A special issue of the *Freiheit*, published with a black border on the occasion of the Martyr's death, January 1, 1881, marked Most's profound devotion to the hapless precursor of Lenin.

This was one of the last issues which Most edited in London. Shortly afterwards he was arrested for glorifying the killing of Tsar Alexander II by the Russian terrorists, the so-called "Nihilists." The article was entitled "At Last" and was written in that enthusiastic and passionate style imitation of which has often been attempted, but never with full success. Public opinion in England was shocked, and Most's forthcoming arrest was a certainty. But the editor of the *Freiheit* refused to go into hiding. He knew that this would be an opportune occasion for his pink step-brethren to accuse him of cowardice. And so he was ready to pay the price.

A great deal of indignation was stirred up at that time by some of the passages in the article, particularly the one dealing with the last moments of the mortally wounded potentate. That passage ended with the rather plebeian "*Endlich krepierete er*," which the court interpreter had great difficulties in translating into civilized English. For the word *krepieren* is slangy and corresponds to the American "croak." The translated version finally incorporated into the court records was "At last he died like a dog."

The New Gospel

While Most was serving a sentence of eighteen months at hard labor, an international conference of revolutionary socialists was held in London. There were a few Blanquists among the delegates; but the great majority were Anarchists. At that time, Anarchism was no longer what it had been when Bakunin was alive: an international movement of conspirators bent upon immediate revolution. The failure of various small-scale attempts at insurrection had killed the faith in an early return of the revolutionary wave. *From a revolutionary movement anarchism began to evolve into a revolutionary religion of protest.* Too weak to destroy the existing system, the Anarchists decided at least to improve the blueprints for the future society. Bakunin's *collectivist anarchism*, they gradually began to perceive, was far from solving the problem of what is usually called "social injustice." His system recognized a sort of collective ownership of the means of production, with every worker getting the full product of his labor. The various producers' associations were to exchange their products among each other, the respective values to be calculated by special commissions. Some of Bakunin's disciples began to notice very serious flaws in this system. Those accounting commissions looked very much like some sort of Government authorities with the power of enforcing their decisions. On the other hand, the apportioning to each of the product of his labor was in more than one way a discrimination in favor of the stronger and luckier at the expense of the weaker.

The followers of the improved version of anarchism, who called themselves "Communist-Anarchists," solved the difficulty by insisting that there should be no accounting at all. Under Anarchism, they argued, everybody would voluntarily work according to his abilities. The output would be deposited in public storehouses which apparently would have neither salesmen nor cashiers. Everybody — whether he worked or not — would take whatever he needed or wanted. Any compulsion to work was contrary to the principles of anarchism; so was any restriction against taking whatever one pleased. Some of the old-time Bakuninists objected that such a system set a premium upon laziness. Personally, Johann Most, even for many years after he had begun to call himself a Communist-Anarchist, could not bring himself to accept that new revelation. His common sense balked at that childish nonsense. When in 1884 he wrote in his paper that he who does not work shall not eat, he was reprimanded by *Le Revoke*, the chief theoretical mouthpiece of the modernized form of anarchism. (Fifty years later, Jean Grave, the then editor of that paper and for decades the most prominent exponent of pure Communist-Anarchism, in a personal letter to the Anarchist historian Max Nettlau, frankly admitted that that idyllic conception had no leg to stand on.)

The theoretical founder and foremost champion of the new version of anarchism was Peter Kropotkin, one of the noblest figures brought forth by the revolutionary movement of the past century. He and other men of very high intellectual and moral standing, such as the famous geographer Elisee Reclus, the untiring conspirator and propagandist Errico Malatesta, the dreamer Carlo Cafiero, constituted for many decades to come the elite and the pride of the communist-anarchist movement. Excellent men, they were blinded by the very nobility of their own charac-

ter. They believed in the inherent goodness of human nature, and particularly in that sentiment of human solidarity which the workers would further develop in their mass organizations and in the struggles waged by them. The theorists of the new creed apparently overlooked the famous statement by Proudhon, the peaceful apostle of non-communist anarchism, that "Man is ready to die for his countrymen, but not to work for them for nothing."

However, most of the Anarchists, while accepting Kropotkin's unearthly ideal, were chiefly interested in individual, terrorist action. It is this feature that was to give to Anarchism its specific reputation, and that made it appear much more dangerous to the existing system than it ever was in reality. Individual terrorist action assumed different forms in accordance with the natural disposition of the protagonist in question. There were those who wanted to take revenge for their misery and privation, and offer their lives in a supreme protest against the lucky beneficiaries of the existing system. That supreme protest was to serve at the same time as a powerful stimulus for awakening the masses, for encouraging emulation, for calling attention to the ideas of Anarchism, and thus for hastening the revolution. These were the martyrs. The most famous of them was August Reinsdorf, a real knight-errant of revolutionary Anarchism, who in 1884 was executed for a thwarted attempt to blow up all the German ruling dynasties assembled for some patriotic celebration.

But the martyrs of his type were scarce among the Anarchists of those days. Most of the men of individual action were of a more prosaic mold. They combined terrorist protests against State authority with individual negation of private property, in other words, with various forms of banditism. The money thus obtained was to be used for aiding the movement. But more often than not the means would become the aim. Persons of an individualist bent are only too prone to identify the cause with their own selves. To many men of this kind anarchism was welcome as an ideological justification for an existence that was nothing but an illegal form of capitalist parasitism. Most of these spurious Robin Hoods were workers who had become tired of hopeless drudgery.

Kropotkin, while staunchly opposing the various forms of revolutionary banditism, was one of the most ardent protagonists of individual terrorism, which at that time was called "propaganda by the deed." It was his plan to initiate two forms of organization on an international scale: open associations helping the workers in their mass struggles and propagating Anarchist ideas; and secret groups composed of men of action who would direct their blows against the employers and their official protectors. Twenty-one years later (1902) he propounded the same idea. However, that second form of organization was never attempted. Somehow open propaganda for the Anarchist ideal, necessitating the use of newspapers and similar enterprises, does not go together with a regular underground organization for terrorist purposes. The latter is bound to lead to the suppression of the former. As a result, the propagandists of the word, even though they never admitted it, preferred that the "propaganda by the deed" be carried on beyond the borders of their own respective countries. Whatever deeds of this kind were committed by Anarchists in subsequent years, they were almost invariably unorganized acts of individual protest.

Off to the Land of the Free

The world at large paid no attention to the Anarchist Conference, and the British authorities on whose soil it was taking place had their hands full with another group of terrorists who were anything but “red.” It was that other brand of terrorism which, unwittingly, brought the London career of Most’s paper to an end. The *Freiheit* continued to appear even after its editor’s imprisonment. Most had only six more months to serve, when, in May, 1882, the Irish “Invincibles” killed Lord Cavendish and another dignitary in the Dublin Phoenix Park. It was one of those episodes in the war which was going on for centuries between Erin’s nationalists and their English masters. The *Freiheit*, in commenting upon the event, expressed the sympathy of the German revolutionists for the cause of the Irish rebels. Needless to say, that issue of Most’s paper was the last to be published on British soil. The editorial office, which served as the composing room and as living quarters as well, was raided. The acting editor and the manager succeeded in escaping, but the two compositors were seized by the police, who carried away the type and all available literature.

Henceforth no printer could be found in England who would dare to handle the paper. The *Freiheit* was transferred to Switzerland, where it was issued during the next few months. Released from prison by the end of October, 1882, Most saw no possibility of renewing the publication in London. Many of his old supporters had left England in the meantime. A way out of the difficult situation came in the form of an invitation to go to the United States and start a lecture tour across the country. He accepted. On December 18, 1882, he was hailed triumphantly at Cooper Union by thousands of German workers who had answered the call of the Social-Revolutionary Club of New York.

At the time of Most’s arrival in New York, the radical movement in America was pre-eminently a German affair. The Germans in those days represented a very large percentage of the working class, especially of skilled labor. They had brought their socialist ideas from the old country, or else had acquired them through contact with immigrant radical militants. The native American population was practically untouched by those ideas. True, there were unions and there were also strikes which would sometimes assume threatening proportions. The railway strike of 1877 was the closest approach to a real mass uprising. However, these organizations were not imbued with any specific revolutionary gospel that would sway the workers’ thoughts beyond the existing forms of social organization. Unlike the unions on the European Continent, the American unions had grown and won their victories, without the aid of agitators coming from the ranks of the malcontent stepsons of the middle classes. That latter element was very numerous in Europe, but it was practically negligible in America. Unemployed preachers, football coaches, Harvard graduates, who at present constitute a large percentage of the C.I.O. organizers, were at that time practically unthinkable. There was still an abundance of administrative and other desk jobs. Consequently there were practically no educated “outs” who might discover their love for the horny-handed underdogs; help in organizing them; give them that socialist “class-consciousness” which always comes from the ranks of the middle classes; and finally use them for their own political ambitions.

Thus to the native workers Socialism and Anarchism represented hardly anything more than varieties of some outlandish cult, all the more suspect as they were imported by immigrants who competed with them on the labor market.

The depression which held the United States in its grip during a large part of the Seventies had done much to “radicalize the immigrant workers. The very moderate Socialist Labor Party, whose composition was largely German, was gradually deserted by its more energetic members. These were absorbed by the Revolutionary Socialist Party, which was founded in 1881. At the constituent convention held in Chicago, the revolutionary spirit which animated that organization found its expression in a resolution in favor of “armed workers’ organizations ready to repel, rifle in hand, any encroachments upon the rights of the workers.” Albert Parsons and August Spies, the outstanding figures in the Chicago Haymarket tragedy of 1886–1887, were among the first militants of the new organization.

Most’s arrival in 1882 strengthened the radical current among the German workers. His propaganda trips carried the gospel to all the cities of the East and of the Middle West. That new gospel was a hodge-podge of the revolutionary vocabularies of the most outstanding radical thinkers and leaders of the last twenty years. Marxist ideas of capital concentration and increasing pauperization of the masses appeared there, alongside the Lassallean “iron law of wages.” There was also Blanqui’s insistence upon an immediate uprising against the existing system, and Bakunin’s Collectivist Anarchism with its advocacy of exchange of goods among autonomous associations of producers. One thing only was conspicuous by its absence in this potpourri: the emphasis upon strikes for higher wages. In other words, it was a *religion* of emancipation which Most offered his working-class audiences, rather than steps towards an immediate improvement of their lot.

Inspiring as Most’s personal propaganda was, it could not prevent the occurrence of what has always been the bane of every revolutionary movement, particularly on foreign soil — internal squabbles and splits. Eventually Most and some of his most intimate and intelligent comrades left the Social-Revolutionary Club of New York and founded a special group of their own.

Yet there was also an actual difference, aside from the ex post facto issues invented for the purpose of covering up petty grudges and jealousies — even if this difference lay chiefly in the choice of the name. The majority of those who called themselves “Social-Revolutionists” neither were, nor did they profess to be, Anarchists. They were primarily opposed to the ballot, and believed in violence as the weapon for combating the capitalist system. Once this system was overthrown, they visualized in its stead a sort of revolutionary dictatorship that was to secure to everyone “the full product of his labor.” Johann Most himself, from whom the “Social-Revolutionists” obtained these ideas, still largely professed them himself — yet he preferred to designate them as “anarchism.” But this anarchism was as spurious as that of the great anarchist teacher Bakunin himself. It consisted chiefly in renouncing the idea of a centralized government, and in adopting the principle of local communal or municipal administration. In the belief of many Anarchists, such a form of administration no longer has the attributes of the State. In short, what chiefly distinguished the Anarchists was their insistence upon what in other languages is usually called “federalism” — in the meaning of local and provincial autonomy — as opposed to the strictly centralized form of Government advocated by the Marxists and the Blanquists.

The purely local split in New York did not affect the collaboration of the Social-Revolutionists and of the Anarchists throughout the country. At a conference held in Pittsburgh in October, 1883, the delegates of the two practically identical schools issued the “Declaration of Principles” of the American Federation of the International Working People’s Association. (This was the full

name of the so-called “First International,” which the Anarchists continued to treat as a living organization, even though the followers of Marx, who had expelled the Anarchists, had since officially liquidated that body.) The chief emphasis of this *Declaration* was upon the point that the workers should arm themselves because “the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie must bear a violently revolutionary character, and because mere wage struggles will not lead to the goal.” One of the six points dealing with the aims of the struggle clearly separated its sponsors both from the followers of Marx and from the new Communist-Anarchism of Kropotkin. It demanded “Free exchange of products of equal value through the producers’ organizations themselves and without middlemen and profit-making.” This was the economic aspect of what is usually designated as Bakuninist or Collectivist Anarchism.

The new body was growing. By 1885 the organization comprised about eighty groups with approximately seven or eight thousand members. The bulk of them were Germans, but there were also many Czechs, Scandinavians, and even native Americans. In addition to the weekly *Freiheit* in New York, they had a German daily in Chicago, as well as an English language weekly edited by Albert Parsons. They reached their peak in 1886, the time of the first large-scale eight-hour movement launched in the United States. Many things, however, happened before that fateful year.

Looking Homeward

Most's *Freiheit* struck on responsive soil. The number of its readers grew, and so did its size. The "International Organ of German-Speaking Anarchists" was sought by many for its unique editorial tone, which set it apart from most revolutionary papers. The directness with which it glorified and encouraged acts of individual terrorism was accentuated by the lack of constraint with which the paper gave minute technical details as to the manufacture of explosives and the various practical uses to which these materials could be applied in the war between the poor and the rich.

To many people the impunity with which such things could be printed appeared as a most flattering comment upon the unlimited liberty of the press then prevailing in the United States. For every country in the world has special laws forbidding the publication of details concerning the manufacture of explosives — except, of course, in special books accessible only to experts. Max Nettlau, the historian of anarchism, had ventured a more sober explanation for the great broad-mindedness, or patience, of the American authorities. Most's propaganda, though conducted on American soil, was still primarily a European affair. Germany was not popular in America at that time, and the official spheres had no objection if immigrants stirred up violence against the Hohenzollerns. They had the same attitude toward Great Britain. The Irish-American nationalists, as represented by O'Donovan Rossa, editor of the *United Irishmen*, could conduct an altogether uninhibited terrorist propaganda against England. At the very same time, however, the State Department was on excellent terms with Tsarist Russia; and woe to the "Nihilist" who at that time would have dared to come to these shores. He would have been mercilessly extradited. This was the reason why the world-famous Russian terrorist Sergius Stepniak-Kravchinsky preferred British hospitality and never ventured to visit the United States.

The Anarchist movement in the German-speaking lands of Europe was greatly stimulated by Most's brilliantly written newspaper. A special "European" edition contained articles dealing exclusively with German and Austrian conditions. London became the headquarters from which the uncensored revolutionary word was to be smuggled into all corners of Central Europe.

One of those corners was Austria; and it was in this section, particularly in Vienna, that Most's propaganda made the greatest number of converts. The Austrian Socialist movement was at that time split into a "Moderate" and a "Radical" wing. The breakdown of the German Socialist Party, brought about by Bismarck's persecutions, had caused in Austria a very strong drift towards the Left. Most's *Freiheit* became very popular. In fact, aside from Spain, Austria was at that time the only country in which the labor movement was controlled by the Anarchists, even though they did not call themselves by that name. (They were generally called "*die Radikalen*")

The Rival

The Austrian movement brought forth a leader of its own who in later years was to play a sinister part in the life of Most. That man was Joseph Peukert, like Most a child of the working class and for many years a knight-errant of revolt. He was one of those tragic would-be Messiahs whose ambitions by far exceed their qualifications. Having spent a few years in France, he was one of the first German-speaking Anarchists to embrace the new gospel of Communist-Anarchism — that ultra-utopian dream of an earthly paradise which is usually connected with the name of Peter Kropotkin. This gave him a certain advantage over Johann Most, who still preached the antiquated Collectivist Anarchism of Bakunin.

Soon after the active appearance of Peukert the Anarchist movement among the German-speaking workers was rent by a serious conflict. Outwardly it was a question of “principles” — of the new gospel according to Kropotkin as against the old gospel according to Bakunin. At bottom, however, it was a purely personal fight for power and influence. Peukert had many grievances against his older fellow apostle. In the first place, he had neither the journalistic brilliancy nor the oratorical verve of the man who so definitely played the first fiddle among the German-speaking Anarchists. He had often attempted to place his articles in Most’s paper, but they were almost invariably rejected. With his sound judgment, the editor of the *Freiheit* realized that Peukert’s purely theological and exceedingly dull discourses would not be of any interest to the readers. This was a mortal insult to the great vanity of the new leader. All his resentment against the existing system gradually turned into one single hatred against the “autocratic” editor who stood in the way of the great ambition of his life — to become the undisputed leader of the German Anarchist movement.

Peukert’s struggle against Most was facilitated by the fact that he had remained in Europe. Between 1882 and 1884 he edited an Anarchist paper in Vienna, but the persecutions called forth by the terrorist acts and hold-ups organized by two fanatics forced him to leave his country. He went to London. Here, in that district around Tottenham Court Road and Hampstead Road, were the haunts of the German emigrants, exiles and refugees. And here, in the opinion of the uninitiated, were hatched the criminal plots against the established order and against the lives of its most prominent representatives. Peukert soon became one of the best-known figures among the Anarchist refugees on the Thames.

As a matter of cold fact, what plotting was going on was chiefly directed against other groups within the same Anarchist movement. The record of all the squabbles between the various groups and cliques, of all the mutual accusations of betrayal, of dishonesty in money matters, dictatorial ambitions, and heterodoxy in matters of faith, is very depressing reading. It is the same old story, ever recurring since the beginning of time, of personal ambitions outweighing all kinds of idealist considerations; of Machiavellian intrigues, slander and double-crossing. One man alone was above all these tempests in a teapot: Johann Neve, Most’s devoted assistant in charge of the distribution of the paper.

That carpenter from Holstein was one of the few great, though unknown, heroes who rose from the ranks of the German working class in the past century. He was one of the few men to whom Most seems to have been genuinely attached, even though, or perhaps because, he was his very opposite in many respects. Neve possessed none of Most's gifts; but he was free of the unpardonable shortcomings of the great agitator — his imprudence, his boastfulness, and his lack of tact. He was the born man of action who very intelligently carried out all the dangerous technical work without which a revolutionary movement cannot exist. After Most's departure for America, Neve left for the Continent to take charge of the very dangerous task of smuggling revolutionary literature across the frontier of Germany. While the other militants were absorbed in their petty internecine hatreds and jealousies, Neve retired to the loneliness of a small Belgian frontier town, from which, unknown to his neighbors, he made his periodical and secret visits to forbidden territory.

It was the tragic fate of this silent hero that brought the mutual hatreds within the movement to their highest pitch. One day, early in 1887, he was arrested on Belgian territory and delivered to the Prussian authorities as an unwanted, homeless vagabond. He was given what amounted to a life sentence, for he was perhaps the only man in the entire Anarchist movement of whom the German Government was genuinely afraid. His disappearance was a terrific blow to the spread of Most's propaganda in the German-speaking lands. More terrific, however, were the aftereffects of this arrest, which for years to come were to agitate the German radical press.

For no sooner had Neve been arrested than both the Socialists, and the Anarchists of Most's camp, began to accuse Peukert of having played the traitor in the case. He had gone to see Neve and had taken with him a man who was suspected of being a stool-pigeon, and whose guilt was later established beyond any doubt. Until then the Belgian police had been altogether unaware of Neve's presence — but they arrested him shortly afterwards. Thus the circumstantial evidence against Peukert was crushing. Yet, subjectively, Most's rival seems to have been innocent. It was unpardonable stupidity or carelessness rather than deliberate intent that he was really guilty of. A few personal admirers accepted his confused explanations and continued to regard him as their leader. But in general it was the end of his revolutionary career — even in the eyes of those who were ready to believe in his sincerity. Peter Kropotkin, whose first apostle the hapless man had been among the German-speaking workers, and from whom he expected his vindication, told him frankly that for anyone guilty of such stupidity there was only one thing to do — disappear from the movement. Yet Peukert tried frantically to remain in it.

Revolutionary War Science

In the meantime, Most went on dreaming his dream of a mighty terrorist movement that would strike fear into the hearts of the ruling classes. Mere verbal endorsement of terrorist acts, he felt, was not sufficient. The bombs of the Russian “Nihilists” had made a deep impression upon the revolutionary elements of both hemispheres; but outside of Russia there was hardly anybody who actually knew how these mysterious things were made. In 1884 Most decided to fill that gap. For the first time in his life he began to conform with the rules of conspiratorial work. In deepest secret, unknown to his comrades, he took up his quarters in Jersey City Heights and found a job in a factory engaged in the manufacture of explosives. He learned the production methods; but more important still, he succeeded in purloining quantities of the dangerous material. For, unlike the situation with the preparation of foodstuffs, in the matter of explosives the product brought out by large-scale industry is more reliable than the homemade article. And it is, of course, incomparably cheaper, for it removes the necessity of maintaining special laboratories with their by-product of unpleasant and suspicious fumes. It also eliminates the risk in human lives connected with amateurish experimentation.

But the possession of explosives was not enough. Most meant to have them used, not in the United States in which at heart he was not particularly interested, but in Central Europe, that is, in Germany and Austria. He wanted to ship them across the Ocean — but it simply could not be done. Moreover, explosives alone were of no particular use; and bombs ready for use, or infernal machines — “time-bombs” as they are sometimes called — were not on sale nor would they be made to order. For these are articles which the “consumer” is supposed to manufacture himself. The Russian terrorists had in their ranks many university-trained chemists and inventors who could produce the most marvellous engines of death. The German-speaking Anarchists were exclusively manual workers who were altogether ignorant in these matters. So Most himself had to undertake the task of teaching them the gentle art. He dug into the textbooks dealing with explosives and the methods of manufacturing various kinds of deadly contrivances. The result of the study was his *Revolutionäre Kriegswissenschaft* — “Revolutionary War Science” — a handbook, as it were, for the extermination of the bourgeois vermin. It was a literary effort somewhat comparable to his extract of Marx’s *Kapital* — a popular treatise easy to read but completely missing its purpose.

That handbook on explosives has gone down in history as one of the queerest pieces of literature ever published. It is now quite a bibliographical rarity; its readers today, like those of fifty years ago, read it more for a “thrill” than for instruction in the serious business of killing capitalists and their allies in the seats of government.

Its introductory chapter contains what, from the point of view of a terrorist, was very sensible advice. It warned against the manufacture of explosives, advising that they be bought or stolen if possible. Burglarizing a factory was dangerous business, but even more so was the business of manufacturing nitroglycerine, dynamite and similar products in a homemade laboratory. However, as the regular factories of explosives were usually very well guarded, it was more practical

to get the money for buying the stuff. The movement not having any “angels” to speak of, the only conclusion, as emphasized in the handbook, was *Tu’ Geld in deinen Beutel* — “put money in thy purse” — by taking it from “the purse of other people.” This simple and utterly un-philosophical defense of individual expropriation created much bad blood among the more respectable radicals of the time. It had its share in discrediting Anarchism.

Once these first two steps were made — the acquisition of money and the purchase of explosives — the manufacture of the missile itself was a comparatively easy matter, provided one had some mechanical skill and followed the directions. As for the application itself, Most recommended placing the finished device “under the table of an opulent banquet,” adding that “what can tear asunder rocks may also have a good effect at a ball at which the court or the heads of big business are assembled.”

Instructions as to the manufacture and use of explosive contraptions constituted only one part of the little handbook. There were also chapters about other aspects of revolutionary chemistry, such as the preparation of invisible ink for writing secret messages; and of self-inflammable liquid compounds which could be used for starting fires safely; the poisoning of bullets and daggers; and, last but not least, hints about placing all kinds of deadly chemicals in various delicacies which were to be served at the dinners of the rich.

All in all it was quite an amusing little book. It had only one shortcoming. It was almost exclusively used for purposes which had very little in common with the revolutionary aim it was supposed to serve. Ordinary crooks, or men with a similar philosophy of life who had made a fleeting visit to the radical movement, made use of the accumulated wisdom of the little book to cash in on fire-insurance policies.

However, it was not only this species which entered upon a holy war against the excess profits of the fire-insurance companies. There were also Anarchist sympathizers who would set fire to their apartments or to their own little stores or workshops, and contribute part of the “proceeds” to the movement. Most, though no party to the setting-up of those exploding kerosene lamp contraptions, closed both eyes in accepting their gifts. This practice was later publicly denounced by Benjamin R. Tucker, Yankee gentleman-Anarchist, and originator of a special school of individualist Anarchism for the respectable bourgeois. There was a rift among Most’s followers, some of whom demanded from their leader an unequivocal repudiation of those dark angels. But Most refused. He actually believed that by complying with this request he would betray his Anarchist philosophy. For he saw in every criminal a sort of free-lance Anarchist, a lone rebel against the Law and the State, and he could not possibly side with the latter as against the former. Most’s idealization of the common criminal was obviously a hangover from his readings of Bakunin. The great Russian romantic had written of the roaming brigands of Russia’s past as of the true rebels they apparently were. But that was ancient history, and if Most had had a little more judgment, he would have understood that the “anarchism” of the modern crook or gangster is of a very spurious quality. For the underworld character of our times is quite often a partner of the very agencies that are supposed to be out for his suppression. And if he mixes in politics, he does so as a rule as the henchman and the beneficiary of some corrupt party machine that robs the rich and the poor alike.

The Chicago Tragedy

While this domestic quarrel was going on, American labor entered upon a nation-wide campaign for the eight-hour day. The Anarchists, particularly those of Chicago, took a very active part in the movement, which was inaugurated by a general strike that started on May 1, 1886. The incidents connected with that movement led to one of the great tragedies of the modern labor struggle. The killing of a worker during a strike meeting held on May 4 in front of the McCormick Harvester factory in Chicago was protested two days later on the now no longer existing Haymarket Square. Upon the intervention of the police, who tried to break up the peaceful assembly, a bomb was thrown by a person who has remained unknown to this day. One policeman was killed and seven fatally wounded. In retaliation the State demanded and obtained the conviction of eight Anarchist militants — five Germans, most of whom had come to these shores before they were twenty, one English immigrant, one native American of German descent, and one full-blooded Yankee of early American ancestry. It was the first great “frame-up” trial in American history which in its time aroused the passions just as much as did the Mooney-Billings and Sacco-Vanzetti cases more than a generation later. All the eight men were absolutely innocent, as was established seven years later by Governor John Altgeld.

There was no direct proof that the indicted men had anything to do with the bomb-throwing itself. Yet there was one thing that weighed very heavily against them, both with the jury and with a large section of public opinion. This was their naive worship of the liberating virtues of dynamite and of the various contraptions that could be filled with it. One year before the tragedy, on February 25, 1885, the *Alarm*, English-language organ of the Chicago Anarchists, had published that famous, oft-quoted article beginning with the words “Dynamite! Of all the good stuff, that is the stuff!” and giving minute directions as to “stuffing several pounds of that sublime stuff into an inch pipe” and placing it “in the immediate vicinity of a lot of rich loafers,” and so on.

The eight-hour movement had its repercussions in New York as well. One week before May 1, 1886, a big public meeting was held in Germania Garden. Most spoke in his usual vein, urging his listeners to provide themselves with rifles, revolvers, bombs and similar weapons so as to be prepared for the decisive conflict. This time his counsels of violence, though identical in essence with scores of other speeches he had delivered during the four years of his stay in the States, were no longer considered a harmless German-European affair. He was arrested for “holding an unlawful assembly.” Convicted, he spent a year in the penitentiary on Blackwell’s Island.

There was a certain irony in Most’s imprisonment for his part in this agitation. At the very meeting which caused his arrest he had spoken contemptuously of the eight-hour movement, from which he expected no gains for the workers. Only immediate armed expropriation of the employers was in his opinion an action worth undertaking. The rest was merely a struggle “for a little more butter on their [the workers’] bread.” The Anarchists of Chicago, though taking theoretically a similar stand, had thrown themselves with all their enthusiasm into the eight-

hour-day movement, which, they hoped, would develop into a countrywide uprising. Johann Most did not believe in the revolutionary potentialities of the campaign.

A New Religion

This attitude of Most's represented the purely religious aspect of the anarchism of that period. Indifferent towards the present-day demands of the workers and skeptical as to the imminence of the social revolution, the German agitator and his followers sought and found an emotional release in a vocabulary of invective directed against the injustices of the existing system. It was no longer class struggle for the sake of a material objective — economic improvement for the masses, or power for the leaders — but merely class hatred for its own sake, as a sort of religious dogma holding together the congregation, and providing a livelihood for its preacher.

It was during the eight-hour-day movement that Emma Goldman, a young Russian-Jewish immigrant girl, had been won over to the revolutionary movement. In her *Living My Life* one may find illuminating passages showing how remote Johann Most was from the idea of any actual class struggle in the immediate interest of the workers. The great agitator, having discovered the budding oratorical talent of his young follower, began to coach her for a lecture tour in the English language. The main object of her speeches, in his opinion, was to demonstrate the futility of the struggle for the eight-hour day. "Our comrades in Chicago," his argument ran, "lost their lives for it, and the workers still work long hours." But, even if the eight-hour day were established, he insisted, there would be no actual gain. "On the contrary, it would serve only to distract the masses from the real issue — the struggle against capitalism, against the wage system, for a new society." Emma Goldman faithfully followed his instructions, making speeches "about the waste of energy and time the eight-hour struggle involved, scoffing at the stupidity of the workers who fought for such trifles," and "scoffing at their readiness to give up a great future for some small temporary gains." But in Most's own opinion, that "great future" which was to come on the morrow of the social revolution was still very, very far away.

In the long run, however, even the best-written pamphlets and the most fiery speeches about the futility of the ballot, the nonexistence of God, the uselessness of the State, the coming extermination of the capitalists, and the propaganda by the deed, failed to give the followers full satisfaction. To be of really propagandistic value, the terrorist "plank" needed some practical demonstration from time to time. Most was anxiously waiting for some terrorist act to be committed in Germany or Austria to bolster up the enthusiasm of his congregation. But nothing happened, and this was "actually driving Most to despair," to use the words of the conscientious Anarchist historian Nettlau, who had an opportunity to read the personal letters of the agitator.

The non-occurrence of terrorist acts in Europe was not accidental. Mutual confidence among the more energetic elements had disappeared ever since the accusation of betrayal had been raised against Peukert. Moreover, the absence of a concrete aim — and the Anarchist ideal was certainly not an immediate aim — was more conducive to dreaming than to acting. And from dreaming dreams of hate to ordinary braggadocio there is only a step.

“I”

Released from Blackwell’s Island by the middle of 1887, Most resumed his propaganda. All his accumulated bitterness and hatred found expression in a pamphlet written in the form of an appeal *To the Proletariat*. It was a challenge to the capitalist system, couched in dignified emotional language, and it represented one of the most impassioned pieces of revolutionary journalism ever produced. “As long as I have eyes to see the horrors of this world,” he wrote, “as long as my ears can hear the moans of the proletariat; as long as my brain is alert in my head and can reflect all the terrible impressions which are called forth by the injustices of every hour; as long as my heart has not become insensible to the sufferings of the disinherited, my mouth will not remain silent to the crimes which the rich and the powerful commit against the people” — and so on. That pamphlet was remarkably free from his customary thrusts against the other sections of the labor movement. The enforced solitude of the prison had made him forget the internal squabbles within the Left wing. He called for a united front of all revolutionary forces and for more tolerance towards those who professed different opinions.

One thing, however, sounded unusual in this piece of revolutionary literature. It was the emphasis upon the “I,” which as a rule is absent from the speeches and writings of the anarchists of the classical mold. Bakunin did not write or speak that way, nor did Kropotkin. The two Russian apostles of aristocratic descent would have protested with all their might against any outward form of veneration which a following bestows upon the founders of a religious cult or a political creed. The German disciple of plebeian origin closed both his eyes upon the sale of his pictures and plaster casts for the benefit of the movement. For Anarchist theory and Anarchist practice are bound to differ from each other as widely as does the Communist ideal of human brotherhood and equality from the vast prison and concentration camp called the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

Possibly Most’s occasional emphasis upon his own I was merely “whistling in the dark,” as his faith in the eventual triumph of his cause was dwindling. The opportunities then still open in America to the more energetic members of the working class led to the gradual disappearance from the radical movement of many of the once devoted followers. No less depressing were the petty jealousies among the active militants. All this filled him with that deep pessimism from which sensitive souls often find escape, either in physical self-destruction or in the mental suicide of drink. Most chose the latter — even though he was not actually “always drunk,” contrary to the assertions of his slanderers and enemies. At any rate, his tastes did not interfere with his editorial duties. The paper was always well written, even if occasionally, for lack of material, he had to reprint some of his really timeless masterpieces of bygone years.

Having lost his faith, he was no longer so stubborn in maintaining his own version of Anarchism against the victorious march of Kropotkin’s more beautiful Utopia. It took a long time before he finally accepted the new gospel. For his worst personal enemies, who were out to ruin and to humiliate him, were shielding themselves with the authority of the great Russian idealist. And the latter had expressed his personal satisfaction over the publication of the London *Au-*

tonomie, a Communist-Anarchist paper which competed with Most's *Freiheit*. There Peukert and his friends were painting the beauties of a society that would require not more than an hour and perhaps only twenty-five minutes of voluntary daily labor. Having finally convinced himself that practically all the Anarchists the world over — except in Spain — had adopted the new gospel, Most began gradually to switch over to the new faith. They wanted it — and so he let them have it.

The Blot

In the meantime the Anarchist movement of America was gradually declining. In Chicago, where the Anarchists had had great influence upon the labor movement, five of the most prominent militants had been executed. Others were cowed. The Chicago *Alarm*, English-language organ of the movement, which had been edited by Albert Parsons, survived the execution of its editor by only two years. The German daily *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, likewise in Chicago, became very moderate, and eventually landed in the Socialist camp. The hovering threat of a law which would have spelled deportation to all foreign Anarchists acted as a deterrent upon a large number of those who were still left in the movement.

To this was added another disturbing element. Most's old rival, Joseph Peukert, came to New York in 1890. For three years he had been roaming all over Europe in the vain effort to forget the disgrace he had incurred in connection with Johann Neve's tragic fate. Now he came over with the intention to fight it out with Most, and to force him either to retract the accusation of treason or to submit the matter to a jury of honor. The old domestic quarrel was revived. All those who for one reason or another were opposed to Most found a new rallying-point in Peukert. All those who had had their copy rejected by the editor of the *Freiheit*, who had seen their "individuality" repressed by the authority of the sometimes intractable and rude leader; in short, all the "soreheads" found at last a counter-Messiah who could lead the struggle against the man they had once worshiped and now detested. But the insurgents included also two persons of a better caliber, who were later to play a very important role in the American Anarchist movement — who, in fact, were to take over Most's heritage after his death, small though that heritage was. These two were Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman.

The story of their conflict with Johann Most has been told in Emma Goldman's *Living My Life*. It is one of the saddest chapters in the history of modern revolutionary movements. There was the very unpolitical jealousy centering around the woman in the case, between the aging and somewhat skeptical veteran and the adolescent fanatic barely out of his teens; there was also the revolt of the younger generation against "the tyrant who wanted to rule with an iron hand under the guise of Anarchism," as Berkman put it; there was the Puritanism of the young ascetic imbued with the glorious tradition of the heroic Nihilists, in whose eyes Most was "no longer a revolutionist" because occasionally he would buy flowers for Emma and eat with her in a non-proletarian restaurant. And there was also, on the other hand, the quite comprehensible indignation of the old German war-horse against "the arrogant Russian Jew" who wanted to tell him what was "in keeping with revolutionary ethics."

While all these passions were seething, Johann Most was called upon to serve a sentence imposed on him on account of a speech delivered after the execution of the Chicago martyrs. He surrendered in June, 1891, and was released early in 1892. It was about that time that one of the most violent battles of the American workers was fought against the Carnegie Steel Company in Homestead, Pennsylvania. Henry Clay Frick, the general manager of the steel concern, refused to deal with the union and imported two boatloads of Pinkerton guards. A dozen dead and scores

of wounded remained on the spot as a result of a pitched battle between Frick's private army and the workers, who had armed themselves spontaneously.

The militia was called out and the workers lost the struggle in the end. But before they surrendered, young Alexander Berkman decided to play destiny. He was going to accomplish a deed that would give an altogether unexpected turn to the struggle — and perhaps tip the scales in favor of the workers. Forcing his way into Frick's office, he attempted to kill the man in whom he saw the outstanding enemy of the workers. He paid with sixteen years of imprisonment for his daring act.

Most had been free only a short time when all this happened. What occurred now was to remain the great disgrace of his life, even though various Anarchist historians, among them Alexander Berkman himself, after his release, tried to put the cloak of Christian charity over that blot on the great agitator's escutcheon. Both in a public speech and in his paper, the preacher of revolutionary terrorism did his best to dissociate himself from Berkman's act. Emma Goldman, young and temperamental, horsewhipped her teacher at a public meeting. It was the greatest scandal in the history of Anarchism, and, together with Most's attitude, it contributed more than anything else to the disintegration of the movement in America. True, the majority of the German and Yiddish-speaking Anarchists in America, and particularly in New York, remained loyal to Most and violently opposed his critics. But it was all so discouraging that many hitherto loyal militants forswore all radical activities.

In an article published in an Anarchist organ opposing Most's *Freiheit*, Emma Goldman accused her former teacher of treachery and cowardice. Under the first impression of the news reports of the attack on Frick, Most had actually declared that the attacker "might be some crank or perhaps Frick's own man to create sympathy for him. Frick knows that public opinion is against him. He needs something to turn the tide in his favor." In later articles, published several weeks after Berkman's act, he presented his modified views with regard to "the propaganda by the deed." He admitted that for years he had greatly overestimated the importance of terrorism. He had come to the conclusion that it was not practicable where the revolutionary movement was yet in its infancy and where, as a result, the reprisals on the part of the Government could put an end to all radical activities.

Plausible as his arguments were — and they were actually accepted by most Anarchists ten years later — he had chosen the worst possible moment, from the Anarchist point of view, for expressing his doubts about that former panacea for arousing the masses. For in all the history of the modern labor movement Berkman's terrorist attempt had been perhaps the only one which was inspired by the immediate grievances of the workers in conflict with their employers. As a result, Most's detractors — and his impartial critics as well — were not altogether wrong when they suspected that this access of common sense was dictated by the very human sentiment of self-preservation rather than by a sudden inspiration. Berkman's act had aroused a veritable lynching fury among the respectable. And Most, having just completed his ninth prison year, was apparently anxious henceforth to live less dangerously.

Discovering the Labor Movement

The abrogation of Bismarck's anti-Socialist laws (1890) and Germany's economic upswing greatly reduced the flow of German immigrants to America. Those who were still coming over were not of the old militant skilled-labor element trained in the class struggle and imbued with the love of theoretical discussion.

With the gradual disappearance of his flock, and the waning of his faith in the efficacy of individual violence, Most's doctrinal attitude took a paradoxical turn. A manifestation of the class struggle which he had hitherto ignored now claimed his attention. He discovered the trade unions. Not that he expected anything from the American Federation of Labor, which he considered hopelessly corrupt and backward; nor did he see any chances for a revolution in America, where the organized workers were largely satisfied with their lot. But he began to realize that his followers needed some concrete basis for their dreams of a better future; more concrete at any rate than the loose "groups of affinity" advocated by the typical Communist-Anarchists. And thus he stumbled upon one of the essential ideas of syndicalism, long before that term had been introduced in its revolutionary meaning. It might have been a reminiscence of some of his readings in Bakunin, to whom many of the concepts of modern syndicalism could be traced. At any rate, as far back as 1890, in one of his pamphlets, entitled *Our Position in the Labor Movement*, Most anticipated the basic idea of modern syndicalism by declaring that after the victory of the revolution the trade unions would have the mission of reorganizing society. But he showed no interest as yet in the other basic idea of syndicalism — the immediate struggle for material improvements. That indifference of Most's was largely the result of his desperate "All or nothing!" outlook which he adopted after his break with the Socialist Party. Moreover, he always remained a faithful believer in the spurious "iron law of wages" according to which the workers, under the capitalist system, can never get more than what is absolutely necessary for their bare subsistence.

By the middle of the Nineties, French syndicalism began to take shape both in its organizational form and in the literary expression of its ideas. Most began to fill his columns with translations of pamphlets and articles published by the new school. Ten years later, shortly before his death, he was to hail just as enthusiastically the appearance of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), a sort of unorthodox variety of syndicalism on American soil.

In Prison Again

In 1897 the steady decline of his paper and the sheer impossibility of making a living forced Most to go to Buffalo, where he became the editor of a German daily paper. He had only one assistant, and performed the incredible feat of writing eight to ten columns daily. At the same time he continued the publication of the *Freiheit*, which became a weekly supplement to the daily. The enterprise was launched by the German trade unions of that city, which apparently hoped to increase their membership by having their paper written in the popular style of the famous pamphleteer. However, he could not get along with his employers, who wanted him to moderate his tone. After two years he returned to New York to face the same old misery and the same old squabbles.

It was Most's good luck that his job in Buffalo had not become a permanent affair. If it had, he might have died in the electric chair in 1901. For, two years after Most left the Buffalo paper, President McKinley was killed in that city by Leon Czolgosz, a native American worker of Polish extraction. Czolgosz is usually described as "an Anarchist," although nothing definite is known about his actual affiliation with the movement. The motives which had prompted him to commit that act have never been established. He had tried to get in touch with the Anarchists in Chicago, but his strange behavior rendered him suspicious. Believing the lurid stories he must have read about the alleged conspiracies of these reputedly dangerous men, he tried to locate and join their "secret organization." The Anarchists whom he accosted in his attempts took him for a stool-pigeon. Their paper, the Chicago *Free Society*, warned its readers against him. Had Czolgosz read that notice? Did he want to vindicate himself before those who questioned his sincerity? Nobody knows.

American public opinion would not have failed to connect Most with the deed, if he had still worked in Buffalo at that time. His presence in New York saved his life, but did not save him from jail. He had had the incredible bad luck of having one of his periodical lazy spells during that week. Instead of writing an editorial of his own, or at least translating a recent article from the European radical press, he had inserted an old standby entitled *Mord contra Mord* (Murder vs. Murder) which for several decades had been used as space-filler by many German-American radical papers. It was a piece of classical republican instigation to regicide written by the good old German democrat Karl Heinzen, a revolutionist of 1848 who had emigrated to the United States and had been dead now for many years. (His invectives against Karl Marx are still amusing reading for an antiquarian.) The article in question, as printed in the *Freiheit*, concluded with the words: "We say: Murder the murderers! Save humanity through blood and iron, poison and dynamite!"

That piece of bombast appeared in the *Freiheit* on the day on which McKinley was murdered. It could not possibly have been responsible for the deed. Yet Most was arrested and condemned to serve a year on Blackwell's Island. It was his tenth and last year of imprisonment.

The *Freiheit* did not suffer by the sentence. On the contrary, the enforced removal from all the petty squabbles, also the reaction to his loss of liberty, brought about a sort of intellectual

revival in the aging rebel. The weekly editorials, signed *Ahasverus*, which were smuggled out of his cell, were among the best articles he had written in ten or fifteen years. They were also much more dignified in style, and dispensed with that low-brow vulgarity which was the distressing accompaniment of much of his humor.

The sequel to Czolgosz's shot was perhaps the strongest confirmation of all the doubts that Most, nine years before, had expressed about the effectiveness of terrorist acts in America. The only thing that was actually achieved was the final elevation to power of a political figure who otherwise might never have entered the White House. But the new President, Theodore Roosevelt, showed little gratitude. In a historical Message to Congress he likened the Anarchists to pirates and slave-traders — an unconscious slam at the ancestors of many of the most respected families. The first statutes directed against the immigration of men professing Anarchist ideas were adopted on his initiative. In the mood of hysteria that was worked up against an insignificant sect, Most's little children were almost daily beaten up on the street. And a federal Senator stood up in Congress and demanded that all immigrants be examined for tattooed marks which might testify to their membership in a secret Anarchist group!

It looked as if all Anarchist propaganda were going to be outlawed. Back from Blackwell's Island, Most seriously considered the necessity of going underground and organizing secret groups. But better counsels prevailed in the Government. The public excitement subsided, and the Anarchist movement was permitted to go on — dying a natural death.

The Last Years

Most's old comrades-in-arms gradually withdrew from the movement. Many of them achieved middle-class or lower middle-class security. The financial support the paper received from its readers was negligible. More and more the *Freiheit* became a one-man affair, the old war-horse not only supplying all of its copy, but also folding and shipping the paper as well. Yet his followers, who contributed next to nothing for the paper's upkeep, insisted upon supervising its editorial and financial policy. They cried out at his "authority" and "tyranny" when the old man refused to submit to their control. This opposition to Most's editorial authority had its roots in the old rivalry between Peukert and Most. Speaking of that tendency, Max Nettlau, the historian of Anarchism, playfully remarks: "The purpose is always a periodical without an editor, i.e. without Most, which is produced spontaneously, i.e., by Peukert." Curiously enough that scholarly admirer of Bakunin failed to see that his correct analysis of the underlying "anti-authoritarian" motive in this particular case carried much deeper implications. For the victorious leader of the "no-editor" group, who invariably becomes the editor himself, *offers the key to the real meaning of the "no-government" slogan of the Anarchists.*

To keep the paper alive Most was often forced to go on speaking tours, covering the more important cities of the East and the Middle West. The financial situation of the *Freiheit* was particularly bad in 1905. As a result, Most went on a trip early in 1906. He was sixty years old — yet apparently still in good health. But he was not to return to New York. Heedless of the bad weather, even when drenched by a cold rain in Pennsylvania he insisted upon following his schedule, and went on to Ohio. Exhaustion, a bad cold, and an attack of erysipelas swept him off his feet. He died in Cincinnati, after a vain attempt to disregard his serious condition and proceed with the journey.

Blackened, slandered, ridiculed in his lifetime, he had, ironically enough, very good press notices after his death. Most of the German-American papers — and they were very numerous in those years — forgot their old hostilities and paid tribute to the gifted son of their old country. Even the *New Yorker Staatszeitung*, his life-long bitter enemy, was quite generous in its praise. To the *New York Times*, however, he remained a "mad dog" and "enemy of the human race" even after his death. The great New York daily has since mitigated its tone even with regard to living revolutionists.

Most's death marked the end of an epoch in the American radical movement. It was an epoch when the emotions of the more alert immigrant worker were divided between his millennial dreams of justice and freedom, and his desire for vengeance — even if it was wreaked only upon individual members of the master class. To a certain extent these two emotions were merged in the new gospel of syndicalism which made its appearance during the declining years of the great agitator. Syndicalism — in its I.W.W. variety — offered, or seemed to offer, a practical road towards that hoped-for millennium; and the slogans of general strike and direct action held out the promise of an actual mass vengeance instead of the poor substitute offered by the individual deed of some hero or suicide. The Russian Revolution and the elimination of the capitalist class

in one-sixth of the globe disposed of syndicalism and pointed to a new way: that shown by the men calling themselves Communists. It is they who have now taken possession of a large section of the most dissatisfied, the most temperamental, and the most fanatical immigrant workers in this country.

There is every indication that Johann Most, were he alive in 1917, would have hailed this new school of what is called human emancipation. With his Marxist dialectics, his Blanquist will to power, his Bakuninist disregard for consistency, he would have had no difficulty in bridging the chasm between Anarchy and Dictatorship. The latter would be merely the transitional phase to the former.

But one can just imagine his thunderous protests a few years later. For he was not a practical politician.

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Max Nomad
The Preacher
Johann Most, Terrorist of the Word
1939

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