

Anarchist “Organization”

Ross Winn

1900

I have a few words to say to the American Anarchists; and having been in this movement (if we can be said to have one) for more than twelve years, I think I may be frank. While there are more Anarchists today than at any time in the past, our cause is just as weak and struggling as it was twelve years ago, when I became a young “convert”. The reason is not hard to find. While political Socialism has fought its way to recognition, Anarchism, with stronger claims to human reason and sentiment, and with a far greater intellectual support, is still non-existent, so far as the public at large is cognizant of its real aim and purport. Socialists have acted in concert, and with systematic effort. They have promulgated their theories in platforms and manifestos that the public could read and understand. They have by organized action put hundreds of speakers in the field, who have gone forth and talked Socialism to the masses. And we Anarchists have done nothing—published a few struggling papers, read only by our own people; a few books, when the common people cannot or do not find time to read such exhaustive literature. And the class of literature we have put out has been pitched in a key suitable only for students of political economy, when it is the common, unthinking, everyday man we must reach and educate.

Socialism has outstripped Anarchy in making converts, simply because its advocates have taken the trouble to make themselves understood by the people—the everyday people. Let us go and do likewise. Look at the work accomplished by our resolute little comrade Emma Goldman, in the lecture field! And she has stood alone! What would be accomplished with a dozen lecturers in the field, preaching Anarchy’s gospel of human freedom?

Why this inactivity? Simply that we persistently refuse to practice the fundamental principle of Anarchism—co-operation. We refuse to organize as a body, because, forsooth, organization is governmental. Nonsense! Call it co-operative association, if you like; but at least this tact is apparent: we must come together as a compact body, and act together, if we ever make Anarchy a living issue.

I call upon all those who realize the importance of such a movement at this time, to say something upon this subject through the columns of *Free Society* and *Discontent*. I should also be pleased to correspond with those who favor the formation of an American Anarchist propaganda society, and the adoption of an Anarchist declaration of principles. [text here obscured and/or missing from microfilm copy] on account of an avowal of my convictions. I do not blame the people—they have received no light upon the subject; and it is time they did. We must have a platform of principles, to show the public exactly where we stand. You cannot read all of Kropotkin’s

works to every man you meet, to prove to him that Anarchy is not murder; but, if the Anarchists had a platform, setting forth concisely what Anarchists demand, we could carry a copy of it around in our pockets, and, when we meet someone willing to listen, we could prove to him without much effort, that we were somebody besides assassins of kings.

I do not suppose all Anarchists would join or even co-operate with an Anarchist organization; but enough would, I am sure, to make the movement a success. At any rate, let us do something to create an Anarchist movement in America, that will help to make Anarchy an issue. I am frank to confess that I am anxious for the time when one may avow him or herself an Anarchist anywhere without losing caste with respectability. It is all bosh to say we care nothing for social ostracism—I do, and you do too, even though you may humbug yourself with the delusion that you don't.

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