

An Open Letter to the Editors of *Freedom*

Sidney E. Parker

1967

Having been a regular reader of your paper for over twenty years I am writing to give you some of my thoughts about *Freedom* and its relation to anarchism. I don't intend to range through all the issues that have appeared during this time, but simply to have a look at *Freedom* as it was at about the time I began to read it and then to have a look at it as it is now. For this I shall compare two issues — one for March 9, 1946 and the other for July 8, 1967.

The main theme of the 1946 issue was the imperative need for the workers and peasants, the masses, to bring about a social revolution. In an article called "India- the Menace of Famine", we were told that "The setting up of workers' and peasants' committees to administer the land and industry for the benefit of all and the relief of starvation; these are the constructive necessities of the time." Another article on the situation in France announced that the "French workers begin to understand" and that the chances of "revolutionary minorities have become preponderant." And the Egyptian masses have to "understand their true role and take a really revolutionary path, overstepping the infantile fallacies of nationalism." While the author of an article on conscription said that "The one fear apparent in the government (as it is the fear of all tyrants) is the fear of the people themselves. They dread that the masses will rise against the existing order and establish a society of peace and equality wherein liberty becomes a cornerstone and not a crime." And George Woodcock indicted the "petty bourgeois" outlook of the Levelers

which made them concerned to create a society of small proprietors and to deny with pathetic vigor the anarchist communist doctrines preached by Winstanley and the Diggers. Winstanley's social vision, combined with the revolutionary vigor of the Levellers and expressed in widespread direct action in the taking over of land, might have brought real freedom to England and changed the history of the world.

Have you ever given any thought as to what happened to all these pious hopes?

Did the Indian masses do as you suggested? Were they even interested enough to listen? How much nearer are the Egyptian masses to the real "revolutionary path"? Do you think that their recent hosannas for Nasser showed they have "overstepped" nationalism? And the French workers—the once white hope of Bakunin and Kropotkin have they understood? Is de Gaulle trembling in his shoes at the impending rising of "the people themselves" who will "establish a society of peace and equality"? Were these hopes any different from Woodcock's retrospective

speculations as to what would have been if the Levellers had done as he said they should have done 300 years later?

I have not noticed any serious analysis by you as to why these hopes remained pious. No doubt in the heady, disillusioned atmosphere just after World War 2 they were understandable. I know, I shared them. But over twenty years have passed and they are littered with the ruins of shattered hopes and exploded wishes. Yet even in those days a dissident voice was heard disturbing the euphoria of the approaching revolution. A reader wrote:

Strikes, syndicalism, and class war mean little in themselves. Class war is a fact, but has, in my view, little direct connection with anarchism which knows no classes and certainly is not (either historically or actually) very representative of working class aspirations

But you took little notice of such an argument then and seem to have forgotten it altogether now if your back page is any guide, nor, indeed, the front page of the July 8th issue for this year. Here there is an article on Aden which reads like a rehash of the 1946 articles. Once again, the solution is “a revolution, not only in the Aden territories, but throughout the Arab states to ensure that the wealth from oil monopolies, at present held by a small minority, is used for the benefit of the whole population.” I would be interested to hear what response you get from the Adeni masses. Not to be outdone the back page features a report from Japan in which it is stated that the “majority of the people of Japan” want the war in Vietnam to end. The writer does not say how he reached this conclusion, and I doubt very much if he could.

So the theme of the people in revolt continues to be plugged. What have you got to show for it after twenty years? Indeed, I could say after eighty years, since you and your predecessors have sung the same song since 1886 when the first issue of *Freedom* appeared.

What is your answer to this? Where are the forces for your revolution and how are you going to organize them? After all, if the Adeni masses need a revolution you might at least spell out to them what it means.

Of course, one line of retreat from your totalistic approach to revolution is to stand with the editor of your brother publication *Anarchy* when he agrees with Malatesta that libertarian socialism is “only one of the forces acting in society, and history will advance, as always, in the direction of the resultant of all the forces,” but if you were to do this, if you junked the proletarian myth, as the logical carrying out of this view would entail, then bang goes your creed of social salvation, whether in the form of being washed in the blood of the social revolution or the progressive revelation of gradual enlightenment. Malatesta, however, was no pioneer of permanent protest, as this quotation might suggest, since he believed that One Day the particular social force he favored would triumph over all the others. But he almost hit the bull’s eye that time.

People like you have been denounced as “enemies of society”. No doubt you would indignantly deny being such and claim that you are trying to save society from the vampire of the State. You delude yourselves. Insofar as “society” means an organized collectivity having one basic norm of behavior that must be accepted by all (and that includes your libertarian communist utopia) and insofar as the norm is a product of the average, the crowd, the mediocre, then anarchists are always enemies of society. There is no reason to suppose that the interests of the free individual and’ the interests of the social machine will ever harmonize, nor is it desirable that they should.

Permanent conflict between the two is the only perspective that makes any sense to me. But I expect that you will not see this, that you will continue to hope that if you repeat “the free society is possible” enough times then it will become so.

One day, however, some of you may grasp that the world does not go the way you think it should. You will then either give up and go along with the present social Lie, or shrug off the accumulated pipe-dreams of both it and the hope of social salvation and make yourselves, your living egos, the bedrocks of your lives. An anarchist is someone who acknowledges no authority, not even that of Anarchy. Maybe he cannot deny or destroy the existence of anarchism, but he can refuse to be its creature, he can be his own, belonging to neither god nor Man, neither Society nor the State. This, at least, I have learnt during these twenty years.

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