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On the 100th anniversary of Leo Tolstoy's death
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According to the Julian calendar (which was still valid in Russia until February 14, 1918), Lev (Leo) Nikolayevich Tolstoy died on November 7, 1910, according to the Gregorian calendar, at the Astapovo railway station (since 1918 Lev Tolstoy) at the age of 82. This is important to know, because various biographies cite either one or the other date of death.

According to his own account, Tolstoy had a very happy childhood, then from his entry in 1844 at the age of 16 into Kazan University, to study oriental languages, then law, and in 1847 to his death, he had a very eventful life: He incurred gambling debts, borrowed heavily, fled from his creditors into the military, took part in the suppression of an uprising of Caucasian mountain peoples (e.g. Chechens), as well as in the Crimean War from 1854 to 1856, then resigned, returned to his inherited estate Yasnaya Polyana, where he had been born into a family of Russian nobility, built a school there for the children of his serfs (there were four such school experiments on his estate), undertook two trips to Europe, made a personal acquaintance with Proudhon and made a name for himself as a great writer, participated in the so-called peasant emanci-

pation (abolition of serfdom), he had a rather unhappy marriage, turned to religious topics, clashed with the Orthodox Church, the Tsarist state, and the feudal-bourgeois society into which he was born and from which he strove to break free, refused the Nobel Prize intended for him in 1901, was excommunicated by the Church in the same year (which is why he was not allowed to be buried in any cemetery), and spoke out against the death penalty very early on after witnessing a guillotine execution in Paris. This execution was so abhorrent to him that he stated in a letter that he would never again serve any government anywhere.

In his later years, although once a passionate hunter himself, he turned against hunting game and slaughtering animals and advocated an exclusively vegetarian diet. He wanted to leave all his possessions, including his works, to the Russian people in his will, but the notary prevented this, citing the fact that the law did not allow for the transfer of his property to the public.

Tolstoy was considered not only an anti-authoritarian educator, an outstanding writer, and ultimately a preacher of a non-church-based Christianity based on reason and absolute non-violence, but – especially for at least the last twenty years of his life – also an anarchist, although he never described himself as such. Although he corresponded very diligently with Kropotkin (whom he never met personally), he otherwise kept his distance from the anarchist movement because the majority of the movement did not share his fundamental non-violence.

Tolstoy's anarchism is quite easy to identify: Due to his preoccupation with religious questions, which began in 1879, he was guided by Christian values, primarily by the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 5–7), which was written about 40 to 50 years after Jesus' death. Thus, it is questionable whether this Gospel faithfully reproduced the aforementioned sermon. However, the theological community may quarrel about that. In any case, this was irrelevant to Tolstoy; he guided himself exclusively by the biblical text and, in doing

so, made the discovery, contrary to all Christian church dogma, that the text does not refer to an afterlife after death, but rather promises a redemption (one could also say liberation) of humanity in the present. It does not say "Blessed are those who…", but rather "Blessed are those who…". The text becomes more understandable as a very early liberation theology document if the word "blessed" is replaced with "blessed is he" (which the original Greek text certainly allows as a possible translation). From this Sermon on the Mount, which is considered the core of Christian doctrine, Tolstoy accordingly derived a "Kingdom of God on Earth" as a human society in which there would be no private property (which Tolstoy, like Proudhon, viewed as a fundamental evil), but only communal property. For the earth's riches were created for all, not just for a privileged few. These views on the earth's riches were by no means new in Tolstoy's time; they can already be found in some so-called Church Fathers of the 4th century AD (e.g., Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom of Antioch). For Tolstoy, his concept of the "Kingdom of God" was associated with a path that leads humanity out of tyranny, slavery, oppression, and domination. This "Kingdom of God on Earth," to which human rule is supposedly alien, thus also knows no wars or other forms of violence. In his religious-critical treatise "The Kingdom of God is Within You!" (based on an almost identical, alleged saying of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke [Luke 17:21]), he developed his religious-political principles: religion is a matter of reason, from which the law of love and mutual aid follows. And this can only be achieved on the basis of strict non-violence. Instead of what he considered a violent revolution, Tolstoy focused on a pursuit of individual perfection.

Now, it is by no means the case that Tolstoy is the only revolutionary in history to refer to Christian themes. Proudhon also did so for a time, and Bakunin's early writings also make occasional references to this. We find them everywhere among the early socialists, especially in the shoemaker Wilhelm Weitling's "The Gospel

of the Poor Sinner," published in 1845. But they were most consistently embedded in Tolstoy's social utopia. Tolstoy recognized an anti-state trait in Christianity. From this perspective, he denied the state any right to exist, regardless of its form. The same applied to state (and church) institutions that (should) provide protective functions and social facilities for their populations; for in the society envisioned by Tolstoy, such things are unnecessary, because everything will regulate itself on the basis of non-violence, charity, mutual aid, and self-determination.

Tolstoy's Christian-influenced anarchism can probably be considered a special form; for anarchism in general recognizes no kind of rule, not even divine. And Tolstoy, in particular, submitted himself "to the law of God," thus recognizing a power above him. Nevertheless, his idea of a society free from any kind of human rule, albeit motivated by Christianity, can certainly be called anarchistic. And it had its effect:

Even in the last twenty years of his life, entire colonies of Tolstoyans emerged – and not only in Russia! (They were, however, massively persecuted in the Tsarist Empire, while Tolstoy himself, probably because of his global reputation, was left in peace at the instigation of the Tsar, despite all other repression). After the First World War and in the 1920s, Tolstoy's liberal ideas increasingly found their way into the movement of religious socialists that had emerged in Central Europe in 1900. Even Erich Mühsam, in 1913, three years after Tolstoy's death, referred to the "anarchist Tolstoy" in his magazine "Cain" when justifying his – at that time – non-violence to his comrades.