

Down With the Anarchists!

Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman

1910s

We must get rid of the Anarchists! They are a menace to society. Does not Hearst say so? Do not the M. & M. and the gentlemen of the Chamber of Commerce, who have also declared war on Labor, assure us that the Anarchists are dangerous and that they are responsible for all our troubles? Does not every skinner of Labor and every grafting politician shout against the Anarchists? Isn't that enough to prove that the Anarchists are dangerous?

But why are all the money bags and their hirelings so unanimous in condemning the Anarchists? Generally they disagree on many questions and they bitterly fight each other in their business and social life. But on TWO questions they are always in accord.

Smash the Labor Unions!

Hang the Anarchists!

WHY? Because the Labor Unions are cutting the bosses' profits by constantly demanding higher wages. And the Anarchists want to abolish the boss altogether.

Now, what is the matter with the Anarchists? What do you really know about them, except the lies and misrepresentations of their enemies — who are also the enemies of the workers and opposed to every advancement of Labor? If you stop to think of it, you really know nothing of the Anarchists and their teachings. Your masters and their press have taken good care that you shouldn't learn the truth about them. Why?" Because as long as they can keep you busy shouting against the Anarchists, they are safe in their saddle on the backs of the people.

That's the whole secret.

What do the Anarchists really want? When you know that, you will be able to decide for yourself whether the Anarchists are your enemies or your friends.

The Anarchists say that it is not necessary to have murder and crime, poverty and corruption in the world. They say that we are cursed with these evils because a handful of people have monopolized the earth and all the wealth of the country. But who produces that wealth? Who builds the railroads, who digs the coal, who works in the fields and factories? You can answer that question for yourself. It is the toilers who do all the work and who produce all that we have in the world.

The Anarchists say: The products of Labor should belong to the producers. The industries should be carried on to minister to the needs of the people instead of for profit, as at present. Abolishing monopoly in land and in the sources of production, and making the opportunity for production accessible to all, would do away with capitalism and introduce free and equal

distribution. That, in turn, would do away with laws and government, as there would be no need for them, government serving only to conserve the institutions of today and to protect the masters in their exploitation of the people. It would abolish war and crime, because the incentive to either would be lacking. It would be a society of real freedom, without coercion or violence, based on the voluntary communal arrangement of "To each according to his needs; from each according to his ability."

That is what the Anarchists teach. Suppose they are all wrong. Are you going to prove it by hanging them? If they are wrong, the people will not accept their ideas, and therefore there can be no danger from them. But, if they are right, it would be good for us to find it out. In any case it is a question of learning what these Anarchists really want. Let the people hear them.

But how about violence? you say. Don't the Anarchist preach and practice violence and murder?

They don't. On the contrary, the Anarchists hold life as the most sacred thing. That's why they want to change the present order of things where everyone's hand is against his brother, and where war, wholesale slaughter in the pursuit of the dollar, bloodshed in the field, factory and workshop is the order of the day. The poverty, misery and bitter industrial warfare, the crimes, suicides and murder committed every day of the year in this country will convince any man of intelligence that in present society we have plenty of Law, but mighty little order or peace.

Anarchism means OPPOSITION to violence, by whomever committed, even if it be by the government. The government has no more right to murder than the individual. Anarchism is therefore opposition to violence as well as to government forcibly imposed on man.

The Anarchists value human life. In fact, no one values it more. Why, then, are the Anarchists always blamed for every act of violence? Because your rulers and exploiters want to keep you prejudiced against the Anarchists, so you will never find out what the Anarchists really want, and the masters will remain safe in their monopoly of life.

Now, what are facts about violence? Crimes of every kind happen every day. Are the Anarchists responsible for them? Or is it not rather misery and desperation that drive people to commit such acts? Does a millionaire go out on the street and knock you down with a gaspipe to rob you of a few dollars? O, no. He builds a factory and robs his workers in a way that is much safer, more profitable and within the law.

Who, then, commits acts of violence? The desperate man, of course. He to whom no other resort seems open. Violence is committed by all kinds of people. Such violence is mostly for the purpose of theft or robbery. But there are also cases where it is done for social reasons. such impersonal acts of violence have, from time immemorial, been the reply of goaded and desperate classes, and goaded and desperate individuals to wrongs from their fellow-men, which they felt to be intolerable. Such acts are the violent RECOIL from violence, whether aggressive or repressive; they are the last desperate struggle of outraged and exasperated human nature for breathing space and life. And their CAUSE LIES NOT IN ANY SPECIAL CONVICTION, BUT IN HUMAN NATURE ITSELF. The whole course of history, political and social, is strewn with evidence of this fact. To go no further, take the Revolutionists of Russia, the Fenians and Sinn Feiners of Ireland, the Republicans of Italy. Were those people Anarchists? No. Did they all hold the same political opinions? No. But all were driven by desperate circumstances into this terrible form of revolt.

Anarchists, as well as others, have sometimes committed acts of violence. Do you hold the Republican Party responsible for every act committed by a Republican? Or the Democratic Party,

or the Presbyterian or Methodist Church responsible for acts of individual members? It would be stupid to do so.

Under miserable conditions of life, any vision of the possibility of better things makes the present misery more intolerable, and spurs those who suffer to the most energetic struggles to improve their lot, and if these struggles only immediately result in sharper misery, the outcome is sheer desperation. In our present society, for instance, an exploited wage worker, who catches a glimpse of what work and life might and ought to be, finds the toilsome routine and the squalor of his existence almost intolerable; and even when he has the resolution and courage to continue steadily working his best, and waiting until new ideas have so permeated society as to pave the way for better times, the mere fact that he has such ideas and tries to spread them brings him into difficulties with his employers. How many thousands of rebel workers, of Socialists, of Industrialists and Syndicalists, but above all of Anarchists, have lost work and even the chance of work, solely on the ground of their opinions? It is only the specially gifted craftsman who, if he be a zealous propagandist, can hope to retain permanent employment. And what happens to a man with his brain working actively with a ferment of new ideas, with a vision before his eyes of a new hope dawning for toiling and agonizing men, with the knowledge that his suffering and that of his fellows in misery is not caused by the cruelty of fate, but by the injustice of other human beings—what happens to such a man when he sees those dear to him starving, when he himself is starved? Some natures in such a plight, and those by no means the least social or the least sensitive, will become violent, and will even feel that their violence is social and not anti-social, that in striking when and how they can, they are striking, not for themselves, but for human nature, out-raged and despoiled in their persons and those of their fellow sufferers. And are we, who ourselves are not in this horrible predicament, to stand by and coldly condemn these piteous victims of the Furies and Fates? Are we to decry as miscreants these human beings who act with heroic self-devotion, often sacrificing their lives in protest, where less social and less energetic natures would lie down and grovel in abject submission to injustice and wrong? Are we to join the ignorant and brutal outcry which stigmatizes such men as monsters of wickedness, gratuitously running amuck in a harmonious and innocently peaceful society? NO! We hate murder with a hatred that may seem absurdly exaggerated to apologists for war, industrial slaughter and Ludlow massacres, to callous acquiescers in governmental and plutocratic violence, but we decline in such cases of homicide as those of which we are treating, to be guilty of the cruel injustice of flinging the whole responsibility of the deed upon the immediate perpetrator. The guilt of these homicides lies upon every man and woman who, intentionally or by cold indifference, helps to keep up social conditions that drive human beings to despair. The man who flings his whole life into the attempt, often at the cost of his own life, to protest against the wrongs of his fellow-men, is a saint compared to the active and passive upholders of cruelty and injustice, even if his protest destroy other lives besides his own. Let him who is without sin in society cast the first stone at such a one.

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