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Gustav Landauer (1870–1919)

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Although acknowledged by those who have encountered his ideas as one of the finest minds ever to have come out of the anarchist movement, Gustav Landauer remains relatively unknown outside the German- and Hebrew-speaking world. Precious little of his voluminous corpus of work is presently available in English, and despite a minor resurgence in interest in his ideas during the early 1970s Landauer is known today primarily for his involvement in the Bavarian revolution of 1918–19, or in connection with one or more of the many illustrious individuals with whom he was in close touch throughout his life, rather than for his own inimitable philosophy.

Landauer's was a Romantic, non-doctrinaire anarchism which, although rooted in the ideas of Proudhon and Kropotkin, went unashamedly against the grain of the anarchist orthodoxy of late 19th and early 20th century Europe. Central to his thinking is a fundamental comprehension that the capitalist state by its very nature is not something that can be "smashed" — rather, as he famously declared in 1910, it is "a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently"¹. Rejecting the historical materialists' reification of the state and society he argued that in reality "we are the State and continue to be the State until we have created the institutions that form a real community". He maintained that although externally imposed the state lives within each and every human being, and can only perpetuate itself as long as human beings exist in this 'statual' relationship which makes its coercive order necessary; following thinkers like Étienne de la Boétie he therefore insisted that all it takes is for human beings step out of this relationship, this artificially-created social construct of reality, and the state is rendered obsolete, it disintegrates.

Landauer's middle-class origins, his uncompromising pacifism and disdain for the sterile dogmatism and reductive rationalist arguments of many of the dominant theories of his day meant that he spent most of his life ostracised by the bulk of the mainstream European workers' movement. Nevertheless, the philosophy he put forward points to a level of insight into human psychology and the nature of social relationships uncommon among anarchists of his time and many, particularly the more intellectual factions within the European Left, recognised that the populist-Romantic strain underpinning his ideas actually brought his unique brand of anarchism closer to accounting for the complexity of the human being than theories which reduce the manifold intricacies of human existence to the simplistic rigidity of two battling classes. Thus the ethical-idealism for which he received a good deal of flak from many of his contemporaries also earned him a sizable army of admirers, including some of the most highly esteemed literary

¹ Landauer in Buber, Martin, *Paths in Utopia*, (New York: Syracuse University Press. 1996), 46.

and philosophical figures of his day, and he has continued to find a small but dedicated group of followers in every generation since his death.

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Born in Karlsruhe in South-West Germany on April 7 1870 into a middle-class, assimilated Jewish family, Landauer began his lifelong battle with authority early on in his education at Karlsruhe's Gymnasium. Although he excelled academically from a young age it soon became clear that he was never going to be a 'model student'; he found formal schooling tedious and constrictive and his burgeoning obsession with independence and personal autonomy led to frequent conflict with authority figures throughout his formative years. As well as invoking the wrath of teachers and the school authorities on numerous occasions, Landauer's stubbornness and predilection for vocal dissent laid the groundwork for a relationship of mutual antagonism with his father which would continue until the latter's death in 1900, and his refusal to yield to parental intentions that he study the sciences in preparation for a career in dentistry eventually resulted in a transfer to the town's more classically orientated Bismarck Gymnasium where he spent the final two years of his pre-university schooling. This move allowed him to pursue the passion for music, theatre and the arts developed during his early childhood,² but even so the bulk of his education would continue to take place outside the classroom (the gymnasium, he later wrote, was above all "a tremendous theft of my time, my freedom, my dreams, my own explorations and my search for action"³) where he delved ever deeper into literature, music and especially theatre. By his late teens he had discovered Wagner, developed a love of romantic and mystical literature and become fluent enough in French and English to translate literary works from these languages into German.

On completion of his Gymnasium studies Landauer moved on to the universities of Heidelberg, Berlin and Strasbourg where he pursued courses in German philosophy, history and culture. By this point his political orientation was already being shaped by socialist and libertarian ideas, and his university education saw him identifying heavily with figures like Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Rousseau, Tolstoy and Strindberg. He developed a great respect for the classics and was fascinated in particular by the works of the German Romantic period, producing lengthy and detailed critiques of authors such as Tieck, Novalis and Brentano already tinged with an admiration and depth of understanding way beyond his

² Lunn, Eugene. *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 21.

³ Landauer in Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 22.

years. But the one figure who dominated his thinking at that time was Friedrich Nietzsche, whose thunderous intellectual assaults on the moral and cultural values upon which modern Germany was being built were part of a rising tide of opposition to the autocracy of the Bismarckian Reich causing outrage amongst the establishment, but finding a great deal of sympathy among left-leaning German writers of Landauer's generation. By the 1870s Marxism had established a foothold in the German Left, but by the time Landauer was at university many young radicals were beginning to ask serious questions as to whether a Marxist program really did hold the key to the meaningful social change it promised; with the Second International looking increasingly unable to maintain the solidarity it had exhibited during its early years and the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) attempting to impose its rigid Marxist agenda across the European labour movement, Landauer's burgeoning neo-romantic outlook was one which would be taken up by many of his contemporaries. Disillusioned with the direction being taken by the SPD during the late 80s and early 90s many, particularly the more intellectual factions within the German Left, began to turn to philosophers like Nietzsche and Stirner, shunning party-political approaches altogether in favour of various types of anarchism.⁴

Abandoning university in 1891 Landauer left Strasbourg and returned to the more auspicious social milieu of Berlin where he quickly found himself drawn into just such a group. Berlin at that time was a city in the midst of considerable social and political upheaval and it is easy to see how Landauer's intellectual and artistic sensibilities would have made it easy for him to be caught up in the revolutionary mood of the city's left-wing literati; the libertarian worldview he espoused was one shared by many of the artists, writers and intellectuals who flocked to the city during the 1880s, and although barely 21 he found that his virulent anti-establishment streak and commanding knowledge of the arts meant that it wasn't long before he was associating with and being taken seriously by prominent figures in the city's literary and theatrical community. This swift acceptance by Berlin's cultural elite has been attributed in part to a close acquaintance, evidently initiated during his first stay in the city in the late 1880s, with the philosopher Fritz Mauthner,⁵ under whose influence Landauer quickly became active in a group of young radicals known as the *Berliner Jungen*. The *Jungen* was an organisation of anti-authoritarian students whose opposition to the bureaucratic procedures of the SPD had recently earned them expulsion from the party, and it was through them that Landauer received his first taste of political activism under the tutelage

⁴ Maurer, Charles, *Call to Revolution: The Mystical Anarchism of Gustav Landauer*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1971) 26.

⁵ Maurer, *Call to Revolution*, 27.

of the likes of Benedikt Friedländer, who introduced him to the ideas of Proudhon, Kropotkin and the libertarian socialist Eugen Dühring.

In 1881 his activities with the *Jungen* led to his becoming involved in the Freie Volksbühne (Free People's Theatre), a socialist theatrical institution established by Bruno Wille for the education of Berlin's working class. With Berlin the undisputed theatrical capital of Europe at that time, Wille's project aimed to make available to the workers the social insights of dramatists like Ibsen and Hauptmann whose politically-charged plays had previously been denied to a working class audience by the exorbitant membership fees of the city's more well-established theatrical institutions. In the Freie Volksbühne idea Landauer evidently found a perfect vehicle for his dedication to both art and social reform, and when political differences split the theatre in 1892 he was among several Independent Socialists and other literati including Wilhelm Bölsche and Ernest von Wolzogen who set about founding a rival institution, the Neue Freie Volksbühne (New Free People's Theatre), with which he would be heavily involved until his death in 1919. It was at an early meeting of the Neue Freie Volksbühne in October 1892 that Landauer met Grete Leuschner, a needle-trade worker in Berlin's clothing industry, with whom he promptly fell in love. In less than two months the couple were married.

The years 1892–93 saw Landauer coming to terms not only with the SPD's authoritarian methodology, but with the Marxist ideology which by now had become the hegemonic force throughout the European Socialist movement. Shortly after his arrival in Berlin he had written several articles for the SPD's newspaper *Die neue Zeit*, but within the *Jungen* Landauer began to develop an ardent opposition to Marxism and throughout 1892 found himself increasingly drawn to the more explicitly anarchist wing of the group, his anti-Marxist sentiments solidifying into a fully-fledged anarchist position by the end of the year. In August 1892 Landauer's first article appeared in *Der Sozialist* (The Socialist), a weekly newspaper established the previous year as the voice of left-wing opposition to the SPD by an offshoot of the *Jungen* known as the Union of Independent Socialists.⁶ Landauer worked on numerous projects with the Independents during the autumn and winter of 1892–93, and by February 1893 he had taken over the editorship of their paper. It wasn't long before the likes of Errico Malatesta, Peter Kropotkin and Johann Most were hailing it as the best of several German-

⁶ Until the spring of 1893 when the non-anarchist faction within the Independents parted company with the group, the paper contained both purely antiauthoritarian and more orthodox Marxist articles. According to Lunn, the first year of the paper's existence saw the likes of Bruno Wille, Benedikt Friedländer and Wilhelm Werner arguing the anarchist case, with Max Schippel, Karl Wildberger and Paul Kampffmeyer continuing to toe the Marxist line. Although opinion remained somewhat divided as to the proper alternative to the SPD Landauer's assumption of editorial duties effectively marked the beginning of an explicitly anarchist direction for the paper.

language anarchist journals in circulation at the time. His work with *Der Sozialist* soon made Landauer something of a figurehead among the young radicals of *fin-de-siècle* Berlin, and in August 1893 he was chosen to represent the *Jungen* at the Second International congress in Zurich. Here he planned to deliver a speech on the state of German socialism, attacking the SPD for their treatment of the opposition in 1891 and reprimanding the party for their expulsion of the *Jungen* representatives. The 1893 meeting would in fact be the first in a series of high-profile incidents which would catapult Landauer to notoriety in the European Labour movement, but possibly not for the reasons Landauer had hoped.

Partly because of the damage sustained by the First International as a result of the famous confrontation between Marx and Bakunin, the Second was highly suspicious of the anarchists, and when Landauer and fellow *Jungen* member Wilhelm Werner arrived at the Zurich Tonhalle on August 9th 1893 their demands for admission to the congress were met with outright hostility from SPD leader August Bebel. Having been at the forefront of formal attempts to exclude the anarchist factions at the Second International's Brussels congress in 1891, Bebel dismissed Landauer's reasoning that as anarchists were fundamentally part of the socialist movement they had every right to be admitted, with a terse and soon-to-be familiar insistence that advocates of socialism must "use political rights and the legislative machinery . . . in order to enhance the interests of the proletariat and win political power".⁷ Despite unexpected support for Landauer from the British trade-union delegation Bebel managed to get a motion carried to bar the anarchists from the congress, limiting admission solely to groups prepared to accept the legitimacy of parliamentary channels and democratic structures in the pursuit of socialist objectives. Landauer and Werner were violently manhandled from the conference hall, their expulsion followed the next day by that of fifteen other attendees in a heavy-handed display of bigotry that prompted outrage from many of the other delegates. In a show of solidarity the Italian Socialist Amilcare Cipriani resigned his mandate declaring "I go with those you have banished; with the victims of your intolerance and brutality".⁸

Intolerance and brutality would become defining features of the SPD's attitude to dissenting voices throughout the 1890s, and Rudolf Rocker later commented that had Landauer known then the direction that the SPD would take over the course of the next two decades, he wouldn't have wanted to be included in their meeting anyway. Furious, apart from anything else, at the fact that the Social Democrats had not even afforded them the dignity of leaving the conference under their own steam but physically pushed and shoved them out of the hall

⁷ Bebel, in Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 85.

⁸ Amilcare Cipriani in Ward, Colin. "Gustav Landauer", *Anarchy*, (Vol.5 No. 1, January 1965), 245.

it was from experiences such as the Zurich debacle that Landauer developed his lifelong disgust for German Social Democracy, a stance given its earliest expression in his first novel *Der Todesprediger* (The Preacher of Death) which was published in 1893. Although Landauer would later distance himself from the novel, *Der Todesprediger* has been seen as probably the earliest manifestation of the characteristic blend of “vitalistic Nietzschean individualism and socialist communalism”⁹ which would underpin his later work, attempting a reconciliation of individual self-determination and community integration which soon came to characterise his philosophy.

Der Todesprediger's impact was slight, and Landauer set about articulating his opposition to the dictatorial style of the SPD-dominated German Left over the course of innumerable articles in *Der Sozialist*, during which he evolved a detailed, anti-authoritarian critique of Second International Marxism that would send ripples across the European socialist movement. As the writer and drama critic Julius Bab said of Landauer shortly after his death in 1919, “he hated all party politics, he hated the parliamentary Opposition no less than the Conservatives, because for him their politics, all politics, did not stand for freedom but meant only a deeper entanglement in the net of the all-consuming power of the State”.¹⁰ Accordingly his articles repeatedly dismissed the reformists as utterly impotent in the attainment of socialism, the hostility towards those trying to effect social change through parliamentary mechanisms expressed in these early contributions to *Der Sozialist* placing him at odds as much with the mainstream socialist movement as with Germany's established elites.

In January 1895 *Der Sozialist* was temporarily forced to close due to a police campaign against it involving the arbitrary confiscation of manuscripts and the financial donations on which the newspaper and its progenitors depended. Finding himself without an income Landauer applied to the medical faculty at Freiburg University in an attempt to secure permanent financial stability, but his application was denied because of a two-month prison term he had served at the end of 1893 for his involvement with *Der Sozialist*. As editor of *Der Sozialist* it was he who was held personally responsible by the German government for what it decided amounted to the paper's advocacy of civil disobedience, and as a result Landauer would find himself in and out of prison throughout the 1890s for various supposedly libellous writings against authorities of the Wilhelminian Reich. Although Bismarck's resignation in 1890 had officially seen the demise of Germany's

⁹ Berman, Russell and Luke, Tim. Introduction to English Edition of Landauer, Gustav, *For Socialism* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1978), 3.

¹⁰ Bab, Julius. “Gustav Landauer: Commemorative Speech Given by Julius Bab at the People's Hall in Berlin on the 25th of May, 1919”, 22.

notorious anti-socialist laws the political persecution of left-wing opposition was still commonplace within the country, and for someone of Landauer's profile imprisonment was not so much a risk as a guarantee. The seventeen months spent in prison during 1893, 1896 and 1899 gave him time to press on with his studies, and it was during his incarceration that he wrote his second novel, *Lebendig Tot* (Dead Alive), a work which, like *Der Todesprediger*, contains early signs of many themes which would later find fuller expression in his tractarian writings. He would also use his prison time to edit Mauthner's *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (Contributions to a Critique of Language) and translate the sermons of the 13th century mystic Meister Eckhart into modern German.

After his rejection from Freiburg Landauer decided that journalism was the way forward for him after all, and accepted the editorship of a newspaper in Bregenz, Austria. He began his editorial duties there in April 1895 but his involvement with the paper did not last long, for by August that year *Der Sozialist* was up and running again and Landauer was back in Berlin. With the Fourth International Workers' congress scheduled to take place in London in August 1896, the anarchists were eager to have as much support as possible from the people for their renewed attempt to be accepted by the Second International, and to this end late 1895 and early '96 saw Landauer and his colleagues at *Der Sozialist* stepping up the production and distribution of anarchist propaganda.

Unsurprisingly, when delegate tickets for the congress were sent to the SPD Newspaper *Vorwärts* for distribution in Germany, the paper's editor, Wilhelm Liebknecht, refused to provide any for the anarchists. Nevertheless, when August came around many of Europe's leading anarchists were present among the 750 delegates at Queen's Hall in London in order to seek admission to the congress, and before the conference got underway they attended a special meeting at which they received a warm welcome from their English hosts, the Independent Labour Party's Keir Hardie and Tom Mann. While Hardie and Mann may have been sympathetic to the anarchists' position it came as little surprise to anyone that the SPD once again attempted to ban the anarchists outright. This time however, German chairman Paul Singer was prevented from steamrolling the conference as Bebel had in Zurich by Hardie, who informed him that "people didn't conduct meetings like that in England".¹¹ Hardie insisted that both sides must be given a hearing before the vote was taken, so Landauer was given the opportunity to present his case. This he did in no uncertain terms, and in his speech, published as a pamphlet by London's Freedom Press later that year, he condemned the SPD's dictatorial behaviour and appealed to the conference delegates to allow the anarchist case to be heard.

¹¹ Ward, "Gustav Landauer", 245.

“I, as a German revolutionist and anarchist,” he declared, “consider it my duty today, as three years ago in Zurich, to tear off this painted mask and solemnly declare that the apparent splendour of the labour movement in Germany is but skin-deep, whilst in reality the number of those who fully and conscientiously go in for a total regeneration of human society, who struggle to realise a free socialist society, is infinitely smaller than the number of Social Democratic voters . . . The laws (at the elaboration of which the Social Democratic deputies work with great assiduity in parliament and in the various committees) merely strengthen the State and the power of the police — the German, Prussian, monarchist and capitalist state of today — and it becomes more and more a question whether our Social Democracy thinks that some mere finishing touches applied to our centralised, tutelary, ceaselessly interfering police state, are all that is necessary to transform the German Empire into the famous State of the future”.¹²

Landauer repeated his previous defence of the anarchist cause, arguing that as anarchists were as much a part of the socialist movement as any other faction they had every right to be included in the congress: “What we fight”, he declared, “is *State* socialism, levelling from above, bureaucracy; what we advocate is free association and union, the absence of authority, mind freed from all fetters, independence and well-being for all. Before all others it is we who preach *tolerance* for all — whether we think their opinions right or wrong — we do not wish to crush them by force or otherwise. In the same way we claim tolerance towards us, and where revolutionary socialists, where working men of all countries meet, we want to be among them and to say what we have got to say . . . If our ideas are wrong, let those who know better teach us better.”¹³ He was rewarded for his efforts by again being physically ejected from the conference hall along with several other prominent anarchists including Kropotkin, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis and Errico Malatesta who had arrived in London armed with mandates from trade unions in Spain, France and Italy. This was to be the last time the anarchists sought admission to the meetings of the Socialist International, and shortly after the London Congress Landauer denounced Wilhelm Liebknecht, the idolised leader and co-founder of the SPD as a “seven times political rogue”¹⁴ in front of 6,000 of Liebknecht’s followers at the Berlin Feenpalast.

The revamped *Sozialist* which emerged after the 1895 hiatus continued to provide an outlet for Landauer’s hostility towards the SPD’s authoritarianism, but the paper’s new incarnation saw attacks on the parliamentary socialists taking a back seat as Landauer concentrated instead on putting forward an alternative vision

¹² Landauer in Ward, “Gustav Landauer”, 245.

¹³ Landauer in Ward, “Gustav Landauer”, 245–246.

¹⁴ Bab, “Gustav Landauer”, 22.

of socialism. For Landauer, as for the rest of the anarchists, parliamentarianism served no purpose other than to further the interests of the bourgeoisie, but at a time when some still saw violence or 'propaganda by the deed' as the natural alternative to reformism Landauer's anarchism took an altogether different approach. Post-1895, *Der Sozialist* would become primarily a vehicle for Landauer's ideas pertaining to the creation of producer-consumer cooperatives as a beginning of an anarcho-socialist society,¹⁵ a program which was given its first full explication in a pamphlet published towards the end of 1895 entitled *Ein Weg zur Befreiung der Arbeiterklasse*, (A Way to Freedom for the Working Class).

Here Landauer condensed the sentiments contained in his *Der Sozialist* articles into the first concrete proposal of an idea which would form the basis of his life's work. Redefining the vocabulary of anarchism he described the libertarian alternative as the restructuring of society from below, the self-emancipation of the workers rather than a call to acts of terrorism or the violent destruction of capitalism and the state; the phrase 'direct action' came to mean the setting up of peaceful cooperatives and passive resistance to the state rather than armed rebellion. 'General strike' ceased being merely a bargaining mechanism; for it to be of any real use to the socialist cause, he insisted, it must mean not the temporary cessation of work in capitalist enterprise, but the permanent withdrawal from capitalism altogether and the continuation of work outside of it as workers put together their own self-sufficient co-operative ventures under self-management and for their own benefit. He thus called for workers – *all* workers, from peasant to intellectual – to opt out of the state-capitalist system by forming their own voluntary rural and urban communes. Socialism, he argued, *true* socialism, would come about neither through parliamentary mechanisms, nor by resorting to acts of violence, but by means of 'building the new society within the shell of the old' as workers dropped out of the present system and constructed their own cooperative enterprises as enclaves of libertarianism as an alternative to the existing society. As these societies grew they would act as an example, an inspiration and a model for other socialist militants to follow, siphoning workers out of the state-capitalist system and eventually reaching a critical mass after which *they* would be the prevalent form of organisation, and the state-capitalist order would become the alternative society.

As the 1890s drew to a close the increasingly theoretical direction from which *Der Sozialist* had acquired its reputation as a journal of unrivalled intellectual quality began to prevent the paper from reaching out to a working class audience, limiting its potency in its original role as an agitational publication. Some of the working-class members of its staff began to complain that the paper was losing

¹⁵ Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 95

its effectiveness as an instrument of anarchist propaganda, and from 1897 the day-to-day running of *Der Sozialist* became punctuated by fights and disagreements between staff members concerning the literary style and choice of material for publication. With much criticism starting to focus on Landauer as too high-brow and middle-class he made attempts to alter the newspaper's approach; ultimately his efforts were too little too late, and dwindling readership finally forced *Der Sozialist* to cease publication again in 1899.

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Although like many of the young intellectuals in Berlin at the time Landauer's dire financial situation for most of his life put him on the same economic footing as the mass of the workers, his middle-class origins meant a certain degree of isolation from the struggles of the working-class socialist movement, and it was partly because of this perception of him as 'too middle-class' that he never fully integrated into the mainstream anarchist circles of the day. This obviously meant that his contribution to anarchism came from the point of view of an outsider, but to an extent this isolation was a position Landauer enjoyed – he was a free spirit and it was alien to his nature to join large, potentially stifling organisations or become simply another rank and file member of anything that looked like a homogenous political movement. After his early experiences of anarchist activism with the *Jungen* and *Der Sozialist*, the circles in which he moved increasingly became those of the middle-class idealists, poets, artists and writers.

In 1897 Landauer and Grete separated and Landauer moved to the Berlin suburb of Friedrichshagen, famous stamping-ground of many of the city's bohemian literary groups and birthplace of German literary naturalism and the Volksbühne movement. Landauer himself was still heavily involved in avant-garde theatre, continuing to write plays and serving intermittently on the literary and artistic committee of the Neue Freie Volksbühne. As far as novel-writing was concerned, despite his early forays into the medium he came to the conclusion early on that such endeavours were not the way for him to achieve the meaningful and large-scale social change he sought. Nevertheless he remained in close touch with writers of the expressionist movement, particularly Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller, and in 1900 joined the bohemian group Neue Gemeinschaft, (New Community) set up by Heinrich and Julius Hart as a vehicle for a mystical, metaphysical revitalisation of society.

Although he had never exhibited much respect for their writings, Landauer initially greeted the Hart brothers' venture with a certain degree of enthusiasm, not because of the philosophical theorems and mystical rhetoric of the brothers but because "he believed he had found in their *practical* program the basis for a

highly fruitful, exemplary social structure”.¹⁶ He delivered numerous lectures to the group and his essay *Durch Absonderung zur Gemeinschaft* (Through Separation to Community) appeared in one of their pamphlets. But Landauer’s involvement with Neue Gemeinschaft was to be short-lived and it wasn’t long before he was slating the Hart brothers for what he felt to be the total absence of substance beneath the mystical, pseudo-religiosity which surrounded their group. Although he lasted less than a year with the organisation it was by no means an unproductive experience, for it was through them that he first met Julius Bab, as well as developing close friendships with the likes of Erich Mühsam and the esteemed Jewish ideologue Martin Buber.

Landauer’s meeting with Buber was to be of profound significance to the development of his thinking, to the extent that his subsequent work should in many ways be viewed within the context of a deep-seated connection with Judaism with which it was Buber above all who enabled him to reconnect. Landauer had had little exposure to the Jewish faith during the early part of his life and prior to 1908 there are very few references to Judaism to be found in any of his writings or letters. This was to change when he first came into contact with Buber’s work, particularly *The Legend of the Baal-Schem* (1908) in which he discovered a new conception of Jewish spirituality with which he quickly expressed a clear affinity. Although a committed atheist and firmly opposed to churches and denominations, unlike most anarchists Landauer had long placed great emphasis on the positive aspects of religion; prior to his meeting Buber however his focus had been on Christianity, in which he saw potential to be a unifying force capable of transcending artificial socio-political constructs, of going “beyond the boundaries of states and languages”¹⁷ to unite individuals into a true spiritual community. Like many Jewish Libertarians of his day he was fascinated by the figure of Jesus, and he embraced the prophetic belief in the coming of a messianic age of peace, equality and justice, albeit one which would be brought into being exclusively by human endeavour.¹⁸ The Hasidic legends to which Buber introduced Landauer appeared to Landauer to fulfil this vision of an egalitarian society, and in a 1908 review of Buber’s *The Legend of the Baal-Schem* he shows the first signs of this change in direction, noting how “Judaism is not an external accident, but a lasting internal quality, and identification with it unites a number of individuals within a *Gemeinschaft* (community). In this way, a common ground is established between

¹⁶ Julius Bab in Maurer, *Call to Revolution*, 45.

¹⁷ Löwy, Michael, *Redemption and Utopia. Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe: A Study in Elective Affinity*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), 133

¹⁸ “Landauer, Gustav. 1870–1919”, Libcom.org, (libcom.org, February 10th 2007).

the person writing this article and the author of the book”.¹⁹ For Landauer the Hasidic legends represented “the collective work of a *volk* signifying ‘living growth, the future within the present, the spirit within history, the whole within the individual. . . The liberating and unifying God within imprisoned and lacerated man; the heavenly within the earthly’”.²⁰

Buber would also be instrumental in introducing Landauer’s ideas to Europe’s socialist Jewish youth groups. Again, Landauer had had little or no connection to political Zionism during the early part of his career, but his ideas would prove immensely popular among the youth groups of the radical Zionist Left and through Buber he would deliver many lectures to these organisations over the next two decades.

It was also at a meeting of Neue Gemeinschaft that Landauer met his future wife, the acclaimed poet and translator Hedwig Lachmann. In the face of mounting persecution from the German authorities the couple moved to England in September 1901 with financial backing from Mauthner’s cousin Auguste Hauschner,²¹ and after spending some time in London they took up residence a short distance away in Bromley, Kent, which was also at that time the home of Peter Kropotkin. Landauer and Kropotkin had met previously at the 1896 conference of the Socialist International – both had been among the anarchists to address a protest meeting held after their expulsion from the conference – but although Landauer had long expressed an affinity with many of Kropotkin’s ideas the two did not get on well in person.²² In his biographical sketch of Landauer, Max Nettlau rather diplomatically comments that the two thinkers “came to no mutual understanding”,²³ a

¹⁹ Landauer in Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, 134.

²⁰ Landauer in Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, 134.

²¹ Maurer, *Call to Revolution*, 51. Landauer was beset with financial difficulties throughout his life; his father Hermann effectively disowned him early on, (for Hermann, Landauer was a walking catalogue of disappointment – Hermann had opposed his son’s study of literature, his dropping out of university, his marriage to Grete, adoption of radical ideas and was incensed by his arrests for anarchist activities). With financial support from his father not forthcoming, from 1892 Landauer was supported for a number of years by his cousin Hugo, a watchmaker, who sympathised with many of Landauer’s ideas. Landauer felt himself to be primarily a writer and wanted above all to have the opportunity to write; Mauthner spent a good deal of time trying to find some means of financial support so that his friend might have that opportunity and Auguste Hauschner helped Landauer financially from as early as 1896 – the two finally met in 1900 and developed a close friendship.

²² Landauer’s relationship with Rudolf Rocker was a similarly odd one. Although the two shared much in terms of ideology and lived in close proximity to one another during Landauer’s time in England they never became close friends, for reasons that none of Landauer’s biographers has seen fit to explain. Rocker nevertheless repeatedly spoke highly of Landauer’s ideas and after Landauer’s death succeeded him as the editor of Kropotkin’s works in German.

²³ Nettlau, Max. *A Short History of Anarchism*, (London: Freedom Press, 2000), 221.

perhaps intentionally evasive way of conveying the fact that, in reality, Landauer found Kropotkin aloof and was disappointed to discover that the man he had for so long admired conducted himself in a manner consistent with his princely origins. The esteem in which Landauer held the Russian's writings however remained undiminished and, according to his daughter Brigitte, throughout his life referred to Kropotkin as "my great friend".²⁴

Nevertheless, the turn of the century did herald something of a change in direction in the development of Landauer's thought. If the 1890s were for him a period of youthful rebellion, his agitational activities with the *Jungen* earning him widespread notoriety as a rabble-rouser, the start of the new century marked the beginning of what we might call the 'mature' period of his life during which he would cement his status as an original and important political philosopher. Throughout the final decade of the 19th century his politics had been dominated by the revolutionary anarchism of Bakunin and Kropotkin but his philosophy would from the early 1900s take a different direction; while he remained a staunch disciple of Kropotkin it was arguably less for the militant and revolutionary aspects of his work than for his ethical approach, his theory of mutual aid and his emphasis on decentralised cooperative production,²⁵ and as we have seen, despite having long professed a love for Bakunin's work his ideas were already starting to take serious issue with certain key elements of the latter's often fiery brand of anarchism. By contrast, the early years of the 20th century saw him focusing far more on the pacifist anarchism of Tolstoy and particularly the ideas of Proudhon. His emphasis became increasingly on the necessity of peaceful social revolution and on the centrality of libertarian education in the process of social change, an area in which he drew heavily on the ideas of the Spanish educator Francisco Ferrer, progenitor of the Modern Schools movement.

So Landauer's anarchism remained very much at odds with the philosophy of violence still espoused by many anarchists, and it is probably in part because of this that he was fairly isolated from anarchist activities during his time in England. His article *Anarchische Gedanken über Anarchismus* (Anarchic thoughts on Anarchism), written shortly after his arrival in the country and published in *Zukunft* in October that year, denounced the anarchist violence that had punctuated the previous decade and reiterated his longstanding argument that a violent approach merely emulated the methods used by political parties. "There can only be a more human future" he insisted, "if there is a more humane present", and as such anarchism demanded methods consistent with the new, non-violent anarchistic

²⁴ Brigitte Hausberger in Avrich, Paul, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton, 1995), 35.

²⁵ Avrich, "Gustav Landauer", 11.

society-to-be. As for those bent on the violent destruction of the existing order, “they have accustomed themselves to living with concepts, no longer with men. There are two fixed, separate classes for them, who stand opposed to each other as enemies; they don’t kill men, but the concept of exploiters, oppressors. . . . From force one can expect nothing, neither the force of the ruling class today nor that of the so-called revolutionaries who would perhaps attempt. . . . through dictatorial decrees to command a socialist society, out of nothing, into existence”.²⁶ For anarchists schooled in Bakunin and Malatesta this message would surely have been a difficult one to digest, and it would not be pushing the bounds of possibility to assume that Landauer’s uncompromising pacifism may have contributed to his failure to see eye to eye with Kropotkin, who remained ambiguous throughout his career as to the desirability of violent means in the pursuit of anarchism.

Landauer’s sojourn in England ended in June 1902, and on their return to Germany he and Hedwig settled in Hermsdorf near Berlin; their first daughter, Gudula, was born in late 1902 and the following year Landauer finally obtained a divorce from Grete which enabled him and Hedwig to marry. Around this time he began working for Axel Junker Nachfolger booksellers and publishers, who published his volume on Meister Eckhart as well as several of his other works including the second edition of *Der Todesprediger* in 1903. That year also saw the publication of Landauer’s first major philosophical work, *Skepsis und Mystik* (Scepticism and Mysticism), in which his indebtedness to Eckhart’s mysticism and the atheistic language criticism of Mauthner is given its first full explication. *Skepsis und Mystik* was followed by a slew of literary studies, as well as German translations of works such as Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid, Fields, Factories and Workshops* and *The Great French Revolution*, Étienne de la Boétie’s *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, salient portions of *Proudhon’s War and Peace*, and *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, in addition to countless other political and literary works including a collection of Bakunin’s writings (co-edited with Nettlau), and his own groundbreaking and still highly-regarded translations of and treatises on Shakespeare.

Landauer’s work as a translator during the early part of the new century was often in collaboration with Hedwig, whose own accomplishments in this field had already earned her international recognition; together the two produced the first German translations of Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* and *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, the essays of George Bernard Shaw and the poems of Walt Whitman, all of which can be seen to embody ideas which would surface in Landauer’s own works. His affinity with Whitman in particular would be one

²⁶ Landauer in Gambone, Larry, “For Community: The Communitarian Anarchism of Gustav Landauer”, The Anarchy Archives, (dwardmac.pitzer.edu, January 24th 2007).

which would clearly impact on his ideas and there is little doubt that Landauer saw much of the American poet in himself; in one of his several essays on Whitman Landauer compared him to Proudhon, commenting that the two men combined “conservative and revolutionary mentalities, individualism and socialism”,²⁷ an accolade which, as Buber pointed out, might well be applied to Landauer’s own worldview.

* * *

That this first decade of the twentieth century was one of maturation in Landauer’s philosophy is attested by the publication, towards its end, of his three most important political treatises which would catapult him to even greater prominence both within Germany and among anarchists across Europe. In January 1907 his article *Volk und Land: Dreissig Sozialistische Thesen* (People and Land: Thirty Socialist Theses) was published in *Die Zukunft* in Berlin; the following year saw the publication of *Die Revolution* (The Revolution), and perhaps his most famous work *Aufruf zum Sozialismus* (A Call to Socialism – or For Socialism) was published in 1911.

Expanding and consolidating the ideas put forward in *A Way to Freedom for the Working Class* and his articles in *Der Sozialist*, between them these three tracts represent the fullest explication of Landauer’s analysis of the state-capitalist system, the social structures which should replace it and the process by which he envisaged these structures coming into being. Following de la Boétie, dropping out of bureaucratic, centralised society became Landauer’s main message and in many ways the lynchpin of his philosophy, his vision of the post-capitalist order blending the federalist principles of Kropotkin and Proudhon into a neat new approach to anarchism which would generate a great deal of interest from many European socialist groups. Reprising and expanding his many attacks on the ideological hegemony of Marxism, describing it as “the plague of our times and the curse of the socialist movement”,²⁸ he put forward an alternative vision of socialism, a stateless society based on voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, “a society of equalitarian exchange based on regional communities, rural communities which combine agriculture and industry”.²⁹

But Landauer was never content simply to wax lyrical about a possible anarchist future society, and earned the admiration of his contemporaries for his

²⁷ Landauer in Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, 131.

²⁸ Landauer, *For Socialism*, 32.

²⁹ Landauer in Avrich, “Gustav Landauer”, 11.

willingness to back his words up with practical action. Throughout his life recognition of the urgency in the immediate realisation of the new forms of society of which he spoke, independent of a democratically-induced change in the structure of the state, led him to take part in numerous projects in which he saw the potential seeds of this new social structure. His abortive dalliance with *Neue Gemeinschaft* was one such attempt, and in 1903 he participated in meetings of the union of *Deutsche Gartenstadt Gesellschaft* (German Garden City Association). This was an organisation based on a romantic, anti-urban spirit involving a shift from the city to the country *a la* the Garden City movement of Geddes and Howard and the Arts and Crafts movement of Ruskin and Morris in England, and also involved many of his contemporaries from the Friedrichshagen poet circle, including Bernhard and Paul Kampffmeyer and the Hart brothers. But perhaps the most important of his own attempts at the practical realisation of libertarian alternatives came in 1908 when he was among the founders of the *Sozialistische Bund* (Socialist Bund). The publication of his *Thirty Socialist Theses* in 1907 inspired many of Berlin's anarchists and independent socialists to bring about the establishment of an organisation to put into practice the ideas contained in it, and in May 1908 Landauer was invited to give a talk to these groups at a public assembly in Berlin. His lecture generated a great deal of enthusiasm (and would subsequently form the basis of *Aufruf zum Sozialismus* in which he included his outline for the organisation, *Twelve Articles of the Socialist Bund*) and resulted in the formation of numerous groups keen to actualise his proposals. The Bund, on which Landauer spent most of his time during 1908 and 1909, was to represent a practical libertarian alternative to the SPD, a federated framework of cooperative structures disconnected, as far as possible, from the state-capitalist system, into which striking workers would be drawn and in which the basis of a future socialist society constructed. 1908–09 saw the publication of his *Flugblätter* (Leaflets) of the Socialist Bund, and by the time *For Socialism* was published in 1911 the organisation had twenty groups operating in Berlin, Zurich and various other cities across Germany and Switzerland, and one in Paris.

In 1909 Landauer revived *Der Sozialist* with the specific objectives of furthering the cause of the Bund and, with the spectre of war looming ever larger over Europe, of promoting his pacifistic agenda. Landauer was by now a familiar face in German artistic and cultural circles, and it is often forgotten that as well as editing (and, at this point, being virtually the sole writer for) *Der Sozialist*, he was also a prolific contributor to some fifty or sixty small journals through which he attracted legions of dedicated readers to add to his already sizable following. His reputation as an essayist and theatre critic as well as his participation in numerous other activities in Berlin's cultural and political milieu led to his also becoming a prominent figure on the city's lecture circuit and throughout his

career he delivered many lectures in the middle-class 'salons' of Berlin. His time as a visiting lecturer saw him delivering frequent talks both on social problems and on literature, discussing writers like Shakespeare, Kropotkin and Tolstoy.

But while Landauer was by all accounts an inspiring speaker his opposition to war and admission of German aggression began to elicit no small amount of contempt from many of his compatriots. Even his friend Buber was initially in favour of war until Landauer managed to bring him around to his own philosophy of non-violence, but this was a subject on which Landauer refused to be moved, and as the prospect of war grew increasingly real the pacifism which had long provided the unshakable basis of his philosophy became an ever more prominent feature of his lectures. In the elections of 1912 the SPD became the single largest party in the Reichstag, and the following year they voted unanimously for the Rearmament Bill; with war looking increasingly likely, and with the SPD looking increasingly complicit in it, in 1914 Landauer and Buber made attempts to organise an anti-war conference, but their efforts were cut short by the outbreak of hostilities. As if to vindicate the concerns Landauer had voiced as to the dangers of the SPD's form of "socialism" and the faux-revolutionary posturing of many within the German Left, on August 4th 1914 the Socialists voted unanimously for the government's war credits.

When war broke out, the usually fiery Landauer became "uncannily quiet and calm",³⁰ apparently resigned to the reality that no one individual had a chance against the sheer magnitude of the powers involved in the conflict. This period saw him concentrating primarily on literature, writing plays and studies of Shakespeare, Holderlin, Goethe and Strindberg, but he nevertheless continued to promote his revolutionary agenda in *Der Sozialist*. Military censorship now meant that not only was the paper severely restricted as to what it could publish, but that Landauer's already precarious position became even more dangerous with the war giving the authorities an excuse to place ever more stringent restrictions on the proliferation of his writings; with increased surveillance making him one of the most carefully-watched men in the country, his wartime writings are characterised by more subtle language than his previous revolutionary, and occasionally libellous proselytising. In an article entitled *Der europäische Krieg* (The European War) in August 1914 for example, Landauer called for communities to set up soup kitchens for the homeless and hungry and to take common action to provide clothing and shelter for those affected by the hostilities. In a letter of February 6th the following year he suggested growing food on lawns and street borders, a project which he knew would necessarily require community effort. Not only would such activities help provide relief for the plight forced upon many

³⁰ Bab, "Gustav Landauer". 24.

by the war, but their implied importance lay in the fact that they would provide a school where people could be introduced to the benefits of common effort.³¹

Der Sozialist was eventually forced to close for the final time the following year however, neither through diminishing readership nor governmental persecution this time but due to the printer, who had contributed greatly to the paper in terms of time and effort, being conscripted into the army.

* * *

For all his condemnation of the hostilities, Landauer began to see in the trenches of the First World War the early signs of a newfound communality and the emergence of a revolutionary spirit of the kind he had long deemed indispensable in a successful transition to socialism. That these young people who had been sent by their government into a pointless and brutal conflict were experiencing first hand the violence of the state and the dangers inherent in the present system intimated to Landauer that this generation was one with a more developed understanding of politics and social relationships than its predecessors. As the conflict wore on, widespread dissatisfaction with present conditions, anger at the regime and a desire to create something new began to ferment among a generation of German youth, and Landauer observed that the generation now bearing the brunt of the tragic situation to which the state-capitalist social structure had led were growing together into a solid group that could feasibly be the basis for a new society.³² In such trends he found cause for optimism that the revolution for which he had worked so hard for so long might actually be coming, and sooner rather than later.

In 1917, in dire financial straits, Landauer and Hedwig left Berlin and moved to the small Swabian town of Krumbach, Hedwig's hometown. The Russian revolution in October 1917 fortified his optimism for imminent social change and Landauer hunkered down in Krumbach in preparation for the uprising that he by now believed to be inevitable. It wasn't long however before personal tragedy would disrupt his newfound sanguinity; in the winter of 1917 Hedwig contracted pneumonia, and died on February 21st the following year. Her death shook Landauer deeply, and according to his friends her loss was something from which he would never fully recover.

Events of 1918 proved Landauer's wartime predictions well-founded however, as revolutionary activity swept across the country and the forces of socialism began to reshape Germany's political landscape with mass strikes against the

³¹ Maurer, *Call to Revolution*, 134.

³² Maurer, *Call to Revolution*, 134.

war in early 1918 turning into full-scale uprisings in towns and cities across the country. In late October naval mutinies broke out in Kiel, workers' and soldiers' councils were formed, and Landauer's writings, particularly *For Socialism*, experienced a rapid upsurge in popularity. On November 7th, soldiers and workers in southern Germany deposed the government and the Independent Socialist Kurt Eisner declared Bavaria a "free state", a declaration which marked the end of the monarchy of the Wittelsbach dynasty which had ruled the province for over 700 years. Eisner became Minister-President of Bavaria, and in November 1918 summoned Landauer to Munich to assist in the revolution. Eisner was a man for whom Landauer had a great deal of respect and as such he was more than happy to assist in the new administration. Landauer never served in Eisner's cabinet, as has sometimes been asserted, but alongside fellow-anarchist Erich Mühsam and playwright Ernst Toller he was central in the new government's efforts to organise councils of workers, farmers and other professions to launch the kind of federalist society he had been advocating for so long, serving for a time with Mühsam in the Revolutionary Workers' Council and also in the Central Workers' Council of Bavaria. Although painfully aware of the irony in having become entangled in what essentially amounted to party-politics in its messiest and most unpleasant form, Landauer used his influence to push hard for a decentralised system of councils, cooperatives and communities based on autonomy and self-management, opposing calls for a parliamentary government and the radical Marxists' demands for a proletarian dictatorship which would see industry and agriculture placed under state control ("I would hate it", he wrote, "and would fight against it as if it was the plague"³³). Instead, Landauer insisted that the councils should include all members of the community, and called for "the 'abolition of the proletariat' as a distinct class".³⁴

In the event, elections were held in February 1919 and Eisner's Independent Social Democrats were defeated. On February 21st, as he was making his way to the Parliament building to announce his resignation Eisner was assassinated in Munich by an extreme right-wing fanatic. During the final weeks of Eisner's life he and Landauer had locked horns over ever more acute political differences, but the eulogy Landauer delivered at his friend's funeral on February 26th was nevertheless a speech that Julius Bab would later describe as "burning with indignation and with love";³⁵ Eisner's murder followed close behind those of Spartacist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, both of whom had been arrested

³³ Landauer in Most, Johann. "Our Class Memory, On the Beast of Property", Libcom.org, (libcom.org, January 24th 2007)

³⁴ Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 301.

³⁵ Bab, "Gustav Landauer" 26.

and shot by counter-revolutionary forces in Berlin on January 15th in the midst of the Spartacist Uprising, their deaths part of a growing spate of violence right across the country.

Eisner was replaced by the Social Democrat Johannes Hoffmann, who immediately began negotiations with the SPD government in Berlin. Hoffman's collusion with the SPD did not sit comfortably with the workers, and Mühsam proposed to the Munich Workers' and Soldiers Councils that they proclaim a socialist republic. His proposal was adopted by 234 votes to 70, and on April 7th 1919, Landauer's forty-ninth birthday, a Council Republic was proclaimed in Munich. Hoffmann's government fled to Bamberg and Landauer was appointed Minister of Culture and Education in the first Bavarian Council government, an appropriate position considering his admiration for Ferrer and the emphasis he had long placed on the importance of libertarian education. Although his tenure would be brief, it was time enough for him to draw up plans for the comprehensive overhaul of the German school system, making free education available to all ages and reputedly placing the poetry of Walt Whitman on the syllabus of every schoolchild. These plans were never implemented however, for within a week of his appointment the Communists had seized power and installed a military Soviet government under the leadership of Eugene Leviné, a hard-line Communist described by some as 'the German Lenin', who was quick to dispense with Landauer's services. Although Landauer initially offered his support to the Communists, (which they rejected anyway), he withdrew his offer when it became clear that they intended to adopt the authoritarian methods of the Bolsheviks. He had been deeply critical of Lenin's activities in Russia, and in a chilling prediction in 1918 had warned that the Bolsheviks were "working for a military regime which will be more horrible than anything the world has ever seen".³⁶

In the final days of April the Bavarian Soviet was overthrown by counterrevolutionary troops. The SPD's minister of Defence in Berlin, Gustav Noske, sent soldiers from the right-wing Freikorps militia into Munich to restore order, and the following days would see Freikorps thugs, notorious for their hostility towards socialists, trade unionists, democrats and Jews, slaughtering over a thousand people across the city. As counter-revolutionary troops cracked down on insurgencies throughout the country it became increasingly clear to Landauer that his own days were numbered, but although despondent he resisted pleas from his friends to flee to the safety of neighbouring Switzerland. On May 1st 1919 he was arrested by troops from the counterrevolutionary White Guard and thrown into jail in the nearby town of Starnberg. The next morning he was transferred to Stadelheim Prison. An eyewitness later described to Ernst Toller the events of May 2nd:

³⁶ Landauer in Avrich, Paul, "Gustav Landauer", *The Match!*, December 1974. 10.

“Amid shouts of “Landauer! Landauer!” an escort of Bavarian and Württemberger Infantry brought him out into the passage outside the door of the examination room. An officer struck him in the face, the men shouted: “Dirty Bolshie! Let’s finish him off!” and a rain of blows from rifle-butts drove him out into the yard. He said to the soldiers round him: “I’ve not betrayed you. You don’t know yourselves how terribly you’ve been betrayed”. Freiherr von Gagern went up to him with a heavy truncheon until he sank in a heap on the ground. He struggled up again and tried to speak, but one of them shot him through the head. He was still breathing, and the fellow said: “That blasted carrion has nine lives; he can’t even die like a gentleman.” Then a sergeant in the life guards shouted out: “pull off his coat!” They pulled it off, and laid him on his stomach; “Stand back there and we’ll finish him off properly!” one of them called and shot him in the back. Landauer still moved convulsively, so they trampled on him till he was dead; then stripped the body and threw it into the wash-house”.³⁷

Another witness later told Toller that Landauer’s last words to his attackers were “Kill me then! To think that you are human!”³⁸ Landauer’s body was buried in a mass grave from which his daughter Charlotte secured its release on May 19th that year, but it was not until May 1923 that the urn containing his remains was interred in Munich’s Waldfriedhof. In 1925, with financial backing from Georg Kaiser, a monument was erected by the Anarchist-Syndicalist Union of Munich but it was later torn down by the Nazis, who dug up his remains in 1933 and sent them to the Jewish community in Munich. He was finally laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery on *Ungererstrasse*.

* * *

It is unfortunate, not to say ironic, that Gustav Landauer will forever be associated with a short-lived and ultimately abortive provincial revolution in Southern Germany, that a man who had throughout his life and works championed non-violence and the spiritual rejuvenation of humanity ended up in the company of the powerful, embroiled in a struggle for power and entangled in a violent and largely fruitless insurrection of the kind that he had so long condemned. The irony was not lost on him, and according to those closest to him the final days of his life were spent in abject despondency; his refusal to leave Munich even after it became clear that the only thing that awaited him there was certain death has even led some historians to conclude that his murder may in reality have been little more than assisted suicide. But while the revolution for which

³⁷ Quoted in Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 338.

³⁸ Quoted in Lunn, *Prophet of Community*, 339.

Landauer had worked for so long never happened in Germany during his lifetime, the one with which his name is now associated being about as far removed from his own anarchistic vision as could be imagined, Landauer was not without his influence. To see what could be his most enduring political legacy however one must look further afield than his native Germany, for while the Socialist Bund and the revolution in Bavaria occupied much of his time and effort during the final days of his life another, perhaps more important experiment was unfolding across the countryside of Palestine.

As noted earlier, the impact of Landauer's philosophy was keenly felt among the Socialist Jewish youth groups of early 20th Century Europe, and along with thinkers like Bernard Lazare, Chaim Arlosoroff, Aaron David Gordon and Martin Buber his ideas would be important in giving early Socialist Zionism the anarchistic dimensions pivotal in the process of the Jewish settlement of Palestine during the early part of the twentieth century. Landauer and his *Call to Socialism* particularly would have a profound influence on a generation of radicalised Jewish youth who, imbued with the revolutionary spirit of goings-on in Germany and Russia in 1917 and 1918, headed to Palestine as part of the Third *Aliya*. It was these groups, notably Hashomer Hatzair and Hapoel Hatzair who were instrumental in the industrialisation of the early, small-conceived agricultural *kvutzot* set up by the Second *Aliya* pioneers into the network of agro-industrial *gemeinschaft* communities we would now recognise as the kibbutz movement.

With no state structures in place in the country, many of these groups saw Palestine as an opportunity to create a new kind of society, to nip capitalism in the bud before it established a foothold and instead create a stateless society built on a federated network of free, anarchistic communities. It is clear that many looked to Landauer for inspiration and in March 1919 he was in correspondence with the Socialist Zionist leader Nachum Goldman, who invited him to speak at a special conference of Zionist representatives set up specifically to clarify the position of European socialist groups in relation to the situation in Palestine. In this correspondence Goldman seeks Landauer's advice regarding, among other things, the industrialisation of the existing settlements, economic and political decentralisation and the relationship between the Jewish settlers and the country's native Arab population. It has been suggested that the Third *Aliya* groups looked to Landauer's plans not only for inspiration, but as nothing short of a blueprint for cooperative settlement. While the German Bund quickly disintegrated the kibbutzim would go from strength to strength, taking on a central role in society and developing into a flourishing network of communal, agro-industrial communities whose internal political, economic and social structures to this day bear a striking similarity to those about which Landauer had been

writing.³⁹ But although probably the most well-known, the kibbutzim are not the only communities that can count Landauer among their ideological forefathers; his ideas became part of a counter-culture which swept across Europe after the First World War, and have since been adopted by a number of communal movements, Germany's Bruderhof and Integrierte Gemeinde for example, and more recently the self-professed 'anarcho-socialist' groups of Ma'agal Hakvutzot.

As well as being canonised by Buber in *Paths in Utopia* and hailed by Rudolf Rocker as a "spiritual giant"⁴⁰ Landauer and his ideas were important to many other individual thinkers including Silvio Gesell, Eberhard Arnold, Ernst Bloch, Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, Hermann Hesse, Arnold Zweig and countless others. According to Paul Avrich, Gustav Landauer was "at once an individualist and a socialist, a Romantic and a mystic, a militant and an advocate of passive resistance . . . He was also the most influential German anarchist intellectual of the twentieth century".⁴¹

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³⁹ The operative word here being "internal" — what Landauer would have had to say about the role that the kibbutz would play in the Israeli State is a very different matter.

⁴⁰ Rocker in Avrich "Gustav Landauer", 11.

⁴¹ Avrich, "Gustav Landauer", 11.

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