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Anarchism in the German-speaking Countries

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To-day the Swiss movement of German-speaking Anarchism has some literary circles; workers of our faith propagate our ideas in the Social Democratic trade unions – with great success for syndicalism, as the one-day General Strike action of July 12, 1912, proves.

Intellectually and literary, the Swiss movement derives its inspiration from Germany and Austria. But signs are multiplying that it will soon be on its own feet again.

The above survey does not claim to give a thorough monographic or psychological review of the Anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist movement in the named countries. It is intended only to give some glimpses and sketches of the work done for Anarchism amongst the German-speaking working class. That work is not in vain; it is progressing, and the time is not far when it will grow into the ripeness of its idealism and social-revolutionary realism.

Switzerland

Here, too, as usually when comparing the German with other races, we must unfortunately draw a sharp line between the French and Italian movements of Anarchism-communism and revolutionary syndicalism in the so-called “Roman” parts of Switzerland, and the weakness of the movement in the German parts. In the former the Anarchist principles of the time of the old “Internationale” have survived. And just as at that time, almost forty years ago, the movement in the German part of Switzerland was mainly Social Democratic, adhering to the centralism of Marxism, so it has practically remained until to-day.

But here is another factor which must not be overlooked. The Swiss Social Democracy is very opportunistic, but – may be just therefore – not as intolerant as its sister parties in other countries. There are many professed Anarchists and syndicalists within the party and within its trade union movement, exercising there a very wholesome influence and giving much inspiration in the direction of Anarchism, federalism and economic direct action on the part of the workers.

The great impediment to an independent self-sustaining Anarchist movement in Switzerland is the rigid laws of expulsion, which by the way, are vigorously applied by Social Democratic police officials, rampant in Switzerland. The writer of these lines has himself been imprisoned and afterwards expelled by a Social Democratic Chief of Police in Zürich (Vogelsanger) for having become unpleasant by his agitation to some of the leaders of the Swiss Social Democracy. The party there is split in two factions, but both are equally opportunistic to last degree, which accounts for their not caring if even Anarchists like Dr. Bauphacher, for instance, are members of the party; they are glad to have them remain.

Whenever German or Austrian Anarchists carried on an active propaganda in Switzerland, their efforts were crowned with great success. But soon the government, under the direct influence of Social Democracy, interfered by expelling the most active agitators. Somehow the German Swiss does not possess as yet himself the necessary oratorical and organizing ability for the cause of Anarchism; and the work of the few expelled fighters soon collapsed.

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At the middle and end of 1907 the Anarchist propaganda began again in the German language; there was then not even a remnant left of a former revolutionary movement. A fortnightly paper was launched by a few comrades, entitled *Wohlstand für Alle* (Welfare for All), and, lo and behold, it succeeded where former attempts under more auspicious conditions failed; it remained alone until to-day, and has now reached its sixth year of existence.

The struggle of our movement in Austria is very severe. The workers themselves have been converted into conservatives by the Social Democracy. Still the Anarchist cause, through having strenuously to fight for its direct existence, is here to-day, it is penetrating into the ranks of the workers; it is attracting their attention by showing them that there is a higher and truer aim than Social Democracy, and is gradually winning valuable adherents and fighters for our ideal.

Except *Wohlstand für Alle*, an annual almanac for the whole of Germany, Austria and Switzerland, is published in Austria. It is called *Jahrbuch der freien Generation-Documente der Weltanschauung des Anarchismus-Sozialismus* (Annual of the Free Generation; Documents of the Philosophy of Anarchism-Socialism). The Austrian movement is also the base of supply of Anarchist literature to the movement of the other German-speaking countries.

The German-speaking Anarchist movement is communistic in its economic ideals and propagates the ideas of Kropotkin, Reclus, etc. It possesses various groups for theoretical agitation as also for syndicalist activity. Both are going hand in hand; the latter being a means for the former. Developing in a country of the densest Catholicism and of an all-powerful clergy, our movement is tinged with many tendencies of Tolstoy in his ruthless annihilation of churchism as contrary to the real "genesis" of Christianity.

A young Polish movement is developing in Galicia, where our comrades have succeeded in interesting private publishers to issue books by Kropotkin and have also published various pamphlets by the latter, Bakunin and others.

Austria

The following account does not comprise the Bohemian section of Anarchism in Austria. The movement of our Czech comrades is very strong and vigorous, characterized by a fully developed Anarchist philosophy, and possessing revolutionary labor activities and several organizations, mostly among the miners and weavers. In spite of their small number, the Czech comrades publish six journals of their own, all dealing with the various phases of our cause.

The German-speaking movement of Austria is by no means as thoroughly developed as the movement in Germany. The cause of this is the history and comparative youth of the movement. It began as a radical Marxian faction of Social Democracy about thirty years ago; under Anarchism it understood the tactics of terrorism. All the heroism of these precursors of the Socialist cause in Austria could not stem the overwhelmingly crushing power of government. The latter was assisted by and did itself foster the so-called "moderate" Social Democratic faction which aimed solely at the harmless conquest of universal suffrage. Anarchism as a philosophy and practical application in the labor movement was, even in a purely theoretical way, severely prohibited by the Austrian government, which condition of affairs, on the other hand, drove many a well-meaning idealist of the "radical" Social Democratic Marxian wing into terrorism, then labeled by the government and the "moderate" wing as Anarchism. The absolute crushing out of free speech, assembly, and press for the "radical" faction, followed up by years of penal servitude for the slightest attempt to publish a mere leaflet, then at the same time unmolested evolution of the "moderate" wing, led to an absolute extermination of the former, and an equally absolute arena for the latter.

Until universal suffrage was conquered in 1907, Anarchism had no foothold whatsoever amongst the German-speaking workers of Austria, the same being enwrapped by the most blissful expectations of the possibility of parliamentarianism as promised and pictured to them by their Social Democratic leaders. The latter are in Austria through and through more "revisionist" than Bernstein and his followers in Germany have ever been. But now the great disillusion is setting in; the Austrian workers perceive that they have been hoodwinked by their political grafters.

It has been said, and not unjustly, that before the proletariat will be able to triumph over the scourges of authority and exploitation, it will have first to overcome the ban of discipline and cast-iron centralism that is dominating the German working class under the form of "Socialism," viz., Social Democracy. Verily, this may not be far from the truth, because it is this more than anything else that is keeping the working people of the German-speaking countries back from rational and revolutionary activity upon the path of social reconstruction. Germany is at the helm of this reaction against the "real thing," a rigorous labor movement, wielding its economic power in the General Strike, Direct Action, Sabotage, and Anti-militarism, and thereby pushing ahead to the final goal of the modern emancipating movement, Communism – Anarchy.

In virtue of these facts the labor movement of Austria and Switzerland is hardly more than a tail of the Social Democracy of Germany, even more submissive, more bereft of all really Socialist activity and still more permeated by opportunism than the latter. And it stands to reason that a principle like Anarchism, with its entire negation of all rule and government of men by is hated most bitterly not only by the governments but also by the political exploiters of the labor movement in the mentioned countries. They combine with their respective governments when it is a problem of downing the revolutionary principles of Anarchism. Thus we find them rejecting every principle of free speech when they direct their venomous efforts against our cause. The history of the labor movement in Germany and Austria – to a lesser extent in Switzerland – is a combined onslaught of government and politician against real revolutionary Socialism, as it is only embodied in Anarchism. In this strife, aided by the dense ignorance and under-development of the working class, State or parliamentary "Socialism" and shallow "social reform" take the place of a really class-conscious labor movement in Germany, Austria, and the German-speaking parts of Switzerland.

Nevertheless, the flame of idealism and real Socialistic activities can not be wholly quenched. And thus there is also an Anarchistic movement in these countries which is even getting stronger as the flood of evolution and experience passes by. We shall attempt to give a short survey of the same.

Germany

The Anarchist movement is the strongest in this country in comparison to the other two. It has, over twenty years ago, developed out of a rigid Marxian wing of the effete Social Democracy which excluded the former for its too revolutionary proclivities. This was at the time of the so-called *Jungen* (Young Folks). Out of this group there emanated the Anarchistic movement of contemporary Germany.

Theoretically, the movement is based on the principles of Communist-Anarchism as enunciated by Kropotkin. In its tactics, it is thoroughly revolutionary with a leaning toward the old insurrection method of Bakunin. But the latter is superseded by its revolutionary syndicalist activities, which concentrate mostly upon a very vigorous and energetic anti-militarist propaganda, exceedingly necessary in military-ridden Germany, but also very dangerous. Thus the movement has to bring many sacrifices for anti-militarism. Every year numbers of good comrades are disappearing behind the bars of jail and prison, to serve long sentences. Only recently, for instance, Rudolf Oestreich has been released after penal servitude of almost 4 years, for the reproduction of the Amsterdam resolution on anti-militarism in the organ *Der Freie Arbeiter* (The Free Worker).

The German Social Democracy has adopted the method of calling the General Strike, in its economic aspect, Anarchistic, while for the purposes of politics the General Strike is called a mass strike. The courts, therefore, have lately focussed their attention upon the General Strike as propagated by the Anarchists. Without an explicit anti-Anarchist law, our movement is yet under a harsh, exceptional law, by virtue of the free interpretation which courts give to the existing laws. For instance, the propaganda in favor of the General Strike is declared to be tantamount to an incitement to it and is punished by many months of imprisonment.

The stronghold of the Anarchist movement in Germany is organized in the *Anarchistische Föderation Deutschlands* which has during the last few years succeeded in gaining almost the whole of the movement. Another section is organized in the so-called *Socialistischer Band*, the theoretical foundation of which is collectivism as perceived by Proudhon; in tactics

this group aspires mainly toward the starting and creating of co-operative settlements and productive as well as consumptive co-operative associations, upon the basis of solidaric mutuality, but practical effort in this direction has not been made as yet.

Since the last five years the revolutionary syndicalist movement has developed considerably in Germany. It matured out of the most thoroughly organized Social Democratic unions, which this party had excluded for not wanting to adhere and merge themselves in the "pure and simple" trade union movement as led in Germany by renowned Social Democratic leaders, for instance, Legien, Sassenbach, Schlicke, Elm, etc. Being excluded, the revolutionary organization *Freie Vereinigung Deutscher Gewerkschaften* (Free Association of German Trade Unions), became a clear-cut revolutionary syndicalist organization, which rejects the ballot swindle and parliamentarian game in general and propagates the general strike, direct action and anti-militarism with the avowed aim of free communism. The movement is, happily enough, growing quite briskly, though bitterly fought by the "pure and simple" unions as well as the Social Democratic movement.

In point of literature, the above organization publishes two papers: *Einigkeit* (Unity) and *Pionier* (Pioneer). Both appear weekly, the former being the official and the latter the propagandist organ of the association. Besides these, the *Socialistischer Bund* is publishing a fortnightly periodical entitled *Der Socialist*. A very great fighter and leading agitation paper is the organ of the "Anarchist Federation," named *Der freie Arbeiter*. A small monthly leaflet paper appears in Hamburg, the *Kampf* (Struggle). I must not forget to mention a very laudable, solitary effort by the Anarchist poet Erich Mühsam, of Munich, who publishes there a literary monthly *Kain* (Cain) which is pervaded by a delightful spirit of Anarchism carried into literature, criticism, art and letters.

The foundation of the Anarchist as well as the syndicalist movement is ineradicably rooted in the soil of the social movement in Germany. As events go by and the decay of the Social Democracy into a purely middle class palliative movement will become clearer to the conscience of the German working class, our movement will be the legitimate heir of the revolutionary triumph of labor, its emancipation.