

**MEN AGAINST THE STATE:
THE EXPOSITORS OF
INDIVIDUALIST ANARCHISM
IN AMERICA, 1827-1908**

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INTRODUCTION

The writing of a history of anarchism in the United States will run into the difficulties created by the necessity of establishing criteria for the purpose of separating anarchism from other expressions of radical social thought which may be allied to but are distinct from it. On the verbal level the most perplexing problem is that of definition of terms, beginning with the basic word itself. In one respect the obstruction may never be bridged. An almost insuperable barrier has been the matter of semantics. The use of the term as an identification for a social order characterized by the absence of the State is quite recent. As used by Pierre Joseph Proudhon in this way, it is hardly more than a century old. However, its association with reprehensibility in this country has generally greatly restricted its use for descriptive purposes. European radicals have been far less inhibited in this way, hence the study of anarchism there is relatively unimpeded by hesitancy on the part of radicals to disclose themselves. Their propaganda has been open and identified, and thus may be readily examined.

The reluctance to openly declare positions which has been a periodic matter of concern in all areas of radicalism in America makes such an approach here out of the question. Thus the problem of discovering anarchist literature and sentiments when disguised as something else. The constant use of less highly-charged words to describe anarchist propaganda is still another situation which is essentially American. In such a way, anarchist doctrines have found acceptance here when identification as the former would have produced a general flight away from it, so sinister have been the associative connotations of the word. In view of such a situation, it is not peculiar that the study of anarchism involves the necessity of escaping the limits of the word itself. On the other hand, the indiscriminate use of the word makes it imperative that all professions of it be examined. A vast number of ideas which have nothing to do with anarchism are often purported to be such, resulting in distortion, deliberate or otherwise.

It has been evident to thoughtful observers for more than two generations that the words "anarchist," "anarchism," and "anarchy" have been used so loosely by writers and the general public alike that they have practically ceased to have any definite meaning. The problem here is similar to that existing in many other cases where abstract terms or generalizations having no or little substance have been overused or misused.¹

1. An example of the problem involved in the matter of accurately using such specialized words can be found in the interesting study by Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., "The Evolution of the Socialist Vocabulary," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, IX (June, 1948), 259-302.

Nor has the use of these terms by scholars tended to promote any greater degree of understanding. In too many cases the tendency has been to resemble the weaknesses of the general observer. Here the situation has been usually created by the repeated interpretation of expressions of hostility to the status quo as evidence of anarchist thought.²

The idea has long been prevalent that violent conduct is characteristic of anarchists, and that anarchism is a doctrine of destruction.³ There exists little justification for such a stand, in actuality. In addition, the rejection of one particular variety of authority in favor of its replacement by another finds continual identification with anarchism, while social philosophies which are utterly opposed to it are on occasion labeled "anarchistic." This merely adds to the already large amount of confusion existing on the subject, setting up extremely vague limitations and permitting the inclusion of many elements which are quite controversial.

Mere dissatisfaction with or opposition to the existing order anywhere is gravely insufficient to serve as evidence of anarchist sentiments. Nor is a program of pure negation or obstructionism more than faintly related; anarchists are not advocates of replacing something with nothing. An example of presumption is the widespread interchangeable use of the terms "nihilism" and "anarchism." Actually, the anarchist proposes specific solutions for social problems. His occasional tendency to mask them by encouraging the greater disintegration and decay of the older order may lead to identifying him with an element which desires planless, cumulative revolutionary disorder. But the anarchist and those enamored with perpetual revolutionary dynamism part company long before this.

2. Ernest A. Vizetelly, *The Anarchists* (London, 1911), and Peter Latouche, *Anarchy! An Authentic Exposition of the Methods of Anarchists and the Aims of Anarchism* (London, 1908), are prime examples of popular writing concerned with anarchism primarily as a program of calculated terrorism aimed in particular to those in high places. Latouche, in his zeal to lay all prominent international political assassinations at the door of the anarchists, even included those of Presidents Lincoln and Garfield. *Anarchy!*, 238. For vindication of the employment of violence by anarchists, see Peter A. Kropotkin, article "Anarchism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, XI ed., (29 vols. London, 1910), I, 916.
3. There is virtually no credible evidence for the assumption that violence is a basic element of the strategy of the anarchists. In distinguishing between the doctrine and the coercive action sometimes associated with it, the non-anarchist German observer and critic Ernst Victor Zenker remarked, "That the theory of Anarchism is not merely a systematic incitement to robbery and murder, we need hardly to repeat. . . . Proudhon and Stirner . . . never once preached force. . . . The doctrine of propaganda which since Proudhon's time has always accompanied a certain form of anarchist theory, is a foreign element, having no necessary or internal connection with the fundamental ideas of anarchism. It is simply a piece of tactics borrowed from the circumstances peculiar to Russia, and accepted moreover only by one fraction of the Anarchists, and approved by very few indeed in its most crude form; it is merely the old tactics of all revolutionary parties in every age." *Anarchism, a Criticism and History of Anarchist Theory* (English translation, New York, 1897), 306.

A history of anarchism, therefore, becomes progressively more difficult to undertake if it is assumed that all that has the appearance of anarchist philosophy as conventionally understood properly comes within the purview of such a study. Careful reflection on the issue leads one to observe that the loose application of the term "anarchy" as a synonym for chaos is a verbal reflex based on a conditioned semantic response. This patently ignores one of the fundamental principles on which most of the varied schools of belief in the ideal of the stateless society are grounded. The last century, with its all-pervading atmosphere of nationalism, has been especially hostile to such thinking, as was an earlier era of religious authoritarianism. And as the problems produced by the conflicting national policies have encouraged the elaboration of totalitarian schemes as solutions, the resistance to anarchistic thinking has grown apace. The belief that abolition of external coercion or control is an impossibility, or at best a probability of the most remote and impractical order, has prevailed, and is now virtually unquestioned. Even among those least satisfied with the structure of world society, the assumption that institutional government is absolutely necessary as a starting point is universally held. The fear of the disappearance of traditional values and modes of behavior thought worthy of preservation without the bulwark provided by institutionalism is expressed implicitly here.

It can thus be seen that the peripheral area of anarchism becomes as extended as desired, depending upon the object sought. It is possible, for instance, to take a running start from the early seventeenth century, as has been done, recording the varied social protests since that time and sifting their content for what may have significance in the delineation of antistatist thought. In addition, the writings of a great variety of thinkers from that time to this may be strained for quotations which have the semblance of anarchist sentiment and connotation when abstracted out of context. Thus it becomes possible, as does Rudolf Rocker, to include even such personages as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln on the fringe of the anarchist fold. It might be mentioned at this point that the area of overlapping of liberal and anarchist ideas is itself a full scale study, which can only be indicated in such a work as this. Even such pertinent figures as William Godwin and Robert Owen can easily be overextended when one is engaged in elaborating the development of anarchism in the United States. And it has been remarked upon elsewhere that when considered from the point of view of a consistent school of thought, the radical writing of even Henry David Thoreau has far more pertinence to the abolitionist rather than the anarchist movement. Thoreau's pamphleteering was discovered by the radicals a generation after it had ceased, and the extent of Thoreau's anarchism is a highly debatable matter.

With respect to the United States, especially, the stretching of the

term "anarchism" to apply to all the variety of vague and dimly felt resentments toward authority which have been discerned in the history of American dissension from colonial New England days to the present is now questionable. It appears increasingly probable that expressions of well-organized arguments against the State date from the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and represent more accurately a reaction to the complex problems produced by the growth of urbanism, industrialism, and the expansion of the modern national state. Observations of isolated expressions containing particles of anarchistic thought can be made, but the difficulty of presenting them in any logical sequence has yet to be surmounted. The element of relation or continuity is absent, and their contribution to a sustained integrated propaganda is tenuous at best. More often than not they are isolated phenomena which lack any central theme or point of polarization.

Since 1880 and thereabouts people have almost universally thought of anarchists in terms of violence and conspiracy. The result has been the regarding of anarchist literature as a product of a handful of criminals. In Europe the advent of this revolutionary movement was accompanied by a number of sensational acts which led to the identification of anarchism with socially pathological developments.⁴ In the United States there have been similar implications, to the point where even governmental policy incorporated the layman's conception of anarchism and anarchists. The definition of anarchism employed by the Department of Justice in modern times is essentially derived from this earlier period.

Although the tendency to blame destruction of property and loss of life during industrial disputes on "agitators," "doctrinaires," and "communists" prevailed for some time previous to the celebrated Haymarket incident in Chicago in May, 1886, such predilections received a powerful stimulus from this event.⁵ The now-familiar stereotype of the black whiskered, bomb-throwing vandal came into being at this time and created a new political symbol which has been used to manipulate mass opinion with an impressive degree of success.⁶ As a consequence of this

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4. Zenker, *Anarchism*, 6. An early and exhaustive inquiry into the matter is Cesare Lombroso, *Gli Anarchici* (Turin, 1894). A German edition was published in Hamburg the next year under the title *Die Anarchisten. Eine Kriminal Psychologische und Sociologische Studie*. Lombroso's methods and techniques as well as most of his conclusions have been discarded for some time.
 5. Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair*, continues to be the most thorough account of this unfortunate occurrence. In American history the identification of anarchism with terroristic activities dates from this time, an impression which neither time nor attempts at rectification of the injustice inflicted at the time have succeeded in erasing.
 6. An accompanying attitude has been the double standard which has tacitly been adhered to with respect to the employment of extra-legal violence. No public condemnation accompanied the use of coercion on the part of industrialists and local groups of citizenry, acting in a vigilante capacity, in dis-

and other factors, anarchism became so tainted with diabolism that rational study of its place in American history has rarely taken place.

General conclusions as to the basis of anarchist opposition to conventionally-constituted government have more often than not been based on something less than a scholarly investigation of libertarian literature. To make matters worse, the frame of reference, liberal or otherwise, of most writers who have approached the subject has markedly contributed to promoting attempts to demolish anarchism by the polemical method, rather than presenting the record. There has tended to be too much interpretation based on far too little factual data. It was the conclusion of Ernst Victor Zenker, a serious critic of anarchism and writer of one of the few substantial volumes on the subject in the last century, that hardly a critic of anarchism with whom he was familiar had ever read *any* anarchist writings. Objective writing on the subject is so meager and threadbare that the *Encyclopedia Britannica* has depended on the anarchist Peter Kropotkin's article for over a generation and a half in presenting the matter of anarchism to the general reader. Surveys of anarchism such as that contained in Gerald Brennan's *The Spanish Labyrinth* are exceedingly rare.

The preparation of this study has taken place with most of the foregoing complexities in mind, and is therefore presented with distinct limits upon its scope. It is made with the hope that it may help to establish a method of approach to the problem of a critical survey of the whole radical movement in America. American history reveals a vast amount of native thought and action which may be arranged under the general heading of anarchism, but much of it is so disjointed and sporadic that no comprehensive and logical picture can be constructed from it. It is with the attempt to establish more universal criteria to make possible a more careful examination of anarchism that this study is also concerned.

When anarchism in its several forms, including its theoretical statements and practical experiments, is analyzed structurally, it generally separates into three broad areas of tactics and strategy; (a) a rejection of constituted authority as the source of social dynamism and equilibrium; (b) a refusal to collaborate with the existing order anywhere through participation in any program of reformism; (c) the promotion of a variety of non-coercive alternatives of quite clearly defined nature as a substitute. Within this framework the various schools of anarchism have developed a number of sectarian variants, and some of these elaborations have created bitter doctrinal controversies. The result has been the erection of barriers fully as steep among the anarchists as those existing between them and the conventional world. The thread of

putes with strikers and radicals, until very recently. For an account of this matter see Robert Hunter, *Violence and the Labor Movement* (New York, 1914), 276-326.

violence which has criss-crossed through this is, however, not an integral part of the fabric. Too often it has been mistaken by superficial observers to be the whole cloth.

Nearly all scholarly attention directed toward anarchism in America has been along political lines. With the possible exception of Richard T. Ely and the John R. Commons associates, practically no one has examined the economics of anarchism. This preoccupation with the political has also been responsible for the inclusion in anarchist ranks of several radical fringe groups and individuals who do not belong there. The most important discussion by an American of the politics of anarchism thus far has been that of Charles Edward Merriam. For over thirty years it has been referred to constantly. The only academic treatise devoted exclusively to anarchism in America, Eunice Minette Schuster's *Native American Anarchism*, which appeared in 1931, gives extensive evidence of its influence. Merriam's studies began with an observation of the similarity between anarchistic sentiments and the expressions of the Antinomian rebels of seventeenth century Massachusetts Bay. The narrative was carried through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, stressing especially Henry David Thoreau, the Garrisonian wing of "no government" abolitionists, and a number of religious dissident splinter aggregations, such as the enclaves of John Humphrey Noyes and Adin Ballou. The survey included a discussion of the individualist-mutualist anarchism, concluding with special attention being paid to the imported anarchism which made its way to the United States from Germany and Russia between 1880 and 1905.

The attempt to link these varied phenomena into a logical sequence has been undertaken by others as well, with less success. It now appears that the assumption that American anarchism stemmed from Puritan Antinomianism and was associated with the peculiar variety of resistance to the state found in the non-resistant and "no government" sentiments of the Garrison school of "Christian Anarchist" abolitionists is untenable. It is more probable that, rather than being a derivative of native American conditions, the real source of the anti-statist evidences observed in Antinomianism and other varieties of early colonial dissidence and unrest can be discovered in the radicalism, both religious and socio-economic, already developing in England before the times of Charles I, and which found expression through lower class spokesmen at the time of the English Civil War.⁷ Concerning other aspects of this matter, it

7. See especially David W. Petegorsky, *Left Wing Democracy in the English Civil War: A Study of the Social Philosophy of Gerrard Winstanley* (London, 1947), Chapters I-V, and Mildred A. Gibb, *John Lilburne, The Leveller* (London, 1947), introduction. See also Mosca, *Ruling Classes*, 271-272, for the advancement of a cyclical theory dealing with the persistence of anarchist and allied sentiments in the ancient literature of China, India, Persia, Israel, Greece and Rome, and continuing down through the Christian Fathers and the Muslims. The influence of Merriam's view on subsequent writers dealing with anarchism in the United States is readily observable, however.