

Anarchism

Alexei Borovoy

1924

Contents

Anarhiismo (A. Borovoj)	3
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”No social ideal, from the point of view of anarchism, could be referred to as absolute in a sense that supposes it’s the crown of human wisdom, the end of social and ethical quest of man.”

Alexei Borovoj *Anarchism*, 1918.

Alexei Borovoi was a Russian Anarchist, teacher and writer. Born in 1875 he spent much of his life articulating an individualist anarchism and giving lectures on anarchist thought. During the Russian Revolution he remained active and was a founding member of the Unions of Workers of Intellectual Labour, a union for doctors and teachers and the Union of Ideological Propaganda of Anarchism a group whose purpose was the spreading of Anarchist ideas. He edited both organisations newspapers.

The Bolsheviks shut both organisations down, Borovoi continued to teach until 1922 when he was stripped of his professorship and banned from teaching. In 1929 he was arrested and exiled to Vyal'tka, he spent the last years of his life in minor clerical posts. He died in 1935.

In his time Borovoi was a very popular figure in Russia, university students lodged a mass petition for an intellectual debate on Anarchism vs Marxism with Borovoi representing the Anarchists, while Bhukarin and Lunarchasky were to be his opposition. The debates never happened though as the Bolshevik central government cancelled them. Unfortunately in our present time and Anglocentric world Borovoi is an obscure figure, there are only scraps of information about him, the Esperanto wikipedia has more information than then the English language entry, and I can find just one short piece by him on the Anarchist library, *Anarchism and Law*, so I hope translation of this short piece (not to be confused with the book of the same name) will help correct that in a small way.

Anarĥiismo (A. Borovoj)

Anarchism by A. Borovoj.

Is there in the sphere of modern socio-politics and ideas an idea as indefinite, contradictory and at the same time exciting to all, as anarchism?

Here, full of irresistible attraction, here full of terror and disgust, the synonym of perfect harmony and fraternal unity, the symbol of the destruction of faith and fratricidal infighting, the triumph of freedom and justice, the feast of unbridled passions and arbitrariness, anarchism stands as a great enigma, stirring by its name immense feats of human love and explosions of obscure vile passions, all are called the same.

And anarchism, affirming freedom, fighting against any form of despotism, regardless of the mask it hides behind, cannot but rise up against the excessive distortions of it, against the identification of revolutionary creation with the destruction of faith, of anarchic rebellion with the abominable dance of savages. Where do these arbitrary contradictory understandings of anarchism come from?

1-e. No socio-political thought can fit neatly into ready-made, finished formulas. Life is so full, elastic, and versatile that no dogma can forge chains can forge chains to restrain freedom of expression for long. It elementally outgrows the most fearless inventions of the wise, it puts aside the experienced, the old, buries the laws and theories, disregarding their logical harmony and the perfection of their constructions.

2-e. Despite the general conviction, the socio-political vivid idea is not so much the fruit of abstract speculations, the truth obtained through "reason", as the object of belief, conditioned by the profound originality of an individual.

In every human being, and the richer the individuality, the more strongly it manifests itself as an ever-living tendency towards the acceptance and understanding of definite truths. It may be modified according to time and place, environment, fashion, but the psychophysical originality of the individuality is its main source. Not expressed in terms of logic, it stands behind external argumentation and it decides the matter.

The citizen of modern cultural society can freely, handily, draw from the rich treasury of human thought. Various worldviews, hostile and close to each other, are equally presented with great brilliance and talent, and despite all this, in addition to the external, obvious for all reasons, there are the internal, inconsiderable, powerfully drawing us to the acceptance and confession of one truth and to the equally passionate denial of the other. Never before has one religious teaching, one philosophical system, one socio-political institution united all people. This is impossible and unnecessary. Namely, this absence in humanity of one faith is the best evidence of the multifaceted nature of human nature and at the same time - the hopelessness of the claims of an individual, party, class, state, nation, to say - the whole truth.

3-e. Anarchism has not yet had historical experience. One can speak of the history of anarchist thought, of the history of anarchist groups, communities, and individual attempts, but it is premature to speak of the social experience of anarchism. Conservatism and liberalism, as forms of socio-political thought, have deep living roots.

They were not born of the cabinet meditations of scientists, nor of the disputes of progressive circles, but of real life interests. From the stage of separate attempts they had long since passed into the form of practical experience, had defined the politics of classes, had more than once taken the destinies of nations into their own hands; in a word, they had a long and complicated history.

In the last half of the 19th century we can already speak not only of socialist vision, but also of socialist practice. The theoretical demands of Socialism began to be embodied in the real politics of the proletariat. And now we already have extensive socialist experience, because under the banner of socialism the ranks of modern workers' parties are being founded.

Anarchism was not yet a real policy.

Separate pages of the International, small circles, colonies of intellectuals and some facts from the history of the workers' and especially peasant movement, that is all that can be called a particularly anarchist experience. The traditional aversion to "organization" and "collective discipline" has slowed down anarchism from playing a significant role in the development of the workers' movement. Anarcho-syndicalism is the phenomenon of recent years and in the history of anarchism it has opened a completely new page.

4-e. Finally, one must pay attention to the abnormality, both of anarchist thinking itself, and of anarchist behavior. The socio-political philosophy of liberalism and socialism is based on the experience of a defined legality. The birth and development of class consciousness for them are the results of defined historical premises.

On the contrary, anarchism, despite the proclamations of its leaders - *Bakunin*, *Kropotkin* and others - has always been outside historicism, being in its sociological concepts a methodology inherited from the rationalist teachings about "natural man", "state of nature", "natural law". In

its assertions, society did not have an independent existence; it is a mechanical aggregate of free, self-defining "individuals".

Anarchism was not and until recently did not claim to be the philosophy of any class. It was a philosophy of the creatively self-defining individual. It knew no formulas that bound the individual, acknowledging for everyone the unrestricted right of criticism.

Hence, the boundless diversity of statements of particular shades, currents in anarchism or even of particular anarchists, which with difficulty allows us to establish at least general lines of the worldview common to all of them.

But as for the "rules" of conduct, in fact, up to now there have been and are absent.

These are the general causes that have slowed down, and that still continue to slow down the recognition of the nature of anarchism and the establishment of its constitutional recognitions.

Alexei Borovi 1924.

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Translated from Esperanto into English by Reddebek

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