

Anarchism in Hungary

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The anarchist tradition in Hungary survived for almost 40 years from the 1880s to 1919, represented by four different waves. The first involved an anarchist-influenced radical socialist group led by Ármin Práger and András Szalay, from 1881 to 1884. These radicals were well acquainted with the principles, revolutionary rhetoric, and cultivation of the propaganda of the deed associated with Johann Most, a social democrat who became an anarchist. The banning of socialist organizations by Germany's "exceptional legislation" in 1878 had a direct influence on Hungarian radicals as a significant number of German socialists and anarchists settled in Austria and Hungary. By their intermediation, the radical revolutionary point of view could then recruit many adherents. The "radical-socialist" group did not reject violent means of struggle against the system, but it was quickly crushed by the firm intervention of the government in 1884.

By contrast, the later waves of Hungarian anarchism rejected the use of terrorism. In the 1890s, the non-violent ideal anarchism represented the second wave. Philosopher Jenő Henrik Schmitt was convinced that verbal persuasion and true Christian moral example were the means to achieve social transformation. He propagated this approach in his newspapers – *Állam Nélkül* (Without State) and *Erőszaknélküliség* (Non-Violence) – but failed to influence wider urban circles. However, it did have an impact on the peasant-based Independent Socialist Party (ISP) led by István Várkonyi, which later influenced the agrarian-socialist movements of the late 1890s. The ISP would go on to accept a program of abolition of rule and state with an ideal of non-violence, but it did not always abide by this anarchistic principle. Jenő Henrik Schmitt would be remembered more as a philosopher and prophetic preacher than as an anarchistic ideologue. He later withdrew from politics and entered the intellectual world of Gnosticism. Ideal anarchism would remain politically marginalized, surviving only in religious, messianistic peasants' sects until government intervention suppressed harvest strikes and eventually arrested Várkonyi.

The third wave of anarchism in Hungary came through the rationalist, solidarity approach of Ervin Batthyány. As the twentieth century began, Batthyány advocated the labor movement's theory of class war and anarchosyndicalism. He edited anarchist newspapers such as *Testvériség* (Fraternity) and *Társadalmi Forradalom* (Social Revolution) in which he tried to unite anti-systemic forces along anarchist and anarchosyndicalist ideas. Batthyány also took the idea of revolutionary education seriously and, in 1905, he founded a school to nurture critical thinking.

Batthyány and Schmitt were the two most significant figures in the history of anarchism in Hungary. Both were able to achieve an intellectual consciousness within a western intellectual tradition. While Batthyány hailed from English rationalism and Schmitt from German metaphysics, they were able to share basic principles that were opposed to rule and politics. Both theorized that the creation of the new moral world order was not a political question. However, the realities of their respective movements forced both into active politics and into a schizophrenic position of theoretical conviction and revolutionary practice. Both were forced to abandon pure theory through a series of compromises. Between 1897 and 1899, Schmitt drew near to peasant socialism and Batthyány, between 1906 and 1908, sought association with anarchosyndicalism.

The particular features of Hungarian political life, the high salience of the franchise question, the attacks of the Social Democratic Party, and the party's institutional appeal all contributed to the difficulty of founding an anarchist or anarchosyndicalist movement in Hungary at the start of the twentieth century. However, in 1919, the Budapest Anarchist Group emerged around Károly Krausz to become the fourth wave of Hungarian anarchism. These anarchists, operating legally under the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic between March and July 1919, advocated

three distinct paths – critical, revolutionary, and cultural. The Budapest anarchists' efforts were anti-parliamentarism, anti-militarism, direct actions, and the practical questions of the general strike. Because of limited time and rapid-change politics, the Budapest anarchists were prevented from developing a theoretical generalization of their criticism on the contradictory relationship between anarchism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The pattern of Hungarian anarchism was that it could flourish for relatively short periods of time. The first wave, having split in the Hungarian social democratic movement, was linked to the divide within the German and Austrian movements between 1881 and 1884. In the second wave, social democracy was incapable of covering the political space of the emerging radical agrarian movement (1897–8). In the third wave, Batthyány's efforts were multiplied by his material sacrifices and the appeal of French anarchosyndicalism from 1904 to 1910. Finally, in the fourth case, while the Bolshevik state left a brief opportunity for the small group of theoretical anarchists, they were unable to find a social base in 1919.

These short periods proved to be exceptional in Hungary as a strong institutional organization of social democracy. Unfortunately, state repression removed radical socialists in 1884, suppressed the agrarian movement in 1897–8, and transferred power to the Horthy regime in 1919, stifling every anarchist initiative in Hungary. The various European anarchist ideas and movements were confronted with a variety of geographic, historical, and cultural challenges. In areas such as Western Europe, where democratic struggles had been established, anarchist movements were able to find a social base. This was equally possible in regions where democracy and anarchism were distant from reality and appeared only on a utopian horizon, as in Russia. Central Europe, in its transitional flux, seemed only to have democracy within its grasp. Thus, its immediacy made it difficult for both pre-democratic and post-democratic anarchism to gain strength. Essentially, the region imagined a solution that combined the advantages of anarchy and democracy without the disadvantages of either. While it craved for the people to hold power, it could not resolve its own disgust with power itself.

SEE ALSO: Anarchism, Russia ; Hungary, Revolution of 1848 ; Kropotkin, Peter (1842–1921) ; Socialism

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