

Fragment

Max Nettlau

24 August — 5 September 1902

All my arguments are based on the fact that men are different from one another, so that the same thing cannot be known to the same degree by everyone.

If we accept in theory that all the possibilities of development exist in a rudimentary state or develop in all of us, the practical life shows that these possibilities develop in a different manner for each of us. We do not think nor wish to render men uniform — just as we do not think of leveling the mountains and the plains. We hope that the most contradictory and harmful differences will disappear — just as we construct roads, bridges, etc., in order to render difficult regions more accessible, etc. — but now we face all the differences with all the disharmonies.

We accept that among a given number of men there is a strictly defined number per hundred of true artists, true scientists, true lovers of the mountains or the sea, etc.

To this I add that there is an equally definite number of true lovers of liberty, of truly independent men,—then another number whose love of liberty is more tepid, and so on—and on the other hand there are so many men who have no idea of liberty, and no desire for it, who only understand authority—all that to differing degrees.

Now, we can teach music to *everyone* and we can indoctrinate *everyone* in liberty—but the result is equally pitiful in both cases.

We know this for music...., the advanced parties must learn it for their ideas—it is the same thing. Universalizing an idea is a utopia—it only succeeds in a superficial and momentary manner for the fashion, by demagoguery and suggestion—or else by the common ignorance, traditional superstition; thus always one thing, indifferent or reactionary, never (save for superficial and powerless surges) for a good cause.

This explains the inevitable decline of all the parties, including anarchy, that do not recognize this fact; this is what happens:

The idea corresponds to the latent aspirations and dispositions of a definite number of persons who fully embrace it (the period of enthusiasm for anarchy, of the Saint-Simonians, etc., etc.)

Then we pursue the wretched chimera of generalizing that idea—we address ourselves to persons who are not disposed to it—and what follows is: *either* a complete fiasco, apathy, which discourages the true adherents and kills the movement, *or* we gain adherents who are only $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, or $\frac{1}{4}$ convinced, etc., and as a result of their influence we put water in the wine ($\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, etc.) and the idea is sacrificed: that happened to the social-democrats of all countries from the moment

that they counted the voters instead of the convinced adherents, and it has happened to anarchy since 1895, since it has counted the union members and not the comrades.

I can only consider the generalization of an idea as equivalent to its complete neutralization, to its death by anemia. It is in this sense that I have said: anarchy to the anarchists, because it is dear to me and I have seen with horror that it is sacrificed to the thirst for success or to purely humanitarian, charitable considerations, as I have seen, and we have all seen, socialism sacrificed to social-democracy, then to social reform. Those socialists become simple radicals and the anarchists become simple trade-unionists—the evolution is the same and as dire for the one as for the other.—

Someone asks me my ideas about the desirable form of the evolution. I respond:

[End of manuscript.]

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