

A Vision of Anarchist Love

Takamure Itsue

1930

Editor's Note: Takamure Itsue (1894–1964) was a prominent anarchist feminist in Japan during the interwar years and one of the founders of the anarchist feminist group, the Fujin Sen sen (the Women's Front). The following excerpts are from her article, "A Vision of Anarchist Love," originally published in 1930. The translation is by Yasuko Sato of the University of Nevada (History Department).

What I mean here by anarchist love is unfettered love. However, those who have hitherto been too subjected to the fetters of social convention hastily interpret such love as a pathological setback, hence as "wanton" and "promiscuous."

Similarly, many people think of anarchism as a principle that upholds an unsettling degree of disorder. Denouncing it as undermining the legitimacy of the police or the state, those who are pitifully parochial believe that the maintenance of peace in this world is possible only by means of police and state. But this idea is a consequence of being deceived by the ruling authorities. Anyone who studies history can easily envision peaceful and communitarian orders of society free from police and state. Everybody is innately capable of mutual aid and love. Only when mutual aid and love are fully realized will our society be peaceful, and we will be able to accomplish great endeavors...

In the course of time, we gradually become indifferent to political administration. With the assumption that those above will manage skillfully, we consider everything to be tiresome and allow them to handle it. In the process, we degenerate into the totally spiritless, uncritical "ignorant masses." The "system of control" is thus one that "nourishes the ignorant masses." Having thoroughly been degraded into the ignorant masses, we become even unable to ruminate on such matters as "autonomy" and "self-government."

Insofar as we maintain such a complacent attitude, we will never be redeemed. We must continue living a life that is endlessly unrewarded and full of pain and distress.

Now, it is time for us to rise up. We must rise up and wipe out all evils completely. To achieve this end, we must not be seduced by other reformist ideas such as Marxism, which is so inconsistent and deceptive as to call for gradual reforms through a better system of control.

Our political consciousness consists not in participating in politics, but in denying it. This means being absolutely opposed to politics, controls, and oppressive power — all these things.

Analogously, every sphere [of human activity] should be like this. All phenomena in the world are interconnected and organic. Even in the matter of love, we need to strive strenuously for free love by abolishing traditional views of love as a “shackle.” Free love signifies none other than anarchist love...

Men have an irresponsible attitude toward the problem of love. They are in a carefree position, able to regard sexual intercourse only as an excretion. Such is not the case with women. For them, love is immensely real, leading immediately to pregnancy and childbearing. These are the differences that separate male and female views on the issue of love.

... One of the reasons why male-dominated society belittles the issue of love as a private affair has to do with the male “sex,” although, of course, this does not account for everything. By making use of the male “sex,” the ruling class has cunningly accelerated this tendency. This is because the ruling class is concerned only with the object of direct exploitation, that is, with the production of commodities. They are insatiably intent on turning all of the exploited into a single efficient industrial machine. This being the case, the problem of sexuality is rather vexatious, and those in power conceive of such “human” demands, daily life and all as mere extravagance for everyone except themselves. (They certainly favour the birth of babies as eggs for their industrial machines, but invariably, this birth has to occur under restricted conditions. In other words, babies are allowed to be born only to be chained up within the confinement of the marriage system.) Under these circumstances, it is only natural that romance between humans should be wholly despised, rejected, and denounced ...

We may safely assume that, in the case of men, except for those who have an unusual degree of objectivity and a warm humanity, very few arrive at social consciousness through sexual liaisons. The same is not true of women. They take on the burdens of pregnancy and childbirth through sexual encounters.

However young they may be, women cannot afford to remain unconcerned in present-day society by perceiving love merely as a “romance” or “poem.” When in love, they cannot avoid devoting some thought to the “realistic, all too realistic” problem of pregnancy. They confront the “social, all too social” problem of childbearing.

Thus for women, love is an extraordinary event. The fact that love is an inevitability for young people makes the problem all the more serious. Women today cannot detachedly say, “why not love?” when pregnancy and childbirth, the consequences of love, are dismissed as private affairs, all the responsibilities of which are relentlessly imposed upon frail women. In addition, the more humane love is, the more brutally it is suppressed, and of course the damage is inflicted solely on women.

In a society like ours, sexual acts are utterly impossible except within the confines of [family] chains or in the form of perverse lascivious acts women do not desire. It would not be possible to painfully experience such misery, anxiety, and discontent without rapidly turning them into social consciousness. For women, sexual intercourse is directly linked to pregnancy and childbirth. Hence, women’s sexual conduct is not merely romantic or poetic, but manifests in full measure a society itself.

... [I]n an attempt to carry out rapacious exploitation by making people believe that what is done “for the nation” and “for God” is the only thing that matters, [the ruling class] thinks about how to get rid of all troublesome human desires and uniformly regiments people by leading them

away from those unproductive activities as much as possible. That is, each individual is paired with another individual of the opposite sex and made to privately own him or her under fixed conditions. With this, it is supposed that the lives of children born of such arrangements can be fitted into the couple's own responsibilities. It has been thought that the origins of marriage institutions have been construed only in terms of the inheritance of private property, but this is not quite right. We also need to know that they originated from a ruling-class view of sexual desire as private and contemptuous (in the sense that the sexual desire of the ruled is deemed to be bothersome, and that various duties arising from it are ignored).

Since the feudal age, marriages for the inheritance of family names and property (marriages for childbearing) have been falling into decay. Obviously, marriage in the capitalist age is distinctive in that it is "childless," centered on contraception ...

Thus envisaged, if its origins are simply "for the sake of property inheritance," the institution of marriage should have already disintegrated in the capitalist era. Nonetheless, Ben Lindsey and others are vigorously calling for the legalization of capitalist marriage, and it is entirely legalized in Soviet Russia. This suggests that the marriage system is still necessary for certain reasons. That is, for reasons that are beneficial for the ruling class: the reduction of [labour power] to uniformity through the concept of marriage as a private affair and the attribution of various kinds of responsibilities to [the private sphere].

... It is only on the level of ineffectual law or morality that husbands are connected to their wives, and after all, it is only mothers — inseparably bound up with their babies — who are compelled to take care of them. Furthermore, in places like America and Russia where uninhibited love prevails, men are neither affectionate toward their regular children nor certain whether they are truly their own, so they seek to evade [paternal responsibility] as much as possible. It is argued, therefore, that the most difficult and numerous cases that dominate most of the courts in contemporary Russia are about sex. As long as they dream of their liberation only on the level of politics and law, women will never be liberated. This is because politics and law are no more than bureaucratic lawsuits and scraps of paper ...

According to Ms. Ellis in England: "Women have cyclic sexual impulses. Nevertheless, as a result of the marriage system, a woman's sexual organs are seen as her husband's possessions, and she is constantly exposed to his sexual drive regardless of whether or not she has sexual impulses..."

It should now be obvious that healthy sexual conduct is natural sexual intercourse between a man and a woman via the spontaneity of their mutual love. In effect, since the emergence of oppressive society, such sexual activities have been heavily repressed and vulgarized. Because they have been ruthlessly institutionalized for the convenience and maintenance of oppressive power, the sexual life we now see before our eyes presents an almost hellish picture .

... We are told that in capitalist society people no longer desire to have children, since sex life exists only for pleasure.

While this tendency has promoted contraception, the headway made by contraception has accelerated this tendency. Although their individual motivations may be different, the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, farmers, women — no one among them — disavows contraception. The world is moving into an astonishing era of birth control...

Why did capitalist marriage — marriage centered on contraception — come into existence? One of the primary reasons is that the proletariat faces economic difficulties, while capitalist production, concurrent with advances in machinery, has lowered the rates of necessary human

labour. Another reason is the turbulent incongruities and contradictions generated by the marriage system since the dawn of history.

Notably, in recent times women's self-consciousness has formulated this phenomenon not as mere lustfulness, but as a kind of rebellious action. Admittedly, women have "resisted childbearing" since the dawn of the history of oppressive power. (Society confined women to dungeons and denied them genuinely free child birth by imposing painfully involuntary births, as if in prison cells. Since then, women's rebellious spirit has completely nullified the meaning of their social contribution through childbirth, because childbirth in dire confinement is simply a humiliation for women.) Ultimately, women's desire takes the form of promoting birth control, and they have come to play a leading role in the drama of rebellion ...

One contemporary form of anarchist love may show an American face; it is free love through the full utilization of contraception. If women themselves have become abnormal, this is not applicable; but as long as they have not, as long as their position is to seek genuine anarchist love, they will never be satisfied with recreational sex. Therefore, even in conjunction with free love featuring birth control, anarchist love will be pursued in a faithful manner. The spirit of a sexual life based on respect and love — even if momentary — will never be lost. A rendezvous will begin with respect and earnest longing, and parting will also take place with respect and serene kindness. We may experience ardent love for a short while without knowing when and where, and there is no reason to deny the freedom of realizing that love.

Nevertheless, we may have an eternal love that is both passionate and quiet, full of respect. It will evoke a sense of "peaceful union." In such cases, as an inevitable consequence of that love, we will never involve ourselves in another love, because that is impossible ...

Anarchist love can never be phrased in terms of fulfilling one's selfish interests, because it is not mere selfish love between lovers themselves but an outgrowth of respect and love for all people. At times, it may thus be necessary for us to bury in silence the ardent love that our hearts incidentally start embracing by virtue of our strong reason or to illuminate it from a broader perspective. In such cases, then our love could be tragic, but that is inescapable. Since we must respect and love the positions of all people without exception, it would not do for our conduct to ever be easy.

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From Robert Graham (Ed.), *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas; Volume One: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300 CE to 1939)*.

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