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June 19, 2012



Paul Reclus

Anarchist

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July 15, 1919

From *Les Temps Nouveaux*, n. 1, July 15, 1919.
Translated from the French by Michael Shreve
Retrieved on June 18, 2012 from michaelshreve.wordpress.com

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The headline of the newspaper does not contain the word anarchist. It is my opinion that it is understood in the word communist, but let's not be afraid to go further.

I understand the term like this: the individual only obeys the law formed by his own conscience. Modern man does not accept "orders from on high" if all they do is consecrate the privileges of a minority or the power of money. He submits to them while clenching his fists in his pockets or he breaks them. He ignores the law if it is only a transcription of truths discovered by successive generations in their experiences of life in common. In any case, he does not respect the law.

It is not the result of an increasing obedience to the law that the number of crimes against people decreases. Being less and less bloodthirsty it only follows the development of minds from a distance. It is not fear of punishment that keeps most people from living by theft—it is that they realize a fact: in order to produce it is more profitable and conforms more to the natural law of least effort to get along with equals rather than to plot and fight among masters and slaves. In general, through billions of individual cases, in human transactions we have found that cooperation produces more than discord and force.

We will not deny the active role that the laws of Moses, Solon and even Napoleon have played in human development. Forgetting about the victims that they have sacrificed, the Codes did, in their time, regulate ideas, limit desires and abolish the cruelest punishments. But these are new times. The number of people who are aware of their position in the universe has grown and in the masses certain basic truths have risen from the level of experience to that of the foundation of the conscience.

That all men have not found a satisfying personal morality is an undeniable fact and the crisis of savagery that is running rampant in humanity has thrown us backward a generation or more, but cannot the anarchist show us the way? Reveal an ideal to those who are looking to better themselves? Proclaim the superiority of educating young brains rather than the coercion by adults? Search for the conditions favorable to the development of responsibility?

For me, the word anarchist also has a sense of sincerity; it can reveal the immensity of the task. In today's complex societies, to organize a group using nothing but the play of passions as a support.

But really, is a word necessary for all this? Basically, we are guided by our temperament and then our opinion is added on. We tumble down the hill of our passions and if we don't try to hide them, we formulate ideas that adapt to them and use them as a banner. Our first actions were as communists, but after thinking about it we became anarchists. Of course there are those who instinctually do not want to submit to any authority, but we must see that they sometimes have a will that they try to impose on others.

Anarchist! So what! Ravachol or any one else whose different temperament brought them into the same camp . . . We'll let Villain accuse the impulsive.

So, it is about a "law formulated by the conscience" or, if you prefer, the "absence of exterior law", which does not prevent the anarchist from having his own law, inseparable from his morality, overseeing the actions of his public and private life. To take the initiative and feel its responsibility, to educate without pedantry, to be moral without vanity and to learn every day from the baser instincts are some of the difficulties in this.

Well, they tell us, some other term would be better: autoarch or something like that. Perhaps, but anarchist has suffered the insults of time and, since we have no reason to distort it, we understand it very well.

I am an anarchist.