

# **Gustav Landauer — the Man, the Jew and the Anarchist**

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“I am, the Jew, a German — I accept my complexity.”  
*Der Werdende Mensch*

# 1.

I will begin with the main details about Gustav Landauer's life and his epoch, because I assume that only little is known about them, and because a combined analytical and historical approach is required.

Gustav Landauer was born in 1870 in Karlsruhe (south-west Germany) into a petit-bourgeois family. From his youth he showed great interest in philosophy and the humanities, in literature and in the Bohemian life that attracted young people to the cafes of Berlin. Those days were the days of Germany's victory over France and its growing in Europe. In 1893 Landauer was expelled from Berlin University because of a speech he made before workers. He was arrested again in 1896 as an anarchist calling for disobedience, although throughout his life Landauer refrained from what is commonly termed "extremism". He was a determined pacifist but was unremitting in explaining his position and his socialist propaganda, to which he devoted much time despite the need to make a living and his passion for scientific and literary work.

His life ran in this twofold direction until his foul murder in a prison-yard on 2 May 1919, the victim of German anti-revolutionary terror that already portended the Nazi barbarity (including violent antisemitism.)

Landauer was a prolific publicist and was bound up in the *fin du siecle* current that brought an era to an end and opened a new century. The characters are known: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Wagner, and the various streams of socialism.

A noteworthy point for analysis is that most anarchists of that epoch were engaged in literature — writing and criticism. Landauer wrote many articles on theatre, and his two volumes of essays on Shakespeare still evoke interest. He edited a journal on the theatre and wrote articles on Ibsen, Tolstoi and others. He himself was a writer, as well as a translator of Peter Kropotkin, among others. In short, he was a man of remarkable talent, whom some compared to Moses Hess.

In 1900 he wrote an article on Ludwig Berne in which he cited some anarchistic concepts of the later: "Freedom can only come from anarchism", "Anarchy is nothing other than absence of rule", etc. Landauer liked the two Jews Heine and Berne very much. In their name he claimed that the state had become a god demanding sacrifices from which his priests benefited. Judaism, however, he viewed otherwise; there was another path and the Jews had a special historical destiny, a spiritual mission that influenced them and the people among whom they lived.

He admired the Prophets as well as Jesus of Nazareth and Spinoza. The Jews had a clear moral goal, and many Jews such as his friend Kurt Eizner, Erich Musam, Roza Luxemburg, etc., were active all around. He described himself more or less thus: first I am an animal, next a man; then the following order: a Jew, a German, a south German — and finally the unique “I”, I myself, crystallized. He did not disavow his people’s tradition: Spinoza was no Greek but an “Original Jew”, just as Nicholas Kusanus was a pure German. The prophet Samuel was clearly anti-state — as were the first Christians. Without expanding on this theme, which is of interest in itself, I would merely quote some of Landauer’s lines: ‘There is no people, even not the Jewish people, as long as a *foundation* is not given to every people; this is a *free, viable community based upon justice*... The individual cannot be swallowed up just like that, he is capable of standing firm. At present we carry injustice with us from country to country. But in the beginning justice was embodied in the basic structure, and this will adapt itself to specific national characteristics. It will itself become urgently clear that in the various socialist experiments our right can be realized in to our own fashion *only* among ourselves”.

To return briefly to Landauer’s life: his development at the beginning of the century came under the influence Proudhon, Tolstoy and Kropotkin; he should not be regarded as a purely anarchistic mystic (his friend and publisher, Martin Buber is partially responsible for this view of him) as he participated in political struggles all his life.

He belonged to a coterie of intellectuals who established a kind of “new community”, where he met Buber for the first time. The idea of the community (Gemeinde, Gemeinschaft) was to occupy a central place in his social concept. His radicalism crystallized into anarchism during his stay in England, at the beginning of the century, in the proximity of P. Kropotkin and his circle. (He translated Kropotkin’s *Mutual Help* into German).

In the next decade of his life he published a socialist journal, lectured frequently and was very active; he also struggled against the expulsion of the anarchists from the Socialist International (he was a delegate at the Zurich congress in 1903). His theoretical books *Scepticism and Mysticism* (1903) and *The Revolution* (1907) were not fortuitous: studying the problems of language and religion, of atheism and scepticism, he laid the foundation of his anarchistic socialism, which is a voluntaristic concept. He was remote from a determinist view of history: will and consciousness are of decisive importance; hence there is room for pluralism in the socialist movement.

His dealing with symbols, language, will and consciousness is highly relevant for present-day problems of socialism and even for the social sciences in general (the “false consciousness” in Lukacs’s writings; “The Ideology” in the Gramsci’s concept, etc.). It contained the beginnings of criticism of Marxist socialism, then

dominant in German Social Democracy. The idea that consciousness was only a super-structure and a function of the economic base resulted in flagging interest in consciousness and ideology. Landauer believed that literature and education in fostering the desire for justice, were of primary importance. He admired the poetry of Walt Whitman.

His criticism of Marxism found expression in his book *Call for Socialism*. Marxist – as accepted in the European social democracy of the time (Plekhanov, Kautsky, Bebel) was seen by him as an “etatist”, that is, a state-bureaucratic-authoritarian (and this was many years before the Soviet system under Stalin). According to Landauer, socialism grew from below, from the will and the life of communalist societies: it was federal and decentralist – the opposite of state and ruling authority. The growth of the communities would cause the withering of the state, and not the “proletarian dictatorship” would bring this about (in his opinion this was the essence of Marxism).

Socialism as a product of the will could arise wherever and whenever it was desired and agreed upon; the “code” and the symbol for unifying communities would be found.

Buber’s influence is easily understood here. The vision of the community, romantic and “volkist”, derived from Herder and a particular German philosophy as well as from some hassidic stories in the Buber version, in which there is a symbolic atmosphere, a myth and a “Bund”. He would not have accepted the social-democratic definitions of class, the people and the nation according to Borochof. He certainly saw something positive in the unique nature of each national entity, and was far from any kind of chauvinism, German or Jewish.

Peoples and nations grew out of the communal and harmonious life mankind had known prior to the era of capitalism. The sole revolution in the past was the most destructive – that which began in the fifteenth century and led ultimately to the dominance of capitalism, the centralist state, authoritarian political rule, social atomization and alienation. This grew, and was not merely imposed. Therefore, only the will “to break out” could offer salvation. Any time was appropriate for change: this was the core of “self-realization” in his doctrine, which is so very close to Gordon’s and to the constructive socialism that formed the ideological basis of the *kibbutz* movement.

The most serious crisis in his relationship with Buber, which should be noted and not glossed over, arose during the first world war. On the face of it, opposition to the war seemed natural, owing to its clearly imperialist character and the fact that years before its outbreak socialists and intellectuals had already warned of its approach. But as is well known most of them did not withstand the acid test, and the betrayal by social democracy in its first parliamentary trial is familiar to all. Gustav Landauer was a sworn opponent of the Social Democratic party, the Prussian

state and all wars. According to him, an “armed peace” carried with it corruption and decadence, exploitation of the masses, hypocrisy and fear. On the eve of the war he wrote that its flames had been fanned in the world since 1870. He refuted Kropotkin’s stand, which supported the policy of the *Entente*, namely, placing the blame on Germany, as well as Buber’s which saw fit to support Germany against “eastern barbarism”.

Landauer was among those at whose incentive a group of intellectuals gathered to proclaim the unity of all men and a resolute stand against the war. (Buber joined this group, but it disbanded when the war broke out...). He went still further: blame for the war fell upon all the imperialist states, and upon all those who saw it coming yet remained complacent and did little to forestall it.

He condemned his friend Buber, who in his famous “Hanukka oration” (December 1914) and in his articles, fostered the illusion that in the war the Jewish people would unite and their sense of national identity would increase. Buber compared Germany at war with the Greeks at the tune of Pericles; and even hinted at its historic destiny: to serve as a bridge between the cultures of East and West.

Landauer saw in this a justification of the war and in fact severed his relations with Buber. He did not believe that war caused people to unite; that the state and violence were issues of culture and social renewal. Landauer termed Buber’s claim that the Jews would grow spiritually stronger during the war metaphysics and illusory contemplation on Buber’s part. Jews and non-Jews in their masses wished to live in order to return quickly to their families and saw no point in the aggressive war. Hundreds of thousands of victims had no “destiny” and the Jews fighting on both sides did so because they had no choice; the states compelled them to do so. All the virtues extolled by Buber (courage, self-sacrifice, dedication, heroism) were not a source of pride for the soldier; the German “spirit” was in fact dying in the aggressive violence and it should not be glorified. Landauer himself, fought in his own fashion against the war and against the widespread aggressive patriotism that was being inflamed. At the end of 1916 in his simplicity and honesty he was enthralled by the idea that President Wilson of the United States would be able to bring the war and the race to rearm to an end, by calling an international conference and the like. He stated this in a letter he sent to Wilson. He no longer believed in the political struggles against the war like that of the Zimmerwald group, etc. because he regarded the war itself as a result of secret diplomacy and power politics. Nevertheless, he found renewed hope in the Russian revolution (not necessarily Kerensky or the S.D and the S.R) in which he saw an awakening of the “folkspirit” – the Russian folk spirit as embodied in Tolstoy. It was in the spirit of this revived hope that he answered Eisner’s call to take part in Council Government in Bavaria.

In the spring of 1917 the L. family was in Krumbach, Bavaria. Landauer himself was; primarily engaged in his Shakespearian research (published after his death)

and his belief that only a powerful will and determined consciousness could terminate the war and put an end to capitalism and the state was enhanced. In February 1918 his second wife, the renowned writer Hedwig Lachman, died. Landauer fell into a dangerous depression, his solitude was entire. Buber then attempted to involve him in the policies of the Zionist-Socialist movement; in this connection the Landauer's correspondence with Nahum Goldmann took place on the collective settlements in Israel.<sup>1</sup> No longer did he evince enthusiasm over the achievements of the Russian revolution, which had moved to the Bolshevik stage; but the Bavarian revolution in November 1918 was still able to elicit a glimmer of hope. Many of his friends participated in this so-called "cafe-sitters revolution." Landauer knew that the intellectuals who had at last sprung into action were very weak, yet he identified with the attempt to alter the course of German history. But his spiritual freedom was dearest to him above all.

During the rule of Kurt Eisner, Landauer and some of his friends (Mühsam, Toller) concentrated on peace-propaganda and the establishment of councils. He supported Eisner, who began to publish documents bearing witness to Germany's guilt during the war, and his struggle against a hostile press. But he went even further than Eisner in his demand that socialism be realized at once: the councils seemed to him to herald the abolition of the state, and to implement decentralization in the spirit of anarchism. He saw danger in Prussian hegemony over all Germany and strove for an alliance of small states based upon councils whose legislative bodies sprang up from the grassroots. However, he despaired over "the spirit of the German revolutionaries", and in fact reached the paradoxical conclusion that they would only be able to get things done when the situation grew even more serious.

Landauer opposed the elections that were called, which he regarded as a formality that would jeopardize the few gains that had been made. And indeed, immediately following the elections Kurt Eisner was murdered on his way to the Parliament (21.2.1919). At the end of February 1919 the *councils* and the Republic of Councils were proclaimed. In truth, Landauer's feeling was that conditions not yet ripe for the events that were in train and the hearts of the people was not ready for them. He even suggested advancing the councils and turning them into communities. He called for the spread of information and education, and opposed any notion of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (the Leninist version in Russia) as an answer to anti-revolutionary activities and political killings. He was most interested and encouraged by the economic plans that began to be published and by the establishment of councils in Hungary (Bela Kun's regime). When the Councils' Republic was proclaimed with Ernst Toller at its head, Landauer no longer

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<sup>1</sup> see my publication in *HaKibbutz*, No. 2, 1976.



had the option of remaining at one side: he assumed the post of Council Secretary (Komissar) for Art and Culture in the new government. During the week the (first) Councils' Republic was in existence, Landauer elaborated highly interesting programmes for the education of adults and culture for all. However, the dangers and pressures brought about its fall and the establishment of the second Councils' Republic headed by the communists (Eugene Levine tried to turn it into a kind of military communism), in which there was no longer any place for Landauer.

## 2.

Perhaps I have digressed somewhat on Gustav Landauer's biography, but his life so interesting, varied and full of inspiration that this is not surprising. Furthermore, he is unknown. But returning to our analysis, we may ask, what anarchism is and what is Landauer's particular contribution to its theory and philosophy. A passage from his collection of articles on this subject is apt here:

“What I call anarchism is a basic mood which may be found in every man who thinks seriously about the world and the spirit. I mean the impulse in man to be reborn, to be renewed and to refashion his essence, and then to shape his surroundings and the world, to the extent that it can be controlled. Such a sublime moment should fall to the lot of everyone.” (“Anarchic Meditations about Anarchy”)

In the following I concentrate on three points: (1) The definition of anarchism and Landauer's relation to social-anarchist philosophy; (2) negation of the State; (3) communal socialism. These are of course only some of the problems that have to be studied.

### A.

The definition of anarchism is not clear, partly because of the many anarchist currents, yet it is important to refine some elements necessary for the definition. These are: (1) A vision of a classless society, without authority and state rule. Only in a stateless society can all other things considered “good” and “just”, such as equality, liberty, reciprocity be realized. (2) A radical criticism of existing society with its powerful authoritarian institutions, including the patriarchal family cell, the church and religion. (3) Complete decentralization of economic life, administration, education and culture, with emphasis on associations, communities, workplaces. Decentralization is a condition for the autonomy of the individuals and their organizations. Autonomy is the opposite of authoritarianism. (4) Regarding human nature as making possible progress toward an egalitarian non-authoritarian and non-violent society. Spontaneous and voluntary associations of people are the basis of social change. Reciprocity and cooperation are possible. (5) Finally — and

here precisely is the main weakness of anarchism in the multiplicity of its shades – the strategy that is prescribed to endanger the desired social change: gradual or revolutionary transition; means suitable for the aims (self-realization); obedience and disobedience; morality and politics; parties and parliamentarism.

Marx and his disciples regard anarchism as a Utopian petty bourgeois socialism. Initially Marx admired Proudhon but later he criticized him sharply, and the struggles at the First International between himself and Bakunin are well known. But is it indeed the case that if one does not accept the historical necessity of socialism one becomes a Utopian? Landauer (and in consequence Buber in his book) enlarges upon “Utopia” and “Topia”.<sup>1</sup> He sees “the revolution” as a kind of social theatre, a continuous process of regeneration, because the principle is not rule by power, but society and social structure. Therefore the will to change is important. This is particularly in the interest of a certain class (lately H. Marcuse revived the problem of “the subject of revolution”, and was charged with anarchist tendencies) and the problem still remains unsolved. There is talk of “a new working class”, of the Third World (where there is “nothing to lose but the chains”), students with no future, etc. – and not only the salaried workers as avant garde.

To answer a question: Marx can only be understood within the context of his times. From the *Communist Manifesto* up till *Das Kapital* the industrial salaried working class is the *subject* of the socialist revolution. In his latter years Marx also discussed other social classes for whom capitalism was destructive. But in circumstances of political controversy in German and Russian social democracy, considerable parts in Marx’s philosophy became dogmatic, and it is known that he once said: “If they are Marxists then I am not a Marxist!” I cannot expand on the changes of today as they were not evident during Landauer’s lifetime. As for the peasantry, Marx voiced his opinions on France and Russia (as well as India).

The attitude of anarchism toward the state and politics in general (parties, institutions) is negative. But it has no unified position on the use of violence. Bakunin was not opposed to violence and nowadays anarchism is unjustly identified with violence and disorder. Landauer was a sworn opponent of all violence, and he explains his concept of “revolution” at some length. Kropotkin too was opposed to violence although he was not as consistent as Landauer in the first world war. Marx criticized Bakunin and was sharply against individual terror (Nechaev and others) and it is nonsense today for terror groups to claim they are being faithful to Marxism. Anarchism, which believes in man’s social and cooperative nature, needs no strategy of violence to achieve social change. But in this discussion, which had already taken place during the First International and after the Paris Commune, Marx had to pay more attention to the claims of the anarchist against him.

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<sup>1</sup> see my book *Buber’s Social Philosophy*

Marx did not clarify sufficiently what he meant by “dictatorship of the proletariat” or how to organize a decentralized society (meaning the withering away of the state). I am sure that the ultimate goals are very similar, but some matters are not clear enough in Marx’s writings (he discusses only the issue of the experiment of *The Paris Commune* and the *Remarks on the Gotha Plan* the rest is the responsibility of the commentators). The paradox in the non-violent anarchism of Landauer, who believes that man is good lies in the statement often repeated by the students in the sixties that “the revolution needs good people; but if people are good, then why is a revolution needed?”

The theme of human nature was central for socialists, when they despaired of historical necessity. It is discussed extensively in social philosophy and two great antagonists on the subject should be mentioned: Hobbes and Rousseau (as well as Nietzsche, Buber and others). All religions are concerned with it because of their preoccupation with reward and punishment. Indeed there is no formula to settle once and for all the problem of man’s nature and of the connections and interrelations between the individual and society (the collective).

According to Landauer – and this is also the principle of the *kibbutz* in Israel – in a cooperative community it is easier to find solutions to this problem. What then do men want? What are their needs?

It is difficult to find a single answer for all ages. Marx already mentioned “free men in a free society”, but this too seems to be a kind of utopianism. Landauer refuses to compromise regarding the freedom of the individual, not only the formal sort that is now accepted in all modern states. In the *kibbutz* movement there has lately been talk of “self-realization”. If this is correctly understood it refers to such social conditions as will permit the individuals living under them (everyone equally) to realize the cultural and intellectual potential inherent in each. Therefore, the trend toward a *communal socialism* seems nowadays to answer such a demand.

Nevertheless, even if man’s nature is good from his youth, he is corrupted by the egoism nurtured in capitalist society and by consumerist exhibitionist brainwashing. And it is indeed difficult today to sustain even a limited egalitarian-cooperative society like the *kibbutz*. Far more education and self-study, willingness, and a clear-cut socialist ideology, are required.

The *kibbutz* experience can teach much about the socialist way of life, but little about socialist government and the abolition of the state. In the *kibbutz* – which is the true embodiment of the Landauer version of communal socialism – man is seen as a goal in himself, but in the Kantian version too it is notable that there is an interest in the means also. Who will do the work? There is thus no escape from the dialectic version, which is replete with tensions: man as a means and as a goal simultaneously (the *kibbutz* too is perceived in this way).

In general I think that a philosophical debate is called for when the issue is the founding of a social concept. In “liberalism” and neo-liberalism” there is also the promise of freedom, and there is “the welfare state”; it is not at all easy nowadays to find any sound socialistic view, not merely the socialist anarchist one. But there is no avoiding a theoretical and philosophical attack at the roots of the problems: What has the attempt of centralism taught? Is the self-realization of modern man at all feasible in the framework of the mass society and the anonymous centralist state? Should communal socialism be nourished more than it was in the past? I find the questions posed and some of the answers given by Landauer relevant to all these issues that concern our generation and our children’s.

There is of course the danger that our socialism will be no more than “anti-capitalist romanticism”. Gustav Landauer rejected not only political authority in the form of the state but also the political party. However we organize the political parties currently operating around us, no parliamentary democratic regime is possible without them. But Landauer as an anarchist rejected all authority and subjection: he sang the praises of the individual’s autonomy as the foundation of any moral and social approach. Only that which springs willingly from below is in his view valid. For that reason he enthused over the beginnings of the Russian revolution, but was not especially impressed by “the conquest of power”. Dictatorship did not appear to him the way to freedom. The way to freedom was to get free, self-realization here and now was the decisive point. Here lay the sharp clash between anarchism and Marxism, and within Marxism itself: *the character of the transitional period* (especially in the light of the Soviet experience). And as with the problems of subjectivity so with the definition of “the transitional period”, there is the tension of contradictions, which I do not think we have so far resolved.

The adjustment of the dialectic with so-called “non-antagonistic” contradictions is the following: this entire construction is connected to the dialectic concept under conditions in which those who developed are already in power; and hence they believe that there are contradictions that are resolved by harmonious reconciliation. These are important problems of philosophy but we cannot enlarge upon them here; and I believe that there are problems for which philosophy and perhaps philosophical anthropology are still seeking solutions. But better not to draw conclusions as yet. The problem is that every political establishment tends toward centralization and domination of its will; but it is possible to assure freedom of the individual and of all men without any apparatus of imposition, that is, without a state? And not in the minimum state as accepted at present by the neo-liberals as it was in his day by Buber who was inconsistent in the anarchist aspect of his philosophy. Landauer thought that the more societies, communities, associations and federations grew and developed, the more would the new (socialist) relationships wax strong, rendering the political-authoritarian connections called the state, su-

perfluous. The latter would indeed wither and die during this evolutionary process. These desire and the will were even then reducing the legitimacy of the regime.

## B.

We in fact began our study with Gustav Landauer's attitude to the *state* also, which he perceived as a relationship of coercion, a ruling institution and an authority whose legitimacy was contingent upon the agreement and desire of the people. If I ask here — as I ask my students — “What is a State?” I am sure there will be very different answers. But it is surely well known that an important political sociologist such as Max Weber defined it as the only legitimate authority using power (within certain territorial boundaries) and the authority that gives legitimacy to institutions to use compulsory means (punishment, laws, police, etc.). In Marx's opinion the state and similarly any ruling authority were no more than tools in the hands of the ruling class to impose its own interests. True his writings occasionally mention some “independent” functions of the state, but these were exceptions. With the abolition of the classes at an advanced stage of communism, there would no longer be any need for a state and it would “wither away”. Nevertheless, during the “transitional period” coercive means were necessary, and hence the state and military apparatus had to be maintained. However, in the aftermath of the Paris Commune Marx realized that coercion was in fact required against the counter-revolution; except that this would not be achieved with the old apparatus — authoritarian bureaucracy — a product of the old regime.

The “commune” seemed to be a “stateless state” suited to the task. All anarchists consider state and church to be the root of all evil, and the primary condition is to struggle against them and to bring about their downfall. But as we have seen, Landauer's stand is more complex: the state is a sort of relationship, the fruit of the will of the masses at a particular period and this coercion will not be removed by means of an opposite coercion. The way is by communal growth from below that will gradually erode the importance and the source of existence of the invalid state-relationships.

Martin Buber also distinguishes between social relations, which should be fostered, and state-relations, which have to be reduced to the absolute minimum. Buber does not go so far as Landauer, who sees the future as stateless, Buber claims that “historical reality is not perfect and will never be so. Therefore the absolute abrogation of the political principle is a vision of the millenium. And, indeed, various messianic and heretical sects within the church were essentially anarchist. Gershon Scholem well portrays these mystical sects, and he terms the best of the pioneering youth of the third Aliyah “anarchists”. Not surprisingly even today the

stable communes in the USA are the religious ones and they keep as distant as possible from national politics (even being conscientious objectors, etc.) Landauer's answer to the reality of the state is the collective settlements and the federations they form ("a society of societies"); the state is always centralist and coercive; but as long as it is acceptable to those who live in it, it will not be abolished. This is a lengthy educational and organizational process, from below. Slavery resides in the spirit.

This is why the critics of anarchism constantly point to the lack of development of a strategy for social change in its doctrine, that is to say these are Utopian concepts that do not show the way to the transition to the "topos", the realization of their vision. This criticism is justified but through the crystallization of an alternative and promising strategy, and it is not true that they have no strategy. Anarchist strategy did not prove itself in the history of the last century; anarchists have never held power nor have they brought a ruling power down; it does not seem to me that beyond the communes and the *kibbutzim*, (diffuse collective networks) they have the capacity to dissolve the state and its centralized institutions.

I present here Gustav Landauer's position, and I think that it is clear today that combined paths have to be followed: without a revolutionary change in the state regime, progress is limited (perhaps no more than a "welfare state"); and the capture of reinforcement of the political power alone have not so far led to socialism (the Soviet model) — hardly the "welfare state"; and the "structural changes" of Eurocommunism have not yet been tested.

Basically I agree with Marx's analysis of politics, that is, the power to force and the centralized domination of state and church. It has also been said that the fundamental dispute between Marx and Bakunin has been exaggerated (it also had many subjective aspects...) because on the question of coming to terms with power and authority, the anarchists were right and Marx placed overwhelming emphasis on the alteration of economic conditions, on the assumption that with them the superstructure too would undergo the desired change.

However, as stated, people rise up and change the world order from their inner conviction; that is, revolutionary consciousness actually motivates the masses. Here there is a complex tie, especially now in the age of late consumerist capitalism, which Marx did not know and surprisingly did not examine. The anarchists with their subjective and instinctive rebelliousness were accurate in some of their assumptions. One may see in Gramsci's or Marcuse's philosophy how fruitful these lessons were. As already observed, the question of revolution and its nature is still an open chapter for repeated reading and discussion at all times (for that reason various "Marxisms" are spoken of today).

And now a word on *Lenin*: his greatness lies in the fact that he understood what revolution meant in Russian conditions and also the importance of power during

the ‘transition period’. He was not always a consistent disciple of Marx; it was in fact the Mensheviks who were orthodox and dogmatic and who accused Lenin of drawing too much on the Narodniks. Lenin made many innovations in various areas but the imposition of “Marxism-Leninism” destroyed the entire theory. But I do not see any responsibility extending from Marx to Lenin, and from Lenin to Stalin. Such an approach is completely anti-historical. Mao Tse Doun is also an innovator in the conditions of China, and we now face a different Marxism...

Let us return to Landauer. He did not consider class analysis as the key to an understanding of history. He had a romantic admiration for the guilds of the Middle Ages and rural-communities as fundamental social formations in contrast to the state and the political institutions. He sharply criticizes Marx for this, but he *did not know* Marx’s very well. Marx’s early texts and his later writings (drafts and letters to Russian revolutionaries)<sup>2</sup> are well known now and from them it is clear that he set much store by the basic social institutions and saw various roads to socialism. That is why I stated that certain facets worked out by anarchism must be taken into account, even if at times they overlap opinions of Marx that were not developed by his school for historical reasons in Russia. Plekhanov was most dogmatic on the development of capitalism in Russia – for the purposes of his struggle against the Populists.

Landauer assumes that cooperative communities united in federations will arise, etc. What will happen if a federation of communes finds itself in opposition to the interests of a neighbouring federation? In theory, the transitional stage between the state and the federation of communities was not clearly elaborated. We know that the problems of the intermediate stages and the transitional period are not sharply enough defined. I myself do not see that the state and all its accessories which protect private property and the privileges of the ruling classes quietly departs and the wonderful world of Landauer, Buber and Kropotkin spreads across the entire globe. There seems to be a Utopian or messianic element here. And you know as well as I concerning the first part of the question that the contradictions within the federations (and even between the *kibbutz* and its movement) are the real conflicts and we know from experience that they do not simply disappear. But we do have the opinion of Landauer, who in reply to Nahum Goldmann’s letter on “the industrialization of the *kibbutzim*” (in 1919!) warned that there must be no bureaucratization *and* no contrasts between rich and poor *kibbutzim*.. And now in the situation of an economic crisis bequeathed to the state, there is a “chance” of seeing how the principles actually pass the test of contrary interests. Regarding the state I would like to stress that there is here weakening of the legitimacy of compulsion and eventually also of the need for its institutions. From a different viewpoint,

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<sup>2</sup> see my: “Marx and the Russian Obschina”



with legitimation and professionalization the bureaucratic apparatus becomes “a self-crowned sovereign”; this is what has happened in the “Welfare State”. The pure liberalism of today also recommended a “minimum state”; but political and class suppression do not completely die out before exploitation and domination disappear. Now too, it is important to emphasize that which was central to Landauer’s thinking: “voluntary slavery”. Without this the state and its institutions based upon obedience will not survive. The state not only protects private property by force: power becomes the private property of a class. And the brainwashing that we are subject to turns all of this into a kind of “human nature”.

## C.

We now come to the *anarchist-communal vision* of Gustav Landauer. One of the best books written on him just recently in the USA bears the title: *Prophet of Community*. In sociology there are many definitions of “community”, from the well known dichotomy of F. Tonnies between *gemeinschaft* (“community”) and *gesellschaft* (“association”) up to the latest of the followers of behaviorism or communication, who have developed definitions of their own, but this is not our concern here.

The community as formulated by Landauer (and by other anarchists and essentially by Buber also) has some principal characteristics: (a) A cohesion that goes beyond the “social contract”, making for multi-faceted as well as face-to-face relationships; (b) the spontaneity and reciprocity of direct relationships, which is only possible in small units (limited but not necessarily closed); (c) stability, which allows for the development of these relationships and the flowering of fraternity and friendship: and mutual assistance; (d) common values, ideas or the existing belief which created a kind of “inner code” evincing a sense of “feeling at home”. There are of course other qualities also, but in essence it may be said that the *sine qua non* is for the individual to feel at home within a social framework that does not develop into a creature with an existence of its own that turns against its creator.

In the anarchist community there is harmonious integration between agricultural, industrial and intellectual endeavour (the visions of Kropotkin).

Landauer was a most severe critic of capitalism, in the sphere of economics but no less in the social relationships that developed in the characteristic culture of market relations. Capitalism from the fifteenth century on, words he held, had engendered social atomization involving alienation, domination and exploitation, political absolutism and atrophy of the “team spirit” that had been the unifying force in the past. The traditions of the medieval communities (*Gemeinden*) impressed him greatly and he researched them widely; hence the ambivalence of his attitude

to the French Revolution, which laid the foundations of the modern centralized state and the anonymous authoritarian administration that are the root cause of all that besets us at present. The state continues to develop and is as powerful as a substitute for the genuine communal unifying spirit (here he is not far from Marx, who saw in it an “illusory community”).

The collective society for which Landauer longed is not the fruit of a “purposeful rationalism” (a principle sufficient for the establishment of various administrative bodies); this is the principle of bureaucracy, which is centralist by nature. The community is diffuse by nature. He wrote (against the Marxist): “These socialists won’t make the state socialist... The state will make them worshippers of the idol state”. He does not foresee the details of the picture of the future society, but he presents clear principles: the individual in communion, socially restructured in an infinite process, with no single absolute model. And he intermixes many images which I consider mystical: socialism as a mixture of earth, spirit and communalism; the revival of the community as a kind of experience in the renaissance of the individual and society; idealization of the rustic life and nature; anti urbanism; etc.

Similar elements are to be found in heretical-religious sects, in A. D. Gordon, as well as in the many hesitations as expressed in the well known collection *Our Community (Kehilyatenu.)* Perhaps in contemporary terms it looks like social existentialism that prefers a social communal experience to economic and institutional arrangements (private property, democracy, etc.). Even the state is sometimes conceived as “a way of behaving”, which can be changed voluntarily.

The communities have no good reason for enmity and war; nor have nations and people. Wars are between states — for power, expansion, exploitations and oppression. Communities and nations are sufficient unto themselves in order to live: the vital element precisely does not come from the outside. Uniqueness of peoples is not a cause for war because mankind is pluralist by nature. During the war Landauer did not fear to proclaim: “My sympathies go out to other people in the same way as to my own”. He criticized and scorned intellectuals who invested arguments upholding the rights of their own people (in fact of their state) to fight and to conquer. Even in his lectures on Shakespearian theater (during the war) he emphasized the disintegration of the moral personality under the pressure of egoism and nationalism. He saw himself as a cosmopolitan in the highest sense of the term, and although far from being a Zionist, he held the universalism of Judaism dear and worthy of being fostered. (Hence his esteem for Buber’s activities).

It is interesting to note that the three “Ministers of Culture” in the revolutionary transitional periods were Jews: *Landauer*, *Lukacs*, and *Lunacharsky*. But that is a different story.

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