

ALLIANCE[®]

a journal of theory & strategy

P. S.—Since writing the above I have found an early French Anarchist pamphlet, from which I translate the following:

“Thus, those who feel so inclined will unite for common life, duties, and work, whilst those to whom the slightest act of submission would give umbrage will remain individually independent. The real principle [of Anarchism] is this far from demanding integral Communism. But it is evident that for the benefit of certain kinds of work many producers will unite, enjoying the advantages of co-operation. But I say once more, Communism will never be a fundamental [meaning unique and obligatory] principle, on account of the diversity of our intellectual faculties, of our needs, and of our will.”

This quotation (the words in brackets are mine) is taken from p. 72 of what may be one of the scarcest Anarchist publications, on which my eye lit on a bookstall ten days after writing the above article: “Philosophie de l’Insoumission ou Pardon a Cain,” par Felix P. (New York, 1854, iv. 74 pp., 12mo)—that is, “Philosophy of Non-Submission,” the author’s term for Anarchy. I do not know who Felix P. was; apparently one of the few French Socialists, like Dejacque, Bellegarrigue, Coeurderoy, and Claude Pelletier, whom the lessons of 1848 and other experiences caused to make a bold step forward and arrive at Anarchism by various ways and independent of Proudhon. In the passage quoted he put things into a nutshell, leaving an even balance between the claims of Communism and Individualism. This is exactly what I feel in 1914, sixty years after. The personal predilections of everybody would remain unchanged and unhurt, but exclusivism would be banished, the two vital principles of life allied instead of looking askance at each other.

By Max Nettlau.

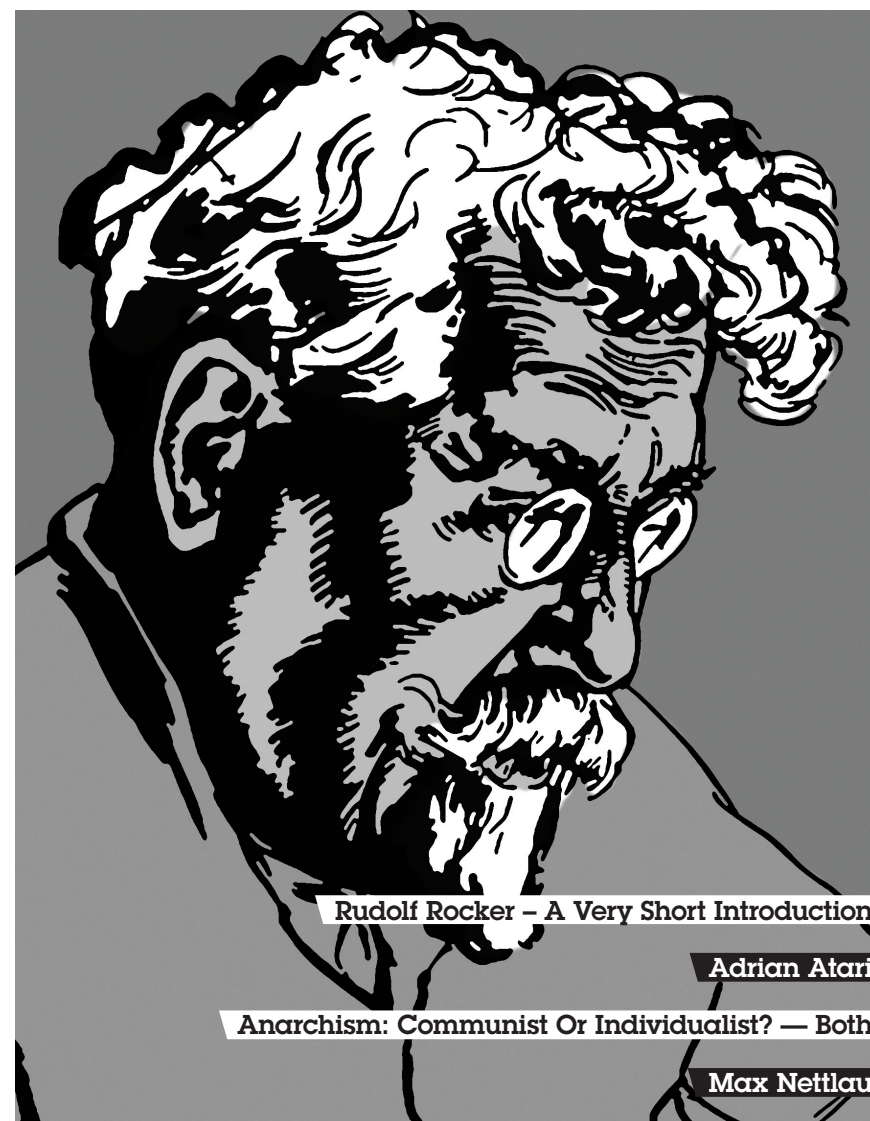


The intrepid student

Corvus Editions — Tools for Free Absolutes

- Anarchist History
- Handbound Books
- Pamphlets
- Donations and Partnerships
- Periodicals

<http://corvusdistribution.org/shop/>



Rudolf Rocker – A Very Short Introduction

Adrian Atari

Anarchism: Communist Or Individualist? — Both

Max Nettlau

Rudolf Rocker – A Very Short Introduction

When anarchists speak of historical anarchism, many names are likely to come up. We are likely to talk about Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and perhaps Emma Goldman. Individualist anarchists are likely to talk about Benjamin Tucker and Lysander Spooner. One anarchist who does not get enough mention in such discussions, in this author's opinion, is Rudolf Rocker. Sometimes called the father of Anarcho-Syndicalism, Rocker was well versed in anarchist theory, both individualist and communist. He lived through what could be considered anarchism's heyday, witnessing the aftermath of the Haymarket affair, the Russian Revolution, two World Wars, and the Spanish Civil War. A life-long activist, Rocker remained dedicated to the idea of a libertarian society until the day he died.

Born in 1873 in Mainz, Germany, Rudolf was the second of three children. By the time he turned 15, both of his parents had died and he was forced to live in a Catholic orphanage. It was here that his opposition to authoritarianism began to take root. Feeling like a prisoner, Rocker twice tried to escape the orphanage. Neither attempt was completely successful. And he was forced to remain in the orphanage until he finished his schooling.

After finishing school and leaving the orphanage, Rocker became apprenticed as a bookbinder, following in the footsteps of his older brother Philipp and his uncle Carl Naumann. It was through his uncle Carl that Rocker would first become politically aware. Carl was an ardent socialist and had in his possession an immense library of books, pamphlets, newspapers and other socialist publications, many of which were illegal to possess due to anti-socialist legislations. The young Rudolf spent many afternoons absorbed in subversive literature and discussion with his uncle.

At the age of 17, Rudolf joined the Social-Democratic Party, but this association did not last long. Quickly becoming disillusioned with the bureaucratic nature of the political system, Rocker was excommunicated by the Social-Democratic Party after questioning the actions of party leaders. Soon after, Rudolf began distributing anarchist literature in Germany.

Following a meeting of unemployed workers in which another speaker had advised the workers to take the food they needed rather than starve, Rocker was forced to flee the country or face arrest. As a result, Rudolf fled to Paris. In Paris, Rudolf was introduced to the Jewish anarchist community, and was thoroughly impressed.

In 1895, Rocker traveled to London to visit the German consulate and determine the possibility of returning to Germany. However, he was told he would be jailed if he attempted to return. As anti-anarchist sentiment was growing in France, Rudolf decided to stay in London. After hearing about the terrible conditions of London's mostly Jewish

certitude, apparent permanency, which they never ought to have assumed, for stagnation—this is the word—is the death of progress. Hardly any effort was made in favor of dropping the differences of schools; thus both had full freedom to grow, to become generalized, if they could. With what result?

Neither of them could vanquish the other. Wherever Communists are, Individualists will originate from their very midst; whilst no Individualist wave can overthrow the Communist strongholds. Whilst here aversion or enmity exists between people who are so near each other, we see Communist Anarchism almost effacing itself before Syndicalism, no longer scorning compromise by accepting more or less the Syndicalist solution as an inevitable stepping-stone. On the other hand, we see Individualists almost relapse into bourgeois fallacies—all this at a time when the misdeeds of authority, the growth of State encroachments, present a better occasion and a wider field than ever for real and outspoken Anarchist propaganda.

It has come to this, that at the French Communist Anarchist Congress held in Paris last year Individualism was regularly stigmatised and placed outside the pale of Anarchism by a formal resolution. If ever an international Anarchist Congress was held on these lines, endorsing a similar attitude, I should say good-bye to all hopes placed in this kind of sectarian Anarchism.

By this I intend neither to defend nor to combat Communism or Individualism. Personally, I see much good in Communism; but the idea of seeing it generalized makes me protest. I should not like to pledge my own future beforehand, much less that of anybody else. The Question remains entirely open for me; experience will show which of the extreme and of the many intermediate possibilities will be the best on each occasion, at each time. Anarchism is too dear to me that I should care to see it tied to an economic hypothesis, however plausible it may look to-day. Unique solutions will never do, and whilst everybody is free to believe in and to propagate his own cherished ideas, he ought not to feel it right to spread them except in the form of the merest hypothesis, and everyone knows that the literature of Communist and Individualist Anarchism is far from keeping within these limits; we have all sinned in this respect.

In the above I have used the terms "Communist" and "Individualist" in a general way, wishing to show the useless and disastrous character of sectional exclusiveness among Anarchists. If any Individualists have said or done absurd things (are Communists impeccable?), to show these up would not mean to refute me. All I want is to see all those who revolt against authority work on lines of general solidarity instead of being divided into little chapels because each one is convinced he possesses a correct economic solution of the social problem. To fight authority in the capitalist system and in the coming system of State Socialism, or Syndicalism, or of both, or all the three combined, an immense wave of real Anarchist feeling is wanted, before ever the question of economic remedies comes in. Only recognize this, and a large sphere of solidarity will be created, which will make Communist Anarchism stand stronger and shine brighter before the world than it does now.

laid, Individualism would grow stronger than ever in opposition to this. Whenever a uniform system prevails, Anarchists, if they have their ideas at heart, will go ahead of it and never permit themselves to become fossilised upholders of a given system, be it that of the purest Communism.

Will they, then, be always dissatisfied, always struggling, never enjoying rest? They might feel at ease in a state of society where all economic possibilities had full scope, and then their energy might be applied to peaceful emulation and no longer to continuous struggle and demolition. This desirable state of things could be prepared from now, if it were once for all frankly understood among Anarchists that both Communism and Individualism are equally important, equally permanent; and that the exclusive predominance of either of them would be the greatest misfortune that could befall mankind. From isolation we take refuge in solidarity, from too much society we seek relief in isolation: both solidarity and isolation are, each at the right moment, freedom and help to us. All human life vibrates between these two poles in endless varieties of oscillations.

Let me imagine myself for a moment living in a free society. I should certainly have different occupations, manual and mental, requiring strength or skill. It would be very monotonous if the three or four groups with whom I would work (for I hope there will be no Syndicates then!) would be organized on exactly the same lines; I rather think that different degrees or forms of Communism will prevail in them. But might I not become tired of this, and wish for a spell of relative isolation, of Individualism? So I might turn to one of the many possible forms of "equal exchange" Individualism. Perhaps people will do one thing when they are young and another thing when they grow older. Those who are but indifferent workers may continue with their groups; those who are efficient will lose patience at always working with beginners and will go ahead by themselves, unless a very altruist disposition makes it a pleasure to them to act as teachers or advisers to younger people. I also think that at the beginning I should adopt Communism with friends and Individualism with strangers, and shape my future life according to experience. Thus, a free and easy change from one variety of Communism to another, thence to any variety of Individualism, and so on, would be the most obvious and elementary thing in a really free society; and if any group of people tried to check this, to make one system predominant, they would be as bitterly fought as revolutionists fight the present system.

Why, then, was Anarchism cut up into the two hostile sections of Communists and Individualists? I believe the ordinary factor of human shortcomings, from which nobody is exempt, accounts for this. It is quite natural that Communism should appeal more to some, Individualism to others. So each section would work out their economic hypothesis with full ardour and conviction, and by-and-by, strengthened in their belief by opposition, consider it the *only* solution, and remain faithful to it in the face of all. Hence the Individualist theories for about a century, the Collectivist and Communist theories for about fifty years, acquired a degree of settledness,

East End, Rocker decided to see for himself. Finding a thriving Jewish anarchist movement, he joined the Jewish anarchist Arbeter Frait group and became a regular lecturer at its meetings. It was here that he met Milly Witkop, a Ukrainian-born Jew who would become his lifelong companion. For several years, Rocker remained a leader in the Jewish anarchist movement, even though he was a gentile.

With the advent of World War 1, Rocker was arrested and interned as an enemy alien after he made statements denouncing the war. He was eventually released as part of a prisoner exchange arranged through the Red Cross and returned to Germany. While in Germany, Rocker helped found the Free Worker's Union of Germany, which was organized on anarcho-syndicalist lines. In 1920, Rocker assisted in the founding of the International Worker's Association, a federation of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions. The Free Worker's Union of Germany eventually reached a peak of roughly 150,000 members, but membership steadily declined beginning in early 1920's.

Becoming increasingly concerned with the rise of fascism in Germany and the rest of Europe, Rudolf and Milly left Germany in 1933. After traveling around Europe for several months, they finally settled in the United States. Rudolf spent the last few decades of his life doing lecture tours and writing books on anarchism and nationalism. In 1956, Milly Witkop Rocker passed away. Two years later, in 1958, Rudolf died as well.

Rudolf Rocker was, throughout his life, an opponent of authoritarian social forms in all their forms. Much like Emma Goldman and other anarchists of the time, Rocker was a strong opponent of Bolshevism, stating:

"For two decades the supporters of Bolshevism have been hammering it into the masses that dictatorship is a vital necessity for the defense of the so-called proletarian interests against the assaults of counter-revolution and for paving the way for Socialism. They have not advanced the cause of Socialism by this propaganda, but have merely smoothed the way for Fascism in Italy, Germany and Austria by causing millions of people to forget that dictatorship, the most extreme form of tyranny, can never lead to social liberation. In Russia, the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat has not led to Socialism, but to the domination of a new bureaucracy over the proletariat and the whole people. ..."

Although dedicated to anarcho-syndicalism as his preferred method for bringing about an anarchist society, Rocker was also a self-professed "anarchist without adjectives". Rocker considered the different schools of anarchist thought to be:

"only different methods of economy, the practical possibilities of which have yet to be tested, and that the first objective is to secure the personal and social freedom of men no matter upon which economic basis this is to be accomplished."

Furthermore, while fully committed to the ideal of a completely free society, Rocker was not a Utopian. While in his youth he dreamed of

one great social revolution to quickly bring about a libertarian society, as he grew older he came more and more to the view that social revolution would need to be a more gradual process. Rocker stated that:

“I am an anarchist not because I believe anarchism is the final goal, but because there is no such thing as a final goal.”

Notable is the fact that Rocker had a deep understanding not only of social anarchism, but also the individualist anarchist schools of thought that originated in North America. The influence of the American individualist anarchist tradition is readily visible in the first chapter of his book “Anarcho-Syndicalism”:

“Anarchism is a definite intellectual current in the life of our times, whose adherents advocate the abolition of economic monopolies and of all political and social coercive institutions within society. In place of the present capitalistic economic order Anarchists would have a free association of all productive forces based upon co-operative labour, which would have as its sole purpose the satisfying of the necessary requirements of every member of society, and would no longer have in view the special interest of privileged minorities within the social union.”

Spending more than two decades of his life in the United States, Rudolf extensively studied the works of such libertarian visionaries as Josiah Warren, Lysander Spooner, and especially Benjamin Tucker. Rocker put this study to good use in his book “Pioneers of American Freedom”. In the book, Rocker writes glowingly of the American liberal and later libertarian tradition. Rocker even goes so far as to point out that the American anarchist tradition may be the first real libertarian movement, stating that:

“Anarchism existed in America at a time when no indication of an anarchist movement was to be discovered in Europe. Its basic economic and political ideas were already worked out by J. Warren before Proudhon conceived his great historical task. It must be regarded therefore as a part of American history, the recording of which would be defective and incomplete if one should overlook this side of intellectual life in America.”

Rudolf Rocker dedicated his life to the struggle for a free society. As a result he suffered imprisonment, harassment and assault, but gained the friendship and comradeship of hundreds in the quest for individual liberty. His life and actions should shine out like a guiding light to anarchists of all schools of thought everywhere.

By Adrian Atari

Adrian Atari is the pseudonym of a twenty-something individualist anarchist currently residing in Anchorage, Alaska. When he isn't advocating for a voluntary society and an end to wage slavery, Adrian enjoys hacking his gadgets, reading zen koans, and contemplating the universe. Adrian is a proud member of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Anarchism: Communist Or Individualist?—Both

ANARCHISM is no longer young, and it may be time to ask ourselves why, with all the energy devoted to its propaganda, it does not spread more rapidly. For even where local activity is strongest, the results are limited, whilst immense spheres are as yet hardly touched by any propaganda at all. In discussing this question, I will not deal with the problem of Syndicalism, which, by absorbing so much of Anarchist activity and sympathies, cannot by that very fact be considered to advance the cause of Anarchism proper, whatever its other merits may be. I will also try not to repeat what I put forward in other articles in years gone by as possible means of increasing the activity of Anarchists. As my advice was not heeded, it cannot, in any case, be considered to have hampered the progress of our ideas.

I will consider the theories of Anarchism only; and here I have been struck for a long time by the contrast between the largeness of the aims of Anarchism—the greatest possible realization of freedom and well-being for all—and the narrowness, so to speak, of the economic program of Anarchism, be it Individualist or Communist. I am inclined to think that the feeling of the inadequacy of this economic basis—exclusive Communism or exclusive Individualism, according to the school—hinders people from acquiring practical confidence in Anarchism, the general aims of which appeal as a beautiful ideal to many. I feel myself that neither Communism nor Individualism, if it became the sole economic form, would realize freedom, which always demands a choice of ways, a plurality of possibilities. I know that Communists, when asked pointedly, will say that they should have no objection to Individualists who wished to live in their own way without creating new monopolies or authority, and *vice versa*. But this is seldom said in a really open and friendly way; both sections are far too much convinced that freedom is only possible if *their* particular scheme is carried out. I quite admit that there are Communists and Individualists to whom their respective doctrines, and these alone, give complete satisfaction and leave no problem unsolved (in their opinion); these would not be interfered with, in any case, in their lifelong constancy to *one* economic ideal. But they must not imagine that all people are constituted after their model and likely to come round to their views or remain “unreclaimed” adversaries on whom no sympathy is to be wasted. Let them but look on real life, which is bearable at all only by being varied and differentiated, in spite of all official uniformity. We all see the survivals of earlier Communism, the manifold workings of present-day solidarity, from which new forms of future Communism may develop—all this in the teeth of the cut-throat capitalist Individualism which predominates. But this miserable bourgeois Individualism, if it created a desire for solidarity, leading to Communism, certainly also created a desire for a genuine, free, unselfish Individualism, where freedom of action would no longer be misused to crush the weaker and to form monopolies, as to-day.

Neither Communism nor Individualism will ever disappear; and if by some mass action the foundations of some rough form of Communism were