

George Engel on Anarchism

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This is the first occasion of my standing before an American court, and on this occasion it is murder of which I am accused. And for what reasons do I stand here? For what reasons am I accused of murder? Thee same that caused me to leave Germany - the poverty - the misery of the working classes.

And here, too, in this "free republic," in the richest country of the world, there are numerous proletarians for whom no table is set; who, as for the whole Wage class, outcasts of society, stray joylessly through life. I have seen human beings he struggle for existence among capitalist. Of gather their daily food from the garbage heaps of the streets, to quiet therewith their knowing hunger....

When in 1878, I came here from Philadelphia, I strove to better my condition, believing it would be less difficult to establish a means of livelihood here than in Philadelphia, where I had tried in vain to make a living. But here, too, I found myself disappointed. I began to understand that it made no difference to the proletarian, whether he lived in New York, Philadelphia, or Chicago. In the factory in which I worked I became acquainted with a man who pointed out to me the causes that brought about the difficult and fruitless battles of the workingmen for the means of existence. He explained to me, by the logic of scientific socialism, how mistaken I was in believing that I could make an independent living by the toil of my hands, so long as machinery, raw material, etc., were guaranteed to the capitalists as private property by the State. That I might further enlighten my mind in regard to these facts, I purchased with money earned by myself and family, sociological works, among them those of LaSalle, Marx, and Henry George. After the study of these books, it became clear to me why a workingman could not decently exist in this rich country. I now began to think of ways and means to remedy this. I hit upon the ballot box; for it had been told me so often that this was the means by which workingmen could better their condition.

I took part in politics with the earnestness of a good citizen; but I was soon to find that the teachings of a "free ballot box" are a myth, and that I had again been duped. I came to the opinion that as long as working-men are economically enslaved they cannot be politically free. It became clear to me that the working classes would never bring about a form of society guaranteeing work, bread, and a happy life by means of the ballot....

Soon enough I found that political corruption had burrowed through the ranks of the social-democrats. I left this party and joined the Inter-national Working People's Association, that was just being organized. The members of that body have the firm conviction that the workingman can free himself from the tyranny of capitalism only through force; just as all advances of which history speaks, have been brought about through force alone. We see from the history of this country that the first colonists won their liberty only through force; that through force slavery was abolished, and just as the man who agitated against slavery in this country, had to ascend the gallows, so also must we. He who speaks for the workingman to-day must hang. And why? Because this republic is not governed by people who have obtained their office honestly.

Who are the leaders at Washington that are to guard the interests of this nation? Have they been elected by the people, or by the aid of their money? They have no right to make laws for us, because they were not elected by the people. These are the reasons why I have lost all respect for American laws.

The fact that through the improvement of machinery so many men are thrown out of employment, or at best, working but half the time, brings them to reflection. They have leisure, and they consider how their conditions can be changed. Reading matter that has been written in their interest gets into their hands, and faulty though their education may be, they can nevertheless cull the truths contained in those writings. This, of course, is not pleasant for the capitalistic class, but they cannot prevent it. And it is my firm conviction that in a comparatively short time the great mass of proletarians will understand that they can

be freed from their bonds only through socialism.