

Anarchism in Hungary – an encyclopedia article

Anarchist tradition in Hungary survived for almost forty years from 1880s until 1919, and contained four different waves. The first wave was represented by the anarchist-influenced radical socialist group led by Ármin Práger and András Szalay, existed between 1881 and 1884. The radicals were well acquainted with the principles, revolutionary rhetoric and cultivation of the propaganda of the deed associated with Johann Most, a social democrat who became an anarchist. Germany's 'exceptional legislation' of 1878, which banned the socialist organizations influenced the organization of the group of Hungarian radicals in many ways. It had a direct influence in that the banned socialists requested and received - in the name of international workers' solidarity - assistance and accommodation in the Dual Monarchy for their colleagues escaping from Germany. Through personal and movement connections, a significant number of German socialists and anarchists settled in Austria and Hungary, and, with their intermediation, the radical revolutionary point of view could recruit many adherents. The 'radical-socialist' group did not reject violent means of struggle against the system, but they were crushed quickly by the firm intervention of the government in 1884.

By contrast, the later waves of Hungarian anarchism rejected the use of terrorism. In the 1890s, the non-violent ideal anarchism represented the second wave. Its representative, the philosopher Jenő Henrik Schmitt was convinced that verbal persuasion and true Christian moral example are the means to achieve social transformation. This approach, propagated in his newspapers – *Állam Nélkül* (Without State), *Erőszaknélküliség* (Non-Violence) – could not influence a wider urban circles. However, it influenced the peasant based Independent Socialist Party led by István Várkonyi and, through this, on the agrarian-socialist movements of the late 1890s. The party accepted the programme of abolition of rule and the state and ideal anarchism's complete non-violence, but it did not act by these anarchistic principles in

practice. Jenő Henrik Schmitt was therefore proved to be more important as philosopher and prophetic preacher than an ideologue of a movements. He withdrew from politics into the intellectual world of Gnosticism. Ideal anarchism remained politically marginalized its system of thinking survived only in the religious, messianistic peasants' sects. This radical- and anarchist-influenced peasant movement was forced back by the terrorist actions of the government. Its decline can be explained by the banning of its party congresses, the suppression of the harvest strikes, Várkonyi's arrest and the implementation of the so-called 'slave law'.

The rationalist, solidaristic anarchism that appeared with Ervin Batthyány – as the third wave of anarchism in Hungary – sought a different way out: after the turn of the century, it slid towards the labour movement's theory of class war, and anarcho-syndicalism. He edited anarchist newspapers such as *Testvériség* (Fraternity) and *Társadalmi Forradalom* (Social Revolution) in which he tried to unite anti-systemic forces along anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist ideas. Batthyány also took the idea of revolutionary education seriously and, in 1905, he founded a school to nurture critical thinking.

Batthyány and Schmitt were the two most significant figures in the history of anarchism in Hungary. Despite their differences, their lives, endeavours and conflicts proceeded along parallel tracks. Both achieved intellectual consciousness within the Western intellectual tradition, though these differed radically from one another: Batthyány proceeded from English rationalism, Schmitt from German metaphysics (and both returned to these roots at the end of their careers). Their shared basic principles were opposition to rule and opposition to politics – it followed from their theories that the creation of the new moral world order was not a political question. Yet the logic of the situation forced them both into active political involvement: the drift towards a schizophrenic position characterized by the antinomy of theoretical conviction and revolutionary practice forced them to abandon pure

theory. They made a series of compromises: between 1897 and 1899, Schmitt drew near to peasant socialism; between 1906 and 1908, Batthyány sought association with anarcho-syndicalism. The particular features of Hungarian political life, the high salience of the franchise question, the attacks of the social democratic party and the party's institutional appeal – which released even the opposition social democrats from its influence only fleetingly – all contributed to the difficulty of founding an anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist movement in Hungary at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Finally, the Budapest Anarchist Group emerged around Károly Krausz in 1919, as the fourth wave of Hungarian anarchism. The anarchists who operated legally under the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic (between March and July 1919) advocated three distinct paths: critical, revolutionary and cultural. Besides their mere existence, their journal, their programme and their attempt to establish a national federation are worthy of attention. Limited time and the rapid changes in the political situation largely prevented them to develop a theoretical generalization of their early criticism on the contradictory relationship between anarchism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Hungarian anarchism could flourish for relatively short periods of time. In the first case, the split in the Hungarian social democratic movement could be linked directly to an external factor: the split in the German and Austrian movement (1881-1884). In the second case, social democracy was incapable of covering the political space of the radicalizing agrarian movement (1897-1898). In the third case, Batthyány's efforts were multiplied by his material sacrifices and by the appeal of French anarcho-syndicalism, which was at the time enjoying its golden age (around 1904-1910). Finally, in the fourth case, the Bolshevik state briefly left time and space for the small group of theoretical anarchists, who were, however, unable to find a social base (1919). But these short periods proved to be exceptional. On the one hand, the strong institutional organization of social democracy, and on the other hand

state repression (the dispersal of the radical socialists in 1884; the suppression of the agrarian movement in 1897-1898; and the transfer of power to the Horthy régime (in 1919) stifled every anarchist initiative in Hungary.

The various European anarchist ideas and movements were confronted with a variety of challenges that were geographic, historical and cultural in nature. Anarchism could be strong structurally where there was democracy as in Western Europe and where consequently there was disappointment with democracy. It was also strong where democracy and anarchism were equally distant from reality and appeared only on a utopian horizon, as in Russia. Central Europe, including Hungary, was in a transitional position. Achieving democracy seemed only a few steps away and thus offered the opportunity for strong, optimistic expectations. The immediacy of democracy made it difficult for both pre-democratic and post-democratic anarchism to gain strengths. Thinkers in this region, sympathizing with liberalism and anarchism, endeavored to answer the question of societal changes with a hybrid theoretical solution. In essence all of them imagined a solution that combined the advantages of anarchy and democracy without the disadvantages of either. They wanted the people to come into power but detested power itself.

The group established by András Szalay, the Radical Workers' Party was an anarchist initiative within the emerging Social Democracy and as an internal opposition to it. The participants were not certain what to call themselves. They were hesitant to call themselves anarchists but they were sharply critical of Social Democracy even though they functioned within it. They were very much aware of the dilemma of democratic clout versus anarchist rejection.

In this regard perhaps Jenő Henrik Schmitt was the most interesting individual who was simultaneously very much Western and Eastern. Western because on a Christian basis and in Christ's name he rejected democracy, as though it had existed in Hungary, and

considered it a mendacious domineering system. He went so far as to remove the word democratic from the name of the Independent Socialist party. He was Eastern, because under the influence of Tolstoy and others he proclaimed worldly redemption and Gnostic teachings. In fact, he did not have a political program and had no positive utopia about a desirable and possible political system. This duality was united in the cult of non-violence because this was an equally Western and Eastern concept. Schmitt was probably the only exception of the Central European paradigm that blended democracy and anarchy while idealizing both.

Erwin Batthyány was originally a Western personality who shared the Western disillusionment with social democracy and believed in evolutionary practices like reformed schools, education, enlightenment and training on the British model. Politically he vacillated between Kropotkin's anarchism that he liked and the idea of "free Socialism" that was associated with William Morris. He also experimented with hybrid solutions. Particularly, when he wrote an article about socialism and anarchism being the two sides of the same coin. He urged that the followers of both unite not only tactically but strategically as well.

Károly Krausz also fits into this group. He simultaneously fought against the liberal capitalism of the Monarchy and against the Commune that modeled itself on Soviet Russia and introduced censorship. It is important to note, however, that initially the slogan "All Power to the Soviet" appealed to him indicating that he also perceived the need for a potential fusion of anarchy and democracy. He found that if the power belonged to the workers' collectives and not to the Party or the State, he could support it even though, as an anarchist, he should have rejected it. He became disillusioned with the Soviet Republic because the first Hungarian Communist regime was not true to the principles of a direct, participatory workers' democracy that it proclaimed and because the rule of the workers was replaced by the dictatorship of the Party.

On the European semi-periphery, it is the characteristic peculiarity of the history of Hungarian anarchism that the anarchist movements and the democratic initiatives echoed each other and, to some extent, were manifested in a reciprocal relationship,

András Bozóki
Professor of Political Science
Central European University, Budapest