

BOOKS AND THE ARTS

American anarchism revisited

JAMES J. MARTIN

The American as Anarchist: Reflections on Indigenous Radicalism, by David DeLeon. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 242 pp., \$14.00.

ONE MAY BE inclined to stand back in awe at Professor DeLeon's daring and ambitious effort in tackling all the subjects he has brought together in what amounts to little more than a 150-page interpretative essay. To attempt to wrap up something as broad and complicated as this is indeed bold, but not likely to overwhelm those who already know something about the numerous matters involved. And it

strikes this reader that the author is not the first to be dazzled and fascinated, and, ultimately, swamped, by his subject matter, and surely will not be the last. The richness and diversity and immense volume of the source material related to all the tendencies which its students tend to lump together under the designation "anarchism" will serve to attract curious and speculative investigators for a long time. But to call a large part of what is in this book an examination of "the American as anarchist" is both imaginative and generous.

Professor DeLeon's lateral digressions into sub-topics which sometimes graze the subject point up the problem of separating anarchism from many seemingly related sentiments and impulses. Professor DeLeon recognizes this on his first page, where he suggests that his prolegomenon might have been titled "The American Radical," probably a better choice. His generous sallies into recounting the nature and activities of liberal reformism of many sorts and in many times, and his numerous brief semi-disquisitions on the general nature of politics and political theory, serve to illustrate and also to entertain, but they are surely departures from what the title of the book promises to be of primary concern.

Professor DeLeon's plunge into the subject

provoked a reservation in this corner from the very start, as soon as I recognized the approach already taken by Eunice Minette Schuster in her *Native American Anarchism* in 1931, consisting of getting a running start by going back to the early 17th century New England divines in an effort to establish a pedigree for American anarchism by poring over the significance of their independent ideas concerning Church and State relations. I did not think this was valid nearly 40 years ago, and I still do not; I have always wondered how much of this was Schuster's own thinking, and how much of it was acquired from her mentor, Merle Curti. Now it is becoming an industry.

The important aspect of Professor DeLeon's work is his recognition that, in America, anarchism has been and is mainly a negative response to organization and power-gripping, and a resentment of their material and other advantageous consequences, and that it is a *tendency*, not a *program*. In this sense Americans do differ from the program-anarchists of Europe and elsewhere, but anarchism abroad is far from being exclusively devoted to programs, either in the past or now. The latter is so obviously a failure that persistence in its promotion and the endless recrimination in the anarchist press, especially that of Europe, as to what it should comprise, tends to make program-anarchism look slightly absurd to many Americans, even though the American scene has not been as innocent of program-anarchism's promotional propaganda as some might assume. And one must agree that not all of the non-American world has been obsessed with formulae, programs and manifestoes dedicated to supplying a substitute structure to that which they seek to terminate. Max Stirner, author

of the ultimate encouragement to individual rebellion and self-liberation without a suggested replacement for what is to be overthrown, probably hardly ever ventured outside the confines of his native Germany. The achievements of anarchists have been preponderantly by individuals, and there is a large part of this which remains unknown, though recognized, like the submerged part of an iceberg, and successful because of the consistent and intelligent low-profile tactics of those involved. The fiascoes of many "activists" stand in contradiction to this, spectacular, dramatic, appealing, but the result of involvement in fuzzily-conceived operations mainly encumbered by sentimentalism, martyr complexes and hazy unshared idealism, which latter is one of mankind's great and enduring menaces. (Omitted from this brief survey and analysis is an attempted classification of the trendy "anarchist" of the last 15 years, with a "Smash the State" button on his lapel, with, as likely as not, a check from some branch of the government partially subsidizing his education nestling in his pocket, and a comfortable job in some part of the Establishment shortly after attaining a few post-teenage years.)

There is also in Professor DeLeon's narrative a theme of greater or lesser emphasis that somehow or other there simply is far too much middle class presence attending the thought and literary effort of anarchism, and that there is an excessive absence of proletarian presence, expressed or implied in several places. But intellectuals rarely stained by real toil have for a long time held that there is a neglected reservoir of 24-karat anarchism among the "workers," though the ranks do not seem to build up appreciably despite generations of

paean to "labor" from anarchist typewriter theorists and strategists, a stumbling block to understanding what it is all about for over a century. In 16 periods of employment at things ranging from operating a construction project jack-hammer to assembly line factory work, firing boilers, and railroad freight-handling, those with anarchist tendencies whom I encountered in that time, in the 1930s and '40s, I could have safely gathered within the confines of a phone booth.

People not already gifted with a rebellious temperament rarely respond to libertarian appeals of any kind, and the latter ranks are fortunate if they just maintain their ratio to the rest of the populace, year in and year out. No amount of proselytization ever made a race horse out of a cow, and one may bury someone with servile tendencies in copies of *The Ego and His Own* and produce nothing except suffocation. As for "labor," in America still mainly a largely shifting and rather amorphous part of the social order, the movement of many from proletarian to middle-class status (most polls of working people reveal that few of them do not *already* consider themselves part of the middle class) tends to make it a vast reservoir of conventional fixed views. Therefore it is hardly to be wondered at that the largest part of anarchist literary and agitational personalities have pronounced middle class moorings. Most of other ideas and thinking comes from there too.

This leads to a further speculation. Professor DeLeon might have included a few dozen other sub-topics in his collection while he was at it, and swept the scene from the cooperative movement (he largely slights monetary radicalism) and the decentralist homesteader impulse to the Jehovah's

Witnesses and the right-wing tax-revolt and the related bewildering variety of survival-school activities. The JW's have surely been more anti-state than any religiously motivated "protest" group of the 17th-19th centuries, as their stands during 20th century American wars have plainly demonstrated (what other religious group dared to call World War I "a work of Satan" and patriotism "a certain delusion"?)

The point is that once

yond the confines of what one may conventionally designate or acknowledge as "anarchist"; that they may have little or no acquaintance with nor relationship to anarchist reading matter or anarchist oratory has no special significance. They simply lack a chronicler willing to include them in the narrative.

Experts estimate 15-million or more Americans who should do so by law consciously neglect to file an income tax return, to the im-

archist *tendencies*? What elements in the American Agriculture Movement can be isolated as specifically anarchist-inspired? If we are going to deal with anarchism as a *tendency*, there is far more to American anarchist inclinations than what pedagogues maintain, and literary evidence substantiates.

To change the subject, or, rather, to bring up another aspect of it, is there a reason why so little anarchist theory comes to grips with the land question? The urban/industrial nature of so much visible radicalism tends to present a lop-sided view of the problem of sheer survival in the world, with too many assuming that major attention can be devoted to perpetual turning-over of clichés related to power and the abstractions radicals have always so dearly loved to reformulate, the closest we may have come to perpetual motion. They seem to think that agriculture is not work and farming populations can be ignored as non-proletarians, and that the whole situation will be transfigured some day by the conversion of farms to factories, their operation assumed by people alien to the soil, after the resident population has been liquidated. Everything is resolved as different facets of middle class bourgeois futility (Jules Romain's remarks in a postwar book that the French *petite bourgeoisie* never forget their peasant origins, but in America the decimation of the rural population has been accompanied by an Orwellian-style brain-burning following which the new urbanites fail to remember much of anything, and food presumably results from the realization of a spontaneous act of the will of Horn and Hardart Automat customers). This rumination is a result of contemplating Professor DeLeon's cavalier and abrupt dismissal of Henry



FRIEDRICH ENGELS

“Max Stirner, author of the ultimate encouragement to individual rebellion, hardly ever ventured outside his native Germany.”

you embark on an omnibus assembling of every social impulse which radiates any degree of anti-statist negativism and any measurable opposition to and rejection of organized power, you end up with an immense entourage that gets far be-

hind but suppressed vexation of our home security state police, the Internal Revenue Service (or Bureau, as it was known 60 years ago, in its infancy.) What portion of them are to be incorporated in this registration of native American an-

George, creating the impression that it was all a romantic bourgeois caper of a century ago, ignoring the continuity of Georgist thinking and reassessments to this day, the so-called "Georgist anarchists," among which one may number Frank Chodorov, their impressive literature and persistent dwelling upon this very basic problem, one which grows more severe with every upward leap in population totals. Which gets us back to something just as basic, while we are at it.

Perhaps we might profit from a study of the *family* as the basic well-spring of anarchist *tendencies*, instead of considering it as the font of the inculcation of reverence for God and Country, exclusively. For surely this is the place where we all start, and where fundamental ideas relating to self and to mutual aid are first engendered, the incubation place where dedication to one's welfare and to that of one's closest associates is first emphasized, and neglect or deliberate flouting of the demands of State abstractions and impersonal institutionalized power first is seen, felt, and emulated. We may have barely scratched the surface in the exploration of the place of origin of anarchist *tendencies*.

There is of course a vast difference between formal history and what has really happened. But for some, including this writer, there is a growing preference for achievement, no matter how little and obscure, as against the illusions of achievement. Libertarians should count their gains this way, not in prestigious public formalities, even when concerning themselves with victories against State power; announcing the triumph of "anarchy" or the coming inevitableness of libertarianism is comparable to the decreeing of production. It is the small and unblazoned successes of the unmemori-

alized that count so far, because anarchism as a "movement" has been true mainly in the sense that it is known that anarchists are inclined to roll from side to side while sleeping; one needs the vision of Superman or the Six-Million Dollar Man to detect otherwise.

Another criticism should be entered here, aimed at the traditional compartmentalizing of the ideologies of the varying sects and gurus of anarchism and its cousins. The fuzz-sorting expeditions resulting in the expectable and conventional Left-Right dichotomies may be an aid to the writer trying to file the various elements neatly in his mind, but they are really all just fragments of a common assemblage, the *Outsiders*. (The revolt against this Left-Right business is under way, and when it finally hits, it is going to leave a large part of our most glib socio-politico-economic mouthpieces in a state of advanced aphasia,

Professor DeLeon is vastly proud of his bibliography, which amounts to a sixth of the total pages of his opus, so much so that he published it separately four or five years before the rest of his book, under the title *Threads in the Black Flag*. It no more than other bibliographies reflects the endless cannibalism that goes on in the bibliography-construction industry, and should be especially useful to those first approaching the subjects he has treated. The updated portions, dealing mainly with the writing of the last decade, will be found quite helpful, though one may quarrel long and loud as to what some of these people and their topics are doing in a book primarily advertised as a work dealing with American anarchism. One may also internalize reservations at his bright and cheerful self-serving in casually suggesting that his is the best (p. 1 of *Threads*, p. 197 of this book), but

cialists, one should consult for example the incredible 90-page listing exclusively of works by and about Max Stirner, worldwide, in Hans G. Helms' *Die ideologie der anonymen Gesellschaft*. Those readers with some acquaintance with the subject may find the chapter notes more useful than the bibliography.

The last chapter of Professor DeLeon's book, another one sixth of his total text, is a sweeping socio-political overview of American life in recent times, written in the bravura manner of C. Wright Mills, William H. Whyte and Vance Packard, with just a touch of sociological bafflegab here and there, but which has about as much to do with the title of the book as bullfighting has to do with agriculture. On the last two pages he abandons his role of detachment and analysis and volunteers his own suggestions in the field of socio-economic proposals which he believes might straighten out our disorderly world and move it on to a desired plateau of adjustment to the uneven demands of our multitudinous populace. But to this writer, upon serious speculation devoted to his recommendations, they boil down to a recipe for our conversion into one vast *kibbutz*.

One may hope that the stealthy and cowardly ideological ploy aimed at defenestrating Professor DeLeon from his employment, which was rather widely explored some months ago, has failed, and that he continues to be able to work, since it is this reviewer's contention that, in the light of his best chapter, the fifth, he is capable of preparing a better book than this.

James J. Martin is the author of numerous historical books and articles, including the classic, *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in American, 1827-1908*.

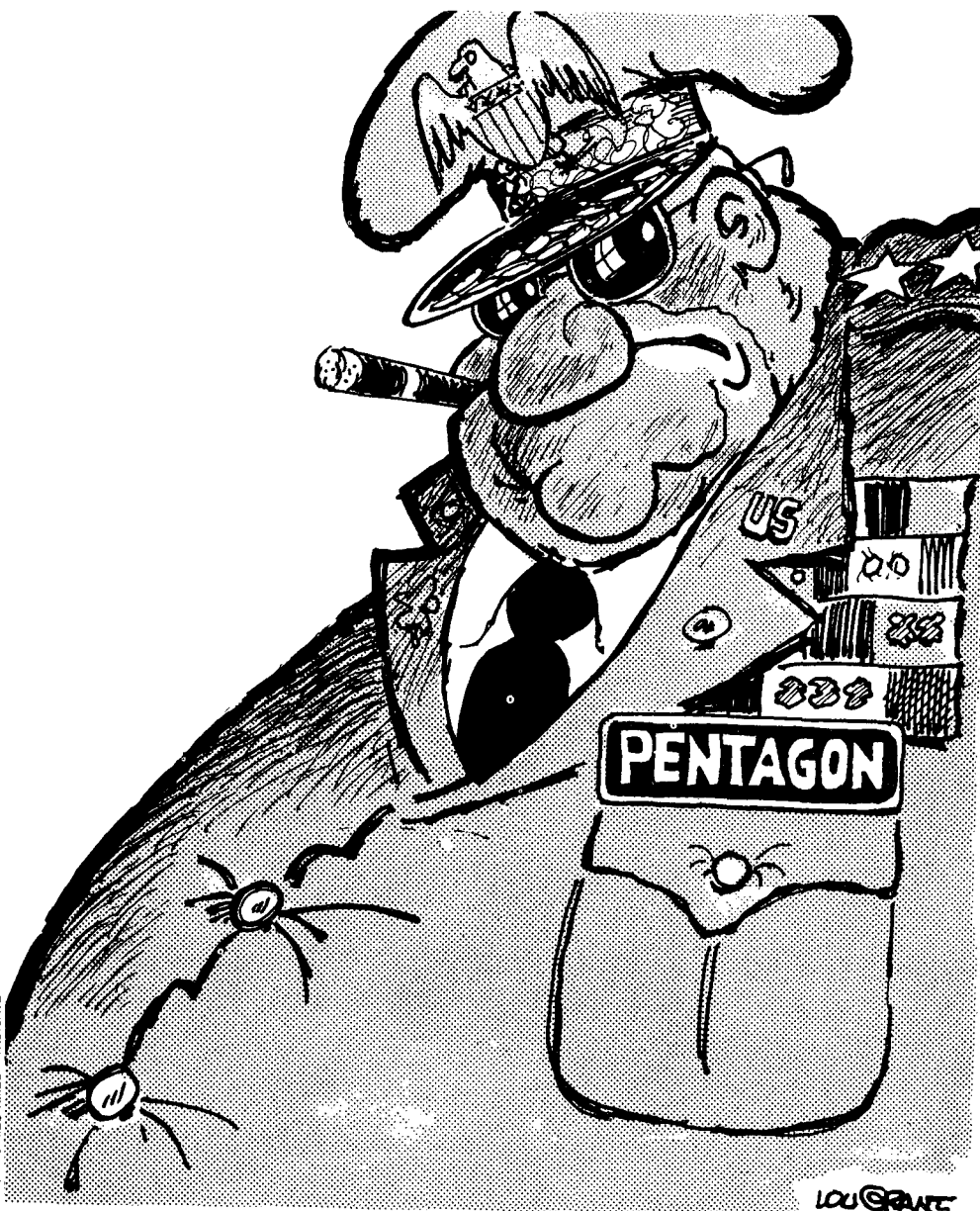
"People not already gifted with a rebellious temperament rarely respond to libertarian appeals of any kind."

as they have for this whole century come up with little else as an analytical and descriptive tool.)

And whether Americans form some kind of human pool in which the sentiments of libertarianism are presumed to gestate in a way superior to the rest of the world may be tried by future tests as the American State grows older and more rigid. Noble and hyperthyroid generalizations incorporating the usual frontier geopolitical self-praise aside, Americans have tended to behave in as herd-like a way as any other peoples, when placed under stress, and in most of their wars their behavior has been the answer to a slave-holder's dream.

surely there can hardly be more than a taxiful of those experienced with anarchist literature who will agree with Professor DeLeon's genial promotion of Murray Bookchin as "probably the most systematic and intelligent of all anarchist theorists, past and present" (p. 199); this seems to be the sort of casual and gratuitous press-agentry which contemporary scholarship considers "creative." I am of the conclusion that the 19th century originals will be being read worldwide when the derivatives of the 20th will have been entirely forgotten. To get an idea of the difference between general bibliographies such as appends this book and those of spe-

LOS ANGELES TIMES SYNDICATE



Back to basics

FELIX MORLEY

Memoirs of a Dissident Publisher, by Henry Regnery. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 260 pp, \$12.95.

TOWARDS THE CLOSE of her posthumously published autobiography Agatha Christie wrote: "I have never given in to anyone over what I write." The emphasis is her own.

From the other side of the fence that separates author and publisher the equivalent might well be said by Henry Regnery. His *Memoirs of a Dissident Publisher* reveal a man who knew in advance

the sort of manuscript he wanted to see in print, almost regardless of commercial prospects. Unfortunately there was never a Christie-Regnery affiliation.

As Regnery says: "The publisher's role is often misunderstood." It is his business to find a market for the literary wares that he finances and this expensive subsidization of course entitles him to make editorial suggestions. To these the author may or may not respond cooperatively and on the manner in which minds meet will depend the harmony of the relationship. The fledgling writer will probably be deferential, since to break into hard

covers is a big step up the ladder to literary success. Even Agatha Christie admits to being malleable at the outset, though in later years publishers would line up to court her. Yet there is little doubt that her life story would have gained in readability from some discriminating pruning of trivia.

The best relationships between author and publisher are therefore to be expected in the case of a small firm, with more likelihood of personal appreciation on both sides. We have been moving away from this condition. Many of our historic publishing houses have become subsidiaries of huge conglomerates, where pressure

for rapid profit on quick turnover is dominant. Regnery, in his modest way, has always been an eclectic rather than a "dissident" publisher. He has dissented vigorously from the belief that literary production should conform to popular taste. But he has never sought to indoctrinate his own ideas.

As related in these memoirs Regnery moved into book publishing through the medium of the old *Human Events* pamphlets, in which he and I were closely associated. Several of the immediate post-war studies emphasized that what was left of Western Civilization would collapse in Europe if Germany were reduced to the "goat pasture" that some Americans seemed to think desirable. In presenting this viewpoint Henry may have been influenced by his German ancestry and his student years in that country. But the theme seemed equally vital to me, with a completely English background.

While several of Regnery's early books were distinctly "revisionist"—such as Professor Charles C. Tansill's *Back Door To War*—the young publisher soon broadened his reach. There were important Regnery books on education and a distinct leaning towards the philosophic and religious, as in the story of *Great Saints*, by the Swiss Protestant theologian Walter Nigg. In its comments on this wide variety this memoir reveals a highly discriminating rather than a perversely dissident character. From one of his authors (Wilhelm Roepke) Regnery selects the quotation which "I like best of all." It is: "The highest interests of the community and the indispensable things of life have no exchange value and are neglected if supply and demand are allowed to dominate the field."

But behind this cultural 41