

VI LANDAUER

LANDAUER'S step beyond Kropotkin consists primarily in his direct insight into the nature of the State. The State is not, as Kropotkin thinks, an institution which can be destroyed by a revolution. "The State is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently." Men stand to one another to-day in a "statual" relationship, that is, in one which makes the coercive order of the State necessary and is represented by it and in it. Hence this order can only be overcome to the extent that this relationship between men is replaced by another. This other relationship Landauer calls "People". "It is a connexion between people which is actually there; only it has not yet become bond and binding, is not yet a higher organism." To the extent that people, on the basis of the processes of production and circulation, find themselves coming together again as a People and "growing together into an organism with countless organs and members", Socialism, which now lives only in the minds and desires of single, atomized people, will become reality—not in the State "but outside, without the State", and that means *alongside* the State. This "finding themselves together" of people does not, as he says, mean the founding of something new but the actualization and reconstitution of something that has always been present—of Community, which in fact exists alongside the State, albeit buried and laid waste. "One day it will be realized that socialism is not the invention of anything new but the discovery of something actually present, of something that has grown." This being so, the realization of socialism is always possible if a sufficient number of people want it. The realization depends not on the technological state of things, although socialism when realized will of course look differently, begin differently and develop differently according

to the state of technics; it depends on people and their spirit. "Socialism is possible and impossible at all times; it is possible when the right people are there to will and do it; it is impossible when people either don't will it or only supposedly will it, but are not capable of doing it."

From this glimpse into the real relationship between State and Community some important things ensue. We see that, practically speaking, it is not a question of the abstract alternative "State or No-State". The Either-Or principle applies primarily to the moments of genuine decision by a person or a group; then, everything intermediate, everything that interposes itself, is impure and unpurifying; it works confusion, obscurity, obstruction. But this same principle becomes an obstruction in its turn if, at any given stage in the execution of the decision reached, it does not permit *less* than the Absolute to take shape and so devalues the measures that are *now* possible. If the State is a relationship which can only be destroyed by entering into another relationship, then we shall always be helping to destroy it to the extent that we do in fact enter into another.

To grasp the subject fully we must go one step further. As Landauer pointed out later, "State" is status—a state, in fact. People living together at a given time and in a given space are only to a certain degree capable, of their own free will, of living together rightly; of their own free will maintaining a right order and conducting their common concerns accordingly. The line which at any time limits this capacity forms the basis of the State at that time; in other words, the degree of incapacity for a voluntary right order determines the degree of legitimate compulsion. Nevertheless the *de facto* extent of the State always exceeds more or less—and mostly very much exceeds—the sort of State that would emerge from the degree of legitimate compulsion. This constant difference (which results in what I call "the excessive State") between the State in principle and the State in fact is explained by the historical circumstance that accumulated power does not abdicate except under necessity. It resists any adaptation to the increasing capacity for voluntary order so long as this increase fails to exert sufficiently vigorous pressure on the power accumulated. The "principal" foundations of the power may have crumbled, but power itself does not crumble unless driven to it. Thus the dead can rule the living. "We see," says Landauer, "how something dead to our spirit

can exercise living power over our body." The task that thus emerges for the socialists, i.e. for all those intent on a restructuring of society, is to drive the factual base-line of the State back to the "principlial" base-line of socialism. But this is precisely what will result from the creation and renewal of a real organic structure, from the union of persons and families into various communities and of communities into associations. It is this growth and nothing else that "destroys" the State by displacing it. The part so displaced, of course, will only be that portion of the State which is superfluous and without foundation at the time; any action that went beyond this would be illegitimate and bound to miscarry because, as soon as it had exceeded its limits it would lack the constructive spirit necessary for further advance. Here we come up against the same problem that Proudhon had discovered from another angle: association without sufficient and sufficiently vital communal spirit does not set Community up in the place of State—it bears the State in its own self and it cannot result in anything but State, i.e. power-politics and expansionism supported by bureaucracy.

But what is also important is that for Landauer the setting up of society "outside" and "alongside" the State is essentially "a discovery of something actually present, something that has grown". In reality a community does exist alongside the State, "not a sum of isolated individual atoms but an organic cohesion that only wants to expand and, out of many groups, form a great arch". But the reality of community must be roused, must be summoned out of the depths where it lies buried under the incrustations of the State. This can only happen if the hard crust that has formed on mankind, if their own inner "statehood" is broken open and the slumbering, immemorial reality aroused beneath. "Such is the task of the socialists and of the movements they have started among the peoples: to loosen the hardening of hearts so that what lies buried may rise to the surface: so that what truly lives yet now seems dead may emerge and grow into the light." Men who are renewed in this way can renew society, and since they know from experience that there is an immemorial stock of community that has declared itself in them as something new, they will build into the new structure everything that is left of true community-form. "It would be madness," Landauer writes in a letter to a woman who wanted to abolish marriage, "to dream of abolishing the few forms of union that remain to us! We need *form*, not formlessness. We need *tradition*." He who builds, not arbitrarily

and fruitlessly, but legitimately and for the future, acts from inner kinship with age-old tradition, and this entrusts itself to him and gives him strength. It will now become clear why Landauer calls the "other" relationship which men can enter into instead of the ordinary State-relationship, not by any new name but simply "People". Such a "People" comprehends also the innermost reality of "Nationhood"—what remains over when "Statehood" and politicization have been superseded: a community of being and a being in manifold community. "This likeness, this equality in inequality, this peculiar quality that binds people together, this common spirit, is an actual fact. Do not overlook it, you free men and socialists; socialism, freedom and justice can only be accomplished between those who have always been united; socialism cannot be established in the abstract, but only in a concrete multiplicity that is one with the harmony of the peoples." The true connexion between Nation and socialism is discovered here: the closeness of people to one another in mode of life, language, tradition, memories of a common fate—all this predisposes to communal living, and only by building up such a life can the peoples of the earth constitute themselves anew. "Nothing but the rebirth of all peoples out of the spirit of regional community can bring salvation." And Landauer understands "regional community" quite concretely, in the reappearance—if only in a rudimentary state—of the traditional community-forms and in the possibility of preserving them, renewing and expanding them. "The radical reformer will find nothing to reform, now or at any other time, except what is there. Hence, now and at all times it is well for the regional community to have its own boundaries; for part of it to be communal land, for the other parts to be family property for house, yard, garden and field." Landauer is counting here on the long memories of communal units. "There is so much to which we could add whatever outward forms of life still contain living spirit. There are village communities with vestiges of ancient communal property, with peasants and labourers who remember the original boundaries that have been in private possession for centuries; communal institutions embracing agricultural work and the handicrafts." To be a socialist means to be livingly related to the life and spirit of the community; to keep on the alert; to examine with impartial eye whatever vestiges of this spirit yet lurk in the depths of our uncommunal age; and, wherever

possible, to bind the newly created forms firmly to the forms that endure. But it also means: to guard against all rigid delineation of ways and methods: to know that in the life of man and human communities the straight line between two points is often the longest; to understand that the real way to socialist reality is revealed not merely in what "I know" and what "I plan", but also in the unknown and unknowable; in the unexpected and the not to be expected; and, so far as we can, to live and act accordingly at all times. "We know absolutely no details," says Landauer in 1907, "about our immediate way; it may lead over Russia, it may lead over India. The only thing we know is that our way does not lead through the movements and struggles of the day, but over things unknown, deeply buried, and sudden."

Landauer said once of Walt Whitman, the poet of heroic democracy whom he translated, that, like Proudhon (with whom in Landauer's opinion he had many spiritual affinities), Whitman united the conservative and the revolutionary spirit—Individualism and Socialism. This can be said of Landauer too. What he has in mind is ultimately a revolutionary conservation: a revolutionary selection of those elements worthy to be conserved and fit for the renovation of the social being.

Only on these assumptions can we understand Landauer as a revolutionary. He was a man from south-western Germany, of the Jewish middle class, but he came much nearer to the proletariat and the proletarian way of life than Marx, also a south-west German of the Jewish middle class. Again and again Marxists have condemned his proposals for a socialist Colony as implying a withdrawal from the world of human exploitation and the ruthless battle against it, to an island where one could passively observe all these tremendous happenings. No reproach has ever been falser. Everything that Landauer thought and planned, said and wrote—even when it had Shakespeare for subject or German mysticism, and especially all designs whatsoever for the building of a socialistic reality—was steeped in a great belief in revolution and the will for it. "Do we want to retreat into happiness?" he wrote in a letter (1911). "Do we want our lives for ourselves? Do we not rather want to do everything possible for the people, and long for the impossible? Do we not want the whole thing—Revolution?" But that long-drawn struggle for freedom which he calls Revolution can only

bear fruit when "we are seized by the spirit, not of revolution, but of regeneration"; and the individual revolutions taking place within that long "Revolution" seem to Landauer like a fire-bath of the spirit, just as in the last analysis revolution is itself regeneration. "In the fire, the ecstasy, the brotherliness of these militant movements" says Landauer in his book *The Revolution*, which he wrote in 1907, at my request, "there rises up again and again the image and feeling of positive union through the binding quality, through love—which is power; and without this passing and surpassing regeneration we cannot go on living and must perish." It is important, however, to recognize without illusion that "although Utopia is prodigally beautiful—not so much in *what* it says as in *how* it says it—the end which revolution actually attains is not so very different from what went before". The strength of revolution lies in rebellion and negation; it cannot solve social problems by political means. "When a revolution," Landauer continues, speaking of the French Revolution, "ultimately gets into the terrible situation that this one did, with enemies all round it inside and out, then the forces of negation and destruction that still live on are bound to turn inwards and against themselves; fanaticism and passion turn to distrust and soon to blood-thirstiness, or at least to an indifference to the added terrors of killing; and before long terror by killing becomes the sole possible means for the rulers of the day to keep themselves provisionally in power." Thus it happened (as Landauer, his view unchanged, wrote ten years later about the same revolution) that "the most fervent representatives of the revolution thought and believed in their finest hours—no matter to what strange shores they were ultimately flung by the raging waves—that they were leading mankind to a rebirth; but somehow this birth miscarried and they got in each other's way and blamed each other because the revolution had allied itself to war, to violence, to dictatorship and authoritarian oppression—in a word, to politics". Between these two statements Landauer, writing in July, 1914, on the threshold of the first World War, expressed the same critical insight in a particularly topical form. "Let us be under no illusion," he says, "as to the situation in all countries to-day. When it comes to the point, the only thing that these revolutionary agitations have served is the nationalist-capitalist aggrandisement we call imperialism; even when originally tinged with socialism they were all too easily led

by some Napoleon or Cavour or Bismarck into the mainstream of politics, because all these insurrections were in fact only a means of political revolution or nationalist war but could never be a means of socialist transformation, for the sufficient reason that the socialists are romantics who always and inevitably make use of the means of their enemies and neither practise nor know the means of bringing the new People and the new humanity to birth." But already in 1907 Landauer, basing himself on Proudhon, had drawn the obvious conclusion from his views. "It will be recognized sooner or later that, as the greatest of all socialists—Proudhon—has declared in incomparable words, albeit forgotten to-day, social revolution bears no resemblance at all to political revolution; that although it cannot come alive and remain living without a good deal of the latter it is nevertheless a peaceful structure, an organizing *of* new spirit *for* new spirit and nothing else." And further: "Yet it is the case, as Gottfried Keller says, that the last triumph of freedom will be dry. Political revolution will clear the ground, literally and in every sense of the word¹; but at the same time those institutions will be preparing in which the confederation of industrial societies can live, the confederation destined to release the spirit that lies captive behind the State." This preparation, however, the real "transformation of society, can only come in love, in work and in stillness". Hence it is obvious that the spirit that is to be "released" must already be alive in people to an extent sufficient for such "preparation", so that they may prepare the institutions and the revolution as "clearing the ground" for them. Once again Landauer refers to Proudhon. In the revolutionary epoch of 1848 Proudhon had told the revolutionaries: "You revolutionaries, if you do *that* you will make a change indeed." Disappointed, he had other things to do afterwards than repeat the catchwords of the revolution. "Everything comes in time," says Landauer, "and every time after the revolution is a time before the revolution for all those whose lives have not got bogged in some great moment of the past." Proudhon went on living, although he bled from more than one wound; he now asked himself: "'If you do that,' I said—but *why* have you not done it?" He found the answer and laid it down in all his later works, the answer which

¹ "Den Boden frei machen" also means to "free the land", make it available to the people. The phrase is used in this latter sense in the next paragraph. Trans.

in our language runs: "Because the spirit was not in you."

Again, we are indebted to Landauer rather than to Kropotkin for one vital clarification. If political revolution is to serve social revolution three things are necessary. Firstly: the revolutionaries must be firmly resolved to clear the ground and make the land available¹ as communal property, and thereafter to develop it into a confederation of societies. Secondly: communal property must be so prepared in institutions as to ensure that it can be developed along those lines after the ground has been cleared. Thirdly: such preparations must be conducted in a true spirit of community.

The significance of this third item, the "spirit", for the new society-to-be is something that none of the earlier socialists recognized as profoundly as did Landauer. We must realize what he means by it—always assuming of course that we do not understand spiritual reality merely as the product and reflection of the material world, as mere "consciousness" determined by the social "being" and explicable in terms of economic-technical relationships. It is rather an entity *sui generis* that stands in close relation to the social being, without, however, being explicable at any point in terms of the latter.

"A degree of high culture is reached," says Landauer, "when the various social structures, in themselves exclusive and independent of one another, are all filled with a uniform spirit not inherent in or proceeding from these structures, but reigning over them purely in its own right. In other words: such a degree of culture arises when the unity pervading the various forms of organization and the supra-individual formations is not the external bond of force, but a spirit dwelling in the individuals themselves and pointing beyond earthly and material interests." As an example Landauer cites the Christian Middle Ages (truly the sole epoch in the history of the West comparable in this respect with the great cultures of the Orient). He sees the Middle Ages as characterized not by this or that form of social life, such as the County Commune, the guilds, corporations and trade-confraternities, the city-leagues, nor even by the feudal system, the churches and monasteries and chivalric orders—but by this "totality of independent units which all interpenetrate" to form "a society of societies". What united all the variously differentiated forms and "bound

¹ See footnote, p. 52.

them together at the apex into a higher unity, a pyramid whose point was not power and not invisible in the clouds, was the spirit streaming out of the characters and spirits of individual men and women into all these structures, drawing strength from them and streaming back into the people again". How can we invoke this spirit in a time like ours, "a time of unspirituality and therefore of violence; unspirituality and therefore mighty tension within the spirits of individuals; individualism and therefore atomization, the masses uprooted and drifting like dust; a time without spirit and therefore without truth?" It is "a time of decay, and therefore of transition". But because this *is* so, in such a time and only in such a time will the spirit be conjured to reappear; such conjurations are the revolutions. What, however, makes room for the spirit is the attempt at realization. "Just as the County Communes and numerous other instruments of stratification and unification were there *before* the spirit filled them and made them what they have meant to Christendom; and just as a kind of walking is there before the legs develop, and just as this walking builds and fashions the legs—so it will not be the spirit that sends us on our way, but our way that will bring the spirit to birth in us." But this road leads "those who have perceived how impossible it is to go on living as they are, to join together and put their labour at the service of their needs. In settlements, in Societies—despite all privation". The spirit that animates such people helps them along their common way, and on this way and on it alone can it change into the new spirit of community. "We socialists want to give spirit the character of reality so that, as unitive spirit, it may bring mankind together. We socialists want to render the spirit sensible and corporeal, we want to enable it to do its work, and by these very means we shall spiritualize the senses and our earthly life." But for this to happen the flame of the spirit must be carefully tended in the settlements lest it go out. Only by virtue of living spirit are they a form of realization; without it they become a delusion. "But if the spirit lives in them it may breathe out into the world and suffuse all the seats of co-operation and association which, without it, are but empty shells, gaols rather than goals. We want to bring the Co-operatives, which are socialist form without socialist content, and the trades-unions, which are valour without avail—to Socialism, to great experiments." "Socialism," says Landauer in 1915,

"is the attempt to lead man's common life to a bond of common spirit in freedom, that is, to religion." That is probably the only passage where Landauer, who always eschewed all religious symbolism and all open avowals of religion, uses the word "religion" in this positive and binding sense—uses it to express the thing he craves: a bond of common spirit in freedom.

This state of affairs should not wait on our expectations; it should be "attempted" and a beginning be made. In his striving for "common spirit" Landauer knows that there is no room for this without the land, i.e. that it can only have room to the extent that the soil once more supports man's communal life and work. "The struggle of socialism is the struggle for the soil." However, if the great upheaval is to occur in the "conditions of soil-ownership" (as it is called in the twelve Articles of the Socialist League founded by Landauer), "the workers must first create, on the basis of their common spirit—which is the capital of socialism—as much socialist reality, and exemplify it, as is possible at any time in proportion to their numbers and their energy." Here a beginning *can* be made. "Nothing can prevent the united consumers from working for themselves with the aid of mutual credit, from building factories, workshops, houses for themselves, from acquiring land; nothing—if only they have a will and begin." Such is the vision of the community, the archetype of the new society, that floats before Landauer's eyes; the vision of the socialist village. "A socialist village, with workshops and village factories," says Landauer in 1909, continuing Kropotkin's thought, "with fields and meadows and gardens, with livestock large and small, and poultry—you proletarians of the big cities, accustom yourselves to this thought, strange and odd as it may seem at first, for that is the only beginning of true socialism, the only one that is left us." On these seemingly small beginnings (on whether they arise or not), depends the revolution and whether it will find something worth fighting for—something which the hour of revolution itself is unable to create. But whether it finds this something and secures its full development, on this depends in its turn whether socialist fruit will ripen on revolutionary fields apart from the usual political crop.

Although, therefore, there is no beginning, no seed for the future other than what people now living under the rule of

capitalism can achieve in their life together, in a common life based on common production and consumption, despite all the weariness, misery and disappointment—yet Landauer is far from regarding these results as the final form of realization. Like Proudhon and Kropotkin he, too, has little faith in hitching the demands of socialism to the dreams, visions, plans and deliberations of men living to-day. He knows well enough “the strange circumstance that this precarious beginning, this ‘Socialism of the Few’—the settlement—bears many resemblances to the hard and toilsome communism of a primitive economy”. Nevertheless the “essential thing” for him is “to accept this communist-looking state not as an ideal but as a necessity for the sake of socialism, as a first stage—because we are the beginners”. From there the road will lead “as quickly as may be” to a society, in outlining which Landauer blends the ideas of Proudhon and Kropotkin: “a society of equalitarian exchange based on regional communities, rural communities which combine agriculture with industry.” But even here Landauer does not see the absolute goal, only the immediate objective “so far as we can see into the future”. All true socialism is relative. “Communism goes in search of the Absolute and can naturally find no beginning but that of the word. For the only absolute things, detached from all reality, are words.”

Socialism can never be anything absolute. It is the continual becoming of human community in mankind, adapted and proportioned to whatever can be willed and done in the conditions given. Rigidity threatens all realization, what lives and glows to-day may be crusted over to-morrow and, become all-powerful, suppress the strivings of the day after. “Everywhere, wherever culture and freedom are to dwell in unison, the various bonds of order must complement one another, and the fixity of the whole must bear in itself the principle of dissolution. . . . In an age of true culture the order of private property, for instance, will bear in itself, as a revolutionary, dissolvent and re-ordering principle, the institution of *seisachtheia*¹ or Year of the Jubilee.” True socialism watches over the forces of renewal. “No final security measures should be taken to establish the millennium or eternity, but only a great balancing of forces, and the resolve periodically to renew the

¹ A “shaking off of burdens”, the name given to the “disburdening ordinance” of Solon, by which all debts were lowered. Trans.

balance. . . . “Then may you cause trumpets to be blown throughout the land!” The voice of the spirit is the trumpet. . . . Revolt for constitution; reform and revolution the one rule valid for all time; order through the spirit the one intention—these were the great and holy things in the Mosaic order of society. We need them again, we need redirection and convulsion through the spirit, which has no desire to fix things and institutions in their final forms, but only to declare itself everlastingly. Revolution must become the accessory of our social order, the corner-stone of our constitution.”