

The Red Vienna Reader
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Adler, Victor. “Ludwig Anzengruber”¹

Anon [Victor Adler]. „Ludwig Anzengruber“ *Arbeiter-Zeitung* 13 Dezember 1889, s. 1-2. <http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=aze&datum=18891213&seite=1>

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Translated and annotated with a commentary by Paul Werner.

[Last revised July 29, 2017]

Today in Vienna the greatest dramatic poet of our day is to be laid to rest. After a life full of struggle, misery, disappointment and bitterness he died at one of those rare moments when the high and the mighty were moved to begrudge him his laurels.² The people from whom he came, that he loved, that he depicted in lasting portraits with all their virtues and vices, their hopes and despair, his people themselves did

¹ Editorials in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* were usually unsigned; Adler's authorship was subsequently confirmed by David Josef Bach in D. B. [David Josef Bach], „Anzengruber und Viktor Adler“, *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (27 January 1920), 2; the attribution is repeated in „Victor Adler, Ein Aufsatz über Kunst“, *Kunst und Volk* 3. Jahrgang, Nummer 3 (November 1928): 1.

² Ludwig Anzengruber (born 1839) was the grandson of a farmworker and son of a petty functionary with literary ambitions. After years as a travelling actor he returned to Vienna, where in 1870 he had his first and only major theatrical success with *The Parish Priest of Kirchfeld* while working as a police official, 4th class. Over the next two decades he was employed as an editor and writer of short stories and naturalist plays whose usual topic was the conflicts between the petite bourgeoisie or peasantry and the lower classes. He died on December 10, 1889. Anzengruber's plays were frequently revived during the Interwar Period in Vienna, and his Volkisch qualities made him popular with Nazi filmmakers.

not know him; even today they barely know him. Of all that's outrageous about the present "Order" perhaps the most outrageous is not that the People are abandoned to physical hardship and tormenting needs, nor their political subjugation: it's that on top of all the People are excluded from enjoying the greatest treasures of the Spirit.³ The great thoughts of our thinkers, the mighty creations of our artists are merchandise; like everything else they've become merchandise; and as with all merchandise they're accessible only to those who can pay to possess them.⁴ Art and Knowledge, designed to make all of the People happy, to inspire and to elevate them, are the object of basest profiteering by those who speculate in plays they never wrote as others speculate in cloth they never wove or coal they never extracted. Thus the bright jewels of the Mind are thrown to clumsy peacocks who, without love or understanding, find them just fit enough to adorn their vainglorious tails with their splendor. The People, the mothering womb of Genius, enjoy no more of the products of its fertility than they enjoy the fruit of their own labor.

Even if their prosperity was as great as their misery, their freedom as great as their enslavement, by the simple fact that the great mass of the People remain excluded from the radiant heaven of the mind without which life seems not worth living to the wise, our present situation stands inexorably condemned. See with what lofty yearning the miserable mass, the "mob" in rags with hungry stomachs, thirsts after every narrow streak of light that's allowed to pass through the thick curtain, while the high and mighty, the silk-hat mob lounging on plump velvet

³ The word *Ordnung* "Order," echoes the expression *Vergehen gegen die öffentliche Ruhe und Ordnung*, "An offense against public peace and order," that concludes the legal decision against the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* printed above the present article. For "Spirit" read the German word *Geist*, encompassing at once the mind, the Spirit, the intellect and the Humanities.

⁴ Adler uses the commonplace German word *Ware*, meaning merchandise, translated as "commodities" in *Capital* Book One, Part One.

cushions, looks down, bored and satiated, on the greatest productions of the human mind.

The monopoly on the products of human brain-labor will first be broken along with the monopoly on the products of human manual labor.

Ludwig Anzengruber was a poet of the People; no-one has better understood and represented the Austrian character.⁵ A long sequence of popular playlets, most of them in Austrian dialect, bear witness, as does an impressive number of short stories. As a dramatic poet he stands closer to Shakespeare than any other among the younger generation.⁶ Yet he has been valued by few, and for a long time he did not attain the fame of the manufacturers of tear-jerkers and philistine burlesques, or the leering joke-writers who dominate the Stage. Why? The reason's obvious. Anzengruber was sober and the audience wants to be teased. Anzengruber had a sense of humor and the audience wants fun. And whenever they were forced to recognize him, whenever they could no longer ignore the poet's voice they resigned themselves grudgingly, resentfully. They felt, perhaps without knowing it, that Anzengruber was not one of them.

⁵ The term "Volk" is used twice in this sentence, and it is used repeatedly throughout the text. The term was commonly used to indicate a "people" without necessarily defining the group as racial, or cultural, or national; see Paul Weindling, "A City Regenerated: Eugenics, Race, and Welfare in Interwar Vienna," in *Interwar Vienna. Culture between Tradition and Modernity*, ed. Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), 81-114.

⁶ "You yourself should have *shakespearified*. Instead, I consider your *schillering*—transforming individuals into mere mouthpieces of the *Zeitgeist*—to be your most significant error [*Du hättest dann von selbst mehr shakespearisieren müssen, während ich Dir das Schillern, das Verwandeln von Individuen in bloße Sprachröhren des Zeitgeistes, als bedeutendsten Fehler anrechne*]. „Marx an Ferdinand Lassalle in Berlin; London, 19. April 1859;" reprinted in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Briefe. Januar 1856 - Dezember 1859. Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels Werke [MEW]*, Vol. 29 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1979), 592. https://marxwirklichstudieren.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/mew_band29.pdf. Marx plays on the name *Schiller* and the verb *schillern*, "to shine forth in society, to impress." As Adler suggests throughout, Anzengruber (like Shakespeare) created characters who reflect the conflicts within society, as opposed to the hero of Lassalle's play *Franz von Sickingen* who merely reflects the author's "higher" view.

We are far from proclaiming him a Socialist; economic issues were alien to him. But he felt the cutting contradictions in our society, and with the innocent love for truth of a real poet he expressed what he saw and felt. In each of his plays a man steps forth to express these contradictions, a man who is not like the others, who thinks and loves Humanity. Wurzelepp in *The Parish Priest of Kirchfeld*, Steinklopferhanns in *The Cross-Signers*, the Solitary in *Steel and Stone*, Hubmeier in *A Stain on her Honor*, all have fallen in Society and out of it, and they know it, and they say so.⁷ This "trash" by means of which the whole staid, respectable society of peasants and burgers and their complacent virtuousness receive a harsh condemnatory look, speaks the language of truth. And that made the poet uncomfortable.

Anzengruber was a rebellious nature like Beethoven, like Richard Wagner, thus the prolonged war against these greats—conducted openly for a long time, and then increasingly covertly.⁸ The general acclaim of the bourgeoisie reached him only once: an enemy of the Clericals, his “Parish Priest of Kirchfeld” occurred at the time when the Austrian bourgeoisie had its last attack of liberalism.⁹ This made him popular for

⁷ Wurzelepp: Traditional figure of the plain-speaking peasant; Steinklopferhanns: “Hanns the Stone-Breaker;” “The Cross-Signers:” *Die Kreuzelschreibern*, illiterates who sign a document with a cross; see Gustav Pollak, “The Peasant Drama in Austria. Ludwig Anzengruber” in *Franz Grillparzer and the Austrian Drama* (New York: Dodd, Mead 1907), 15-29. <https://ia801409.us.archive.org/26/items/franzgrillparze01pollgoog/franzgrillparze01pollgoog.pdf>

⁸ Adler is referencing Richard Wagner’s own *Beethoven* of 1870. The irony—which would not have escaped an alert and educated reader—is that Wagner describes Beethoven (and Wagner himself by implication) as an inner-directed consciousness mediating the metaphysical concept of an eternal German *Volk*, whereas Adler uses the two composers, and Anzengruber as well, as examples of an outward-directed consciousness whose creative achievements are the reflection of their social situation rather than any metaphysical element; see, Richard Wagner, *Beethoven in Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, Volume 5, translated by William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul Trench, Trübner & Co.), 67; <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wlpr0133.htm>. Adler’s views on “absolute music” (music without any material referent) are comparable to the practice of his friend and protégé Gustav Mahler.

⁹ The success of the play was due in no small part to its political message, a condemnation of clerical intolerance in the years following the abrogation of the 1855 Concordat that had given a virtual monopoly on education and civil procedures to the Catholic Church and had served as a pretext for Germany’s war against Austria in 1866. See Pollak, *op. cit.*, 15-17.

a short time. The “People’s German Theater,” in which the only people who find seats are those with time and money, should honor him by rights; but commodified Taste demands slick comedies, and the luxury of genuine poetry is a rare self-indulgence.

Thus the man they will bury tomorrow was not allowed to reach his full potential. He himself sensed it: the wings of his genius were hobbled by the oppressiveness, the apathy, the intellectual shallowness, the narrowmindedness of those classes to whom alone he was able to make himself heard. But the People to whom he belonged, to whom he spoke, he could not reach. What would have become of Anzengruber in a free country, under humane conditions, cannot be foreseen. The art-loving bourgeoisie stunted him, as it left Schiller and Feuerbach to starve, as it drove Wagner to flee to the protection of a splendor-loving prince.¹⁰

Anzengruber died in petty, meager circumstances while the Lindau’s, Moser’s, and whatever the names for the poetasting lackeys of the Bourgeoisie, dwell in palaces and dine with the Greats of the earth.¹¹ Do not let the pomp with which Anzengruber will be buried tomorrow, fool you: what they like best about him, is that he’s dead.

But the day will come when our artists will be able to speak to the people; when the dividing wall will fall that isolates them from those out of whose hearts they speak; when Art will be the common good of all

¹⁰ Engels’ *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* was published in 1886 in *Die Neue Zeit*, of which Adler’s friend and collaborator Karl Kautsky was the editor. It was reprinted in 1888 along with the first publication of Marx’s *Feuerbach Theses*. Engels designates both Schiller and Feuerbach as idealistic philosophers whose spiritual affinity with the German Bourgeoisie did not preserve them from being rejected by that class. Adler lumps Richard Wagner with them to suggest that Wagner, too, was one of those bourgeois idealists rejected by the Bourgeoisie.

¹¹ Paul Lindau and Gustav von Moser, authors of *comédies de boulevard*.

who have hearts and minds to grasp it. That wall will fall when the chains fall.

COMMENTARY

“We lost the best man, perhaps the only one who might have been up to the task,” wrote Sigmund Freud (1918) upon the death of Victor Adler on November 11, 1918; the “task” was the leadership of the Austrian Republic, founded the following day, and which Adler more than anyone else had helped to bring about (p. 311).

Born in Prague in 1852, Victor [or Viktor] Adler was, like Freud himself, of a generation of Jews empowered by the Habsburg’s lifting of civil and political restrictions in the second half of the nineteenth century. Like Freud, Adler studied medicine as an assistant to Theodor Meynert at the University of Vienna: Meynert’s theories of human behavior would later be associated by Freud (1930, p. 71) with “Socialism” with reference to Meynert’s concept of “Mitleid,” or empathy as an inborn trait (McGrath 1974, p. 43 sq).

Adler’s began his involvement in politics alongside Georg Ritter von Schönerer, the proto-fascist who, along with the populist mayor of Vienna Karl Lueger, built a movement that used “emotional manipulation” and “new methods of advertising” (Rabinbach 1983, pp. 11-12) as “potent tools for a twentieth-century politics of mass psychology” (McGrath 1974, p. 167). Adler’s rejection of these methods drove him toward Socialism and a reliance on the rational enlightenment of the Working Class.

The 1866 war between Germany and the Habsburg Empire and the subsequent suppression of the Socialist movement in Germany gave Adler leeway to build the Social-Democratic Worker's Party (*SDAPÖ*) as an independent force, with the support of Karl Kautsky, the pre-eminent Marxist theoretician of his day, and Friedrich Engels who, with Marx, had long fought to stem the theoretical deviations of the German Social Democrats—including deviations in theories of Culture and Education. Adler and Engels developed a warm personal relationship, based in part on Adler's considerable skills in Marxist theory, in part on a shared highly cultured background (Kautsky 1912, Adler 2012).

1889 was a busy year. On January 1 Adler and Kautsky formally launched the Austrian Social-Democratic Party. In April the Party organized a successful strike of Vienna's tram-drivers. On July 12 the first issue of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* appeared and in Paris on July 14th the Second International was born. Meanwhile the authorities brought Adler up on charges of sedition; he was convicted and sentenced on June 27; his appeal was rejected on December 7, the same day the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* was seized and destroyed by the authorities. A week later the newspaper displayed top left the legal decision for its seizure; below that a call for the workers to prepare for the coming Mayday and the eight-hour work-day; below that Adler's eulogy for Anzengruber, translated here.

It's widely argued that certain bourgeois economic theories originally critiqued by Marx have been appropriated by Vulgar Marxists under the guise of Marxism itself. The same can be said of Marx's thoughts on Culture, which are inextricably linked with his political and economic theory and his own cultural background. In his Introduction to the *Grundrisse* Marx (1857) had critiqued the aesthetic theories of Friedrich Schiller—theories originally derived from the Kantian epistemology that Marx had addressed earlier on. The role of Art, according to Schiller,

was to provide the passive masses with a vision of a “Realm of Freedom,” a reflection of an idealized world that would lead them to the Future (Buonfino 1975). For Marx, however, cultural production was inextricably bound with the prevalent forms of social reproduction. The social function of art—a “mythologizing” function—was to organize relations among producers and consumers by modeling those relations as objective reflections of the world: the content of Art, however revolutionary or utopian in appearance, could serve as the justification for its own system of production; conversely, the revolutionary value of any given work of art was proportionate to its historical distance from the actual conditions of its production. Thus, any truly revolutionary activity—including those involving culture—must address before all else the relations among producers and among consumers. As Adler himself states, “The monopoly on the products of human brain-labor will first be broken along with the monopoly on the products of human manual labor.”

Marx and Engels (1859) had criticized the German political organizer Friedrich Lassalle for his tendency to put hero-worship and hierarchical organizing ahead of the liberation of the working class. The major fault of Lassalleanism was its willingness to sacrifice the wider goals— “the extension of democracy to social life as a whole, and in particular to the organization of production”—to the Party’s need for political power (Bottomore 1983, p. 497). Marx and later Engels would continue to oppose the Lassallean tendencies in Germany and in Austria, where “There were sharp divisions between the followers of the German Lassalleans, who stressed ‘state help’ [...] and the advocates of [a] ‘self-help’ movement of credit and consumer cooperatives, vocational training courses, and the moral development of the working classes [...]” (Rabinbach 1983, p. 8). Such divisions were most pronounced in Austria, where a rigid autocratic system left Bildung or

“cultural improvement” the only available means of organizing. For many of Adler’s generation the most urgent task was the promotion of democratic equality over stultifying hierarchical relationships. In this context, one should not confuse his references to Shakespeare, Schiller or Beethoven with Lassallean calls to hero-worship (Holmes 2006); rather, these and similar figures were common tropes in the correspondence between Marx, Engels and Adler: Revolution was not the annihilation of the Bourgeois Enlightenment but its *Aufhebung*.

Still, the fact that references to Shakespeare or Feuerbach might have seemed distant to Adler’s audience begs the question, what that audience was—or rather, *were*. The *Arbeiter-Zeitung* was not, nor could it ever hope to be, a journal addressed exclusively to “The People,” but rather one where the revolutionary intellectuals, the petite bourgeoisie and the proletariat might find common ground. Adler does not call for the Working Class to emulate the “Great Men,” but for solidarity between the progressive cultural bourgeoisie—even the petite bourgeoisie of which Anzengruber was a representative—and the workers.

In 1920, shortly after the founding of the First Republic, David Josef Bach (1920), Cultural Editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and head of the *Sozialistische Kunststelle* (Socialist Art Section) reprinted Adler’s article, explaining its context: six weeks after the publication of this article and two weeks before he began serving his sentence, Adler had written to the elderly writer Marie Eber-Eschenbach to ask permission to run one of her short stories in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Unfortunately, wrote Bach, Adler was unable to meet the publisher’s fee. The lesson drawn by Bach was the lesson originally stressed by Engels (1893): an overemphasis on the predominance of economic factors to the exclusion of all others ultimately leads to the preservation of that dominance in all aspects of social relationships, including Culture. Now, Bach suggested, it was intellectuals and artists who were

called to join in solidarity with the Working Class; now, at last, it might be possible to tear down the curtains erected by an all-encompassing economic system. Adler's was not a call for the worker's responsibility to the producers of Culture, but for the producers of Culture's responsibility to the workers.

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