

(The following text is my manuscript of a lecture about “free love” at the 4<sup>th</sup> conference of the Anarchist Studies Network in Loughborough, 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> September 2016. An elaborated German version of it will be published in the journal *Erkenntnis* which you can find as download at the following website: <http://www.ramus.at>.)

**Dr. Maurice Schuhmann**

**Free Love – for whom? “Free love” between patriarchy, homophobia and liberation**

### **(Introduction)**

Dear comrades, dear colleagues,

since the outgoing 19<sup>th</sup> century the topic of “free love” has been a central aspect of anarchistic theory and practice, in Europa as well as in the USA. It is an equally common theme in classic anarchism as in neo-anarchism. In the light of that background I consider it important to critically evaluate and challenge that concept. As far as the era is concerned, I will focus on the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as far as the location is concerned, I will focus on both Germany and France.

In the encyclopaedia of anarchy (*Lexikon der Anarchie*), edited by Hans-Jürgen Degen, Hubert van der Berg defines the concept as follows:

“The anarchistic idea of free love for the most part draws on ideas of a rearrangement of love life, sexuality and a relationship between the sexes similar to those in paradise, as they have been developed by theorists of utopia in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely by Charley Fourier in his conception of a “new love world” (see Charles Fourier 1977) that had an on-going impact not only on the anarchistic discourse about love and sexuality in France, but in other countries as well. (...) Anarchistic free love though was not so much an element or even essential feature of an integral utopia – as in Fourier's work. When discussed more and more in the anarchistic media of the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was rather a reaction to the question of women's rights, to the women's movement demanding equality in politics, economy and culture.”

I am going to use this definition as a basis on which to work.

The anarchistic discourse about “free love” so far has only been investigated more closely in the American context. Neither the German nor the French one have been analysed in depth until now. But you can still occasionally find references and attempts of a classification within secondary literature on individual anarchists like Erich Mühsam, John Henry Mackay or E. Armand or anarchistic positions related to questions of sexuality.

I don't intend to outline the whole discourse but rather to critically evaluate the discourse on “free love” by reference to particular protagonists and organisations that represent various positions in the anarchistic discourse. Specifically I want to show the discussion style in the context of patriarchy and homophobia – unfortunately the anarchistic movement hasn't been quite clear of that either.

In the first part I will focus on the German discourse. Within that frame I will focus on

- Erich Mühsam (1878-1934)
- John Henry Mackay (1878-1934)
- the Syndikalistischer Frauenbund (1921-1933)
- Silvio Gesell (1862-1930)

The anarchist and bohemian Erich Mühsam, albeit being married, was an important advocate of “free love” in Germany.

Apart from Mühsam John Henry Mackay may be considered the most important exponent. Besides, he was an important proponent of the emerging homosexual movement in Germany, so his position at the same time represents an anarchistic-homosexual approach to the topic.

Additionally I am interested in the female discourse, which I think is a feminist discourse. I will draw on the discussion within the Syndikalistischer Frauenbund to give an example for that.

In an excursion I will speak about the controversial economist Silvio Gesell. Although not an anarchist himself, he was still linked to it and German anarchists discussed his concept of “free love”.

The second part of my speech will be slightly shorter than the first one and will address the French discourse. To avoid repetitions after speaking about Germany I will speak about E. Armand (1872-1962) and his journal *L'en-dehors* (1922-1939), i.e. I will focus on individual anarchism.

## **German discourse**

The German historian Ulrich Linse was the first one to try and categorise the discourse about free love in Germany, in his study about organised anarchism in the German Empire (*Organisierter Anarchismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich*). He discerned to different positions within (the German) anarchism:

“Free love is praised as an alternative to the ‘constraint’ of marriage, and not only so by the bohemian anarchists but by the working class anarchists as well (...). The common word though must not conceal a characteristic difference: For bohemians it initially meant simple promiscuity; whereas for workers free love did exactly not mean ‘sexual rampancy’ but that love and marriage were based on ‘voluntariness’.”

## **Erich Mühsam and free love**

Erich Mühsam was bohemian and anarchist at the same time. In his first publication Mühsam – who had a lifelong (homoerotic) relationship to the writer

Johannes Nohl – addressed the issue of homosexuality, but you can find traits of misogyny in his works as well.

His most important piece regarding “free love” is the play *Die Freivermählten*, dedicated to Frank Wedekind. (The term “Frei-Verwählte” was common at that time; Ernst Thiem had already published a play with the same title.) Although Mühsam had already written the play in 1909 it was only published in 1914 – and then banned immediately afterwards.

In this play an unmarried couple, though living together without certificate – so in “concubinage” –, nevertheless behaves like married people do. The woman is the former lover of Camillo Rack, an advocate of free love, who ended the relationship in order to give her the opportunity to freely unfold. In the end though he fails because of this love for that woman. Secondary characters include a young artist and a polyamorous couple that familiarises the young artist with this concept. They live their love in a reflected way, fulfilled with freedom-awareness and without any jealousy.

Mühsam's biographer Heinz Hug defines the ideal promoted here as follows:

“a relationship between two individuals, where both only account to themselves, not to any convention.”

Mühsam not only wrote this play, which was hardly received, but also held speeches about the topic. In his memoirs *Ausgeschert aus Reih' und Glied* the anarchist Kurt Wafner recounts how, as a teenager, he heard him speak, and quotes Mühsam with the following statement:

“Free love means to leave the decision exclusively to feeling or instinct. (...) But there are one thing you must always be aware of, in particular the young men among you: that freedom applies to man and woman equally. Never force your female partner to do things she doesn't want to do.”

In the *Internationale* – the journal of the anarcho-syndicalist Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschland – Mühsam wrote in 1932:

“Man – neither male nor female – has not been made by nature to only be gravitated to one single, matching individual. It is not possible to have command of sexual drive without deteriorating it. Jealousy as a means of ensuring the affinity to one person exclusively only works for persons who absolutely believe in authority ... All relationships of love are based on mutuality. But this mutuality is not cancelled by the person who has several relationships but by the person who requests a mandatory one-to-one relationship. There is no possibility to derive general rules or moral regulations from sensually motivated persons who just found each other and fulfil a temporary desire, as long as not violence, abuse, economic dependency or seducement of not yet developed children and persons bare of their free will destroy the way to power negotiation and this mutuality.”

In this text Mühsam advocates frequent theses about polyamory.

## **John Henry Mackay and “free Love”**

For the German discourse about free love John Henry Mackay, a German-Scottish author, was an important exponent as well. He is known as a pioneer of the German homosexual movement and because of his texts that even had an effect beyond the country's borders (they were already translated into English and French during his lifetime).

His positioning towards "free love" has two main aspects:

- Free love as opposing model to marriage
- Free love as liberation of love

The following poem clarifies his criticism of marriage:

#### Marriage

They had to go through life together but never could stand by each other.  
They became tired and old and further toiled themselves obstinately.  
One way or the other, both of them were beyond remedy.

He also criticised marriage in his novel *Menschen der Ehe*.

Similar to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon he shows a kind of homosexual sexism in utterances like the one below:

"No woman is absolutely without slyness."

In that text he characterizes married people as "persons of commonness", i.e. he accuses them of smugness. Mackay's protagonist presents "free love" as a counter model:

"I only know one relationship between two human persons and between man and woman which I perceive as worthy: a relationship that is based on independency and that enables to worship each other. Since the master always despises the servant and the servant always hate his master."

Mackay also demanded freedom of love in a poem with the title "Free Love":

"May love be free. No chains should fetter hands that have their own free will. Maybe you are blinded by your first temperamental choice – but you shall still be free. Man shall come to a woman and woman to a man as freely as the winds blow above. Love shall be free, and then – only – you can speak of love, moral enforcers who begrudge us our luck and who despise authentic lust of life and who dispraise what you are not able to understand. Go away! Your days are numbered. Nature with all its strength has awakened within us and quashed your laws and morals as well as you and your power in one single flap".

The poem was published in the series *Der Sturm* (Zurich, 1888).

The issue of free love is also a main topic in his novel *Der Freiheitssucher*, a kind of individualistic manifest, and in *Die Anarchisten*. Those both works are considered as his programmatic texts where he outlines his own anarchistic philosophy.

He especially fights against the bourgeois spectre of "free love" meaning ubiquitous prostitution – and counterattacks from his anarchistic position:

“It is that enforcement only which I detest. I would never raise an objection against two persons who deliberately come together and who deliberately stay together.”

To liberate love for him not only meant emancipation from the constraints of church and state but also to terminate the heterosexual standardization.

As a homosexual and an activist he was closely linked to the Wissenschaftlich-Humanitäres Komitee, which was initiated by Magnus Hirschfeld. He used the pseudonym “Sagitta” to sing about the “unnamed love” that he called so due to the fact that at that time there was no adequate denomination for homosexual love but only pathologizing terms. In his *Bücher der namenlosen Liebe* which he wrote under the pen name Sagitta, he said:

„This love is a kind of love like any other kind of love, not better, neither worse – and if it is real love, it brings as many blessings as any other love. To fight for this love should never lead to a fight against another love since each kind of love has its own right and subsists on the same sources. (...) The position of the opposite sex may be absolutely wrong today (in all classes) – but to hinder and deny its development does not mean to turn foes into friends, but to turn the foes of today into irreconcilable foes of tomorrow and ever. Above all this would be an enormous misunderstanding of the great law of future: This law is freedom. Freedom though includes everyone and excludes none.”

### **Der Syndikalistische Frauenbund**

It is striking that this discourse about “free love” is dominated by male voices. But still, there was a discussion within the feminist wing. Cornelia Regin spoke about free love as an alternative concept in contrast to the bourgeois marriage concept where men always could operate more freely than their women. Advocates of the Syndikalistischer Frauenbund said about “free love” that it meant:

“a partner chosen on a voluntary basis, practising love by one's own volition, lead by harmony and based on accountability to oneself and society.”

Regin thought of the Syndicalists' position as a refinement of traditional partner relationships.

Ulrich Klan and Dieter Nelles quote an unnamed female activist in their study *Es lebt noch eine Flamme*:

“It seemed to be common to think that ‘free love’ meant that a group's women were available for every ‘comrade’. I though understood that free love meant for me to have the freedom to choose my men and at a point of time which I chose – so it meant above all that I had the right to say ‘No’.”

You can see a good example of the problematic nature of this issue in the text *Das Geschlechtsproblem* (1929) by Hertha Barwich, published in the magazine *Der Frauen-Bund*.

„The liberation of sexual love entails the risk of unhalting sexual love.“

Other texts as well complained about the fact that some comrades seemed to consider women only as sexual objects.

The Spanish *Mujeres Libres* addressed this issue in the 30ies more than once. "Free Love" should not be regarded as an invitation to libertinage but was closely linked to the equality of both sexes and their liberated co-existence. Marriage – as an institution that resembles a cage to imprison the woman – was rejected. Propaganda for "free love" and well-known advocates of the idea – like Red Emma in the USA – did not spring from the *Syndikalistischer Frauenbund*. The theoretic foundation of the discussion within the *Syndicalist Women's Group* mainly came from Emma Goldman, the workers' doctor Fritz Brupbacher and the feminist Helene Stöckler.

### **Excursus: Silvio Gesell**

Considering the background that the anarchistic criticism of marriage was, among other aspects, a criticism of the economic basis – namely, that the woman was economically dependent on her husband and marriage therefore became a kind of "legal prostitution" – it seems relevant enough to address this issue.

Silvio Gesell's idea of a "mothers' rent" seems to be worth a look here. Gesell, himself close to anarchism, developed his concept of "free money" based on Proudhon's economics.

Similar to the anarchists he criticised that economic aspects influenced love. He demanded love to be clear of influence by the state, the church or economics.

For him it was an important aspect that women should be economically independent, thus his idea of a "mothers' rent". He already wrote explicitly about that concept in his text *Natürliche Wirtschaftsordnung*. But then you can also see a part of the problem here since he determines the specific role of "the woman" to be that of "the mother". Women – i.e. mothers – should become economically independent thanks to an unconditional basic income. She does not have to marry or remain married for economic reasons. Gesell though at the same time promotes a "higher cultivation" as he writes in his late text *Der abgebaute Staat* (1927). An independent woman shall look for an adequate partner and will not have to take an "inferior" partner out of sheer emergency.

Gustav Landauer belonged to Gesell's detractors. Among other aspects he criticised that Gesell considered the family to be the nucleus of a future society.

### **French discourse**

It is useful to take a few references from Jean Maitron's *Le mouvement anarchiste en France* to classify the French discourse. Maitron discerned between the "union libre" as an idea of anarchist communism and the "amour libre" as an idea of individualist anarchism. Below we will only speak about the idea of the individualist anarchists where "amour libre" means the same as "camaraderie amoureuse".

Similar to Germany, in France “free love” primarily existed in bohemian circles, for example among the friends of the journal *L'Anarchie* (1905-1914) like Rétif (= Victor Serge). Often the same people kept company here who also were part of the individualist anarchism movement.

For their theory E. Armand (=Lucien Ernest Juin) was important who wrote about the “camaraderie amoureuse” in *L'en-dehors* (1922-1939) as well as in the *L'encyclopedie anarchiste*, published by Sebastien Fauré, you could also find the term in newer dictionaries. According to Roger Bousset (*Les mots de l'anarchie*) the phrasing “camaraderie amoureuse” only means “free love” but it also included accepting male and female homosexuality – while E. Armand still considered these to be abnormal – as well as incest. This last point is a specific of the French discourse, which you can retrace back to the famous and infamous writer Marquis de Sade and to the socialist Charles Fourier who knew his works. Both can be considered as progenitors of the French anarchism. For E. Armand free love always implies polyamorous relationships – “l'amour pluriel” – without condemning monogamy provided that it is based on a deliberate decision involving both partners. At least in his later years he accepts this kind of relationship whereas his original concept was strongly promoting polyamory.

E. Armand is a good example for this debate since his text about “free love” and sexuality were also translated into Spanish and Italian. So he not only had influence in France but in other countries as well.

Following the investigation by Gaetano Manfredonia and Francis Rosin (*E. Armand et “la camaraderie amoureuse”*) the debate about that topic started in 1924 and should become one of the key issues of the journal.

Armand's definition of the term “camaraderie amoureuse” is stunningly utilitarian. In his text *La camaraderie amoureuse*, published in 1930, he simply writes:

“Sexual camaraderie is the cooperation of producing and consuming love.”

This does not only mean a differentiation from the classical model of marriage but also from traditional relationships in general that, according to E. Armand, are characterized by the “destruction of the autonomy” of the involved partners. In contrast he promotes the concept of “camaraderie” and says:

“Sexual camaraderie as we understand it means to retain the couple, the family and the concept of living together (which might be considered an emergency solution by individualists since they thus have the possibility to relieve their egoism) as long as no other key affection or a second love intrudes which might be temporary or on-going.”

For him the term “love” was closely linked to sexuality. Even when he wrote about the most various topics he redundantly came back to that issue.

For us the interesting point here is the term “camaraderie amoureuse” which was originally exclusively heterosexual. The definition below served as a promotion for his brochures:

“In other words their (the individualist anarchists’) idea of sexual camaraderie involves a free contract – which can be terminated but has no planned end date – agreed upon by individuals of different sexes who follow the rules of sexual hygiene. By this contract they aim to avoid the risks of love life like rejection, splitting up and jealousy.”

In other texts about the “camaraderie amoureuse” he later also speaks about homosexuality and deems it to be equal to heterosexual free love.

He explicitly defended himself against the accusation of pressing anybody:

“Our perception of love shall include absolute freedom, meaning to devote ourselves to anybody we like, and absolute freedom meaning at the same time to have the possibility to reject anyone we dislike.”

He repeated this statement throughout his works and defined the “freedom of love” as foundation of the “camaraderie amoureuse”. This “freedom of love” is an aspect, which Max Stirner already emphasized who was an important author for Armand on the other hand. In “The Ego and Its Own” Stirner wrote: “Every love to which there clings but the smallest speck of obligation is an unselfish love, and, so far as this speck reaches, a possessedness.”

The discourse about free love, as led by E. Armand, was – and still is – hardly noticed in Germany. Only a small part of *L'initiation Individualiste Anarchiste* has been translated into German and published by the Mackay Association in the 70ies.

### **Germany and France – how to compare both countries**

In both countries “free love” has been discussed predominantly as a counter model to the “bourgeois marriage”. Marriage as an institution, which has to be approved by the state and the church, was rejected. Sexology which at that point of time was only an emerging science seems to have supported the discussion of love and sexuality. Yet non-heteronormative kinds of sexuality were accepted but were of less importance for the discourse as a whole. The inclusion of homosexuals in the context of free love – if you speak about the liberation of love and not a counter model to bourgeois marriage only – happens at a very late stage, in Armand's works from around 1933. In Germany male homosexuality was criminalised and the demand for “free love” vanished behind the fight against paragraph 175 or were only published anonymously. Henry Mackay, for example, used a pseudonym.

For (cis)-males the position of other sexes was a blind spot – the critical voices from the feminist network show that clearly. The patriarchal background of society is also demonstrated by many men using the discourse of “free love” to



imply a right to live a polyamorous, libertine life themselves – but at the expense of women.

The psychological level of “free love”, i.e. the handling of feelings and emotions as for example jealousy was not addressed in Germany at all. In France, by contrast, the discourse was much more intensive and profound. Except for single protagonists – e.g. Erich Mühsam, John Henry Mackay and Fritz Brupbacher, whom I have not covered today – in Germany mainly American texts were discussed and used as a foundation.

Considering all weaknesses and blind spots, you cannot deny the emancipatory effect of the discourse of “free love” in my opinion. Armand, among others, demonstrates a distinct development. It is still correct though, unfortunately, that the liberation was mainly a liberation of cisgender males, while women and homosexuals only benefited secondly.

Thank you for your kind attention.

#### Literatur:

Armand, E. (= Ernest L. Juin): *L’amour, amour en liberté, camaraderie amoureuse*, in: Sébastien Faure (Hrsg.): *Encyclopedie anarchiste*, Tome 1: A-D, La librairie internationale Paris 1934, S. 53-55.

(<http://www.encyclopedie-anarchiste.org/articles/a/amour.html>)

Ders.: *L’émancipation sexuelle, l’amour en camaraderie et les mouvements d’avant-garde*, éditions de L’en-dehors Paris, Limoges et Orléans 1936.

Ders.: *Entretien sur la liberté de l’amour*, L’en-dehors Orléans 1933.

Ders.: *L’homosexualité, l’onanisme et les individualistes*, L’en-dehors Orléans 1931.

Ders.: *L’initiation Individualiste Anarchiste*, Editions La Lenteur o.O. 2015.

(dts.: (in Auszügen) *Das Problem der sexuellen Beziehungen und der individualistische Gesichtspunkt*, Verlag der John Henry Mackay Gesellschaft Hamburg 1978.)

(an English translation ist available from AK Press)

Armand, E. / Livinska, Vera, St. Hélène, C.: *La camaraderie amoureuse*, Editions l’en dehors, Paris / Orléans 1930.

Barwich, Hertha: *Das Geschlechtsproblem*, in: Milly Witkop / Hertha Barwich Aimée Köster u.a.: *Der syndikalistische Frauenbund*, Unrast Verlag Münster 2007, S. 205-206,

van den Berg, Hubert: „Freie Liebe“, in: Hans Jürgen Degen (Hrsg.): *Lexikon der Anarchie*, Verlag Schwarzer Nachtschatten Bösdorf 1993ff.

([http://dadaweb.de/wiki/Freie\\_Liebe](http://dadaweb.de/wiki/Freie_Liebe))

Ders.: „Frauen, besonders Frauenrechtlerinnen, haben keinen Zutritt!“ *Misogynie und Antifeminismus bei Erich Mühsam*, in: *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 28, 1992, S. 479 – 510.

Boussenet, Roger: *Les mot de l’anarchie. Dictionnaire des idées, des faits, des actes, de l’histoire et des homes anarchists*, Delalain Paris 1982.

Dudek, Peter: Ein Leben im Schatten. Johannes und Hermann Nohl – zwei deutsche Karrieren im Kontrast, Verlag Julius Klinkhardt Bad Heilbrunn / Obb. 2004.

Fourier, Charles: Aus der freien Liebeswelt, Wagenbach Verlag Berlin 1977.

Ders.: Le nouveau monde amoureux, Editions Stock Paris 1999.

Gesell, Silvio: Der abgebaute Staat. Leben und Treiben in einem gesetz- und sittenlosen hochstehenden Naturvolk, *in*: Ders.: Gesammelte Werke, Band 16 : 1926-27, Verlag für Sozialökonomie Lütheburg 1995, S. 253-346.

Ders.: Natürliche Wirtschaftsordnung (= Gesammelte Werke Band 11), Verlag für Sozialökonomie Lütheburg 1998.

(eng.: The natural economic order,  
[http://wikilivres.ca/wiki/The\\_Natural\\_Economic\\_Order](http://wikilivres.ca/wiki/The_Natural_Economic_Order))

Haug, Wolfgang: Erich Mühsam. Schriftsteller der Revolution, Trotzdem Verlag Reutlingen 1978.

Kennedy, Hubert: Anarchist of Love. The secret life of John Henry Mackay, Mackay Society New York 1983.

(dts.: John Henry Mackay (Sagitta). Anarchist der Liebe, Männerschwarm Verlag Hamburg 2007.)

Klan, Ulrich / Dieter Nelles: „Es lebt noch eine Flamme“. Rheinische Anarcho-Syndikalisten / -innen in der Weimarer Republik und im Faschismus, Trotzdem Verlag Grafenau-Döffingen 1986.

Linse, Ulrich: Organisierter Anarchismus im deutschen Kaiserreich, Dunker & Humblot Berlin 1969.

Mackay, John Henry: Die Anarchisten. Kulturgemälde aus dem Ende des XIX. Jahrhundert, Forum Verlag Leipzig 1992.

(eng.: The Anarchistes. A Picture of Civilisation at the Close of the Nineteenth Century, Verlag von Benjamin R. Tucker Boston 1891.)

Ders.: Der Freiheitssucher. Psychologie einer Entwicklung, tredition Hamburg o.J.

Ders.: Die Menschen der Ehe. Schilderungen aus der kleinen Stadt, Bernhard Zack Treptow bei Berlin 1912.

Maitron, Jean: Le mouvement anarchiste en France, François Edition Suela Paris 1955.

Manfredonia, Gaetano: E. Armand, un anarchiste pas comme les autres ([http://www.editions-zones.fr/spip.php?page=lyberplayer&id\\_article=92](http://www.editions-zones.fr/spip.php?page=lyberplayer&id_article=92)).

Manfredonia, Gaetano / Ronsin, Francis: E. Armand et „la camaraderie amoureuse“. Le sexualisme révolutionnaire et la lutte contre la jalousie (<http://kropot.free.fr/Manfredonia-armand.htm>)

Mühsam, Erich: Die Freivermählten. Kain Verlag München 1914.

Ders.: Homosexualität. Ein Beitrag zur Sittengeschichte unserer Zeit, Lilienthal Verlag Berlin 1903.

Regin, Cornelia: Hausfrau und Revolution: Die Frauenpolitik der Anarchosyndikalisten in der Weimarer Republik, *in*: Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung (IWK), 25. Jg., H. 3 (Sept. 1989), S. 379-397.

Sagitta (= John Henry Mackay): Bücher der namenlosen Liebe, 2., vermehrte Auflage Selbstverlag o.O. 1924.

Serge, Victor: Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire 1905-1945, Lex Editeur Montréal 2010.

(dts.: Beruf: Revolutionär. Erinnerungen, 1901 - 1917 - 1941, Fischer Verlag Frankfurt / M. 1967.)

Stirner, Max: Der Einzige und sein Eigentum. Ausführlich kommentierte Studienausgabe, herausgegeben von Bernd A. Kast, Verlag Karl Alber Freiburg / München 2009.

Thiem, Ernst: Die Frei-Vermählten. Komödie in 3 Akten, Theater Verlag Berlin 1910.

Wafner, Kurt: Ausgeschert aus Reih' und Glied. Mein Leben als Bücherfreund und Anarchist, Verlag Edition AV Lich 2001.

Wolf, Siegbert: « Nur langweilige Naturen sind frei von Widersprüche ». Gustav Landauer: Sex und Gender, *in*: Philippe Kellermann (Hg.): Anarchismus und Geschlechterverhältnisse, Edition AV Lich 2016, S. 81-112.