

A text dump on the history of the animal
rights movement

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Anarchist Beginnings

Excerpt from Which Side Podcast's interview with Ian McDonald

Source: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z1ss5cNaDY>

The first organized vegan movement was anarchist, it was the vegitalia, they were early 20th century anarchists who decided that to be completely independent of masters you needed to reduce all the things you were using, so your body wasn't polluted and you didn't need as much stuff.

The word vegitalia already existed in French, it roughly speaking means vegetable-arian, but they took it to mean; no tea, no coffee, no chocolates, a very frugal diet, so erring towards raw and as part of a communal anarchist philosophy.

I mean there was even a drive-by armed robbery gang in early 20th century France. One of the first armed gangs to use getaway cars was actually vegetarian and anarchist and raising money I think for their anarchist political projects by robbing banks.

I'm all on board except for the chocolate and tea.

And alcohol.

So they're straight edge?

Basically yes, these are anarchist straight-edged vegans in early twentieth century France. And they set up communes and they had a chain of restaurants and their own salad called La Paskinase that they thought would be a complete meal. And they had a number of other interesting dietary beliefs, they petered out with their founders, but it was a really interesting little movement that at its time managed to keep outposts going all around France.

But if you asked anybody in the early 20th century who the most famous vegetarian was they'd say Leo Tolstoy, who had a dramatic conversion to vegetarianism after visiting a slaughterhouse and settled his own [commune]... but his motivation was deeply religious, he had a massive crisis of faith and came out of it deeply touched by the Gospels, by the Christian Gospels, but very much an anarchist version of them, in which Jesus was simply a fantastic teacher, and it's it seems he came to a very stripped-down liberal theology with a very radical message about giving up your wealth and sharing it and working in communes and asceticism and kind of fell out with his wife quite badly over it, but particularly they're giving away all his wealth.

But there were Tolstoyan communities all around the world. Gandhi called his ashram in South Africa Tolstoy farm, he owed a lot of his views to Tolstoy and actually I think there was a Tolstoyan congregation in Croydon in South London that set up a vegetarian society, and that vegetarian society was still around in '44 and one of the pivotal events that played a pivotal role in the launch of a proper vegan movement that wasn't attached to any other philosophies. That was kind of a meeting ground for vegans from all persuasions.

And because that society was still around fifty years later and hosted a debate between the vegans and non-vegans, that was probably the first time that the vegans who were yet to be called vegans actually came together and actually met each other. Because that was quite a well-attended and written up

debate and there are people who were there who then a few months later went on to set up the vegan society.

So without anarchism who knows if we'd have had a vegan society in 1944.

Excerpt from ‘Vegetarianism: The Story So Far — Episode 15: Liberation’

Source: The Vegan Option Podcast. <theveganooption.org/2017/09/13/veghist-ep-15-liberation-veganism-hippies-and-the-animal-rights-movement-with-sam-calvert-and-maneka-gandhi-at-london-cambridge-and-bangalore>

From 1909 to 1912, there was a lively discussion in the pages of the Vegetarian Society's journal, about the idea of whether or not one should eat dairy products.

Mr A W Duncan: "As long as we drink milk, eat butter and cheese, or use leather, we are taking part in the slaughter and ..."

Joseph Lebolo-Carey: "When the cows are old or too badly diseased to be further milked, they become the butcher's ..."

CP Newcombe: "Cannot have eggs without also having on your hands a number of male birds, which you must kill."

Writing from India there's Narsi Ram, from the "Animals' Friend Society, Punjab." He defends Hindu farmers, saying there's milk for calves and humans to share.

Narsi Ram: "When a mother cow is domesticated and caressed by supplying her with all the necessities of life, as if she were a very member of the family, the usual quantity of the cow's milk is much increased."

Dr Florence Sexton, one of Scotland's first women physicians and a trained dairy farmer, suggests cows have a comfortable existence. And, unlike Ram, she defends killing the male calves.

Florence Sexton: "Newly born babies, whether human or animals, have no consciousness, and it cannot therefore be cruel to destroy them."

Some familiar names take part in this debate. Anna Bonus, the niece of famous 19th Century feminist mystic anti-vivisection physician, Dr Anna Bonus Kingsford, speaks up for cows.

Alice Bonus: "It must involve some slaughter, I think, and some suffering to the cows and calves."

So does the simple lifer from last show, Dugald Semple, who is already experimenting with veganism.

Dugald Semple: "Eggs were meant to produce chickens and not omelettes; and cow's milk is a perfect food for a calf, but most assuredly not for a human being."

The editor, Alfred Cornelius Newcombe, is more concerned about hygiene than animals.

Alfred Cornelius Newcombe: "Eggs and milk when carefully selected, are pure foods....They have not been through the wear and tear of life and, therefore, do not contain the broken down tissues, the refuse of the body which is so objectionable a component of every piece of flesh which a meat eater swallows."

But a Mr Hunter, of Stirling, looks to the future.

Mr Hunter: "Personally I use very little of these animal products. I am only on the way. In a few generations we may succeed in living on a purer and more humane diet."

The dairy discussion recurs in the magazine again in the mid '30s, and again in the early '40s, and that time it gathers momentum. In 1944, a handful of non-dairy vegetarians get organised.

Donald Watson is probably the most well-known. He was the person who edited the magazine for the first two years.

This is Donald Watson, interviewed in 2002 at the age of 92 by the then Vegan Society chair George Rodger.

Donald Watson: "Year or two before the Society was formed, I was corresponding with a very small number of people scattered far and wide."

Who are these people in terms of social class and background?

Reasonably well-educated people, but not people of great wealth or position in society. There's certainly no one who's titled, for example, as a patron or anything like that.

In fact if anything I suppose people like Donald Watson were anti-establishment. He was a conscientious objector which would have been pretty unusual at the time.

In April, at the Croydon Vegetarian Society, south London, Donald Watson proposes a motion against dairy products and only two or three people disagree. This debate probably brought together a lot of like-minded people, and it was organised and chaired by one Elsie Shrigley.

Elsie Shrigley taught piano at one point. Later on she marries a dentist and she helps in his surgery.

Elsie will stay on the organising committee until she dies in 1978.

Donald's seconder, Fay, is a 40-something widow from a vegetarian family who manages the Attic Club. Seven weeks later, she marries a fellow activist, Allan Henderson.

Mr Henderson would later go on to be the first employee of the Society. He was a sort of a paid secretary.

The goal is to organise a section within the Vegetarian Society and its newsletter.

The Vegetarian Society refused them space in their journal. And had that request been accepted, they would have been a subgroup within the Vegetarian Society.

So one Sunday in November, the 5th says Elsie, core activists gather in Fay Henderson's Attic Club.

I think there probably is a sense that the war is coming to its close, and that the end of the war is not that far away. So I suppose there must be beginnings of a mood of optimism I think.

But what to call themselves?

Watson: "I did appeal to my readers to suggest what the name might be. And I had a list of very bizarre suggestions.

The suggestion from the Hendersons was that the Society might be called All-Vega. And the magazine All-Vegan. And from that, Donald Watson created the name, vegan.

And I think that came from probably the restaurant that was owned by Walter Fleiss and his wife in central London at the time, which was called Veega.

You might remember the Fleisses from last show as socialist refugees from Nazi Germany.

Watson: "I settled for the word vegan, which was immediately accepted. And over the years, became part of our language.

Early Critiques

The Vegetarian

Author: Johann Most

Date: 1875

Source: Retrieved on March 26, 2025 from <www.anarchismus.at/anarchistische-klassiker/johann-most/7272-johann-most-die-vegetarianer>

Notes: Volksstaat-Erzähler, supplement to the social democratic “People’s State”. No. 19 of 23.5.1875 and No. 20 of 30.5.1875.

A small sect of comical enthusiasts lets its little light shine here and there to show poor, misguided humanity the way that leads to where coolies and Hindus have long since arrived; and to give the matter a learned air, its believers call themselves “vegetarians.”

It certainly doesn’t occur to me to try to disabuse these strange boarders of anything, for this is quite impossible, because people who indulge in such unnatural extravagances undoubtedly suffer from an incurable obsession. What I intend is merely preventative in nature, amounting to a warning to all those who have not yet been afflicted by the disease of voluntary asceticism, but are certainly at risk of being infected with it.

Some of the plant-eaters pursue this more or less as a game and know how to fill their meatless table with a variety of other inviting delicacies. Anyone familiar with fine gastronomy knows that the number of fine pastries and baked goods is legion, that a number of tasty dishes can be prepared from various local and foreign fruits, and that there are also quite a few nobler vegetables.

Furthermore, those who are not exactly orthodox vegetarians do not despise milk and egg dishes. Such vegetarianism would ultimately be acceptable—if one’s sole concern is enjoyment; it’s just a pity that people with limited budgets can’t join in.

Other meat-haters, however, take plant-eating very seriously. They also condemn eggs, milk, and fat and only accept plant-based foods cooked in water or served raw. Indeed, one cannot know whether these people will soon adopt the purely root and herbal diet of the mythical forest people. As long as these eccentrics are content with indulging their essentially innocent inclinations, one should not interfere in their private affairs. However, as soon as they formally preach the gospel of roots and herbs or even dare to propose vegetarianism as a means of solving the social question, they must be vigorously opposed.

So far, workers have generally steadfastly avoided vegetarianism – unless forced upon them by necessity – but the possibility cannot be ruled out that necessity will ultimately be turned into a virtue and watery soup will become the obligatory food for workers. This is a danger that loses none of its magnitude, however remote it may be, and which must therefore be combated wherever it may appear. And it does appear here and there; Just recently, a worker (who, he believed, was socialist-minded) seriously tried to prove to me that it was the utmost folly to want to consume anything other than plants boiled in water, that one could live quite well on bread and water, and that the consumption of meat dishes, spirits, and the like was just as useless and even harmful as smoking tobacco. What more could one want?

To prove the fallacy of such views, I will not engage in lengthy chemical deductions; rather, I consider it sufficient to refer to nature itself. In tropical regions, humans require only a small amount of carbon, thus needing to consume only a few fatty substances, because the climatic conditions there do not require the animal heat generated by carbon to be constantly renewed on a significant scale. For this reason, vegetable food is generally more popular there, although (apart from religious vegetarians) meat dishes are not disdained there either. In the far north, however, fat plays the main role among foods, because body heat must be continually renewed through the supply of carbon if humans are to avoid succumbing to the influences of the cold climate.

In the temperate zones, therefore, human diets will have to follow a middle path, and indeed, they have always followed this middle path, without any vegetarians or animalists (meat eaters) or anyone else having paved the way for it. The further south a people lives, the more they adhere to a plant-based diet; the further north they are located, the greater their need for meat dishes. This is not, as vegetarians put it, a matter of an old prejudice or blind faith, but simply of following the laws of nature, which cannot be disobeyed in the long run with impunity.

But if one examines the economic side of the vegetarianism question, one encounters quite different things. Suppose the workers one fine day became convinced that all their previous struggle for freedom and equality had been in vain and that only vegetarianism could achieve their goal—how long does the die-hard vegetarian believe this illusion would last? But we don't want to cause anyone much headaches; instead, we'll provide the answer quite briefly and bluntly. This illusion could not last longer than until the workers bumped heads against the economic law of wages; and this would have to happen very soon. If the workers can live more cheaply than before, their wages must also fall by exactly the amount of the differential. Anyone who can't immediately figure this out, despite living in a society with free competition, should let any halfway reasonable worker explain the effect of this competition and, in general, the nature of the economic law by which wages are determined. As long as one isn't clear about this, one shouldn't even want to talk about things that touch on the social question. Incidentally, the consequences of a future vegetarianism—fortunately only fictitious—of the workers would be of the most disastrous nature for them for other reasons as well. The economic law of wages would not only apply in a single way, but in two and three ways.

If workers abstain from all meat consumption, all spirits, and smoking tobacco—in short, from everything that is abhorrent in the eyes of vegetarians—then a large portion of those previously engaged in the production of the aforementioned articles will necessarily become “redundant.” The supply of labor within the remaining branches of industry will far exceed demand, and thus wages will generally fall, continuing to fall until they reach the level just sufficient to sustain a vegetarian existence. The solution to the social question is therefore “out of the question”!

It should strike vegetarians as obvious that capitalists give workers very similar advice to themselves, namely, that they constantly talk about saving, saving that would only be possible for workers if they embraced vegetarianism and similar whims of lack of needs. If workers could accumulate capital in this way, they would be able to provide themselves—organized in cooperatives—with the means of production and produce independently; but the capitalists would no longer be able to play entrepreneurial roles; their property monopoly would be transformed into a dead nut, and their thalers would no longer lay eggs. The austerity apostles know full well that the consequences of saving would have to be of a completely opposite nature (apart from the repercussions of saving already mentioned above, it should also be noted that any saving that results in a reduction in consumption and simultaneous accumulation of capital may appear to promote production, but in reality must impair it, since one cannot truly produce more if less is consumed). That the entire theory of saving is vain nonsense, and that is why they preach about it, and why they rave about public kitchens, etc.

The fact that vegetarianism cannot improve the situation of workers is not the worst of it, however, because it would have to result in a significant deterioration of working-class conditions, a deterioration not only in material but especially in spiritual terms. Although plant-based diets do contribute to strengthening bones, which is why, for example, the miners of Peru are eagerly encouraged to eat

bread containing a strong mixture of bean flour, the replacement of the used-up brain, for example, is significantly impaired — especially qualitatively — when eating exclusively plant-based diets, because there is too little phosphorus in the vegetables.

If we examine tribes that more or less adhere to vegetarianism, we find that they are totally incapable of defending themselves against the worst oppressions. Lacking energy, lacking intellectual vigor, and with complete apathy toward any higher endeavor, they are dully resigned to their fate. The mere contentment with a miserably monotonous, pleasure-free existence must make one not even consider a more pleasant existence worth striving for. We can learn more about this in East Asia, where vegetarianism is the strongest pillar of despotism, and from where, to the horror of American workers, a sense of contentment and a sense of servitude are shipped across the great ocean with the plant-eating coolies.

Individuals who, despite being vegetarians, display great energy, even passion, cannot be cited as counterexamples, for great causes and great effects in national life cannot be observed in individual people.

The aforementioned worker drew my attention to the French revolutionary Blanqui and pointed out that, despite his “Spartan” (that wouldn’t really be apt, since the Spartans lived simply, but not vegetarian) lifestyle, he was truly full of energy and drive; but I can’t even recognize this comment as appropriate. Blanqui was so mistreated for nine years in Fort Michel under the reign of Louis Philippe that his body was permanently broken; no wonder, then, that his nature can only tolerate very light food. And that his spirit, despite all this, remained healthy and fresh is because he—well, because he is Blanqui. It’s as if, at times, a principle seeks to embody itself in some person, and such a person seems to be Blanqui; at least, he is often considered the incarnation of the revolutionary idea. (Personally, I’m not too enthusiastic about Blanqui because I don’t consider his coup-making tactics practical and because, despite his otherwise radicalism, he has no understanding of modern socialism. However, given that Blanqui is an honest man, and especially because he’s in prison, I’ll refrain from further criticism of him.) Be that as it may: In any case, Blanqui is not suitable to be used as bacon to catch vegetarians.

Finally, I’ll allow myself to raise the question of how a society that exclusively adheres to vegetarianism should behave towards the animal world? Surely one couldn’t consistently spare animals life, because otherwise they would soon become so numerous that hardly enough plants would grow to feed them, thus creating unpleasant competition for the vegetarians. But one couldn’t exterminate the animals either, because one couldn’t do without their fertilizers, furs, etc. So, we would still have to raise livestock, the only difference being that in the vegetarian age, we would no longer eat meat as we do now, but would discard it or use it for secondary purposes!

No matter how you twist and turn the matter, you always immediately come across—with all due respect!—the most blatant nonsense, which will hopefully speak eloquently enough to forever protect humanity from running itself into the dead end of vegetarianism.

[Untitled]

Source: Retrieved on 2025/10/21 from <www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/the-people-slp/020503-weeklypeople-v12n05-ddltwopages.pdf>

Notes: Weekly People (New York), Vol. 12, No. 5. Saturday, May 3, 1902.

“How to beat the beef trust?”—“eat bananas”, answers the Vegetarian Society. But this is simply changing one trust for another. The United States Fruit Co., (the Banana Trust) has the importation of that fruit under monopolistic control. It has a fine fleet of coastwise steamers to which it is adding extensively and continuously.

There is one way to beat all trusts and that is to socialize them.

The Asininity of “h’Organized” Labor.

Source: Retrieved on 2025/10/21 from <www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/the-people-slp/20503-weeklypeople-v12n05-ddltwopages.pdf>

Notes: Weekly People (New York), Vol. 12, No. 5. Saturday, May 3, 1902.

The assininity of what presumes to call itself “Organized Labor.” and is known in just derision as “h’Organized Labor,” is again exemplified’ in its participation in the fruitless -attacks upon the Beef Trust.

For years “h’Organized Labor,” that is to say, the “Organized Scabbery” that runs the old style Unions, has failed in its attempts to organize the workingmen employed in the plants of the corporations composing the combine. The result has been the imposition of conditions which have created a terrific development of speed in work. Without a corresponding increase in wages. ‘Men are east aside as soon as they show an inability to keep up’ with the exhausting pace set by. the steam and electric-driven machine. Women have been introduced in many of the branches; and, it is believed, that in the course of a short time, they will even wield the knife used in the slaughter of cattle. Against these monstrous conditions “h’Organized Labor” has proven powerless; aye, by its criminal conduct, it has nursed them.

With the recent rise in the price of beef, eggs, butter and other food products, largely consumed by the working class and controlled by the Beef Trust to the detriment of the middle class, there has arisen several outcries against the Beef Trust; in which “h’Organized Labor” has joined.

Newspapers and political organizations, desirous of extending their circulation and their influence among the middle and the working classes, have inaugurated movements for the purpose of securing state and federal investigation o. and legislation against the Beef Trust. Vegetarian societies, anxious to improve the shining hour for propaganda, have urged the use of fruits and cereals instead of meat. All are sure that by these means the Beef Trust will be beaten and its extortionate practices rendered ineffectual.

To these movements, “h’Organized Labor,” incapable of attacking the conditions which beset Beef Trust employees, has given its direct and indirect endorsement. By resolution it has joined in the demand for state and federal investigation and legislation and praised those newspapers and organizations advocating them; while with an eye out for vegetarian approval, it has urged the working class to abstain from the use of meat during a certain period.

The value of these measures is best appreciated when it is recollected that the Beef Trust, in common with many other Trusts, has already been the object of investigation and legislation without any detriement to the interests of the corporations composing it. Who has forgotten the “Embalmed Beet” investigation and legislation? Who will fail to remember the oft-repeated investigation and legislation against the Standard Oil, the Sugar, and other Trusts? The history of Trust investigation and legislation has proven that modern government is nothing more nor less than a committee of capitalists for the protection and defense of capitalists. To appeal to a government so constituted for investigation and legislation, in the hope of securing a remedy, is not only nonsensical, but it is assinine; extremely so. as it shows an obstinacy in the pursuit of a course which experience has repeatedly proven, can only result in failure.

The same may be said of the appeal to abtsain from the use of meat for the purpose of beating the Trust. This is like jumping from the frying pan into the fire: for. if the workingman concludes to eat cereals exclusively he places himself in the power of the Cereal Trust. Should be fly from the Cereal Trust to the Fruit Trust, his condition will remain unaltered. No matter which way he turn« the Trust win be there to receive him, and make him pay for the reception, too.

Capitalist “investigation” and legislation, together with vegetarianism, will not “bust” Trusts: nor will they end them. Trusts can only be advantageously ended by making them social property. Society must own, control and operate them for its own benefit. There is no other way out.

As a first step to this end, the working class must organize politically, for the purpose of securing control of the functions of government, so that we may have a government of. by, and for. the working class. To this end a political party is needed.

The Democratic and Republican parties are out-and-out Trust parties, being out-and-out controlled by the capitalist class.

Then Kangaroo Social Democratic, alias “Socialist” party, is but a decoy duck for those, as shown by the numerous instances of its members running on Republican, or Democratic, or “Citizen” tickets.

The Prohibition and Populist parties are vagaries, and not always innocent vagaries either.

There is but one party in the land of approved trustworthiness, — the Socialist Labor Party.

The Library of Unconventional Lives

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