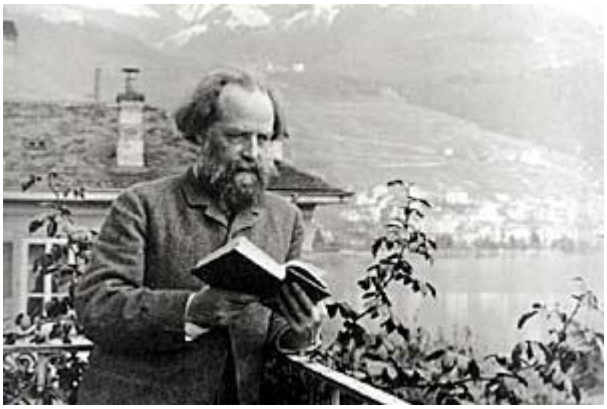
Black Flag

Anarchist Review

Louise Michel (1830-1905)

Elisée Reclus (1830-1905)



Luigi Fabbri (1877-1935)

And much more...

Summer 2025

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Contents

Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of *Black Flag* in 2025!

We start with Élisée Reclus (1830-1905). Like Kropotkin, Reclus was a world-renown geographer as well as a leading anarchist thinker. In his recollections of Kropotkin, Malatesta listed him alongside Bakunin and Kropotkin as those who had contributed most "to the elaboration and propagation of anarchist ideas." However, he is not as well-known as these three in the English-language movement, something we hope to address with our selection of articles.

Next, we mark the birth and death of Louise Michel (1830-1905). An active participant in the Paris Commune, she became an anarchist when sent into exile after its crushing. Michel played a key role in the French Anarchist movement (and the British, when she was in exile here). Her use of the black flag – a symbol of the French labour movement – at an unemployed workers demonstration ensured its association with anarchism.

Then we turn to Luigi Fabbri (1877-1935), the leading Italian anarchist. While somewhat in the shadow of his friend and colleague Errico Malatesta, Fabbri was an important anarchist thinker in his own right. Sadly, his writings have not been extensively translated into English – for a long time only his "Bourgeois influences on anarchism" and "Anarchy and 'Scientific' Communism", his debunking of Bukharin, were available. This is, happily, changing and we present a selection of recently translated works which we are sure will be of interest to anarchists today.

We follow this with three reviews, one on the *Russian Anarchists* to mark the anniversary of the 1905 Revolution, another on a flawed account of the 1910-1914 Labour Unrest and a short one of an important collection of essays by British Syndicalist Tom Brown. Next are obituaries to two recently deceased comrades, Colette Durruti (daughter of Buenaventura) and Scottish anarchist John Couzin. We end with our usual movement news, *Parish Notices.*

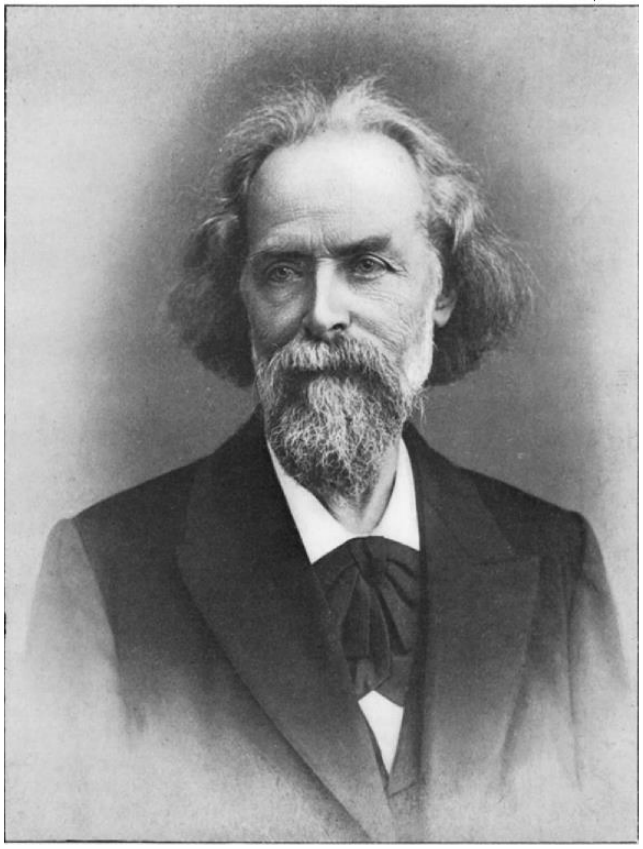
If you want to contribute rather than moan at those who do, whether its writing new material or letting us know of on-line articles, reviews or translations, then contact us: blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk

Elisée Reclus

Peter Kropotkin

The Geographical Journal, September 1905

On July 4, Elisée Reclus died in his seventy-sixth year in a small Belgian village not far from Ostend, and the most sympathetic articles which have been devoted to him since in the press of all nations bear testimony to the extremely wide popularity as a writer, and the profound esteem as a man, which the great French geographer enjoyed in all civilised countries.



Elisée Reclus (1830-1905)

Jean Jacques Elisée Reclus was born on March 15, 1830, in a small town of the Gironde Department, Ste.-Foy-la-Grande, and his family have never broken their association with this part of south-western France. His father was a Protestant pastor – a man of great integrity of character and remarkable energy. So was also his mother, who reached a very great age, teaching in a school of her own foundation, and retaining wonderful mental energy till her very last days. Elisée was the second of a family of twelve, all of whom, brothers and sisters alike, have left their mark in life. His elder brother, Elie, became a well-known anthropologist, one of his brothers is a geographer, another an engineer, and one a surgeon of great repute. One of his sisters, Madame Dumesnil, was for the last twenty years his constant help in all his work.

Elisée Reclus received his first education in Rhenish Prussia, and later on he entered, with his brother Elie, the Protestant Faculty at Montauban. Their father's intention was to make of them Protestant ministers. Neither of the two brothers felt, however, inclined to follow the vocation of their father. Karl Ritter was attracting at that time students from all parts of Europe by his wonderful generalisations concerning the Earth and its inhabitants, and both brothers, leaving Montauban in 1849, went to Berlin, making most of the journey on foot, and living chiefly on bread and fruits. The lectures of Ritter, like the works of Humboldt, undoubtedly left a deep impression upon all the subsequent work of Elisée Reclus. The Earth always appeared to him as a living being in its continuous variations, and the inhabitants of its different parts were intimately connected in his mind with the physical characters of the portion of the globe where they had developed; while the influence of Humboldt's poetical ways of interpreting Nature and describing it is evident in Elisée Reclus's style.

After the *coup d'état* of Napoleon III, Elisée Reclus, as well as his brother Elie, were compelled to leave France. He came to London in 1852, then stayed in Ireland, and finally went to America, where he visited the United States, Central America, and Columbia. This last journey he described in a charmingly written little book, 'Voyage à la Sierra Nevada de Sainte Marthe' (Paris, 1861).

Returning to France in 1857, Reclus took a lively part in both the scientific revival and the political movement which characterised the middle of the nineteenth century. These were the years when, by a series of monumental works, the foundations

were laid of the mechanical theory of heat, the kinetic theory of gases, modern atomistic chemistry, the variability of species and modern biology altogether, anthropology, physiological psychology, and so on; while the political revival which took place after the Crimean war led, as is known, to the liberation of Italy and the abolition of serfdom in Russia, and slavery in the United States. Reclus contributed his part to loth these movements. The need of good popular works in all branches of natural science was deeply felt at that time, and in 1864 he published (besides an 'Introduction au Dictionnaire des Communes de France') an extremely well written little book – which he considered later on as his favourite work – 'Histoire d'un Ruisseau,' in which he gave quite a course of geography by following a stream from its birth till it becomes a mighty river and an artery of human intercourse. The substance of the method which Reclus followed later on with such a success in his ' Universal Geography,' was thus contained in this 'History of a Brook.'[1]

Three years later, in 1867, appeared the first volume of his 'La Terre: Description des Phénomènes de Globe,'[2] which at once conquered for him a place of honour amongst geographers. This work, which is a necessary introduction to the 'Universal Geography,' is a true product of the scientific revival of those years, and represents an admirably told physical geography. The life of the continents, their distribution on the globe, their architectonic features, the laws governing their outlines, as well as the distribution of the plateaus, the lowlands, the deltas, and the deeply indented peripheric regions, all these problems of comparative earth knowledge are dealt with, and the corresponding features described with admirable lucidity in the first volume of 'La Terre.' The oceans and the atmosphere were dealt with in a subsequently published second volume. All the characteristics of Reclus's geographical work appear already in 'The Earth.' He pays just as much attention to geotectonic and geological hypotheses as is required for the comprehension of the Earth as a living planet; and he excels especially in the treatment of the slow modifications of the surface (perhaps without reaching the concreteness of the illustrations which we find in Lyell's 'Principles of Geology'), and in the description of the aspects which the Earth's surface offers now to its human inhabitants. Altogether, there is no better guide for one who wishes to be familiar with physical geography (or physiography) than these two volumes. None could, at the same time, be a better source of inspiration of love of the subject, as well as love for Nature in general. The numerous small maps in the text add immensely to the suggestiveness of the book, while its style is such that it reads as a work of art.[3]

When the Franco-German war broke out in 1870, and Paris was besieged, Reclus joined the National Guard, attaching himself to the battalion of aëronauts which had been formed by his great friend, the photographer Nadar, and he aided him in that remarkable organisation of the pigeon-post and the ballooning which kept the besieged capital in regular intercourse with the provinces unoccupied by the Germans.

Later on came the Commune of Paris, and Elisée Reclus, refusing, in accordance with his opinions, any place in the Government of the Commune, went as a soldier in the ranks of one of the battalions of the *fédérés.* On April 5, 1871, he took part in a sortie towards Versailles, and, after the defeat of the column, was made prisoner on the plateau of Chatillon. He lived through all the horrors of the Satory camp and the pontoons of Brest, and was considered as irretrievably lost after the terrible experience of the transport of the prisoners to Brest, which resulted in the loss of reason and life for so many of his companions. However, he soon recovered, and founded a school for his working-men comrades in the prison of Quelern, teaching them reading, geography, and English.

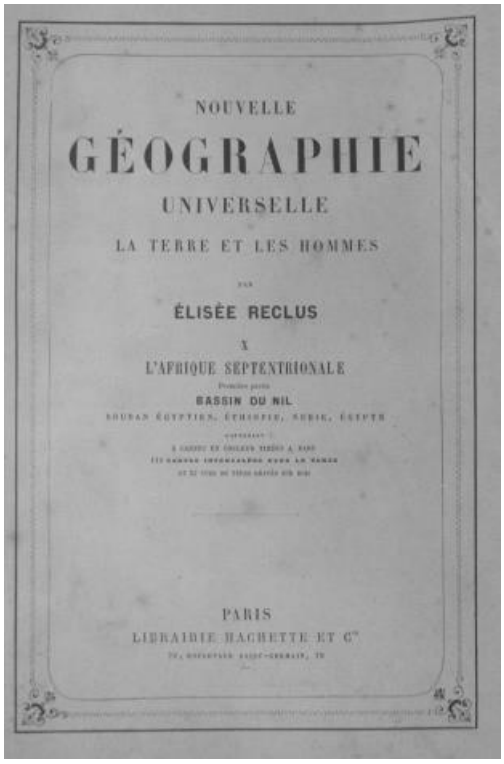
In November, 1871, he was condemned by a Council of War to transportation, but was released in the following January, after a representation in his favour had been made by scientific men of different nationalities, especially English – Darwin, A. R. Wallace, Carpenter, and many others having signed the petition. His condemnation was commuted to perpetual banishment.

[1] There is no English Translation of the 'Histoire d'un Ruisseau,' and of its companion book, 'Histoire d'un Montagne.'

[2] This work has run through five or six editions, and has been translated into all languages, including English

[3] Elisée Reclus had himself written condensations of 'The Earth' in two small 18mo volumes, published at the low price of one franc each. These, again, have not been translated into English.

After his release, Elisée Reclus went to Zürich to rejoin his brother Elie; then he stayed for a time at Lugano, and finally settled at Clarens. The first work he wrote in Switzerland was another admirable little book, 'Histoire d'une Montagne' – a companion volume to his 'Histoire d'un Ruisseau' – in which he expressed his gratitude to the beautiful Nature of the Swiss mountains for healing the deep wounds which his mind had received during the civil war.


NOUVELLE

GÉOGRAPHIE

UNIVERSELLE

LA TERRE ET LES HOMMES

PAR

ÉLISÉE RECLUS

X

L'AFRIQUE SEPTENTRIONALE

BASSIN DU NIL

PARIS

LIBRAIRIE HACHETTE ET C^IE^

Soon after that he undertook his main work, the 'Géographie Universelle: la Terre et les Hommes,' of which the first volume began to appear in weekly parts in 1876. Beginning with Greece as the cradle of our present European civilisation, and treating in succession from east to west the European peninsulas of the Mediterranean, Reclus described next France, then Central Europe, North-Western Europe (Belgium, Holland, and these isles), the Scandinavian lands, and European Russia. Europe took thus five volumes. The next five volumes were given to Asia, Russia in Asia, Japan and China, Farther India, British India, and South-Western Asia. One volume was given to Australia and the Pacific islands, four to Africa, and the last four to the two Americas.

For nineteen years in succession Reclus brought out with astonishing regularity these bulky volumes, and there was not one single week in which the part which was due did not appear. The immensity of labour accomplished by Reclus during these years is alone a matter of wonder, the more so as he found also time to travel, and visited during that time several of the countries with which he was dealing. The amount of work which he was performing every day was colossal. Each volume of his work covered from 800 to 900 large octavo pages, and contained from 200 to 230 small maps in the text, and for each of these volumes Reclus consulted an average of 900 to 1000 volumes. Very often a volume was read and annotated, only to add a few words to the description of a valley or a mountain pass, or to choose a more characteristic adjective in the description of a range of mountains. As soon as one volume was out Reclus immediately began the next one, and by the middle of the year the fundamental manuscript, which usually represented one-half, or maybe less, of the final text, was ready. It contained the framework of the volume. All main lines, all generalisations were established. All the characteristic features of a given region were recorded in the proper terms. Its general structure, its mountains, and the characteristics of each river-basin, with its populations, industries, roads, and cities, or its successions of lacustrine basins and the wild tribes inhabiting their banks, were traced in broad, characteristic, well-chosen traits in this first manuscript. Then came the filling up of this framework with details: the beauties of hill and dale in this spot, the work of erosion of such a river, or the action of the sea on this part of the coast, the more detailed characteristics of the different stocks of which all great nations are composed, the conquests or devastations of civilisation, the interesting features of such a city, or of the roads connecting them – all these were introduced, giving more and more life to the broadly painted landscape. When one remembers that every line of the manuscript, as well as of the just-mentioned details, and of the corrections in the countless proofs which used to pass between the printers and the author were made in Elisée Reclus's own handwriting, one understands vaguely the immensity of the work. And while one sees that the framework has been constructed with all the powers of a great geographer, who holds all the features of the continent which he describes in his brain and imagination, trained by travel, colossal reading, and previous work, one also realises that the details are often true jewels set into the main picture. The result was that two distinctive features of the 'Géographie Universelle' struck all those who have written about it, – the generalising power of a geographical genius, and the richness of admirably told, characteristic details which reveal a true poet's capacity for understanding Nature.

Before the 'Universal Geography' had been written, the description of the different portions of the globe was very unequal. For different regions we had no general geographical sketch, and knew only the results of local explorations of certain parts of the region. But Reclus so well managed to utilise all the available materials that he gave us full harmonic pictures of the whole, and that, as has been remarked once in *Petermanns Mitteilungen* (Bd. 40, litt., p. 132), the mosaic character of the preparatory work had disappeared.

It is especially in the description of rivers and their drainage areas that Elisée Reclus excelled. Taking any of the great streams – the Volga, the Niger, or the Amazonas – we find the same method applied with full success. From the very first lines the reader obtains a general idea of the position and shape of the river and its basin. Then he sees the birth of the river with the wild mountains or marshy plateau round its cradle, and the more or less wild tribes which are dwelling, or used to dwell formerly, round its headwaters. Then we are told how the upper course of the river became the seat of small barbarian republics or monarchies, and how, finally, a powerful state grew up on its banks, concentrating several territories under its rule. The river is living in the legends of its present inhabitants, or in the hypotheses of the early geographers, or in the early historical records. And then, as we follow Reclus in his course down the river, we see the stream growing, we learn about the different civilisations that appeared or are appearing now on its banks, and we see the growing intercourse that is maintained now with other nations coming to its mouth. In short, we obtain a real living picture of a wide territory.

As to the style of Elisée Reclus, it bears distinct traces of the influence of both Karl Ritter and Alexander Humboldt, with a light veil of the poetical, imaginative mind of Southern France. All through that immense work the style conveys the impression of an intense energy of both feeling and thought. It is the comprehension of Nature of Goethe and of Shelley in his softest, less tumultuous strophes.[4]

Another distinctive feature of Reclus's 'Geography' is his profound respect for every nationality, stem, or tribe, civilised or not. Not only is his work free from absurd national conceit, or of national or racial prejudice; he has succeeded, besides, in indicating in every branch, stem, or tribe of the human race those features which make one feel what all men have in common – what unites, not what divides them. However, it must not be believed that such a broadly humane attitude led the writer to obliterate the racial or national peculiarities. Not only every European or Asiatic nation appears with its truly national characteristics, but even the smallest of the hundreds of tribes described appears with its own tribal character. This is so much so that one cannot but wonder how Elisée Reclus succeeded in describing so many tribes without repeating himself.

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It must also be said that the human inhabitants of the globe are what interested Reclus most, much more than the animals and the plants, or the flora and fauna of past ages. The Earth as the abode of man, and what man has done and is doing of his abode, this is what absorbed his main attention.

The last volume of the 'Universal Geography' appeared in 1894, and by now, several parts of it have already had to be revised in order to follow the rapid developments of geography, anthropogeography, and demography. The volume dealing with France was entirely revised, and several others ('Russia' in the number) underwent partial revision. Besides, South Africa and China were completely brought up to date by Elisée

[4] In dealing with the 'Géographie Universelle,' I of course refer to the French edition; naturally much is lost of Reclus's delicate treatment even in the best translation.

Reclus and his brother Onésime, and were published separately with a few of the small maps.[5]

The 'Universal Geography' placed Reclus in the foremost rank of modern geographers, and the Royal Geographical Society awarded to him in 1894 its Royal Gold Medal.

As soon as Reclus had terminated his great work, he began to prepare a new one, in which the development of Man was to be traced in close dependency on his geographical environment.

> "Man, like the Earth, has his laws," Reclus wrote in the "Parting Words," with which he concluded his 'Geography.'
>
> "Seen from above and from afar, the diversity of features intermingled on the surface of the globe – crests and valleys, meandering waters, shore-lines, heights and depths, superimposed rocks – presents an image which, so far from being chaotic, reveals to him who understands a marvellous picture of harmony and beauty. . . . And if the earth seems consistent and simple amid the endless complexity of its forms, shall the indwelling humanity, as is often said, be nought but a blind chaotic mass, heaving at hazard, aimless, without an attainable ideal, unconscious of its very destiny? Migrations in diverse directions, settlements and dispersions, growth and decline of nations, civilisations and decadence, formation and displacement of vital centres; are all these, as might seem at the first glance, mere facts, nay, facts unconnected in time, facts whose endless play is uncontrolled by any rhythmical movement giving them a general tendency, which may be expressed by a law? That it is that it concerns us to know. Is the evolution of man in perfect harmony with the laws of the Earth? How is he modified under the thousand influences of the modifying environment? Are the vibrations simultaneous, and do they incessantly modulate their tones from age to age?
>
> "Possibly the little already known may enable us to see further into the darkness of the future, and to assist us at events which are not yet. Possibly we may succeed in contemplating in thought the spectacle of human history beyond the evil days of strife and ignorance, and thus again behold the picture of grandeur and beauty already unfolded by the Earth.
>
> "Here is what I would fain study according to the measure of my strength."

This new work Elisée Reclus completed in three large volumes, and it has begun to be published at Paris, by the Librarie Universelle, under the title, 'L'Homme et la Terre.' Only the first three parts (twelve facsimiles) are now out; but several chapters have previously appeared as separate articles in various reviews, and it is already possible to say that this new work will be an important contribution to that branch of Earth knowledge which is known as historical geography. The first chapters, dealing with primitive man, and next with the relations that existed between man and different animals which he has domesticated or used for the purposes of hunt, are already full of interest, and show already the advantages of Reclus's method. But the chapters of modern geographical history, – such as, for instance, "The Partition of China," published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in November, 1898, or various chapters of general interest published in the French reviews, *Societé Nouvelle* and *Humanité Nouvelle*, entitle us to think that we shall have in the new three volumes an extremely valuable acquisition. Nobody but the author of the 'Universal Geography' was able to so deeply analyse the international problems arising from modern colonisation, and the rivalries between the industrial nations for getting hold of new markets.

In the year 1892 Elisée Reclus, dissatisfied with the turn that affairs were taking in France, left Paris, where he was staying then, and settled at Brussels. There he devoted his energy to three different undertakings. One of them was the "Université Nouvelle" – a free university which he founded with the aid of a few collaborators, and in which he himself taught geography, while his brother Elie delivered a remarkable course of a hundred lectures on the origin and history of religions. Many men of mark joined this university, which probably would have taken a further extension were it not for the difficulty offered by the small comparative value of the degrees conferred by the Université Libre, so long as they were not recognised by the State as

[5] 'L'Afrique Australe,' small 4to, pp. 358, 1901; and 'L'Empire du Milieu,' small 4to, pp. 667, 1902.

equal to the degrees conferred by the other Belgian universities. The École des Hautes Etudes of the Université Nouvelle continued, nevertheless, to accomplish good work.

The other preoccupation of Reclus was the construction of a globe on the linear scale of 1:1,000,000, and, as a step to it, the preparation of convex maps with a true representation of the orography. It is known that this idea is being worked at now by many geographers, and Elisée Reclus gave to it a great deal of his activity. He came over to London a few years ago, in order to speak before the Royal Geographical Society upon this subject. In connection with this work Reclus established at Brussels a Geographical Institute. The idea of it was to create an institution which, like the great Gotha Institute, would collect cartographic and geographical information, publish geographical works of universal utility, and undertake to accomplish geographical works for private persons, public bodies, and States. And finally, Reclus worked at the above-mentioned great work, 'L'homme et la terre.'

Elisée Reclus terminated this work last summer, and – as if his overstrained energy had been sustained only by the great problem he had before his eyes – he began to suffer from repeated and strong attacks of heart disease. The first attack of *angina pectoris* he had had already in 1880, but they seemed to have left no traces, and for a number of years they did not return. Now, and especially after the death of his brother Elie, which took place at Brussels at the end of January, 1904, the attacks of the heart became more and more frequent and extremely painful. I went to see him last June at Brussels, and found him suffering very much during such attacks, but full of mental energy a few hours later. It was hoped by his family and friends that he might still recover, but in June last the disease and suffering became more and more acute. He retained, however, full lucidity of mind, and as late as Saturday, July 1, he dictated some notes for his work. In the morning of July 4 he breathed his last, enjoining that no sort of public demonstration be made at his burial, and that nobody but his nephew, Paul Reclus (son of Elie) should accompany his body to the cemetery. He was buried in accordance with his wish, and laid by the side of his brother Elie.

Elisée Reclus leaves behind him his aged widow, a daughter married in Algeria, and several grandchildren. He was married three times. The first time he married a Creole lady, by whom he had two daughters; one of them died not long ago. He knew in perfection what Victor Hugo described as *l'art d'être grandpère.* His first wife died a few years before the Franco-German war, and he married once more, but soon lost his wife, in 1874, at Lugano. He married for a third time in Switzerland, and his wife – a good botanist and entomologist – always accompanied him during the journeys which he made while he was writing the 'Universal Geography,' and fully understood the importance to science of the great work to which her husband was giving his life.

If Elisée Reclus was held in high esteem as a geographer, he was perhaps esteemed even more as a man by the immense numbers of persons of all nations who had known him

If Elisée Reclus was held in high esteem as a geographer, he was perhaps esteemed even more as a man by the immense numbers of persons of all nations who had known him. It was impossible to approach Elisée Reclus without feeling the elevating influence of his character – such is the unanimous verdict of those who knew him. The profound scientific honesty of his work was only a reflection of his high personal integrity, absolute disinterestedness, and unlimited love of truth, without any restriction, mental or otherwise, that had become his intimate nature. The sobriety of his life was marvellous. Bread and some fruit was all that he lived upon, even when he worked from six in the morning till eleven in the evening. It was also his favourite food. Apart from the need of warmth that he began to feel as he grew in age, he may be said to have had no wants. He knew how to die poor after having written wonderful books. And he knew how, having attained the high summits of fame, never to rule anybody and to remain the equal of his humblest collaborator and of every one he met with. He certainly was one of the finest specimens of civilised mankind, a man *free* in the purest sense of the word.

Worker, seize the machine!
Seize the land, peasant!

Élisée Reclus

"Ouvrier, prends la machine ! Prends la terre, paysan !" *Le Révolté: Organe Socialiste*, 24 January 1880

Our enemies, the defenders of private property, have always claimed that their best ally is the small peasant landowner. According to them, Jacques Bonhomme stands guard day and night around his plot of land, waiting for some "dreadful socialist" worker to jump him or hang him in the corner of his barn. According to them, the difference in interests between the peasant and the city worker is such that the antagonism between the two classes must remain forever, and naturally count on this immortal hatred to retain power and capital.

What is true in this way of seeing? Without doubt, there is a great difference between the peasant who owns property and the worker who owns only his body weakened by hunger, but it is not fair to compare them. The comparison must be made between true proletarians, those in the countryside as well as those in the towns, between those who, from both parties, depend for their work on the goodwill of a master. And do the gentlemen economists not know that, even in France, the country par excellence of small property, the destitute of the soil are counted in millions? Do they not know that in almost all the countries of Europe, the fate of the peasant is, like that of the factory worker, one of irremediable misery? Must they not admit that in England, the homeland of this much-vaunted political economy, that the cultivator of the countryside is a debased mercenary, "Fallen so low," says the *Fortnightly Review*, "that if we gave him the land, he would not know what to do with it?" It is a charming picture of country life, as sung by poets and painted by artists. Leafy trees, a stream of pure water, a barn full of shiny-haired animals frolicking in the yard, a fat farmer's wife with her infant, surrounded by playing children, welcoming with a kind smile the man returning from the fields, the hearth, the steaming meal that can be seen through the half-open door; all this is charming and sweet. But now go and see in Silesia what a horrible tragedy this idyll has turned into. There, no more fire, no food, no clothes: men, women, children, lie sick on pallets or on the bare earth, and hungry rats come to devour the corpses! Such is the regime of private property. The land belongs to a few great personages: too bad for those who were not born princes or whose lucky star did not make them bankers!

Now, contemporary history proves to us that this regime of capitalist property is developing more and more: inevitably, by the normal development of economic laws, small property must be devoured by the big; the plots of land belonging to the peasant are destined to round off the large estates, just as small workshops are an inevitable prey for the powerful factory owners and the big financiers enrich themselves from the ruin of small speculators. In this respect, nothing is more instructive than the correspondence placed in the great English newspapers on the exploitation of the soil, as it is now practiced in the most fertile States of the North-American Republic. Let the peasants of Europe take heed! What the capitalists have found good to do on the western side of the Atlantic, have no doubt that they will soon learn to do on the opposite shore! It is precisely those who give us information on American farms who are commissioners charged by the English government with importing good agricultural methods into Europe.

Let us take as an example of these American farms, that of Casselton, situated in the plains which extend to the west of Lake Superior. A railway company, on very good terms with the government, as are all the large financial companies, has been granted in this region an area of 30,000 hectares in one holding: this is a little more than the surface area of the canton of Geneva. This vast space was entrusted to a skilled agriculturalist who had already managed to make his fortune elsewhere, and our man settled in the middle of the solitude to transform it into a wheat, clover and hay factory. He has in his sheds a hundred ploughs, a hundred sowing machines, a hundred harvesters, twenty threshers; about fifty railway wagons come and go incessantly between the stations in the field and the nearest port, whose piers and ships also belong to the company. A network of telephones goes from the central house to all the buildings on the estate; his voice is heard everywhere, he has an ear for every noise, nothing is done without his orders and far from his supervision.

As for the living tools of the factory, they consist of four hundred horses and six hundred men. The stables are arranged in such a way that, as soon as they leave the gate, the animals begin to trace the furrow several kilometres long that they have to gouge to the end of the field: each of their steps is utilised by the thrifty proprietor. The judicious use of human forces is carried out in the same way; all the movements of the workers are regulated upon leaving the common dormitory.

There, no children or women come to disturb the task; the workers are grouped into squads with their captains and their sergeants; their own duty is to obey and keep silent in the ranks. At the end of autumn, the entire army is disbanded, only ten men remain to watch over the stables. The following year, the recruiters call for other soldiers, because the company judged that it would be undesirable to employ the same worker: this would have the great disadvantage of tying them too much to the land, of making them think that a clod could belong to them!

Is this not the ideal of the agricultural farm, and do not all the agronomists of the United States and England have reason to be delighted? Moreover, the financial results are admirable. With four hundred horses and six hundred men, employed for seven months, they obtain a quantity of wheat that represents the food of a least fifty thousand people. A triumphant example of what can be obtained through grand scientific cultivation, but no less a striking example of the monopoly that a few capitalists can claim over the work and life of all!

And what a terrible fate does this industrial progress prepare for all workers, labourers and peasants, if the right of monopolisation is maintained, if property continues to be concentrated in the hands of a few! It is all very well that one man employed in the service of machinery can supply enough products for a hundred other people; but in this case, what need does the owner have of the crowd of workers who come to present themselves to him? Everywhere work is simplified and the number of workers increases. Here, where ten men collaborated, one is enough; there, where his product was 10, it is now 100. Everywhere the needy besiege the workshops and the capitalist can lower wages from year to year, sort the men to keep only the most docile and the most subdued. If the Frenchman reasons too much, if he is too independent, he will be replaced by the German! If the German eats too much, he will be replaced by the Chinese! That is the will of political economy! It is the law of supply and demand, it is the law of the strongest! No difference can remain in this respect between the factory of the cities and the factory of the fields. The peasant owner of a plot of land can enjoy his leftover like the artisan and the petit bourgeois. The time will come when all competition with the methodical exploiter of the soil, served by capital and machinery, will become completely impossible for him, and on that day, he will have nothing left but to become a beggar.

Unless, however, united with the worker, his companion in toil and misery, he has finally reconquered common property!

Worker, seize the machine!

Seize the land, peasant!

Evolution and Revolution

Élisée Reclus

"Évolution et Révolution", *Le Révolté: Organe socialiste*, 21 February 1880[1]

These two words, Evolution and Revolution, closely resemble one another, and yet they are constantly used in their social and political sense as though their meaning were absolutely antagonistic. The word Evolution, synonymous with gradual and continuous development in morals and ideas, is brought forward in certain circles as though it were the antithesis of that fearful word, Revolution, which implies changes more or less sudden in their action, and entailing some sort of catastrophe. And yet is it possible that a transformation can take place in ideas without bringing about some abrupt displacements in the equilibrium of life? Must not revolution necessarily follow evolution, as action follows the desire to act? They are fundamentally one and the same thing, differing only according to the time of their appearance. If, on the one hand, we believe in the normal progress of ideas, and, on the other, expect opposition, then, of necessity, we believe in external shocks which change the form of society.

It is this which I am about to try to explain, not availing myself of abstract terms, but appealing to the observation and experience of every one, and employing only such arguments as are in common use. No doubt I am one of persons known as "dreadful revolutionists;" for long years I have belonged to the legally infamous society which calls itself "The International Working Men's Association," whose very name entails upon all who assume membership the treatment of malefactors; finally, I am amongst those who served that "execrable" Commune, "the detestation of all respectable men." But however ferocious I may be, I shall know how to place myself outside, or rather above my party, and to study the present evolution and approaching revolution of the human race without passion or personal bias. As we are amongst those whom the world attacks, we have a right to demand to be amongst those whom it hears.

[1] Originally, a lecture given in Geneva, 5 February 1880. This translation is from the pamphlet Elisée Reclus, *Evolution and Revolution* (London: W. Reeves, 1891), Seventh Edition. (*Black Flag*)

To begin with, we must clearly establish the fact, that if the word evolution is willingly accepted by the very persons who look upon revolutionists with horror, it is because they do not fully realise what the term implies, for they would not have the thing at any price. They speak well of progress in general, but they resent progress in any particular direction. They consider that existing society, bad as it is, and as they themselves acknowledge it to be, is worth preserving; it is enough for them that it realises their own ideal of wealth, power or comfort. As there are rich and poor, rulers and subjects, masters and servants, Caesars to command the combat, and gladiators to go forth and die, prudent men have only to place themselves on the side of the rich and powerful, and to pay court to Caesar. Our beautiful society affords them bread, money, place, and honour; what have they to complain of? They persuade themselves without any difficulty that every one is as well satisfied as they. In the eyes of a man who has just dined all the world is well fed. Toying with his tooth-pick, he contemplates placidly the miseries of the "vile multitude" of slaves. All is well; perdition to the starveling whose moan disturbs his digestion! If society has from his cradle provided for the wants and whims of the egotist, he can at all events hope to win a place there by intrigue and flattery, by hard work, or the favour of destiny. What does moral evolution matter to him? To evolve a fortune is his one ambition!

But if the word evolution serves but to conceal a lie in the mouths of those who most willingly pronounce it, it is a reality for revolutionists; it is they who are the true evolutionists.

Escaping from all formulas, which to them have lost their meaning, they seek for truth outside the teaching of the schools; they criticise all that rulers call order, all that teachers call morality; they grow, they develop, they live, and seek to communicate their life. What they have learned they proclaim; what they know they desire to practise. The existing state of things seems to them iniquitous, and they wish to modify it in accordance with a new ideal of justice. It does not suffice them to have freed their own minds, they wish to emancipate those of others also, to liberate society from all servitude. Logical in their evolution, they desire what their mind has conceived, and act upon their desire.

Some years ago the official and courtly world of Europe was much in the habit of repeating that Socialism had quite died out. A man who was extremely capable in little matters and incapable in great ones, an absurdly vain *parvenu*, who hated the people because he had risen from amongst them, officially boasted that he had given Socialism its death-blow. He believed that he had exterminated it in Paris, buried it in the graves of Pere La Chaise. It is in New Caledonia at the Antipodes, thought he, that the miserable remnant of what was once the Socialist party is to be found. All his worthy friends in Europe hastened to repeat the words of Monsieur Thiers, and everywhere they were a song of triumph. As for the German Socialists, have we not the Master of Masters to keep an eye upon them, the man at whose frown Europe trembles? And the Russian Nihilists! Who and what are those wretches? Strange monsters, savages sprung from Huns and Bashkirs, about whom the men of the civilised West have no need to concern themselves!

I do not know what unpleasant consciousness first revealed to the Conservatives that some Socialists remained, and that they were not so dead as the sinister old man had pretended. But now no one can have any doubts as to their resurrection. Do not French workmen at every meeting pronounce unanimously in favour of that appropriation of the land and factories, which is already regarded as the point of departure for the new economic era?

Nevertheless the joy caused by the disappearance of Socialism was of short duration. I do not know what unpleasant consciousness first revealed to the Conservatives that some Socialists remained, and that they were not so dead as the sinister old man had pretended. But now no one can have any doubts as to their resurrection. Do not French workmen at every meeting pronounce unanimously in favour of that appropriation of the land and factories, which is already regarded as the point of departure for the new economic era? Is not England ringing with the cry, "Nationalisation of the Land," and do not the great landowners expect expropriation at the hands of the people? Do not political parties seek to court Irish votes by promises of the confiscation of the soil, by pledging themselves beforehand to an outrage upon the thrice sacred rights of property? And in the United States have we not seen the workers masters for a week of all the railways of Indiana, and of part of those on the Atlantic sea-board? If they had understood the situation, might not a great revolution have been accomplished almost

without a blow? And do not men, who are acquainted with Russia, know that the peasants, one and all, claim the soil, the whole of the soil, and wish to expel their lords? Thus the evolution is taking place. Socialism, or in other words, the army of individuals who desire to change social conditions, has resumed its march. The moving mass is pressing on, and now no government dare ignore its serried ranks. On the contrary, the powers that be exaggerate its numbers, and attempt to contend with it by absurd legislation and irritating interference. Fear is an evil counsellor.

No doubt it may sometimes happen that all is perfectly quiet. On the morrow of a massacre few men dare put themselves in the way of the bullets. When a word, a gesture are punished with imprisonment, the men who have courage to expose themselves to the danger are few and far between. Those are rare who quietly accept the part of victim in a cause, the triumph of which is as yet distant and even doubtful. Everyone is not so heroic as the Russian Nihilists, who compose manifestos in the very lair of their foes, and paste them on a wall between two sentries. One should be very devoted oneself to find fault with those who do not declare themselves Socialists, when their work, that is to say the life of those dear to them, depends on the avowal. But if all the oppressed have not the temperament of heroes, they feel their sufferings none the less, and large numbers amongst them are taking their own interests into serious consideration. In many a town where there is not one organised Socialist group, all the workers without exception are already more or less consciously Socialists; instinctively they applaud a comrade who speaks to them of a social state in which all the products of labour shall be in the hands of the labourer. This instinct contains the germ of the future Revolution; for from day to day it becomes more precise, transformed into distincter consciousness. What the worker vaguely felt yesterday, he knows today, and each new experience teaches him to know it better. And are not the peasants, who cannot raise enough to keep body and soul together from their morsel of ground, and the yet more numerous class who do not possess a clod of their own, are not all these beginning to comprehend that the soil ought to belong to the men who cultivate it? They have always instinctively felt this, now they know it, and are preparing to assert their claim in plain language.

This is the state of things; what will be the issue? Will not the evolution which is taking place in the minds of the workers, i.e. of the great masses, necessarily bring about a revolution; unless, indeed, the defenders of privilege yield with a good grace to the pressure from below? But history teaches us that they will do nothing of the sort. At first sight it would appear so natural that a good understanding should be established amongst men without a struggle. There is room for us all on the broad bosom of the earth; it is rich enough to enable us all to live in comfort. It can yeild sufficient harvests to provide all with food; it produces enough fibrous plants to supply all with clothing; it contains enough stone and clay for all to have houses. There is a place for each of the brethren at the banquet of life. Such is the simple economic fact.

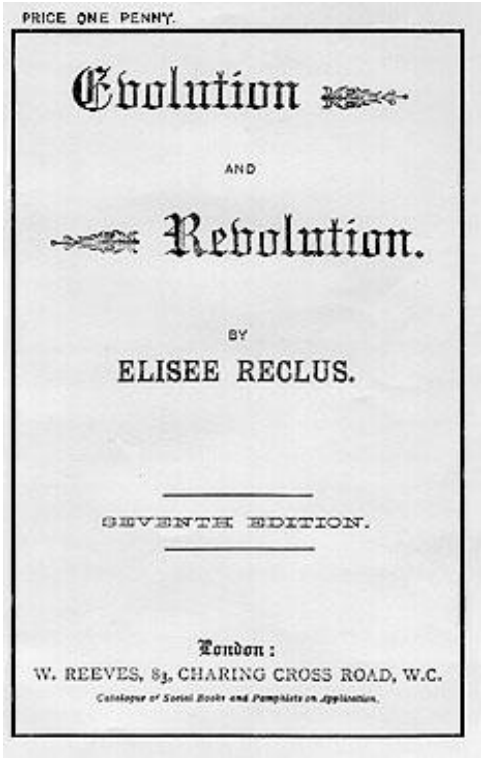
What does it matter? say some. The rich will squander at their pleasure as much of this earth as suits them; the middle-men, speculators and brokers of every description will manipulate the rest; the armies will destroy a great deal, and the mass of the people will have the scraps that remain. “The poor we shall have always with us,” say the contented, quoting a remark which, according to them, fell from the lips of a God. We do not care whether their God wished some to be miserable or not. We will re-create the world on a different pattern! “No, there shall be no more poor! As all men need to be housed and clothed and warmed and fed, let all have what is necessary, and none be cold or hungry!” The terrible Socialists have no need of a God to inspire these words; they are human, that is enough.

Thus two opposing societies exist amongst men. They are intermingled, variously allied here and there by the people who do not know their own minds, and advance only to retreat; but viewed from above, and taking no account of uncertain and indifferent individuals who are swayed hither and thither by fate like waves of the sea, it is certain that the actual world is divided into two camps, those who desire to maintain poverty, i.e. hunger for others, and those who demand comforts for all. The forces in these two camps seem at first sight very unequal. The supporters of existing society have boundless estates, incomes counted by hundreds of thousands, all the powers of the State, with its armies of officials, soldiers, policemen, magistrates, and a whole arsenal of laws and ordinances. And what can the Socialists, the artificers of the new society, oppose to all this organised force? Does it seem that they can do nothing? Without money or troops they would indeed succumb if they did not represent the evolution of ideas and of morality. They are nothing, but they have the progress of human thought on their side. They are borne along on the stream of the times.

The external form of society must alter in correspondence with the impelling force within; there is no better established historical fact. The sap makes the tree and gives it leaves and flowers; the blood makes the man; the ideas make the society. And yet there is not a conservative who does not lament that ideas and morality, and all that goes to make up the deeper life of man, have been modified since “the good old times.” Is it not a necessary result of the inner working of men’s minds that social forms must change and a proportionate revolution take place?

Let each ascertain from his own recollections the changes in the methods of thought and action which have happened since the middle of this century. Let us take, for example, the one capital fact of the diminution of observance and respect. Go amongst great

personages: what have they to complain of? That they are treated like other men. They no longer take precedence; people neglect to salute them; less distinguished persons permit themselves to possess handsomer furniture or finer horses; the wives of less wealthy men go more sumptuously attired. And what is the complaint of the ordinary man or woman of the middle-class? There are no more servants to be had, the spirit of obedience is lost. Now the maid pretends to understand cooking better than her mistress; she does not piously remain in one situation, only too grateful for the hospitality accorded her; she changes her place in consequence of the smallest disagreeable observation, or to gain two shillings more wages. There are even countries where she asks her mistress for a character in exchange for her own.


PRICE ONE PENNY.

Evolution

AND

Revolution.

BY

ELISEE RECLUS.

SEVENTH EDITION.

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It is true, respect is departing; not the just respect which attaches to an upright and devoted man, but that despicable and shameful respect which follows wealth and office; that slavish respect which gathers a crowd of loafers when a king passes, and makes the lackeys and horses of a great man objects of admiration. And not only is respect departing, but those who lay most claim to the consideration of the rest, are the first to compromise their superhuman character. In former days Asiatic sovereigns understood the art of causing themselves to be adored. Their palaces were seen from afar; their statues were erected everywhere; their edicts were read; but they never showed themselves. The most familiar never addressed them but upon their knees; from time to time a half-lifted veil parted to disclose them as if by a lightning flash, and then as suddenly enfolded them once more, leaving consternation in the hearts of all beholders. In those days respect was profound enough to result in stupifaction: a dumb messenger brought a silken cord to the condemned, and that sufficed, even a gesture would have been superfluous. And now we see sovereigns taking boxes by telegraph at the theatre to witness the performance of *Orphee aux Enfers* or *The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein* that is to say, taking part in the derision of all which used to be held most worthy of respect- divinity and royalty! Which is the true regicide, the man who kills a sovereign, doing him the honour to take him as the representative of a whole society, or the monarch, who mocks at himself by laughing at the Grand Duchess or General Boum ? He teaches us at least that political power is a worm eaten institution. It has retained its form, but the universal respect which gave it worth has disappeared. It is nothing but an external scaffolding, the edifice itself has ceased to exist.

Does not the spread of an education, which gives the same conception of things to all, contribute to our progress towards equality? If instruction were only to be obtained at school, governments might still hope to hold the minds of men enslaved; but it is outside the school that most knowledge is gained. It is picked up in the street, in the workshop, before the booths of a fair, at the theatre, in railway carriages, on steam boats, by gazing at new landscapes, by visiting foreign towns. Almost every one travels now, either as a luxury or a necessity. Not a meeting but people who have seen Russia, Australia, or America may be found in it, and if travellers who have changed continents are so frequently met with, there is, one may say, no one who has not moved about sufficiently to have observed the contrast between town and country, mountain and plain, earth and sea. The rich travel more than the poor, it is true; but they generally travel aimlessly; when they change countries they do not change surroundings, they are always in a sense at home; the luxuries and enjoyments of hotel life do not permit them to appreciate the essential differences between country and country, people and people. The poor man, who comes into collision with the difficulties of life without guide or *cicerone,* is best qualified to observe and remember. And does not the great school of the outer world exhibit the prodigies of human industry equally to rich and poor, to those who have called these marvels into existence and those who profit by them? The poverty-stricken outcast can see railways, telegraphs, hydraulic rams, perforators, self-lighting matches, as well as the man of power, and he is no less impressed by them. Privilege has disappeared in the enjoyment of some of these grand conquests of science. When he is conducting his locomotive through space, doubling or slacking speed at his pleasure, does the engine-driver believe himself the inferior of the sovereign shut up behind him in a gilded railway-carriage, and trembling with the knowledge that his life depends on a jet of steam, the shifting of a lever, or a bomb of dynamite?

The sight of nature and the works of man, and practical life, these form the college in which the true education of contemporary society is obtained. Schools, properly so called, are relatively much less important; yet they, too, have undergone their evolution in the direction of equality. There was a time, and that not very far distant, when the whole of education consisted in mere

formulas, mystic phrases, and texts from sacred books. Go into the Mussel school opened beside the mosque. There you will see children spending whole hours in spelling or reciting verses from the Koran. Go into a school kept by Christian priests, Protestant or Catholic, and you will hear silly hymns and absurd recitations. But even in these schools the pressure from below has caused this dull routine to be varied with a new sort of instruction; instead of nothing but formulas the teachers now explain facts, point out analogies and trace the action of laws. Whatever the commentaries with which the instructor accompanies his lessons, the figures remain none the less incorruptible. Which education will prevail? That according to which two and two make four, and nothing is created out of nothing; or the odd education according to which everything comes from nothing and three persons make only one?

The elementary school, it is true, is not all: it is not enough to catch a glimpse of science, one should be able to apply it in every direction. Therefore Socialistic evolution renders it necessary that school should be a permanent institution for all men. After receiving "general enlightenment" in a primary school, each ought to be able to develop to the full such intellectual capacity as he may possess, in a life which he has freely chosen. Meanwhile let not the worker despair. Every great conquest of science ends by becoming public property. Professional scientists are obliged to go through long ages of research and hypothesis, they are obliged to struggle in the midst of error and falsehood; but when the truth is gained at length, often in spite of them, thanks to some despised revolutionists, it shines forth clear and simple in all its brilliance. All understand it without an effort: it seems as if it had always been known. Formerly learned men fancied that the sky was a round dome, a metal roof — or better still — a series of vaults, three, seven, nine, even thirteen, each with its procession of stars, its distinct laws, its special *regime* and its troops of angels and archangels to guard it! But since these tiers of heavens, piled one upon the other, mentioned in the Bible and Talmud, have been demolished, there is not a child who does not know that round the earth is infinite and unconfined space. He hardly can be said to learn this. It is a truth which henceforward forms a part of the universal inheritance.

There was a time when the great majority of men were born and lived as slaves, and had no other ideal than a change of servitude. It never entered their heads that "one man is as good as another." Now they have learnt it, and understand that the virtual equality bestowed by evolution must be changed into real equality, thanks to a revolution.

It is the same with all great acquisitions, especially in morals and political economy. There was a time when the great majority of men were born and lived as slaves, and had no other ideal than a change of servitude. It never entered their heads that "one man is as good as another." Now they have learnt it, and understand that the virtual equality bestowed by evolution must be changed into real equality, thanks to a revolution. Instructed by life, the workers comprehend certain economic laws much better than even professional economists. Is there a single workman who remains indifferent to the question of progressive or proportional taxation, and who does not know that all taxes fall on the poorest in the long run? Is there a single workman who does not know the terrible fatality of the "iron law," which condemns him to receive nothing but a miserable pittance, just the wage: that will prevent his dying of hunger during his work? Bitter experience has caused him to know quite enough of this inevitable law of political economy.

Thus, whatever be the source of information, all profit by it, and the worker not less than the rest. Whether a discovery is made by a bourgeois, a noble, or a plebeian, whether the learned man is Bernard Palissy, Lord Bacon, or Baron Humboldt, the whole world will turn his researches to account. Certainly the privileged classes would have liked to retain the benefits of science for themselves, and leave ignorance to the people, but henceforth their selfish desire cannot be fulfilled. They find themselves in the case of the magician in "The Thousand and One Nights," who unsealed a vase in which a genius had been shut up asleep for ten thousand years. They would like to drive him back into his retreat, to fasten him down under a triple seal, but they have lost the words of the charm, and the genius is free for ever.

This freedom of the human will is now asserting itself in every direction; it is preparing no small and partial revolutions, but one universal Revolution. It is throughout society as a whole, and every branch of its activity, that changes are making ready. Conservatives are not in the least mistaken when they speak in general terms of Revolutionists as enemies of religion, the family and property. Yes; Socialists do reject the authority of dogma and the intervention of the supernatural in nature, and, in this sense however earnest their striving for the realisation of their ideal,

they are the enemies of religion. Yes; they do desire the suppression of the marriage market; they desire that unions should be free, depending only on mutual affection and respect for self and for the dignity of others, and, in this sense, however loving and devoted to those whose lives are associated with theirs, they are certainly the enemies of the legal family. Yes; they do desire to put an end to the monopoly of land and capital, and to restore them to all, and, in this sense, however glad they may be to secure to every one the enjoyment of the fruits of the earth, they are the enemies of property.

Thus the current of evolution, the incoming tide, is bearing us onward towards a future radically different from existing conditions, and it is vain to attempt to oppose obstacles to destiny. Religion, by far the most solid of all dikes, has lost its strength: cracking on every side, it leaks and totters, and cannot fail to be sooner or later overthrown.

It is certain that contemporary evolution is taking place wholly outside Christianity. There was a time when the word Christian, like Catholic, had a universal signification, and was actually applied to a world of brethren, sharing, to a certain extent, the same customs, the same ideas, and a civilisation of the same nature. But are not the pretensions of Christianity to be considered in our day as synonymous with civilisation, absolutely unjustifiable? And when it is said of England or Russia that their armies are about to carry Christianity and civilisation into distant regions, is not the irony of the expression obvious to every one? The garment of Christianity does not cover all the peoples who by right of culture and industry form a part of contemporary civilisation. The Parsees of Bombay, the Brahmins of Benares eagerly welcome our science, but they are coldly polite to the Christian Missionaries. The Japanese, though so prompt in imitating us, take care not to accept our religion. As for the Chinese, they are much too cunning and wary to allow themselves to be converted. “We have no need of your priests,” says an English poem written by a Chinese, “We have no need of your priests. We have too many ourselves, both long-haired and shaven. What we need is your arms and your science, to fight you and expel you from our land, as the wind drives forth the withered leaves!”

Thus Christianity does not nominally cover half the civilised world, and even where it is supposed to be paramount, it must be sought out; it is much more a form than a reality, and amongst those who are apparently the most zealous, it is nothing but an ignoble hypocrisy. Putting aside all whose Christianity consists merely in the sprinkling of baptism or inscription on the parish register, how many individuals are there whose daily life corresponds with the dogmas they profess, and whose ideas are always, as they should be, those of another world? Christians rendered honourable by their perfect sincerity may be sought without marked success even in “Protestant Rome,” a city, nevertheless, of mighty traditions. At Geneva as at Oxford, as at all religious centres, and everywhere else, the principal preoccupations are non-ecclesiastical; they lean towards politics, or, more often still, towards business. The principal representatives of so-called Christian society are Jews, “the epoch’s kings.” And amongst those who devote their lives to higher pursuits — science, art, poetry — how many, unless forced to do so, occupy themselves with theology? Enter the University of Geneva. At all the courses of lectures — medicine, natural history, mathematics, even jurisprudence — you will find voluntary listeners; at every tone except at those upon theology. The Christian religion is like a snow-wreath melting in the sun: traces are visible here and there, but beneath the streaks of dirty white the earth shows, already clear of rime.

The religion which is thus becoming detached, like a garment, from European civilisation, was extremely convenient for the explanation of misery, injustice, and social inequality. It had one solution for everything-miracles. A Supreme will had pre-ordained all things. Injustice was an apparent evil, but it was preparing good tilings to come. “God giveth sustenance to the young birds. He prepareth eternal blessedness for the afflicted. Their misery below is but the harbinger of felicity on high!” These things were ceaselessly repeated to the oppressed as long as they believed them; but now such arguments have lost all credence, and are no longer met with, except in the petty literature of religious tracts.

What is to be done to replace the departing religion? As the worker believes no longer ill miracles, can he perhaps be induced to believe in lies? And so learned economists, academicians, merchants, and financiers have contrived to introduce into science the bold proposition that property and prosperity are always the reward of labour! It would be scarcely decent to discuss such an assertion. When they pretend that labour is the origin of fortune, economists know perfectly well that they are not speaking the truth. They know as well as the Socialists that wealth is not the product of personal labour, but of the labour of others: they are not ignorant that the runs of luck on the Exchange and the speculations which create great fortunes have no more connection with labour than the exploits of brigands in the forests; they dare not pretend that the individual who has five thousand pounds a day, just what is required to support one hundred thousand persons like himself, is distinguished from other men by an intelligence one hundred thousand times above the average. It would be scandalous to discuss this sham origin of social inequality. It would be to be a dupe, almost an accomplice, to waste time over such hypocritical reasoning.

But arguments of another kind are brought forward, which have at least the merit of not being based upon a lie. The right of the strongest is now evoked against social claims. Darwin's theory, which has lately made its appearance in the scientific world, is believed to tell against us. And it is, in fact, the right of the strongest which triumphs when fortune is monopolised. He who is materially the fittest, the most wily, the most favoured by birth, education, and friends; he who is best armed and confronted by the feeblest foe, has the greatest chance of success; he is able better than the rest to erect a citadel, from the summit of which he may look down on his unfortunate brethren. Thus is determined the rude struggle of conflicting egoisms. Formerly this blood-and-fire theory was not openly avowed; it would have appeared too violent, and honied words were preferable. But the discoveries of science relative to the struggle between species for existence and the survival of the fittest, have permitted the advocates of force to withdraw from their mode of expression all that seemed too insolent. "See, they say, "it is an inevitable law! Thus decrees the fate of mankind!"

We ought to congratulate ourselves that the question is thus simplified, for it is so much the nearer to its solution. Force reigns, say the advocates of social inequality! Yes, it is force which reigns! proclaims modern industry louder and louder in its brutal perfection. But may not the speech of economists and traders be taken up by revolutionists? The law of the strongest will not always and necessarily operate for the benefit of commerce. "Might surpasses right," said Bismark, quoting from many others; but it is possible to make ready for the day when might will be at the service of right. If it is true that ideas of solidarity are spreading; if it is true that the conquests of science end by penetrating the lowest strata; if it is true that truth is becoming common property; if evolution towards justice *is* taking place, will not the workers, who have at once the right and the might, make use of both to bring about a revolution for the benefit of all? What can isolated individuals, however strong in money, intelligence, and cunning, do against associated masses?

In no modern revolution have the privileged classes been known to fight their own battles. They always depend on armies of the poor, whom they have taught what is called loyalty to the flag, and trained to what is called "the maintenance of order." Five millions of men, without counting the superior and inferior police, are employed in Europe in this work. But these armies may become disorganised, they may call to mind the nearness of their own past and future relations with the mass of the people, and the hand which guides them may grow unsteady. Being in great part drawn from the proletariat, they may become to *bourgeois* society what the barbarians in the pay of the Empire became to that of Rome – an element of dissolution. History abounds in examples of the frenzy which seizes upon those in power. When the miserable and disinherited of the earth shall unite in their own interest, trade with trade, nation with nation, race with race; when they shall fully awake to their sufferings and their purpose, doubt not that an occasion will assuredly present itself for the employment of their might in the service of right; and powerful as may be the Master of those days, he will be weak before the starving masses leagued against him. To the great evolution now taking place will succeed the long expected, the great revolution.

If it is true that ideas of solidarity are spreading; if it is true that the conquests of science end by penetrating the lowest strata; if it is true that truth is becoming common property; if evolution towards justice *is* taking place, will not the workers, who have at once the right and the might, make use of both to bring about a revolution for the benefit of all?

It will be salvation, and there is none other. For if capital retains force on its side, we shall all be the slaves of its machinery, mere bands connecting iron cogs with steel and iron shafts. If new spoils, managed by partners only responsible to their cash books, are ceaselessly added to the savings already amassed in bankers' coffers, then it will be vain to cry for pity, no one will hear your complaints. The tiger may renounce his victim, but bankers' books pronounce judgments without appeal. From the terrible mechanism whose merciless work is recorded in the figures on its silent pages, men and nations come forth ground to powder. If capital carries the day, it will be time to weep for our golden age; in that hour we may look behind us and see like a dying light, love and joy and hope — all the earth has held of sweet and good. Humanity will have ceased to live.

As for us, whom men call "the modern barbarians," our desire is justice for all. Villains that we are, we claim for all that shall be born, bread, liberty, and progress.

Anarchy and Universal Suffrage

Elisée Reclus

Liberty (Boston), 4 March 1882

The following is an extract from a masterly discourse recently delivered by Elisée Reclus, the eminent geographer, before the Section of Outlaws at St. Etienne, a branch of the International Working People's Association:[1]

There are socialists and socialists, many will observe, and of the various schools which is to prevail? Certainly, if one trusts solely to appearances, there seems a great variety of forms, but this is only an illusion. At bottom there are but two principles confronting each other: on one side, that of government; on the other, that of anarchy: Authority and Liberty. The names in which parties enwrap themselves are of no consequence. Just as under the pretended republicans of today we find petty dictators, so many Louis Fourteenths in miniature, so we discover Anarchists beneath all revolutionists. The governmentalists, be the chief of State king, consul, emperor, president, council of three or of ten, wish to hold the power in their hands, dispose of offices, salaries, and honorary titles, and award decorations and favours; they wish to be the masters, and to start every initiative from above: they one and all proceed on the idea that they are animated by a supernatural power to think, wish, and act for their subjects. All claim obedience to their decrees and laws; like the popes and ancient kings by divine right, they are infallible. Look at your representatives and the representatives of your representatives, – that is, your ministers! Do they not scorn an imperative commission as an insult offered to their dignity? Have they not devised for themselves special legislation which places them outside of the laws enacted for common mortals? By recommendations, endorsements, and demands for office, honours, and favours are they not inevitably accomplices of all the servants of preceding governments? Bureaus, administrations, legislation, – all remain the same: the mechanism has not changed: what matters it if the mechanicians have changed their clothing? The word Republic is certainly a fine one, since it means the "Public thing" and would seem to attribute to all who call themselves republicans a spirit of disinterested solidarity in the defence of the common cause; but the name has lost its real meaning since it was captured by the governmentalists, and indicates no longer a change of system, but only a change of persons.

All history is nothing else than the series of revolutions by which the individual gradually extricates himself from servitude and labours to become his own master by destroying the State.

On the other hand, all revolutionary acts are, by their very nature, essentially anarchistic, no matter what the power which seeks to profit by them. The man, weary of injustice, who throws himself into the fray for the triumph of the right becomes, at least for the moment, his own master; his associates are his companions, not his superiors; he is free while the struggle lasts. From time to time history brings us face to face with grand revolts, and, if we try to distinguish the various elements confounded therein and assign to each its *rôle*, we see that the active factor, the only one productive of results instrumental in the progress of humanity, is the anarchistic element, – that is, the element proceeding from individual initiative, from personal wills leagued together without the intervention of a master. From time immemorial authority has desired to maintain routine, and from time immemorial the anarchistic intervention of revolt has been needed to destroy barriers and give air to the stifled people. All history is nothing else than the series of revolutions by which the individual gradually extricates himself from servitude and labours to become his own master by destroying the State. What matters it if the majority of historians relate the opinions of kings and princes and describe their governmental expedients, their efforts to aggrandise themselves at the expense of the people? They misconstrue the life of humanity. In the same way a physician sees in the life of a men only the history of his diseases.

The old motto of the revolutionists, handed down to us from century to century, which he finally become an official formula, but a formula void of meaning under any government whatsoever, – "Liberty, Equality,

[1] "L'Anarchie et le Suffrage Universel", *Le Révolté: Organe socialiste*, 21 January 1882. (*Black Flag*)

Fraternity," or rather, Solidarity, – proves that anarchy has always been the ideal of successive generations. Can the word Liberty have a meaning if it does not imply the integral development of the individual in such a manner that he may have all the physical strength, health, and beauty compatible with his race, enjoy all the knowledge that his native intelligence can acquire, and choose without hindrance the labour best befitting him? So, the word Equality is but a lie if private property, inheritance, industrial speculations, and the possession of power involve the contrast between wealth and poverty, condemning one class to privation, disease, and sometimes vice, while another lives in comfort, having health, facilities for study, and the joys of science and art. Finally, fraternal Solidarity can be born only among men freely associated, grouping themselves according to their inclinations, and distributing the common task with it view to their talents and mutual convenience. Any other solidarity is that of the wolf and the lamb, of the master and his slaves.

But, they tell us, the health of the social organism is only a chimera! The grand words Liberty, Equality, Solidarity are only words, good to figure on the pediments of buildings, but without practical application. And mental sluggards, like the privileged classes, cling to the existing order, however bad it is, as if it could offer them the slightest guarantee of stability. But can this society he truly said to have a real existence? Is it not dependent upon the constant change, the incessant modification of its tottering equilibrium? Is that a viable society where more than nine-tenths of its members are condemned to die before old age for want of comfort and harmony, where interests are so divided that wise cultivation of the soil and a truly scientific disposition of its products are impossible, where nearly half the wealth is lost through disordered distribution, and where the manufacturers, driven by competition or by the necessity of living, occupy themselves in adulterating products, lowering the standard of merchandise, and even in changing food into poison? Is that a society where so many thousands of women have no choice except between suicide, robbery, and prostitution? In so far as it is a society of rulers and proprietors it is only struggle and disorder, and really constitutes that which in current phraseology is commonly called "anarchy." Fortunately the true anarchy – that is, the rebellion of individuals and the free association of the rebels – comes to introduce into this diseased organism a few principles of cure and renovation. It was in spite of the divine authority with which priests claim to be armed that free minds gained the right to think in their own fashion and freed themselves from the stupid fear of hell and the silly hope of heaven. It was in spite of the holiness with which tradition had invested kings and governments of all sorts that the people, by revolution after revolution, finally tore from their masters at least a few fragments of Liberty and the factitious recognition – pending something better – of their rights of sovereignty. In the family, where the husband and father was formerly absolute master, it has also been by continual insurrections at the fireside that the wife and child have at last got possession of some of the personal rights which the law always denied them, but which public opinion is beginning to concede to them. Likewise, if language develops and improves, it is in spite of academic routine; if science takes huge strides and achieves marvellous results by its industry, it is in spite of the professors and official *savants;* and it is also by successive revolts that art conquers new territories. Thus I ever vivify the ancient legend of the miraculous fruit which gives the knowledge of good and evil: it is the fruit that the tree of science bears. According to the priests, it is from this fruit of which the sons of men have eaten that all evil comes; according to the revolutionists, on the contrary, it is from this fruit of knowledge that all good has come. Without the spirit of revolt we should still be wild animals, nibbling the grass and devouring the roots of the earthly paradise. All progress, all life upon earth is the work of incessant rebellion. Isolated, the rebels are consecrated to death, but their example is not lost, and other malcontents rise up after them; these unite, and from defeat to defeat finally arrive at victory.

Nevertheless, many people think, or pretend to think, that the book of revolutions is closed forever, thanks to what is commonly called universal suffrage. We are to find a safety-valve in the right to vote granted thirty-three years ago by the provisional government.....

But French males and majors vote in vain; they can only choose masters, petty kings who can avenge themselves for a single day of humiliation by years of insolence and irresponsible government. The elections over, the government makes war and peace without consulting the rabble of its subjects; notwithstanding the elections, millions of wretches wallow in the mire of misery, millions of labourers remain at the mercy of capital, which pens them up in its mines and factories; the uncertainty of the future is a load upon all. Has universal voting dispersed the corporations of robbers who speculate on labour and gather in all the profits? Has it diminished the number of merchants who sell by false weights and of advocates who plead indifferently for the just and the unjust? The plainest result of the substitution of so-called universal suffrage for restricted suffrage and suffrage exercised at the royal will is the increase of that hideous class of politicians who make a trade of living by their voice, paying court first to the electors and then, once in office, turning to those above them to beg for offices, sinecures, and pensions. To the aristocracy of birth, capital, and official position is added another aristocracy, that of the stump. Of course men are to be found among the candidates who are moved by good intentions and who are firmly resolved not to prove false to the programme which they have

mapped out during the campaign; but, however good their intentions, they none the less find themselves on the day after the voting in circumstances different from those of the night before. They are a part of privileged class, and, in spite of themselves, they become men of privilege. Invested by their fellow-citizens with the power to know everything and decide everything, they imagine themselves, in fact, competent to deal with all questions; their science is universal; they are at once *savants*, engineers, manufacturers, merchants, generals, admirals, diplomats, and administrators, and the whole life of the nation must be elaborated in their brains. Where is the individual strong enough to resist this flattery of the electors? Heir of kings and, like kings, disposing of affairs with a supreme comprehension, the deputy ends like kings, seized with the vertigo of power: proportionately he lifts his whims into laws, surrounds himself with courtiers whom it pleases him to despise, and creates self-interests directly antagonistic to those of the multitude which he is reputed to represent.

So far, our profession as electors has consisted only in recruiting enemies among those who call themselves our friends, or even among those who pretend to belong, as we do, to the party or social revendication. Must we untiringly continue this task of dupes, incessantly till this cask which empties as rapidly, forever try to climb this rock which tumbles back upon us? Or should we busy ourselves with our own work, which is to establish, by ourselves and without delegation, a society of free and equal men? To justify their participation in electoral intrigues, some revolutionary socialists claim to have no object in view except agitation. Passions being more excited during electoral struggles, they would take advantage of this fact to act more forcibly on the minds of the people and gain new adherents to the cause of the revolution. "But does not the election itself mislead all these passions? The interest excited by elections is of the same order as that felt at the gaming-table. The course of the candidates at the balloting is like that of the horses at a hippodrome: people are eager to know who will win by a length or half-length; then, after the emotions excited by the struggle, they think the business finished until the races of the following year or decade, and go to their rest as if the real work was not yet to do. The elections serve only to start the revolutionists on a false scent and consequently waste their strength. As for us Anarchists, we remain in the ranks, equals of each other. Knowing that authority always results sadly to him who exercises it and to those who submit to it, we should feel ourselves dishonoured were we to descend from our condition of free men to enrol ourselves on the list of mendicants of power. That business let us leave to the prideless people who like to crook the spine.

And while the so-called governing classes know how to set us no other example than that of trying to succeed at any price in extracting their incomes from the toll of another, in the ranks of the so-called governed classes are to be seen the rudiments of a world no longer that of priests and kings. There you find strength, because there you find labour and solidarity!

Besides, what need have we to enter a society not our own? In vain they tell us that the establishment of an anarchistic society is impossible; such a society already exists: once more, it is by moving that we have proved movement to be possible. In spite of the hostile conditions forced upon us by *bourgeoise* and capitalistic society, anarchistic groups are springing up everywhere; they have no need of presidents or of privileged representatives; woman is not the inferior of man, nor is the foreigner deprived of the rights which the Frenchman enjoys; all these factitious distinctions made by institutions and laws have disappeared from our midst. Each employs himself according to his faculties, labours according to his strength without demanding additional reward for his superior merit. And while the so-called governing classes know how to set us no other example than that of trying to succeed at any price in extracting their incomes from the toll of another, in the ranks of the so-called governed classes are to be seen the rudiments of a world no longer that of priests and kings. There you find strength, because there you find labour and solidarity! But it is not enough to have strength; it is also necessary to have the confidence of its possession and the wisdom not to apply it hap-hazard, as has been done hitherto, in revolutions of caprice, in which blind instinct played the largest part. That, companions, was the special word that I had to say to you. Prepare yourselves for the grand struggle!

So you should reject every authority, but also commit yourself to a deep respect for all sincere convictions. Live your own life, but also allow others the complete freedom to live theirs **– *Advice to My Anarchist Comrades* (1901)**

Anarchy: By an Anarchist

Elisée Reclus

The Contemporary Review, May 1884[1]

[I]

To most Englishmen, the word *Anarchy* is so evil-sounding that ordinary readers of the *Contemporary Review* will probably turn from these pages with aversion, wondering how anybody could have the audacity to write them. With the crowd of commonplace chatterers we are already past praying for; no reproach is too bitter for us, no epithet too insulting. Public speakers on social and political subjects find that abuse of Anarchists is an unfailing passport to public favour. Every conceivable crime is laid to our charge, and opinion, too indolent to learn the truth, is easily persuaded that Anarchy is but another name for wickedness and chaos. Overwhelmed with opprobrium and held up with hatred, we are treated on the principle that the surest way of hanging a dog is to give it a bad name.

There is nothing surprising in all this. The chorus of imprecations with which we are assailed is quite in the nature of things, for we speak in a tongue unhallowed by usage, and belong to none of the parties that dispute the possession of power. Like all innovators, whether they be violent of pacific, we bring not peace but a sword, and are nowise astonished to be received as enemies.

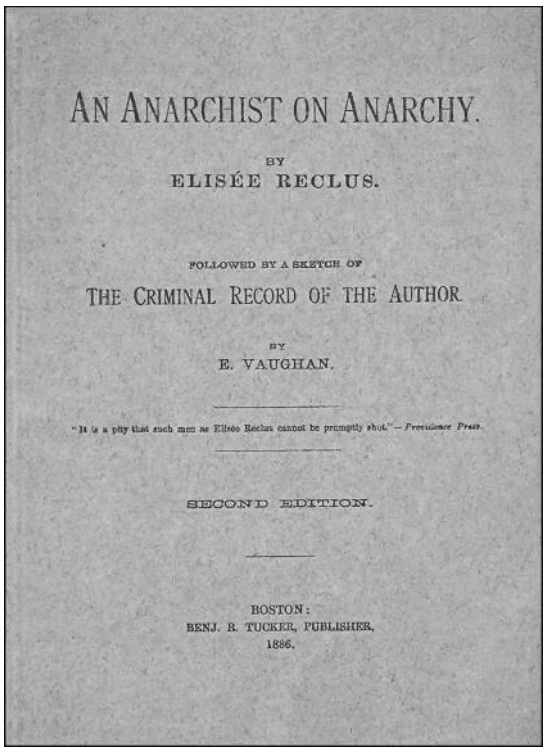
Yet it is not with light hearts that we incur so much ill-will, nor are we satisfied with merely knowing that it is undeserved. To risk the loss of so precious an advantage as popular sympathy without first patiently searching out the truth and carefully considering our duty would be an act of reckless folly. To a degree never dreamt of by men who are born unresistingly on the great current of public opinion, are we bound to render to our conscience a reason for the faith that is in us, to strengthen our convictions by study of nature and mankind, and, above all, to compare them with that ideal justice which has been slowly elaborated by the untold generations of the human race. This ideal is known to all, and is almost too trite to need repeating. It exists in the moral teaching of every people, civilised or savage; every religion has tried to adapt it to its dogmas and precepts, for it is the ideal of equality of rights and reciprocity of services. “We are all brethren,” is a saying repeated from one end of the world to the other, and the principle of universal brotherhood expressed in this saying implies a complete solidarity of interests and efforts.

Accepted in its integrity by simple souls, does not this principle seem to imply as a necessary consequence the social state formulated by modern socialists: “From each according to ability, to each according to needs”? Well, we are simple souls, and we hold firmly to this ideal of human morality. Of a surety there is much dross mixed with the pure metal, and the personal and collective egoisms of families, cities, castes, peoples, and parties have wrought on this groundwork some startling variations. But we have not to do here with the ethics of selfish interests, it is enough to identify the central point of convergence towards which all partial ideas more or less tend. This focus of gravitation is justice. If humanity be not a vain dream, if all our impressions, all our thoughts, are not pure hallucinations, one capital fact dominates the history of humanity – that every kindred and people yearns after justice. The very life of humanity is but one long cry for that fraternal equity which still remains unattained. Listen to the words, uttered nearly three thousand years ago, of old Hesiod, answering beforehand all those who contend that the struggle for existence dooms us to eternal strife. “Let fishes, the wild beasts and birds, devour one and other – but our law is justice.”

Yet how vast is the distance that still separates us from the justice invoked by the poet in the very dawn of history! How great is the progress we have still to make before we may rightfully cease comparing ourselves with wild creatures fighting for a morsel of carrion! It is in vain that we pretend to be civilised, if civilisation be that which Mr. Alfred R. Wallace has described as “the harmony of individual liberty with the collective will.” It is really too easy to criticise contemporary society, its morals, its conventions, and its laws, and to show how much its practices fall short of the ideal justice formulated by thinkers and desired by peoples. To repeat stale censures is to risk having called mere disclaimers, scatters of voices in the market-place. And yet so long as the truth is not heard, is it not our duty to go on speaking it in season and out of season? A sincere person owes it to themselves to expose the frightful barbarity which still prevails in the hidden depths of a society so outwardly well-ordered. Take, for instance, our great cities, the leaders of civilisation, especially the most populous, and, in many respects, the first of all – the immense London, which gathers to herself the riches of the world, whose every warehouse is worth a king’s ransom; where are to be found enough, and more than enough, of food and clothing for the needs of the

[1] Reprinted as the pamphlet *An Anarchist on Anarchy* by Benjamin R. Tucker, 1884. (*Black Flag*)

teeming millions that throng her streets in greater numbers than the ants which swarm in the never-ending labyrinth of their subterranean galleries. And yet the wretched who cast longing and hungry eyes on those hoards of wealth may be counted by the hundred thousand; by the side of untold splendours, want is consuming the vitals of entire populations, and it is only at times that the fortunate for whom these treasures are amassed hear, as a muffled wailing, the bitter cry which rises eternally from those unseen depths. Below the London of fashion is a London accursed, a London whose only food are dirt-stained fragments, whose only garments are filthy rags, and whose only dwellings are fetid dens. Have the disinherited the consolation of hope? No: they are deprived of all. There are some among them who live and die in dampness and gloom without once raising their eyes to the sun.


AN ANARCHIST ON ANARCHY.

BY

ELISÉE RECLUS.

FOLLOWED BY A SKETCH OF

THE CRIMINAL RECORD OF THE AUTHOR.

BY

E. VAUGHAN.

"It is a pity that such men as Elisée Reclus cannot be promptly shot."—*Freedom's Press.*

SECOND EDITION.

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1886.

What boots it to the wretched outcast, burning with fever or craving for bread, that the Book of the Christians opens the doors of heaven more widely to them than to the rich! Besides their present misery, all these promises of happiness, even if they heard them, would seem the bitterest irony. Does it not appear, moreover, – judging by the society in which the majority of preachers of the Gospel most delight, – that the words of Jesus are reversed, that the "Kingdom of God" is the guerdon of the fortunate of this world, – a world where spiritual and temporal government are on the best of terms, and religion leads as surely to earthly power as to heavenly bliss? "Religion is a cause for preferment, irreligion a bar to it," as a famous commentator of the Bible, speaking to his sovereign, said it ought to be.[1]

When ambition thus finds its account in piety, and hypocrites practice religion in order to give what they are pleased to call their conscience a higher mercantile value, is it surprising that the great army of the hopeless should forget the way to the church? Do they deceive themselves in thinking that, despite official invitations, they would not always be well received in the "houses of God"? Without speaking here of churches whose sittings are sold at a price, where you may enter only purse in hand, is it nothing to the poor to feel themselves arrested on the threshold by the cold looks of well-clad men and the tightened lips of elegant women? True, no wall bars the passage, but an obstacle still more formidable stops the way, – the dark atmosphere of hatred and disgust which rises between the disinherited and the world's elect.

Yet the first word uttered by the minister when he stand stands up in the pulpit is "Brethren," a word which, by a characteristic differentiation, has come to mean no more than a sort of potential and theoretic fraternity without practical reality. Nevertheless, its primitive sense has not altogether perished, and if the outcast that hears it be not stupefied by hunger, if he be not one of those boneless beings who repeat idiotically all they hear, what bitter thoughts will be suggested by this word "brethren" coming from the lips of men who feel so little its force! The impressions of my childhood surge back into my mind. When I heard for the first time an earnest and eager voice beseech the "Father who is in heaven" to give us "our daily bread," it seemed to me that by a mysterious act a meal would descend from on high on all the tables of the world. I imagined that these words, repeated millions of times, were a cry of human brotherhood, and that each, in uttering them, thought of all. I deceived myself. With some, the prayer is sincere; with the greater part it is but an empty sound, a gust of wind like that which passes through the reeds.

Governments at least talk not to the poor about fraternity; they do not torment them with so sorry a jest. It is true that in some countries the jargon of courts compare the Sovereign to a father whose subjects are his children, and upon whom he pours the inexhaustible dews of his love; but this formula, which the hungry might abuse by asking for bread, is no longer taken seriously. So long as Governments were looked upon as direct representatives of a heavenly Sovereign, holding their powers by the grace of God, the comparison was legitimate; but there are very few now that make any claim to this quasi-divinity. Shorn of the sanctions of religion, they no longer hold themselves answerable for the general weal, contenting themselves instead with promising good administration, impartial justice, and strict economy in the administration of public affairs. Let history tell how these promises have been kept. Nobody can study contemporary politics without being struck by the truth of the words attributed alike to Oxenstjerna and Lord Chesterfield: "Go, my son, and see with how little the world is governed!" It is now a matter of common knowledge that power, whether its nature be monarchic, aristocratic, or democratic, whether it be based on the right of the sword, of

[1] Alexander Cruden, Preface to the "Concordance".

inheritance, or of election, is wielded by individuals neither better nor worse than their fellows, but whose position exposes them to greater temptations to do evil. Raised above the crowd, whom they soon learn to despise, they end by considering themselves as essentially superior beings; solicited by ambition in a thousand forms, by vanity, greed, and caprice, they are all the more easily corrupted that a rabble of interested flatterers is ever on the watch to profit by their vices. And possessing as they do a preponderant influence in all things, holding the powerful lever whereby is moved the immense mechanism of the State – functionaries, soldiers, and police – every one of their oversights, their faults, or their crimes repeats itself to infinity and magnifies as it grows. It is only too true: a fit of impatience in a Sovereign, a crooked look, an equivocal word, may plunge nations into mourning and be fraught with disaster for mankind. English readers, brought up to a knowledge of Biblical lore, will remember the striking parable of the trees who wanted a king.[1] The peaceful trees and the strong, those who love work and whom man blesses; the olive that makes oil, the fig-tree that grows good fruit, the vine that produces wine, "which cheereth God and man," refuse to reign; the bramble accepts, and of that noxious briar is born the flame which devours the cedars of Lebanon.

But these depositaries of power who are charged, whether by right divine or universal suffrage, with the august mission of dispensing justice, can they be considered as in any way more infallible, or even impartial? Can it be said that the laws and their interpreters shows towards all people the ideal equity as it exists in popular conception? Are the judges blind when there come before them the wealthy and the poor – Shylock, with his murderous knife, and the unfortunate who has sold beforehand pounds of their flesh or ounces of their blood? Hold they always even scales between the king's son and the beggar's brat? That these magistrates should firmly believe in their own impartiality and think themselves incarnate right in human shape, is quite natural; everyone puts on – sometimes without knowing it – the peculiar morality of their calling; yet, judges, no more than priests, can withstand the influence of their surroundings. Their sense of what constitutes justice, derived from the average opinion of the age, is insensibly modified by the prejudices of their class. How honest soever they may be, they cannot forget that they belong to the rich and powerful, or to those, less fortunate, who are still on the look-out for preferment and honour. They are moreover blindly attached to precedent, and fancy that practices inherited from their forerunners must needs be right. Yet when we examine official justice without prejudice, how many inequities do we find in legal procedures! Thus the English are scandalised – and rightly so – by the French fashion of examining prisoners, those sacred beings who are in strict probity ought to be held innocent until they are proven guilty; while the French are disgusted, and not without reason, to see English justice, through the English Government, publicly encourage treachery by offers of impunity and money to the betrayer, thereby deepening the degradation of the debased and provoking acts of shameful meanness which children in their schools, more moral than their elders, regard with unfeigned horror.

Nevertheless, law, like religion, plays only a secondary part in contemporary society. It is invoked but rarely to regulate the relations between the poor and the rich, the powerful and the weak. These relations are the outcome of economic laws and the evolution of a social system based on inequality of conditions.

Laissez faire! Let things alone! have said the judges of the camp. Careers are open; and although the field is covered with corpses, although the conqueror stamps on the bodies of the vanquished, although by supply and demand, and the combinations and monopolies in which they result, the greater part of society becomes enslaved to the few, let things along – for thus has decreed fair play. It is by virtue of this beautiful system that a *parvenu*, without speaking of the great lord who receives counties as his heritage, is able to conquer with ready money thousands of acres, expel those who cultivate his domain, and replace people and their dwellings with wild animals and rare trees. It is thus that a tradesman, more cunning or intelligent, or, perhaps, more favoured by luck than his fellows, is enabled to become master of an army of workers, and as often as not to starve them at his pleasure. In a word, commercial competition, under the paternal aegis of the law, lets the great majority of merchants – the fact is attested numberless medical inquests – adulterate provisions and drink, sell pernicious substances as wholesome food, and kill by slow poisoning, without for one day neglecting their religious duties, their brothers in Jesus Christ. Let people say what they will, slavery, which abolitionists strove so gallantly to extirpate in America, prevails in another form in every civilised country; for entire populations, placed between the alternatives of death by starvation and toils which they detest, are constrained to choose the latter. And if we would deal frankly with the barbarous society to which we belong, we must acknowledge that murder, albeit disguised under a thousand insidious and scientific forms, still, as in the times of primitive savagery, terminates the majority of lives. The economist sees around them but one vast field of carnage, and with the coldness of the statistician they count the slain as on the evening after a great battle. Judge by these figures. The mean mortality among the well-to-do is, at the utmost, one in sixty. Now the population of Europe being a third of a thousand

[1] Judges ix:8.

millions, the average deaths, according to the rate of mortality among the fortunate, should not exceed five millions. They are three times five millions! What have we done with these ten million human beings killed before their time? If it be true that we have duties, one towards the other, are we not responsible for the servitude, the cold, the hunger, the miseries of every sort, which doom the unfortunate to untimely deaths? Race of Cains, what have we done with our brothers and sisters?

And what are the remedies proposed for the social ills which are consuming the very marrow in our bones? Can charity, as assert many good souls – who are answered in chorus by a crowd of egoists – can charity by any possibility deal with so vast an evil? True, we know some devoted ones who seem to live only that they may do good. In England, above all, is this the case. Among childless women who are constrained to lavish their love on their kind are to be found many of those admirable beings whose lives are passed in consoling the afflicted, visiting the sick, and ministering the young. We cannot help being touched by the exquisite benevolence, the indefatigable solicitude shown by these ladies towards their unhappy fellow creatures; but, taken even in their entirety, what economic value can be attached to these well-meant efforts? What sum represents the charities of a year in comparison with the gains which hucksters of money and hawkers of loans oftentimes make by the speculations of a single day? While Ladies Bountiful are giving a cup of tea to a pauper, or preparing a potion for the sick, a father or brother, by a hardly stroke on the Stock Exchange or a successful transaction in produce, may reduce to ruin thousands of British workers or Hindu coolies. And how worthy of respect soever may be deeds of unobstentations charity, is it not the fact that the bestowal of alms is generally a matter of personal caprice, and that their distribution is too often influenced rather by political and religious sympathies of the giver than by the moral worth of the recipient? Even were help always given to those who most need it, charity would be none the less tainted with the capital vice, that it infallibly constitutes relations of inequality between the benefited and the benefactor. The latter rejoices in the consciousness of doing a good thing, as if they were not simply discharging a debt; and the former asks bread as a favour, when they should demand work as a right, or, if helpless, human solidarity. Thus are created and developed hideous mendacity with its lies, its tricks, and its base, heart-breaking hypocrisy. How much nobler are the customs of some so-called "barbarous countries" where the hungry person simply stops by the side of those who eat, is welcomed by all, and then, when satisfied, with a friendly greeting withdraws – remaining in every respect the equal of their host, and fretting under no painful sense of obligation for favours received! But charity breeds patronage and platitudes – miserable fruits of a wretched system, yet the best which a society of capitalists has to offer!

We are striving to draw nearer to that ideal equality which, century after century, has hovered before subject peoples like a heavenly dream. The little that each of us can do offers an ample recompense for the perils of the combat. On these terms life is good, even a life of suffering and sacrifice – even though it may be cut short by premature death.

II

Hence we may say that, in letting those whom they govern – and the responsibility for whose fate they thereby accept – waste by want, sink under exposure, and deteriorate by vice, the leaders of modern society have committed moral bankruptcy. But where the masters have come short, free individuals may, perchance, succeed. The failure of governments is no reason why we should be discouraged; on the contrary, it shows us the danger of entrusting to others the guardianship of our rights, and makes us all the more firmly resolved to take our own cause into our own care. We are not among those whom the practice of social hypocrisies, the long weariness of a crooked life, and the uncertainty of the future have reduced to necessity of asking ourselves – without daring to answer it – the sad question: "Is life worth living?" Yes, to us life does seem worth living, but on condition that it has an end – not personal happiness, not a paradise, either in this world or the next – but the realisation of a cherished wish, an ideal that belongs to us and springs from our innermost conscience. We are striving to draw nearer to that ideal equality which, century after century, has hovered before subject peoples like a heavenly dream. The little that each of us can do offers an ample recompense for the perils of the combat. On these terms life is good, even a life of suffering and sacrifice – even though it may be cut short by premature death.

The first condition of equality, without which any other progress is merest mockery – the object of all socialists without exception – is that every human being shall have bread. To talk of duty, of renunciation, of ethernal virtues to the famishing, is nothing less than cowardice. Dives has no right to preach morality to the beggar at

his gates. If it were true that civilised lands did not produce food enough for all, it might be said that, by virtue of vital competition, bread should be reserved for the strong, and that the weak must content themselves with the crumbs that fall from the feasters' tables. In a family where love prevails things are not ordered in this way; on the contrary, the small and the ailing receive the fullest measure; yet it is evident that dearth may strengthen the hands of the violent and make the powerful monopolisers of bread. But are our modern societies really reduced to these straits? On the contrary, whatever may be the value of Malthus's forecast as to the distant future, it is an actual, incontestable fact that in the civilised countries of Europe and America the sum total of provisions produced, or received in exchange for manufacturers, is more than enough for the sustenance of the people. Even in times of partial dearth the granaries and warehouses have but to open their doors that every one may have a sufficient share. Notwithstanding waste and prodigality, despite the enormous losses arising from moving about and handling in warehouses and shops, there is always enough to feed generously all the world. And yet there are some who die of hunger! And yet there are fathers who kill their children because when the little ones cry for bread they have none to give them.

Others may turn their eyes from these horrors; we socialists look them full in the face, and seek out their cause. That cause is the monopoly of the soil, the appropriation by a few of the land which belongs to all. We Anarchists are not the only ones to say it: the cry for nationalisation of the land is rising so high that all may hear it who do not wilfully close their ears. The idea spreads fast, for private property, in its present form, has had its day, and historians are everywhere testifying that the old Roman law is not synonymous with ethanol justice. Without doubt it were vain to hope that holders of the soil, saturated, so to speak, with ideas of caste, of privilege, and of inheritance, will voluntarily give back to all the bread-yielding furrows; the glory will not be theirs of joining as equals their fellow-citizens; but when public opinion is ripe – and day by day it grows – individuals will oppose in vain the general concourse of wills, and the axe will be applied to the upas tree's roots. Arable land will be held once more in common; but instead of being ploughed and sown almost at hazard by ignorant hands, as it has hitherto been, science will aid us in the choice of climate, of soils, of methods of culture, of fertilisers, and of machinery. Husbandry will be guided by the same prescience as mechanical combinations and chemical operations; but the fruits of their toil will not be lost to the labourer. Many so-called savage societies hold their land in common, and humble though in our eyes they may seem, they are our betters in this: want among them is unknown. Are we, then, too ambitious in desiring to attain a social state which shall add to the conquests of civilisation the privileges of these primitive tribes? Through the education of our children we may to some extent fashion the future.

After we have bread for all, we shall require something more – equality of rights; but this point will soon be realised, for an individual who needs not incline themselves before their fellows to crave pittance is already their equal. Equality of conditions, which is in no way incompatible with the infinite diversity of human character, we already desire and look upon as indispensable, for it offers us the only means whereby a true public morality can be developed. An individual can be truly moral only when they are their own master. From the moment when they awaken to a comprehension of that which is equitable and good it is for them to direct their own movements, to seek in the their conscience reasons for their actions, and to perform them simply, without either fearing punishment or looking for reward. Nevertheless their will cannot fail to be strengthened when they see others, guided like themselves by their own volition, following the same line of conduct. Mutual example will soon constitute a collective code of ethics to which all may conform without effort; but the moment that orders, enforced by legal penalties, replace the personal impulses of the conscience, there is an end to morality. Hence the saying of the Apostle of the Gentiles, "the law makes sin." Even more, it is sin itself, because, instead of appealing to humanity's better part, to it's bold initiative, it appeals to it's worst – it rules by fear. It thus behoves every one to resist the laws that they have not made, and to defend their personal rights, which are also the rights of others. People often speak of the antagonism between rights and duties. It is an empty phrase; there is no such antagonism. Whoso vindicates their own rights fulfils at the same time their duty towards their fellows. Privilege, not right, is the converse of duty.

Besides the possession of an individual's own person, sound morality involves yet another condition – mutual goodwill, which is likewise the outcome of equality. The time-honoured words of Mahabarata are as true as ever: "The ignorant are not the friends of the wise; the man who has no cart is not the friend of him who has a cart. Friendship is the daughter of equality; it is never born of inequality." Without doubt it is given to some people, great by their thoughts, by sympathy, or by strength of will, to win the multitude; but if the attachment of their followers and admirers comes otherwise than an enthusiastic affinity of idea to idea, or of heart to heart, it is speedily transformed either into fanaticism or servility. Those who are hailed lord by the acclamations of the crowd must almost of necessity attribute to themselves exceptional virtues, or a "Grace of God," that makes them in their own estimation as a predestined being, and they usurp without hesitation or remorse privileges which they transmit as a heritage of their children. But, while in rank exalted, they are morally degraded, and their partisans and sycophants

are more degraded still: they wait for the words of command which fall from the master's lips; when they hear in the depths of their conscience some faint note of dissent, it is stifled; they become practiced liars, they stoop to flattery, and lose the power of looking honest individuals in the face. Between those who command and those who obey, and whose degradation deepens from generation to generation, there is no possibility of friendship. The virtues are transformed; brotherly frankness is destroyed; independence becomes a crime; above is either pitying condescension or haughty contempt, below either envious admiration or hidden hate. Let each of us recall the past and ask ourselves in all sincerity the question: "Who are the individuals in whose society we have experienced the most pleasure?" Are they the personages who have "honoured" us with their conversation, or the humble with whom we have "deigned" to associate? Are they not rather our equals, those whose looks neither implore nor command, and whom we may love with open hearts without afterthought or reserve.

It is to live in conditions of equality and escape from the falsehoods and hypocrisies of a society of superiors and inferiors, that so many men and women have formed themselves into close corporations and little worlds apart. America abounds in communities of this sort. But these societies, few of which prosper while many perish, are all ruled more or less by force; they carry within themselves the seed of their own dissolution, and are reabsorbed by Nature's law of gravitation into the world which they have left. Yet even were they perfection, if humans enjoyed in them the highest happiness of which their nature is capable, they would be none the less obnoxious to the charge of selfish isolation, of raising a wall between themselves and the rest of their race; their pleasures are egotistical, and devotion to the cause of humanity would draw back the best of them into the great struggle.

As for the Anarchists, never will we separate ourselves from the world to build a little church, hidden in some vast wilderness. Here is the fighting ground, and we remain in the ranks, ready to give our help wherever it may be most needed. We do not cherish premature hopes, but we know that our efforts will not be lost. Many of the ignorant, who either out of love of routine or simplicity of soul now anathematise us, will end by associating themselves with our cause. For every individual whom circumstances permit to join us freely, hundreds are hindered by the hard necessities of life from openly avowing our opinions, but they listen from afar and cherish our words in the treasury of their hearts. We know that we are defending the cause of the poor, the disinherited, the suffering; we are seeking to restore to them the earth, personal rights, confidence in the future; and is it not natural that they should encourage us by look and gesture, even when they dare not come to us? In times of trouble, when the iron hand of might loosens its hold, and paralyzed rulers reel under the weight of their own power; when the "groups," freed for an instant from the pressure above, reform themselves according to their natural affinities, on which side will be the many? Though making no pretension to prophetic insight, may we not venture without temerity to say that the great multitude would join our ranks? Albeit they never weary of repeating that Anarchism is merely the dream of a few visionaries, do not even our enemies, by the insults they heap upon us and the projects and machinations they impute to us, make an incessant propaganda in our favour? It is said that, when the magicians of the Middle Ages wanted to raise the devil, they began their incantations by painting his image on a wall. For a long time past, modern exorcists have adopted a similar method for conjuring Anarchists.

As for the Anarchists, never will we separate ourselves from the world to build a little church, hidden in some vast wilderness. Here is the fighting ground, and we remain in the ranks, ready to give our help wherever it may be most needed.

Pending the great work of the coming time, and to the end that this work may be accomplished, it behoves us to utilise every opportunity for rede and deed. Meanwhile, although our object is to live without government and without law, we are obliged in many things to submit. On the other hand, how often are we enabled to disregard their behest and act on our own free will? Ours be it to let slip none of these occasions, and to accept tranquillity whatever personal consequences may result from doing that which we believe to be our duty. In no case will we strengthen authority by appeals or petitions, neither shall we sanction the law by demanding justice from the courts nor, by giving our votes and influence to any candidate whatsoever, become the authors of our own ill-fortune? It is easy for us to accept nothing from power, to call no one "master," neither to be called "master" ourselves, to remain in the ranks as simple citizens and to maintain resolutely, and in every circumstance, our quality of equal among citizens. Let our friends judge us by our deeds, and reject from among them those of us who falter.

There are unquestionably many kind-hearted individuals that, as yet. hold themselves aloof from us, and even view our efforts with a certain apprehension, who would nevertheless gladly lend us their help were they not repelled by fear of the violence which almost

invariably accompanies revolution. And yet a close study of the present state of things would show them that the supposed period of tranquillity in which we live is really an age of cruelty and violence. Not to speak of war and its crimes, from the guilt of which no civilised State is free, can it be denied that chief among the consequences of the existing social system are murder, maladies, and death. Accustomed order is maintained by rude deeds and brute force, yet things that happen every day and every hour pass unperceived; we see in them a series of ordinary events no more phenomenal than times and seasons. It seems less than impious to rebel against the cycle of violence and repression which comes to us hallowed by the sanction of ages. Far from desiring to replace an era of happiness and peace by an age of disorder and warfare, our sole aim is to put an end to the endless series of calamities which has hitherto been called by common consent "The Progress of Civilisation." On the other hand, vengeances are the inevitable incidents of a period of violent changes. It is the nature of things that they should be. Albeit deeds of violence, prompted by a spirit of hatred, bespeak a feeble moral development, these deeds become fatal and necessary whenever the relations between people are not the relations of perfect equity. The original form of justice as understood by primitive peoples was that of retaliation, and by thousands of rude tribes this system is still observed. Nothing seemed more just than to offset one wrong by a like wrong. Eye for an eye! Tooth for a tooth! If the blood of one person has been shed, another must die! This was the barbarous form of justice. In our civilised societies it is forbidden to individuals to take the law into their own hands. Governments, in their quality of social delegates, are charged on behalf of the community with the enforcement of justice, a sort of retaliation somewhat more enlightened than that of the savage. It is on this condition that the individual renounces the right of personal vengeance; but if they be deceived by the mandatories to whom they entrust the vindication of their rights, if they perceive that their agents betray their cause and league themselves with the oppressors, that official justice aggravates their wrongs; in a word, if whole classes and populations are unfairly used, and have no hope of finding in the society to which they belong a redresser of abuses, is it not certain that they will resume their inherent right of vengeance and execute it without pity? Is not this indeed an ordinance of Nature, a consequence of the physical law of shock and counter-shock? It were unphilosophic to be surprised by its existence. Oppression has always been answered by violence.

Nevertheless, if great human evolutions are always followed by sad outbreaks of personal hatreds, it is not to these bad passions that well-wishers of their kind appeal when they wish to rouse the motive virtues of enthusiasm, devotion, and generosity. If changes had no other result than to punish oppressors, to make them suffer in their turn, to repay evil with evil, the transformation would be only in seeming. What boots it to those who truly love humanity and desire the happiness of all that the slave becomes master, that the master is reduced to servitude, that the whip changes hands, and that money passes from one pocket to another? It is not the rich and the powerful whom we devote to destruction, but the institutions which have favoured the birth and growth of these malevolent beings. It is the medium which it behoves us to alter, and for this great work we must reserve all our strength; to waste it in personal vindications were merest puerility. "Vengeance is the pleasure of the gods," said the ancients; but it is not the pleasure of self-respecting mortals; for they know that to become their own avengers would be to lower themselves to the level of their former oppressors. If we would rise superior to our adversary, we must, after vanquishing them, make them bless their defeat. The revolutionary device, "For our liberty and for yours," must not be an empty word.

The people in all times have felt this; and after every temporary triumph the generosity of the victor has obliterated the menaces of the past. It is a constant fact that in all serious popular movements, made for an idea, hope of a better time, and above all, the sense of a new dignity, fills the soul with high and magnanimous sentiments. So soon as the police, both political and civil, cease their functions and the masses become masters of the streets, the moral atmosphere changes, each feels themselves responsible for the prosperity and contentment of all; molestation of individuals is almost unheard of; even professional criminals pause in their sad career, for they too, feel that something great is passing through the air. Ah! if revolutionaries, instead of obeying a vague idea as they have almost always done, had formed a definite aim, a well-considered scheme of social conduct, if they had firmly willed the establishment of a new order of things in which every citizen might be assured bread, work, instruction, and the free development of their being, there would have been no danger in opening all prison gates to their full width, and saying to the unfortunates whom they shut in, "Go, brothers and sisters, and sin no more."

It is always to the nobler part of humanity that we should address ourselves when we want to do great deeds. A general fighting for a bad cause stimulates their soldiers with promises of booty; a benevolent individual who cherishes a noble object encourages their companions by the example of their own devotion and self-sacrifice. For them, faith in their idea is enough. As says the proverb of the Danish peasants: "His will is his paradise." What matters is that he is treated like a visionary! Even though his undertakings were only a chimera, he knows nothing more beautiful and sweet than the desire to act rightly and do good; in comparison with this vulgar realties are for him but shadows, the apparitions of an instant.

But our ideal is not a chimera. This, public opinion well knows; for no question more preoccupies it than that of social transformation. Events are casting their shadows before. Among individuals who think is there one who in some fashion or another is not a socialist – that is to say, who has not their own little scheme for changes in economic relations? Even the orator who noisily denies that there is a social question affirms the contrary by a thousand propositions. And those who will lead us back to the Middle Ages, are they not also socialists? They think they have found in a past, restored after modern ideas, conditions of social justice which will establish for ever the brotherhood of man. All are awaiting the birth of a new order of things; all ask themselves, some with misgiving, others with hope, what the morrow will bring forth. It will not come with empty hands. The century which has witnessed so many grand discoveries in the world of science cannot pass away without giving us still greater conquests. Industrial appliances, that by a single electric impulse make the same thought vibrate through five continents, have distanced by far our social morals, which are yet in many regards the outcome of reciprocally hostile interests. The axis is displaced; the world must crack that its equilibrium may be restored. In spirit revolution is ready; it is already thought – it is already willed; it only remains to realise it, and this is not the most difficult part of the work. The Governments of Europe will soon have reached the limits to the expansion of their power and find themselves face to face with their increasing populations. The super-abundant activity which wastes itself in distant wars must then find employment at home – unless in their folly the shepherds of the people should try to exhaust their energies by setting the Europeans against Europeans, as they have done before. It is true that in this way they may retard the solution of the social problem, but it will rise again after each postponement, more formidable than before.

Let economists and rulers invent political constitutions or salaried organisations, whereby the worker may be the friend of their master, the subject the brother of the potentate, we, "frightful Anarchists" as we are, know only one way of establishing peace and goodwill among women and men – the suppression of privilege and the recognition of right. Our ideal, as we have said, is that of the fraternal equity for which all yearn, but almost always as a dream; with us it takes form and becomes a concrete reality. It pleases us not to live if the enjoyments of life are to be for us alone; we protest against our good fortune if we may not share it with others; it is sweeter for us to wander with the wretched and the outcasts than to sit, crowned with roses, at the banquets of the rich. We are weary of these inequalities which make us the enemies of each other; we would put an end to the furies which are ever bringing people into hostile collision, and all of which arise from the bondage of the weak to the strong under the form of slavery, serfage, and service. After so much hatred we long to love each other, and for this reason are we enemies of private property and despisers of the law.

Why are we Anarchists?

Élisée Reclus

"Pourquoi sommes-nous anarchistes?", *La Société nouvelle*, Year 5, No. 2, 1889

The following lines do not constitute a programme. They have no other purpose than to justify the usefulness of elaborating a draft programme which would be subject to the study, to the observations, to the criticisms of all communist revolutionaries.

Perhaps, however, they contain one or two considerations that could fit into the project that I am asking for.

We are revolutionaries because we want justice and everywhere we see injustice reigning around us. The products of labour are distributed in an inverse ration to the work. The idler has all the rights, even that of starving his neighbour, while the worker does not always have the right to die of hunger in silence: he is imprisoned when he is guilty of striking. People who call themselves priests peddle miracles so that they can enslave intellects; people called kings claim to be from a universal master to be master in their turn; people armed by them cut, slash and shoot at their pleasure; people in black robes who say they are justice par excellence condemn the poor, absolve the rich, often sell convictions and acquittals; merchants distribute poison instead of food, *they kill in detail instead of killing in bulk* and thereby become honoured capitalists.[1] The sack of coins is the master, and he who possesses it holds in his power the destiny of other men. All this seems despicable to us and we want to change it. We call for revolution against injustice.

But "justice is only a word, a mere convention," we are told. "What exists is the right of force!" Well, is that is so, we are no less revolutionary. It is one or the other: either justice is the human ideal and, in this case, we claim it for all; or else force alone governs societies,

[1] Reclus writes "tuent en detail," a play on words as "vente en detail" means retail sale. (*Black Flag*)

and in that case we will use force against our enemies. Either the freedom of equals or an eye for an eye [*la loi du talion*].

But why the rush, all those who expect everything in time tell us, to exempt themselves from taking action. The slow evolution of events suffices for them, revolution scares them. History has pronounced [judgement] between us and them. *Never has any partial or general progress been achieved by mere peaceful evolution; it has always been made through a sudden revolution*. If the work of preparation takes place slowly in minds, the realisation of ideas occurs suddenly: evolution occurs in the brain, and it is the arms that make the revolution.

And how to bring about this revolution that we see slowly preparing in Society and whose advent we are aiding with all our efforts? Is it by grouping ourselves in bodies subordinate to each other? Is it by constituting ourselves like the bourgeois world that we fight as a hierarchical whole, with its responsible masters and its irresponsible inferiors, held as tools in the hand of a boss? Will we begin to become free by abdicating? No, because we are anarchists, that is to say men who want to keep full responsibility for their actions, who act in accordance with their rights and their personal duties, who impart to a [human] being his natural development, who has no one as a master and is not the master of others.

We want to free ourselves from the grasp of the State, no longer to have above us superiors who can command us, putting their will in the place of ours.

We want to rip apart all external law, *by holding ourselves to the conscious development of the inner laws of our nature*. By suppressing the State, we also suppress all official morality, knowing beforehand that there can be no morality in obeying misunderstood laws, in obeying a practice which they do not even try to justify. There is morality only in freedom. It is also by freedom alone that renewal remains possible. We want to keep our minds open, amenable in advance to any progress, to any new idea, to any generous initiative.

But if we are anarchists, enemies of every master, we are also international communists, because we understand that life is impossible without social organisation. Isolated, we can do nothing, while through close union we can transform the world. We associate with each other as free and equal men, working for a common task and regulating our mutual relations by justice and reciprocal goodwill. Religious and national hatreds cannot separate us, since *the study of nature is our only religion* and we have the world for our homeland. The main cause for savagery and wickedness will cease to exist amongst us. The land will become collective property, barriers will be removed and henceforth the ground belonging to all can be adapted to the enjoyment and well-being of all. The required products will be precisely those which the land can best provide, and production will respond exactly to needs, without ever wasting anything as in the disorderly work that is done today. In the same way the distribution of all these riches amongst men will be removed from the private exploiter and will be done by the normal functioning of society at large.

But if we are anarchists, enemies of every master, we are also international communists, because we understand that life is impossible without social organisation. Isolated, we can do nothing, while through close union we can transform the world. We associate with each other as free and equal men, working for a common task and regulating our mutual relations by justice and reciprocal goodwill.

We do not have to sketch in advance the picture of the future society: *It is the spontaneous action of all free men that is to create it and give it its shape, moreover incessantly changing like all the phenomena of life*. But what we do know is that every injustice, every crime violating human dignity [*lèse-majesté humaine*] we always find us rising to fight them. As long as iniquity exists, we, international communist-anarchists, we will remain in a state of permanent revolution.

Libertarians cannot be reproached with wanting to get rid of a government to put themselves in its place… Relying on observation, Anarchists believe that the State and all belonging to it is not a mere entity or a philosophical formula but an ensemble of individuals placed in a special surrounding and subjected to its influence.

– "Anarchy", *Liberty* (London), December 1896

Anarchy

Elisée Reclus

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, August and September 1895

(A lecture delivered to Elisée Reclus at South Pace Institute on Monday July 29th, 1895)

[I]

You know that we, the Anarchists, are considered as a set of most desperate and wicked men; and recently, perusing by mere chance an English review which had already published some of my scientific papers, I found, to my surprise, that I was spoken of by name as belonging to a "gang of ruffians." Now, this is indeed a very bad introduction to you; still I hope you will not condemn me at once. If you have read and heard the attacks, you are bound by fair play to hear also the defence, and even a counter-attack.

Our name explains perfectly what our aim is – at least our negative aim. We wish to do away with government because every organisation from the outside prevents the free working of spontaneous organisation. Government, under all its various shapes, is but another name for a body of people having got the power to enforce their will, which they call and make *Law;* and this will, this Law, represents not the society's interest, but their own. If mankind's ideal is the happiness of all, government cannot and will not ever fulfil it, because its first concern is for its own members. Subjects come always after the ruler; and even were they sensuously pleased as a herd of well-fed swine, they will never enjoy that true happiness which exists between friends and equals. A drudging servant never enjoys life nobly and manfully side by side with his master, never a slave with a free man; never a poor fellow picking up in the mud his morsel of bread with the rich, who does not care for bread, because dainties are better for him.

If mankind's ideal is the happiness of all, government cannot and will not ever fulfil it, because its first concern is for its own members. Subjects come always after the ruler; and even were they sensuously pleased as a herd of well-fed swine, they will never enjoy that true happiness which exists between friends and equals.

Our ideal of society is quite different from the actual state of things, quite different from the imagined Utopias of most ancient and modern writers. High people, who have enjoyed the privileges of birth, wealth, and education are always prone to believe themselves to be a chosen tribe; and even when they feel kindly towards the lowborn poor, they want them to be led by strings, like children, and taught good morals by their betters. And who are their betters? The aristocracy, of course – those who enjoy already the advantages of a pleasant life, and who by their very position are induced to maintain inequality in their own favour.

The society we imagine, and whose evolution we are studying in the present chaotic crowd of conflicting units, is a society in which work is going on, not by the behest of a whole hierarchy of chiefs and sub-chiefs, but by the comprehension of common interests and the natural working of mutual aid and sympathy; in which order is kept, not by the strong arm of law, by prisons, cat-o'-nine-tails, hanging-ropes, guillotines, and wholesale blowings-up, but by universal education, by respect of everyone for himself and for others; in which happiness will be ensured, not by intermittent and disdainful charities, but by real and substantial welfare, and by the common enjoyment of riches due to the common work.

In fact, the change we propose in society is precisely the change which is going on in the family itself, where the old idea of a ruling master, having the right, and even the duty, to chastise with the rod wife and children, is gradually abandoned, and where love, mutual respect, and permanent kindness are considered the only natural ties between all. And everywhere the same evolution is going on in social morals. People feel that a new departure must be taken in the methods of social activity. Even in workshops and great manufactories, the best way of going on smoothly for employers and employed is to have, in spite of the difference in wages, a link of mutual respect. You all remember the saying of the chief engineer of the Forth Bridge at the opening of that most stupendous work of the age: "If all we fellow-workers had not laboured together in the

glorious undertaking with the same mind and the same heart, it never would have been achieved. Every nail is necessary to the whole; everyone of us has been necessary to this splendid end!" Such were the words of the illustrious constructor; he felt that enthusiasm for the achievement of a great work had been throughout the chief motor, although, generally and quite naturally, hatred and envy are bred by the difference of social standing and salaries. That enthusiasm for high aims is to take the place of continual compulsion.

Of course, we know that the change in society brought about by the substitution of inner natural organisation for the outer artificial organisation of caprice, force, and law, will be a change of capital importance, and, in consequence, accompanied by numerous and formidable events. Every general evolution brings in its wake corresponding revolutions. It must be so, and we cannot alter the course of history; but this we know, that howsoever great may be the dangers following the change from governance to spontaneous grouping, these dangers can never compare with the actual evils which result from the exercise of personal authority and the extortions of law.

Why is it that from five to ten millions of men die every year in Europe before the natural term of life? It is because government – and under that name I comprehend all those who command by birth, law, or power of riches – refuses bread to many, and gives it sparingly to the majority of men. Why is it that six millions of men are rotting,-morally and sometimes physically, in barracks, sharpening their big knives to butcher other people, and especially those of their own countries? It is because governments know no other way of solving their private disputes or of enforcing peace among the starving poor. Why is it that land belongs especially to those who don't till the ground, houses to those who have not built them, and merchandise of every kind to those who had no part in its production? Because government is composed precisely of those who oblige others to work in their stead. It has been well said that work is the production of riches, and, by an astonishing logic of history, those riches go to the non-labourer.

The actual political life of France gives you a very good example of the very nature of government, and of its necessary gravitation towards barbarism and inhumanity. There is near the town of Montluçon an old Catholic gentleman, who seems to be of a very conservative turn of mind, but who nevertheless is very goodhearted and kind man (de Montaignac by name) is better known under the nickname of "L'Homme du Pain" (the "Bread-Man"), because he has taken in its real sense the prayer in the gospel, "Give us our daily bread." He wants, first of all, the exchequer to deliver to each man, woman, and child the necessary funds to ensure daily food in its simplest form. "Thus," says he, and very truly, "thus man would be lifted above the worst of despair, that of seeing his exposed to starvation; and being free from all cares on that side, he would feel himself more of a man, and, knowing his inalienable right to-life, he would face any man with more courage and spirit. Especially when meeting an employer he would not cringe like a slave or creep like a dog, and would expect to be treated as a man. The result would be a general rise of wages and a fairer execution of contracts on the part of the capitalist. Of course, such a state of things does not fulfil our ideal – far from it; but although a makeshift only, is still considered as an abominable concession to the starving people by all political economists. Sure of his morsel of bread, the employed would fancy himself to be, they say, on an equal footing with the employer, and the latter would not be able any more to dictate starvation terms. Thus it is that the old "Homme du Pain" is poohpoohed and laughed at as a crank. So is also a certain Barrucand, a writer of some talent, who gives lectures in Paris and pens articles on the same subject. Certainly of bread there is enough for all, but people must at present conquer it by subservience to the detainers of money. The stupid and abominable theory on the subject of "supply and demand" is that which was put in practice during the siege of Paris. Provision of food there was in abundance, and people claimed that it should be equally distributed to all, as all were in the same danger and liable to be mowed down by the same cannon-shot. But such a shocking violation of laws was not allowed to prevail. Professors of the Institute demonstrated, with great flourishing of would-be scientific words, that the matter ought to be left to the natural functions of trade, which would let the rich survive and eliminate the poor. And in reality, during three months of winter, 66,000 persons were eliminated by bronchitis alone; and the word "bronchitis" had the same meaning as "starvation." Government, as it is wont to do, put then all the weight of its influence on the side of those who could afford to buy throughout comfortable dinners.

Of course, you say, but this was a bad, foolish government; a good government would have acted otherwise. Only there is no such thing as a "good government." An organ-grinder cannot grind anything but very poor music out of his barrel. Thus a master, however well-intentioned he may be, is obliged, when trying to fulfil his aims, to use all the indispensable machinery of government, soldiers, policeman and hangman, preachers and magistrates, bankers and bailiffs, and the immense number of functionaries whose natural ambition is simply to get on in life and to draw their money. Let us take as examples the emperors of the Antonine dynasty. By an extraordinary combination of circumstances those men, brought up by the Stoic philosophers, had been true to their education, and, wonderful to say, had resisted the invasion of folly which makes the heads of princes giddy. They discarded flattery, and saw perfectly through the false

hearts of courtiers. As the collection of their maxims sufficiently show, they remained pure, simple, unambitious, considering themselves as simple organs of the immense Roman body; the recital of their actions gives the proof that they always tried to do good. But were these excellent intentions of any avail to prevent or retard the decline and fall of Roman civilisation? Not in the least. Under Maecus Arelius, as under the other Caesars, the control of the governmental machine went on in the same way. The Roman citizens did not rise to their former dignity of men; deprived of real freedom, they worked less and less; provinces were crushed for treasure as they had been before; the barbarians kept waiting on the frontiers, or even overstepped them and the good Marcus Aurelius left after him as his natural heir one of the most ignominious monsters that have ever lived. Thus ended what may be called in history the best-intentioned government that ever existed.

This will be the reason for our final and decided victory. They know already that they are wrong: they don't believe in their own morals. We, on the contrary, know that we are right and that our idea is just; for we are working and fighting for the equality of men, for the happiness of all human beings.

Therefore it is that we do not care about any change of government, because we know that a so-called change is no change at all. You Englishmen have already made many experiments on the subject, and are just now undergoing a new experiment. Of course, many men will benefit by it: land squires and parish rectors, game and bar-keepers; but in the main, do you there will be a great difference from the former state of things, and do you blame those who did not care to vote? In France they made a much bolder experiment – in appearance at least; but most of you know the proverb which settles the matter "It ne valiant pas la peine assurément de change de gouvernement." It was useless, assuredly, to change our governing body. Taxes are all the same, only higher; injustice and bad morals continue to rule. With Tories, as well as with Liberals and Republicans, there will be always on one side money-mongers, and on the other poor breadless devils. Always a bad example will be given by those who pretend to educate the people. As Richard Burton, who was in his way a kind of Anarchist, used to repeat the Persian saying: "Fish always rots head first."

[II]

There is a proverbial phrase which is very commonly uttered, even by the most conservative people: "The best government is that which governs the least!" This is also our opinion, and we follow it logically by adding that government, when reduced to a mere cypher, leaves society free to attain its final perfection. But everywhere, the so-called "civilised" nations groan under the pressure of a more or less strong government, and certainly I can show you in no part of the world any large community which lives entirely free, without the intervention of people who consider themselves as rulers, givers of work and superintendents of the whole political and social machinery.

All Anarchical existing groups (and there are many of them) are only small tribes, enjoying their entire freedom from general or local governments in forests and in open plains. There are, also, some groups of agriculturists who have still the good luck in mountain fastnesses to escape conquest, and the laws of monarchies or republics. We must add a few consciously Anarchical and Communist societies that have arisen during this century in Western Europe and America. I must especially mention the old Icarians, who began some fifty years ago as authoritarians and law-abiders, who had a chief or rather a pope, but who, by a long series of vicissitudes lost, so to say, their first skin and, changing their constitution from time to time, finished by abolishing it altogether, and now live happily and simply without any other rule of life than self and mutual respect and love.

But if I can show you only comparatively small Anarchical communities, history exemplifies to us in a splendid way how among nations progress is always in exact proportion to the increase of freedom, to the decrease of strength in government and power in laws.

Look first at Greece, the land to which we trace our spiritual birth. Certainly it had governments, even many of them, aristocracies and democracies and oligarchies and so on, but with the single exception of barbarous Sparta, entirely composed of warriors, who were forbidden to think, to speak, even to read, all the Greek republics were in a state of constant evolution and revolution; governments built on the sand were continually shaken; they had no time to take hold of the public mind, to become a kind of religion, correlative with the belief in a heavenly god, and the strife of thought went on between parties and parties, between men and men. The spirit of freedom was not crushed among them as it had been in Babylon, in Persia, in Egypt, and that is why knowledge increased immensely in all directions. Art attained a perfect beauty which was considered for two thousand years as a definite standard; all sciences began or developed themselves,

and the outlines of every course of study which we are now trying to complete were distinctly marked; history made its appearance in literary master-pieces; the theories of evolution, which most people falsely think a new conquest, grow splendidly in Epicurus out of the treasury of facts; and, lastly, morals progressed at the same pace as science, as is shown by the admirable, and I say eternal, books of the Stoics, so well sustained by their noble life. That period of time is always the pride and glory of mankind.

And now let us turn to another period, when the long night of the middle-ages gave way to the first light of the dawn. For more than one thousand years triumphant barbarian chiefs and Christian monks had utterly prevented any freedom of speech and thought; but under those ashes gleamed still some fire, and flames rose again. The history of communes, that history which has not yet been written, but which, I hope, will be taken up by some of our thinkers, began in all parts of Europe and even of Mussulman Africa. There was everywhere, as in ancient Greece, a clashing of states against states, of barons against cities, of peasantry against knights: innumerable conflicts and revolutions shook the old state of things, and people were born to new thoughts. Again that happy struggle, which weakened the idea of strong government, allowed human intellect to free itself and a new period of science, literature, art, discovery, morals, developed itself throughout Europe. Some of the most splendid pages that have been written belong to that time, which culminates with the Renaissance, that is with the new birth of mankind, when old Greece was discovered again.

The names of the Spanish comuneros, of the French communes, of the English yeomen, of the free cities in Germany, of the Republic of Novgorod and of the marvellous communities of Italy must be, with us Anarchists, household words: never was civilised humanity nearer to real Anarchy than it was in certain phases of the communal history of Florence and Nürnberg.

Great monarchies prevailed over these many free republics and the gloom of subjection seemed to darken our Western Europe; but it was difficult to eradicate entirely free speech and free thought. In spite of the great kings, in spite of Philip of Spain and Louis XIV of France, the little common wealth of Netherlands had writers and printers to keep tyranny in check. Afterwards the struggle went on also in France, in England, in America, minds emancipated themselves and gave rise to those revolutions, which were the beginning of our modern world. Without those revolutions society would have been at a stand-still in industry, in science, art, social philosophy; and we Anarchists, instead of speaking to you on the destruction of capitalist society, would have certainly no opportunity of grouping ourselves all over the world in new communities.

And now do you not think it is too late for government to put a gag in our mouth, to let silence reign again over a subject people? We have behind us the impulse of all former acquisitions in science and in morals and these drive us forward with an irresistible force.

Certainly, we seem to be weak in numbers, in material strength, and we are very poor in money; meanwhile governments have on their side armies, ammunition, millions and millions of pounds, the reasonings of the political economists and the blessing of the priests. But there is one thing which is wanting to them and which we have. This will be the reason for our final and decided victory. They know already that they are wrong: they don't believe in their own morals. We, on the contrary, know that we are right and that our idea is just; for we are working and fighting for the equality of men, for the happiness of all human beings.

Preface to *Socialism in Danger*

Élisée Reclus

Préface d'Élisée Reclus, F. Domela Nieuwenhuis, *Le socialisme en danger* (Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1897)[1]

The work of our friend, Domela Nieuwenhuis, is the result of patient studies and personal experiences very profoundly lived; four years were spent writing this work. In a time like ours, in which events go by quickly, in which the fast succession of facts makes harder and harder the critique of ideas, four years is already a long time, and certainly, during this period, the author has been able to observe many changes in society, and his own spirit went through an evolution. The three parts of the work, published at various long intervals in *La Société Nouvelle*, testify of the steps traversed. Firstly, the writer studies the "various tendencies of Social Democracy in Germany"; then, terrified by the retreat of the revolutionary spirit which he has recognised in German socialism, he asks himself whether socialist development is not in danger of being confused with the innocuous demands of the liberal bourgeoisie; finally, resuming the study of the manifestations of social thought, he notes that there is no reason to worry, and that the regression of a school, in which one deals more with commanding and disciplining than with thinking and doing, is very largely compensated by the growth of

[1] https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ferdinand-domela-nieuwenhuis-socialism-in-danger

libertarian socialism, where fellow workers, without dictators, without enslavement to a book or to a collection of formulas, work together to build a society of equals.

The documents cited in this book are of great historical importance. Under the thousand appearances of official policy – formulas of diplomats, Russian visits, French genuflections, toasts of emperors, recitations of verses and decorations of servants – appearances which one is often naive enough to take for history, happens the great thrust of proletarians emerging from the consciousness of their condition, with the firm resolution to make themselves free, and preparing to change the axis of social life by the conquest for all of a well-being which is still the privilege of some. This deep movement is the real story, and our descendants will be happy to know the twists and turns of the struggle from which their freedom was born!

the regression of a school... is very largely compensated by the growth of libertarian socialism, where fellow workers, without dictators, without enslavement to a book or to a collection of formulas, work together to build a society of equals.

They will learn how difficult was intellectual and moral progress in our century which consists in "curing individuals." Certainly, a man can render great services to his contemporaries by the energy of his thought, the power of his action, the intensity of his devotion, but, after having done his work, he should not pretend have become a god, and especially that, in spite of himself, we do not consider him as such! It would be to want the good done by the individual to turn into evil in the name of the idol. Every man weakens one day after having struggled, and how many of us give in to fatigue, or else to the solicitations of vanity, to the snares laid by perfidious friends! And even if the wrestler had remained valiant and pure until the end, some will lend him a language which isn't his, and even the words he spoke will be used by diverting them from their true meaning.

So see how was treated this powerful individuality, Marx, in whose honour, hundreds of thousands fanaticised, raise their arms to heaven, promising to religiously observe his doctrine! A whole party, a whole army with several dozen deputies in the Germanic Parliament, do they not now interpret this Marxist doctrine precisely in a sense contrary to the thought of the master? He declared that economic power determines the political form of societies, and it is now argued in his name that economic power will depend on a party majority in political assemblies. He proclaimed that "the state, in order to abolish pauperism, must abolish itself, for the essence of evil lies in the very existence of the state!" And we devote ourselves to his shadow to conquer and rule the state! Certainly, if Marx's political ideas are to triumph, it will be, like the religion of Christ, on condition that the master, adored in appearance, is denied in the practice of things.

Readers of Domela Nieuwenhuis will also learn to fear the danger posed by the duplicitous ways of politicians. What is the goal of all sincere socialists? No doubt each of them will agree that his ideal would be a society where each individual, developing fully in his strength, his intelligence and his physical and moral beauty, will freely contribute to the growth of human wealth. But what is the way to get to this state of affairs as quickly as possible? "To preach this ideal, to educate each other, to join together for mutual aid, for the fraternal practice of any good work, for the revolution," will say first of all the naive and the simple like us. "Ah! what a mistake! — we are told — the way is to collect votes and conquer the public powers ." According to this parliamentary group, it is advisable to substitute ourselves to the State and, consequently, to use the means of the State, by attracting the voters by all the manoeuvres which seduce them, while being careful not to offend their prejudices. Is it not fatal that the candidates for power, led by this policy, take part in intrigues, cabals, parliamentary compromises? Finally, if they one day became the masters, would they not necessarily be trained to use force, with all the apparatus of repression and compression that we call the citizen or national army, the gendarmerie, the police and all the rest of these filthy tools? It is by this path so widely open since the beginning of ages that the innovators will come to power, admitting that the bayonets do not overturn the ballot before the happy date.

The safest way still is to remain naive and sincere, to simply say what our energetic will is, at the risk of being called utopian by some, abominable, monstrous, by others. Our formal, certain, unshakeable ideal is the destruction of the State and all the obstacles that separate us from the egalitarian goal. Let's not play the finest with our enemies. It is by trying to deceive that one becomes fooled.

This is the moral that we find in the work of Nieuwenhuis. Read it, all of you who have a passion for truth and who do not seek it in a dictator's proclamation or in a program written by a whole council of great men.

The Anarchist

Élisée Reclus

"L'Anarchiste", *Almanach anarchiste pour 1902*

By definition, the anarchist is the free man, one who has no master. The ideas that he professes are indeed his own through reasoning; his will, born of the understanding of things, is focused on a clearly defined goal; his acts are the direct realisation of his individual intent. Alongside all those who devoutly repeat the words of others or traditional sayings, who bend their being to the whim of a powerful individual, or, what is even more grave, to the oscillations of the crowd, he alone is a man, he alone is conscious of his value in the face of all these spineless and inconsistent things that do not dare to live their own lives.

But this anarchist who has morally freed himself from the domination of others and who never accustomed himself to any of the material oppressions that usurpers impose on him, this man is not yet his own master as long as he has not emancipated himself from his irrational passions. He must know himself, free himself from his own whim, from his violent impulses, from all his prehistoric animal survivals, not to kill his instincts, but to bring them into harmony with the whole of his conduct. Freed from other men, he must also be freed from himself to see clearly where the truth he seeks is to be found, and how he will move towards it without making a movement that does not bring him closer to it, without saying a word that does not proclaim it.

If the anarchist comes to know himself, by that very fact he will know his environment, men and things. Observation and experience will have shown him that by themselves all his firm understanding of life, all his proud will remains powerless if he does not associate them with other understandings, with other wills. Alone, he would be easily crushed, but, having become strong, he groups himself with other forces, constituting a society of perfect union, since all are linked by the communion of ideas, sympathy and goodwill. In this new social body, all comrades are so many equals, giving each other the same respect and the same expressions of solidarity. From now on they are brothers and the thousand revolts of the isolated are transformed into a collective demand, which sooner or later will give us the new society, Harmony.

Today and Tomorrow

Elisée Reclus

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, July 1908

Will there never be an end to this ferocious struggle for existence between men who should love one another? Shall we always be enemies, even while labouring side by side in the common workshop? Among all those who either, with their head or their hand are associates in the same task, will those who grow wealthy and wealthier forever arrogate, to themselves the right to despise the others, and on their side will the latter never cease to return hate for scorn and fury for oppression? No, it will not always be thus. With its love of justice, humanity, which is continually changing, has already commenced its evolution towards a new, order of things. When studying calmly the march of history, we see the ideal of each century slowly becoming the reality of its successor, we see the Utopia of the visionary take form and develop into a social necessity and the desire of all.

Already in thought we foresee the factory in a country environment, as the future will surely inaugurate. The park has grown larger; it now contains the entire valley, colonnades rise in the midst of the verdure, fountains scintillate above banks of flowers, happy children run about the paths. The factory is always there; more than ever it has become a grand laboratory of wealth, but its treasures are no longer divided into two-parts, one of which goes to a minority, while the other, the workers' portion, is but a pittance of misery; from thenceforth both belong to the associated workers. Thanks to science, which enables them to make better use of currents and other forces of Nature, the workers are no longer the panting slaves of the iron machine; they also have rest and festivals, the joys of family life, the lessons of the drama, the emotions of the play. They are free and equal, they are their own masters, they can look each other in the face -- none bear on their features the scar which slavery imprints. Such is the picture we may contemplate in advance as we pace the borders of some well-loved stream, while the rays of the sinking sun embroider with gold the wreaths of smoke escaping from the factory chimney. As yet it is only a vision, but if justice is no vain word this vision foreshadows the city of the future, now low hid behind the distant horizon.

– From the "Story of a Stream" by Elisée Reclus

Louise Michel

Gillian Fleming

Freedom: Anarchist Fortnightly, 6 February 1982

Despite her fame Louise Michel remains a little-known figure in this country, for practically nothing by or about her has ever been translated into English. Now, at last, an English translation of Edith Thomas' biography, first published in 1971 has appeared. Published by Black Rose Books of Montreal, *Louise Michel* is available from FREEDOM Bookshop, price £5.50.

Louise Michel (1830-1905)

This Review is an attempt to throw some light on parts of her life or on elements of her thought which have received much less attention than her role in the Paris Commune - in particular the influences of her childhood, her views on the liberation of women - and of animals - and the artistic nature of her attitude to revolution. A summary of her life is followed by two extracts from her Memoirs, first published in 1886, to which I have given my own titles, and her article 'How I Became an Anarchist' which first appeared in the *Libertaire* on 15 January 1896.

In these three pieces of translation I have tried to remain as faithful as possible to the words and rhythms of the original French, and in so doing to preserve the peculiarities of the style, but this is not easy and I by no means claim to have made a good job of it. It is meanwhile to be hoped that an English translation of both her *Memoirs* and her *Histoire de la Commune* will not be long in following upon that of Edith Thomas' biography.

Gillian Fleming

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Louise Michel was born on 29 May 1830 at the chateau of Vroncourt in the Haute-Marne. She was an only and illegitimate child. Her mother, Marianne Michel, was a servant of peasant origin; her father was probably the owner of the chateau, or the owner's son, a family of liberal lawyers with noble rank.

Her childhood was unusually free for a girl. She describes herself in those days as 'tall, thin, prickly, wild and reckless, burned with the sun and often bedecked with rags fastened with pine needles'. Her impressions of the bloody-mindedness of rural life were to have a deep effect on the development of her republicanism, just as her experience of the Commune was to move her on towards anarchism.

She rejected two offers of marriage from 'old crocodiles', as she calls them, and after the death of her grandmother she and her mother were turned out of the chateau. She trained as a schoolteacher, gaining her diploma in 1852, the year Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* brought in the Second Empire. She opened a girls' school, got into trouble with the local préfet for her republican activities and settled later in Paris.

In 1868, towards the end of the Empire, she established her school at 24 rue Oudot. cannot say,' remarked a cautious Clemenceau, 'that this school was absolutely correct, in the sense in which it is understood at the Sorbonne... New methods were taught there randomly but at any rate it was teaching.' Indeed, Louise Michel's methods were new and well ahead of her time. The school in rue Oudot was not only republican in spirit but, at least where her own classes were concerned, libertarian also, with little or no enforced discipline. There were animals, there was a moss garden, and an emphasis on visual techniques. She believed it was possible to teach the most backward children, and that 'idiocy' or madness did not, or need not, exist.

School teaching was then about the only pursuit open to young women of independent spirit and ambition, and in her writings Louise describes with feeling the hunger for knowledge and the unrecognised talents of those 'obscure bluestockings' who were her companions at that time.

Her own inexhaustible intellectual curiosity drew her to the study of mathematics (particularly algebra), music and science, the writing of poetry and novels and even the occasional opera. She kept up a regular correspondence with Victor Hugo and also took an active part in republican and women's rights groups.

The major turning-point in the life of Louise Michel came with the Paris Commune of 1871. The greatest urban insurrection of the nineteenth century, it managed to keep the Versailles-based National Government of Thiers at bay for 72 days, between 18 March and 28 May, and though this was too short a time to allow the *communards* to carry out any lasting measures of social reform, its ideals and achievements were to inspire successive generations of socialists, communists, and anarchists.

One of the most striking features of the Commune was the active role taken in it by the women of Paris. Louise's interest in feminism had already been awakened by her experience of the cultural oppression of her fellow schoolteachers, as well as by her wide-ranging studies and rejection of religion. In her history of the Commune, she dedicates a chapter to 'the women of 70', seeing in them some of 'the most implacable fighters who fought the invasion and defended the Republic'.

However, although she took part in and influenced them, her own role in women's activities during the Commune was not as prominent as that of contemporaries such as Elisabeth Dmitrieff, Nathalie Lemel, Elisabeth Retiffe, Beatrix Excoffon or many others in the Union of Women for the Defence of Paris, Care of the Wounded, and similar groups. Louise saw herself primarily as a soldier, and she fought with the men of the 61st battalion of Montmartre. The Commune saw her as a Joan of Arc figure, a warrior of exceptional strength and energy who had a 'strange influence' over her brothers in arms. Watching her one day, Clemenceau did not understand how she managed to survive even for a few hours.

During this time Louise became closely associated with the Blanquist and deputy police chief of the Commune, Theophile Ferre, who was to be executed after its fall. The details of the relationship between them remain obscure. She herself, unlike the police files of the time, was silent about it. The only really clear thing about her feelings for Ferri was their sublimation in her love of Revolution itself - a love which many saw as fanatic and mad, but which she interpreted herself as an aesthetic, almost sensual love of danger and adventure as well as of the ideals with which they were connected.

This intense romanticism can at least in part explain the extraordinary *anti* defence which she conducted at her trial on 16 December 1871 before the Versailles war council.[1] She had given herself up to the authorities in order to secure the release of her mother, who had been taken hostage. Despite her continual taunting of the judges and passionate demands to die, as Ferré had done, her life was spared and she was sentenced to deportation in 'a fortified place', in other words, to the island of New Caledonia in the South Pacific. With a number of other deportees, Louise set sail on an old wreck of a frigate called the *Virginie*, and her long conversations during the voyage with her fellow *communards*, Nathalie Lemel and Henri Rochefort in particular, were crucial to her political development an anarchist. In New Caledonia, a small anarchist group was formed, and it was only among the members of this group, to which Louise belonged, that any real sympathy was shown for the rising of the native Kanaks against the French colonists which took place during this time.

Ever passionately curious, Louise began to study the Kanak language, their legends and music, and gave them lessons not only in algebra, which she felt more suited to them than arithmetic, but in direct action and sabotage.

Despite her openly agitational activities, Louise Michel's sentence was commuted to *déportation simple* (10 years' banishment) in May 1879. Campaigning in France led to the granting of a pardon, but she refused to return until the

[1] Louise Michel, "Statement before the Military Tribunal", *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 1 No. 1 (Spring 2021). (*Black Flag*)

declaration of a total amnesty of deportees in July 1880.

With five of her oldest cats – her Caledonian strays – she sailed home at last, eight years later, a convinced anarchist, something of a natural historian and an expert on Kanak culture. She returned to a rapturous welcome and, much to the chagrin of the government, at once began addressing political and feminist meetings. For the rest of her life, she was under constant police surveillance. On 9 March 1883, less than three years after her return from the South Pacific, she was arrested for taking part in a demonstration of unemployed workers, some of whom had en route pillaged a baker, crying 'Bread, work, or lead!' Louise Michel was charged with instigating the looting, and sentenced to six years' imprisonment.[1] Though torn apart with grief and anxiety over the imminent death of her mother, to whom she was devoted, she refused to appeal. She was pardoned in 1886 – against her will, because the others remained in prison.

She returned to a rapturous welcome and, much to the chagrin of the government, at once began addressing political and feminist meetings. For the rest of her life, she was under constant police surveillance.

Prison itself, she commented, was less hard to bear than the efforts of her friends to release her, in the sense that 'a male prisoner has but to fight against his situation; a female prisoner not only has to bear the same situation, but also the complications [caused by] the interventions of friends who ascribe to her every weakness, stupidity and folly'. Virtually forced out of prison, she resumed her subversive activities and in 1890 escaped further harassment by departing for London, where she remained for five years. During this time, she set up a libertarian International School for the children of political refugees and, among others, met Peter Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta and Emma Goldman. On leaving England she embarked upon an unceasing round of European capitals, preaching the social revolution. On 22 January 1888 at Le Havre, she was several times shot by a Breton named Pierre Lucas, for whose acquittal she worked as generously as Voltairine de Cleyre would later do for *her* would-be assassin. On 10 January 1905, at Marseille, while in the middle of a speaking tour, she died. Her funeral was attended by 100,000 people. It happened to take place on the same day as the massacre of St. Petersburg, which marked the beginning of the first Russian Revolution.

It has been said of Louise Michel (as of Emma Goldman) that her life was a work of art. Yet, if this is meant as a compliment - and both Hugo and Verlaine wrote poems about her - it could also be taken to imply a lack of intellectual substance. Few people, when they mention Louise Michel, refer to anything beyond the image of the exalted mystic, the 'transcendant' revolutionary, the fiery 'petroleuse with the heart of a forget-me-not' (to quote *Le Monde).* Has her contribution to the anarchist and feminist movements been unjustly neglected or simplified, or was she too romantic, too melodramatic even, to be taken seriously?

Louise Michel, it is true, lacked an analytical mind, a critical intelligence. She never really shed all trace of Blanquism. her history of the Commune is disappointing from an anarchist viewpoint in that it makes no attempt to grapple with the development and implications of the conflict between the Jacobin/Blanquist 'majority' and the more libertarian socialist 'minority' within the Commune, or to describe in any detail the social experiments which the Commune carried out. Her conversion to anarchism is described in terms of poetry, and tends to mystification. While in later life she gave unqualified support to the classic principles of anarchist communism (as outlined in the Anarchist Manifesto of Lyon, which she reproduces in her memoirs) she is also drawn both to nihilism and to syndicalism, while her writings lack coherence, being above all the product of

[1] Constance Bantman, "The unemployed demonstration of 9 March 1883, a snapshot of anarchism in the early 1880s",

impulse and veering between the prosaic and the surreal.

But if she is not a theorist, she is most certainly the exponent of one single and supreme idea: that freedom is the most important aim of revolution, and that it is indivisible. 'The fact is,' she said, 'that everything goes together.' And if this is hardly an original thought, rarely can anyone have lived or expressed this conviction more thoroughly, or with such integrity. It meant that as a revolutionary Louise Michel was what most *communards* were not – an anti-racist and a feminist; and it also meant that as an anti-racist and a feminist she was (unlike most of us still) an animal liberationist too. These various vanguard positions were linked to her quite extraordinary imaginative powers.

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Louise Michel was, in all probability, the first woman of any significance to link women's liberation with anarchism. In the declining days of the Second Empire, she took the name of Enjolras to join with other women in fighting the anti-feminism of Proudhon, Michelet and other progressives of the age. In later years, after becoming an anarchist, she was able not only to challenge the Proudhonian view of woman as domestic animal, but to stress the danger of the belief that liberation would come to women through the conquest of political, cultural, and economic rights, as opposed to the achievement of libertarian communist revolution.

Louise Michel had long been concerned with the problems of working women and with the aim of helping them live by the fruits of their own labour. The feminist struggle against prostitution (which she believed that women were forced into, but from which they alone could deliver themselves) was a particular concern of hers and her 'heart bled' for the many prostitutes who not only fought (and died) on the barricades of Paris but had to fight for the *right* to fight because of their 'uncleanness' in the eyes of the male revolutionaries.

She was full of admiration for the women of the Commune who 'did not ask whether something was possible, but whether it was useful, the succeeded in doing it' - in contrast to the interminable wrangling of the men. She refers to the women's ambulance work, their vigilance committees, their workshops and soup kitchens, as well as to their fighting on the barricades. On her return from exile, she continued her feminist work, involving herself in the League of Women, advocating women's strikes for equal pay and a shorter working day, while at the same time warning of the danger of believing that the right to work in a factory instead of a home would of itself free women more than it had freed men. Her anarchism came in, on one hand, in her intention of arousing awareness of feminist ideas through a structure of federated but autonomous women's groups throughout France, and on the other, in her insistence that such ideas could not be separated from the wider context of antimilitarism and anti-state revolution.

Louise Michel saw women as a 'caste', the word conveying perhaps a more radical and more profoundly cultural separateness than the word 'class'. 'Man, whoever he is,' she writes, 'is master; we are the intermediary beings between man and beast whom Proudhon classed as housewife or courtesan. I admit, always with sorrow, that we are a caste set apart, rendered such through the ages.' But, though man is master, he is basically as much a slave as woman. And since he cannot give what he himself lacks, how is it possible for woman to demand it of him? Woman has to bring about her own freedom, even though, in the circumstances it requires a hundred times more courage of her than of him; even though 'Today, when men weep, women must remain dry-eyed'. And if she can't obtain it from man because man is a slave too, the only solution is to overthrow the main instrument of slavery itself: the state.

As an anarchist and feminist, Louise Michel refused to stand as a woman's candidate in the elections, although nominated. 'Politics,' she writes, 'is a form of stupidity.' Universal suffrage is a 'prayer to the deaf gods of all mythologies'. She continues, 'I cannot oppose the women's

candidates in that they are an affirmation of the equality of men and women. But I must ... repeat to you that women must not separate their cause from that of humanity, but take a militant part in the great revolutionary army.'

Thus, it is clear that, like Emma Goldman, Louise Michel was no separatist and I think that she would have been appalled at Marian Leighton's statement that '...anarcho-feminism's primary commitment is and should be to the radical feminist movement with only marginal participation in anarchist movement politics...' (see her *Anarcho-Feminism and Louise Michel*[1]). But beyond the rejection of the separateness of these movements, and beyond her espousal of anarchist communism in general, what is the Revolution for Louise Michel? What is the uniqueness, if any, of her view of it?

Louise the charismatic firebrand is only one aspect, for, just as importantly, she is the aesthete and the (albeit desultory) scholar.

Seek in her work what revolution means for her, and time and again it is to be found expressed in terms of art and science or science fantasy; a revolutionary artistic and scientific experience which, freed from the shackles of State power and political and economic exploitation, stripped of its contemporary inessentials and abuses, will develop, and multiply forms which we can barely comprehend.

Today only her autobiography and her history of the Commune can be easily obtained (and these are still untranslated into English). Most of her novels and plays, if not lost entirely to the four winds, are buried in the depths of the *Bibliothéque national* and other libraries and museums; her musical compositions have undergone a separate fate; her poems express a passion and romanticism long out of fashion. Yet it is in this lost work that one finds a part of her rarely mentioned, a very dark side, a pervasive sense of violence and cruelty which is at least as important an element of her attitude to revolution as her millenarian optimism; and which is an essential part of the liberating process.

Her opera, *Le Rêve des Sabbats*, provides an example. It is no less than the story of the destruction of the earth in an infernal war between Satan and Don Juan for the love of a druidess. In the process the planet crumbles, and mind is assimilated into matter to the orchestral accompaniment of harmonicas, flutes, lyres, horns, guitars, and a devils' choir of 20 violins! Placed on the valley floor, surrounded by mountains, the audience is a part of this cosmic experience.

Louise Michel was well aware of the 'monstrosity' (her word) of this and similar works and she describes them in her memoirs with obvious humour, yet it is in terms of such an opera that she sees the Revolution - a whole, terrible, exhilarating and aesthetic experience, brought out of the concert halls and theatres into real life. She herself always acted to the full, to the point of Dadaism, and not without amusement and self-mockery, a role in one of these bizarre, fantastical creations. She is, yes, the mystic, but also and above all the artist, because of the power of her imagination, because of the sudden flashes of sheer beauty in the tangled undergrowth of her work, because these are what are most important to her. Far more in fact than the mystic, Louise Michel is the *aesthete* of Revolution. 'They say I'm brave,' she writes, 'the fact is, that in the idea, the setting of danger, my artist's senses are entrapped and charmed...' Or 'It was beautiful, that's all; my eyes served me like my heart, like my ears charmed by the cannon...' Or again, 'I loved the incense as I loved the smell of hemp; the smell of gunpowder as I loved the smell of the lianas in the Caledonian forests'.

She is always gambling, playing games with the danger from which she draws nourishment. Just as, one night, she had turned on the man who was following her (she describes his shadow in the light of the street lamps as that of a 'fantastic bird' perched on tall heron legs) and terrified him into flight by chanting, like swearwords, the letters of the 'Danel method of notation' (D,B,L,S,F,N,R,D) so too, during the Commune, she plays a symphony of revolution on some half-broken organ in some half-ruined church in the midst of bursting shells, terrifying and angering her companions.

Everything for Louise is an experience with its own poetry – even the procession to likely death at Satory, even the voyage of deportation – as important for the beauty of its images as for the fact of her conversion to anarchism, or the distinct probability that she would never again have seen those she loved: her mother, Marie Ferre. The passages on the New Caledonia are sheer prose

[1] Marie Leighton, "Anarcho-Feminism and Louise Michel," *Black Rose* (April 1974); reprinted in *Our Generation* (Summer 1990). (*Black Flag*)

poetry – among the most splendid and memorable of their kind that exist about the place. It is from this time that her concept of the new, anarchic world began to form, a concept inseparable from her physical experience of the world of the South Pacific. It is a world of living poetry, of science fiction turned fact, when fleets cross the sky and seabed, among submarine and sky-cities like the severed space-cities of late 20th century futurology. Even if it's only a legend that it was Louise Michel who gave Jules Verne the idea for the *Nautilus*, the legend itself is significant!

In the following extracts from her writings, I have tried within narrow confine to give as broad a view as possible of an extremely rich and complex personality. None of these pieces has the usual character of the political tract because, inevitably, the rambling, urgent, lyrical style characteristic of her does not allow it. But I have tried to show the main facets – the feminist, the anarchist, the poet, prophetess and artist of revolution – Louise whose most important contribution to our movement was, I think, both to unite it with the women's *and* animals' liberation, and to remind us that politics, science, and technology should never be separated from the poetic imagination.

Marseillaise of the New World

(An extract from the first chapter of the second part of the *Memoirs*)

....Regrettably, the thought that is secreted by the brain cannot survive the person who produces it. Yet it is possible to see that the dominant ideas of a particular life have their material origins in such and such an impression, or in the phenomena of hereditary or other things, I come across a strong sensation, the strength of which I still feel after all these years.

The sight, for instance, of a decapitated goose, walking with bloody neck raised, stiff with the red wound where the head had been; a white goose with drops of blood on its feathers, walking as if drunk while its head lay on the ground, eyes shut, thrown in a corner, had multiple consequences for me.

It was impossible for me then to reason out this impression, but I find it at the depths of my compassion for animals, and then at the depths of my horrors of the death penalty.

Some years later, a parricide was executed in a nearby village; at the hour of his death the sensation of horror that I felt for the agony of the man mingled with my memory of the agony of the goose.

Another effect of this child's impression was that until the age of eight or ten years, the sight of meat made me want to vomit; to overcome this disgust required great will power, and the reasoning of my grandmother, along the lines that I would suffer from too much emotion in my life if left to indulge such a peculiarity.

The stories of sufferings which we heard at the *ecregne*[1] of Vroncourt those rare evenings when Nanette and I got permission to go there, perhaps contributed to my keeping vividly alive the image of the goose.

. . . . . .

I liked to listen to those stories accompanied by the sound of the spinning wheel; the knitting needles cutting through the drone with a small, dry noise; and the snow, the great white snowfall, stretched like a shroud upon the earth, now and again lashing the face.

We had to go home at ten o'clock, but we always went back later, that was the best time! Marie Verdet laid her knitting on her knees; her eyes dilated beneath her coiffe, which overhung her like a roof, and the ghost stories: the will o' the wisp, the white Washerwomen, the dell of witches, told in her broken, almost-centenarian voice, had just the right setting; her sister Fanchette had seen everything, she nodded in confirmation.

We left reluctantly, Nanette and I, skirting the cemetery wall where we have only ever seen snow and heard only the winter wind.

From my evenings at the women's house dates a feeling of rebellion which I have very often rediscovered.

The peasants make the wheat grow, but they do not always have bread! An old woman told how with her four children, during the bad year (I think that's what they called those years when the monopolists brought famine to the land) neither she nor her husband nor her children were able to eat every day; they had nothing more to sell; they owned only the clothes on their backs; two of their children had died, they thought from hunger! Those who had wheat would no longer give them credit, *not even a handful of oats to make a little bread with*. But you have to resign yourself! she said. Not every one can eat bread every day. She had stopped her husband from killing the man who had refused them credit *by making them pay back double in a year*, while his children were dying. But the two brothers had held

[1] In her Memoirs Louise explains that this is 'in our villages the house where, on winter evenings, the women and young girls meet together to sew, knit and especially to tell old tales...."

back, they worked for the very man her husband wanted to destroy. The usurer got off scot-free, but there you are, the *poor people must put up with what they can 't do anything about!....*

When she said all that, in her calm way, my eyes went hot with anger, and I said to her: You should have let your husband do it! He was right!

I imagined the little children dying of hunger, the whole picture of misery, which she made so harrowing that you felt it right inside you; I saw the husband with his torn shirt and his bare feet in his clogs, on his way to plead with the wicked usurer and wandering sad and empty-handed home again. I saw him, threatening, with the little children stretched out cold on the handful of straw which remained to them, and the wife preventing the arbiter of justice who wanted to avenge his family and the others, and the two brothers, growing up with this memory, going to work for that man; the cowards!

It seemed to me that had he entered, I should have sprung at his neck to bite it, and I said so; I was angry that they could accept that not everyone could have bread every day; such herd-like stupidity frightened me.

As for the rich, believe me, I had little respect for them. Then the idea of communism came to me... People can't make an income from working the land; the income goes to those who already have too much of it.

'*You mustn't* speak like that, little one!' said the woman. '*It makes the good Lord cry*.'

Have you seen sheep offering their throat to the knife? That woman had the head of a sheep.

It was of this story I was thinking one day when, at catechism, I argued fervently against the famous proverb: Charity begins at home. The old cure (who believed it) called me over; I feared a punishment, but it was to give me a book.

Well, that book was all I needed to provide me with a horror of conquerors equal to my horror of the other human vampires.

It was a sort of paraphrasing of the psalms of exile.

'The harp hangs from the willows of the riverside.
Captive Jerusalem has seen her streets lament'.

And I cursed those who crush peoples as I did those who starve them, without however suspecting the extent to which, one day, I should see such crimes multiply.

A detail in passing, a confession even. This book was bound in the same way as M. Laumont the elder's little encyclopaedia, and I must admit that from the moment the cure laid it beside him, I was engrossed by the thought of what the brown skin cover could contain; it couldn't be a children's book; perhaps my preoccupation didn't escape him.

Since I have spoken of the little volume of M. Laumont; since I have said that each of us is, I believe, capable of all the good and evil in the fibres of our being, I will also confess that as a child I took from the house remorselessly, anything from money, if there was any, to fruit, vegetables and so on... I gave them all away in my family's name, and this made for some good rows when certain people thought to thank them. Incorrigible as I was, I laughed.

One year my grandfather offered me twenty sous a week if I'd stop stealing, but I found that I lost too much on the deal.

I had filed some keys to open a cupboard of pears and other things where I left little notes in place of what I took; for instance there was this: You have the lock, but I have the key.

Over the years the land returned so little that neither my uncle, who cultivated one half of it, nor ourselves, no-one could make ends meet; I felt there were many successive such years, often; that one lot of people couldn't always help the other and that something other than charity was necessary to provide everyone with bread.

As for the rich, believe me, I had little respect for them. Then the idea of communism came to me.

I saw the rough work on the land for what it is, bowing men like oxen over the furrows, keeping the slaughterhouses for the beasts when they are worn out; and the beggars' sacks for the men who can no longer work; the *fusil de toile* as they call it in the Haute-Marne.

People can't make an income from working the land; the income goes to those who already have too much of it.

The flowers of the field, the beautiful fresh grass, do you think they are there for the little children who tend the animals to play in? They want the grass only to lie down on and sleep a little at midday; I have seen them.

The shade of the woods, the blond harvests through which the wind soughs like waves, is the peasant not too tired to find them beautiful? The work is hard, the day is long; but he is resigned; has his will not been broken? Man is overworked as a beast.

Then the feeling of injustice in him goes to sleep; he is half dead and works unthinkingly, for the exploiter.

Many men have said to me, like the old woman of the *ecregne*: Mustn't say that, little one; it offends God!

Yes, they said that when I told them that everyone has the right to everything that there is on earth.

My pity for all that suffers, for the dumb beast, more perhaps than for man, went far; my revolt against social inequalities went further still; it has grown, always grown with the struggle, with the hecatomb; it has returned from across the ocean, it overshadows my pain and my life.

I return to the callousness of man for animal.

In summer, all the streams of the Haute-Marne, all the damp meadows in the shade of the willows are filled with frogs; you can hear them on fine evenings, sometimes one, sometimes the whole choir. Who knows whether they did not hitherto inspire the monotone choruses of ancient theatre!

It is during this season that the cruelties I have mentioned take place; the poor animals, able neither to live nor die, try to bury themselves in the dust or in the corners of dung heaps; in broad sunlight you can see their eyes, become enormous, and always soft, shining as in reproach.

The hatches of birds are left to the children who torture them; if they escape, traps are laid for them in autumn, along the woodland paths; there to die, caught by a claw and fluttering in desperation to the end.

And the old dogs, the old cats, I have seen them thrown to the lobsters. If the woman who threw the animals had fallen into the hole, I should not have offered her my hand. I have, since then, seen the workers of the fields treated like beasts and those of the town die of hunger; I have seen bullets rain on unarmed crowds.

I have seen cavalrymen break into crowds with the breasts of their horses; better than the men, the beasts raised their hooves from fear of causing injury, they advanced reluctantly under the whip.

Oh! How the Georgics and Eclogues deceive on the happiness of the fields! The descriptions of nature are true, the happiness of the workers of the fields is a lie.

The earth! This word lies at the very roots of my life, in the fat illustrated Roman history, from which M. Laumont (the younger) taught the whole family, on both sides, to read.

My grandmother taught me to read from it, indicating the letters with her big knitting needles.

The book was laid on the same desk where she made me practice the solfa, according to the great old solfas of Italy where she herself had learned.

In looking back to the cradle or to certain circumstances which have impressed the brain, one finds the living source of the rivers which sweep life along, the departure point of successive comparisons.

At certain times an idea emerges suddenly, while others disappear; it is time which arouses volcanoes from under the old continents and gives rise in people to new senses in preparation for the future cataclysm.

Thought, as it runs through life, changes and develops, involving a thousand unknown forces.

Yes, surely the man of the future will have new senses! You can feel them germinating in the very essence of our epoch.

The arts will be for everyone; the power of the harmony of colours, the sculptural grandeur marble, all that will belong to the human race. Encouraging genius, instead of extinguishing it, even those artists now fastened to the past will slip anchor; from everywhere the anchor must be raised.

Allons, allons, art for everyone, science for everyone, bread for everyone; has ignorance not wrought enough evil and is the privilege of knowledge not more terrible than that of gold! The arts form a part of the demands of humanity; they must be for everyone; only then will the human flock become the human race.

Who then will sing this *Marseillaise* of art, so loud and proud'? Who will tell of the thirst for knowledge, the intoxication of the harmonies of marble made flesh, the instruments that render the human voice, the canvasses that palpitate with life? Marble perhaps! Marble significant and voiceless, could well be the terrible poem of human protest.

No, neither marble, nor colour, nor song, can on their own tell the *Marseillaise* of the new world! All, everything must be liberated, all living creatures and the world, the worlds perhaps, who knows? Savages that we are!

What, do you propose that we give crumbs of bread to the crowd of disinherited? That we give bread without art, without science, without freedom?

Allons, allons, let each hand take a torch and let the coming epoch walk in light!

Arise each one of you, great hunters of stars!

Bold sailors, unfurl your sails, you who know how to die!

Allons, arise, heroes of the legends of times to come!

We speak of atavism! Yonder, fallen with the red roses of the fields, dead with the bees, there are family legends. Those who told me them will never tell them again.

Like sphinx they lean engulfed in shadow, upon me. With their green mer-eyes, they watch under the waters of the sea; their witch-figures tall and lean, they roam the *maquis*, or the moors.

This remote legend runs from the wild gorges of Corsica to the haunted menhirs of Brittany; from the red gul of Flogof, where storms the sea wind of the north-west, to the dark lake of Creno.

How many things around a wretched being to widen his horizon, to make him feel and see so that he suffers more, so that he better understands the wilderness of life where everything is fallen around him!

But, without that, could he be useful? Perhaps no.

Even where there has not been a little atavism in my leanings, one becomes a poet in solitude, whether or not the verse is rhymed. There the winds blow a poetry wilder than that of the north, softer than that of the *trouveres* following the great snows of winter, or the spring breezes that stir in the hedges of our hollow pathways so many hawthorns and roses.

Nanette and Josephine, those two daughters of the fields. were they not poets?

Have I not told their song? *L'Age nu deu bos*, *The Dark Bird of the Woods*, the air of which I rediscovered on the sea's edge, across the years and the ocean.

Yes, it was certainly the dark bird of the wild fields that I rediscovered on the edge of the sea, singing the brutal stanzas of wild nature.

How I became an anarchist

I became an anarchist when we were sent to Caledonia in the galleys, convicted of grievous and infamous crimes to which we were completely indifferent; since our consciences told us that it would have been criminal to act in any other way than we had done; rather we reproached ourselves for not having torn our hearts out; under certain circumstances pity is treason.

All the same, to make us repent for having fought for liberty, and as a precautionary measure against such evil-doers, we were kept in cages like tigers or lions.

For four months we saw nothing but sky and water and sometimes, on the horizon, the white sail of a ship like a bird's wing-the vastness made a striking impression. We had all the time in the world for thinking-, rocked by the gentle rhythm of the waves, which sometimes rose up as if two immense arms had lifted them and then thrown them down into the bottom of the sea again, it was like dough being kneaded, and the wind in the sails sung its scales at infinitely small intervals, suddenly leaping into great depths or into shrill whistling; the vessel creaked under the swell, we were at the mercy of the elements, and the Idea grew.


INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST
WORKERS & TRADE UNION CONGRESS
1896.
ANARCHIST-SOCIALIST AND ANTI-PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE
WELCOME TO DELEGATES
AN INTERNATIONAL
MASS MEETING
HOLBORN TOWN HALL,
GRAYS INN ROAD, W.C. ON
TUESDAY, JULY 28TH, 1896,
ALL DELEGATES ARE INVITED TO ATTEND
The following have consented to SPEAK:
ELISEE RECLUS.
J. C. KENWORTHY. A. HAMON.
PETER KROPOTKINE.
TOUZEAU PARRIS. MORRISON DAVIDSON.
TOM MANN.
BEN TILLET, L.C.C. BERNARD LAZARE. PIETRO GORI.
AMILCARE CIPRIANI.
ERRICO MALATESTA. GUSTAVE LANDAUER.
KEIR HARDIE. LOUISE MICHEL.
FRANK KITZ. JAMES TOCHATTI. H. H. DUNCAN. ALFRED BARTON. J. CAPLAN.
All communications to be addressed to J. PERRY, 7, Lord's Conduit Street, Theobald's Road, W.C.
ADMISSION FREE.
DOORS OPEN AT 7 P.M.; COMMENCE AT 7-30.
THE SOCIALIST CHOIR WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE DURING THE EVENING.
All Trade Unionists Specially Invited.

Well, by dint of comparing things, events and men, having seen our brave friends of the Commune behave in such a way that, fearing to be terrible, they were active only in throwing away their lives, I came rapidly to the conclusion that honourable people in power would be as incapable as dishonourable people in power are harmful, and that it is impossible for liberty ever to be allied with any form of power.

I felt that a revolution which seized power of any kind was nothing but an illusion, able merely to mark time and not to open all doors to progress; and that the institutions of the past, which seemed to disappear, remained by changing their names, and that everything in the old world was fastened together by chains, and that it thus formed a single system, fated to give way entirely to a new world, free and happy under the sky.

I saw that the laws of attraction, whereby innumerable spheres are unceasingly drawn toward new suns between the two eternities of past and future, must also govern the destiny of individual beings in the eternal progress that draws them towards a new and ever-developing ideal. So I am an anarchist, because only anarchy can bring happiness to humanity, and because it is the noblest idea that the human intelligence can grasp, until the dawning of perfection.

For as the ages pass, forms of progress yet unknown will succeed one another. Is it not common knowledge that what seems utopia for one or two generations becomes reality for the third?

Only anarchy can make man aware, because only anarchy can set him free; thus it means complete separation between a herd of slaves on one hand and humanity on the other. For any man coming to power, *l'Etat c'est lui*[1], he sees it as a dog sees the bone he gnaws, and it is for himself that he protects it.

If power makes us ferocious, egoistic and cruel, servitude degrades us; anarchy thus means an end to the wretched misery in which the human race has always lain; anarchy alone will not lead to a renewal of suffering; and increasingly it attracts hearts tempered in the battle for justice and truth.

Humanity wants to live, and in the desperate struggle to emerge from the abyss, to begin the bitter ascent of the rocks it will attach itself to anarchy; any other idea is comparable to the crumbling stone or clump of grass that one seizes while falling to yet further depths; we must fight with courage, but with logic; it is time that the real ideal, greater and finer than all the fiction which has preceded it, should be made so widely known that it prevents the disinherited masses from spilling anymore of their blood upon deceptive dreams. This is why I am an anarchist.

Speaking on women

(An extract from the ninth chapter of the first part of the Memoirs. The text is dotted with New Caledonian words, *keule*, *pikinnini*, *nemo*, *tayo* etc., which I have left as in the original)

...Over there, in the Caledonian forests, I have seen collapsing suddenly with a soft cracking of rotted trunk, old niaulis which had lived their quasi-eternity as trees.

When the whirlwind of dust has disappeared, there remains only a heap of ashes on which green branches lie like funeral wreaths: the last growths of the old trees, swept away with the rest.

Myriads of insects, which have been multiplying there for centuries, are buried in the collapse.

Some, painfully stirring the ashes, look anxious and astonished at the day that kills them; their species, born in darkness, will not survive the light.

This is how we live in the old social tree, which people obstinately believe to be alive and well, yet the least breath will annihilate it and disperse its ashes.

No creature can escape the transformations which, with time, will have altered them to the last atom. Then comes the Revolution, taking everything by storm.

This is the point at which we have arrived! Peoples, races and within the races the two parts of humanity: man and woman who should walk hand in hand; but the antagonism between them will last for as long as the stronger commands or believes he commands the other, reduced to ruse and to ruling in secret, to using the weapons of slaves.

Everywhere the struggle has been taken up. To recognise the equality of the sexes would be to make a great breach in the wall of human stupidity.

Meanwhile, to quote old Moliere, woman is still man's pottage (*le potage de I'homme*).

The *strong sex* condescends to the level of flattering the other by calling her the *fair sex*.

It's a hell of a long time since we began to reject that sort of strength, there are a good many of us rebels quite simply taking our part in the struggle, without asking permission to. You can carry on arguing to the end of the world!

For my part, comrades, I haven't withed to be *man's pottage*, I've spent my life with the vile multitude and have not given Caesar slaves.

That too, the vile multitude, is flattered at times, called the sovereign people.

Let us speak a few truths to the strong part of the human race, we shall never be able to say too much.

And first, let us speak of the strength that is made from our own cowardice; it isn't nearly as great as it may seem.

Were the Devil to exist, he would know that if man rules with much noise, woman rules quietly. But what is done in darkness is worth nothing; once this mysterious power is changed into equality, the petty little vanities and great deceits will cease; the brutality of the master and the treachery of the slave will cease to exist.

The cult of force goes back to the caves; it is general in savage cultures, as among the peoples of the first world. Over there, in Caledonia, I have seen tayos loading their *popinee*, their *nemo*, as mules are laden[2]; they walked proudly, wearing only the assegai of the warrior, wherever they were likely to meet someone. But if the path were deserted, if the mountain gorges narrowed, then moved to pity the *tayo* would unburden the *popinee*, by this time, sweating blood and water, of the fishing net, the *keule* or one of the *pikinninis*.

She would sigh with relief, only the smallest child still hanging from her back, and one or two others (not

[1] That is: *The State is him*. A play on Louis XIV's infamous statement "L'État c'est moi" (I am the State) which summarised the nature of absolute monarchy. (*Black Flag*)

[2] *Tayo* would appear to mean roughly man, *popinee* or *nemo*, to mean woman or wife, *lele* the done thing – but I confess I'm no expert! (Translator)

attached to her skirts, she had none) , their little arms slung by a garter to the maternal knee, trotting along on agile little partridge feet.

If a shadow appeared on the horizon- were it only that of an ox or horse- the sling stones, the fishing net, the little children were quickly loaded back again onto the woman's back, the tayo seeming to consolidate the burden.

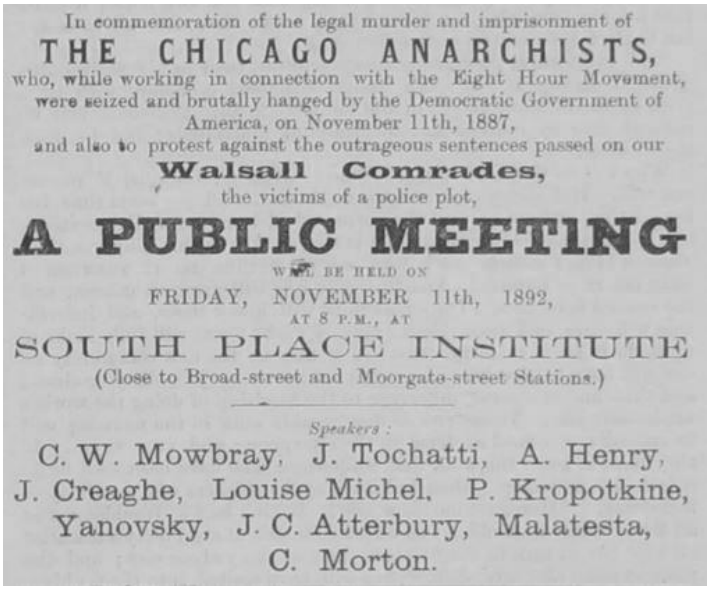
Supposing he had been seen? Not *lele*, a warrior who valued *nemos*. They would hardly be content to be treated like nothing any more!

Is it not everywhere the same? Does the stupid vanity of strength not maintain, among the number of arguments for the inferiority of women, that motherhood and other circumstances get in the way of their ability to fight?

Even so, will they always be so daft as to cut their own throats'?

……

And besides, women, when a thing is worth fighting for, are not the last to do so; the old yeast of revolt at the depths of the heart of all women ferments quickly enough where the struggle opens up wider paths, where there is less of the smell of the charnel house and the squalor of human stupidity. They are disgusted, the women! Cruelty sickens them....


In commemoration of the legal murder and imprisonment of
THE CHICAGO ANARCHISTS,
who, while working in connection with the Eight Hour Movement, were seized and brutally hanged by the Democratic Government of America, on November 11th, 1887,
and also to protest against the outrageous sentences passed on our
Walsall Comrades,
the victims of a police plot,
A PUBLIC MEETING
WILL BE HELD ON
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11th, 1892,
AT 8 P.M., AT
SOUTH PLACE INSTITUTE
(Close to Broad-street and Moorgate-street Stations.)
Speakers :
C. W. Mowbray, J. Tochatti, A. Henry,
J. Creaghe, Louise Michel, P. Kropotkine,
Yanovsky, J. C. Atterbury, Malatesta,
C. Morton.

It's a long time since the stupid old attitudes to sex were overturned by the Americans and the Russians. Women began to get the same education as men, and men weren't jealous of them, feeling themselves capable of the same zeal and not understanding that sex should be a greater concern than skin colour.

But among the first people of the world, it would be no more *lele* than among the tribes of Caledonia for women to have the same education as men. Supposing they wanted to govern!

Don't worry! We're not stupid enough for that! That would mean the continuance of authority: keep it for yourselves, that it may come to a swifter end!

Alas! That swifter end is still far off. Human stupidity throws over us, doesn't it, all the veils of all the old prejudices?

Don't dismay! There are enough to last some time yet. But you'll never halt the tide, nor prevent the raising of ideas, like banners, before the crowds.

Never have I understood that there should be a sex whose intelligence one should try to stifle, as if there were already too much of it in the species.

Girls, raised in fatuity, are deliberately disarmed, the better to be deceived: that is the requirement.

It's just as if you were thrown into the water after having been forbidden to learn to swim, as if your limbs were bound, even.

Under the pretext of preserving the innocence of a young girl, she's left to dream, in profound ignorance, of things which wouldn't make the slightest impression on her were they known to her through simple questions of botany or natural history.

She'd be a thousand times more innocent if they were, since she'd take coolly the thousand things which now trouble her: questions of science or nature don't trouble the senses.

Does a corpse trouble those who go regularly to the amphitheatre?

Alive or dead, nature doesn't make you blush. The mystery is destroyed, the corpse is offered to the scalpel.

Nature and science are clean, the veils thrown over them are not. Those vine leaves fallen from the loins of old Silenus serve only to draw attention to what would otherwise pass unheeded.

The English breed races of animals for slaughter; civilised peoples prepare young girls for deception; yet, for the girls, they make deception a crime, and for their seducers a virtual honour.

What a scandal when black sheep are found among the flock! What would become of us if lambs were no longer content to be slaughtered?

No doubt they'd be slaughtered just the same, whether they offered their necks or not. No matter! Better not to offer them.

Sometimes lambs turn into lionesses, tigresses, octopi.

And that's all to the good! The caste of women should never have been cut off from humanity. Aren't there markets where the beautiful daughters of the people are sold in the street, at street stalls? And aren't the daughters of the rich sold for their dowries?

The former are taken by whoever wants them; the latter are given to whoever happens to be chosen.

It's the same with prostitution, and the Oceanian morality is widely practised among us. Not *lele*, the *tayos* who value their *nemos*!

The proletarian is a slave, but slave of all is the proletarian's wife.

And women's wages? Let us speak of them a little; they are nothing but a bait, since, being illusory, they're worse than if they didn't exist at all.

Why do so many women not work?

There are two reasons: some can't find work; others prefer to die of hunger, in a hole if they can find one, at the corner of some boundary wall or road if they have no shelter, than to labour at a job which only just repays them for the yarn they invest, but brings in a great deal to the boss. There are some who hold on to life. Then, driven by hunger, cold, misery, drawn towards the villains of both sexes whose living it is – there are worms in all manner of putrefaction- the unhappy women allow themselves to be recruited into that lugubrious army which trails from Saint-Lazare to the Morgue.

Famine... et arrestation de douze mille républicains, socialistes et anarchistes en Italie. — Le peuple espagnol trompé, enregimenté et poussé à une guerre nationale par les dirigeants. -- De Montjuich à Cuba — Duperie du Suffrage Universel — Le pain cher.

MEETING PUBLIC

SALLE DE L'HARMONIE, 94, rue d'Angoulême

Samedi 11 juin, à 8 h. 1/2 du soir

avec le concours de

LOUISE MICHEL

Laurent TAILHADE, Charles MALATO

Les accapareurs de blé, financiers, valets des despotes, ajoutent la famine à la guerre. Les révoltes des prolétaires italiens et espagnols, qui veulent VIVRE sont noyés dans le sang. La RÉACTION internationale affame et saigne séparément les peuples. Le tour de la France est arrivé. Les gens de l'ordre moral et clérical se démasquent à la Chambre et dans le pays.

Le suffrage universel est une duperie atroce. — Ne comptons que sur nous-mêmes, ne nous laissons pas surprendre.

LES ORGANISATEURS

ENTRÉE: 0 fr. 50 centimes

Les dames sont admises

Paris. — Imprimerie Gustave MARCHAL, 35, rue d'Hauteville.

I mean, when shivering in the mire, a wretch takes from some fool's pocket more than he gives her, so much the better! Why did he go there? Were there not so many buyers, such merchandise wouldn't exist.

And when a decent woman, calumniated or pursued, kills the scoundrel who pursues her, then bravo! She's ridding the others of a danger; she's avenging them; there aren't enough of us who do.

If women, those accursed beings who, even for Proudhon, can be only housewives or courtesans[1] – in the old world they can be nothing more – if women are often *fatale*, whose fault is it? Who for his pleasure has cultivated their coquettry and all the other vices agreeable to men? Through the ages a selection of such vices has been made. It could not have been otherwise.

They are weapons now, the weapons of slaves, dumb and terrible; they shouldn't have been given them! It's well done!

Everywhere in this accursed society man suffers; but no suffering is comparable with that of woman.

In the street she is a commodity.

In the convent where she hides as in a tomb ignorance embraces her, the rules enmesh her, pulverise her heart and brain.

In the outside world she is subjected to humiliation; in her home the burden crushes her; man wants it to stay that way, to be sure she won't encroach on his territory and rights.

Don't worry, gentlemen! We've no need of your rights to take over your functions when it suits us!

Your rights? Never! We don't like your rags; do with them what you will; they're too worn, too tight-fitting for us.

What we desire are science and liberty.

Your rights? The time isn't far off when you'll come and offer them to us, in an attempt, by sharing them, to recover them a little.

Keep your cast-offs, we don't want them.

Our rights, we have them. Aren't we beside you in the great fight, the supreme struggle? Would you dare make an allowance for the *rights of women*, when men and women have won the rights of humanity?

This chapter is no digression. A woman, I have the right to speak of women.

The proletarian is a slave, but slave of all is the proletarian's wife... Everywhere in this accursed society man suffers; but no suffering is comparable with that of woman.

[1] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Système des contradictions économiques* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1846) II 254. (*Black Flag*)

Why we are Anarchists

Louise Michel

The Commonweal: A Revolutionary Journal of Anarchist Communism, 26 September 1891

Our comrade Louise Michel has received the following letter from a stranger; we insert the letter and a translation of her answer.

DEAR MISS:– You have been represented in various periodicals and newspapers (which I have read at various times) as the leader of the school of Anarchists and of all those who wish to undermine the national Governments of civilised countries. I write to ask you whether you have not been misrepresented upon this matter, and if not, how and by what system of reasoning have you come to believe that we shall reach a perfect state of Society by destroying all Government, than by helping or forcing Governments to make laws which shall better the social condition of the people. I apologise very much for troubling you and remain,

Yours Sincerely S.B.

I should have been satisfied with answering the question which Mr. S.B. has put in such an open handed manner, if this question was only asked by one man and if my views only were to be expressed.

We are Anarchists because it is absolutely impossible to obtain justice for all in any other way than by destroying institutions founded on force and privilege.

We cannot believe that improvement is possible, if we still keep up the same institutions, now more rotten than in the past, or if we merely replace those whose iniquities are known by new men.

These latter become in their turn what the others were, or else become barren.

After the gradual changes of past centuries the hour has come when evolution cannot be separated from revolution, as in all birth they must be *accomplished* together. You can no more retard the birth of a system than you can that of living being.

In what would you that we should help those who govern—their work being only exploitation and wholesale murder—it has never been otherwise: the reason for the existence of a state is nothing but the accomplishment of some crime or other in order to assure the domination of a privileged class.

An equal division of wealth would also be as mad as capitalism is criminal: to expect any amelioration of misery by modifying laws is a piece of stupidity of which we are not capable: we have seen the work of men whose illusions have only been able to perpetuate misery — millions of years being insufficient for the least amelioration of the lot of the workers. We can now see the fin-de-siècle cutthroats and assassins. That is better. We can see power on trial — we can judge it for what it is worth.

When free groups of men will use *for the general welfare* machines which reduce the hours of labour to a few, and in many forms of production the toil of rough work will be annihilated, there will remain for the intellect of the time, some time for the pursuit of art and science

The land which belongs to all can no more be divided than the light which also belongs to all.

When free groups of men will use *for the general welfare* machines which reduce the hours of labour to a few, and in many forms of production the toil of rough work will be annihilated, there will remain for the intellect of the time, some time for the pursuit of art and science; and when men are delivered from the struggle for existence, they will also be delivered from crime and grief.

The ideal alone is the truth — it is the measure of our horizon. Time was when the ideal was to live without eating an other up. Is it not so still under another form which exists in the so-called civilised countries where the exploiter eats up the exploited? Do not the people in nocks fertilise the soil by their sweat and blood?

That is what we want to destroy — this annihilation — this eating of man by an other man.

The old bogie of "Society" is dead. It is time that she was buried with the worms burrowing in her vitals, in order that the air may be pure for young Anarchy, which will be order and peace under freedom instead of order kept by the murder of the multitudes.

How did I become an Anarchist? This is how. It was during a four months voyage for New Caledonia while looking at the infinity of the sea and of the sky — feeling how miserable living beings are when taken individually — how great is the ideal when it goes

beyond time and beyond the hecatombs as far as the new aurora.

There I deeply felt how each drop of water of the waves was but microscopic, but how powerful it was when joined to the ocean.

So also ought each man to be in humanity. As for the third question I am not the least bit in the world "chief" of the "International school"; the word "directrix" which my comrades have joined to my name is worth nothing either, for each of us gives freely according to his conscience the courses of instruction with which he or she has charged him or her self.

What would you have? Our tongue is poor, the words are old and so they ill express new ideas.

And finally is it not time that our limited tongues should fall into the ocean of speech and of human thought? What will be the language of mankind delivered to the new Aurora — Anarchy!

The Eighteenth of March

Louise Michel

The Rebel: Anarchist-Communist Journal (Boston), March-April 1896

The eighteenth of March 1871 had been chosen by the wicked gnome Thiers, his accomplices, and his dupes to arouse Paris after having disarmed it, in order to justify a massacre preparatory to some dynastic restoration. The treacherous plan being organised, the traitors and the incapables were caught in their own trap. To them any master seemed preferable to a revolution. But it was no longer the spies of the empire crying "on to Berlin!" when no one wanted war it was a people wishing to be free. They had the revolution. Jules Favre recounts as follows the provocation which they prepared. "Vinoy would have liked to engage the party by suppressing the pay of the National Guard, we thought this plan more dangerous than direct action."

Direct action was attempted. It was the seizure by those in power of the cannon which the National Guard had bought with their own funds for the defence of Paris neglected by the inertia of the government. The power in the hands of the government of "*La Defense Nationale*" had no energy but that directed against the people. The proclamation made the day before was similar to those of the empire on some Second of December. An attempt hazarded two nights before to take the cannon from the Place des Vosges had given warning.

They knew by the 31th of October, by the 22nd of January, by all the refusals of defence and all the attempts to surrender of what the bourgeois are capable when they dream of the red Specter of the Revolution. It was imprudent this time for those in power to pit the soldiers against Paris, which did not wish to be disarmed. It was too near all the battles lost by the incapacity of the old generals of the empire, too near, above all, to the opposition of Paris to all the attempts to surrender that had been made until now, to imagine that the army would not make common cause with Paris, which would rather die than surrender. The soldiers who invaded the faubourgs found Montmartre, Belleville standing ready. They were surrounded by the National Guard. Every where the soldiers fraternised with the crowd.

It was not only the popular will to guard the cannon but to have a republic which would not be a continuation of the empire. A post of the National Guard had passed the night at a house in the rue des Rosiers at the summit of the *buttes*. Suddenly the post was surprised, the soldier on guard at the door fell mortally wounded. The blank charge which ought to have been fired in case of surprise was not made but the alarm was given just the same.

Montmartre assembled like a swarm of bees. At dawn when the alarm bell sounded the tambours beat, the general call to arms. We all charged up the hill knowing that at the top of the hill, under the orders of General Lecomte, were ten thousand men in battle array; we thought to die for liberty or rather thinking no more, we would have scaled the sky itself.

We never noticed the steep and rocky ascent, excited as we were by the tocsin and the hurried rhythm of the charge. There was a clear atmosphere, a splendid dawn like an aurora of deliverance. We knew well though we died, Paris would rise. It was not death that awaited us on the heights of Montmartre, where however they were

dragging away the cannon to join them to the others at the Batignolles, already taken. It was the surprise of a popular victory.

Between us and the army, the women of Montmartre threw themselves in front of the cannon. The soldiers retreated; three times General Lecomte ordered them to fire on the crowd, a subaltern stepped out of the ranks, placed himself in front of his company and gave the order: Ground Arms! It was he whom they obeyed (Verdaguerre who, several weeks later was shot at Versailles). The revolution was a fact.

Lecomte had been arrested at the moment, when for the third time he was ordering his soldiers to fire, he was conducted to the rue des Rosiers, where very soon he was rejoined by General Clement Thomas, discovered in civilian's dress, while taking the plan of the Montmartre barricades.

Their destiny accomplished itself. Both had been condemned to death long since by the survivors of June 1848. Lecomte, who had been continually insulting, the National Guard again remembered the old griefs. Clement Thomas had just been taken in the act of spying. This time popular justice was in accord with the law of war. In addition to this Clement Thomas and Lecomte had some accounts to regulate with their own soldiers. It was the revolution that executed them. In the bloody days of May a crowd of victims who had never taken any part in their death, were shot in revenge for the execution of these two men, who had so often cut into the flesh of multitudes.

The people's victory would have been complete had they gone to Versailles the evening of the 18th of March to overthrow the reactionary government. Many might have fallen on the way but the slaughter of May would have been avoided.

It was *legality* that carried the day. The Commune was elected by vote and too much time was lost to have made it yet possible to smother the past in its lair. The Commune, conquered, carried off with it the weaknesses and the hesitations of its profound honesty. The veritable duty would have been to sacrifice every human sentiment to the necessity of holding the people's victory.

But if *la Commune* feared to make victims she never feared for her own existence. She sleeps in the red shroud of her wedding with Death.

The day to celebrate *la Commun*e should have been the 28th of May when her life blood was taken, the avenging flames of the conflagration extinguished by streams of blood.

Louise Michel

London, Feb. 25, 1896

Why I am an Anarchist

Louise Michel

Liberty: A Journal of anarchist-communism, March 1896

I am an Anarchist because Anarchy alone, by means of liberty and justice based on equal rights, will make humanity happy, and because Anarchy is the sublimest idea conceivable by man. It is, today, the summit of human wisdom, awaiting discoveries of undreamt of progress on new horizons, ages roll on and succeed each other in an ever widening circle.

Man will only be conscious when he is free. Anarchy will therefore be the complete separation between the human flocks, composed of slaves and tyrants, as they exist today, and the free humanity of tomorrow. As soon as man, whoever he may be, comes to power, he suffers its fatal influence and is corrupted; he uses force to defend his person. He is the State, and he considers it a property to be used for his benefit, as a dog considers the bone he gnaws. If power renders a man egotistical and cruel, servitude degrades him. A slave is often worse than his master; nobody knows how tyrannous he would be as a master, or base as a slave, if his own fortune or life were at stake.

To end the horrible misery in which humanity has always dragged a bloody and painful existence incites brave hearts more and more to battle for justice and truth. The hour is at hand: hastened by the crimes of governors, the law's severity, the impossibility of living in such circumstances, thousands of unfortunates without hope of an end to their tortures, the illusory amelioration of gangrened institutions, the change of power which is but a change of suffering, and man's natural love of life: every man, like every race, looks around to see from which side deliverance will come.

Anarchy will not begin the eternal miseries anew. Humanity in its flight of despair will cling to it in order to emerge from the abyss. It is the rugged ascent of the rock that will lead to the summit; humanity will no longer clutch at rolling stones and tufts of grass, to fall without end.

Anarchy is the new ideal, the progress of which nothing can hinder. Our epoch is as dead as the age of stone. Whether death took place yesterday or a thousand years ago, its vestiges of life are utterly lost. The end of the epoch through which we are passing is only a necropolis full of ashes and bones.

Power, authority, privileges – no longer exist for thinkers, for artists, or for any who rebel against the common evil. Science discovers unknown forces that study will yet simplify. The disappearance of the order of things we see at present is near at hand. The world, up till now divided among a few privileged beings, will be taken back by all. And the ignorant alone will be astonished at the conquest of humanity over antique bestiality.

I became definitely an Anarchist when sent to New Caledonia, on a state ship, in order to bring me to repentance for having fought for liberty. I and my companions were kept in cages like lions or tigers during four months. We saw nothing but sky and water, with now and then the white sail of a vessel on the horizon, like a bird's wing in the sky. This impression and the expanse were overwhelming. We had much time to think on board, and by constantly comparing things, events, and men; by having seen my friends of the Commune, who were honest, at work, and who only knew how to throw their lives into the struggle, so much they feared to act ill; I came rapidly to the conclusion that honest men in power are incapable, and that dishonest ones are monsters; that it is impossible to ally liberty with power, and that a revolution whose aim is any form of government would be but a delusion if only a few institutions fell, because everything is bound by indestructible chains in the old world, and everything must be uprooted by the foundations for the new world to grow happy and be at liberty under a free sky.

One of ten statues of women honoured at the 2024 Olympic Games

Anarchism is today the end which progress seeks to attain, and when it has attained it will look forward from there to the edge of a new horizon, which again as soon as it has been reached will disclose another, and so on always, since progress is eternal.

We must fight not only with courage but with logic; that the disinherited masses, who sprinkle every step of progress with their blood, may benefit at last by the supreme struggle soon to be entered upon by human reason together with despair. It is necessary that the true ideal be revealed, grander and more beautiful than all the preceding fictions. And should this ideal be still far off it is worth dying for.

That is why I am an Anarchist.

The Eighteenth of March

L. Michel

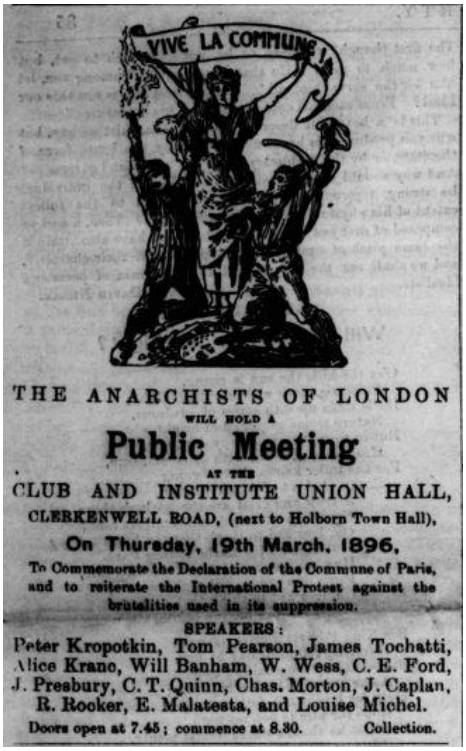
Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, March-April 1901

Thirty years have passed since that day, since the 18th of March, 1871. At dawn the tocsin was sounding, and, hardly feeling the ground beneath us, at a quick step we climbed the heights of Montmartre, on the summit of which stood an army ranged in order of battle. Little did we ever expect to return even though all Paris had risen. The soldiers were already putting horses to the cannon which the National Guard held there, having brought them up from Batignolles during the night. And behold! between us and the army the women we had none of us seen climbing, and who now threw themselves upon the guns, the soldiers remaining motionless!

As General Lecomte gave the order to fire upon the crowd, a subaltern (Yerdaguerre) stepped from the ranks, and louder than the General's voice rang his cry: "*Butt ends in the air!*" And he it was the soldiers obeyed. The crowd fraternised with them, and the spring sunshine flashing like diamonds seemed to illuminate Liberty – Liberty, the great, the triumphant, and which we thought to keep for ever.

Instead, there followed massacre. More likely a hundred thousand rather than the twenty thousand bodies officially numbered, were buried in all parts – in communal ditches, under the street pavements, in the squares, or were burnt in the caseinates or on the Place de la Concorde and elsewhere; those that lie beneath the pavements still reappear; from time to time during excavations whole skeletons are found still wrapped in some red fragment of their National Guard uniform; but the ashes of the burnt have been scattered by the winds throughout the world.

It is thirty years since then, and though today some might say that Liberty is farther off than ever, rather is it near; so near that those who battle against it have only one resource left – that of sowing the seeds of hatred amongst revolutionists, forgetting that one day this very hatred will become the avenger against the common enemy, that monstrous Past which refuses to die and yet agonises, suffocated in the blood of its victims.



It is its crimes that will kill the old Society. Those it commits today become the greater the nearer it finds itself approaching the edge of the abyss. Just as we can no longer be content to return to the conditions of the ancient cave-dwellers, so too will it be impossible for any man born in these days and grown to manhood to live as we now do, surrounded by iniquities and bloodshed. The executions, the pillage, the indiscriminate assassinations that today take place in China in the name of Civilisation and under the cloak of military and clerical legalism would, however, not be permitted in Europe since every nation would rise in horror; nor would any war similar to that in the Transvaal break out here could we see the thousands of dead, English and Boer, that strew the distant mountain gorges of Africa, calling down malediction from every silent height. Never after so horrible an object lesson could Capitalist cupidity renew such atrocities.

I say it is the end! That is why the Abdul Hamids of the world tremble in the midst of their criminal and sanguinary follies; feeling the earth sinking beneath them they are forced to cease their cruelty.

Man is not made either to be an executioner or to be executed; he is not made for a life of hatred, despair and everlasting misery; these evils only exist because of the universal stupidity and cowardice. The monsters that the legendary heroes of the future will destroy, are they not War, Misery, Oppression and Ignorance? The true ideal appears in a clearer form to us now than it did thirty years ago; and it is for one and all, each fulfilling his appointed task, to build up the first stage of these new times in which though the years may roll along unknown paths it is towards an aim that is no longer unknown and cannot be misunderstood. With our eyes fixed upon this star of Deliverance, let us stride forward without fear; the days of feeble indecision are at an end. Yet we still have much to learn in regard to the vastness, the grandeur, the beauty and the possibilities of the work. But would the gigantic columns that ancient Egypt transported from place to place by the labouring arms of millions of slaves have been impossible to raise had those arms belonged to free men? Is it too hard to create around the cradle of a free humanity the large clear space required for the natural development of justice, truth, science, art and the marvels that a new sense of freedom and truth will give birth to?

The 18th of March which we saw thirty years ago was magnificent; for a moment it aroused every other nation. The new 18th of March will be that of every awakened man. and their number is already immense; that of every noble and elevated spirit, of every brave heart beating in the breasts of humanity, and these shouting aloud the tocsin of Liberty, must awaken the earth.

On the 18th of March the dawn of the Commune was beautiful, aye, and even more so in May in the grandeur of death. The weaknesses, the follies that Commune committed should be pardoned in view of its fierce contempt for life – always one of the greatest factors in a combat for liberty.

The predominant sentiment after the victory of March 18th was one of joy for deliverance, the glorious happiness of having secured liberties upon which to found a great and noble republic! The Manifesto of the Central Committee ran:

Citizens: The people of Paris have thrown off the yoke that was being imposed upon them. Calm, impassive in her strength, the city has fearlessly and without provocation awaited the shameless fools who wished today the republic. This time our brothers of the army have refused to lay their hands upon the sacred arch of Liberty.

Alas! too soon the soldiers, stuffed with lies and alcohol, obeyed the orders from Versailles to massacre. This, as always, is the eternal history of Discipline which forces men into ruts and makes of some mills that grind, of others the grain that they crush.

Man, I say, is not made for a life of crime or pain; it is necessary for all to understand this, so that on one side we refuse to torture and on the other to be tortured. We know, we see all round us the evidence of the most hideous crimes; we must refuse to help in their committal – there lies the key of the situation.

Then the 18th of March of the whole world will be like a sun risen to its full glory above virgin summits, and the new, the diviner times will commence.

Remembering Luigi Fabbri

Francesco Lamendola

Umanità Nova, 6 November 1988[1]

Luigi Fabbri (1877–1935)

A clear-sighted and very astute intellectual, author of essays crucial to my libertarian understanding of the great political upheavals of the 20th century (the Russian revolution, the fascist seizure of power in Italy). A generous and tireless anarchist militant, he knew imprisonment and internment, physical assault at the hands of fascist thugs and was driven into exile; he was one of the few professors to refuse to take the oath of loyalty to the Italian regime after 1922, a refusal that cost him a chair to which he had always brought honour. A dogged organiser for the movement, a friend and follower of Errico Malatesta (of whom he has left us a moving and comprehensive biography), a supporter of anarcho-communism and of the workers' movement, he attended the International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam in 1907. This was Luigi Fabbri, a comrade whose name is all too rarely invoked these days, and whose books and pamphlets (which are of such immediate relevance, even though their author died before the second World war broke out) are too little read.

He was born on 23 December 1877 in Fabriano in the province of Ancona (Italy), one of the 'classic' stamping grounds of anarchism (along with the Romagna, the Valdarno and the areas around Carrera and La Spezia), which was to be the epicentre of the famous 'red week' uprising in 1914. He spent his childhood and early youth farther south in the marches, in Montefiore dell'Ase (in the province of Ascoli Piceno), then went on to the Recanati high school. In 1893 at the age of 15 he encountered anarchist teachings for the first time and instinctively embraced them; from that point on his militant activity would take place under the red and black colours of freedom and into it he poured all of this energies and intellect. Unlike Kropotkin, an anarchist academic who was also capable of scientific work unrelated to politics (such as his research into Ice Age geology and the geography of the Far East and Central Asia), for Fabbri academic and militant were one and the same. His thirst for knowledge and urge to investigate and subject everything to the probing light of a critical and alert intelligence was placed in the service of the libertarian ideal. This was a struggle that was unceasing even during his times in prison (he was first arrested in 1894 at the age of 16, charged with having printed and distributed anti-militarist matter: this was at the time of the disgraceful war in Africa launched by Francesco Crispi for reasons of prestige). In 1896 he enrolled with the law faculty of the university of Macerata. The following year he met Malatesta, becoming one of his best friends and most loyal collaborators. Malatesta was a member of the military draft of 1895, so he was 24 years Fabbri's senior. For Malatesta Fabbri felt a filial affection (if it means anything, the year of Fabbri's birth was the year of the Matese gang, the hapless attempted uprising by Malatesta, Carlo Cafiero and Andrea Costa in the San Lupo mountains). It was with Malatesta that he cut his teeth in his long career as a movement journalist and publicist; in fact he was placed in charge of the publication of *L'Agitazione* in Ancona, whilst his mentor was in prison. But in 1898 it was Fabbri's turn to be arrested. He was interned on offshore islands first on Ponza and then on Favignana. This was a common practice in King Umberto's freemason and clergy-ridden Italy; it followed the failure of the attempt to serum a penal colony on the desolate Dahlak islands in the Red Sea along the lines of French Guyana.

In 1900, Fabbri was released. Even though the anti-anarchist crackdown was raging as furiously as ever (following the assassination of Umberto in Monza), his propaganda activity did not let up. In 1903, along with Pietro Gori, Fabbri launched the review *Il Pensiero* and a short time later started to contribute articles to the anarchist newspaper of the émigrés in Paterson, New Jersey, *La Question Sociale. Il Pensiero* continued to appear, albeit faced by thousands of problems, until December 1911. He shuttled between Rome, Bologna, Fabriano and his native region, carrying on with his activities as a teacher under close police surveillance but determined to spread his libertarian ideas wherever

[1] https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/2rbpdf

he went. He joined Malatesta in writing for *Volonta* in Ancona, In 1907 he was in Amsterdam along with Malatesta to attend the International Anarchist Congress which was to have such importance for the evolution of the anarchist movement.

Being caught up in the 'red week' he was obliged to quit Italy and took refuge for a while in Switzerland, returning to Italy to throw himself body and soul into anti-militarist and pro-neutrality propaganda in 1914-1915. These were difficult times: the whole of Italy was convulsed by pro-intervention euphoria and uncertainty and confusion infected even the left. Socialists like Cesare Battista, anarchists like Peter Kropotkin argued that the war was a necessity. This eventually stretched and snapped the weakening vestiges of the International. Luigi Fabbri, charged with defeatism, was arrested again; upon his release he carried on with his work as a teacher during the war years under the closet police surveillance (in Corticella in Bologna province). His anti-war propaganda carried on but he had to take certain precautions in order to remain at large.

Aside from *Volonta*, he contributed to *Umanita Nova* which had been launched in 1920 as a daily. But his contributions to *Umanita Nova* led to his being arrested again in the years after the Great War, tried and convicted again; he also suffered his first fascist attack.

Yet these were his most fertile years as a writer. Back in 1905 he had published his *Letters to a Woman on Anarchy*, followed in 1912 by *The School and the Revolution*, in 1913 by *Giordano Bruno* and in 1914 by *Letters to a Socialist* and *The Aware Generation*. But between 1921 and 1922 he sent to the presses his most important books (aside from a later life of Malatesta), *Preventive Counter-revolution*; and *Dictatorship and Revolution* - works generated by a probing, perceptive intelligence set out in the clearest of styles and closely argued, consistent in their reasoning and non conformist in their approach and conclusions. [KSL hope to print the latter some time in the future]

Some of what he wrote is startlingly relevant even now, like this extract from the 1906 pamphlet *Workers' Organisation and Anarchy*… "This vicious circle has led reformist socialists to devise the curious theory that in their strikes the workers should worry about the interests of the employers and the conditions of their industry… Thus are the workers on strike wrong-footed and the capitalist taken as being right, all in the name of a brand new interpretation of socialism. It has been overlooked, however, that it is the workers who always have right on their side, always, always, even when they declare an ill-timed strike that harms themselves. True, they are not doing the right thing in launching a dispute in unfavourable circumstances, when their defeat is a certainty; but the damage they are doing is to their own interests and not because the boss is in the right or because the industrialists are right rather than the wage earners. For as long as the worker works a single hour for the benefit of an employer, for as long as the boss makes a penny out of a working man's labours, that working man will always have right on his side - the sacrosanct right which is the very basis of socialism and of anarchism…"

In *Dictatorship and Revolution* (1921), an analysis of the Russian Revolution and its authoritarian distortion by the Bolsheviks, he always deals with the relationship between libertarian socialism and Marxism. "Socialists always say that the 'dictatorship' will be a passing thing, an imperfect transitional stage, something akin to a painful necessity. We have demonstrated what errors and dangers lurk within that belief; even granting (which I do not) that dictatorship may truly be necessary, it would still be a mistake to offer it as an ideal target to aim for and turn it into a flag to afford precedence over the flag of freedom. In my event we ought to agree that one of the essential preconditions of such a dictatorship's being provisional and passing and not consolidating itself and leading on to a stable, lasting future dictatorship, is that it must terminate at the earliest opportunity, and that outside and against the law there should be a watchful and energetic opposition from revolutionaries, a living flame of freedom a strong faction preventing it from solidifying and combating it until it is successfully destroyed, just as soon as its raison d'etre has evaporated… assuming that it may have only the one! It will be anarchism's natural vocation part of its very essence and tradition, to represent that ultra-revolutionary opposition within the revolution, that flame of freedom…"

But his most incisive, most effective, intellectually most inspiring essay is, in our judgement, *Preventive Counter-revolution* (1922). It was written in the heat of the moment whilst fascist goons were gaining the upper hand over the revolutionary disturbances in the factories and the fields. The post-war elections had inflated out of all proportion the strength of the leftwing parties, the striking workforce was poised to bring the system grinding to a halt and the trams were running with red flags on display. It was time to act, before the reaction could orchestrate any countervailing measures. Fabbri wrote: "But the revolution did not come and was not made. There were only popular rallies, lots of rallies; and alongside these demonstrations, countless choreographed marches and parades … Moreover, this euphoria lasted too long, at almost two years; and the others, the ones who felt everyday that they were under threat of being toppled from their thrones and stripped of their privileges began to wake up to the situation and appreciate their own strength and the weakness of their enemies." And they had armed the fascists to mount a counter-revolution to pre-empt the revolution; what we might describe as a preventative counter-revolution which fastened upon society even though the revolution never happened. This was Fabbri's interpretation of the fascist phenomenon, which came into existence as the armed wing of the landlords and capitalists and as a

substantially novel force, the subsequent evolution of which defies explanation unless we recognise a frightening series of errors, shortcomings, ingeniousness and weakness on the part of the left.

At the same time as he was publishing his books he was writing articles for old and new libertarian publications (like *Pensiero e Volonta, Fede, Libero Accordo*, etc.), and Luigi Fabbri was carrying on with his own activities as a militant. In 1919 he was among the promoters of the first hard and fast essay at organising, the launching of the Union of Italian Anarchist Communists, and, the following year, of the Italian Anarchist Union (UAI). In 1923 he suffered his second beating at the hands of fascists. In 1926 he declined to swear an oath of loyalty to the regime and lost his position and fled abroad. This was the beginning of a series of painful moves, throughout which he carried on writing for the world's anarchist press and launching new publications. In 1927 he was in Switzerland, only to move quickly thereafter to Paris where he launched the journal *Lotta Umana*. Expelled from democratic France he fled to Belgium only to be expelled from Belgium too. It looked as if there was no way for him to carry on the struggle in Europe; but he refused to give up; and in 1929, at the age of 52, he embarked with youthful courage upon a new life in South America. He set up home in Uruguay, in Montevideo, where he soon launched *Studi Social*, although he continued to send items to the libertarian press in Spain, France and the United States and penned his *Malatesta: His Life and Thought* (published in Buenos Aires in 1945). He died prematurely in the thick of the struggle on 24 June 1935. The previous December an incident at the oasis of Wal Wal in Ethiopia had provided the spark for a fascist attack on Ethiopia and the start of a spiral of warmongering which would carry the Mussolini Dictatorship through events in Spain to the catastrophe of Hitler's war. A catastrophe which Fabbri had been awaiting faithfully, hopefully for many a long year, but which he was denied the chance to see.

Revolution and Dictatorship:

On one anarchist who has forgotten his principles

Luigi Fabbri (written under the name Catilina)

Volonta, 1920[1]

In the latest edition of *Vie Ouvriere* to have arrived from Paris, we find a long letter from a Russian comrade, Victor Serge, known in France – where he lived before 1915 – under the pseudonym of Kibaltchitch. He writes from Moscow about the Russian Revolution, living as he is in the middle of it all.

In truth, he has no news to deliver.

His letter is, more than anything else, a polemic against the newspaper *Le Libertaire* which he takes to task for keeping faith with our beliefs, according to which, if we may quote Bakunin's phrase, the authoritarian communists' notion that a revolution can be decreed and organised "either by a dictatorship or by a Constituent Assembly, is quite mistaken". Kibaltchitch thinks otherwise. He has changed his mind and is a supporter of the so-called proletarian revolution.

But as is the policy of every renegade who is, or appears to be, sincere, he deludes himself that he has evolved and reproaches the anarchists who have stayed faithful to their own principles with being traditionalists, of being stick-in-the-muds, whereas anarchism – so he says – is not traditionalist and not static but dynamic. Precisely! But he fails to appreciate that under the pretext of breaking free from a so-called anarchist tradition, he fails into the orbit of the old statist, authoritarian tradition of the bourgeois socialists, if not directly into the absolutist and militaristic tradition of the *ancien regimes*. He is the very archetype of the anarchist who has moulded anarchy like a beautiful dream of his imagination, because, deep down, he has little faith in it: and as soon as events crop up, in the face of which he is called upon to abide by his own ideas, even should it cause friction, conflict and sacrifices, he promptly scampers off in the opposite direction. And to any who might be surprised by this, he replies:

"One has to march in step with life, and face reality. One has to remain on the terrain of facts." This is precisely the same language employed in 1914 by anarchy's other renegades in their embrace of war-mongering policy, renegades who forgot their own principles and whose assertions were so brilliantly exposed as false by our Malatesta.

Kibaltchitch is a State anarchist (the contradiction between those two words is indicative of his wrongheaded stance) just as Grave and Malato were in 1914: just as the Vanderveldes, Guesdes and Bissolatis were State socialists, except that they were less at odds with their own teachings. just as the interventionists of 1914–1915 used to call us traditionalists and worshippers of words, and argued, as Kibaltchitch does, that one had to revise one's own ideas in the light of the

[1] https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/8932r8

reality of the facts, etc., But just as they were unable to offer anything in place of anarchist ideas other than the empty, deceitful verbiage suitable for bourgeois democrats, so Kibaltchitch too can offer no more details as to how and in what particulars anarchist ideas stand in need of amendment and he simply retreats behind the "phenomenon occurring" in Russia in order to mouth the authoritarian marxist formula about the State being an instrument of revolution.

He, like some other anarchists we know, has failed to understand that the most important part of the anarchist programme consists, not of some far-off dream, which we would also like to have come true, of a society without masters and no government, but, above all else, of the libertarian notion of revolution, of revolution against the State and not with the State, the notion that freedom is also a means as well as an end, a more appropriate weapon against the old world than the State authority preferred by Kibaltchitch and less of a two-edged sword, a weapon less treacherous than that authority.

He, like some other anarchists we know, has failed to understand that the most important part of the anarchist programme consists, not of some far-off dream, which we would also like to have come true, of a society without masters and no government, but, above all else, of the libertarian notion of revolution

Therein lies the whole essence of the anarchist teaching: not sprung all at one stroke, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, from the mind of one isolated thinker, however gifted: but deduced from the experience of previous revolutions, from contact with which and in the heat of which, after 1794, 1848 and 1871, people like Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Arnould, Pisacane and Lefrancais, etc… have drawn the appropriate lessons which the First International largely adopted as its own and which are known today by the generic description of anarchism.

If one denies this revolutionary function of anarchism, one is an anarchist no more. If the whole of anarchism consisted of a distant vision of a Society without government, or of the individual's assertion of self, or of the intellectual and spiritual conundrum of abstract individual perception of lived reality, there would be neither need nor room for an anarchist political or social movement. Were anarchism only an personal ethic for self-improvement, adaptable in material existence to the most widely divergent actions, to movements that would fly in the face of that existence, we might be called "anarchists" whilst belonging to other parties, and the description "anarchist" might be applied to all who, even though intellectually and spiritually liberated, are and remain our enemies in terms of practicalities.

But that is not how we understand it, nor do those who have detected in anarchism, not some means of retreating into an ivory tower, but a revolutionary proletarian movement, an active involvement in the emancipation of the workers, with equality and freedom alike as its criteria and its object! Kibaltchitch, who does not accept that object, automatically places himself outside the anarchist family. In order to stay within it, when he reaches conclusions of his own, he implicitly admits that he is neither an anarchist nor an anarchist-communist: he confines himself to the assertion – I am a communist. That comes within an ace of flying false colours, for it is far from certain that, as he contends, communism is of itself anti-State and libertarian in its immediate aims, as soon as they can look upon the State not as some impediment and deviation, but as a weapon against the old world. He deceives himself and deceives us when he seeks to reconcile dictatorial communism with anarchy, since Lenin himself cautioned (in *The Reconstructive Task of the Soviets*) that "anarchism and anarchist syndicalism are irreconcilable with proletarian dictatorship, with socialism, with communism". Socialism and communism in the sense in which Lenin understands them, which is to say, Bolshevism.

Whilst we wait to hear from Kibaltchitch just what this non-traditional anarchism is, we note that his own is more properly described as a non-anarchism. Indeed, he speaks in the most pessimistic manner possible about the Russian anarchist movement which so flourished in 1905, 1906 and 1917-18. "After having done the revolution immeasurable service and afforded it a legion of heroes – he says this Russian anarchist movement has been rent by utter ideological, moral and practical confusion."

That would be depressing news indeed, if we did not know already that all who quit one party for another discover that everything is going from bad to worse in the one they have just left. All renegades see things through the same spectacles! Our reply is that a movement that has been strong enough to do the revolution immeasurable service and provided a legion of heroes cannot be destroyed so easily.

It may perhaps have happened in Russia as it has in other revolutions that the burning idealism and revolutionary vigour of the combatants may have paved the way for the ruling party, which later disposed or

them, or rather, rid itself of those who proved incapable of accommodating themselves to becoming functionaries of the new government and who were unwilling to forswear expression of their own dissenting ideas. Kibaltchitch might supply us with news of Emma Goldman and let us know if it is true that this courageous woman, who arrived in Russia brim-full of faith in and enthusiasm for the revolution, is presently walled up in the prisons in Moscow. Let Kibaltchitch try to get hold of Russian language anarchist papers, and if he can find none, let him tell us why and let us know if it is true that the anarchist press is not allowed under the dictatorship. That would account for the "destruction" of the Russian anarchist movement better than subtle distinctions between traditional and non-traditional anarchisms.

If these be baseless rumours and calumnies, let him deny it – himself or someone else – for it is right that light should be shed on events in Russia, even from the revolutionary point of view, from the point of view of liberty, now that the threat from the Western states has been neutralised and the Moscow government senses victory. For example: is there any truth in reports of compulsory labour in Russian factories, military discipline, extended hours, restricted wages, bans on strikes, etc? It is not important that we should know about steps taken against the bourgeois, reactionaries, nobles, monks, etc.. and we might even endorse those, but the important thing is that we find out what effective freedom is enjoyed by proletarians, revolutionaries, our anarchist comrades: freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom of thought, freedom of enterprise, etc?

And it is on those counts precisely that we are kept most in the dark.

In his article, Kibaltchitch talks only of the least important matters: intellectual work on Communist Party history, open air festivals and theatres, etc.. Even the Roman tyrants offered the people "bread and circuses" and it is very true that in Russia there are spectacles aplenty and the news that food supply in Moscow and Petrograd is better than before is a comfort to us too. But Kibaltchitch does not talk to us about what most interests anarchists, precisely because they are anarchists: that is, freedom. And should the reports reaching us from various quarters, and which we have spelled out above, are correct, that would confirm our profound belief that communism without anarchy, communism in its statist form, is the negation of freedom. When Kibaltchitch says that "communism itself in its governmental form guarantees the individual greater well-being, more happiness and more freedom than any other current form of social organisation" he is saying something that, to say the least, still awaits practical substantiation.

As he himself admits, in Russia today, there is none of that. We are well aware that a large part of the reasons why the revolution cannot bring the Russian people greater well-being, comfort and freedom can be put down to the infamous blockade by the capitalist countries, to the war waged against the Soviet Republic by the Entente powers, and to the countless, unspeakable acts of infamy perpetrated against it by the international bourgeoisie. We know ail that, but we are convinced that for some of its afflictions, especially its internal afflictions, the Russian revolution is indebted to its dictatorial character, to its government and those who govern. "This is no time to call it to account for its sins", says Kibaltchitch. Perhaps. But nor should a veil be drawn over mistakes or others be encouraged to repeat them.

What, in essence, would Kibaltchitch like? That even the French anarchists abjure their principles so as to join the communist faction of the Socialist Party, "in order to reduce the dangers of State socialism and combat the influence of power" .Very well, charge! We know from all too great experience that all who have defected from anarchism to authoritarian socialism have ended in the worst reformist-legalitarian and authoritarian hyperbole. The best means of bringing an effective anarchist influence to bear is to stay an anarchist in one's ends as well as in one's means.

But Kibaltchitch says that dictatorship is a means, a weapon, just as much as a revolver. "All violence is dictatorial!" Thus does our Russian ex-comrade indulge in a rather fraudulent play on words. By insulting it, he confuses the violence of the rebel with the violence of the gendarme: the violence of a risen people against that of the oppressor government, the violence of the breaker of shackles, breaking free and freeing others with the violence of the State, not that of the revolution: and although it may claim and hold itself to be revolutionary, dictatorship holds the revolution in check and drives it off course. Rejecting, resisting and lining up with the opposition to that certainly does not amount to "withdrawing from the fray", as Kibaltchitch argues, but instead amounts to prosecuting a different action which is simultaneously more revolutionary and more libertarian.

Kibaltchitch says that, at a time when entire generations are being sacrificed "he has no desire to engage in futile discussion of personal preferences", but the anarchist conception of revolution is not a matter of the preferences of Peter or Paul, nor is it partisan apriorism. It is for the good of the revolution that anarchists are against dictatorship: so that the revolution is not aborted, does not place limits upon its aims, does not mould an organism which would inevitably pave the way for a new form of statist rule, a new ruling class. We fervently hope that that does not happen in Russia. Whilst there is every reason to fear so, and whilst the struggle is even today taking such a heavy toil, and our best comrades are thrown into prison by the bourgeoisie's "Royal Guards", we have no wish to be

reduced tomorrow to the sole satisfaction of being tossed into prison by the "Red Guards" of the proletarian dictatorship! And what matters, Kibaltchitch continues, is that we should be "unreservedly in favour of Red Russia if it is to survive!" Certainly! Whether we would say as much if we were in Russia, we cannot tell, but we would certainly make a distinction between the Russia of the People and that of the Government, the official Russia. As we are living in a context of bourgeois rule, opposed to the State and the bourgeoisie hereabouts, we stand unreservedly alongside revolutionary Russia. But that does not imply that we should give ground on the question of dictatorship, on the problem of revolutionary leadership, for the revolution may begin even outside of Russia. Let us defend the Russian revolution against bourgeois vilification: let us cry out to the peoples to rally to its defence against the attacks from capitalist countries, but let us not close our eyes to its errors and let us not be in a hurry to repeat them. Let us not be so seduced by success that we utterly forget our principles.

By remaining above all else anarchists, we will have done our first duty by the Revolution!

"State and Revolution"

Luigi Fabbri

Umanità Nova, 26 January 1921[1]

A book by Lenin, written after the revolution, has recently been published by *Avanti!*, whose title promised an exhaustive treatment of the problem of the relations between revolution and state. But we confess that we have felt a strong disappointment.

Lenin's personality will remain engraved in history with fiery letters. These three years alone, since he and his party settled in power, over a nation of three hundred million inhabitants, would be enough to testify to the moral and material energy of this man, who will one day figure alongside the most famous historical names.

But where it seems to us that his apologists have hitherto erred, about the exaltation of their master, is when they present him as a "great theorist of socialism." Unless there is an allusion to previous works published only in Russian, and not yet translated into Italian or French, everything that has been published [in Italian or French] up to now demonstrates that Lenin is a strong polemicist, one who knows how to handle the texts of Marxism to make them say whatever he likes, a writer who does not mince words, as skilled in argumentation as in invective; but without his own ideas, without a brilliant overall vision, and arid, without that inner fire that always makes the writings of Marx, Mazzini and Bakunin come alive. Also his historical and sociological culture (at least in what we have read so far) appears vast and profound, sure, but only for what concerns Marxism. Everything else seems not to exist for him.

we found in the book only a treatise *for the internal use* of the socialist party. Lenin demonstrates, or seeks to demonstrate, that the system of dictatorship is in harmony with the Marxist doctrine, and nothing else. He does not seem to suspect at all that one can be a socialist without being a Marxist

Some have wanted to see him as a continuer of Marx. What a mistake! Of Marx he has only the less pleasant aspects, the ferocious exclusivism, the resentment for anyone who does not think like him, the roughness of language, the tendency to overcome the opponent with irony and sarcasm, the intolerance of all opposition. As a man of action, or rather as a guide and leader of men of action, Lenin is certainly a personality that has no equal in the history of socialism; and Marx himself could not be compared to him, since he [Marx] was much more a man of thought than of action. But as a theorist, he adds absolutely nothing to Marx, of whose texts he is simply an exegete, a commentator, an interpreter – when he is not a sophisticator [*stiracchiatore*].

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This conviction was strengthened by the reading of the last book on "State and Revolution," on which we launched ourselves eagerly, as it promised to address the problem that most interest us: that is, if the State can actually be an instrument of the revolution, or if it is rather an obstacle, a hindrance, a continuous pitfall for its development, to be continually fought, trying to

[1] https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/luigi-fabbri-review-of-state-and-revolution-by-vladimir-lenin

destroy it or diminish its power with constant and ardent opposition.

Instead, we found in the book only a treatise *for the internal use* of the socialist party. Lenin demonstrates, or seeks to demonstrate, that the system of dictatorship is in harmony with the Marxist doctrine, and nothing else. He does not seem to suspect at all that one can be a socialist without being a Marxist, and that the revolution cannot be adjusted, without crippling it, to the Procrustean bed of an especial doctrinal and unilateral school.

Lenin's demonstration does not persuade us even from the point of view of Marxism. Despite certain [Marx's] expressions, used more to strengthen the enunciation of his own thought than to express their literal meaning, Karl Marx conceived for the revolution a worker-democratic process, not a dictatorial one. That is, he wanted a democratic socialist government, which would use an iron fist, sure, against the bourgeoisie, but leave to the proletariat and the various socialist forces and currents those freedoms that are usually called democratic (vote, press, assembly, association, local autonomies, etc.) as they are based on the prevalence of majorities through the system of representations.

We anarchists are also opposed to this system, as we do not even recognise the right of majorities to oppress minorities, and as we believe the freedoms promised by the representative system to be illusory and incomplete. In this sense we are anti-democratic. But for the same reason, and even with greater hostility, we oppose the dictatorship, which would even deny us the few and illusory freedoms of the representative system, and which would give the minority, indeed a few men, the right to oppress, to govern by force, the majorities. If we don't want majorities to oppress minorities, much less do we want the latter to oppress the former.

But even if the system of the proletarian dictatorship was actually in conformity with the Marxist "sacred texts", it would still be necessary to demonstrate that such a rigidly statist orientation is the most appropriate, as propaganda, to bring the revolution closer, and, in practical implementation, to develop the revolution so as to free the proletariat from economic and political slavery, from state and property servitude. We have searched in vain for this demonstration in Lenin's latest book "State and Revolution."

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Lenin's book is above all a polemic with the social-democrats and reformists. That is why we said that it was rather a writing for the internal use of the socialist party. There is an enormous abundance of quotations from Marx and Engels – actually more from Engels than from Marx – so much so that if the many pages of quotations were removed, the whole book would be reduced to a rather modest booklet.

Of course, we can't help but subscribe to the entire first part of the book which highlights the bourgeois and democratic hypocrisy, according to which the State would be the representative of the interests of all citizens, while in reality it is a weapon of the ruling class for the exploitation of the oppressed classes. But then Lenin falls into the Marxist (or rather Engelsian) error according to which the proletariat, by seizing state authority and transforming the means of production into *State property*, manages to make the State itself disappear. If the State also becomes the property owner, we will have State capitalism, not socialism, much less the abolition of the State or anarchy!

A curious way to abolish an organism would be to increase its functions and give it new means of power!

With the proprietary State, all proletarians would become wage earners of the State, instead of wage earners of the private capitalists. The State would be the exploiter; that is to say, the infinite congeries of high and low rulers, and all the bureaucracy in all its hierarchical levels, would form the new ruling and exploiting class. It seems that something similar is taking shape in Russia, at least in the big cities and in the field of large industry.

Here is the serious Marxist error, as far as the State is concerned: to conceive it as a simple effect of class division, while it is also a cause of it. The State is not only a servant of capitalism, reinforcing the economic privilege of the bourgeoisie, etc., but it is itself a source of privileges, it constitutes a class or caste of privileged people, it feeds the ruling class by always providing it with new elements; and all the more so if, in addition to political strength, it also had the economic strength, that is to say all social wealth, as the sole owner.

Lenin says that the dictatorship will be "the proletariat organised as a ruling class." But this is a contradiction in terms! If the proletariat has become the ruling class, it is no longer a proletariat, it is no longer propertyless. It means that it has become the boss. Furthermore, if there is a ruling class, it means that there are ruled classes; that is, classes that have remained or have become proletarian. The class division would continue to exist. And the only explanation for this riddle is that the ruling class will be constituted by a minority of the proletariat, which will have dispossessed the present bourgeois minority, and which will dominate politically and exploit economically all the rest of the population, that is, the old classes dispossessed and the majority of the proletarians who will remain as such and will remain in subjection.

If this terrible mistake comes true, once again humanity will have been blood-stained for nothing. It will have done nothing but turn to another side in its bed of pain and injustice!

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Mikhail Bakunin predicted, forty-five years ago, these consequences of the application of Marxism: the government of the more advanced workers' and industrial groups of the big cities, to the detriment of the majority of workers of the countryside, of the small towns, of the unskilled trades, etc.

Lenin, under the escort of Marx and Engels, appeals to the example of the French revolutions of 1848 and 1871. But it was precisely from the experience of these revolutions that *anarchism as a libertarian conception of the revolution* was born, as all revolutionary theorists who saw these two revolutions closely noted the damage of the statist or dictatorial course of the revolution. Marx himself is wrongly cited [by Lenin] in this regard, since in writing about the Paris Commune he does not praise centralism at all (as Lenin claims), but precisely the system of communal autonomies.

Lenin constantly speaks of the destruction of the state mechanism; but he wants to destroy the bourgeois state mechanism to replace it with another, equally bureaucratic and cumbersome, of the communist party. In this change, only those who make up the personnel of the new State, of the new bureaucracy, will benefit. In this regard, the ancient fable comes to mind of the wounded horse covered with flies, who refused the help from those who wanted to take the flies away, "because," he said, "the ones I have on me are already full, whereas without them others would come more hungry and voracious."

Lenin… wants to destroy the bourgeois state mechanism to replace it with another, equally bureaucratic and cumbersome, of the communist party. In this change, only those who make up the personnel of the new State, of the new bureaucracy, will benefit

This centralist prejudice of Lenin is also revealed in a reference he makes to anarchists, "because they do not want an administration." We do not know who told Lenin that anarchists do not want administration. But his error stems from the fact that he does not see as possible an administration without bureaucratic centralisation, without authority, that is, without a State; and since anarchists do not want authority, State and bureaucratic centralisation, he believes that we do not want administration. But that is a fantasy [*fisima*]. In reality, the best administration, like the best organisation, the one that truly deserves this name, is the least centralised and the least authoritarian possible.

When Lenin says, quoting Engels, that he wants to achieve the elimination of the State, he is stating a pious intention without practical results, since the way he chose leads instead to the strengthening of the state institution, which simply passes from the dominion of one class to that of another in process of formation.

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In an anarchist newspaper, we cannot ignore what Lenin says in this book about anarchists and anarchism.

We have mentioned some of it above. But we must not hide the effort that Lenin makes to be fair with anarchists, perhaps because he knows from experience how their collaboration can be worth. He does not always achieve this, for example when he says that anarchists have not made any contribution on the concrete questions about the need to destroy the state mechanism and the way to replace it. All anarchist literature is just the proof of the opposite!

But Lenin renders anarchists this justice, after about thirty years, of recognising that Plekhanov's libel, *Anarchism and Socialism*, which together with a stupid pamphlet by Deville constitutes the only socialist treatment on the subject, is very bad.

According to Lenin, Plekhanov addressed the topic "avoiding what was most current and politically essential, namely, the attitude of the revolution towards the State." In Plekhanov's booklet, together with a historical-literary part quite supplied with material on the ideas of Stirner, Proudhon and others (still according to Lenin), there is another part "*of philistine and vulgar considerations*, intended to demonstrate that an anarchist can hardly be distinguished from a bandit." Lenin attributes this way of treating anarchists to the opportunist policy of Plekhanov, who in politics wanted to "walk in the leading-strings of the bourgeoisie."

Needless to say, Plekhanov's vulgar and philistine libel has been reprinted right in these days, who knows why, by the bookshop of the same Bolshevik and Leninist *Avanti!*

But if Lenin recognises that the usual critique of anarchism, made by social-democrats of the kind of Plekhanov, resorts to petty bourgeois trivia, his arguments are no more conclusive, since he too targets an anarchism of his own special fabrication, which does not exist in reality. He repeats Engels's criticisms of the Proudhonists, attributes to the anarchists the illusion of being able to abolish the State overnight, without any idea of what the proletariat should replace it with, etc.

But to show how Lenin did not understand at all what anarchists actually want and how they intend to act, we would have to write at least as much as we have already done so far. Which we will do another time… if there is time!

Dictatorship and Revolution

Luigi Fabbri

1921

VII. Marxism and the Idea of Dictatorship[1]

The idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, of the dictatorial direction of revolution, is taken as deriving from Karl Marx.

That the concept of the proletarian dictatorship is the most suitable for the mentality formed with Marxism, it may be true; but that Marx actually conceived the revolution as guided and dominated by an absolute dictatorial power, this seems to us very doubtful. Karl Marx was an authoritarian socialist, not an anarchist one, and therefore he foresaw a governmental development of the revolution, in which the proletariat would become the ruling class and use political power to expropriate the bourgeoisie, intervening *despotically* in the right of property and the bourgeois relations of production.

But this is not yet the *dictatorship*. It doesn't even seem that this word has been so often used by Marx, nor that he did so by attaching a special importance to it or developing a concrete and precise idea in regards. He saw the coming to power of the proletariat as the *triumph of democracy*; that is to say, a representative and not dictatorial proletarian government, inexorable and violent only to the detriment of the bourgeoisie.

Enrico Leone is also of our opinion, in an article we have already mentioned before. According to Leone, "the word *dictatorship* didn't have an in-depth meaning under the pen of Marx, who used it to summarise the tactics of the revolutionary process that the proletariat will cling to when it has taken hold of political power. Marx enormously extended, *through a metaphorical amplification*, the exact and proximate meaning that this word has in history and political science .... Marx used the word dictatorship (and perhaps he would have eliminated it without the insistence of Engles, who was an admirer of Robespierre) for that sense of salutary pedagogy that was attributed to it ... The more enlightened modern popular consciousness is not willing to sacrifice itself to that sort of political fetishism that decrees dictatorship as salutary; even if exercised in the name of a class, it is a suppression of the fundamental guarantees of human personality."[2]

The idea of the conquest of political power, in order to use it to expropriate the bourgeoisie by means of laws and by force of authority, whether understood in a democratic sense or in a dictatorial and absolute one, is only very relatively of Marx; rather it belongs to the French socialists prior or contemporary to him, Louis Blanc or Blanqui, and it is an idea inherited, through the secret societies before 1848, from the Jacobin traditions of the first French revolution, from Gracco Babeuf, Buonarotti, etc.

Marx made his own the tactics of the conquest of political power, in a more democratic than dictatorial sense, relatively lately, more as a development of his sectarian action within the International and his contrast with the anarchists, than as an application of his theories. The idea of dictatorship can be considered more as a derivation (Kautsky would say deviation) of Marxism, than as a true Marxist idea. Moreover, if one studies the currents of socialism, one will see that much of what bears the label of Marx is not Marxist at all, and it is much easier to find in Malon, Lassalle, Engels and maybe... Von Schaeffle!

When Marx, rather than formulating theories, observed the facts closely, for example in his study of the Paris Commune, he reached conclusions not only different but in absolute opposition to the Jacobin, authoritarian and centralising conception of dictatorship. Regarding the communal tendencies in France in 1871, he wrote:

> "The unity of the nation was not to be broken at all, but on the contrary, organised by the communal constituent; it had to become a reality with the annihilation of that state power which pretended to be the authentic representative of this unity, but which wanted to remain independent and superior before the nation, on whose organism it was nothing but a parasitic excrescence. While the oppressive organisms of the ancient power of government were successfully severed, its legitimate functions had to be withdrawn from a power that aspired to overwhelm society, and had to be returned to the responsible servants of society ... The communal constitution would have returned to the social body all the forces that until then had been consumed by the parasitic State that feeds on society and hinders its free movement. For this fact alone, it would have put France on the path of rebirth ... The simple existence of the Commune brought with

[1] https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/luigi-fabbri-marxism-and-the-idea-of-dictatorship

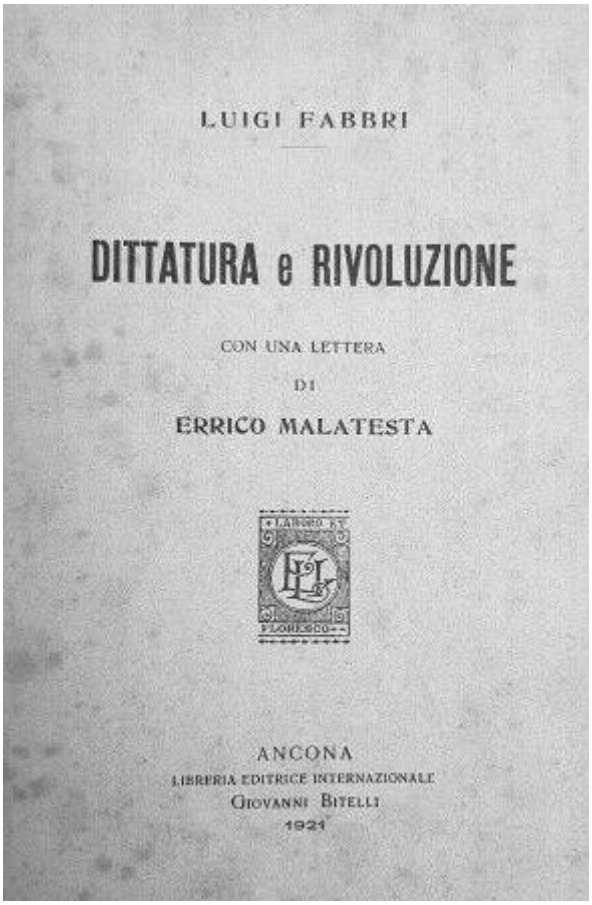
[2] See the article "La Dittatura" ["The Dictatorship"] by E. Leone, in the newspaper *Il Lavoratore* from Trieste, 22 May 1920.

> it, as a natural thing in itself, local autonomy; but now no longer as a counterweight to state power, which had become superfluous."[1]

Everyone understands that the exaltation of local autonomy and communalist constitution, against the power of the State, deemed superfluous, is quite the opposite of the apology of dictatorship.

* * *

We are not Marxists. But it would be wrong to take Marxism as a term of differentiation between anarchism and socialism. One could theoretically, strictly speaking, be an anarchist and a Marxist, and vice-versa be an anti-anarchist socialist and not a Marxist. Of course, by Marxism we mean the complex of theories developed by Marx in his works (historical materialism, class struggle, capitalist concentration, surplus value, etc.), and not the practical political stances of the second period of his activity [in the International], carried out largely to combat the anarchist current of the International. In fact, theoretically, in the ideas of the various socialist and anarchist writers, there has not always been an absolute incompatibility between anarchism and Marxism.



Many have reproduced the passage in which Marx, in 1872, accepted a socialist definition of anarchy.[2] On the other hand, Bakunin repeatedly claimed to be a follower of the Marxist doctrine of economic determinism;[3] and so the first vulgarisers of Marxism in Italy were anarchists. It was the anarchist Carlo Cafiero who made for the Italians the first summary of *Capital*, which Marx praised; it was the anarchist Pietro Gori who had the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels published, with a forward by him, for the first time in Milan. It was Mikhail Bakunin who first translated the *Manifesto* into Russian and had begun the translation of *Capital*, which did not continue only for reasons beyond his control. As Malatesta noted in a polemic in 1897, almost all anarchist literature until around 1894 was impregnated with Marxism. Little by little our movement and our propaganda (at least for the most part, because some tendency of this kind is still manifesting here and there) lost this character; and rightly in our opinion, for the reasons we will tell later. But what we have mentioned is no less valid in showing how wrong it is to speak of Marxism to characterise an antithesis of anarchism.

Moreover, political and social parties, which are parties of action, and are divided by the precise purpose they want to achieve and the methods they intend to use, can hardly be characterised and baptised with names and references to scientific and sociological theories of a general character, that are due to the intuitive or analytical genius of this or that single personality. There are Marxists, or there have been some, among anarchists and republicans, among syndicalists and reformists, among revolutionaries and legalitarians. One could be a Marxist — that is, consider the theories of class struggle, historical materialism, etc. to be correct — and be conservative and reactionary at the same time. Indeed, we believe that there are some. For this it is sufficient to put oneself into practice on one side of the barricade instead of the other — while agreeing that the barricade exists, that there is a conflict of interest and that it is fatal to come to blows sooner or later.

The scientific or sociological explanation of this conflict can be useful to see things in their reality (when the explanation is accurate, which in our opinion is not always the case for Marxism), it can be used as a topic for discussion; but it is not the most important thing and it is not essential. To see all things through a single unilateral explanation, as is done with Marxism, and reduce to the minimum Marxist denominator an entire

[1] *C.* Marx. — *La guerra civile in Francia*. [The civil war in France] — p. 45 and 46. (*Opere di Marx, Engels e Lassalle*, Vol. II, n. 4).

[2] "All socialists mean this by anarchy: once the aim of the proletarian movement is achieved, that is, the abolition of laws, the power of the state disappears, and governmental functions are transformed into simple administrative functions." C. Marx — *L'alleanza della Democrazia socialista*, ecc. [*The Alliance of socialist democracy*, etc.] — P. 13. (*Opere di Marx, Engels e Lassalle*, Vol. II, n. 5).

[3] See also a letter from Bakunin to Herzen, dated October 28, 1869, in which Marx's "enormous merits" are boasted, especially for his influence which prevented the infiltration of bourgeois ideas and tendencies into socialism. (*M. Bakounine*, *Correspondance* — Edit. Perrin, Paris — pages 288–291).

current of ideas and a complex movement such as socialism, all the action of a party and indeed of the entire proletariat, all the social revolution itself, which by its very nature cannot fail to be multiform and eclectic, according to circumstances and places, means shrinking everything by looking through inverted binoculars at everything: socialism, proletarian movement and revolution.

We, we repeat, are not Marxists, though anarchism at its rise, not in practice but in theoretical motivations, was almost completely so; though we recognise, with Bakunin, that Karl Marx contributed powerfully to making socialism make the enormous progress we are witnessing today. We are not Marxists, although many of Marx's ideas are accurate, either because some have over time shown themselves as simple hypotheses not confirmed by reality (capitalist concentration and growing misery) or as insufficient explanations of economic phenomena (surplus value), and because even the accurate ideas, such as those on historical materialism and class struggle, are accurate in a relative and contingent sense, and not in an absolute way, for all times and places.

We are not Marxists — and in this sense we have never been so, not even when all the theories mentioned above were accepted by many of us — in practice, about the direction to be given to the workers', socialist and revolutionary movement in the struggle against the ruling classes. From this point of view it is useless for the neo-Marxists to look in the master's books for some phrase proving the opposite: Marx, Engels and the other early Marxists are responsible for the erroneous direction given to the socialist movement, with the adoption of the tactics of the conquest of power, which after 1880 gave rise to the Second International, shamefully collapsed in 1914.

It is useless to be here remaking the critique of Marxism, and repeating what has already been said by Tcherkesoff, Merlino, Malatesta, Cornelissen and Nieuwenhuis from the anarchist point of view, and Graziadei, Croce, Sorel, Bernstein and David from the reformist point of view. It is not a doctrinal discussion that we want to do, but simply warn socialists and revolutionaries against certain practical attitudes, which originated from Marxism, and which could be the source of terrible disasters, irreparable failures of the future social revolution.

Because, if it is dubious that the dictatorial conception of the revolution — which we believe to be wrong and harmful — can be attributed to Marx, as if he had expressly formulated it and elevated it to a theory, it is also true, as we said in the beginning, that Marxism creates the mental habit best suited to accommodate that concept. In this sense, Marxist apriorism can truly become a danger to the revolution.

* * *

The main defect of Marxism, even in what is good and vital about it, is to be one-sided; that is, to see only some parts of each problem, to pay attention to a single category of facts and to deduce its conclusions from it, and then apply them with its dialectic to all other facts, to all other questions and finally to the practical direction of the socialist movement.

Marx, Engels and the other early Marxists are responsible for the erroneous direction given to the socialist movement, with the adoption of the tactics of the conquest of power, which after 1880 gave rise to the Second International, shamefully collapsed in 1914.

We think that the main merit of Marx was the tireless work of socialist propaganda and organisation within the first International, having strongly contributed to inspire in the working class the conscience and dignity of itself, being one of the first, and more than anyone, to see and support the need for international solidarity of workers. The cry "proletarians of all countries, unite!", and the affirmation that the emancipation of workers must be the work of workers themselves, are worth more for the socialist cause than the book *Capital*.

We speak, of course, of the ideas contained in the two mottos, and not of mere words alone. These ideas, in another form, may have been expressed by others before Marx, but no one in his time and before him had attached so much importance to them, had accompanied them with such a passionate argumentation and historical documentation, had them so effectively hammered, with assiduous propaganda, into the heads of the workers and of those concerned about the social problem in the interests of the working class. The same can be said of the two Marxist concepts, which complement each other, of class struggle and historical materialism. In the so-called utopian socialist writers, before Marx, and in other economists, even non-socialist ones, much is found of these concepts; but Marx and Engels had the merit of coordinating them as a system, of presenting them in a scientific guise, of giving them a logical link, and finally of making them a propaganda subject, a weapon of struggle for the working class.

But evil also sprang from this good, due a little to Marx and especially to Engels, and much more to the Marxists who came later; an evil once unnoticed by all, but which little by little has generated many errors

within the socialist movement. The evil consisted in the one-sidedness with which those concepts were supported, either as the only explanation of all past history, or (and here the theoretical error became a tactical one) as the only guide and motive of the practical movement of socialist propaganda and action.

We note this with all the more dispassionate serenity, since it is an error common to socialists and anarchists up to twenty years ago, and which many anarchists have not yet completely abandoned, especially those who specialise their work in the workers' movement or follow a predominantly trade-unionist mindset.

* * *

When anarchists admit that they too, like socialists and syndicalists, are on the ground of class struggle, they do not mean to unconditionally subscribe to the Marxist theory that goes under these words, but simply to join a practical movement that corresponds to their intentions: *the struggle of the workers against the bosses to free themselves from wage slavery*. Before socialism has organised this struggle of one class against another, attempting to unite the workers above all divisions of groups, professions, categories, nations and races, there was no class struggle, but only, as Merlino says,[1] the struggles between different groups that mingled in the fray, disintegrating and reassembling modified.

The error of Marxism was to have seen a pre-existing fact, continuous through times, and assuming a character of historical fatality, where there was only a concurrence of multiple concomitant facts, among which the Marxists saw and noticed only those who benefited their thesis — moved more or less unconsciously by the noble revolutionary desire to make the whole proletariat solidary against the bourgeoisie. By wanting to give a scientific guise and basis to class struggle, they ended up seeing in it, under different aspects, a kind of historical law, of which they believed themselves discoverers, while they had been in a certain sense, together with all other socialists, its creators.

As Benedetto Croce well observes,[2] for history to be, in the way as the Marxists say, a class struggle, there must be classes, distinct and in antagonism among themselves, and they must be conscious of this antagonism. Two distinct classes, in the strict sense of the word — capitalists and proletarians — exist only where industrialism has developed, that is, not in all countries and not even in the majority of them. For example, in Italy, large industry dominates only in a few and restricted regions. Moreover, as Croce and Merlin observe, *sometimes the classes have no antagonistic interests, and very often they don't have the consciousness of them; this is well known by the socialists who try to forge such consciousness in modern proletarians*.

Indeed, it is up to socialism to make the proletariat aware of its antagonism with the bourgeoisie; and where such antagonism, limited to certain categories, is not there or is little noticed, it must be created by arousing in the workers a sense of dissatisfaction and a feeling of solidarity with the less privileged categories, so as to break up certain commonalities of interests that prevent the development of class struggle. That is to say that we must also rely on the ideal factor, and not be content with the sole natural conflict of interests, for setting the exploited and oppressed classes against the ruling classes, and for the social revolution.

The too narrow conception that Marxists have of the class struggle between workers and industrialists can be a danger in countries like ours, where large-scale industry is limited. It would leave out of the revolutionary orbit a huge amount of people, otherwise exploited and oppressed, that is, those disorganised and unorganisable masses that the Germans call *lumpenproletariat*, all the handicraft still existing in lower and middle Italy, all the peasants non-catalogable in the labour force, the crowd of employees of the lower categories, etc.

These categories, especially that of workers in small towns and fields, would at the most be exploited as a blind tool and would end up being sacrificed. There would be "no more and no less than a new aristocracy, that of the workers of factories and large cities, with the exclusion of the millions who make up the rural proletariat and who will become precisely the subjects of the new great self-styled popular State."[3]

The same Bakunin notes a little later how even for the city workers themselves the "new despotism" would be illusory, since they "could not exercise power directly but by proxy, entrusting it to a group of men elected by them to represent and govern them, which will certainly make them fall back into all the lies and servitudes of bourgeois representative regime."[4] But the industrial proletariat is the most inclined to fall into this illusion of domination by proxy and to adapt to an authoritarian regime, by its very composition, by the spirit of subjection acquired in the large factories, where the worker is educated, almost as if in the barracks, to forced and hierarchical discipline; where the mechanical and automatic work itself dispenses with thinking for themselves and makes them find it more comfortable to get back in the hands of the leaders and representatives.

[1] Saverio Merlino, *Pro e contro il Socialismo*. [*For and against Socialism*]— Edit. Treves, Milano. — p. 28–29.
[2] Benedetto Croce, *Materialismo storico ed Economia marxistica*. [*Historical materialism and Marxist Economics*] Edit. Sandron, Palermo — p. 106.

[3] M. Bakounine, *Oeuvres*, vol. IV, p. 374.
[4] Idem, idem — p. 376

In addition to all this, and taking into account what we have said above, can it really be argued that the "proletariat" is everywhere the majority of the population? And even where it is, it faces a minority that is significantly large and strong, which it cannot fail to take into account, and from which it has indeed an interest in gaining the sympathy, support and help. By relying on class interest alone, it is doubtful that the effective majority of the people can be counted on for revolution.

If the revolution only counted on the industrial proletariat and industrialised rural agencies; or if that proletariat, on the contrary, exploited the first revolutionary impulse of the generality of the masses, but pretended to become the only collectivity in charge of wealth, and in a certain way the ruling class of tomorrow, the revolution would run the double danger of, on the one hand, throwing the foundations for a new class domination, and on the other hand, of arousing such a number of enemies against itself, even among those who had an interest in its flare up, as to be suffocated and defeated.

* * *

The same one-sidedness can be observed for the theory of historical materialism.

According to Karl Marx, the materialistic conception of history would be this: that the mode of production of material life generally dominates the development of social, political and intellectual life; and also, Friedrich Engels adds, of religious, philosophical, moral, etc. ideas of each historical period. In all this there is an undeniable truth, which others before Marx or his contemporaries had affirmed, but which Marx had the merit of giving greater prominence: that of the importance of economic factors and their enormous influence on historical events.

This truth serves, in the interests of the working class, to demonstrate how in order to eliminate most of social evils caused by poverty, it is essential to transform the system of production and distribution of wealth, that is, the entire economic organisation of society; without which all the efforts on the political, religious, moral, etc. terrain, all evangelical preaching, utopian experiments, appeals to state intervention, various forms of workers' legislation, and so on, are condemned to run out in vain or with completely derisory results.

These ideas of Marx are reflected in the famous "Recitals" with which the 1st International was declared as constituted in 1864, and were developed in its "Inaugural Address", as they had been given in another form in the "Communist Manifesto" sixteen years earlier.

Mikhail Bakunin, as we have mentioned, shared his adversary's thoughts on this, repeatedly noting that "the discovery and demonstration of this truth is one of the greatest merits of Karl Marx."[1] But it was not concealed, while agreeing with historical materialism, that "this principle is profoundly true when it is considered in its proper light, that is, from a relative point of view; but seen and put in an absolute way, as the only foundation and source before all other principles, it becomes completely false."[2]

the truth contained in the materialistic conception of history is *a truth*, *not the whole truth*; and Marxists instead fall into the error of subordinating all the other factors to the economic factor… It is a historical error, since, if in every event the economic factor has its influence, not all historical events are determined mainly by the economic factor or by it alone

Indeed, the truth contained in the materialistic conception of history is *a truth*, *not the whole truth*; and Marxists instead fall into the error of subordinating all the other factors to the economic factor, not only admitting the greater importance of the latter in certain historical periods (such as, for example, that of industrial civilisation), but even making it the sole engine of history, and seeing in all the other social factors derivations, consequences, facts in turn determined by the economic fact. It is a historical error, since, if in every event the economic factor has its influence, not all historical events are determined mainly by the economic factor or by it alone; in some, indeed, it is subordinated to factors of another kind.

But, apart from history of the past, which would be too long to discuss here, the Marxist error consists in not taking due account of the other factors of the social movement, also very important, even if to a lesser extent (not always though); once neglecting those factors, things are no longer seen in their reality, but in a one-sided and therefore false light, which can lead in

[1] M. Bakounine, *State and Anarchy* (in Russian) p. 223–224. — *La Théologie politique de Mazzini et l'Internationale*, Neuchâtel, p. 69 and 78. — We take these quotes from the well-known libel of Plekhanov, *Anarchismo e Socialismo* (Edit. Critica Sociale, Milan, p. 51).

[2] M. Bakounine, *Oeuvres*– vol. III, p. 11.

practice to equally false steps. It is in these false steps, to which Marxist dogmatism can lead, that we see a danger for the revolution.

Yes, it is not bad to remember how this excessive subordination of all questions to the economic question, passed from theory to practice, which has become a guide to the conduct of the second International, was one of the reasons for the disastrous end of it, together with the other reason of parliamentary politics. If the latter was the main cause of the failure of socialist parties, the excessive economism, the guidance by the sole reasons of immediate economic utility for the organised working classes, was one of the strongest causes of the deplorable collaboration of all trade union organisations of Europe and America with the various governments in the crime of war.[1] But let us also leave aside the recent past, and look to the future. What errors can a conception of the movement, based exclusively on the theory of economic determinism, lead to?

First of all, naturally, to a repetition of the mistakes of the past. Furthermore, by accustoming the socialist masses and the revolutionaries to the idea that, once wage-labour is abolished and property is socialised, all struggle is over and injustice and oppression deriving from other causes that are not only economic are also eliminated, it will happen that these causes are left standing and the revolution turns out incomplete, unprepared to solve all other problems of the complex social question. Whatever Engels has said, it is not at all true that religion, the family and the state, for example, are institutions that will disappear or transform themselves as a consequence of economic changes. The revolution, with different means depending on the nature of those institutions, must take charge of them directly, so that they do not become obstacles, hearths of reaction and perhaps a starting point for the reconstruction of the economic privilege demolished by the revolution.

This must be said especially for the state institute. But of this — of the fact that the State constitutes in itself, even independently of capitalism properly said, a privileged caste and a permanent cause of reaction, injustice, monopolies and political and economic enslavement — we have already spoken, and it would be superfluous to repeat ourselves.

* * *

It is known that Marxism is a theory that bases its arguments on documentary, scientific and statistical material, etc., almost exclusively reflecting the rise and development of large industry. Marx and Engels, almost always living in England, had an eye on a very rich and very important study material, almost inexhaustible, in the nation that was then the centre of world trade, where industrialism was at the height of its power. Federico Engels was also an industrialist himself. When they had lived outside England, the countries they knew were those which followed most closely the British Empire in industrial progress: Rhenish Germany, Belgium and France.

No wonder then that, from their situation, the environment, the studies they were most comfortable doing, they were led to see in industrial civilisation the apex of bourgeois power, after which should come its collapse and in a certain way the transition to the workers' society. Studying the process of capitalist production in the most fortunate place for it and in a period of growth, when it seemed that the accumulation of capital in a few hands no longer had obstacles ahead, one understands how they could arrive at the erroneous conclusion that this movement was to reach such a point of exaggeration as to provoke the proletarian revolution and the collapse of capitalist domination.

The Russian revolution has shown us that we can hope for the collapse of capitalism even if the process of accumulation of wealth does not happen, or stops or is not yet complete. In spite of this, and although subsequent history has shown that property does not follow constant laws and that if it accumulates on the one hand it splits on the other, the studies of Marx and Engels were nevertheless, on many other problems, a precious contribution to elaboration of socialist ideas. But in making use of it, the revolutionary, who wants not to remain in the abstract heavens of theory but descend to practical ground, must take into account the fact that Marx and Engels based their studies on a specific historical period, very limited in time and space, and therefore they necessarily had to come for many things to unilateral conclusions, hence impractical for other times and different environments. Which, moreover, they themselves would recognise several times later, when they had the opportunity to test the ideas expressed in the past in contact with new facts.

On the other hand, more than to Marx, many errors are due to Marxists. Who, for example, for years and years have deafened us, in the name of their master, talking to us about the impossibility of revolution and implementation of socialism, because in this or that country there was not yet a developed capitalism, because there was not a proletariat in the precise sense of the word, because production was too rudimentary, industry undeveloped, the capitalist cycle not completed, etc. etc. This is also repeated today by the right-wing Marxists, the Russian *Mensheviks*, who wanted to stop the revolution precisely because Russia had not yet become a capitalist country. This is what the

[1] Objection will be raised with the example of Italian socialism and its political and economic organisations. We would be absolutely right for the [italian socialist] Party, but relatively for the *Confederazione del Lavoro* [Confederation of Labor], for which there would be several objections and exceptions. But one of the reasons why the Italian Socialist Party saved itself from the wreck was precisely that it was and is far less Marxist than it seems and wants to think.

Italian reformists say — although they do not at all repudiate the Marxism of which they were — when they point to a danger in revolution, because in Italy the iron and coal necessary for industries are lacking.

In reality, industry has developed, forming the typical capitalism that the Marxist critique targets, only in a small number of privileged countries, rich in coal and iron mines and with a dense and agglomerated population. It has arisen and is growing in other countries as well, but in less advantageous conditions, in a secondary order, and not so powerfully as to absorb all the other forces and not to allow the life of other local processes of production, inherited from the past. Nor do we believe that this is bad from the point of view of international economy. In any case, if the industrialisation of every country were to be expected to bring about the revolution, it should have been done for a long time in England, Belgium, France and Germany, where instead it seems we are still far from it, and conversely it should not have been possible in Russia, where it has triumphed, and not to talk about Italy and Spain, where its precursor signs are increasingly seen.

* * *

But the revolutionary Marxists, whom we will call left-wing, the Russian Bolsheviks and the Italian maximalists, do not disarm for all this, do not diminish their doctrinal infatuation, for which big industry should be the most advanced type of civilisation and most compatible with socialist civilisation.

They do not say (I challenge!), like their comrades on the right, that the revolution must wait for the complete development of capitalism, but in a certain way they want to use the revolution to develop it intensively, transforming it into state capitalism, that is, giving to the State the management of wealth and all governmental powers, so that by hook or by crook it makes the country in revolution an industrial country. This is one of the reasons why Bolsheviks in Italy and abroad appeal to the *proletarian dictatorship*; that is, so that with an iron hand it bends the whole population to the strictest discipline, necessary to artificially implant big industry, no longer capitalistic, and neither proletarian, but state-owned.

This aim is clearly stated in Bukharin's "Communist Program"; which the maximalists of every *nuance* in Milan, Turin and Naples translate and comment as their own program. According to Bukharin, *the best and most perfect way of organising production* is taught to us by *large capitalist industry.* Therefore, *economic equality must be combined with big industry. It is not enough for the capitalists to disappear; production needs to be placed on a wide foot. All incapable small companies must perish. All labour must be concentrated in large factories, large workshops and large farms. One must not ignore what the other is doing, and vice-versa. It is necessary to have* ***a single work plan****, which will be better if it is spread over a larger number of places. The whole world must finally form a great labour company, in which all of humanity works for itself with the best machines, in the largest factories, without today's bosses and capitalists, but* ***according to a rigorously prepared, calculated and measured plan***.[1]

The aberration consists in holding that only the mode of production of large industry is effective, and that small companies are condemned to perish for an alleged crime of incapacity. Everyone knows that there are kinds of work and production that are actually done better in large workshops, others that are better suited to small-scale manufacturing, and still others that are done as well in small as in large.

What a monstrous aberration!

Not that we anarchists are disgusted, as Bukharin believes, by big associations of production or distribution, nor that his joke about our preferences for the "Confederation of the two exploited" is justified (we have already dealt with that nonsense). When the type of work or service to be performed requires it, when it is possible without greater inconvenience than utility, depending on the environment and circumstances, we too admit large factories, large workshops, large farms. We too think that production should be placed on as wide a foot as possible. Nor do we have any phobia for big industry itself; and where its experiences and methods of production can be used for the good of all, it would be foolish not to do so.

The aberration consists in holding that only the mode of production of large industry is effective, and that small companies are condemned to perish for an alleged crime of incapacity. Everyone knows that there are kinds of work and production that are actually done better in large workshops, others that are better suited to small-

[1] N. Bukarin — op. cit., pg. 13 and 14

scale manufacturing, and still others that are done as well in small as in large. Even for technical progress, Kropotkin observes, the concentration of industries in large workshops is not always useful; sometimes it is an obstacle. If the big workshops today have the advantage over the small ones, this often happens not for economy of driving force or for technical progress, but only for the greater ease of disposal of products[1] — an advantage that in a socialist society would be achieved simply by centralising the products in social warehouses, without need to first centralise work and workers in a workshop-barracks.

The same applies to farms. Certain small properties in Marche, Umbria or Abruzzo have nothing to envy, in terms of intensity of cultivation and richness of products, to the large farms of our cooperative friends in Romagna and Lazio. With this we want to give an example, not to support the small culture in preference to the large one, but to show how reckless certain apriorisms are, which do not take circumstances into account and are based on the observation of a single series of facts — as happens with Marxists. It will be the associated producers, we think, who will have to freely establish their own mode and type of production, according to their capacity and the needs, not a government that imposes it on everyone from above.

* * *

The aberration really reaches the monstrous, when the type of large industry is established as mandatory for all, even for countries that are less suitable for it, without worrying about the opportunity and possibility of doing so, without distinguishing where and to what extent it is possible. There is confident talk of *a single work plan for all, according to a rigorously prepared, calculated and measured plan*. The environment, the tendencies, the spirit of the populations do not count for anything! Under the pretext that Peter should not ignore what Paul does, and vice-versa — as if in order to get informed, help each other, exchange ideas, raw materials and products, it was not possible other means than to force us all to do the same way — Bukharin dreams of submitting no less than the whole of humanity to that unique plan, rigorously prepared, calculated and measured!

We would like to rejoice that, after forty years, the socialists have returned to communism, after having for so long left to the anarchists alone the care of propagating it.

However, if the socialists take it from Bukharin, it will happen that they have only changed their outer label. Inside there will always be the old German barracks collectivist utopia, the authoritarian socialism of before 1870, criticised by Proudhon and Bakunin, impossible to achieve. When Bukharin speaks to us of a *state power*, of an *iron power*, of an *energetic government*, our thoughts turn not only to Lenin, but also to Noske — indeed to Czar! In other words, we have every reason to fear that the governmental violence of the new State will not only be unleashed against the reactionary and bourgeois forces that have survived — which we will certainly not regret — but also against the workers recalcitrant to the "single work plan", against the libertarian tendencies developed in the proletariat, against the spirit of autonomy, independence and revolt of the oppressed today who do not want, even for good reasons, to be oppressed tomorrow.

Marxist writers take pleasure sometimes in speaking of anarchism as an exaggeration of bourgeois individualism, pretending to ignore the theoretically and historically socialist foundation of the anarchist idea. With much greater right we can say that their monstrous conception of state capitalism, improperly called socialism, is the most exasperating exaggeration of bourgeois statism. Bourgeois individualism, without socialism, ended up killing the egalitarian spirit that animated the revolution of 1789 from its outbreak. In the same way, state socialism, without freedom, will render sterile the fruits of the revolution that began in Russia in 1917.

There is moreover a serious danger in all this: that the revolution will be exhausted in terrible internal struggles, in a vain effort of the revolutionary government to submit everything and everyone to its decrees, and in a growing discontent and rebellion of the subjects, especially those who first contributed most to overthrowing the bourgeois powers. This is far from impossible, and one could say it is inevitable, in countries like ours, in which a regime of industrial government would clash against the impatience to any compulsory discipline that is in the character of the populations, against the habit acquired under the current regime of seeing government as an enemy, and against the inability to adapt to the industrial regime for which we lack the main natural conditions. This last difficulty could be overcome with time, little by little; but wanting to strike against it with violence, of a sudden, from the very first moment, would mean uselessly arousing new enemies against the revolution, even among those who would be interested in defending it.

All this, instead of benefiting production, would inevitably prevent the order necessary for its development; and it would favour the game of the counter-revolution, preventing the new regime from soon reaching a definitive and stable trim. The reaction, disguising itself as a partisan of sometimes one

[1] P. Kropotkine – *La Piccola industria in Inghilterra* [*The small industry in England*] (See journal *Il Pensiero* of Roma. — issue 19, 1st October 1906).

sometimes the other side in conflict, would end up having the upper hand and unmask itself when all the revolutionary forces had exhausted and cancelled each other out in sterile and certainly bloody retchings, in infightings between freedom and authority. That is to say, the revolution would end like that of 1789–93, by devouring itself.

The Socialists always have time to prevent such a disaster from being prepared for the revolution. We do not pretend by this, although it is our desire, that they become anarchists and definitely accept the anarchist concept of socialism and revolution. However, it is necessary that they inspire their tactics and revolutionary methods with a greater feeling of freedom; and above all they should renounce the pretence of bending by force the revolution to an aprioristic and dogmatic scheme, which of scientific has only the name arbitrarily given to it, and which may perhaps be called Marxist, but certainly Karl Marx himself would repudiate if he were still alive.

Let them take the living word and not the dead one of their masters. Let them remember that Karl Marx — who was keen to declare that he was not a "Marxist" at all — sixteen years after writing the "Communist Manifesto" already felt the need to advise the socialists not to take it too literally, to apply it "in each place and time according to the historical conditions of the moment." Let us not be utopians to the point of forgetting that from 1848 up to today more than seventy years have passed!

X. The Anarchist Concept of the Revolution[1]

[…]

The intolerance of many socialists, even revolutionary ones, in the face of anarchism largely depends on their absolute ignorance of the ideas, aims, and methods of anarchists.

It is astounding to note how some of the most intelligent people, of a vast political and economic culture, among the socialists, when it comes to anarchy, can say nothing but the usual senseless clichés spread by the worst bourgeois press: the most outlandish and defamatory statements, the most foolish interpretations. All the socialist knowledge of anarchism seems condensed in that old pamphlet, in which Plekhanov, in 1893, vented his anti-anarchist bile, without any respect for truth and without any intellectual honesty;[2] or in the well-known book by Lombroso on anarchists, which takes as true documents the reports of the police and of the directors of prisons, and – who knows why – catalogues among the anarchists people who for nine-tenths never dreamed of being one!

Countless socialist refutations of anarchism have appeared in newspapers, books, and journals; but, with praiseworthy exceptions, they almost always refuted ideas that were not at all anarchist, but attributed to anarchists out of either ignorance or polemic artifice. Especially on the concept of revolution, pretended anarchist theories have been put into circulation that were so extravagant as to lead one to doubt the good faith of those enunciating them. How much ink was scattered to demonstrate to the "deluded anarchists" that the revolution is not made with stones, with old rifles or some revolvers, that barricades no longer correspond to the needs of today's struggle! That isolated and sudden movements are not enough! That individual attacks alone do not make the revolution! That the riot is one thing and revolution is another!... And so on, with unique discoveries of a similar kind – ignoring, or pretending to ignore, that anarchists have the most exact concept of revolution, and at the same time most practical, according to the etymological, traditional, and historical meaning of the word.

Revolution, in political and social language – and also in popular language – is a general movement through which a people or a class, breaking out of legality and overthrowing the existing institutions, breaking the lion pact [*patto leonino*[3]] imposed by the rulers on the ruled classes, with a more or less long series of insurrections, revolts, riots, attacks, and struggles of all kinds, definitively overthrows the political and social regime to which, until then, they were subjected, and establishes a new order.

The overthrow of a regime usually takes place in a relatively short time: a few days for the revolution of July 1830, which in France replaced one dynasty for another; a little more than one year for the Italian revolution of 1848; six or seven years for the French revolution of 1789; a dozen years for the English revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. The revolution, that is, the de facto demolition of a pre-

[1] https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/luigi-fabbri-the-anarchist-concept-of-the-revolution

[2] The present volume was already more than half printed when a new book, 'State and Revolution', was published by Lenin for the types of *Avanti!* (Milan, 1920). In it, Lenin recognises the superficiality of Plekhanov, who dealt with the subject by completely avoiding what were the most current and politically essential differences between socialism and anarchy, and by accompanying the historical sections with philistine and vulgar considerations, tending to demonstrate that an anarchist can hardly be distinguished from a bandit. (Lenin, *State and Revolution*, p. 118).

[3] This phrase, now used in Italian law, stems from a fable by Phaedrus, 'The cow, the goat, the sheep, and the lion', which is itself derived from Aesop. The fable concerns the injustice of any arrangement which solely benefits one party at the expense of another. (Translator)

existing political and social regime, is essentially the conclusion of an earlier evolution, which translates into material reality, violently breaking the social forms and the political shell no longer able to contain it. It ends with the return to a normal state, when the struggle has ceased, whether the victory allows the revolution to establish a new regime, or whether its partial or total defeat restores part or all of the old one, giving rise to the counter-revolution.

The main feature, by which it can be said that the revolution has begun, is the exit from legality, the breaking of state equilibrium and discipline, the unpunished and victorious action of the square against the law. Before a specific and decisive fact of this kind, there is still no revolution. There can be a revolutionary state of mind, a revolutionary preparation, a condition of things more or less favourable to revolution; there may be more or less fortunate episodes of revolt, insurrectional attempts, violent or non-violent strikes, even bloody demonstrations, attacks, etc. But as long as the force remains with the old law and the old power, we have not yet entered the revolution.

The struggle against the state, armed defender of the regime, is therefore the sine qua non condition of the revolution, which tends to limit the power of the state as much as possible and to develop the spirit of freedom, to push the people, the subjects of the day before, the exploited and the oppressed, to the maximum possible limit, to the use of all individual and collective freedoms. In the exercise of freedom, unconstrained by laws and governments, lies the health of every revolution, the guarantee that it will not be limited or arrested in its progress, its best safeguard against internal and external attempts to throttle it.

* * *

Some tell us: “We understand that, as anarchists, being opposed to any idea of government, you oppose dictatorship, which is its most authoritarian expression; but it is not a question of proposing it as an aim, but rather as a means, albeit unpleasant, but necessary, just as violence is a necessary but unpleasant means during the provisional revolutionary period, necessary to overcome bourgeois resistance and counterattacks”.

Violence is one thing, government authority is another, whether dictatorial or not. If it is true, in fact, that all governmental authorities rely on the use of violence, it would be inaccurate and erroneous to say that all “violence” is an act of authority, so that if the former is necessary, the latter also becomes so. Violence is a means, which takes on the character of the end for which it is used, of the way it is used, of the people who use it. It is an act of authority when it is used to force others to act in the way of those in charge, when it is an emanation from government or bosses, and serves to keep peoples and classes enslaved, to prevent the individual freedom of subjects, to obtain obedience by force. Instead, it is libertarian violence, that is to say an act of freedom and liberation, when it is used against those who command by those who no longer want to obey; when it is aimed at preventing, diminishing, or destroying any kind of slavery, individual or collective, economic or political; and it is used directly by the oppressed – individuals, peoples, or classes – against the government and the ruling class. Such violence is the revolution in progress; but it ceases to be libertarian, and therefore revolutionary, as soon as, having overcome the old power, it wants to become a power itself, and crystallises in any form of government.

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This is the most dangerous moment of any revolution: that is, when the victorious libertarian and revolutionary violence can be transformed into authoritarian and counter-revolutionary violence, moderating and limiting the popular insurrectionary victory. It is the moment in which the revolution can devour itself, if it is taken over by the Jacobin and statist tendencies, which right now are manifesting themselves through Marxist socialism in favour of the establishment of a dictatorial government. The specific task of anarchists, deriving from their own theoretical and practical conceptions, is precisely to react against such authoritarian and liberticidal tendencies; with propaganda today and with action tomorrow.

Those who make a distinction between theoretical anarchy and practical anarchy, in order to argue that practical anarchy should not be anarchistic but dictatorial, have not well understood the essence of anarchism, in which it is not possible to divide theory

from practice, since, for anarchists, theory arises from practice and is in turn a guide for conduct, a real pedagogy of action.

* * *

Many believe that anarchy consists only in the revolutionary and at the same time ideal affirmation of a society without government, to be established in the future, but without connection with current reality, so that today we can or should act in contradiction with the proposed goal, without scruples and without limits. Thus, while awaiting anarchy, yesterday they advised us to provisionally vote in the elections, as today they propose us to accept provisionally the so-called proletarian or revolutionary dictatorship.

But not at all! If we were anarchists only in ends and not in means, our party would be useless; because, in Bovio's words, the notion that 'Thought is anarchist and history is marching towards anarchy' can also be said and approved of by those who are active in other progressive parties (and in fact many of them subscribe to it). What distinguishes us, not only in theory but also in practice, from other parties is not only that we have an anarchist purpose but also an anarchist movement, an anarchist methodology; inasmuch as we think that the path to take, both during the preparatory period of propaganda and in the revolutionary one, is the path of freedom.

The function of anarchism is not so much to prophesy a future of freedom, but to prepare it. If all anarchism consisted in was the distant vision of a society without a state, or in the affirmation of individual rights, or in a purely spiritual question, abstracted from lived reality and concerning only individual consciences, there would be no need for an anarchist political and social movement. If anarchism were simply an individual ethic, to be cultivated within oneself, and at the same time adapted in material life to acts and movements in contradiction with it, we could call ourselves anarchists and belong to the most diverse parties; and so many could be called anarchists who, although they are spiritually and intellectually emancipated, are and remain, on practical grounds, our enemies.

But anarchism is something else. It is not a means of closing oneself in the ivory tower, but rather a manifestation of the people, proletarian and revolutionary, an active participation in the movement for human emancipation, with principles and goals that are egalitarian and libertarian at the same time. The most important part of its program does not consist solely in the dream, which we want to come true, of a society without bosses and without governments, but above all in the libertarian conception of revolution, of revolution against the state and not through the state, of the idea that freedom is not only the vital heat that will warm the new world of tomorrow, but also and above all, today, a weapon of combat against the old world. In this sense, anarchy is a real theory of revolution.

Both our propaganda today and the revolution tomorrow will need the maximum possible freedom to develop. This does not alter the fact that we must, and can, continue the same, even if freedom is partly, little or much, taken away from us; but our interest is to have it and to want it as much as possible. Otherwise, we would not be anarchists. In other words, we think that the more we act like libertarians the more we will contribute not only to getting closer to anarchy, but to consolidating the revolution; while we will move away from anarchy and weaken the revolution whenever we resort to authoritarian systems. Defending freedom for ourselves and for all, fighting for ever more extensive and complete freedom; this is our function, today, tomorrow, always – in theory and in practice.

* * *

Freedom even for our enemies? one wonders. The question is either naïve or disingenuous. With the enemy we are in a struggle, and in the fray the enemy is not recognised any freedom, not even that of living. If our enemies were only... theoretical ones, if we were faced with them disarmed, unable to attack our freedom, stripped of all privileges and therefore on equal terms, it would be admissible. But to worry about the freedom of our enemies when we have a few poor newspapers and a few weeklies, and they have hundreds of large newspapers; when they are armed and we are unarmed, while they are in power and we are subjects, they rich and we poor, come on! It would be ridiculous... It would be the same as granting a murderer the freedom to kill us! We deny this freedom to them, and we will always deny it, even in the revolutionary period, so long as they keep their condition as executioners and we have not conquered our entire freedom, not only in law but in fact.

But we will not be able to conquer this freedom except by using it as a means, where it depends on us to do so; that is to say by giving an increasingly free and libertarian direction to our movement, to the proletarian and popular movement; by developing the spirit of freedom, autonomy, and free initiative among the masses; by educating them to an ever greater intolerance of any authoritarian and political power, encouraging the spirit of independence of judgment and action towards leaders of all kinds; by accustoming the people to the contempt of every restraint and discipline imposed by others and from above, which is not the restraint of their conscience or a discipline freely chosen and accepted, followed only as long as it is considered good and useful for the revolutionary and libertarian purpose set ourselves.

Of course, a mass educated in this school, a movement having this direction (that is, the anarchist movement), will find in revolution the occasion and the means to

develop itself up to limits not even imaginable today; it will be the natural and voluntary obstacle to the formation and affirmation of any more or less dictatorial government. Between this movement towards ever greater freedom and the centralising and dictatorial tendency there can only be conflict, more or less strong and violent, with greater or lesser truces, depending on the circumstances; but never concordance.

And this is not because of an exclusively doctrinal and abstract whim, but because as deniers of power – this is, we repeat, the most important aspect of anarchist theory, which wants to be the most practical of theories – we think that revolution without freedom would bring us back to a new tyranny; because the government, by the mere fact of being such, tends to halt and limit the revolution; and because it is in the interest of the revolution and its progressive development to fight and hinder any centralisation of powers, to prevent, if possible, the formation of any government, or at least to prevent it from strengthening, becoming stable, and consolidating. That is to say that the interest of the revolution is contrary to the tendency that every dictatorship has within itself, however proletarian or revolutionary it claims to be, to become strong, stable, and solid.

* * *

But no! others reply; it would be a question of a provisional dictatorship, lasting only as long as the work of ousting the bourgeoisie, in order to fight, defeat, and expropriate them.

When one says “dictatorship” it is always implied that it will be provisional, even in the bourgeois and historical meaning of the word. All dictatorships, in the old days, were provisional in the intentions of their promoters and, nominally, also in fact. The intentions in this case count for little, since it is a question of forming a complex organism, which would follow its nature and its laws, and would nullify any contrary or limiting aprioristic intention. What we need to see is: first, whether the consequences of the dictatorial regime are more detrimental than beneficial to the revolution; second, if the destructive and reconstructive purposes for which the dictatorship is intended cannot also, and more successfully, be achieved without it, through the broad paths of freedom.

We believe that this is possible; and that the revolution is stronger, more incoercible, more difficult to defeat, when there is no centre at which to strike it: when it is everywhere, on all points of the territory; and wherever the people proceed freely to realise the two main ends of the revolution: the removal of authority and the expropriation of bosses.

* * *

When we reproach the dictatorial conception of revolution with the grave mistake of imposing the will of a small minority on the great majority of the population, we are told that revolutions are made by minorities. Even in anarchist literature this expression is very often repeated, and it, in fact, speaks of a great historical truth. But we must understand it in its true revolutionary meaning and not give it, like the Bolsheviks, a sense that it had never had before. That revolutions are made by minorities is, indeed, true... up to a certain point. Minorities, in reality, start the revolution, take the initiative of action, break through the first door, and knock down the first obstacles, inasmuch as they attempt that which the inert or misoneistic majorities fear, in their love of quiet living and fear of risk.

Even when the majorities tolerate oppression or are complicit in it, the minority that feels oppressed has the right to rebel, to want its freedom for itself. But majorities would have the same and greater right against any minority that demanded, whatever the pretext, to subjugate them.

But if, once the first ties are broken, the popular majorities do not follow the audacious minorities, the actions of the latter are either followed by the reaction of the old regime as it takes its revenge, or results in the substitution of one form of domination and privilege for another. That is, it is necessary that the rebellious minority have the majority more or less consenting, interpret their needs and latent feelings; and, having overcome the first obstacle, realise popular aspirations, leave the masses the freedom to organise in their own way; become, in a certain sense, the majority.

If this is not the case, we do not say that the minority does not have the same right to revolt. According to the anarchist concept of freedom, all the oppressed have the right to rebel against oppression, the individual as well as the collectivity, minorities as well as majorities. But it is one thing to rebel against oppression and quite another to become an oppressor in turn, as we have said many times. Even when the majorities tolerate oppression or are complicit in it, the minority that feels oppressed has the right to rebel, to want its freedom for itself. But majorities would have the same and greater right against any minority that demanded, whatever the pretext, to subjugate them.

Moreover, in actual fact, oppressors are always a minority, both when they oppress openly in their own name and when they exercise oppression in the name of hypothetical collectivities or majorities. The revolt is therefore, at the beginning, of a conscious minority, rising in the midst of an oppressed majority, against another tyrannical minority; but this revolt becomes a revolution, it can have a renewing and liberating effect, only if its example manages to shake the majority, to drag it, to set it in motion, to gain its favour and support. Abandoned or opposed by popular majorities, the revolt, if defeated, would go down in history as a heroic and unfortunate movement, a fruitful forerunner of the times, a bloody but necessary stage of an inevitable victory in the future. Otherwise, if victorious, the rebellious minority that has become the owner of power in spite of the majorities, a new yoke on the neck of its subjects, would end up killing the very revolution it had aroused. In a certain sense it could be said that, if a rebellious minority were not able with its momentum to drag the majority of the oppressed with it, it would be more useful to the revolution if defeated and sacrificed. Since, if it were to become the oppressor with victory, it would end by extinguishing in the masses all faith in revolution, perhaps making them hate a revolution from which they saw nothing but a new tyranny – of which they would feel the weight and damage, whatever the pretext or name with which it was covered.

* * *

Especially after the Russian revolution, the idea of the dictatorial power of revolution is defended as a necessary means of fighting against internal enemies, against the attempts of the former rulers eager to regain economic and political power. That is, the government would serve to organise, in the first moments of greatest danger, anti-bourgeois terrorism in defence of the revolution.[1]

We do not deny at all the necessity of the use of terror, especially when external enemies come to the aid of internal ones with armed force. Revolutionary terrorism is an inevitable consequence, when the territory on which the revolution has not yet sufficiently strengthened is invaded by reactionary armies. Every snare of the counter-revolution, from within, is too fatal in such circumstances to not be exterminated by fire and sword. The legend of Brutus, who sent his sons to the gallows as internal accomplices to the Tarquins, expelled from Rome and threatening Roman freedom at the head of a foreign army, is the symbol of this tragic necessity for terror. Thus, in France the need was felt in 1792 to exterminate the nobles, priests, and reactionaries accumulated in the prisons, as Brunswick approached menacingly towards Paris, led by emigrants.

Terror becomes inevitable when the revolution is surrounded on all sides. Without the external threat, internal counterrevolutionary threats are not so scary; the sight of their material impotence is enough to keep them inactive. Leaving them undisturbed may still be a mistake, and perhaps a danger for the future, but it does not constitute an immediate danger. Therefore, one can more easily be drawn towards one's enemies by a feeling of generosity and pity. But when these enemies have armed forces beyond the borders ready to intervene to their aid, when they find allies in the external enemies, then they become a danger, which becomes ever stronger the more the other danger advances from the outside. Their suppression then becomes a matter of life or death.

The more inexorable the revolution is in such situations, the better it manages to avoid greater grief in the future. Excessive tolerance today may require a doubly severe penalty tomorrow.[2] And if it had as its consequence the defeat of revolution, far more terrible massacres would punish weakness with the white terror of counter-revolution!

Moreover, we must not over-value the rhetoric with which the bourgeois press is pompous, in order to scorn and slander revolutionary terrorism.

For the past four years everyone has been talking about the horrors, the massacres, the infamies, the revolutionary disorders in Petrograd and Moscow. But if one had the patience to go to libraries to retrieve the diaries of Rome, Turin, Vienna, Koblenz, Berlin, London, and Madrid from about 1789 to 1815, one would read identical words of horror about the massacres, the infamies, and the disorders of the French Revolution, which today everyone calls the Great Revolution. Those who recall the times of the Paris Commune of 1871, also remember with what disgusting language they spoke of the "massacres" by the Communard oilmen: there were not enough words to insult them as the worst murderers. Nevertheless, how many apologists of the Paris Commune are there today among the revilers of the Moscow Commune!

The sincere Italian patriots must remember the infamies reported in moderate and Bonapartist Parisian newspapers – in agreement with the Viennese clerical newspapers – against the Roman Republic in 1849, and how then the pious souls were scandalised and horrified by the massacres attributed to the Carbonari and the Mazzinians. One day the real truth will also be known

[1] We speak of "terrorism" not only in the particular meaning of the government's terrorist policy, but in the general sense of the use of violence up to the most deadly limits, which can be done either by a government through its gendarmes, or directly by the people in the course of a riot and during the revolution.

[2] In this sense Giovanni Bovio said that the Revolution "mercifully commits cruel actions, and avoids feminine piety; excuses a massacre and condemns the Soderinis." (G. BOVIO, Doctrine of the parties in Europe, Naples, 1886 — p. 137).

about the Russian revolution, and perhaps many of its slanderers today will change their minds. Then, probably, the only ones who will persist in criticism will be... the anarchists!

* * *

The bourgeoisie has no right to be scandalised by the terrorism of the Russian revolution. In its revolutions, the bourgeoisie has done the same, and has used terror to its own advantage against the people, every time that the latter has seriously tried to shake its yoke, and with such a ferocity that no other revolutions have ever achieved.

As anarchists, however, we direct all our reservations, not against the use of terror in general, but against codified, legalised terrorism, made an instrument of government – even if it is a government that claims and believes itself to be revolutionary. Authoritarian terrorism, in reality, by the fact of being such, ceases to be revolutionary, becomes a perennial threat to the revolution, and also a reason for weakness. Violence finds its justification only in struggle and in the need to free oneself from violent oppression; but legalisation of violence, violent government, is itself already an arrogance, a new oppression.

The bourgeoisie has no right to be scandalised by the terrorism of the Russian revolution. In its revolutions, the bourgeoisie has done the same, and has used terror to its own advantage against the people, every time that the latter has seriously tried to shake its yoke

Therefore, it becomes a cause of weakness for revolutionary terrorism to be exercised, not freely by the people and only against their enemies, not through the independent initiative of revolutionary groups, but by the government; with the natural consequence that it persecutes, together with the real enemies of the revolution, even sincere revolutionaries, more advanced than the government, but discordant with it. Furthermore, terrorism, as an act of governmental authority, is more susceptible to gathering those popular antipathies and aversions which are always determined in opposition to any government, of whatever kind it may be; and only because it is a government. The government, due to the responsibilities that it bears and all the influences it suffers from abroad and from within, and even when it resorts to radical measures, is inevitably led to concerns and acts, whether violent or submissive, by the principles suggested, by the need to defend its power and personal security, in the present or future, or even the simple good name of its members, rather than the interests of the people and the revolution.

In order to get rid of the bourgeoisie in every place, to proceed with those summary measures which may be necessary in a revolution, there is no need for orders from above. Indeed, those in power, out of a natural sense of responsibility, can have dangerous hesitations and scruples, which the masses do not have. Direct popular action – which we could call libertarian terrorism – is therefore always more radical, not to mention that, locally, it is possible to know much better who and where to strike, than from the distant central power, which would be forced to rely on courts, always far less just and at the same time more ferocious than popular summary justice. – Courts which, even when they perform acts of true justice, do not strike by sentiment but by mandate, therefore become disliked by the people for their coldness, and are led to surround their acts of cruelty, even when necessary, with a useless theatricality and a hypocritical display of a non-existent and impossible legislative equality.

In all revolutions, as soon as popular justice becomes legal, organised from above, it gradually turns into injustice. Perhaps it becomes crueller, but it is also led to strike the revolutionaries themselves, to often spare enemies, to become an instrument of the central power in an increasingly repressive and counter-revolutionary sense. Therefore, as an instrument of destructive violence, not only can one do without governmental power in the revolution, but violence itself is more effective and radical the less it is concentrated in a determined authority.

* * *

To those who counter our arguments with what is happening in Russia, we reply that the experiment is still in progress there, and that it is too early to rely on it as proof of truth. The decrees issued by the Soviet government are widely cited, but to understand if they are good one should know if, how, and to what extent they have been applied, their results, etc. To conclude that good was done there, it would be necessary for the experiment to be finished, either with victory or with defeat, in order to know and understand whether the dictatorship helped or hindered one or the other more. As things stand today, can we, or those in favour of the revolutionary dictatorship, exclude that one of the causes of the terrible conditions in which the Russian revolution struggles is precisely its excessively authoritarian and dictatorial approach? Certainly not.

We, with the greatest sense of objectivity that was possible for us, given our passion as partisan men, examined in a previous chapter the conditions created in

Russia by the dictatorship in relation to the interests of freedom. And from this point of view the conclusions that can be drawn are certainly not encouraging! But our aim is not to set ourselves up as judges and neither to make historical criticism as an end in itself, but rather to examine ideas and facts, taking into account what could be the revolution in our countries. We can also allow that in Russia things could not have gone differently than they did, and that it could not have been done differently from what has been done. But it is certain that in Western countries one could not act in the same way as in Russia.

Our considerations are above all intended to have a value here, where we live, as a norm and guide of a possible revolution more or less near; so we have the duty not to blindly imitate what is said, or what we imagine, to have been done in Russia or elsewhere, but rather to positively prepare the ground for our revolution, seeing what is and is not suitable for its triumph, given our conditions, the means we can dispose of, and the ends we set ourselves with the revolution – here, in our environment, with our sentiments, and our ideas.

Those who quote Lenin so often must remember in this regard the honest advice he gave to the revolutionaries of Hungary, when the unfortunate revolution ended so badly there, to be careful not to ape what had been done in Russia, because errors had been committed there which had to be avoided; and because what could be useful, necessary or inevitable in Russia, could on the contrary be avoidable and harmful elsewhere. Lenin's advice is good for revolutionaries of all countries – including the revolutionaries of Italy.

XIV. The Defence of the Revolution[1]

One of the most serious difficulties that can hinder the development of the revolution, when it breaks out in a single country, no matter how large it is, is the hostility of foreign bourgeois governments, especially when this hostility is expressed through real armed war, with attempts to suffocate the revolution by invading the insurgent territory with armies.

It is therefore necessary to defend, also militarily, the territory of the revolution – this is evident. As long as this necessity lasts, there must be an army, there must be all those annexed and connected organs, with which every anarchist principle is in open contradiction. Not because they are violent, let's be clear, but because they are violent in a more or less governmental way. As long as this necessity lasts, a truly anarchic social order will perhaps not be possible, at least in the first moments; which, however, is equivalent to saying that this need will be a dangerous restraint for the revolution and, as long as it lasts, the revolution will not be able to develop and will be forcibly arrested.

From this point of view, the current war which the bourgeois governments wage against Russia, even without wanting to declare it, is doubly harmful to the revolution. Directly, by the very fact of the attempted military suffocation from outside and the starvation of the Russians by means of the economic blockade; and indirectly, by damaging the revolution for the reason set out above, in that, by forcing it to defend itself militarily, that is, with means contrary to its nature, creates internal military danger, and forces the revolution to self-limitation, to a halt in its development, which we hope to be fleeting and momentary, but it could also become more or less definitive.

However, the example of Russia, and of almost all previous revolutions, show that the foreign military threat is an eventuality that needs to be examined. Granted the inevitable, that is, that the revolution must defend itself, the problem of dictatorship is presented in the following terms: is it necessary, for the defence of the revolutionary country, to concentrate the most absolute powers in the hands of a dictatorial government? Or is it more useful and more necessary (even under the external threat) to preserve the maximum possible freedom, the maximum autonomy to single organisms and single localities? We, needless to say, lean towards the second hypothesis, of which we are firmly convinced not for a dogmatic apriorism, but for the teaching that comes to us from past revolutions and for the objective examination of the conditions in which the proletarian revolution will find itself in practice.

The defence against internal traps can only be effectively and inexorably provided by the direct and free action of the people.

The defence against internal traps can only be effectively and inexorably provided by the direct and free action of the people. When in 1792 the armies of the European reaction invaded France to stifle the revolution and re-establish the royal power, at first the French armies were defeated; and the victory smiled on

[1] https://medium.com/@joao.black/luigi-fabbri-the-defense-of-revolution-150264e689da

them only when the soldiers were persuaded that they were really defending the revolution, assured of this by the news that the free direct action by the Parisian people had, on August 10, defeated the nobles barricaded in the Tuileries [Palace] and locked up the royal family, and in the following September they had made a real radical cleansing of how many internal enemies they had managed to catch. The revolutionary government could never have achieved this; therefore, what is needed is, first of all, internally, to leave the people free to exterminate their enemies, and not to centralise this task in the hands of the government.

But also as an active cooperation in the work of military defence, it will be much more useful to rely on popular initiative manifesting itself in freedom, than on governmental mechanisms, dictatorial centralisations, bureaucratic concentrations, which neutralise efforts and wills, obstruct services, and waste, deteriorate and destroy materials, supplies, food, etc. We had an example in the [1914–18] war just ended, in which the defeat fell precisely to the most centralised states (Russia, Germany, Austria) equipped with the most perfect bureaucratic and dictatorial mechanism. Looking nation by nation, we have read a hundred times how, during the war, state services were the ones that fared worse, and cooperated worse in the national victory, while it was better provided by free private initiatives and collective popular efforts, which, despite being guided by the need to save oneself from hunger and famine, to avoid the calamity of invasions, etc., resulted in indirect cooperation in military victory. If this has happened unconsciously, for a war that the people did not feel and were hostile to, how much better would it not have happened, if the people had done it with the consciousness of defending their direct interest, the cause of their own emancipation and freedom.

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Bakunin too was concerned, at the time, about the need to defend the territory of the revolution against reactionary and foreign invasions, when in the aftermath of [the battle of] Sedan, in 1870, the French people got rid of the empire of *Napoléon le Petit* and proclaimed a republic, but found themselves in need of saving their incipient freedom from the victorious Germanic armies. In his essay *The Knuto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*, Bakunin argued that there was no other salvation for France than in developing the revolution from political into social, giving the people maximum freedom, and giving the proletariat the feeling that they would fight for a homeland that would truly become theirs.

Naturally, Bakunin did not hide the need, for the military defence of the revolution, of a discipline and even a certain hierarchical authority in the militias.

But to this necessity he was careful not to sacrifice the very principle of freedom, that is to say, one of the most powerful impulses of the revolution, one of the most effective coefficients of victory against the external enemies themselves.

> *"Passionate lover of freedom, I confess that I very much distrust those who always have the word discipline in their mouths … especially in France, where it means despotism on the one hand and automatism on the other … The strange slavery that French society endures, from the great revolution onwards, derives largely from the cult of State discipline, inherited from Robespierre and the Jacobins. This cult loses France, paralyzing the only source and means of liberation that remains, the free development of popular forces, and making her [France] seek her salvation in the authority and illusory action of a State, which today represents nothing more than a vain despotic presumption, accompanied by an absolute impotence.*
>
> *"But, however much I am an enemy of what in France is called discipline, I also recognise that a certain discipline, not automatic, but voluntary and reasoned, which harmonises with individual freedom, remains and will always be necessary for any collective work or action. In the moment of action, in the midst of the struggle, the functions are divided, according to the faculties of each one appreciated by the whole community; some direct and command, others execute. But no function becomes petrified, fixed nor remains irrevocably entrusted to the same person. Hierarchical order and advancement do not exist, so that the commander of yesterday can become a subordinate today. No one rises above the others, or if he does, it is only to fall back an instant later, like the waves of the sea, always returning to the salutary level of equality."*[1]

[1] M. Bakounine, *Oeuvres* – Vol II – p. 296–297.

All this must be said as regards the civil government, to be reduced to the minimum possible terms, and at the same time as regards the military government of the defence war. In this regard, it will not hurt to recall the opinion of another competent person who, despite being a revolutionary and a socialist with libertarian tendencies, was also a military man by profession, a scholar of military and war matters, who studied the art of war on books and above all on facts, participating in the revolutions and wars of 1848–49. We repeat the name of Carlo Pisacane – a practitioner, much more than a theorist, of the revolution.

After coming to the conclusion, in the study of the wars of those years, that if the masses do not directly implement the concept of the revolution, *the Government arisen from the insurrection will only replace the fallen one, and will fight the revolution if it doesn't harmonise with the ideas of the individuals composing the government*;[1] after having said in the other essay on the "Revolution" that dictatorship, *powerless to produce good and source of all evil, is also quite powerless to direct war* (and the affirmation is followed by a long demonstration),[2] [Piscane] returns to the same topic in another book, forgotten by too many, devoted exclusively to military issues.[3]

On the technical way of organising the militias of defence of the revolution, in a regime of freedom, it is not our task to discuss it here, both because we lack the necessary expertise, and because for it alone it would be necessary to go even longer than what we have done this far (and it is already too much). However, it would also be necessary for this question to be studied *beforehand*, instead of relying too comfortably on what the undesirable dictatorship can do or what the people can improvise. Scholars of this question can usefully read the book indicated above – which exposes a very commendable technical and practical project.

Naturally, Pisacane spoke of a revolution that was above all national, and therefore different from the one we hope for; and also times have changed a lot, and so have the means of offense and defence, both for revolution and for war. But an acute and zealous sentiment of freedom was alert in him; and furthermore he also conceived the Italian national revolution only of a proletarian nature, inserted into a social and anti-capitalist movement; therefore, from this point of view, it can be said that Pisacane was ahead of the times and spoke for us too. As for the material means that are different today, it is not to those that we intend to refer when speaking of an organisation of armed defence more suited to a regime of freedom – insofar as the more the brute matter is elaborated the better it adapts to the different intentions of those who use it – but to human material, which is roughly the same today as it was fifty or sixty years ago.

In the details, also Pisacane's project is certainly anything but free from errors, which would be useless to enumerate, and which might not have been errors relative to his time. But what counts for us is his demonstration that a good armed defence of the revolution is incompatible with a dictatorial regime.

> *"To say to a city 'recognise such a leader', and prescribe the limits of an uprising, is to lose everything, is proof of a lack of practical sense; and it is strange that those who speak of nothing but popular energy and exaltation, then demand that everything bend to their supreme will; for them only the obedient are a people … Fools! Having cast out the enemy and liberated the city, the citizens, rejoicing in the victory, fall asleep under their laurels … and having elected a government, they rely on its providence and, without looking around, they only take care to set up for defence … And meanwhile the government tries to find generals, to set up the army, choosing the leaders among friends, and thus revolutions miserably die. To give them back to life, there is nothing to do but keep the people in constant movement,* and not to abandon the fate in the hands of dictators … *Without waiting for the sentence of the dictators, or consulting the will of the many who in similar circumstances want to govern, the military order as well as the civil one will arise from the very entrails of the nation.* Unity will result precisely from the absolute freedom proclaimed as a sovereign law"[4]

To mention a few systems recommended by Pisacane, we will say that he wants the conduct of military operations to be independent of political power; the armed forces not to be superior to what is necessary, but according to the borders to be defended;[5] hierarchies and ranks to be limited to what is purely necessary and

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[1] C. Pisacane. – *Guerra combattuta in Italia negli anni 1848–49.* [*The War fought in Italy in 1848–19*] – Pag. 317. (Read the *Considerazioni* [*Considerations*] – from p. 299 onwards).

[2] C. Pisacane. – *Saggio sulla Rivoluzione*. [*Essay on the Revolution*] – Pag. 203. (Read the whole chapter on the subject, especially from p.185 to p.208).

[3] This book is entitled «*Ordinamento e Costituzione delle Milizie Italiane, ossia Come ordinare la Nazione armata*» ["Ordering and Constitution of the Italian Militias, or How to order the armed Nation"], and was republished in 1901 by the Ghisleri family and the publisher Sandron of Palermo, with a preface by Rensi.

[4] C. Pisacane. – *Come ordinare la nazione armata.* [*How to Order the Armed Nation.*] – From p. 148 to p. 154.

[5] In this regard, remember the tragic Hungarian experiment. Among the causes of disaster of the Magyar Communist Republic were the open hostilities against Rumenia, without the soldiers being persuaded to defend the revolution. The same people who had defeated the Czech-Slovaks in

to represent a real diversity of functions; the militiamen to be convinced of the goodness of the cause they are fighting for; each officer to be appointed by free election by those of whom he is to be in charge; the interests of militiamen to be linked to those of the whole community, their earnings depending on their condition as citizens and not as soldiers; the unity of action to result not from the authority of the leaders but from the way of training the formations, so as to transform *the ignoble dogma of blind obedience into profound conviction*.[1]

Here we could mention other means that can be used to restrain the always possible tendency of military leaders to exorbit and extend their authority, to the detriment of the revolution. For example, the system adopted in a certain sense during the French revolution, and also praised by Mazzini, of delegating civil commissioners, representatives of the revolution among the militiamen; but not sent by a central government, but rather by free communities, by revolutionary Communes, among the soldiers they themselves provided. This is so that the soldiers of the revolution always feel flanked by the solidarity of the whole country, and the surveillance of the latter restrains the authoritarian and liberticidal desires, which can develop in anyone who, for whatever reason, is invested with a greater power than the others.

But it is useless, we repeat, to go into these particularities, which we have mentioned only to give an idea of what we think. Nothing perfect will be achieved in this direction either, since, for better or worse, it would also be a direction that is anything but anarchist. Some defects, predictable from now on and visible to the eyes of the anarchist reader, can be eliminated, and some wrongs avoided; but the contradiction will remain, as a fact of *force majeure*. But one thing is to inevitably undergo the adoption of some authoritarian means, seeking among them the least authoritarian possible and limiting their power as much as possible, another is to choose among them precisely the most authoritarian and most tyrannical means there is – like the dictatorship – becoming its apostles *a priori* and presenting it to the masses almost as an ideal to be achieved.

Furthermore, the psychological element should not be overlooked in propaganda. Instead the socialists, in pointing to the people as the best goal worthy of them the establishment of a dictatorship – against which, in any case, even if it were necessary, proletarian distrust should be kept awake – run the risk of preparing a favourable ground for the enemies of the working class; so that one bad day, instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat, we could find on our necks the dictatorship of militarism. We hope to be bad prophets!

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Yet, the possibility of an anarchistic defence of the revolution, even in military terms, however difficult it may seem to us, is not entirely to be excluded, when even a journal completely in favour of the proletarian dictatorship told us, some time ago, about the resistance opposed to Denikin in Ukraine by the anarchist general Makhno, one of the country's most notable personalities (as the aforementioned newspaper put it) who exerts enormous influence on the masses.

> *"Militant anarchist,* enemy of any centralising dictatorship even in military matters*, one understands that he arouses the animosity of Trotsky, who does not want to collaborate with the* volunteers*. However, he is an ardent and sincere soul, a man completely devoted to the regime of Soviets, though based on a regionalist decentralisation. The revolution owes him many things; perhaps thanks to him all of Ukraine will be sovietist in the spring".*[2]

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defending themselves were in turn defeated when they first attacked the Romanians.

[1] 126 C. Pisacane, *Come ordinare la nazione armata* [*How to Order the Armed Nation.*], p. 137.

[2] So it happened indeed, shortly after the above was written. – See *L'Ordine Nuovo* [*The New Order*] of Turin, issue 29 of 13 December 1919.

Speaking of Makhno, after what we said in IV. Chapter, having passed some time (*we warn the reader that we add several of these notes after having finished the book a few months ago, and while we are correcting the proofs*), we note that, having defeated Denikin and Wrangel, the smear campaign has begun again against him. There are no precise news in the socialist and Bolshevik newspapers to this day. Makhno has returned to violent opposition and to insurrection against the Moscow government, to conquer, it seems, the freedom of an autonomous life in Ukraine and in southern Russia.

Makhno leads bands [*bande*] that once rose up against the agrarian policy of the communist party, inspired by a program that was not adequate to the conditions of the country; not having taken such conditions into account, the Bolsheviks antagonised a large part of the population. This would confirm what we have said above, also with regard to the relationship between the revolutionaries of city industry and the peasant masses. But the same bands [*bande*] that yesterday were believed to be anti-revolutionary, because they were anti-Bolsheviks, later became the most formidable threat to Denikin and Wrangel; and actually favoured the military operations of the communist red army.

In any case, we understand very well that, after the revolution, a non-anarchist regime could establish itself on the territory, and indeed, at least for now, this is the most possible and most probable event. This is partly because the majority of the workers who will participate in the movement seem rather inclined towards a republican socialist regime, while the anarchist proletarians are still a small minority; and partly due to the influence of diverse and external factors, including the possibility examined above of military attacks by foreign bourgeois states. We may well want the revolution to take a given direction, but, by force of events, by unforeseen circumstances, by the contrary will of the masses, etc., it can always take a contrary direction, which we consider less good.

But in that case, must we anarchists oppose the revolution, or retreat disdainfully to the Sacred Mount [*Sacro Monte*], lock ourselves up in the ivory tower of our intransigence, refusing our forces to defend the revolution, just because it doesn't go entirely according to our wishes? Not even in dreams! We may, and indeed we must, refuse to contribute to the mistakes of others, but our duty as fighters against the bourgeois State and capitalism, and against their survival, for expropriation and freedom, is a duty that remains and that we must fulfil with all the greater energy, the more advanced and uncompromising our ideas are. The duty and interest of defending the revolution – in spite of its state orientation and in spite of its methods – against the enemies inside and outside, remains complete for the anarchists.

To be absent, to refuse the supreme duty of defending the revolution, would actually mean to betray ourselves, as the result would be an even less radical and even less libertarian revolution. Instead, whatever government emerges from the revolution, it will be the less oppressive, and allow the greater freedom, the more the libertarians – that is, the defenders of freedom – have been and will remain tireless defenders of the revolution on all fields of the multiform battle. The revolution will be animated by a greater egalitarian spirit, the more ultra-revolutionary and libertarian opposition forces exist in the country – which will also defend the integral spirit of the revolution from within – and the more numerous are the nuclei, associations and institutions that will claim the freedom to manage their own interests and to organise with equal freedom their relations with the rest of society.

It is objected that this opposition to the power of tomorrow could favour counter-revolutionary attempts from inside or outside, weaken the general position and the military defence of the revolution. To say this means not to understand the character and spirit of the antigovernmental and anarchist opposition. On the other hand, the lack of opposition to the government could very well cause its greater degeneration, to the point of making the government itself the centre of the feared counter-revolution. But even if this did not happen, it must be understood that the anarchist opposition would always be in a more revolutionary direction, that is, aimed at striking with greater energy and intransigence the remnants of the past and not at favouring them; nor could being an opposition prevent our most active collaboration – indeed it would always be sure and unfailing – to fight, on the ground of action, and in agreement with all other revolutionary forces of any kind, every reactionary and bourgeois attempt from within or without.

It has been said among us, since the times of Bakunin, that the revolution will be anarchist or it will not be; but there are those who understand this formula in an erroneous way, as if we were saying: "either the revolution will have an anarchist direction towards anarchy, or otherwise we don't care." It is not so. Bakunin wanted to make it understood that, in order to succeed, the revolution needs all the latent forces in the people to be unleashed, without restraint or coercion,

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We do not conceal that, unfortunately, the state of war must exert its ominous influence also in the camp of Makhno and on himself, as it develops the militarist spirit, of arrogance, of idleness, of pillage, and in the leaders the spirit of authority. We therefore do not exclude a priori that many criticisms made of Makhno's bands may be justified and that the facts may take a much less anarchist development than we would like. We also know that, while Makhno finds a lot of help in the peasant masses, these are not always and completely anarchic and unselfish; because the peasants of the fertile southern lands of Russia tend to take their grain away from the requisitions of the Bolsheviks, who also urgently need it to feed the most unfortunate countries of the North and they are right in wanting it.

But this does not detract from our arguments about the *relative* possibility of a less authoritarian military defence for the revolution; nor does it diminish the serious wrongs of the Moscow government, which despite having made use of Makhno and the anarchists of the south in times of danger, instead of establishing a fraternal understanding with them, preferred, as soon as the danger ceased, to make them enemies, posing them the dilemma: either renounce freedom by submitting to the Bolshevik government, or civil war.

everywhere and in every sense; and indeed in this manner it is predictable that the first insurrectionary outbreak will occur. If one spends too much time ordering, checking, etc., if orders from leaders or from a centre were to be expected everywhere, the reaction would almost certainly get the upper hand. The triumph of the revolution will be more certain if the revolutionary initiative develops voluntarily in every point of the territory and directly attacks the authoritarian organisms and if, as soon as these are overthrown, it passes to expropriation.

The forces organised, ordered and launched by this or that centre, guided by leaders, etc., will contribute to the revolution, and they too can be enormously useful. But they alone would be insufficient, and would always arrive too late[1] if the first anarchistic action, more or less formally undisciplined, but made unanimous by a more solid inner discipline – since it is made up of a unity of tendencies – has not overcome the first resistances, cleared the ground of operation, and prevented, with sudden assaults on all points, the enemy forces from gathering, agreeing and uniting. Also in this sense, therefore, the anarchist action (understood not only in the sense of party, but in a more general way) has an indispensable function in the defence of revolution; by renouncing this function, to incorporate in a sort of framed army awaiting orders from the leaders or from a centre, one would perhaps renounce the victory.

Therefore, even if the revolution will not be anarchic in the sense desired by us, it will not cease to be a revolution, and will not prevent us from taking part in it; but, whether it is more or less anarchic or more or less authoritarian, it is certain that *the more anarchic the revolution will be, the more complete it will be and the greater the probability of winning*. The task of anarchists is therefore to give the revolution the most anarchic orientation possible.

If the revolution does not give rise to anarchy, it is predictable that it will lead to the establishment of a socialist republic; but the political form will matter much less than the substance it will contain. Now, the revolution will give rise to a form of government that is much weaker and therefore much less oppressive, the more advanced and radical the revolution itself has been, and the more we have participated in it, bringing our ardent spirit of freedom to it, destroying all possible authoritarian survivals, and creating autonomous organisations for collective life as much as we can. Even within a non-anarchist regime, we will have to try to realise as much anarchy as our forces allow us.

We must therefore propagate today, as much as we can, ideas and sentiments that give anarchist spirit and direction to the revolution; and in times of revolution we must claim the right to apply this direction, even as a minority.

This will be the precise action of the anarchists for the defence of revolution. This task and its importance is not understood by those who are satisfied with the hypothesis that anarchy cannot spring from the revolution, to deduce from it that we should … temporarily renounce anarchy and become partisans of that government that will be constituted, and maybe join it! A bourgeois republic could also result from the revolution, and such an eventuality would not prevent us from participating in the revolution with our own ends; but should we therefore, when things are done, become partisans and cooperators of the new regime? Everyone understands we should not. Well, in the same situation we will always find ourselves, opponents from the outside, until an anarchist regime arises from the revolution.

Moreover, it is not at all impossible for the revolution to happen in a libertarian sense, as long as there are people in sufficient numbers who are convinced and willing to give it such a direction. Today in a period of propaganda and revolutionary preparation, such propaganda and preparation can have no other direction on our part than the anarchist one, in order to increase the number of the convinced ones and spread the libertarian spirit among the masses, and to ensure that, when it breaks out, the revolution can unfold in the sense we want, everywhere or as largely as possible. And it will be to a greater extent the more anarchist propaganda and preparation we have done. If, on the other hand, we started from today, as some of our

[1] See in p. 90–91 [of *Dittatura e Rivoluzione*] the episode told by the Bolshevik Victor Serge on the action carried out by the anarchists of Petrograd in defence of the revolution, threatened at the gates of the city by the armies of Yudenitch.

Regarding the freedom of anarchists in the Soviet Republic, on p. 111 [of *Dittatura e Rivoluzione*] we reported that a veteran from Russia had told us that anarchist newspapers are not published there. This statement would be in contrast with another, which seems more reliable to us, read in a book published after the printing of the aforementioned pages, according to which the anarchist newspaper *Volia Truda* (*The Worker's Will*) is published in Moscow. This is what Nofri and Pozzani tell us in their volume *La Russia com'è* [Russia as it is], on p. 43, and we take note of it for the sake of truth.

socialist friends would like, arguing that a government, or rather a dictatorship, is needed for the revolution, we would contribute to artificially creating or increasing this need, rather than eliminating it; and we would spread among the masses a spirit contrary to our ideas and to the interest of the revolution.

We must therefore propagate today, as much as we can, ideas and sentiments that give anarchist spirit and direction to the revolution; and in times of revolution we must claim the right to apply this direction, even as a minority. This will be the best defence we can make of the revolution.

Our ideas, the conception we have of the future social organisation, our criterion on the development of the revolution, therefore impose on us a certain line of conduct even in the very probable eventuality of the establishment, in a revolutionary period, of a new government, be it more free, in a form of federalist-type social republic, or more authoritarian and centralised, as the partisans of the *proletarian dictatorship* wish and as any dictatorship by its nature implies.

This line of conduct – which must be revolutionary and anarchic at the same time – derives implicitly from everything we have said so far; and it has largely been explicitly exposed by us until we admitted the hypothesis of the need for a military defence of the revolution, and therefore of some form of authority and an inevitable minimum of governmental institutions. Whether this hypothesis is true or not, in whole or in part, it is not a question here to discuss. We prefer it not to come true and we have to work today to avoid it, but the question is another. Given that it comes true, against our desire and our efforts, by the prevalence of opposing opinions, or by unforeseen circumstances, or by *force majeure* of events: in relation to our ideas, that is, in order to arrive at their practical implementation more promptly, *in the practical interest of the revolution*, what attitude can the anarchist elements in particular, and the most consciously revolutionary forces of the proletariat in general, hold more usefully?

This is what we will try to see in the following chapter as a conclusion to our book.

The revolutionary method

Luigi Fabbri

La Protesta (Buenos Aires), 21 May 1923[1]

Many fall into the error of believing that there is no other way to be revolutionary, to prepare for the revolution, other than to prepare materially for the upheaval of the foundations of bourgeois society, or to stubbornly and deliberately clash with individual or collective acts of revolt against the current legal order—believing that this is the only practical mode of agitation and struggle.

It is quite true that the one should not be neglected and the other can be usefully implemented in more than one circumstance; but these are exceptional forms of activity, limited in scope, and cannot constitute a lasting rule of conduct that is equal in time and space, nor a normal program of action.

The material preparation for the struggle can be nothing more than the occupation of limited groups of individuals; and this task, exhaustible in a relatively short time, can only be initiated at special moments, when there is a serious and feasible intention to engage in the struggle or the possibility of revolutionary situations is glimpsed in the near future. To resort to it out of time or in a way that requires a very long-term outcome would be useless, too costly, and dangerous at the same time. As for acts of revolt, individual or collective, which for a time were called "propaganda by deed," they depend solely on the will of the person carrying them out; they erupt in an instant and suddenly exhaust their function without specific and precise ties to organised and mass movements. In short, they fall outside the realm of normality, which only encompasses collective and permanent action, such as that of the trade union movement.

But can we therefore say that it is impossible to be revolutionary in the practical life of agitation and struggle, even in normal times, within large organisations and the broadest mass movements? Certainly not. While it is true that, for the time being, the largest, most solid, and oldest organisations have less revolutionary and more accommodating and reformist tendencies, it is also true that it is always possible to act within them, to exert influence in a revolutionary sense. And this is the task of those organised and those who are animated by a faith in an idea of the future. They, even in practical, everyday life, in times of peace, can develop revolutionary activity and give revolutionary content even to the most outwardly peaceful struggles of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.

There are acts, forms of activity that, even without leaving the legal orbit, can be revolutionary. Publishing

[1] https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/luigi-fabbri-the-revolutionary-method

a newspaper, organising and sustaining a strike, promoting popular meetings, street demonstrations, etc., all of this can be contained in the most orthodox forms. Such demonstrations, even if organised by revolutionaries and anarchists, do not cross the boundaries of legality; they only become illegal in exceptional cases. And even in such cases, these are minor infractions that add little or nothing concrete to the desired results. And yet, there are acts of this kind that, without violating the formal law sanctioned in the codes for the benefit of the ruling classes, deeply impress the spirit; and are therefore revolutionary.

This is so true that the ruling classes themselves feel the need from time to time to violate their own laws: "to restore balance," they say; that is, to consolidate their domination, with the slow, though legal, infiltration of revolutionary activity already shaking them to the core. This organisation is not enough, of course—and ultimately, the decisive blow of the true revolution is indispensable—but it is necessary and retains all its revolutionary value in the preceding, more or less long, period of evolution.

It is necessary, however, not to fall into the simplistic error of attributing a revolutionary value to every form of class or party activity, solely because of the label it may take or simply because of the revolutionary affirmation of the final objective. There are also many reformists who do not deny that the solution to the social problem ultimately requires the violent overthrow of the last obstacles to the complete emancipation of the working class; but then, in practical, everyday life, they act in ways that distance the revolution and consolidate rather than weaken the pillars of capitalism and the state.

The proletariat, or rather its revolutionary fractions, are not strong enough to move and act outside the laws, which they nevertheless do not recognise. Consequently, they are forced to suffer them. But even in this sphere, the proletariat could give its activity an effectively revolutionary orientation, that is, in radical opposition; it is intransigent toward all institutions considered evil and unjust. It cannot, it is true, free itself from capitalist exploitation; but in its struggle against it, it is always possible to give it an irreducible character of negation, even when what it proposes to wrest from it is too little in comparison to its comprehensive emancipation.

It is above all in struggles in the economic arena that the revolutionary method can develop, distinguishing itself from the reformist method—which tends to obtain improvements as in a contract between equals—while the former tends to conquer and wrest from the capitalists everything that the proletarian forces allow, as one would act against a thief who had stolen all our assets.

That is why the revolutionary method consists above all in the way in which certain conquests are achieved. And these conquests have value only insofar as they are obtained in this way, and not after reformist negotiations, which recognise, in deeds if not in words, the boss's right to withhold.

It is above all in struggles in the economic arena that the revolutionary method can develop, distinguishing itself from the reformist method… while the former tends to conquer and wrest from the capitalists everything that the proletarian forces allow

The "way" of the reformists also consists, yes, in organisation, taken as a starting point; but then, the path is not the one suggested by the idea that the proletarian class and the boss class are irreconcilably hostile, but rather the other, in which there can always be a way to resolve the two classes. Reformism therefore tends to transform class conflicts into contracts, equal to any contract between buyer and seller.

From which this consequence arises: that the ultimate goal of the proletarian movement is forgotten, and the greatest importance is attributed to immediate improvements, which precisely for this reason lose all significance. Considering every economic and class dispute from this single, limited perspective, one ends up employing all means that can serve the immediate objective: even those that jeopardise the future, even those that constitute an obstacle to future achievements.

It is the policy of Jacob, who sells his birthright for a mess of pottage; and the entire philosophy of this policy seems to be enclosed in the flat, comfortable, and lazy popular saying: "Better an egg today than a chicken tomorrow."

The revolutionary method, on the other hand, consists in not renouncing anything of the future, even taking everything that is possible in the present, and taking great care not to compromise the achievements of tomorrow in exchange for the meagre, though not inconsiderable, achievements of the present.

About a Project for Anarchist Organisation

Luigi Fabbri

Il Martello (New York), 17/24 September 1927[1]

General considerations

It was with a strong sense of goodwill that I read the project for an anarchist "Organisational Platform" which a group of Russian comrades published last year in Paris and which has been the cause of impassioned debate recently between anarchists from various countries. My first impression was that I was not in disagreement with many points, in fact I found the project to contain many painful, unarguable truths. The whole project breathes such an ardent desire to do something, to work for the good of the cause, that it is quite seductive.

All this is certainly of no little merit for the authors of the "Platform," whose great value is due to another reason — it places under discussion a number of problems inherent to the anarchist movement, to the place of anarchists in the revolution, to anarchist organisation in the struggle, and so on. These need to be resolved if anarchism is to continue to provide answers to the growing needs of the struggle and of present-day social life.

Despite these favourable observations, however, and unless I am much mistaken, I do not think that the project proposed by the Russian comrades can be accepted by any anarchist organisation of any importance since, in my opinion, it contains errors which are of little import should they remain within the realm of the personal (and debatable) opinion of a few comrades, but which could become the cause of serious deviations in the anarchist movement if accepted by the organisation and acquire any programmatic value.

As a programmatic basis for an organisation, the "Platform" is too ideological and too impractical. On a number of problems (such as the class struggle, democracy, the State, the revolutionary transitional period, syndicalism, etc.) it establishes axiomatic points of view, some correct, others not, though opinion on these may be said to vary from comrade to comrade. Unanimous agreement or even wide agreement on these points may be almost impossible (and indeed pointless, as far as practical effects on the organisation are concerned). What is important are the concrete and positive objectives of Anarchism which must be realised. The important thing is what we must and what we want to achieve as regards action, independent of the doctrines and ideologies with which our actions can be justified or evaluated. It seems to me that not enough space is dedicated in the "Platform" to this realistic, voluntarist part, if it is to be considered a real programmatic project.

But I do not wish to dwell too long on criticism of the "Platform" as a programmatic basis for an organisation. I believe that its proponents themselves do not insist on it and are prepared to lay it aside in order to seek a more concrete basis which is better able to unite. Among other things, in fact, one consequence of the "Platform" would be a tendency to exclude from the anarchist organisation not only individualists and anti-organisationalists, who could not join for reasons of the very contradiction in terms, but also not a few anarchist-communists and organisationalists, including some (such as myself) who have for many years supported the need for an anarchist organisation and have been working towards that goal.

There is much in the "Platform" which I find good and which I approve of completely, above all as it seeks to demonstrate the need for anarchist organisation and the need to leave this vague and indeterminate terrain in order to realise the organisation as concrete, permanent and wide-reaching on the largest possible scale. Correct, too, are the many criticisms of our movement past and present and the many painful observations. Likewise the important presentation of some of the problems of anarchist organisation in the here and now. On this part, given that there is agreement, there is no need to dwell. Neither do I wish to deal with certain aspects of the "Platform" with which I personally agree, but with which many comrades disagree, as they are not essential for the practical movement of Anarchism.

I will, however, only examine those parts of the "Platform" which seem to me to be in error or which I believe contain the seeds of error. My approach will be to consider it, not as a simple exposition of ideas, personal or of a group, as if I were simply dealing with one of our many pamphlets regarding theory or propaganda.

Unity and Variety

The departure point of the "Platform," as expounded in comrade Arshinov's introduction, is sound. It establishes that the anarchist movement has devastated itself, sterilised for the most part by the "yellow fever of disorganisation." The experience during the Russian Revolution was decisive from this point of view.

An Italian friend of ours who lived for some time in Germany and in Russia immediately after the revolutionary period, was telling me that it is impossible

[1] https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/luigi-fabbri-about-a-project-for-anarchist-organisation

to continue being anti-organisationalist and individualist once one has experienced the situation in those places. He, himself, who had once belonged to the individualist current of anarchism, became personally convinced of this.[1]

Arshinov, in fact, notes that during the Russian Revolution, the libertarian movement demonstrated a certain confusion and fractioning of its forces; this is what is supposed to have driven some anarchist militants into the arms of the Bolsheviks. And it is the same reason which has caused a certain passivity among some others...[2] And the conclusion of the need for an anarchist organisation is fully justified and correct in every way.

Nonetheless, one can note from the Introduction that the spirit which pervades the "Platform" is in effect excessively exclusivist, tending to place outside the anarchist movement all those, not only practical but ideological, currents which do not agree with it. There are also some statements in it which merit greater development, for as they are, they give an unfavourable impression, for example when it demands the "rigorous unity" of a party, unity of ideology and of "strategy."

We must avoid this exclusivist error which has afflicted the socialist and authoritarian revolutionary parties who, once they established a programme and their own organisation, dogmatised that they alone shall be saved, in other words that there is no other possible socialism or revolutionarism

It is true, among other things, that the anarcho-syndicalist method does not resolve the question of anarchist organisation, and I too am contrary to the letter and the concept intended by the term "anarcho-syndicalism," which is still widespread in Russia, Germany and (in a somewhat different form) in South America. If I am not mistaken, excluding this current of anarchism from a general anarchist organisation would be a serious mistake: it would result in transforming it into an extraneous, adversarial movement, when in fact it is an internal current which can easily co-exist with ours, which prefers to call itself simply "anarchist."

We witnessed this in Italy in 1919–20 and within the *Unione Anarchica Italiana*, where the anarchist elements tending towards syndicalism were perfectly at home and co-operated actively and usefully in the movement of the whole Union, despite disagreement on some particular questions referring to syndical action and the place assigned to this in the general movement. It was generally speaking discussed in the press and in congress, but in the end some print of agreement was always found to enable us to continue to fight together as part of the same organisation.

While it is very true that it is not possible to live practically in the same organisation as the individualists, who are much farther from us than the anarcho-syndicalists, the individualist ideology should not be completely discarded just for that reason. On the contrary, some principles regarding the demands for the rights of the individual, the autonomy of the individual and the group, are held in common with us, the organisationalists, and not to recognise this would be the start of a deviation. So in affirming the need for organisation and being, in effect, separate from all those who refuse a general, permanent organisation, considering this anarchism to be somewhat defective from the point of view of principles, we must guard against letting ourselves judge its proponents as un-anarchist, nor should it stop us (when the occasion presents itself) from possible reciprocal solidarity and co-operation with them.

I do not really know the programme of that group of Russian comrades who speak to us about an anarchist "synthesis."[3] However, if it conceives that anarchism will also, in some way, be individualist and syndicalist, not in an exclusivist doctrinaire sense, but in the practical sense that anarchists believe syndicalist action to be useful and the defence of the freedom of the individual to be necessary in order to arrive at the maximum possible autonomy in harmony with the freedom of all other individuals, then such a conception seems to me to be entirely right and near enough to our own conception, despite defective formulation.

When we speak about a "General Union of Anarchists," we must not be afraid of the words, but rather of the ideas they express, which do not seem to us to be good. On condition, however, that it cannot be expected that an organisation which has given itself such a name can represent the entire "generality" of anarchists, and exclude from its generality those who do not belong to

[1] The comrade referred to is Ugo Fedeli. (Translator)
[2] See the Introduction to the "Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists." (Translator)
[3] The reference is to Volin's group which was proposing an organisation based on a "synthesis" of anarchist trends, as originally propounded by Sebastien Faure. (Translator)

the organisation, which would then in effect be "particular" and not general.

We, who want to organise as many anarchists as possible for propaganda and struggle, anarchists who agree on determinate aims and determinate forms of action, we must distance ourselves from the danger of thinking of our "area" as being the whole, of acting unjustly towards others who do not agree with us and of imagining that we (who are only a part, albeit the largest part of Anarchism) represent the whole of Anarchism. We must avoid this exclusivist error which has afflicted the socialist and authoritarian revolutionary parties who, once they established a programme and their own organisation, dogmatised that they alone shall be saved, in other words that there is no other possible socialism or revolutionarism.

If there were just one dissenting anarchist outside our organisation, then it could not represent all anarchists. To whatever extent this may be of little importance, it is a question of principle which we anarchists should not forget, we who do not believe in any intrinsic virtue of the majority or the minority simply for what they are, or deny either the right to subordinate to their own ends the will of all those, be they few or many, who do not agree.

The class struggle is a fact… and in this struggle the anarchists will stand with the oppressed and exploited classes against the dominant and exploiting classes. For this reason, the workers' class war against capitalism corresponds with the methods and forms of revolutionary action of anarchism

Some errors: workers' organisations and anarchist groups

One part of the "Platform" that I believe is wrong is the section which would have "class struggle" as practically the main characteristic of anarchism, reducing to a minimum the human element and the humanitarian objective.

The expression "class struggle" includes a nucleus of theories which can of course be shared by anarchists but which are not necessarily anarchist. They are, in fact, common to certain other schools of socialism, in particular to Marxism and bolshevism. This is not the place to argue whether or not it is true that human history is determined by the class struggle — it is a scientific question or a question regarding the philosophy of history which does not impinge excessively on anarchism. Anarchism follows its own path whether that theory be true or false. The main characteristic of Anarchism is the refusal of all imposed authority, of all government; it is the affirmation of individual and social life, organised on a libertarian basis.

But anarchism is above all human, inasmuch as it seeks to *realise* (to use Bakunin's expression) *Humanity* upon the destruction of class and state divisions, and to realise it in the individual as much as in society. The class struggle is a fact which can be denied neither by anarchists nor by anyone with a head on their shoulders, and in this struggle the anarchists will stand with the oppressed and exploited classes against the dominant and exploiting classes. For this reason, the workers' class war against capitalism corresponds with the methods and forms of revolutionary action of anarchism, having the aim of expropriating the capitalist class. This expropriation must be to the benefit of *everyone*, so that the exploited may cease being exploited and the exploiters may cease being exploiters, and everyone voluntarily agrees to produce in common and consume the fruits of their common labour together, according to their needs.

In this sense it could be argued that anarchists are "against the class struggle," given that they bring to this struggle of the workers against capitalism the objective of ending the class struggle in order to substitute it with human cooperation. It is better, too, not to clutter our propaganda with formulae that can lead to misunderstandings and could, given the use made of them today, be interpreted in a sense which is contrary to Anarchism.

Historically speaking, it seems inexact to me to speak of Anarchism as a "class ideal." The working class more than anyone else has every interest in the triumph of liberty in the anarchist sense, and consequently we anarchists address ourselves especially to our brother workers, amongst whom we know we can find the most comrades. Indeed, most anarchists, we can even say almost all anarchists, are themselves workers. But neither does this mean that the aim of anarchism is exclusively workerist, or that the triumph of the working class should necessarily lead to Anarchy. We do well to persuade ourselves that, unless I am mistaken, there is among the proletariat even a tiny, unhealthy part which is prey to overbearing, authoritarian or servile ways such as can be found among the bourgeoisie. Unless our anarchist will is able to prevent it, the victory of these elements could end up in new forms of domination which would in no way be

desirable. The example of Russia can teach us something.

Anarchism is also a human idea, the idea of all those, without exception, who want to destroy every form of violent and coercive authority of one man over another. By subordinating this idea to any class bias whatsoever, be it the old bourgeois bias or the more recent workerist bias — we would diminish it and in fact prepare the way for a dangerous psychology which would facilitate the formation (through revolution) of a new class domination.

The working masses, the vast majority of whom are not anarchists, contain many tendencies, some good and some bad, some authoritarian and some libertarian, some servile and some rebellious. They do not in themselves constitute a creative force in any determinate, let alone libertarian, sense. This they can be inasmuch as the individuals which make up the masses can consciously become anarchists and anarchist propaganda can develop in them and increase their libertarian tendencies, combating and weakening the other tendencies. Therefore, the masses are a "creative and liberating force" inasmuch as they are anarchist and to the extent they are anarchist and not because they are workers.

As far as the effects of anarchist struggle and its results are concerned, let it suffice to say that anarchists participate in the fight of the exploited classes against capitalism, for the demolishing of its power and for its complete expropriation.

Amongst anarchists there may be differing opinions on this (which is only natural), but as we are dealing with a debatable theoretical and historical judgement, it is perfectly useless to dogmatise on it one way or another. As far as the effects of anarchist struggle and its results are concerned, let it suffice to say that anarchists participate in the fight of the exploited classes against capitalism, for the demolishing of its power and for its complete expropriation. On this much we agree, without distinction. Everything else can be argued over, but let us not make of it the cause of a real split in the party.

What I really have not understood in the "Platform" is the matter of the relationship between the anarchist movement and the workers' movement, between the anarchist organisation on the basis of ideas and the labour organisation on the basis of economic interests. A certain anarchist organisation of the masses, it is said, must be effected, and in order for this to happen there needs to be, on the one hand, a select grouping of revolutionary workers and peasants on the basis of anarchist ideas, and, on the other hand, a grouping of the revolutionary workers and peasants on the basis of production and consumption, this too, however, "imbued with revolutionary anarchist ideology." But does that not mean useless duplication?

Either one supports a labour organisation open to all workers, and thereby having no particular ideological programme, within which the anarchists carry out their function as animators and driving force (in the libertarian sense) the workers with the aim of rendering it ever more libertarian and revolutionary but without expecting it to adopt our credo officially and a priori. In that case, there is room for a specific movement of anarchists alongside it. Or, to follow the example of the anarchists in the Argentine republic and the anarcho-syndicalists in Germany and Russia, all the functions of the movement and of anarchist propaganda lie within the one labour organisation which has an anarchist programme, tactics and ideology. In this case the existence of specific anarchist groupings would be a pointless duplication with no precise mission.

The fact that here and there in the "Platform" there is talk of a "leading position" or a "leading function" of anarchists within the proletarian movement could be interpreted as something else — in other words that anarchists must in some way create a sort of leading caste which would remain more or less cocooned above the workers' movement in a similar way to the social-democratic parties of western Europe and America or to the Bolshevik party in Russia. This, in my opinion, would be something else which would constitute a deviation from anarchism, though it may appear to benefit the anarchist party. In other words, it would be a more or less concealed sort of anarchist dictatorship over the non-anarchist or only tendentially libertarian proletariat.

A real contradiction in terms.

It is true that the authors of the "Platform" say that this leadership would be one of ideas only. But in order to exert this influence, there is no need for a third conception of the relationship between anarchism and the militant proletariat. The two conceptions specified above allow for it and make it possible to the same degree. The conception proposed by the "Platform" would not add anything — and indeed it would be a mistake; one might be led to think that the spiritual leadership could be interpreted as and could take on the form of a factual leadership which would dare to attempt an anti-anarchist division between the leading elements who are in the minority and the led mass which is in the majority. The masses would have every

right to be wary, despite the denials of those who wish to function as leaders, almost as their "combined staff."

It is not possible to explain in any other way the difference which the "Platform" establishes between the mass organisation imbued with anarchist ideology and the anarchist organisation itself. It is a difference which in practice could not be quantified, as nothing can establish the degree to which the former is anarchist in comparison with the latter, nor sanction the legitimacy of the "leadership" or the superiority of the latter over the former.

It may be that the intention of the authors of the "Platform" is not that expressed above. It may be that at times, I repeat, I have not fully understood what the authors were thinking. The language often gives the reader this impression. And, on the other hand, if we exclude the sense indicated above, its conception has nothing original and could happily fit with that of the supporters of a labour organisation which is open to all, as with that of the anarcho-syndicalists, but closer to the former than the latter.

A certain amount of the misunderstanding and misinterpretation lies in the adoption of the expressions "class struggle" and "syndicalism" which the authors of the "Platform" fail to put to one side, defective and confusional though they be.

I have spoken already of class struggle. As for syndicalism, although they do not give this word anything but the meaning of class-struggle revolutionary workers' movement, where the various forms of revolutionary struggle are concerned, it is impossible (if I am not mistaken) to make abstractions on all that this word has signified over the last 25 years, especially in Italy: from reformist to fascist syndicalism, through all the deviations and errors of theoretical or practical revolutionary syndicalism itself, and not only in Italy.

Theory and Tactics

Luigi Fabbri

Views and Comments, March 1958

Editorial note: This is a free translation of an article by Luigi Fabbri, internationally prominent Italian anarchist militant and writer. Although it was written years ago, its message is still timely. The validity of its ideas have been confirmed by events. It deals with one of the most crucial problems of our times and deserves the careful consideration of every thinking person. Does the end justify the means – can great aims be accomplished by ignoble and unethical methods? The article appeared in *Solidaridad Obrera* (Paris, France, Jan. 2, 1958), organ of the exiled CNT of Spain (Anarcho-Syndicalist labour union).

* * *

Introduction by the editors of *Solidaridad Obrera*:

The outstanding characteristic of Anarchism, without which the idea of Anarchism is inconceivable, is the re-conquest of real freedom for all. This presupposes the establishment of a social organisation in which this liberty will become a fact and will be practiced. It follows from this that a free society is impossible when all the people are not free; when there are exploiters and exploited, rulers and ruled. This principle must be practiced now, in the pre-revolutionary transition period, in the revolution and until the establishment of an anarchist society. There must be no contradiction between our words and our acts. Anarchism would betray itself if it abandons the tactics of liberty while struggling to attain it.

a free society is impossible when all the people are not free; when there are exploiters and exploited, rulers and ruled. This principle must be practiced now, in the pre-revolutionary transition period, in the revolution and until the establishment of an anarchist society.

* * *

In the methods of struggle before and during the revolution, the task of the Anarchists is to combat authority in all its forms. They must assert their own freedom to propagandise, associate and experiment, conceding the right of others to do likewise. The Anarchists will not impose by force their own ideas and tactics upon those who are unwilling to accept them. They will not, however, tolerate the imposition of others and they will defend and rebel against anyone who tries it. On these principles there should not and cannot be any compromise. Absolute and undeviating firmness is indispensable. Lacking this, any movement calling itself "Anarchist" will degenerate into authoritarianism and

will sooner or later be suffocated by its own system, killed by its own weapons.

Anarchism in the social, and not solely the individualistic sense of the word, is possible only to the extent that it harmonises the rights and liberties of all, so that one does not violate the liberties of others and vice-versa. At this stage, the task of Anarchism becomes the organisation of the freedom of all the people by the people.

Under Anarchism, social life and all human relations will be built on the principle of voluntary agreement. In past and present societies these relations were regimented, imposed by force. In all the existing human relations, State and authoritarian organisation will be replaced by Anarchist or Libertarian organisation.

Under Anarchism, social life and all human relations will be built on the principle of voluntary agreement. In past and present societies these relations were regimented, imposed by force

Is this possible? Yes, if as Anarchists we believe that Anarchism can become a reality... On the other hand, if there should exist always the necessity "to impose the good by force," be it by a majority or a minority, then it would be useless to deceive ourselves and others. Anarchism would be impossible. At best it would be a reduced "liberty" unworthy of the name, restraining to some extent the privileges of the Elite, while the great masses of the people would remain slaves. If we were to champion this perversion of a 'liberty' which is based on force, we would be – call it by any name you wish, Social-democrats, Communists, Liberals, Republicans, Monarchists or Fascists – but certainly not Anarchists.

Many revolutionists, by that irresistible power of suggestion which 'success' has over those whose Anarchism is skin deep, were enchanted by the 'victory' of the Bolsheviks over the Russian revolution. They forgot that the main task of every revolution is to give and assure those who had freed themselves from the old bondage, complete and lasting freedom. Instead, they became partisans of the centralised and dictatorial State and separated themselves from the comrades who remained faithful to the idea of liberty.

But some of them recognised their mistake. We knew more than one who was with the dictatorial communists, stood with them for some time, then, disillusioned, they left the party. One of them, very well-known, wrote me from a European capitol about the imprisonment in Russia of the Italian Anarchist, Francisco Ghezzi, "All autocratic regimes are the same." The same thing occurred in respect to some Syndicalists and Anarcho-Syndicalists. One of the most important fractions of the communist opposition was formed in France by a group whose organ is *La Révolution prolétarienne*, edited by Pierre Monatte, an old activist in the Anarchist Camp.

All this is understandable – the contact with facts and the experience of Bolshevism in the Russian Revolution confirmed again what the Proudhons, the Bakunins, the Recluses and others have observed in the European revolutions of the first half of the nineteenth century; that the lack of liberty seems to facilitate in the first moments of the revolution, the task of destroying the old order. But this is an illusion, the fact is that without liberty the revolution is soon choked to death. What is left usurps the name of revolution. It is, in reality, nothing more than reaction and counterrevolution. Nevertheless, not all revolutionists understand this because they lack the passion for liberty. Sincere and ardent, they stubbornly attach themselves to the cadaver and thus foment discord between the workers, thereby preparing for themselves and for the others, terrible disillusionments.

The Anarchists, with the exception of some poor dry leaves who fell from the tree of the libertarian movement and withered in other camps, did not follow the example of the authoritarian revolutionists, nor did they forget the truths so many times affirmed and confirmed by historical experience. On this, irrespective of tendencies, we find ourselves in agreement with the thought expressed by Malatesta: "Anarchism is liberty, it cannot impose itself by force because it would destroy itself..."

[After giving examples of various Italian local, regional and national conferences, Fabbri continues.]

All these reunions agreed on the concept that not only the future organisation of society, but also the orientation and action of the living Anarchist movement, like the conduct of the Anarchists in the revolution, must correspond to the fundamental ideal of Anarchism – freedom.

All this is true. In the field of propaganda, in the movement, in action, in experimentation, Libertarian and Revolutionary standards must be applied. There is much to be done by true idealists and thoughtful men. There is no other way. Action not illuminated by an ideal and guided by thought is insanity.

There is much to do; a lot can be accomplished toward the realisation of our aspirations. But the best road to triumph – I do not say it is the easiest or the most

pleasant – is ourselves never to lose sight of our final objective.

We scorn to barter and surrender our principles, but we will help, and cooperate with any force of rebellion and progress which will promote or is directed toward the Anarchist objective – liberty and justice. We will not go back on ourselves nor travel in paths and take shortcuts which will Lead fatally in the opposite direction.

The straight road is in the end the practical road. That road has been traced by all libertarian conceptions of the revolutionary movement and by the tactical experience gained in the course of its struggles. Certainly our movement should not consist solely of moral and written propaganda. It must have its instruments of struggle and constructive ideas, its militant organisations, its living experiments, its activity in the world of labour, the field of culture, education and so forth. We must be practical, in short, remain within the reality of things and events, constitute a solid base, work efficiently – in other words – we must emerge from utopian dreams and go about the task of making the revolution; remaining faithful to the Anarchist program, without renouncing even a particle of the ideal of freedom.

I say more. Not to renounce any part of our program, especially the postulates of freedom, is to make possible the real and effective things which are anarchist and revolutionary and at the same time feasible. With surrenders and compromises we will deprive ourselves of our foundations, and become unable to perform constructive tasks now or in the future. Without a solid foundation, a harmony of theory and practice, that which we build will crumble at the first storm, the first gust of wind...

Anarchist Organisation Individual Freedom

Luigi Fabbri

Views and Comments of the Libertarian League, Fall 1963

Luigi Fabbri, 1877-1935, outstanding Italian Anarchist thinker, writer, associate of Errico Malatesta, active revolutionist, suffered imprisonment and exile before and after Mussolini came to power. The following is a free translation and summation of some of his ideas about the relationship of Anarchism to Individualism and organisation which are still pertinent for our time.

* * *

Many misguided people, including Anarchists, have the most absurd ideas about the question of Organisation and Anarchism. This leads to confusion about our fundamental ideas, making impossible effective and consistent activity for our ideals. Extreme individualists deny the necessity of organisation in daily life and in the social struggle and maintain that there is some kind of contradiction between liberty and association. The principal argument of our adversaries against organisation is that the sovereignty of the individual will be limited, if not abolished, by organisation. This is an error. Association augments individual sovereignty, precisely because it provides the individual with the united collective power to overcome obstacles and ensure a standard of life which he could never hope to attain by his own isolated efforts. The advantages and practice of association for common aims develop the feeling of solidarity and mutual love of associated individuals whose highest expression is known as Altruism.

But our opponents contradict us and say: “We are not altruists; there is no altruism. Man is an egoist and from his “I” he derives all his actions and thoughts, even when these actions and thoughts appear altruistic.” The man who shares his last crust of bread with his hungry neighbour is, strictly speaking, also an “egoist” because he derives greater pleasure in sacrificing his bread than he would if he ate it all himself. From this narrow standpoint, even the most sublime self-sacrifice, life itself, is an “egoistic” act. But, the exploiter who would rather let his slaves die of hunger than give up a single luxury is also an egoist...Both are egoists, but no one can deny that there is a vast difference between these two diametrically’ opposed types of egoism. The term Altruism distinguishes noble, humane “egoism” from unadulterated swinishness. Altruism does not in any way signify the negation of the “I.” It is, on the contrary, the highest moral fulfilment of the personality. In denying Altruism, many extreme Anarchist individualists followers of Stirner and Nietzsche, end up by denying organisation. Such individualists isolate them-selves from society, exercise no influence on events and condemn our movement to remain perpetually in a state of utopia.

The idea that only the “superman” is important, that only the gifted egoist is responsible for human progress, makes impossible any form of mass action. It is true that a single genius or a hero can make more propaganda and accomplish more than a hundred “average” men. But the world is full of average people, not of heroes and geniuses. Without for a moment underestimating the importance of gifted individuals in our movement, we must, if we are to realise our ideal, depend above all on the continual and tireless action of the masses of “average” men. And we must never forget that even geniuses and heroes can also make catastrophic mistakes and do more harm than the rank and file. In denying the creative power of the people, many individualist anarchists, unconsciously reinforce

the Statists who do not believe that any form of organisation is possible without open or camouflaged dictatorship.

To deny organisation is to deny, in effect, the possibility of social life even in an anarchistic society. To deny organisation because it is subject to abuse is like telling a child not to walk because it is liable to stumble and hurt itself. Many individualists make no distinction between authoritarian and libertarian forms of organisation. To them, all organisation is evil. From rightfully condemning Statist organisation they go on to denying the values of libertarian social structures. Like those who deny the necessity for the organisation of labour, the extreme individualists, because of their distorted viewpoint, cannot even imagine the possibility of freely federated communal organisations in the future society.

To deny organisation is to deny, in effect, the possibility of social life even in an anarchistic society. To deny organisation because it is subject to abuse is like telling a child not to walk because it is liable to stumble and hurt itself.

Many individualists who are not extremists identify themselves with the Philosophy of Nietzsche and Stirner. They repudiate organisation but admit the necessity for solidarity. But the solidarity of men for the common purpose of overthrowing the old society and building the new can be effective only if it is organised. Anarchist organisation is the application of solidarity.

We must rebel against a bad organisation of Society, but not against society itself. Society is not a myth, nor an idea. It is not a preordained, artificially created device which we can refuse to recognise or abolish. Nor is it, as the Stirnerites accuse us of saying, something superior to the individual , to which everyone must sacrifice his "I" and worship as a fetish. Society is the sum total of all the individuals and will exist as long as human beings exist. It is a natural fact, like the cosmos. To repudiate human society is to rebel against life itself--to die. The material, moral and intellectual existence and development of every individual is derived from union with all the other individuals who comprise society.

The maximum satisfaction of man's individuality, his maximum material and moral well-being as well as his maximum liberty is possible only when he is attached to his fellowman by the pact of mutual cooperation. A man in harmonious relationship with society is always much freer than one who is anti-social. The socialist-anarchists combat the present social organisation precisely because it impedes the enfoldment of a social system which will further the greater development of every individual.

To accomplish our aims, we must prepare ourselves and build revolutionary organisations which will not only be united on questions of principle, but also structurally sound and permanent, not chaotic, haphazard, parochial and confused conglomerations of people who don't know what they want or how to get it if they do.

The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists—in view of their being hostile to any form of government, even a transitional one—as the foes of all organisation and all coordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only really effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.

– Luigi Fabbri, Anarchy and "Scientific" Communism

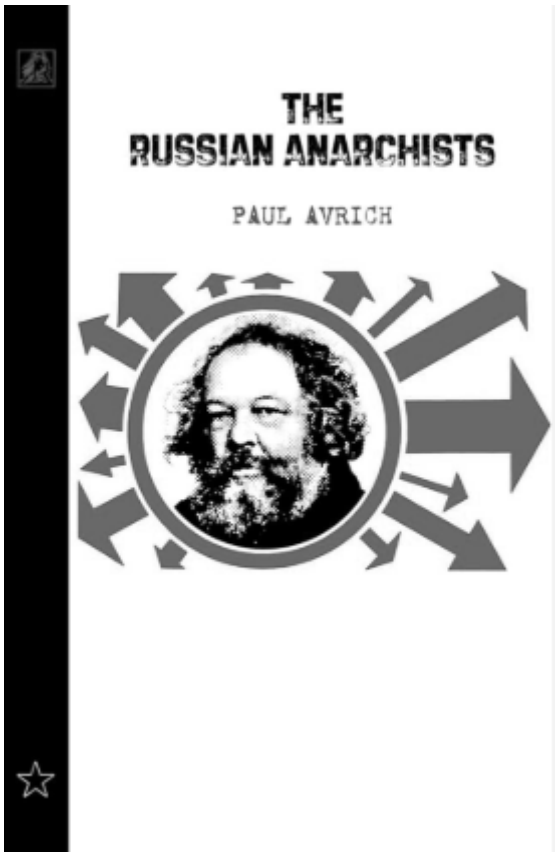
Reviews

The Russian Anarchists

Iain McKay

Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006)

Anyone researching or studying a subject will quickly conclude that some authors are more reliable than others. However, even the best author makes mistakes and if these chime with the conventional wisdom on a subject then their groundbreaking work in one area can be used to justify repeating their mistakes in others.



Such is the fate of Paul Avrich's *The Russian Anarchists*, an account of the anarchist movement before, during and after the two Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. First published in 1967, its rightly positive reviews hid the awkward fact that it gets many things incomplete or wrong, most obviously the ideas of Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin.

It is an important book and, as such, its reprint by AK Press in 2005 was to be welcomed. However, it is problematic in many aspects, not least that its focus means that the Russian Revolutions appear as backdrops to far less important events such as debates between libertarians. True, these debates reflected important events and social movements but concentrating on (imperfect) reflections will inevitably mean the significance of the source will be lost – most obviously, the factory committee movement and the struggle it represented over whether capitalism would be replaced by genuine socialism or, as was to be, *state* capitalism.

The account of Russian anarchists and their debates are placed in context by a short introduction to the ideas and lives of its two most famous exiles, Bakunin and Kropotkin. This is the first weakness of the book as these summaries are flawed – they reflect and so reinforce the conventional wisdom about anarchism rather than presenting the accurate account needed to provide a firm foundation for what follows. This means that readers will get their prejudices confirmed rather than challenged. Unsurprisingly, then, Pat Stack of the SWP utilised Avrich's work to write his awful post-Seattle article "Anarchy in the UK?" in *Socialist Review* while libertarian socialist Maurice Brinton proclaimed revolutionaries were right to be "allergic" to Kropotkin thanks to it.[1]

This is unsurprising as Avrich's account of Kropotkin repeats all the clichés associated with him: his "benign optimism"; how his "nostalgic yearning for a simpler but fuller life led him to idealise the autonomous social units of bygone years"; that he "looked backward" to an idealised Medieval Europe; that he envisioned a "spontaneous" and "speedy" revolution; thought "co-operation rather than conflict lay at the root of human progress"; and gave only "qualified support" to syndicalism.

All this is, at best, incomplete or, at worst, simply wrong – as becomes clear if you read Avrich closely enough. He suggests a fundamental difference between anarchism and syndicalism,

[1] Brinton's review of *The Russian Anarchists* is reprinted in David Goodway (ed.) *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (AK Press, 2004).

proclaiming the latter "a curious blend of anarchism, Marxism and trade unionism" and inspired by Marx's "doctrine of class struggle." Yet on the same page he (correctly) notes that "the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin in the First International were proposing the formation of workers' councils designed both as a weapon of class struggle against capitalists and as the structural basis of the future libertarian society". Asserting "nor [for Kropotkin] could the trade unions become the nuclei of the anarchist commonwealth" is hardly unconvincing *after* quoting him on the previous page on how unions were "natural organs for the direct struggle with capitalism and for the composition of the future order".

Kropotkin is badly served by Avrich, as is Bakunin who is presented primarily (and falsely) as an advocate of pan-destructive revolution and the syndicalism he championed against Marx in the First International goes unmentioned.

Worse, Avrich fails to mention inconvenient passages from the texts he quotes. Kropotkin's pamphlet which proclaimed unions the "natural organs for the direct struggle with capitalism and for the composition of the future order" is also quoted on the general strike being "a powerful weapon of struggle" but no mention is made of the need for a workers' movement which "wages a *direct,* unmediated battle of labour against capital – not through parliament but directly by means that are generally available to all workers and only the workers" – and so anarchists had "to awaken in the workers and peasants an understanding of their own power, of their determining voice in the revolution and of what they can accomplish in their own interests."[1]

Kropotkin, then, embraced the "doctrine of class struggle" as had Bakunin before him (Avrich writes of Bakunin's advocacy of an "all-encompassing class war") yet Avrich asserts that "the partisans of syndicalism went beyond Kropotkin by reconciling the principle of mutual assistance with the Marxian doctrine of class struggle. For the syndicalists, mutual aid did not embrace humanity as a whole, but existed only within the ranks of a single class, the proletariat, enhancing its solidarity in the battle with the manufacturers". This is simply false as can be seen from Kropotkin's anarchist writings: "What solidarity can exist between the capitalist and the worker he exploits?… Between the governing and the governed?"[2] As he put in a lengthy article in *Freedom* on the labour movement and which was considered important enough to be reprinted as a pamphlet:

"We prefer the ameliorations which have been imposed by the workers upon their masters in a direct struggle: they are less spurious… Such concessions as the limitation of the hours of labour, or of child labour, whenever they represent something real have always been achieved by the action of the trade-unions – by strikes, by labour revolts, or by menaces of labour war. They are labour victories – not political victories."[3]

So there is nothing specifically "Marxian" about advocating class struggle. Kropotkin's position on it *cannot* be derived from *Mutual Aid* as that is primarily a work of popular science and *not* a book on anarchism. Yet even that work is hardly silent on the class struggle as it spends most of Chapter 8 on strikes and unions as examples of mutual aid within modern society. He also noted how history showed that some "rose up" to protect and develop institutions of mutual aid while others aimed to "break [them] down" in order "to increase their own wealth and their own powers." Mutual aid, he repeatedly stressed, "represents one of the factors of evolution" and "one aspect only of human relations". History as "hitherto written" was "almost entirely a description of the ways and means by which theocracy, military power, autocracy, and, later on, the richer classes' rule have been promoted, established and maintained". Social progress "originated" from "the masses"

[1] "The Russian Revolution and Anarchism", *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (AK Press, 2014), .466-7, 468. This is the first time that Kropotkin's parts of the 1907 pamphlet *Russkaia revoliutsiia i anarkhizm* has been translated into English which is unfortunate as they present an excellent summation of his ideas on many subjects, not least the role of anarchists in a revolution and the labour movement.

[2] "The Inevitability of Revolution," *Words of a Rebel* (Black Rose Books, 1992), 30.

[3] "Politics and Socialism", *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 378

creating "economical and social institutions" rooted in solidarity rather than by "ruling, fighting and devastating minorities."[1]

So Kropotkin is badly served by Avrich, as is Bakunin who is presented primarily (and falsely) as an advocate of pan-destructive revolution and the syndicalism he championed against Marx in the First International goes unmentioned. Given this it comes as no surprise to see Avrich presenting a chronology that reflected and reinforced the conventional wisdom on anarchism and syndicalism, arguing that the failure of propaganda by deed in the "early nineties… created widespread disillusionment… causing large numbers of French anarchists to enter workers' unions". Yet Kropotkin was advocating "syndicalism" (anarchist involvement in the labour movement, support for unmediated class struggle on the economic arena and unions seizing and running workplaces) from the start: Russia from 1872 until being arrested and imprisoned in 1874, France from 1876 until being arrested and imprisoned in 1882 and, finally, Britain from 1889 onwards.

Rather than dating from the mid-1890s as Avrich asserts, the successful return of anarchists to syndicalism dates from 1889 and the London Dock Strike when Kropotkin, Malatesta and other leading communist-anarchists enthusiastically used it as an example of the importance of the labour movement and anarchist involvement within it as well as how a general strike could start the revolution. It is important to stress *return* as these ideas had been raised by the likes of Bakunin in the 1860s and 1870s in the First International – and was mocked and attacked by Marx and Engels for his troubles.[2] This means that neither Kropotkin's ideas on syndicalism nor that he advocated them from the early 1870s onwards are surprising for what became known as syndicalism had been the defining feature of the so-called "Bakuninist" wing of the First International (something Kropotkin never tired of repeating[3]).

What, then, are the differences between communist-anarchism and syndicalism? These are best sketched by Malatesta at the 1907 International Anarchist Congress, a speech that Avrich recounts but does not understand. Given that Malatesta, like Kropotkin, had been advocating anarchist involvement in the labour movement since joining the First International in the early 1870s – as Malatesta noted in his speech at the Congress[4] – it is untenable to proclaim as Avrich does that he attacked a "naïve fascination with the labour movement" or held "anti-syndicalist views" Malatesta's actual position was that the syndicalists turned the means (anarchist activity in unions) into ends, so overlooking the awkward facts that unions are not *automatically* revolutionary and that anarchists had to organise *as anarchists* to push them to that end. This was a position Kropotkin affirmed:

> "The syndicate is absolutely necessary. It is the only form of working-men's group that permits of maintaining the direct struggle against capital, without falling into parliamentarianism. But evidently it does not take that trend mechanically… The *other* element is necessary, the element of which Malatesta speaks and which Bakunin has always practised."[5]

It could be objected that the main source of Kropotkin's ideas on the labour movement can be found not in his introductions to anarchism but rather in the articles he wrote for anarchist papers (primarily, but not exclusively, French ones) as well as private letters. Yet this forgets that these better known general works are hardly silent on this subject and that Avrich quotes from articles written by Kropotkin for Russian journals which make the same points. So an account of Kropotkin's ideas which accurately reflected his views on anarchist involvement in the labour movement was possible from the materials Avrich researched for his book.

Needless to say, the other clichés Avrich repeats are no more valid. Space precludes showing how Kropotkin advocated *appropriate* scales of technology and industry based on an analysis of the advanced capitalist economies of his time or providing a detailed account of how he recognised

[1] *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (Freedom Press, 2009), 26, 230-1, 181

[2] See my "Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism," *Anarchist Studies* 20:1

[3] It is unfortunate that Avrich repeats Emma Goldman's clumsy statement that Kropotkin had concluded in 1920 "that syndicalism alone could furnish the groundwork for the reconstruction of Russia's economy."

[4] Malatesta's speech and resolution on anarchism and syndicalism can be found in Maurizio Antonioli (Ed.), *The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam (1907)*, Black Cat Press, 2009.

[5] quoted by Woodcock and Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince: A Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin* (T. V. Boardman & Co. Ltd., 1950), 295

that a social revolution was a lengthy process and how anarchism was needed *because* of how difficult it would be rather than any illusions about its ease.[1]

Brinton, then, should not have been so quick to unquestioningly accept claims which reinforced his "allergic" reactions to anarchist thinkers since he was quick to note Avrich's prejudices as regards workers' control. Avrich suggests that workers' control and self-management are impossible dreams as the lack of hierarchy and centralised control inevitably leads to economic chaos and disruption. Yet there is a distinct lack of supporting material to justify this position. Quoting from texts written by Bolsheviks regurgitating the party line or the self-serving complaints of capitalists bemoaning being forced to treat their wage-slaves as equals or seeing their industrial empires expropriated is not convincing.

Avrich fails to note (like the Trotskyists) that as workers' control was ended by the imposition of "dictatorial" one-man management and centralist nationalisation by Lenin, the economy became worse.

So while recounting how bad the economy was from mid-1917 to early-1918 (which, according to Trotskyists, forced Lenin to introduce one-man management with a heavy-heart), Avrich fails to note (like the Trotskyists) that as workers' control was ended by the imposition of "dictatorial" one-man management and centralist nationalisation by Lenin, the economy became worse. Of course, correlation does not imply causation but it seems a strange co-incidence that as hierarchical, centralised and statist forms of economic management were implemented the economy truly tanked. Subsequent research has shown how the complaints about how bureaucracy and ignorance at the centre produced more waste increased as the "chaotic" workers' participation – along with productive economic activity – decreased.[2] While Avrich notes the creation of *Vesenkha* (the Supreme Economic Council) in December 1917 and the subsequent Bolshevik marginalisation and elimination of the factory committees in favour of "the 'statization' (*ogosudarstvlenie*) of economic authority", he does not link this to increasing economic chaos as he did the rise of workers' control.[3]

In short, the notion that the Bolsheviks reintroducing wage-labour (usually under the previous manager/owner now turned into a state official/bureaucrat) was needed to help the economy is not supported by the evidence presented while there is a lot of against it. Regardless, the net effect of Bolshevik economic policies was to create *state*-capitalism and lay the groundwork for the rise of Stalinism.

These critical events and debates are mentioned but only within the context of the anarchist movement and its factions. So what should be the focus, namely history "from below" (what Russian anarchist Voline called "The Unknown Revolution"), becomes the mere backdrop to something else of lesser importance. As Nicholas Walter noted in his review of Avrich's book when it initially came out in 1967:

> "the 1905 Revolution was objectively an anarchist revolution. The military mutinies, peasant risings and workers' strikes (culminating in a general strike), led to the establishment of soldiers' and workers' councils (the famous soviets), and the beginning of agrarian and industrial expropriation – all along the lines suggested by anarchist writers since Bakunin. This aspect of 1905 is mentioned by Avrich, but he… tends to concentrate on the sectarian affairs of the conscious anarchists rather

[1] These issues, and many more, are discussed in my introduction to *Direct Struggle Against Capital*.

[2] See, for example, Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organisation of War Communism, 1918-1921* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[3] Perhaps Avrich's assumptions in favour of centralised economic systems reflect the fact that the book dates from the 1960s when the Soviet Union was generally portrayed as a centrally planned economic power-house to justify the expenditure on the American Military-Industrial Complex and so the problems associated with central-planning were downplayed.

than on the unconscious anarchism of the popular disturbances…

"An anarchist analysis of the 1917 Revolutions leads to… the political revolutions – that is, both the February and October Revolutions – [being] distinguished from the social revolution. The Marxist analysis concentrates on the transfer of power from one regime to another… whereas the anarchist analysis concentrates on the transfer of power from the state to the people.

"Avrich mentions this aspect of the 1917 Revolutions, but again… follows the anarchists themselves in tending to concentrate on their own affairs…"[1]

This also means that while Bolshevik repression of the anarchists is discussed, no mention is made of the repression of workers, unions and strikes by the so-called workers state (the decision of early 1918 that trade union "neutrality was… a 'bourgeois' idea, an anomaly in a workers' state" is mentioned in passing). That this, like the repression of the anarchists, started *before* the revolt of the Czech legion in late May 1918 and continued *after* the end of the resulting civil war is of significance.

That may come as a surprise to most Trotskyist readers as will Avrich recounting how Lenin placed certain works by leading French syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier along with Bakunin and Kropotkin on the banned books Index at the beginning of 1921. This censorship may have been driven by the conflict within the party associated with the "Workers' Opposition". Avrich, rightly, mentions this but it should be noted he repeats the usual position on the "Workers' Opposition" as being a democratic alternative. However, as he admitted in a subsequent book, this conventional wisdom is false for the "Workers' Opposition" (like all Bolshevik factions including Trotsky's later "Left Opposition") "sought to preserve the Bolshevik monopoly of power" and "limited their demands to internal party reform"[2] It is then unsurprising that the "Workers' Opposition" went far beyond just verbally "condemning" the Kronstadt revolt – they willingly volunteered to join the troops sent to crush it.

The suppression of soviet democracy at Kronstadt in early 1921 was no isolated event and like the repression of anarchists and strikes the Bolsheviks started to pack and disband soviets across Russia in the spring of 1918 *before* the civil war began. Avrich does not mention this and although he notes the assassination of the German Ambassador by Left-SRs in passing, he fails to mention that this was driven by Bolshevik packing of the Fifth All-Russian Soviet Congress that denied the Left-SRs their rightful majority. Anarchist – like left-SR and left-Menshevik – hesitancy about supporting the dictatorial and state-capitalist Bolsheviks against the Whites needs this context in order to be fully understood.

Perhaps this is asking too much of a book with a very specific remit but the dynamics of the Russian anarchist movement cannot be understood in isolation from the wider revolution and the continued rise of Bolshevik authoritarianism. The latter *was* to be expected, given how the Bolsheviks were hardly silent on the need for their party to take state power and that they considered this as identical to workers' and soviet power.[3] Any clash between the party and the workers who interests it claimed to embody could only be resolved in one way – the repression of the latter by the former in the name of their "objective" interests by those actually in charge of the so-called "workers' state" (so confirming Bakunin's predictions, ably summarised by Avrich).

The sources for such a work are many and have generally appeared after Avrich's book but section H.6 of *An Anarchist FAQ* (volume 2) has attempted to collate these disparate works to show how Bolshevik ideology impacted negatively on objective circumstances which in turn increased popular alienation against them which, in turn, resulted in increased state repression of the working class and peasantry, paralysing the popular initiative needed to solve the problems facing the revolution. Combine this with the

[1] "Anarchism in Russia", *The Anarchist Past and other essays* (Five Leaves Publications, 2007), 122-4. Avrich's work needs to be supplemented by Walter's excellent review – particularly on the embryonic anarchist movement in the late-nineteenth century which *The Russian Anarchists* does not address well.

[2] Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921* (W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1970), 182-3

[3] As exemplified by the first act of Bolshevik revolution, namely the creation of the Soviet of People's Commissars – *Sovnarkom* – which was a Bolshevik executive body above the soviets in stark contrast to Lenin's *State and Revolution* and its calls for fusing executive and legislative work into one body as per the Paris Commune – see section H.1.7 of *An Anarchist FAQ* (volume 2) for more discussion.

privileged place ideology and party has within Bolshevism and we have a vicious downward spiral of epic proportions.

That Bolshevik ideology played it role in the failure of the revolution can be seen from Avrich's far too short account of the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine which, for all its faults, did not like Bolshevism implement party dictatorship – nor proclaim to the world its objective necessity as Zinioviev did at the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920. Simply put, the Makhnovists operating within the same objective circumstances as the Bolsheviks show the importance of political theory during a revolution – as should be obvious, as the Bolshevik leadership were not operating on autopilot but rather making decisions deeply influenced by their ideology, its assumptions and prejudices as well as their new social position.[1] The prevailing Bolshevik view that the bureaucratic deformations affecting their regime could only be solved by increasing the centralisation which to non-Bolshevik eyes clearly produced them in the first place is one obvious example of how bad theory produces bad practice. There are many, many more.

the debates recounted by Avrich do have some lessons for anarchists today, namely that we should be focused on sensible issues relevant to actual working class life. The message that becomes clear from Avrich's book is that anarchism need not mean disorganised and marginalised groups as his account of Nestor Makhno in the Ukraine shows

The flaws in Avrich's book do not mean that it is not worth reading, far from it. It simply means that it must be read critically and with care, that it needs to be supplemented by other texts. His incorrect account of Kropotkin's ideas and the relation between syndicalism and anarchism (exemplified by his incomplete and so misleading account of Malatesta's 1907 speech) show this best. Sadly, the repeating and reinforcing of the conventional wisdom on these subjects will mean that those whose faith in the Bolshevik Myth may be undermined by this book will be unlikely to investigate the libertarian alternative due to the "allergic" reaction they will suffer. This unfortunate because not only did Kropotkin predict the problems the Revolution faced he also predicted why the Bolshevik solutions would fail as well as pointing to real answers.

Also, Avrich's book has lessons for anarchists today. He shows the negative impact of individuals wishing to be big fish in small ponds and who put their personal egos above the good of the movement. This points to another issue with the book: Avrich does root through the archives and references many original Russian sources but it is hard to tell if these are representative journals or just one or two colourful characters producing interesting – and immensely quotable – diatribes for a handful of others. The journals quoted during 1917, for example, will be representative but can the same be said of those produced in exile or under Tsarist or Bolshevik repression? Similarly, Avrich utilising Leninist or Stalinist publications seems problematic to say the least, even it is occasionally.

Avrich presents a picture of a movement which, while undoubtedly exaggerated, may be familiar to many anarchists today. Exaggerated, for even in terms of the book's subject matter its approach will cause false pictures to be painted as any work that focuses on a movement will inevitably concentrate on its conflicts as agreement never generates as many words – or as much venom – as disagreements. Similarly, Avrich gives the "terrorists" within the movement an unwarranted amount of space for the obvious reason that this is far more exciting – and easier to find in the archives – than the more mundane ("boring") activities of leafleting, organising meetings and talks, creating unions, encouraging strikes, etc. which build a viable movement. Still, the account

[1] see "The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy" by Cornelius Castoriadis (*Political and Social Writings*, volume 3, University of Minnesota Press, 1993)

of the "terrorists" is useful as the futility and waste of a heroic few acting for the many becomes clear. It also raises the question of what would have happened in 1917 if those who died resisting arrest or in the hangman's noose had survived and their energy had been used to push the revolution towards a more libertarian outcome.

So the debates recounted by Avrich do have some lessons for anarchists today, namely that we should be focused on sensible issues relevant to actual working class life. The message that becomes clear from Avrich's book is that anarchism need not mean disorganised and marginalised groups as his account of Nestor Makhno in the Ukraine shows that the right attitude can lead to spectacular results. We must look outwards to the rest of our class as this undermines any tendency towards wasting time, energy and resources in inward-facing polemics over trivial or irrelevant issues.

We need to organise with like-minded people and reject the idea of gathering all anarchists in one organisation (even if we accept the Platform's hope that the "healthy" elements are in the majority and therefore decide policy). Let us organise with those whom we agree and leave the others be – those with the best politics will flourish and grow, the others will remain sects presenting sillier and sillier ideas to a smaller and smaller circle. If we do not grow then it is due to *our* politics and organisation, not because a tiny number of others refuse to join with us. Their ideas are *not* putting people off given the numbers involved and their influence and to suggest otherwise is just avoiding asking awkward questions of *ourselves*.

This does not mean that theoretical or tactical differences should not be discussed – of course they should – but that we must be aware that certain ideas are simply silly, a waste of scare time and resources to bother with. We do not need debates over subjects which are, at worst, crazy ("primitivism") or, at best, not relevant now (such as whether my non-existent workers' resistance group is better than your non-existent syndicalist union). We need to discuss what we have in common and how we can apply these policies in a productive manner. Once we have a movement of tens of thousands rather than hundreds then we can start discussing the issues that only become relevant once certain objective conditions are reached.

As Noam Chomsky recently suggested, social change is like a game of chess but too many radicals become demoralised because they cannot reach checkmate in one or two moves. We must recognise this obvious truism and act appropriately. Indeed, a lack of practical activity may explain the ultra-revolutionary rants of some in the Russian movement – it is easy to be completely correct (at least to your own satisfaction!) if your ideas are irrelevant to actual struggles and events. Holding a position so ideologically pure means that any *real* revolution would never be – particularly during its initial periods – sufficient revolutionary to be anything but a disappointment and faced with problems which were previously assumed away ideologically, perhaps it is unsurprising that many of the previously most intransigent ultra-revolutionaries joined the Bolsheviks? This is in stark contrast to the revolutionary realism Kropotkin expressed in his writings and which he summarised in 1920 with his "Message to the Workers of the Western World".

Marxists will undoubtedly gloat at the in-fighting between anarchists Avrich recounts but any smugness forgets that Lenin produced many a turgid page (when not pamphlet or book) writing polemics against numerous heresies within the Russian and European Marxist movements ("Economism", Mensheviks", "Revisionism", "Millerandism", "Liquidators", "Recallism", "God-builders", "Ultimatism", "Machism", "Kautskyite renegades" *before* the seizure of power;[1] "Left-Communists", "Democratic Centralists", "the Workers' Opposition" *after* it[2]). Then there are the various hair-splitting debates today between the

[1] For those with nothing better to do Grigorii Zinoviev's *History of the Bolshevik Party: A Popular Outline* (New Park Publications, 1973) can be consulted. This work is only notable for an appendix containing a statement issued in March 1923 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party ("To the Workers of the USSR") that summarised the lessons gained from the Russian revolution, namely that "the party of the Bolsheviks proved able to stand out fearlessly against the vacillations within its own class, vacillations which, with the slightest weakness in the vanguard, could turn into an unprecedented defeat for the proletariat." Vacillations are expressed by workers' democracy and so this was rejected: "The dictatorship of the working class finds its expression in the dictatorship of the party." (213, 214)

[2] Leonard Schapiro's *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State: The First Phase, 1917-1922* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1965) is a reliable introduction to these Bolshevik oppositions as well as the right-SRs, the Mensheviks, Left-SRs and the Anarchists. Samuel Farber's *Before Stalinism: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy* (Polity Press, 1990) also discusses these but in less detail.

numerous Marxoid sects, not least on when the Soviet Union finally went beyond reform (was it 1991, 1980, 1968, 1956, 1953, 1936, 1928, 1923, 1921 or, for the best, 1917?) and what is the correct "line" on the pressing issues of the day (such as Stephen Hawking's physics – which was wrong because Hawking's was not a Marxist!). Some of these grouplets make even the weirdest writings and debates at the fringes of Russian Anarchism seem positively sane.

So Leninism has always been marked by the kind of sectarian in-fighting which Avrich documents within anarchism. The image he presents of the anarchists as inherently disorganised and Bolshevik success guaranteed by an efficient party machine was questionable at the time but subsequent research has destroyed that self-serving myth of Leninism. The Bolshevik party in 1917 was very far from the "democratic centralist" organisation it has subsequently been portrayed – unsurprisingly, given that in 1917 it was flooded by thousands of newly radicalised workers who wanted to *act* rather than debate the finer points of a jargon-riddled ideology or await orders through the proper channels. Section H.5.12 of *An Anarchist FAQ* (volume 2) shows that its success in 1917 lay more in its divergence from the principles of Bolshevism than in their application. This does not mean that the party was not marked by bureaucracy (it was), simply that in practice its structures were ignored by the rank-and-file and, ironically, by Lenin: "From April to October, Lenin had to fight a constant battle to keep the Party leadership in tune with the masses."[1] The degeneration of the revolution and the party in and after 1918 was marked by the increasing *application* of the principles Avrich falsely assumes existed within it during 1917.[2]

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To conclude, this book is not history "from below" as the focus on the anarchist movement inevitably turns the Russian Revolutions into a backdrop to its debates and characters. This means that more important movements – such as the factory committee movement – only get mentioned when they intersect with the anarchist movement and so we only get glimpses of the events that delve into the heart of why the revolution failed. These need further research and this happened, with Avrich's book undoubtedly inspiring Maurice Brinton's classic *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* which appeared three years later.[3]

It is annoying when an otherwise useful and important work makes mistakes about foundational issues as is the case here. It undermines the good research in other parts of the book and reinforces false impressions about a subject – anarchism – which seems fated to have nonsense inflicted upon it by, at best, well-meaning but uncomprehending liberal intellectuals or, at worst, malicious Marxists seeking to inoculate the party faithful from the virus of liberty. Still, it is far better that this book was written and is easily available than if it had never appeared. It is, regardless of flaws, a ground-breaking work but others need to produced to create the firm foundation upon which to build our understanding of what really happened in Russia, what went wrong, how do we learn its lessons and what this failure means for all schools of socialism.

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[1] Daniel & Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (AK Press, 2000), 187

[2] Alexander Rabinowitch's 1968 book *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* was the first major work to undermine this image of an "efficient" centralised party.

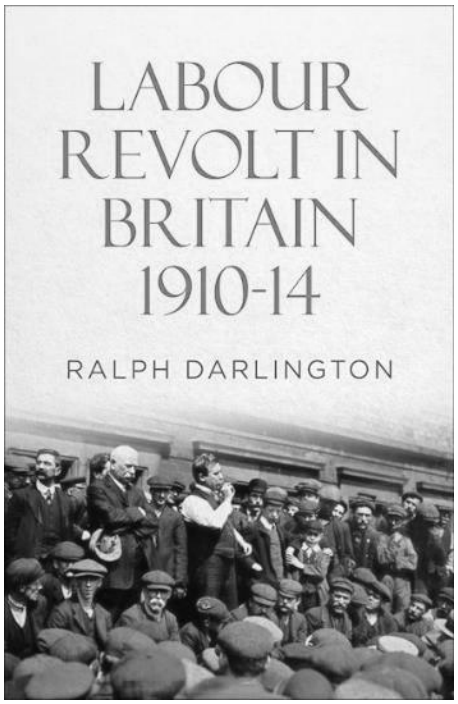
[3] This essential work is contained in *For Workers' Power* and should be read by all socialists, libertarian or not.

A Missed Opportunity

Iain McKay

Ralph Darlington, *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14* (Pluto Press, 2023)

Ralph Darlington is Professor of Employment Relations at the University of Salford whose research is concerned with the dynamics of contemporary and historical trade union organisation, activity and consciousness in Britain and internationally. This has meant he written extensively on syndicalism, including one book focused on it.[1] However, he is also a Leninist, a member of the British SWP, which impacts negatively on all his writings on syndicalism. This is the case with this book, *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14* (Pluto Press, 2023).



Like many countries across the world, Britain experienced a rise in the influence of syndicalist and industrial unionist ideas and activism in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The years immediately before the outbreak of the World War in 1914 experienced massive waves of industrial action within which syndicalists played a key role (indeed, it is sometimes referred to as "the syndicalist revolt"). As such, Darlington is right that a work on this unrest would be useful to activists today. Unfortunately, due to his politics, this is a missed opportunity.

An astute reviewer once noted that the biography of Lenin by Tony Cliff (leader of the SWP until his death in 2000) read like a life of John the Baptist written by Jesus Christ. This informs almost all writings by its members, with work after work explaining what revolutionaries in the past should have done if they had the benefit of the party's politics. Darlington's work reflects this patronising perspective although he generously allows the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) to play a precursor role (in its initial years, for obvious reasons). Still, it must be easy for a Leninist doing any research on earlier radicals and movements for the conclusion is already known before they start, namely the need for a Bolshevik Party.

The book is not without its merits. Part II, on the strikes, is good as it provides a well-written account of the various disputes and how they formed part of a wave of unrest. His discussions in Part III on the dynamics of official and unofficial movements and the role of the union bureaucracy also have useful aspects. Likewise, his recognition that revolutionary politics do not automatically develop from struggles or even the best union organisation (echoing Malatesta, probably unknowingly as he shows no signs of any engagement with the anarchist critique of syndicalism).

Unfortunately, the other three Parts are marred by his ideological assumptions and prejudices. Part of this is his previously expressed downplaying the role of anarchists and anarchism and a corresponding exaggeration of the role of Marxists and Marxism (real or otherwise) in syndicalism.[2] This can be seen here, with the British Socialist Party (BSP) and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) given as much prominence as the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) in terms of "the left" and its impact on the rise and development of the labour unrest. Anarchists are unmentioned beyond three passing references, two to individuals (Rudolf Rocker and Ted Leggett) and the mislabelling of the French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) as "anarcho-syndicalist" (it was revolutionary syndicalist, albeit with a sizeable reformist minority).

Yet Darlington himself gives enough evidence to question this bolstering of the BSP. It is noted how it "could claim 40,000 members in 1912 [the year after its creation], by 1914 this figure had fallen to 13,755 (the majority of whom were merely card-holders)".[3] He does not address what it means that Britain's leading Marxist Party could plumet (or, as Darlington puts it, its

[1] Ralph Darlington, *Syndicalism and the transition to communism: an international comparative analysis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), republished as *Radical Unionism: The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013). For a critique, see my "Syndicalism, Marxist Myth and Anarchist Reality", *Black Flag*, No. 235 (May 2012).

[2] See, for example, "Syndicalism and the Influence of Anarchism in France, Italy and Spain", *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Autumn 2009) and my response "Another View: Syndicalism, Anarchism and Marxism", *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 2012).

[3] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 43. By the time of the unity discussions that eventually formed the CPGB after the

"inability to effectively grow"[1]) in members during a period of unprecedented industrial conflict. He does, of course, point to "many SDP/BSP members [being] involved in trade union and strike activity and solidarity work"[2], but the activity of a few members does not warrant the space he gives to the party, particularly as it approximately the same as the ISEL despite it and its activists playing a far more significant role in events. The reason for so doing seems obvious enough but still unfortunate.

That BSP militants were involved in strikes or solidarity work is a criterion he does not extend to the anarchists for our inclusion in his account. Perhaps it could be argued that this was because the British anarchist movement was small, but he does include the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) in spite admitting it was "a minuscule organisation with no more than 200 members by 1910 and perhaps 300 by 1914"[3]. Given that anarchists had been spreading what became known later as "syndicalist" ideas for many decades, played significant roles in various strikes and the syndicalist groups he does cover, this is unfortunate but sadly to be expected – Leninist anarcho-phobia is well known. So we get two passing references to individuals whilst John Turner, the anarchist head of the Shop Assistant's Union, does not even merit that in spite of his prominent position in the labour movement, the ISEL and his obvious utility as a case study of the limitations and contradictions of working within reformist trade unions. Likewise, the anarchist press which he ignores, such as *Freedom*, were warning of the dangers of "Officialism" within the unions and that the attempts championed by Tom Mann (a leading British syndicalist) to amalgamate the existing unions could increase this.[4] The solution suggested to empower the rank-and-file and getting them used to taking action themselves should be the focus for activists is clearly of relevance.

This lack of engagement with the British anarchists points to a wider problem, namely a lack of historical, international and theoretical context. This is understandable given the ideological perspective of the author but it weakens the book and hinders those readers without a good grasp of socialist history (i.e., your typical Leninist) understand the labour revolt and the role of syndicalism within it.[5]

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This can be recounted quickly enough. Syndicalist ideas on the key role of unions in both fighting and replacing capitalism, the general strike as the means of commencing the social revolution, opposition to "political action" in favour of (what became known as) direct action were raised within the Federalist-wing of the International. Kropotkin, amongst others, championed these before his imprisonment in 1883 and returned to them after the London dock strike of 1889 gave a clear example of their relevance and potential. French anarchists applied these ideas very successfully in the unions that eventually became the CGT and this was termed revolutionary syndicalism (from the French *syndicaliste révolutionnaire*, revolutionary unionism). The example of the CGT inspired similar movements across the globe, including the one in Britain (Mann visited the CGT when he returned from Australia in 1910). While anarchists supported the movement (albeit critically), it also appealed to Marxists disgusted by the reformism and opportunism of Social Democracy as it provided an analysis of why this degeneration occurred as well as an alternative strategy.

These developments were reflected in Britain, with a London meeting in 1891 – attended by Kropotkin, Malatesta and Turner, amongst others – recommending anarchist involvement in the labour movement, with Malatesta pointing to the "good example" of the Spanish movement.[6] This was reflected in *Freedom* and other publications, including the short-lived *The General Strike* (1903–4) and *The Voice of Labour* (1907, relaunched in 1914). These views undoubtedly influenced the wider socialist and labour movement –

war, the BSP had dropped to "about 6,000 members" (Ralph Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of J. T. Murphy* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press], 69).

[1] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 43.

[2] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 43.

[3] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 45.

[4] Iain McKay, "Tom Mann and British Syndicalism", *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 1 No. 3 (Autumn 2021)

[5] Darlington also fails to mention Guild Socialism beyond a passing mention of the "Guild Communist Group" being one of the groupings involved in the creation of the CPGB. (*Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 279). Given that this was a particularly British reaction to the rise of syndicalism, this seems a strange omission.

[6] "Anarchists and the Labour Movement", *The Commonweal*, 7 November 1891. Kropotkin ten years previously had likewise pointed to the Spanish movement as an example to follow ("Le Mouvement Ouvrier en Espagne", *Le Révolté*, 12 November 1881).

Mann's links to anarchism date from the early 1890s, for example – so cannot be ignored as Darlington does without seriously undermining the objectivity and accuracy of any account.

This also impacts on Darlington's suggestion that a fusion of the three major social struggles of the time – the labour revolt, the women's suffrage movement and Irish Home Rule agitation – would have helped produce an even more revolutionary opportunity. For one social grouping noticeably lacking in his account is the immigrant community, then predominantly Eastern European Jews. They warrant two paragraphs[1] – this lack of discussion and that these were organised by Anarchists must, of course, be a coincidence. As it stands, excluding the immigrant struggle is unfortunate given its continuing relevance.

So while syndicalist ideas have developed independently before and after the First International, the history of syndicalism is intimately connected to the revolutionary anarchism which developed within its Federalist-wing. Indeed, the French Revolutionary Syndicalists themselves pointed to that (as did Kropotkin, Goldman, and Malatesta). As such, to fail to discuss any of this means that Darlington's work is lacking and so misleading. After all, the labour unrest of 1910-14 can best be understood by recognising that syndicalist ideas grew wider in influence than the British Anarchist movement and so a critical mass of militants was finally reached which made the movement not only self-sustaining but expanding. This viable alternative undoubtedly drew in activists from Marxist parties who were disillusioned by them, along with news of successful syndicalist movements elsewhere (particularly in France).

Darlington, then, tries to exaggerate the influence of Marxism and the two main Marxist parties in the revolt but his descriptions of the strikes exposes the hopefulness of this. Yes, undoubtedly members of the BSP would have taken part in strikes and solidarity work but syndicalists – as his reporting shows – were at the forefront of such activity. Why the BSP is given such prominence given its anti-syndicalism – so sectarian that it saw it "haemorrhage members" at the end of 1912 when its majority reiterated its position on "political action"[2] – is no more hard to work out than the reason for the lack of anarchism in his account. Indeed, he objects to describing the mood of the period as one of "proto-syndicalism" as "a fairly misleading (and partisan) term" as well as "confusing and misleading."[3] So the suggestion towards the end of the book that the Labour Revolt saw the growth in all sections of the left is somewhat undermined by his earlier admission that BSP membership had plummeted. That this period was marked the growth of the anti-parliamentarian left (anarchists and syndicalists) surely cannot be a coincidence.

Darlington confuses what Social Democracy *became* with what it started *as*. The rise of syndicalism can no more be isolated from the fate of Marxism than it can from anarchist influence.

Which raises another issue, namely Darlington's inability to critically engage with the legacy of Marx and Engels on the labour movement. He reports upon, and rightly laments, the BSP's hostility to industrial action and its focus on "political action" (i.e., taking part in elections) but makes no attempt to explain *where* they got such notions from.[4] There is no discussion of how this was the obvious conclusion to be drawn from the arguments of Marx and Engels in the First International and afterwards, when they stressed again and again the need to organise political parties and take part in elections. Yet the use of "political action", as Bakunin had predicted, saw these parties become reformist (and even counter-revolutionary, as during the German Revolution of 1918-9) and so Darlington confuses what Social Democracy *became* with what it started *as*. The rise of syndicalism can no more be isolated from the fate of Marxism than it can from anarchist influence.

The whole focus of "political action" meant replacing collective struggle for, as one BSP leader noted, had "the workers generally used such political power as they have possessed . . . to capture the political machine . . . the present strike would have been absolutely unnecessary."[5] At least the SLP recognised that political action needed to have a base in economic organisation and struggle. The appeal of syndicalism, with its application of socialist ideas in the constructive work in transforming unions into bodies that not only fight capitalism but also aim to replace it, should be obvious enough given this perspective. Indeed, what can be more individualistic than marking a ballot paper by yourself in a polling booth? This points to strength of the Amalgamation Committees syndicalists were active

[1] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 150-1.
[2] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 263.
[3] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 248.
[4] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 258-9.
[5] Harry Quelch, quoted in *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 259.

in within the unions, namely they along with strikes gave a constructive outlet for militants.

If Darlington criticises the Marxist BSP for its dismissal of economic struggle, he also criticises the syndicalists for failure on "political" issues. This seems confused at times for the syndicalists repeatedly commented upon "political" issues such as the nature and role of the State within capitalist society (which was why they tended to be non- or anti-parliamentarian). It also produces one of the most bizarre criticisms, namely that on the Liverpool transport strike of 1911. He bemoans the lack of discussion of Ireland in the agitation while simultaneously praising the solidarity it generated between Catholic and Protestant workers. It would not be hard to conclude that the strike leaders raising Irish Independence would have swiftly bolstered the sectarian barriers the industrial action was eroding. Yes, in time such questions would be raised by the workers themselves but it would have been suicide for the strike organisers to artificially raise them at the start. Of course, Darlington does not wonder why sectarianism in Liverpool continued after the replacement of syndicalism with Bolshevism within the ranks of the left, suggesting that the problem was more difficult to address than his glib comments would suggest.

He argues that by avoiding the issue, the syndicalists reinforced the sectarian politics of the time based on an old *History Workshop* article contrasting radicals in Glasgow and Liverpool. Yet this article seems to equate voting Labour with ending sectarianism and, as a Glaswegian, I had to laugh at its claim that Glasgow's "working men and women by and large rejected sectarianism and embraced socialism". Suffice to say, sectarianism remained an expression of working-class life as shown by the Orange Lodge and its marches and the number of actual socialists (rather than Labour politicians) elected was few, if any. As for "socialism", well, that appears to mean voting for the Labour Party – or the "right-wing" Labour Party, as Darlington describes it. It should also be noted that the BSP and ILP failed to provide a "political" alternative in Liverpool and they embraced electioneering (we should not discount that this was precisely *because* they were seeking votes and so watered down their position to gain more).

Equally, the notion of this article that the syndicalists thought one mass strike would forge complete class consciousness and unity is a nonsense. "Would that the workers were reasonably prepared to overthrow the wretched system that compels us to work for the profit of a ruling class, and ready to co-operate intelligently for universal well-being," Tom Mann wrote after the end of the Liverpool strike in *Transport Worker* in February 1912. "But we know that the workers are not ready to do this, and we must therefore fall back on something less ambitious for the time being."[1] Darlington follows his source in attributing false notions to the syndicalists. Ultimately, it is hard to see how sectarian barriers could be undermined without fighting on the economic terrain *first* and it is the extremely petty to attack the syndicalists on this when they were simply not putting the cart before the horse.

Ultimately, this attack on the syndicalists success in Liverpool is reminiscent of the BSP position Darlington seems to oppose – the preference for "political action" to the detriment of economic struggle. Ultimately, the notion that (probably) *losing* a major strike by injecting "politics" into it can be considered better than winning one seems strange – unless you view "building the party" as being the be-all and end-all of activism.

Darlington also laments "the dismissive stance adopted towards the women's campaign for the franchise" by syndicalists,[2] suggesting that these movements would have been better off uniting (somehow). Yet he also notes the role of Sylvia Pankhurst and her suffragette organisation in East London in the labour movement and that they were "expelled from the WSPU."[3] He does not explore the difficulties in forging unity with those who "insisted that social questions and class were irrelevant to the women's movement".[4] He notes that the syndicalists argued that women's suffrage would be as useless as men's in terms of overthrowing capitalism, which as a Leninist he can hardly disagree with but here we are in the terrain, I think, of paying lip-service to struggles in order to gain recruits to the party.

Could the industrial and suffrage movement have united? It is possible that a strike wave in favour of women's suffrage would have been powerful means of achieving it but the middle-class leadership of the suffrage movement did not support that. As for the syndicalists, why struggle for something which had not benefited male workers and where direct action was seen as a far more effective alternative to the ballot? Empowering men and women workers within the union movement was understandably considered as a more fruitful use of their limited time and resources. How these two movements could unite is left to the imagination of Darlington's readers, but he provides enough evidence to suggest that such a cross-class grouping would have been inherently unstable if it had come about. As such, to blame this on a lack of appreciation of "politics" by syndicalists seems unfounded and superficial.

Given all this, it is fair to say that Darlington has ideological blinkers as regards Marxism, syndicalism and anarchism. This can also be seen from a footnote in

[1] quoted by Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism 1900-1914: Myths and Realities* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 57.
[2] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 268.
[3] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 37. Also 218.
[4] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 216.

which he references his earlier (flawed) book on syndicalism to suggest syndicalism "did not explicitly address the problem of how a revolutionary general strike to establish workers' control would overcome the state's monopoly of armed force in defence of the capitalist economic and social order"[1] when syndicalists repeatedly did so when explicitly questioned by social democrats on this very point.[2] French Syndicalists also addressed the issue.[3] Now, it is one thing to disagree with these answers or note potential weaknesses, it is another to suggest that they do not exist. Likewise, to say that syndicalists (if not the Marxian Industrial Unionists of the SLP) "did not consider the question of the conquest of political power" is technically correct but to fail to note that they aimed to *destroy* it expresses an ideological blindness – so, in a sense, they *did* see "the need for a political revolution as well as an economic one" just not the one Darlington approves of, namely the conquest of political power by a vanguard power.[4] That such "a political revolution" produced the dictatorship *over* the proletariat suggests the syndicalists were right.

Which brings us to the shortest (and weakest) part of his book, the fourth on the "Aftermath" of the revolt. Here his neo-Trotskyist prejudices and assumptions become explicit. Needless to say, while dutifully noting how syndicalist militants as Tom Mann and Willie Gallacher joined the CPGB (with obvious hopes for radicals today to draw the appropriate implications) he fails to mention that they remained in it under Stalinism (with *actual* relevant lessons for radicals today). For anarchists, this is not that surprising as they had ignored their own experiences in favour of Moscow after the war, so they had no issue with doing so again and again – no matter how contradictory, counterproductive or stupid these instructions were. It is no coincidence that the writings and activism which these militants are remembered for are those of their syndicalist period, not those in the CPGB.

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Darlington does not discuss the context which drew these militants to Bolshevism. News from Russia was unreliable and many revolutionaries outside it projected their hopes and aspirations onto the new regime and the Bolsheviks – including libertarians who thought they had embraced many anarchist tactics and ideas. This meant that syndicalist papers recounted how industry under the Bolsheviks was being run by the workers themselves when, in reality, one-man management had been introduced and strikes broken by military force. By the time the British syndicalists embraced Bolshevism the orthodoxy was in favour of party dictatorship and state capitalism (while the former was acknowledged, the latter was not), the opposite of what they had previously advocated and, ironically, not what had attracted them to Bolshevism in the first place. In short, the apparent success of the revolution blinded them to the fact that, from a genuine socialist perspective, it had failed – just as the apparent success of Social Democracy blinded many to its degeneration.

Darlington fails to mention this, for obvious reasons. He does, however, sketch how "a distinct centralised, national combat organisation" would work miracles[5] but sadly does not explain why such a party has never existed or, being generous and taking the self-imagine of the various Trotskyist sects as reality, grown to be bigger than the BSP in 1914.

Part of the reason for this is that the actual Bolshevik Party in 1917 was not a centralised, disciplined body made up of seasoned professional revolutionaries. Rather it was a decentralised grouping (by necessity if not aspiration) whose membership was predominantly made up of recent joiners who were unwilling to await orders from above. Moreover, Lenin spent a significant amount of time that year fighting the inertia and conservativism of his own party's bureaucracy. The disciplined vanguard party hoped for in *What is to be Done?* became a reality only *after* the party's seizure of power and was a part of the gathering counter-revolution which consolidated that power at the expense of worker and soviet power. The messy reality of 1917 was replaced by an idealised account and this image informs Leninists ever since (as shown by Darlington's alternative).

Perhaps rightly given the scope of this book, Darlington does not explore events after the formation of the

[1] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 269.

[2] For example: "In the plainest of English language, which neither man nor woman here could misunderstand, I commented upon the existence of that power. I also made the straightest possible reference to the means whereby I would deprive them of that power. Isn't that so?" (Tom Mann and Arthur M. Lewis, *Debate between Tom Mann and Arthur M. Lewis : at the Garrick Theatre, Chicago, Illinois, Sunday, November 16, 1913* [Chicago : C.H. Kerr, 1914]), 40.

[3] Émile Pataud and Émile Pouget, *How we shall bring about the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth* (London: Pluto Press, 1990).

[4] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 269.

[5] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 269.

Communist Party and so does not have to ponder why – if the solution to the limitations of syndicalism had been found – that Britain has not been as close to revolution as when syndicalism haunted the minds of its ruling class before and after the First World War. In another work, he (unwittedly) noted in passing some of the reasons for this, reporting on how "[i]n the immediate run-up to the General Strike [in 1926], almost the whole of the CP[GB]'s political bureau . . . was put out of action by a government crack down."[1] Centralised leadership empowers the few at the top which, in turn, makes it easy for the authorities to behead the party. Worse, these few were also just order-takers for "the CP[GB] was part of a centralised world movement. In some respects it owned its very existence to the Russian Revolution and its leaders and members were profoundly influenced and guided by advice and guidance from the Moscow centre. . . In such circumstances the line of the Comintern was bound to be decisive"[2]. During the General Strike, Darlington agrees that this line proved to be disastrous. Still, we can rest assured that Darlington's party has the right people at the top and all will be well.

As his account of the Liverpool Transport Strike of 1911 suggests, Darlington seems impatient, bemoaning that radicals then did not leap to the correct perspectives when, in fact, ideas change through struggle and developments take time. This can be seen in his account of the Shop Stewards' movement during the War, a movement syndicalists were active in. He faults the shop stewards for "refus[ing] to agitate *politically* against the war on the shopfloor, albeit from a minority position"[3] as the Russian Bolsheviks did[4] and so limited themselves to wages and conditions. Again, this feels like a desire to subordinate economic struggles to politics rather than a serious strategy of building working class power.[5] This lack of explicitly anti-war agitation by syndicalist (and often Marxist) shop stewards can be explained by the context these struggles took place in. As one of these activists, J.T. Murphy, later recounted:

> "None of the strikes which took place during the course of the war were anti-war strikes. They were frequently led by men like myself who wanted to stop the war, but that was not the real motive. Had the question of stopping the war been put to any strikers' meeting it would have been overwhelmingly defeated. The stoppages had a different origin and a different motive."[6]

So, again, while in the abstract these activists can be bemoaned for not pursuing a favoured path, the realty on the ground was different. Would it have been better for the Shop Stewards movement to be strangled at birth by its activists raising anti-war views? Or that it had been led by others, lacking a wider revolutionary perspective? Or would it be better to see it grow with the hope that anti-war views would be articulated as appropriate? After all, syndicalists (in Britain and elsewhere) managed to publicly oppose the war suggesting that it is not syndicalism's opposition to "politics" which is the issue here but rather these specific syndicalists and the context they found themselves in.[7] It is not hard to conclude that Darlington would prefer no struggle taking place simply so that party could gain a few more members (at least for a while, given the turn-over rate of these vanguards).

This is, I feel, the logical conclusion from a perspective which views building a *party* as being of more importance than building a *movement*. Darlington rightly notes the important role *The Daily Herald* and its league played in the revolt, being a forum for all rebel movements (syndicalist, suffragette, or whatever). He does not dwell on the awkward fact that no Leninist newspaper would be what *The Daily Herald* was – indeed, the notion that such a paper would print anything about a rival group or theory that was not a travesty would express a touching naivety.

As such, Tom Mann's lament when he resigned from the BSP that activists spent too much time on seeking electoral glory than building working class strength still rings true – although now that would include time spent on building whatever political sect they happen to be in. This is not to suggest that there is no role or need for a specific anarchist federation to influence the wider movement, simply that the Marxist party-fetish needs to be rejected.

The book ends by noting that the labour unrest had "some very distinctive features that were not replicated,

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[1] Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of J. T. Murphy*, 117.
[2] Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of J. T. Murphy*, 122.
[3] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 276.
[4] Or are asserted to have done, as no reference is provided – presumably because that is the official line.
[5] Need it be mentioned that protests and strikes which produced the February Revolution began with economic demands? Or that the local Bolsheviks opposed these direct actions which brought down the Tsar?
[6] Quoted by Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of J. T. Murphy*, 42.
[7] Murphy's 1917 pamphlet *The Workers' Committee* not mentioning the war is used as an example of this. (*Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 276) A more charitable (and perhaps more accurate) explanation would be that Murphy's pamphlet is expounding upon general organisational forms and strategies, so discussion of current affairs (no matter how important) would distract from that (as well as dating the document unnecessarily). It is a pamphlet on general workplace organisation rather than arguing for a specific strategy in response to specific attacks or issues. As such, Darlington is complaining that a pamphlet written for a specific purpose did not other issues which are outwith its scope.

or at least not quite in the same intense and wider-ranging fashion"[1] in later struggles without concluding that this was because there was no "party of a new type" around to sidetrack those conflicts and militants into the dead-end of Bolshevism. Yes, this period is an important one which shaped the British Labour movement for decades afterwards. It should be studied and lessons gained from it. Unfortunately, this book will not allow that to be done. Ultimately, it shows the promise of the Labour Unrest in creating a significant extra-parliamentary minority within the labour movement did not come to pass, mostly because Bolshevism replaced these tendencies.

What comes clear from Darlington's account is that the anarchist stress on economic and social struggle and movements rather than "political action" was well-founded. The radicalising impact of strikes – of direct action in general – can be seen from the numerous anti-union laws imposed by various Tory governments over the years (and not reversed by New Labour). Indeed, much of the direct action and solidarity of the time would be illegal now – sympathy strikes, strikes decided upon at mass meetings, not giving two weeks' notice, etc., etc., etc. These State inferences in the labour market shackling the unions has ensured that labour has managed to keep less and less of the wealth we produce, with it flooding upwards into the hands of the plutocratic few, as well as undermining the development of class consciousness. The ruling class clearly recognises where our power lies but most socialists did not seem to and most still consider standing for elections as a useful activity (in spite of over 100 years of evidence confirming the anarchist critique of it producing reformism).

The ruling class clearly recognises where our power lies but most socialists did not seem to and most still consider standing for elections as a useful activity (in spite of over 100 years of evidence confirming the anarchist critique of it producing reformism).

The debates he recounts on dual unionism, "boring from within" and rank-and-file movements are still important. The latter for Darlington is considered a lesson from the period (after the need for a Bolshevik-style party). This is to be expected as the Clyde Workers' Committee is usually referenced by Leninists when they discuss industrial strategy but the fact that it is *always* this example which is invoked should, perhaps, be cause for concern. Simply put, none of the strategies advanced have worked in their own terms whatever merits they may have but they are all aspects of syndicalism rather than Bolshevism and so should be re-evaluated without that legacy hanging over them.

Strangely, Darlington points out that the contradictory behaviour of reformist union bureaucrats "can be explained by the sophisticated syndicalist analysis of official trade unionism that developed"[2] but that is quickly forgotten in the next section ("Tom Mann and Union Officialdom") when he suggests that Mann "seemed to think that a militant rank-and-file, committed to direct action and grassroots union democracy, would be able to force incumbent union officials either to act in the interests of members or be pushed aside from below."[3] This is not that far from the Clyde Workers' Committee's famous summation of its role:

"We will support the officials just as long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them. Being composed of Delegates from every shop and untrammelled by obsolete rule or law, we claim to represent the true feeling of the workers. We can act immediately according to the merits of the case and the desire of the rank and file."[4]

Which suggests that encouraging a sense of power within workers and encouraging our ability to act for ourselves is far more important than any given strategy. Indeed, we should reject a "one-size fits all approach" to industrial organising and recognise that some strategies are more appropriate than others in specific situations.

Darlington, however, bemoans how "syndicalists concluded that *all* leadership, whether from official *or* unofficial sources was bound to stifle the independence and initiative of the rank-and-file"[5] Yet it is not hard to conclude that they had a point – empowering the rank-and-file is more fruitful than getting them to follow a new set of leaders. He suggests that "the syndicalists *did* provide a form of informal leadership, particularly when they urged them to take strike action, often independent of union officials"[6] yet this is confounding two radically different notions – that of leading and that of giving a lead, or a leadership of people and a leadership of ideas. The former keeps people dependent on others, the latter builds the confidence and empowerment to act for yourself. This feeds into Darlington suggesting, against

[1] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 279.
[2] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 200
[3] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 203
[4] Quoted by Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of J. T. Murphy*, 15.
[5] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 208.
[6] *Labour Revolt in Britain 1910-14*, 208.

the syndicalists, that changing the form of the unions would not change their content yet this fails to recognise that form and content interact. Certain *forms* of organisation encourage the participation, debate and self-activity by which the members ideas (*content*) change while others hinder it.

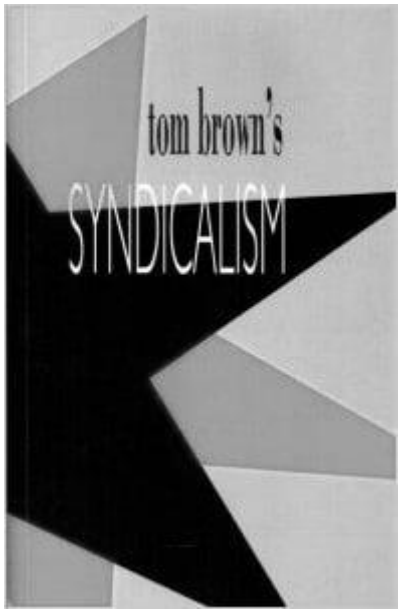
While this is irrelevant to Leninists – who argue how we organise *now* need not reflect the socialist society we aim for – it is not for those seeking to learn from history rather than repeat it. After all, the tragedy of this period is that militants who had originally supported the Bolsheviks because they thought that their ideas on radical democracy, workers' control and anti-capitalism had became advocates of a regime based on party dictatorship, controlled workers and state-capitalism. The farce is that, given what we know now (and then, given the accounts of anarchists like Goldman and Berkman, amongst others), Darlington wants to repeat it. The interrelationship between means and ends, of form and content, needs to be stressed, not dismissed.

Before Darlington's book, the only significant work on this period was Bob Holton's *British Syndicalism 1900-1914: Myths and Realities* (London: Pluto Press, 1976). Sadly, that remains the best account of British Syndicalism and Darlington's must be considered a missed opportunity. While his account of the strike wave is excellent and more comprehensive than Holton's, the book is marred by the politics of its author and his preconceptions, biases and prejudices do not allow him to draw obvious conclusions from the evidence he provides. It may be argued that his book is on the Labour Revolt rather than Syndicalism but the two are interwoven and to downplay the latter ensures that the former cannot be fully understood nor lessons gained.

Tom Brown's Syndicalism

Tom Brown, *Syndicalism* (London: Phoenix Press, 1990)

The book is only marred by a superficial introduction to his life, albeit not malicious (like the ones Rocker has suffered). He is described as a 'latter day Tom Mann'! (Tom Brown's contemporary Tom Mann was a Syndicalist organiser in the trade unions in his early days and a CP hack orator in his latter days). Tom's clear style of addressing audiences, his long industrial struggles, his patience in addressing the problems of anarcho-syndicalism, and the existence of a movement that owes much to him, are not given coverage.



As a member of the editorial board of War Commentary, when Freedom Press was revived from the dead as a publishing wing of the then Anarchist Federation, many were incensed at the way petty intellectuals like Woodcock & Co emerged from the woodwork to take it over and advance their careers; in what is described here as 'unhappy circumstances, but on a point of principle' Brown was pushed out quite shamelessly (by people who now also occasionally reprint his articles to glorify themselves but for years found no slander too great). He warned that the intellectuals would abandon their 'anarchism' when they had made their name as writers, but the mafiosi mentality would ensure business control of the publishing resources for another 40 years. Many thought he was exaggerating the danger: in fact, as that would have been 1984, and the financial and managerial control is still in the same hands, none can now deny the anarchist movement lost its publishing house forever and is unlikely to get it back.

Tom formed the Syndicalist Workers Federation (which later merged with others into the DAM); he was concerned in two important dockworkers strikes where, had we a press and a HQ building, we could have achieved a positive movement second to none in the world. But it was gone.

He was also active in community struggles. When in the part of London where he lived (owned by the Church Commissioners) the Mob moved in to run nightclubs and turn it into a brothel area, his neighbours selected him spokesperson for a protest group. He was beaten up with iron clubs going home from the nightshift, so badly he was unable to work any more.

A third 'gangster' attack of a different sort came when, retired, almost disabled and weak in Newcastle, he wrote his memoirs by hand. A University student (who knows where her career has led her?) offered to type the two volumes, if she could use parts for her thesis. Maybe she did, and maybe she didn't, but he never saw them again.

Pity there was no real autobiographical intro – how could there be? – but the book is an essential introduction for friends at work who are unconvinced of the anarcho-syndicalist case or put off it by pseudo-anarchists. It does not deal solely with 'theory' but with an explanation of capitalism, trade unionism, economics and evergreen topical issues written from the perspective of the person in the street.

Adios to Colette Durruti

Rob Latchford[1]

The only descendant of the anarchist revolutionary José Buenaventura Durruti has died in France at the age of 93.

Colette Durruti, daughter of the anarchist revolutionary José Buenaventura Durruti and the French libertarian activist Émilienne Morin, has died in France where she spent most of her life. Also known as Diana, Colette was the only daughter of the historic anarchist fighter, a key figure during the Spanish Civil War.

Colette Durruti
4th December 1931 to 19th April 2025

Born in Barcelona on December 4, 1931, she was born while her father was in prison, during the Second Republic. They barely knew each other. She was only 5 years old when her father died on the Madrid front during the early days of the Spanish Civil War. However, she has always remembered him, "with affection," as she acknowledged in a French magazine a few years ago.

Daughter of the Revolution

Colette's childhood was marked by economic hardship and constant moving, but also by a family relationship based on equality and mutual support.

During the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, her mother joined the Durruti Column on the Aragon front, leaving Colette in the care of an anarchist companion. A few months later, her father died on the Madrid front when she was only five years old. That event would mark her life and that of her mother, who was determined to raise her faithful to libertarian ideals.

After the war, mother and daughter went into exile in France, where Colette lived for the rest of her life. In the 1950s, she acquired French nationality when she married Roger Mariot, with whom she had two daughters, Yvon and Rémi — the latter of whom died in an accident in 1989. Settled in Brittany, she managed a dairy company before retiring to the French Pyrenees.

Libertarian Commitment to the End

Throughout her life, Colette Durruti never abandoned her anarchist ideology. She actively participated in memorial events and tributes to historical figures of the anarchist movement, keeping alive the memory of her father and an entire revolutionary generation. She said she knew little about her father, despite having read books and seen photographs depicting the adventures he experienced. In 2009, she participated in the documentary Celuloide colectivo, dedicated to films produced during the Civil War, and in 2019, she participated in a commemorative event at the Montjuïc Cemetery.

Despite having spent little time with her father, Colette spoke of him with admiration and tenderness.

[1] https://freedomnews.org.uk/2025/04/22/adios-to-colette-durruti/

John Couzin, *in Memoriam*

James Kelman

for Stasia

John Couzin (1934-2025)

When we talk about the Spirit of Revolt archive we're talking about history, our history, and our history is radical history. It is a marginalised and often suppressed history. I mean by that that it is kept from us. There is no conspiracy. We can speak of it as a class issue. It is not in the interests of the State and the ruling class to promote the history of the people. This is the history to which John Couzin dedicated so much of his life. It begins here in central Scotland but does not end there.

This archive, and archives such as this, are the most fundamental link that we have to our radical past. It is here we make extraordinary discoveries about our family and our community. And we ask ourself, how come I didn't know that? How come word wasn't passed down from one generation to the next?

The Spirit of Revolt archive is there as an account and a record of the countless numbers of people who have gone before, beginning from those who have entrusted their papers and records to the archive, and the different people who have contributed to its existence. It's not a collection of names as in the footnotes to an academic text book, it's everything that conveys to us the wider picture. Letters, notebooks, scraps of paper; flyers, posters and programmes, the one-off magazines, journals; alternative sources of information; all the bits and pieces - gossip, most welcome.

Archives of this nature have it in them to act as a guiding light. In this most crucial sense they connect us not just to the past but to the present, to wider circles of friends, acquaintances and comrades, linked in various ways. Our history is part of a much wider history. This isn't a club, it's a movement, a movement towards liberation. Older comrades spoke about the labour and socialist movements. Some of that way of thinking remains relevant. That very word, movement, it's a dynamic thing. It's life. That is life. Life is movement, it is process. The liberation struggle is a process. An archive allows entry into that process. The links between archives take us everywhere. All corners of the globe.

Right here and right now, we are among friends and comrades. This is how we should view the Spirit of Revolt archive, the SOR. Within the archive we are in contact with comrades old and new, activists within the movement, people who fought and struggled as well as they could, who made good moves and wrong moves. People, just people. We discover further that these old comrades and activists include people we know, the names of relatives, ancestors, people who were pals of our parents, of our grandparents; friends and acquaintances from previous generations. We use archival links and trace stuff going back a couple of hundred years.

The names of people in and around where we're walking, walking where we've just walked. Our relations, their friends, their acquaintances, their comrades: spanning the generations. This is our own history. We get an idea of the power of that if we stop and think about it. We don't have to go anywhere. Here we are in Maryhill crematorium, a cemetery in Cadder. We walk out the door, go a couple of hundred yards and look for the graves of Keir Hardie and Donald Macrae, and do a wee bit of digging - not literally . . . We can do it online. They're both buried here.

One of the better obituaries of Keir Hardie came from his old friend and comrade, James Connolly, a well-kenned figure in the city. This was way before John Wheatley's house in Shettleston became a meeting place. Wheatley organised a discussion club that may have begun for young Catholic-Socialists, but evolved into more than that: Jews, atheists, anarchists, all shades of red, 'godless beings' also welcome, even Protestants from Ulster, like Captain Jack White who came with Connolly and Jim Larkin.

A wee bit more digging and we see that Keir Hardie's ancestor was Andrew Hardie, the weaver from Townhead, murdered alongside his comrade John Baird, murdered by due process of the British State in 1820. A wee lassie in Barrhead was two years old at the time - Helen Macfarlane, who came to know Marx and Engels and wrote the first translation of the Communist Manifesto.

The other guy mentioned, Donald Macrae, was known as the Alness Martyr. Later on, after he was blacklisted across the mainland, he got a job in the Outer Hebrides. He led the Deer Park Raid in Lewis back in 1887. Finding out about that links us into another great archive, founded by Angus 'Ease' Macleod of Carbost. I used this and discovered a relation of my own wound up in prison alongside Macrae in Edinburgh. I didnay make the discovery until twelve years ago – when I was sixty six!

We're up a hill here. Look across the rooftops of Summerston housing scheme and you'll see Dumgoyne Hill. The wee village down from there is where 'the godless' George Buchanan was born five hundred years ago, hated by nobilities and hierarchies everywhere; imprisoned by the Inquisition, who wrote the most powerful attack on the divine right of kings. Five minutes down the road go the canal path and it takes you to Lambhill Stables where there's a monument to the Cadder Pit Disaster of 1913: 22 miners were killed; 11 Protestants and 11 Catholics. Because of that religious divide these workmates were buried separately.

What an indictment, so shameful, so needless. whether we like it or not, that sectarianism is how it was and how it remains, the sectarian fires stoked by the British State. But it doesnay have to be like that.

Closer to home, take a ten minute walk from here down the other side of Gilshochill, there's an Orange Lodge on Sandbank Street. The Chartist leader, Arthur O'Neill, led the Maryhill contingent from there two hundred years ago! The flute band led the march, the Chartists.

These are our people. This is the beating heart of the Spirit of Revolt. Warts and all. All of them. They are all at the core of our radical tradition. Every shade on the left of the political spectrum is found here. Guy Aldred, Arthur McManus and John Maclean spoke from the same platform, literally, one of these occasions they both chanced to be out of prison and in Glasgow at the same time. There is no room for sectarianism, neither religious nor political.

The State and establishment tells us that we exist in the outer reaches, people who take to the streets, people who say no, the non-voters, the anarchists, anti-parliamentarians, ragers against the system, where the State teaches that no distinction exists between left and right, the furthest branches of extremism, 'terrorists', dedicated to open warfare against all that's holy, decent, and obedient; obedient to the law, obedient to the word of the law, obedient to the officers of the law, obedient to the authority of the law, the authority of the authority, ministers, priests, rabbis or mullahs; lawyers, doctors, educators, bureaucrats, professional politicians, father, son and all kinds of holy men.

Obedience obedience, at all costs obedience. It is the exercise of authority, a priori, and by a priori I mean that this authority exists before we do, we are born into it. It is the colonisation of our space as human beings. This is the alienation Marx wrote about, the working class experience, lower order people, born into subjection, alienated from our own humanity. We aren't allowed to be human. We are taught to ignore empathy, fellowship, taught to step over beggars in the street or become walking charities. Who will we help survive this morning, the freezing old lady who sits outside Aldi's or the guy with the shakes who sits on a wet pavement outside the Bank of Scotland. Who gets the cup-a-soup, who gets the Gregg's sausage roll.

These spirals of distress and despair. All of that is the basis of the rage, and those whose lives and commitments are found in the SOR archive. We grieve for people who were trampled into the earth a couple of hundred years ago never mind yesterday. That is the nature of humanity: solidarity and empathy are at its core. This is the key to John Couzin's rage against the system, and so many other friends, acquaintances and comrades whose

personal archives are collected here in SOR. It is the basis of their passion, moved by the memory of those who suffered agonies in conflict, through needless accidents, injuries, and toxic contamination. Avoidable deaths, avoidable tragedies.

The history to which John Couzin dedicated so much of his life was radical history, a history that begins here in central Scotland but does not end there, no matter from where we hail. Dialogues, forums and discussions feature names from anywhere and everywhere. We cannot separate the cultural from the political. It was not just his political activism, it was his love of the arts, his love of our culture. The archivist is a tradition bearer. The social and cultural are integral within our radical history, the stuff we wrote, the pictures painted, the games we played, the songs and the music. All of these ideas and blethers and theories, actions and transactions, they cross all divisions and boundaries. Glasgow's radical history is internationalist and cannot help but be internationalist. It is not possible to enter into that radical tradition and not be internationalist. Global capital forces this upon us anyhow. We have to turn away not to see it. Imperialism and colonisation begin right here, at the very heart of what it is to be human. Our cause is freedom and the essence of our struggle is solidarity. The anti-authoritarian movement spans the world, is supported by millions of people, and is in solidarity with millions of people throughout the world. Look around. Everywhere people are engaging, defending, struggling, and fighting, across the continents.

An archive like the Spirit of Revolt doesn't shape what we do but it throws light on areas that otherwise remain concealed from us. It is the most tremendous resource, and is there to be used. It doesn't operate until we make use of it. If we don't it remains dormant. We bring it to life. It is up to us. It is an account and a record of the struggles fought, the campaigns waged by our own people. We use it and we learn from it. We discover what actually happened, the reality of what it was to take part, to get involved, to take them on and fight for what we believe.

Earlier I mentioned Dumgoyne Hill. There's another wee hill way before there, near Antonine's Wall. That's the old village of Summerston, the original Summerston. It even had its own railway station. Joe McAtamney was born there and loved talking about the history. Years ago in the Scotia Bar, I was having a pint with Joe. Ye'll need to come in and meet with me and John Couzin, he says, us and a couple of pals, he says, we meet every week. John's kind of grumpy, he's an anarchist, but ye'll like him.

Joe was spot on.

John Couzin. RiP.

Parish Notices

Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty (ECAP) organises to combat poverty on the principle of solidarity and self-activity in communities and workplaces, actively rejecting influence by *any* political parties. They work and fight alongside individuals facing poverty related problems and oppressive behaviour from the authorities. They also conduct wider campaigns on specific issues using the same principles of solidarity and self-activity. ECAP was set up by people affected by low incomes, unemployment, too sick to work, lone parents & all those affected by poverty or up against the authorities. They invite people to get involved, for example by joining regular advocacy stalls outside High Riggs and Leith jobcentres. Website: edinburghagainstpoverty.org.uk; email: ecapmail@gmail.com; postal address: ECAP, c/o 33 Tower Street, Edinburgh, EH6 7BN (mail only).

IWA-AIT is now listing Contacts in China (anarchosyndchina.mystrikingly.com) & Köln (asnkoeln.wordpress.com).

IFA has published documents prepared for discussion at the Balkan Anarchist Bookfair, that was held in Thessaloniki in May 2025 - 'Capital, State, war and anarchist responses': i-f-a.org/2025/05/18/capital-state-war-and-anarchist-responses-discussion-at-bab2025

The IWW Pan-African Worker's Association (PAWA) is a support network for African workers in the UK aimed at improving working conditions and possibilities. If you are an African worker and want to get help with working conditions, government regulations or just want to make friends with some fellow comrades, please get in touch: pawa.uk

Solidarity Federation-IWA has re-launched its bulletin, *Direct Action*. Two issues so far: solfed.org.uk/da/direct-action-solidarity-federation-2024-issue-2

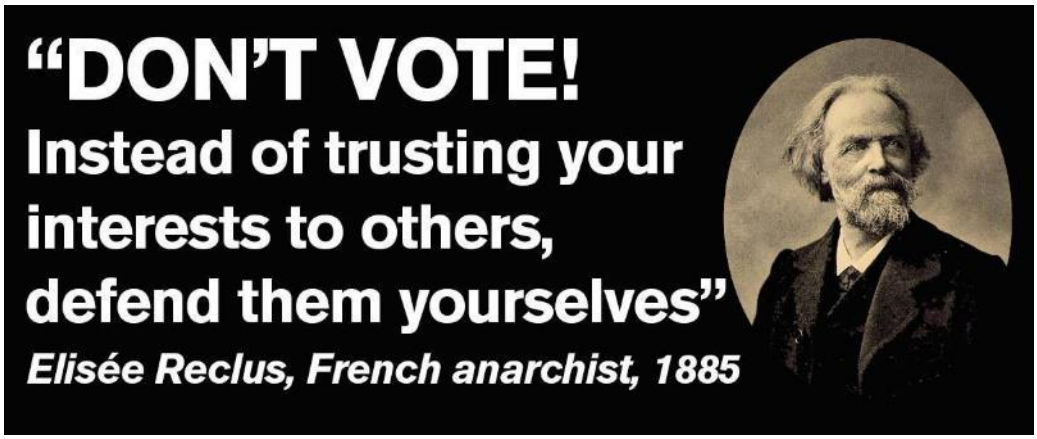
Inspired by Camillo Berneri's newspaper *Guerre de Classe, w*hich was edited by him in Italy and in exile in Spain until his assassination on May 5th 1937, members of 'Organise!' in the Republic of Ireland are producing an anarcho-syndicalist bulletin, *Class War*. Now quarterly: organiseanarchistsireland.com/class-war

Please let us know if you are publishing a Libertarian Socialist freesheet.

To Vote is to be Dupes

Elisée Reclus, *Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, January 1910[1]

(A translation as published in *The Anarchist*, London, December 1885, of a letter by Elisee Reclus, published as a poster by the Anarchist Propaganda Group of Paris at the time of the General Election in France in the autumn of 1885)



Clarens (Vaud), Switzerland
September 26, 1885

Companions,

You ask a man of good will, who is neither a voter nor a candidate, to give you his opinions on the exercise of the right of suffrage.

The time you give me is short, but having definite opinions on the subject of the electoral vote, what I have to say can be said in a few words.

To vote is to abdicate, to nominate one or more masters for a period short or long is to renounce one's own sovereignty. Whether he becomes absolute monarch, constitutional prince or a simple mandatory endowed with the smallest part of royalty, the candidate whom are lead to the throne or the chair will be your superior. You nominate men who will be above the laws since they undertake to make them, and their mission will be to make you obey.

To vote is to be dupes. It is to believe that men like yourselves acquire suddenly at the tinkling of a bell the power of knowing and understanding everything. Your mandatories having to legislate on everything, from lucifer matches to ships of war, from clearing off caterpillars from trees to the extermination of peoples red or black, it must seem to you that their intelligence will enlarge by virtue of the immensity of the task. History teaches that that the contrary will be the case. Power has always made its possessors foolish, parlotage has always stupefied. In ruling assemblies mediocrity fatally prevails.

To vote is to evoke treason. Doubtless the voters believe in the honesty of those to whom they accord their suffrages, and they may have reason the first day when the candidates are in the fervour of their first love. But when his environment changes, man changes with it. Today the candidate bows before you and perhaps too low. Tomorrow he'll straighten himself up and perhaps too high. He begs your votes, he will give you orders. Can the working man who has become a foreman remain what he was before he received this favour of his employer? Does not the noisy democrat learn to curve his spine when the banker consents to invite him into his office, when the servants of the king do him the honour to entertain him in antechambers? The atmosphere of legislative bodies is unwholesome to breathe. You send your mediocrities into a place of corruption, be not astonished if they come out corrupted.

Therefore do not abdicate. Do not entrust your destinies to men inevitably incapable and future traitors. Do not vote! Instead of confiding your interests to others, defend them yourselves; instead of taking advocates to propose a mode of future action, ACT. Occasions will not be missing for those who want them. To throw on others the responsibility for one's own conduct is to be lacking in courage.

I salute you with all my heart, Companions.

Élisée Reclus

[1] A different translation appeared as "Why Anarchists don't vote", *Mother Earth*, July 1913 (*Black Flag*)