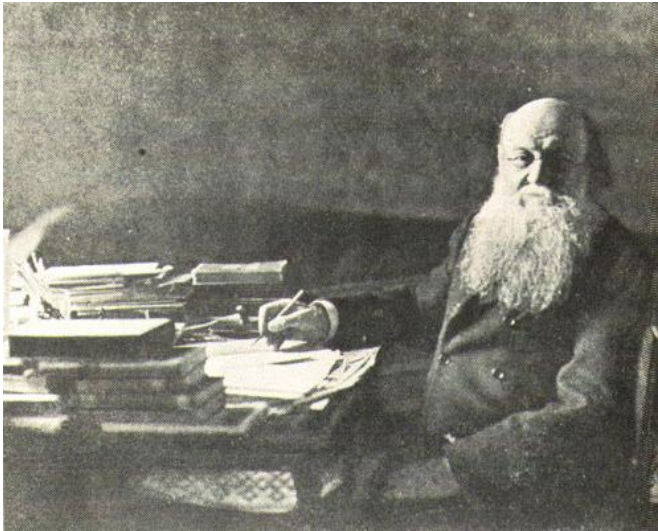


Black Flag

Anarchist Review



**Peter
Kropotkin
(1842-1921)**

The Kronstadt Uprising 1st March 1921



The Paris Commune 18th March 1871

And much more...

Spring 2021

Volume 1

Number 1



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Editorial

Welcome to the relaunched *Black Flag*!

Originally established by Albert Meltzer and Stuart Christie in 1968 as the *Bulletin of the Anarchist Black Cross*, it was renamed *Black Flag* in 1971 and has seen many formats and frequencies over its five decades of existence. At times a fortnightly newspaper (as during the Miners' Strike of 1984-5), sometimes a quarterly, bi-annual or annual magazine, whether subtitled “for anarchist resistance” or “excitingly irregular”, it always presented a mixture of current struggles and libertarian history. We aim to continue this, albeit with more emphasis on the latter than the former for what we hope will be obvious reasons.

This incarnation will be (at least) a bi-annual journal following in the footsteps *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* published in the 1970s. It will be a collection of new translations, rare articles and reprints of the best libertarian articles and reviews, whether modern or old. We will continue its tradition of advocating class struggle anarchism (whether syndicalist or not) and we are open to articles from that tradition or those close to it.

Why bother with the past? Simply because unless you understand and learn from the past, you will be doomed to repeat it. Moreover, what passes for “history” in radical circles is all too often unrelated to the facts of the matter, written (and often rewritten) to meet the requirements of party lines and hierarchies. Debunking the myths peddled by enemies of anarchism is always worth the effort, particularly if this also helps modern-day anarchists to get a better understanding of our forefathers and foremothers.

This issue sees the mix of current and historical very much in favour of the latter. Some may consider this unfortunate, but as Kropotkin said, “only those who do nothing make no mistakes”. Ultimately, *Black Flag* reflects those involved and willing to put in time and effort: if you want the mix to change, then get involved. 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:

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In Commemoration of Peter Kropotkin

Robert Graham

February 8, 2021 marked the 100th anniversary of the death of Peter Kropotkin. In his time, Kropotkin was one of the foremost exponents of anarchist communism, an anarchist revolutionary and a well-respected scholar.

Kropotkin was born into a prominent aristocratic Russian family in December 1842, during the reign of Czar Nicholas I. The political situation in Russia was bleak. Michael Bakunin, who later played an important role in the creation of anarchist movements across Europe, was imprisoned by Nicholas in the Peter and Paul fortress in 1851 and kept in solitary confinement for the next two years. Kropotkin became a prisoner of Nicholas' son, Alexander II, some 23 years later in the same fortress, illustrating the continuity of political repression in Czarist Russia.

Kropotkin was born with the title of Prince, which he ceased using when he was 11, but that has not stopped others from subsequently using that title to identify him, sometimes to discredit him politically, other times in a misguided attempt to emphasise his stature, as if there was something inherently noble about him.

Kropotkin himself has left a vivid description of his early life in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. With an imperious and distant father, and a mean stepmother straight out of an old Russian folk tale, Kropotkin spent more time with his family's peasant servants and his non-aristocratic tutors than he did with his parents. He could see that peasants were really no different from him, and he no better than them, despite his aristocratic status. This helped lay the foundation for a lifetime commitment to equality and equity.

Kropotkin was hand picked by the Czar himself to join his prestigious Corps of Pages. Kropotkin eventually became the personal page to Nicholas' successor, Alexander II. Never comfortable with court life and intrigue, in 1862 Kropotkin transferred to a Cossack regiment in Siberia where he thought he would have more freedom to follow his scientific interests. He explored the Siberian wilderness and began to develop a reputation as a geographer. He also attempted to

ameliorate the conditions of political prisoners in Siberia, but his report on the Siberian penal system was ignored. After the execution of five Polish prisoners who had attempted to escape to Mongolia, Kropotkin resigned his commission and returned to St. Petersburg in 1867 to pursue his university studies.

It was in Siberia that Kropotkin was first introduced to anarchist ideas, obtaining a copy of Proudhon's *System of Economic Contradictions* from the collection of one of the Russian political exiles, the poet Mikhailov, after the latter's death from tuberculosis. But it was not until 1871 that Kropotkin really began his journey into radical politics.

Kropotkin returned to his family estate to see what he could do for the peasants in the area, but was advised by an old priest that the only way that he could do anything

The role of the anarchists was to work with the workers and peasants, to awaken their revolutionary potential through propaganda and collective action

without being jailed would be to assume the role of a travelling preacher, which would have required too much deception for an unbeliever like him to pull off.

Kropotkin then decided to travel to Switzerland in the spring of 1872, which was far more welcoming to political refugees and exiles back then. He wanted to find out more about the International Workingmen's Association, which had a number of sections in Switzerland. He came into contact with Nicholas Utin, leader of a reformist faction within the International in Geneva allied with Karl Marx. Kropotkin was unaware at the time that Utin was compiling a dossier against Bakunin that Marx was to use at the September 1872 Hague Congress of the International to justify expelling Bakunin from the International.

It was enough that Kropotkin witnessed Utin trying to get the Geneva building trades to renounce strike activity because it would harm the election chances of a reformist candidate. This led Kropotkin to seek out the more radical Swiss sections of the International, eventually meeting up with members of the Jura Federation who, under the influence of Bakunin, were developing an anarchist conception of revolutionary socialism.

Kropotkin was impressed by the independence of mind of the Jura Internationalists, many of whom earned their living as watchmakers. In contrast to Utin's reformist Geneva section of the International, in the Jura Federation there was no separation between leaders and led. Everyone expressed themselves freely, as they debated how best to achieve a libertarian socialism. It was the example of the Jura workers that convinced Kropotkin to become an anarchist.

Kropotkin wanted to stay in Switzerland but Bakunin's associate, James Guillaume, convinced him that he could do more valuable work back in Russia. Kropotkin returned to St. Petersburg and joined the radical populist group, the Chaikovsky Circle. He appears to have been the only anarchist in the group, and wrote an early exposition of his ideas to persuade other members to adopt an anarchist stance, "Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System."

At the time, Kropotkin argued for equal access to raw materials, the means of production and distribution, the means of subsistence, housing, health care and education, so that everyone would be able to live by their own labour without being exploited by anyone else (a position then described as "collectivism," in contrast to anarchist communism, which advocated the complete abolition of wage labour). Even at this early stage of Kropotkin's political development, he was advocating the break down of the division of labour and ending the separation between manual and intellectual work. With respect to political organisation, Kropotkin defended Proudhon's positive conception of anarchy, a federation of communal and productive units with no central state or bureaucracy above them.

In 1874, Kropotkin was arrested and imprisoned for his revolutionary activities. After two years in the Peter and Paul fortress, he and a group of comrades organised a spectacular day light escape from the hospital wing of the prison. Kropotkin made his way to England, and then back to Switzerland to reunite with the Internationalists there. He immersed himself in the nascent anarchist movement, and attended the last congress of the anti-authoritarian sections of the International in Verviers, Belgium, in 1877.

By 1877, several sections and federations within the anti-authoritarian International were moving away from the collectivism of Bakunin and his associates toward an anarchist communist position, beginning with the Italian Federation in the fall of 1876. However, it would take a few more years for Kropotkin to adopt an anarchist communist position, after other Internationalists, such as François Dumartheray, Elisée Reclus, Carlo Cafiero, and Errico Malatesta, had already done so.

Prior to Cafiero convincing the Jura Federation to adopt anarchist communism at its 1880 congress, Kropotkin's position was closer to that of James Guillaume, who argued that after the revolution, during the transition from a capitalist to a socialist society, while production and distribution were being reorganised by the workers themselves to provide for everyone's needs, workers would still be remunerated based on their labour, until a sufficient level of abundance had been achieved that the common wealth could be distributed on the basis of need regardless of one's individual contribution.

Kropotkin was immersed in the Swiss and French anarchist movements from 1877 to his imprisonment in France in 1883. He participated in various conferences and congresses, joined in demonstrations, including street fights with the police in Bern, and wrote numerous articles for the anarchist and revolutionary socialist press. One of the more explicitly anarchist papers, *L'Avant-Garde*, was published out of Switzerland by Paul Brousse, then an anarchist communist, Kropotkin and Jean-Louis Pindy, the advocate of revolutionary syndicalism within the International at its 1869 Basle Congress who had miraculously survived the massacre of the Paris Commune.

In late 1878, publication of *L'Avant-Garde* was banned by the Swiss authorities. Undeterred, Kropotkin started a new paper, *Le Révolté (The Rebel)*, in early 1879. Kropotkin wrote that the aim of the new paper was to "make one feel sympathy with the throbbing of the human heart all over the world, with its revolt against age-long injustice," for it "is hope, not despair, which makes successful revolutions."

Although Kropotkin adopted an anarchist communist stance before the 1880 Jura Federation congress, this did not mark a sharp break from the approach advocated by Bakunin and the proto-syndicalist elements within the International. Kropotkin still regarded the workers and the peasants as the two largest groups whose daily struggles would ultimately provide the impetus for a far-reaching social revolution. The role of the anarchists was to work with the workers and peasants, to awaken their revolutionary potential through propaganda and collective action.

In 1881, Kropotkin was expelled from Switzerland as a result of his anarchist activities. He went to England, and then back to France, where the workers' movement was entering a new period of combativeness, after the long reaction that had followed the brutal suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871. In a mining area north of Lyon, the workers were striking but also blew up some stone crosses placed along the roadsides by the reactionary Catholic mine owners. Then a bomb went off in a café in Lyon, killing a worker. The authorities decided the

anarchists must be to blame, and Kropotkin was among the several dozen anarchists arrested in late 1882.

At the trial in 1883, Kropotkin and the other defendants presented an address, prepared by Kropotkin, in which they proclaimed, “Scoundrels that we are, we demand bread for everyone, work for everyone, and for everyone independence and justice too!” Unable to connect Kropotkin to any of the bombings, the French authorities convicted him of belonging to the International, by then a defunct organisation.

Kropotkin remained imprisoned in France until 1886, after which he returned to England. While Kropotkin was in prison, Elisée

Reclus edited a volume of Kropotkin’s articles from the anarchist press and published them under the title, *Words of a Rebel*. This contains some of Kropotkin’s better known writings that were often reprinted in pamphlet form, such as “Order,” “The Paris Commune,”

“Representative Government,” “Law and Authority,” and “The Spirit of Revolt.”

In England, Kropotkin helped found the English anarchist paper, *Freedom*, and continued to write for the anarchist press while also working on more scholarly works, such as *Mutual Aid* and *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, as well as his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, and his exposé of the Russian and French penal systems, *In Russian and French Prisons*.

Kropotkin’s most important and influential book among anarchists was *The Conquest of Bread*, published in 1892. Although it was also made up of articles from *Le Révolté* and its successor, *La Révolte (Revolt)*, it reads like a complete book. It is the most sustained argument in favour of anarchist communism ever written, and was widely translated, inspiring anarchists in Europe, Latin America and Asia. Although Kropotkin was not the first anarchist communist, it was his writings, more than anyone else’s, that persuaded many anarchists to embrace anarchist communism.

While Kropotkin continued to contribute to the anarchist press, primarily *Freedom* and *Les Temps nouveaux*

(which in 1895 replaced *La Révolte* after its suppression by the French government), he also wrote a history of *The Great French Revolution, 1789-1793* from an anarchist perspective, and a detailed exposition of the history and development of anarchist ideas, *Modern Science and Anarchism*, in the 1900s (this being later revised and expanded into a book, *Modern Science and Anarchy*, along with other writings in 1913). However, he dealt both his reputation and the anarchist movement a serious blow when he supported the Allies, including the Russian Empire, in the First World War. His position quickly saw him isolated from the vast majority of his fellow anarchists, who remained true to their internationalist principles and opposed both sides in the conflict.



He returned to Russia after the 1917 Revolution, but was both physically and politically isolated, as he urged the provisional government to continue the war against Germany. He remained astute enough to see through Bolshevik propaganda, and denounced the

growing Bolshevik dictatorship before his death in 1921. His funeral, attended by tens of thousands, was the last mass anarchist demonstration in Soviet Russia.

The articles presented in this issue of *Black Flag* emphasise Kropotkin as an advocate of revolutionary anarchism, focusing on mass revolutionary organisation and the means of revolutionary action. Kropotkin stresses the need for the trade union movement to remain independent of the political parties, and for the workers to take direct action against capitalism. He points to the example of the First International, while exposing the failings of parliamentary socialism. His article on mutual aid emphasises the important role of cooperation in both animal and human life. Reading Kropotkin today, it is his anarchist ideas that appear most relevant, as the gulf between the super-rich and the vast majority of the planet’s population grows ever greater, while governments appear unwilling or incapable of doing much of anything to stop it.

“it is hope, not despair, which makes successful revolutions”

Workers' Organisation

Le Révolté, 10 and 24 December 1881

I

As bourgeois society grows more and more disorganised, as States breakdown and generally we begin to sense the approach of a European revolution, we see emerging amongst the workers of all countries a growing desire to band together, to stand shoulder to shoulder, to organise. In France especially, where every workers' organisation was crushed, broken up, thrown to the four winds after the fall of the [Paris] Commune, this desire is increasingly evident. In almost every industrial town they strive to reach an agreement and to band together, and even in the villages, according to absolutely trustworthy observers, they ask nothing more than to enlighten themselves about socialism and see the emergence of organisations taking into their hands the defence of workers' interests.

The results achieved in this direction over the last three years are certainly very great. However, if we look at the enormity of the task incumbent upon the revolutionary socialist party, if we compare our meagre resources with those available to our adversaries, if we

strive to complete the work that we still have to do, so that in four or five years' time we can present, on the day of the revolution, a real force capable of marching resolutely to the demolition of the old social structure – if we consider all this, we must admit that the amount of work that remains to be done is still immense, and that we are barely at the beginning of a real workers' movement: the great mass of workers still stand outside of the movement inaugurated three years ago.¹ The collectivists, although they give themselves the pretentious name of Workers' Party, do not see coming to them the masses on whom they were counting when they embarked on electoral campaigning; and as they lean more and more towards the Radical Party, they lose

ground instead of gaining it. And as for the anarchist groups, most of them are not yet in sustained daily contact with the great mass of workers, although they alone can give the necessary impetus and action to a party, whether for the theoretical propaganda of its ideas or to be able to express them by acts.

Let others live with illusions, if they want to! We prefer to look at the task that lies before us in all its magnitude, and instead of prematurely announcing victory we prefer to ask ourselves these questions. What must we do to develop our organisations much more than they are today? What must we do to extend our

field of action to the whole mass of workers, in order to establish a conscious and invincible force which, on the day of the revolution, can achieve the aspirations of the working class?

It appears to us that there is an essential point so far overlooked but which it is important to clarify before going any further.

This is it. For any

organisation to be able to develop further, to enable it to become a force, it is important for those who take the lead in the organisation to be fully aware of the *goal* for which the organisation is being established; and once this goal is determined – to choose the means of action *in accordance with this goal*. This prior reasoning is obviously an indispensable precondition in order to have any chance of success and in fact all existing organisations have never proceeded differently. Take the Conservatives, the Bonapartists, the Opportunists, the Radicals, the political conspirators of previous eras – each of their parties had a well-defined goal and their

The enemy on whom we declare war being capital, it is against it that we will direct all our efforts, without letting ourselves be distracted from our goal by the phony agitation of political parties. The great struggle we are preparing for being an essentially *economic* struggle, it is on the economic terrain that our agitation must take place.

¹ A reference to the Third Socialist Workers' Congress of France held in Marseille on 20-31 October 1879 which declared itself as (Marxist) collectivist and committed itself to becoming a political party taking part in elections. It formed the *Fédération des travailleurs socialistes de France*

(Federation of the Socialist Workers of France), but the attendees soon split into different rival groups with the orthodox Marxist *Parti Ouvrier* (Workers' Party) being formed in 1880. (BF)

means of action are absolutely in conformity with this goal.

It would take too long to analyse here the goals and means of action of each of the parties so it will suffice to demonstrate this contention: to take only one and to see if in fact it has a defined goal and if its means of action are in accordance with its goal. Take, for example, the radical or intransigent party.

Their goal is well defined. The Radicals tell us that they want to abolish personal government and to endow France with a democratic republic copied from the model of the United States. These are the salient aspects of their programme – Abolition of the Senate; a single Chamber, elected by the free play of universal suffrage; separation of Church and State; absolute freedom of the press, of speech and of assembly; autonomy for Municipalities; a national militia. – Will the worker be happier or not? Will he as a result cease being a wage-worker at the mercy of his boss?... these questions are of little interest to them; we will sort these out later as we please, they reply. The social question is reduced in their thought to reforms that will be decreed later by the democratic State. For them it is not a question of overturning existing institutions: it is only a matter of modifying them, and in their opinion a legislative Assembly could carry out this task well. Their entire programme can be achieved by way of decrees, and for that – they say – it would be enough that power be wrenched from the hands of those who currently hold it and that it passes into the hands of the Radical Party.

That is the goal. Achievable or not, that is another question; but what is important to us at this moment is that their means of action are in accordance with this goal. Advocates of political reform, they form a political party and work towards the electoral conquest of power. Seeking to shift the governmental centre of gravity towards democracy, they strive to get as many as possible [elected] into the Chamber, into the municipalities, into all governmental institutions and to take the place of the bigwigs [currently] occupying these positions. Their enemy being the [current] government, they organise against the government; they boldly wage war on it and prepare for its fall.

Property, in their eyes, is sacrosanct, and they do not wage war on it in any way: all their efforts are directed to taking over the government. If they appeal to the people and promise them economic reforms, it is only to [help] overthrow the current government and put in its place a more democratic government.

This programme is certainly not ours. We also know that it is unattainable until the regime of property has undergone a profound transformation. But while

criticising this programme, we are forced to agree that for a party that accepts this programme, the means of action that it uses and the way it organises are in accordance with the goal it proposes to achieve. Such-and-such an objective – such-and-such an organisation.

So what is the objective of the workers' organisation? And what should be its means of action and its organisation?

The goal for which French workers want to organise has been only vaguely defined until now. However, there are two settled points on which there can no longer be any doubt. The workers' Congresses have articulated them after long discussions, and the decisions of the Congresses on this matter continually receive the approval of the workers.¹ These two points are: collective ownership, against individual ownership; and the affirmation that this change in the property system can only take place by revolutionary means. The precursors of the workers' organisation have acquired, adopted these two clearly expressed points – the abolition of private property as a goal and the social revolution as the means. The communist-anarchists better define this goal and have a broader programme: they understand the abolition of private property in a more complete manner than the collectivists, and they add to this programme the abolition of the State and revolutionary propaganda. But there is one thing upon which all agree (or, rather, did agree before the appearance of the minimum programme), that is that the goal of the workers' organisation must be the economic revolution, the social revolution.

A whole new world opens up by these resolutions of the workers' Congresses. The French proletariat thus declares that it is not this or that government that it intends to wage war. It takes the question from a much broader and more rational perspective: it intends to declare war on the holders of capital, be they blue, red or white. It is not a political party that it intends to form: it is a party of *economic struggle*. It is no longer democratic reforms that it demands: it is an entire *economic* revolution, the *social* revolution. The enemy is no longer M. Gambetta nor M. Clemenceau; the enemy is capital, along with all the Gambettas and the Clemenceaus, present or future, who are or who would be its supporters or servants. The enemy is the boss, the capitalist, the financier – every parasite who lives at the expense of others and whose wealth is created by the sweat and the blood of the worker. The enemy is the whole of bourgeois society, and the goal is to overthrow it. It is no longer a question of [only] overthrowing a government, the problem is much greater: it is a question of seizing all social wealth, if necessary

¹ A reference to three workers' congresses held between 1876 and 1879, in Paris, Lyon and Marseille. The first congress was predominantly attended by supporters of co-operatives but the second saw anarchists and other revolutionary

socialists attend, with a corresponding change in the politics expressed. The 1879 Congress declared itself opposed to both anarchism and co-operation. (BF)

passing over the corpse of the bourgeoisie to do so, in order to restore all this wealth to those who produced it, to the workers with calloused hands, to those who lack necessities.

This is the goal. And once that the goal is established, the means of action this entails flow naturally. It is on capital that the worker declares war? Is it capital that he wants to dethrone? – Well, it is this war that he must prepare himself for this very day, without wasting a single moment; it is against capital that he must enter into battle. After all, the Radical Party, for example, does not wait until the day of the revolution falls from the sky to declare war on the government it wants to topple: it fights at this very moment, it does so at every moment, without respite nor rest: it does not miss any opportunity to wage this war, and if the opportunity does not present itself, it finds one; and it is right [to do so], for it is only by a continuous series of skirmishes, it is only by relentless small-scale warfare, waged day after day, at every moment, that we prepare the decisive battle and victory. We who have declared war on capital, on the bourgeoisie, must do the same if our declarations are not empty words. If we want to prepare for the day of our victorious battle over capital, we must, from this very day, begin the skirmishes, harass the enemy at every moment, make him rant with rage, exhaust him by the struggle, demoralise him. We must never lose sight of the main enemy – capital, the exploiter – and never let ourselves be dazzled by the enemy's distractions. The State will necessarily play its part in this war; because, if it is quite possible to wage

In the last issue, *Le Révolté* showed that a party which sets itself as a goal the Social Revolution and which seeks to wrest capital from the hands of its current holders must, of necessity, from this very day, place itself on the terrain of the struggle against capital. If it wants the next revolution to be made against the regime of property and that the watchword of the next taking up of arms to be the expropriation of the capitalist, it must necessarily begin now the struggle against the capitalist.

Some object that the great majority of workers are not yet sufficiently aware of the situation they have been subjected to by the holders of capital. “The workers have not yet understood,” we are told, “that the real enemy of the worker, of the whole of society, of progress, and of liberty is the capitalist; and the workers let themselves be carried along too easily by the bourgeoisie into the commotion of the miserable conflicts of bourgeois politics.” But, if this is true, if it is true that the worker all too often drops the prey to chase after the shadow, if it is true that he all too often squanders his energies against those who are certainly also his enemies, but who he will not be able to strike down as long as the capitalist remains standing, if all this is true – will it also be by chasing after a shadow that we will be able to open the eyes of those who are

war on the State without touching capital, it is absolutely impossible to wage war on capital without striking the State at the same time.

What should be our means of action in this war? If we just set our goal to wage war, if we just understand the necessity of this war – the means will not be lacking: they will suggest themselves. Each group of workers will find them on the spot, appropriate to local circumstances, arising from the very situation facing the workers of a given locality at a given moment. The strike will certainly be one of these means of agitation and action, and we will discuss this in a later issue from this perspective. But a thousand other means that cannot be specified in advance in a newspaper and which will be discovered on the spot, during the struggle, are at our disposal. The essential thing is to fully understand this idea:

The enemy on whom we declare war being capital, it is against it that we will direct all our efforts, without letting ourselves be distracted from our goal by the phony agitation of political parties. The great struggle we are preparing for being an essentially *economic* struggle, it is on the economic terrain that our agitation must take place.

Let us place ourselves solely on this terrain, and we will see the great mass of workers strengthen our ranks, grouping itself under the flag of the League of Workers. Then we will be a [mighty] force and, on the day of the revolution, this force will impose its will upon exploiters of every kind.

II

deceived? It is not by forming a new *political* parliamentary party that the *economic* question will be brought to the fore. If the great mass is not sufficiently aware of the importance of the economic question (which, incidentally, we anarchists doubt very much), it is not by relegating this question to the background ourselves that we will be able to show to the workers how important it really is. If this preconception exists, we must work *against* it, not preserve and perpetuate it.

Putting this objection to one side, we must now discuss the various aspects that the struggle against capital can take. But our readers realise that this discussion cannot take place in a newspaper. It is locally, amongst the groups themselves, with a full knowledge of local circumstances and under the impetus of events that the question of practical means should be discussed. In *The Spirit of Revolt*, we showed how in the last century the peasants and the revolutionary bourgeoisie created a current of ideas directed against the lords and the monarchy. In our articles on the Land League in Ireland, we showed how the Irish wage a war without truce or mercy on the lords every day. Inspired by the same idea, it is a question of finding the means to fight against the boss and the capitalist, appropriate to the

needs of each locality. What is excellent in Ireland may not be in France, and what gives great results in one country may fail in another. Moreover, it is not by following the advice of a newspaper that action groups will find the best ways to fight. It is by putting the question on the agenda in each group, it is by discussing it in all its aspects, it is above all by taking inspiration from events which excite minds at a given moment in a given place, and by looking for themselves, that they will be able to find the most appropriate means of action to encourage unrest in a given locality.

But there is a general means of struggle on which *Le Révolté* wants to give its opinion. It is certainly not the only means. But it is a weapon that workers already wield everywhere, in every country – a weapon that the very necessities of the moment impose on them at every turn – the strike.

It is all the more necessary to speak of it today, for some time now the doctrinaires and the false friends of the workers have been discreetly campaigning against strike action, in order to divert the working class from this type of struggle and to cast it into the political rut. As a result of this, recently strikes broke out again across France and those who inscribed upon their banners that the emancipation of the workers must be achieved by the workers themselves stood proudly aloof, not throwing themselves into this struggle in which their brothers and sisters succumbed under the hardships, under the sabres of the gendarmes, under the knives of the foremen and under the sentences of the judges.

It is fashionable today to say that since the strike is not a means to emancipate the worker there is no need to bother with it. So let us see if this objection is true.

Of course, the strike is not [by itself] a means of emancipation. It is [only] by revolution, by expropriating and placing in common social wealth that the worker will break his chains. But does it follow that he will wait with folded arms until the day of the revolution? To be able to make the revolution, the mass of workers must be organised, and resistance and the strike are excellent means for organising workers. They have an immense advantage over those advocated at present (worker candidates, forming a workers' political party, etc.), namely not diverting the movement, but keeping it in constant struggle with the principal enemy, the capitalist. The strike and the resistance fund provide the means to organise not only the socialist converts (these seek and organise themselves) but especially those who are not yet [socialists], although they would like nothing better than to be.

Indeed, strikes break out everywhere. But, isolated, abandoned to stand alone, they fail all too often. And yet, workers who go on strike want nothing more than to organise themselves, to reach an agreement amongst themselves, and they will welcome with open arms

those who come to give a helping hand to build the organisation that they lack. The task is immense; there is so much work for every man and woman devoted to the workers' cause; and the results of this organisational work will certainly be satisfying to those who pitch in. It is a question of organising in every town resistance societies for all trades, to create resistance funds and to fight against the exploiters, to unify the workers' organisations of each town and trade and to put them in contact with those of other towns, to federate them across France, to federate them across borders, internationally. Workers' solidarity must no longer be an empty word but must be practiced every day, between all trades, between all nations. What national and local prejudices, what rivalries between different trades did the International not meet at first; and yet – and this is perhaps one of the greatest services it rendered – these rivalries and these prejudices were overcome, and we saw in the International workers of distant countries and trades, who were once always in conflict, fraternising with each other. This result, let us not forget, was achieved by an organisation that emerged from the great strikes of the time and which grew mainly thanks to strikes. It was by organising resistance against the boss that the International managed to group more than two million workers and to build up that force before which the bourgeoisie and governments trembled.

“But the strike,” the theoreticians tell us, “only addresses the selfish interests of the worker!” First, it is not out of egotism that the worker strikes: he is driven by misery, by the pressing need to raise wages as food prices rise. If he endures months of suffering during a strike, it is not to become a petty bourgeois: it is to avoid himself, his wife, his children going hungry. Then, far from developing selfish instincts, the strike develops the sense of solidarity within an organisation as soon as it occurs. How often have the starving shared their meagre earnings with [their] brethren on strike! Only recently, the building workers of Barcelona were giving up to half their scant wages to strikers who wanted to impose on the bosses a nine-and-a-half hour day (and – let us note in passing – they succeeded, whereas with the parliamentary tactics, they would still be killing themselves working eleven or twelve hours). Never has solidarity been practised within the working class on such a vast scale than during the time of the International's strikes.

Lastly, the best evidence against those who accuse the strike of developing selfish instincts is the history of the International. The International was born from strikes; at bottom, it was a strikers' organisation, until the day when the bourgeoisie, assisted by the ambitious, managed to entice a part of the Association into parliamentary struggles. And yet it is precisely this organisation which managed to develop in its sections and Congresses these board principles of modern

socialism which today are our strength; for – with all due respect to the so-called scientific socialists – up to now there has not been a single idea uttered about socialism which has not been expressed in the Congresses of the International. The use of the strike did not prevent the Sections of the International from grasping the social question in all its complexity. On the contrary, it helped them as it was used to spread the idea amongst the masses at the same time.

Moreover, they say that the strike does not awaken the revolutionary spirit. It is the case today that quite the contrary should be said. Almost no serious strike occurs these days without the appearance of troops, without the exchange of blows, without a few acts of revolt. Here they fight with the troops; there they march to storm the factories; in 1873, in Spain, the strikers of Alcoy declared the Commune and fired on the bourgeoisie; in Pittsburgh, in the United States, the strikers found themselves masters of a territory as large as France, and the strike became the signal for a general uprising;¹ in Ireland, the striking peasants found themselves in open revolt against the State. Thanks to government intervention, the factory rebel becomes a rebel against the State. Today, he still has before him a docile soldier who obeys the officers as soon as they give the order to fire. But the use of troops during strikes eventually “demoralise,” that is to say, moralise the soldier; it will eventually open the eyes of the soldier and make him raise the butts of his rifle into the air before his insurgent brothers.²

Finally, the strike itself, the days without work and without bread, spent in the midst of these opulent streets, this unbridled luxury and these vices of the bourgeoisie, do more for the propagation of socialist ideas than all the public meetings in times of calm. So

much so that one fine day the strikers of Ostrava in Austria went to requisition the food in the town’s shops and thereby declared their right to society’s wealth.³

But the strike, as we have said, is not the only engine of war in the struggle against capital. In a strike, it is the masses who move; but alongside of this, there is the day-to-day struggle which can be conducted by groups, or even by individuals; and the methods to be employed in this struggle can vary infinitely according to local circumstances and the needs of the moment and the situation. It would even be pointless to analyse them here, since each group, if it just grasps the necessity of this struggle, and if it draws inspiration within the midst of the great mass of workers, will find new methods of struggle every day. The most important thing, for us, is to agree upon the following principles:

The goal of the revolution being the expropriation of the holders of society’s wealth, it is against these holders that we must organise. We must make every effort to create a vast workers’ organisation that pursues this goal. The organisation of resistance to and war on capital must be the principal objective of the workers’ organisation, and its activity must be directed, not at the futile conflicts of bourgeois politics, but at the struggle, by all the means found useful, against the holders of society’s wealth – the strike being an excellent means of organisation and one of the most powerful weapons in this struggle.

If we are able, within a few years, to form such an organisation, we will be sure that the next revolution will not fail; that the precious blood of the people will not be spilled in vain, and the worker, today’s slave, will emerge victorious from the fight, to begin a new era in the development of human society based on Equality, Solidarity and Labour.

The Trade Union Congress

(*Freedom*, October 1896)

The last Trade Union Congress, which was held during the month past, at Edinburgh, offers a new departure, to which it is essential to draw the attention of all thinking Socialists.

In its routine business, the Congress has not departed much from its predecessors. It has entrusted its Parliamentary Committee to force through Parliament laws relative to the supervision of mines and factories. It has admonished the Government for giving its orders

to such firms as do not pay Trade Union wages, and urged that that scandal should cease. But it has refused admission to the Congress to the representatives of three papers which do not pay Trade-union wages. (why are not these papers named?).

The discussion of different technical points of different industries was in all respects highly instructive. Thus, to mention one point only, we learn that out of the 300,000, or so, men and children employed in the mines

thousand went on strike, demanding not only an increase in wages but also the dismissal of foremen. On the bosses’ side, troops were immediately called in; on the workers, the miners refused to starve and went en masse into Ostrava and took all the food from the shops that the strikers and their families needed for a week: “And that is how the idea of the *social* revolution spreads.” (“Autriche,” *Le Révolté*, 10 December 1881). (BF)

¹ A reference to the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. (Editor)

² A reference to how the Paris Commune of 1871 started, when troops refused to fire on civilians when ordered to by their officers (André Léo, “La révolution sans la femme” [*La Sociale*, 8 May 1871]). (BF)

³ A reference to a miners’ strike in Ostrava, a city in the north-east of the Czech Republic but then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which took place in late 1881. Twelve

– not only one thousand, and more, are killed every year, but that also *considerably more than a hundred thousand are wounded every year* by various accidents. The accuracy of this authoritative statement evidently cannot be doubted, and it goes far to show the greediness of the capitalists.

The same misunderstandings as last year took place concerning the so-called Socialist resolution. It is well known that although most trade-unionists do not extend their demands farther than a demand for “fair wages,” there is amongst them a growing feeling to the effect that the control of the whole of every industrial concern ought to be in the hands of the workers themselves. And there is a steadily growing majority of workers in Britain who are more and more in touch with Socialist ideas, and who simply and plainly wish that the mines and the factories should be socialised, in one way or another, and be managed and owned by the workers. Socialism makes its way in the Trade Unions as everywhere, and although the majority of the workers do not yet rely upon the possibility of such socialisation, very few among them would be opposed to it on principle.

But as Socialism has always been advocated among them in its State’s centralised form, and as all past history of the Unions brings them to distrust the State – it is evident that the unionists hesitate to commit themselves to such resolutions, in which Social Democrats embody, or mean to embody, their ideal of “armies of workers” under State management. The hackneyed example of the State’s arrangement of the Post Office does not appear to their sound minds as an ideal of industrial organisation.

Consequently, the so-called Socialist resolution is always met with a certain opposition, and accepted half-heartedly, as an imperfect expression of the Unionists’ aspirations. So it was also at the last Congress, at which more than three-fourths of the delegates voted some sort of Socialist resolution, but one-fourth opposed it.

And now comes the two points in which the Congress departed from its previous routine.

Owing to the presence of two American and one German delegates, the Edinburgh Congress made a first step towards assuming an international character.

Two delegates of the American Federation of Labour were received with the heartiest greetings; and although they limited themselves to reading at the Congress reports on the general conditions of labour in the States, it is evident that the questions of the International Federation of Labour Unions and of international strikes must have been discussed between the American and the British Unionists.

We heartily greet the appearance of other unionists than British at the British Congress. The last International Labour and Socialist Congress has proved now little interest in their economic affairs and economic

struggles the workers can expect to find at Congresses at which Social Democrats are numerous. All the hard struggles by means of which the Trade Unions of this country have constituted their power, ameliorated the conditions of labour (so far as they could be ameliorated without expropriation), and conquered liberties for their unions and strikes – all these struggles do not interest the Social Democrats so long as they do not win seats in Parliaments. In fact, the French deputy, *Jaurès*, treated the English Unions as Westminster antiquities, and it is now evident that the intention of one section, at least, of the French Social Democracy was to substitute for the Labour Congresses, Congresses of the Social Democratic parliamentary representatives of all nations. At any rate, such movements as those which are now going on amongst the workers of the United States, England, Belgium and Germany, to constitute a Federation of all workers engaged in the shipping trade, or of all miners, and, we hope soon, of the textile trades as well, and the general strike which is brewing out of these movements, do not interest the French and German Social Democrats, who are inclined to look at such movements on the contrary, anything but friendly. Instance, the reception given to the General Strike resolution at the London Congress.

It is, therefore, absolutely necessary that the elements for *new Labour Congresses, convoked by the Labour Organisations themselves, and not falling under the domination of political parties – Socialist or not –* should be worked out. Most probably, not further than two years hence an International Labour Congress will have to be convoked, instead of the International Socialist and Labour Congress whose seat in 1899 is to be Germany, while everyone knows – the recent expulsion of Tom Mann only too well proves it – that no International Congress can be held in Germany. We greet, therefore, that first step towards the internationalisation of Trade Union Congresses which was made at Edinburgh.

Perhaps, we must mention also the presence of a German unionist delegate at the Edinburgh Congress. But this delegate only came to say that his unions were the true ones, while there are other labour unions in Germany which are *not* the true ones – probably because they keep apart from Social Democracy and do not contribute to the Social Democratic elections. Labour unions ought to beware of such delegates, who already divide the young labour movement in Germany into two parts – the orthodox and the unorthodox – not because the latter would not be serious enough in their struggle against *capitalism*, but because they do not join the *Parliamentary* Social Democratic movement.

An international union of labour organisations ought not to know such divisions. Capital is its enemy. Direct warfare against it – its weapons. Let others use other weapons, if they like; but do not prevent the labour unions from using their own. And don’t measure the

orthodoxy of labour unions by their willingness to use other weapons than those of their own choice.

As to the second new venture of the Edinburgh Congress, it is, perhaps, of even still greater importance. For the first time Trade Unionists have joined hands with Co-operators.

It hardly need be said that the shameless behaviour of bosses in Glasgow and Edinburgh, some of whom boycotted the co-operators and even the sisters of those who were employed by the co-operators, was the last drop to bring about the alliance between the Unionist and the Co-operator; but that that alliance was preparing long since is self-evident.

The fact that the Manchester Wholesale Co-operative subscribed £3,000 to the Yorkshire miners strike fund, and opened a considerable credit to the local co-operative stores in the strike region, was a quite new move in the right direction in the history of the Co-operative movement.

True, that in the productive co-operative workshop, labour continues to be exploited for the benefit of the shareholders; and the small share of profits which it allotted to the workers is nothing but what every reasonable capitalist could do to consolidate his monopoly. True, that in some co-operative workshops even the trade union wages were not strictly adhered to. But the Socialist ideas penetrate into the co-operative movement as well. The great bulk of the buyers at co-operative stores, especially in the North, are workers; and, as such, they are forcibly brought to be members of their respective unions, which again must be brought more and more to understand the necessity of taking

possession of the necessities for production. The Socialist ideal is thus bound to permeate both the unions and the co-operative organisations.

But if these two movements come to join hands (as was the ideal of Robert Owen and all the earliest Socialists), a new invincible force will be created.

And – what is still more important – that now so much asked for form of economic organisation of Society without Capital and State will be indicated by that union. While the State Socialist knows nothing to advocate but State property, State capitalism, and State management of industries, after the land, the mines, the factories, the railways, and so on, have been socialised, and sees in the Post Office and the railway the ideal of the future society – Life indicates another, far more reasonable and practical solution *outside the State*, by means of a direct agreement between the consumer and the producer.

That this union cannot be strong, and still less general, so long as the present monopoly in land, factories and capital continues to exist, is self-evident. That co-operation and unionism cannot shake off the yoke of monopoly merely by obtaining fair wages and making economies in the cost of living, is again self-evident.

But their union points out in which direction we must look for the economical organisation of Society when monopoly has been destroyed by the Social Revolution.

One word more. The resolutions of their Congresses are mere suggestions to the body of the workers. Are they less important for that?

Servitude or Freedom?

(Les Temps nouveaux, 20 January 1900)

Up to the present, all the popular uprisings, all the struggles of the workers against their exploiters and all the revolutions, have resulted in only one thing: abolishing personal servitude and the compulsory labour that ensued. However, through a series of laws passed during the abolition of serfdom and after (imposed redemption, seizure of the land for the benefit of the lord, abolition of workers unions, treated henceforth as illegal coalitions, industrial monopolies created by the State, and so on), serfdom was reconstituted in a new form – economic and impersonal. A whole new science was even created (the science of laws, political economy, etc.) to persuade society that this new form of serfdom represents a natural necessity; that it is also the only possible guarantee of individual freedom.

So our modern societies are in this state, that the plundering of the workers continues but the principle is totally changed. They do not speak to us any more of divine right, or historical rights. But they seek to assure

us – and unfortunately the immense number still believe it – that the system of bourgeois exploitation under which we live is the *only* form [of society] that can guarantee us the little personal freedom we enjoy. It is to guarantee to us this individual freedom – we are told – that the masses must be *doomed* to misery, to insecurity about tomorrow, to crises, to economic servitude – such are the laws of nature; and any attempt to end this exploitation by socialising production or consumption, each step we take in the communist direction, would bring us back to the old regime of personal serfdom, re-established under a new name.

* * *

Indeed, when we say that the peasant who takes land by leasehold or who buys it by getting into debt with a usurer is bound to work three or four days for the privileged – just like the serf formerly; that the lord, the usurer, the railway companies, and a thousand other drones pocketed all that the peasant gave to the land –

we are told: “yes, it is true; but at least the peasant is no longer the serf of anyone. He has a certain amount of freedom; his person is inviolable; he feels himself the equal of those who were formally his lords; he can even nourish the hope to one day leave the caste of the exploited. If he is not yet free, at least he has the vision of the free man – do you want him to become again the serf of the commune or society?”

Likewise for the worker in the factory. When we say that when being hired by the factory he works to enrich his boss while he himself will be thrown onto the pavement at the age of fifty just as destitute (except for more infirmities) as he was at the age of twenty – the bourgeois economist replied: “yes, that is again true. But ask him if he would prefer to become the serf of a lord, a company, or even his municipality and thus lose the little personal liberty he possesses? Misery is the price he pays for this freedom. And gradually, thanks to this same freedom, by grouping and forcing society to take care of his needs, he will eventually obtain a greater share of the riches he produces, without losing his freedom.”

* * *

This discussion between socialists and bourgeois economists has already lasted for more than fifty years. “Serf or exploited” – we cannot escape this. And let us frankly admit it, since the socialists have until the present been only able to offer the worker employment one day in “labour armies,” commanded by a hierarchy of functionaries named by the State, the worker has answered until the present, not wrongly, that this future was not a happy one. He saw in the new chiefs that he was offered the same exploiters as today, in addition dressed up in the uniform of a functionary. And he was absolutely right.

He knows how illusory his personal liberty is; but he is in no hurry to sell what little he does possess for a bowl of soup cooked in socialist barracks. He needs something else, and it is this other thing that he still has to find.

* * *

The anarchists have tried many times to find, to formulate this “other thing.” Our literature has, in fact, a whole series of works whose authors, anxious above all to preserve the liberty of the individual, have tried to show how the common possession of the earth and all that serves to produce wealth could be combined with complete freedom of the individual. But our ideas, fought by both the privileged bourgeoisie and by the socialists of the old school, are little known by the great worker masses. Most of them are familiar with pre-1848 authoritarian socialism, reprised on their behalf by the

German socialists and their colleagues from the Latin countries – socialism enamoured with discipline, authority and officialdom. And, no matter what anyone says, the pyramidal organisation of labour armies, commanded by socialist generals, is repugnant to the great mass who do not wish to risk the little freedom it has for a Socialist dictatorship or caesarism. It does not see a solution to the social question there, it does not get enticed by that, since it already vaguely senses the possibility of another solution; and while the *negative* side of the struggle develops from day to day, nothing *positive* has yet emerged from the grand struggles which our century has the right to be proud of. Continually, every year we see immense struggles between the exploited and the exploiters. Here erupt formidable strikes which, with an ever-increasing zest, assume the character of uprisings, or wars conducted with a bitterness and a reciprocal hatred, always growing. There whole populations rise up against the rich, as, for example, in the countryside and cities of Italy. And whenever a big strike takes place in Paris or London, in the United States or in Russia, we feel the bloody conflict ready to erupt. And yet, for all these struggles, strikes and riots, for all these congresses in which the very words Social Revolution stirs the enthusiasm in thousands of workers’ chests, no clear picture emerges on what we will do: on what are we going to get our hands on? How are we to organise consumption and production without bosses or monopolies? For to say that it will be the “people’s parliament” or else “the workers dictatorship”, as the Germans say, or else “the people”, as so many anarchists say, is not enough. You might as well say: I do not know, I do not see my path yet, I have not thought about it yet. When the mass of people ask us who, by calling ourselves socialists or anarchists, declare by this very fact that we study these things, when it asks us, if only for purposes of advice or for a vague suggestion, what we want to establish in the place of the current exploitation – we refuse to answer or reply with ambiguous phrases.

* * *

On only one point is opinion formed. Since the day – over fifty years ago – socialism clearly appeared, red flag in hand, in the streets of Paris – agreement has been reached on one essential point.

In 1848, the working masses still hoped that a change in government, that a popular Republic, could tackle the great social question; that the workers unions, aided by the State, would gradually take possession of the wealth accumulated in the hands of a few; that they would break privileges, and abolish economic servitude.

Today – at least in the Latin countries – that illusion is destroyed, and socialists of every shade understand that

to accomplish anything it is necessary to destroy property rights over *the social capital* created upon the ruins of personal serfdom. This idea emerges quite clearly – take possession of the land, housing, factories, mines and the means of transportation. The word “expropriation” has made headway during the last half century: it has become established.

This is undoubtedly an immense step forward. But how to proceed with this necessary expropriation? In whose name will it be done? For whose benefit is the revolution achieved? What, finally, is this “State” on

The Conquest of Socialists by Power

(Les Temps Nouveaux, 21 April 1900)

We have all read day by day the debates of the socialist Congress, convened in Paris after the entry of Millerand into the cabinet. But when we read again in their entirety the two reports of this same Congress given in *Humanité Nouvelle* by Hamon and Cornelissen, we cannot help but make certain reflections; and our readers will perhaps forgive us returning to it.

Over six days, more than six hundred socialists – the elite of the French parliamentary socialists – were gathered in a hall. They argued, they fought. And it is in struggle, as we know, that the great ideas of the future spring. There were amongst the six hundred delegates many very intelligent men. Many amongst them had to be absolutely sincere, many claimed to be revolutionaries, while a certain number had taken part in the communalist revolution in Paris in 1871.

The subject of their debates lent itself admirably to a clear exposition of principles; it allowed the formulation of a great and bold programme of the reforms aimed at by the socialists. Let us say more, it was a programme of this kind that the socialist worker masses expected of the Congress.

It was called, as we know, to pronounce on this question: “was Millerand right or not to enter the Galliffet and Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet?” A question which, necessarily, was transformed during the course of the debates into this other, somewhat broader, question: “Can a socialist deputy accept a portfolio in a bourgeois cabinet?”

Well, the only responsible answer that the Congress could give to this question would have to be conceived roughly in the following terms:

– “The Congress certainly does not represent a party of revolutionaries; it represents a party for economic and political reforms, driven by its socialist aspirations. And as these reforms are considered by the Congress as absolutely urgent and necessary – here is the programme. If a bourgeois cabinet accepts this programme of immediate reforms – a socialist can enter this cabinet. Otherwise – no!”

* * *

whose benefit a large section of the socialists proposes to expropriate? Such are the questions which arise in a more or less clear form in the mind of every worker, every peasant, every exploited person, every man or woman who at last felt in themselves the breath of freedom.

It is these questions that we will try to answer again and again. For nothing but a more or less clear vision of the future we are aiming for can inspire the masses with the inner fire every Revolution demands.

Leaving aside individuals, we should expect a response of this kind from such a Congress. Two or three delegates tried to give that direction to the debates. When you are a party of reforms, it is the least that you owe to the people – to frankly declare what your programme of reforms is. And, once the programme was formulated, it settled the special question, leaving no room for ambiguity from now on.

Well, that is precisely what the Congress did not do. Instead of clearly formulating what it expected of its representatives, what did it give us? – Nothing, absolutely nothing! Zero, nil, nought! A cry of rage escapes from the chest when reading about these debates. We knew, without doubt, we had even predicted here, what would become of parliamentary socialism. But we never thought that in so few years parliamentarianism would bring French socialism to this point of intellectual impotence. Our predictions fell far below the sad reality.

* * *

The Paris Congress was definitely not a revolutionary Congress – we know that and it is not from this point of view that we judge it. We know that the members of this Congress take very different attitudes in relation to the social revolution. Some do not believe in it at all; others do not see it coming any time soon; other ones abhor the very idea of the people in the street. Some are ready to shoulder a rifle the day when we will fight in the street; others will hasten on that day to organise “order,” that is to say, the counter-revolution.

But, ultimately, all agree on one point. Whether the revolution comes or not, they will do their best to obtain in the current State a certain number of reforms which they call “socialist.”

Granted! Let us take them for what they say they are. Socialist reformists, while awaiting better.

Well! It is on this duty of socialists and reformists that the six hundred delegates at the Paris Congress have failed on all points. It is in this respect that they have been absolutely useless.

* * *

We know, however, reformers of a very different temper and a whole other intellectual power.

Take Necker and the Abbe Sieyes. Read the latter's *Tiers Etat* and the *Pouvoir Exécutif* of the other. Both lived under vile absolutism. Both loathed revolution. But they had other higher ambitions for their party – the bourgeoisie – whose power they sought to consolidate. With a firm hand and with broad aims, they sketched the political constitution which was to take power from the hands of the nobility and put it into the hands of the bourgeoisie. Their treatment of the people was detestable, they were enemies of the people; but at least they *dared to think* for the party they represented. The parliamentary socialists do not dare to do this at all.

Or take a modern reformer – Henry George – also an enemy of popular revolution. We saw him fight when he stood as a candidate for the mayor of New York. This one again dared to think. Not only did he promise the people that the thieves of “Tammany-Hall”, who had plundered New York for ten years, would be arrested after his election, but he demanded his nomination to carry out his great project of the “single tax” (taxation by square metre). He saw in it the means of wresting the land from the landowners, of giving it back to the people, of communalising added-value [by economic rent]. He bluntly developed this programme before the wretched of the American city and appealed to them to achieve his reform whose plank, as everyone knows, borders on an agrarian revolution. Like Eudes, he fell dead at a rally.

But where is the programme, where is the nobility of thought, the audacity of the Paris Congress? It talked of the *conquest of power*, but it knew only how to show us *its conquest by power*, the conquest of socialism by the bourgeoisie.

* * *

Do not quibble over the resolutions of the Congress. Let us suppose that under the penalty of a rupture between the two factions of the party, the Congress could not do otherwise than vote in the space of twenty-four hours for two contradictory resolutions: today to say that a socialist deputy must not enter a bourgeois cabinet and add tomorrow that he could do so under “exceptional” (which?) circumstances. It is true that, in our opinion, an honest division of the party into two factions would have been preferable to the latent schism that continues to exist, and which paralyses both. But let us move on.

Let us also say that the ten or twenty leaders could not say anything but banalities or make recriminations. For them, questions of personal influence dominated the rest.

But the others? But the other six hundred delegates present? Did they also have nothing to say?

* * *

To call yourself a socialist does not mean, however, renouncing any idea of changing, even overturning, the current political machine. On the contrary. The socialist is *forced* to conceive of another political structure than that which exists.

Here, in fact is a State, France, which has already had its first sketch of communal revolution but which still remains, under the name of republic, the centralised imperial State that it was in the time of Napoleon. So centralised that the Caesarists base all their plans on it. The first Caesar to come will find, on the one hand, a complete crushing of local life and, on the other, a whole powerful machine made to drown in blood any attempt to revolt.

Here is a State in which a forest ranger dares not sell a tree felled by the wind without fifty-two papers being exchanged between the offices of three ministries; a municipality dares not open a school or give 100 francs to hungry workers, without the kinglet, the prefect, sticking his nose in and scrapping the decision. A State, crushed by taxes and monopolies that deliver an unprecedented power to the bourgeoisie. A State in which the clergy, thanks to its immense possessions and political influence, is still the master and still holds [in its hands] *a third* of children going to primary school as well as *half* the young people receiving secondary education in its religious schools. A State, simply put, which is still within the administrative customs of the former regime, which is still a prey and a monopoly of the bourgeoisie. And these socialist reformists find nothing wrong with this machine which they nevertheless should work to remake, if not to demolish, in the very interest of socialist action!

Finally, France is not Germany, which is still waiting for its 1848. It experienced the Paris Commune which, taking in its true sense the saying of Proudhon: “The

Socialism *cannot* be reformist. If it refuses to be revolutionary, it necessarily falls into the arms of reaction.

Commune will be *all* or it will be *nothing*,” one day affirmed this so correct idea on the barricades and paid with the blood of 35,000 Parisian workers.

A whole programme of economic and political reconstruction of society can be summarised in this single idea of the free Commune, of the “Commune-All”, becoming the starting point of a republic differently republican than that of Millerand and Co., as

well as the beginning of the expropriation and the sharing of housing, shops, factories, production. This idea represents at least a tangible form to begin the social revolution, an idea already more or less familiar to the French worker, especially for those who do not want to know anything about anarchy

Well! None of this exists for these so-called “conquerors of power,” well and truly conquered by the bourgeois power.

* * *

It is not for us to write programmes for the reformists. But we can see from here what a proud programme of political and economic *reforms* could be devised on this basis alone. The Commune – master of its destiny, regulating itself the conditions of labour within it, completely reorganising from the bottom to the top the basis of taxation, itself naming its judges, reconstructing the whole of education at, expropriating where it finds it necessary, communalising what it wants to communalise, without going through the channels of Parliament – are not all the elements of a proud programme there?

For us anarchists, this is not our dream. We go much further in our demands. But the Commune master of all its destinies and the shredding of the centralised State is certainly *a reform already needed in old Europe*. Was it

not the duty of the reformist socialists, sons of the communards, to at least raise the flag of this reform, if they do not dare to go further?

* * *

They did not; they did not dare do anything. For to do so would have required the parliamentary socialists to have had the audacity to appear before the Chamber – not as beggars who come, hat in hand, into the shrine of their dreams, but as proud conquerors who want to conquer a better future for the people.

But no! Except for a moment of enthusiasm at the close of the Congress – made brief, to make amends to the bourgeois calling themselves socialist – that is all they have done...

Is that *all*, though? – We should be delighted to be mistaken, we would be happy to be wrong, but we strongly believe that what was established at this Congress – tacitly, in such a way as not to have been perceived by the sincere members at the meeting – is **THE PARTY OF SOCIALIST REACTION**; the party which, one day, will seek to strangle the social revolution by covering itself with the label of socialism.

Socialism *cannot* be reformist. If it refuses to be revolutionary, it necessarily falls into the arms of reaction.

Economic Action or Parliamentary Politics

Les Temps Nouveaux, 25 June 1910

Let us recall once more the essence of the ideas inspired by the international proletariat when it awoke during the years 1866-1870.

After being convinced during the 1848 Revolution that even the most radical of the bourgeoisie had neither the intention nor the ability to solve the social problem, and that they would not stop at mass massacre to prevent the proletarians from reaching that by the revolutionary route: after assuring themselves, later, that the Caesarism in which a certain number of proletarians had had confidence in would not and could not do otherwise than the bourgeoisie; after having understood, finally, the weakness of the proletariat as long as it did not rally around a general idea and did not itself elaborate a clear conception of the solution to the social problem – intelligent workers had agreed upon this idea:

- 1) To organise themselves internationally by trade to conduct a vigorous, direct, struggle against the capitalists in the workshop, the factory, the construction site – by the strike or by any other available means;
- 2) To study in every group and local and regional federation the various solutions to the social problem, with the aim of transferring the land and all the tools of production and exchange to the producers and consumers themselves.

To thus awaken in the working masses the consciousness of their interests and their power: to make them understand the necessity, for all of humanity, of a profound revolution which would restore to Society the immense capital accumulated by the work of all during the course of the centuries; to study, amongst the workers themselves, the means to accomplish this immense economic revolution, which France tried to sketch by its communes and its sections in 1793 and, later, with the support of the State in 1848. Such was the problem that was taking shape, still vaguely perhaps, but was already emerging in the consciousness of the workers of the Latin countries and England.

* * *

The Revolution of 1848, followed by the Empire of Napoleon III, and the Owenist movement in England, followed by the bourgeois selfishness of Chartism, had opened the eyes of a certain number of proletarians.

Before 1848, the hopes of proletarians had been awakened by socialist propaganda – Saint Simonian and Fourierist in France, Owenist in England. This awakening represented a real force, especially as the bourgeois daily press then had not yet reached the extent which it has today, and that the socialism before 1848 – boarder, more humanitarian, and much deeper than the State capitalism and sociological metaphysics preached

today under the label of socialism – had an infinitely stronger hold over the intellectuals of the time. Let us remember only Eugene Sue, George Sand, the socialist and populist spirit of the literature of the Romantic period.

So, when the days of February [1848] came, the blue blouses overthrow the bourgeois parliamentary royalty. And for three months the advanced minds of the whole of Europe followed, anxiously, the work of the labour Commission of Luxembourg, hoping to learn from it the practical basis for great social reform.

All this ended, as is well known, with the impotence of the Luxembourg [commission], with the massacres of June, with the panicked persecution of socialism by the Blue Terror of the bourgeoisie...

After that, we could still see the impotence, the inability of the republican Chamber elected in 1849, which had more than 120 social-democratic representatives sent by more than two million voices – all to end up with Caesarism. With the support, let us say it, and especially with the indifference [*le laisser faire*] of a large part of the socialists, after the revolutionary elements were massacred or paralysed during and after the defeat of the proletariat in June 1848.

Initially President, then Emperor, Napoleon III, after having shot and deported the republicans, promised in his turn the abolition of the proletariat and ended in the mire of Compiègne.

Thinking Europe understood the meaning of these two terrible lessons.

* * *

Then a quite natural conclusion just imposes itself.

Never to count on the radical or other bourgeois. They have had their time. Now, even the most well-intentioned amongst them will be either useless or dangerous if the workers do not take into their hands social emancipation. A large, powerful *labour* organisation is necessary to do this. *The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves*, proclaimed the International.

And it is *direct, economic* emancipation that must be aimed for, added the French who had already experienced the radical republic in 1848.

“Through the Republic to the Social Revolution,” is an illusion. We will make the social Revolution or, at least, we will begin it – or we will have the Republic only in name.

Having that, in principle, the workers would, first and foremost, form a separate group. Certainly, the Great principles of liberty, of equality, of fraternity proclaimed in 1789 remain true for the workers, as for any other class in society. That must never be forgotten.

Sacrificing these principles to give power to a socialist saviour – as was sometimes thought before the coup d'état of December 1851 – would have been a crime, especially said the French, who no longer believed in Caesarism.

The few liberties acquired at the price of so much blood remain a precious heritage, doubly cherished by the worker – a heritage that must always be *increased*, without ever letting it

decrease. But, with this, it must not be forgotten either that *those who produce* all social wealth have a thousand interests *of their own*. The factory, the mill, the building site, the mine, is a whole world – intimately linked without doubt to the political structure of society, but *a world apart*.

The relations of Capital and Labour is the interest that prevails there. The essence of every society is made up of the intimate organisation of these three immense branches: consumption, exchange of products, and the production of wealth. And those who *produce* this wealth are the only ones able to express *their* views on all that concerns this immense organisation.

More than that. Since Capital and Labour are two hostile camps in continual struggle – one to reduce Labour to submission and the other to free itself from the yoke of Capital – Labour must itself organise its forces, *which it can only do by remaining on the terrain of its own struggle*.

And when it feels the strength to stipulate terms to Capital, it will have to do it – not with cap in hand asking admission into capitalist Parliaments. It will have to do it in a body, dealing on an equal footing with the power

formed by capitalism – “like the proletarians who withdrew to Mount Aventine,” as it was often said at that time in the International.

Conscious of the strength that the intelligent conception of what they want will give them, workers will stipulate to the Capitalists the terms they want, and they will make them accept.

* * *

Furthermore, Parliament is not the place where we can discuss with the slightest chance of success the thousand questions arising from the relations between Capital and Labour.

We read the other day that the miners in the north of England would strike *against the eight hour day law* passed by the English Parliament. And that reminds us of the very fair words of old Gladstone. When they came to ask him to pass the eight hour day law in Parliament – “I hesitate to do it,” he said. “Let the English workers discuss this matter well and *agree upon it*. If they do, they will let me know and then I promise that I will put everything at their service to get the law passed.”

This response was deeper than it was previously thought. Indeed, it was not in Parliament that it was necessary to discuss whether the eight-hour day should be made *legal* for all. If the workers, or only a large minority of workers, agreed *to impose the right-hour day on the bosses, the eight-hour day would become an accomplished fact*.

But a *legal* day represented a double danger.

First, because a certain number of workers – notably the Durham miners – were already working *less* than eight hours: and second, because once legalised, the eight-hour day would soon become *obligatory* for workers. They would not dare to work less. Indeed, the conservatives, like John Gorst who flirted with socialist politicians, expressed it differently: *If the State imposes the eight-hour day on the bosses, it will also impose it on the workers*. This is what has always made several English trade unions resist all protective intervention by the State, and refuse its patronage.

They were a thousand times right, and it was regrettable that they have yielded to the statist sirens. The English judges who have just refused to grant the trade unions, taken under the tutelage of the State, the right to give part of their dues for the expenses for the election of their members of parliament were logical. Patronised – ruled! There is no way of getting around this.

The danger, moreover, was foreseen already in the sixties when some of the English trade unions refused to ask the State to legalise and protect them like shareholders of companies.

These workers did not want the State to intervene in their struggle against Capital, and they were perfectly right. Protective force of Capital, its intervention would only be interested and eventually become a danger for Labour.

* * *

We can now understand how the English trade-unionist movement, reinforced by its economic experience, and the French worker current, reinforced by its political experience of 1848-1852 met, were strengthened when the French came to London in 1862 for the first universal exhibition; how they united to form the International Workers Association.

When the French and English initiators of International thus wanted to create – outwith any relation with government – a powerful machine of worker war against Capital, they therefore acted as infinitely more profound sociologists than these sirs of government education think.

* * *

We do not know what parliament would be in an egalitarian society in which there would be neither exploiters nor exploited. Probably, it would not exist at all. As it is in our current societies, parliament is what has replaced the *camarilla*, that is to say, the rabble of people who once had influence at Court, and placed themselves between the king and the people.

Today, the mission of Parliament is also to place itself between the executive (the king, the cabinet, the president in the United States) and those they govern: preventing these from oppressing them too much; but at the same time, to maintain the privileges of the rulers and the established interests of landowners of all kinds and industrial Companies.

To hold the executive in check; to only grant the powers it demands which are needed to subdue the people and deny those which could be a danger to the bourgeoisie; to protect already established monopolies and to create new ones, without, however, weakening the old ones – that is the function of every parliament. And we must recognise that where there are a State and Government, this kind of control certainly represents a guarantee against autocracy and the rule of the *camarilla*. Without this it would be the return to the regime of the whim of the King and his minions.

But to *destroy* the monopolies established by the same bourgeoisie, to *lessen* the power of the monopolists – to accomplish a *revolution* in the relations between the various classes of society, to *abolish* exploitation – no intelligent and honest man has ever said that it could be within the powers of a parliament. On the contrary, whenever it has been a question of accomplishing the slightest of political or economic revolutions, those who really *wanted* it were always *outside the government and national representation*.

In France, during the Great Revolution, it was the municipalities and, in the big cities, the sections, it was finally the clubs that were the organs for *revolutionary* progress. In England, it was for nearly a half century the trade unions – secret at first, and then later openly – which undertook to conquer new rights for the people

and which have conquered some serious concessions for the workers by a thousand means that were resorted to without too much talk.

This is also what the workers of other nations tried in 1866-70, by founding the International.

And it was this attempt that the socialist politicians succeeded in causing to be abandoned by dangling in front of the workers the mirage of the “conquest of power” for the last thirty years.

Let us now see what the results were.

The Bourgeoisie and Parliamentary Socialism

(Les Temps Nouveaux, 23 July 1910)

Let us now see what were the results of the tactic which consisted in organising “workers parties” or “socialist parties” marching towards the “conquest of power” – in the bourgeois State, of course. What is the outcome of the forty-five years during which this tactic was followed?

Let us say it clearly. It was, on the one hand, almost half a century of respite for the bourgeoisie, from which it intelligently took advantage to increase and extend its power, consolidate it, give it a broader and more solid basis.

And, on the other hand, it was the conquest by power of what represented the bulk of the labour movement.

* * *

All the time we were told about the “class struggle.” It was in the name of a class struggle that the workers were called upon to enter into parliamentary struggles, as a distinct political party.

Well, as a class, as producers, the workers, by their parliamentary action, have not approached by a single step towards the conquest of power in the State. The bourgeoisie has indeed made way in its councils for some representatives of the working class, after being assured that they would offer no danger. But as for losing the least part of its political or economic power, that did not happen. We can even say that this double power has increased, for the simple reason that the immense, incredible increase of wealth, the immense accumulation of operating capital and the concentration of political force in the hands of modern States were made for the benefit of the bourgeoisie, and the worker masses themselves contributed to this.

Is there a single bourgeoisie in the world today who fears the socialist party in its parliament? Not a single one!

“They reckon with us,” these gentlemen the deputies tell you, but it is a simple boast! “It is our safety valve,” replied the intelligent bourgeois. “If they had not come, we would have brought them there ourselves!” This was indeed what the English liberal bourgeoisie had done by backing the candidatures of a few miners as soon as the miners began to become dangerous in the years 1860-1870.

* * *

And why should the bourgeoisie fear the representatives of what is today called socialism?

Take all the labour legislation of the last forty years in all the countries of the world, and say: Is there a single law, a single measure, that has reversed the proportions of produced wealth that goes to the capitalist exploiter on the one hand, and to the exploited worker on the other? Name only one that has just altered this proportion in a way to enrich the worker a little or else curb the enrichment of the bourgeois?

For thirty to forty years the worker’s productive force has increased three-, four-, ten- fold. Let us only recall that where the weaver supervised two or three mechanical looms in 1860, today he monitors ten, twelve of them, and even up to twenty in the United States; that where it took man a month or more to produce the wheat necessary for his subsistence for a year, he produces it today in only a day; and so on in all branches [of the economy].

The progress of science, the development of the technical spirit, the invention of new machines, the extension of networks of exchange, and above all the blossoming of ideas of freedom, thrown into the world by the revolutions of 1789-93 and 1848 – for it is they which gave to the sciences, to the spirit of invention and to technique the audacity which characterises the second half of the nineteenth century – all this has increased our productive power in very high proportions.

But, this being an established fact, how then is it possible that well-being has not already established itself in the working class? Our fathers, the French socialists of the last forty years, had already proved that at least half the product of the labour of the worker goes to his boss. That inspired the International’s slogan: *The full (entire) product of his labour to the worker!* But since the productive capacity of the worker has doubled or tripled since then, well-being should have already been established in his home if this exploitation had only been reduced by half. It would have been a serious beginning for well-being if the old proportion had only been maintained!

This is not the case, however. We all know that. It is scarcely one in a hundred workers who know a certain well-being, while thousands and thousands of bourgeois, small and medium, are enriched every day at an appalling level. Despite the noise that has been made about labour legislation, the enrichment of the bourgeoisie by the exploitation of the workers’ labour is

always growing. The insolent mob, mocking the socialists, always increases.

Why then would the bourgeoisie fear the statist and parliamentary socialists, who serve it so admirably as a safety value? Are not those who have allowed it to pocket almost the totality of the immense increase in wealth over the last half-century, without putting up any resistance, not its reliable allies?

* * *

Perhaps you will say that it is going too far to represent the parliamentary socialists as the guard dogs for the enrichment of the bourgeoisie? Well, take any law regarded as the embodiment of socialist thought. Take, for example, income tax.

The idea of a progressive tax on income was launched by the Great [French] Revolution in 1793. What was wanted at that time was to trim by taxation all income, landed and bourgeois, so that they were kept within certain limits: from 1,200 to 20,000 francs per person, without ever exceeding the latter limit.¹

The men of 1793 understand perfectly that a progressive tax, which would rise very rapidly to hit large incomes would disrupt all production and deprive the bourgeois of the lure of enrichment by the labour of the masses. They knew that the abolition of feudal rights without any redemption, the income tax such as they wanted, the limitations on the right of inheritance they had introduced, production by the communes and the organisation of exchange based on the social establishment of values, which they were trying – all these were *measures for the expropriation of the rich, for the equalisation of fortunes* – equality in fact, as they said then.

It was the overthrow of the economic system hitherto based on the exploitation of the poor.

And what do the parliamentary socialists now do with income tax? Do they even dare to advocate the theory as it was understood in 1793? Even to draw it to the attention of the workers? Never!

Their first care – here, as in the eight-hour day law, in the workers' pensions, the law on unions and all the rest – their first care is to ensure that the monopoly of the exploitation of labour, assured to the bourgeoisie by the modern State, is neither undermined nor threatened in any way. Their great preoccupation is to secure themselves and to prove to the exploiter that monopoly will suffer no infringement from the new measure: that with a little "know how" the new law will only increase the strength of monopoly and give it a more solid foundation: the consent of the exploited themselves. At most the new law will serve as a slight stimulus for those of the bourgeoisie who would be likely to sink into the life described by Zola in *Le Ventre de Paris*.

And whether it be income tax, the eight-hour day law, the law of associations, or pensions, the somewhat intelligent bourgeois easily understands that these laws do not in any way affect his monopolies; he realises that they ensure his privileges. The less perceptive, after some resistance, are finally convinced when they see the immense accumulation of wealth in the bourgeoisie and the incredible development of the class of owners which they themselves observe around them, and of which each new census brings them striking proofs.

No, nowhere does the bourgeoisie fear the parliamentary socialists. It recognises in them its allies. If there is a black spot which it currently dreads, it is

Why then would the bourgeoisie fear the statist and parliamentary socialists, who serve it so admirably as a safety value?

precisely the workers who are not recruited into political parties: the miners of Colorado, the metallurgy and metal workers around Pittsburgh, and, in Europe, the French, Spanish and Italian unions rebelling against statist regimentation.

Only those who are not conquered by power arouse its fears.

Natural Selection and Mutual Aid

Humanity, December 1896

After remarking that the subject of mutual aid is essential to any philosophy of humane science, the lecturer pointed out that, in the continual development of science, periods necessarily occur – as now – when there seems to be no satisfactory progress, there being a temporary pause while preparation is made for a new step, an advance to further generalisations. Untrained minds, impatient at the delay, attempt to supply more

than science can give; and this, together with the patronage of Church and State, tends to impair the usefulness of Science. Political Economists who know nothing of the life of the people and the actual conditions of production, write learned works which are accepted as scientific; and in the same way Natural History is studied in closed laboratories and not, as Audubon studied it, in the open forests. Thus

¹ For more details, see *The Great [French] Revolution*, ch. LVII and LIX

conclusions are arrived at which are antagonistic to human nature, and it is believed that science is somehow instructing us to take each other by the throat. But science has no such prescription for us, and indeed no prescription at all; it merely tells us facts—what consequences follow what causes. “Darwinism” is now-a-days made to answer for every sort of outrage, is the explanation of every villainy, as, for example in our recent treatment of the Matabele, whose extinction is justified on the plea that “black men must go,” “it seems cruel, but it is their inevitable destiny,” and other equally “scientific” assertions. Nature, according to Huxley’s theory, is no better than a gladiatorial show, where each being is against each, and there is no need for the spectators to turn their thumbs downwards (the signal for the *coup de grace*), because no quarter is ever shown in any case, since life is a continual free fight.

But, said the lecturer, Darwin does not teach this. He proves that there is a struggle for existence, in order to put a check on the inordinate increase of species. But this “struggle” is not to be understood in a crude petition, but there is also what is still more important—a law of mutual aid, and as soon as the scientist leaves his laboratory and comes out into the open woods and meadows, he sees the importance of this law. Only those animals who are mutually helpful are really fitted to survive; it is not the strong, but the co-operative species that endure.

Instances of mutual aid, of which any number might be quoted, may be seen even in the less developed forms of life. Land-crabs migrate in columns from sea to land; and the lecturer narrated how he had watched an overturned king-crab at the Brighton Aquarium laboriously set on its feet again by the repeated efforts of its companions. The good will of ants is signified by a free gift of food from full crop to empty crop, and this pact of friendship is not confined to individuals but extends to whole nests, thus showing that the Stomach exists not for individuals only but for the community. Natural Selection comes to aid those species that are social.

Much is said of birds and beasts “of prey.” But birds of prey are comparatively few in number, whereas the other kinds, where man has not come on the scene, are countless, as for example, the passenger pigeons in America, which once flew in such flocks as to obscure the sun for days, or the various species which in high northern latitudes breed in immense numbers and all co-operate to scare away the intruding robber.

So, too, with the mammals. There is much talk of the savagery of lions and tigers, but how few they are by comparison, let us say, with the whole villages of prairie-dogs, who live in perfect amity and comradeship! The lecturer further instanced the vast processions of buffaloes that might once be seen in North America, the beasts of prey that followed them being merely the scavengers of nature. The highest form

of association among animals is of course to be seen among Monkeys, whose combined defence is so perfect that it has been said that they seldom die any but a natural death, and instances are recorded of their carrying off the dead body of a comrade from the tent of his human murderer.

Mutual aid is thus a very substantial element in existence, and not for utilitarian purposes only, but for the simple enjoyment of life. The highest developed in every class is the most sociable, because the increased length of years which association secures is favourable to the increase of Experience.

It remains to apply this principle to human science. “It may be true of the animals,” it is said, “but is it true of man? Is it true of savages?” a doubt to which even Spencer and Huxley have in some degree lent their sanction. But those who have lived among savages know that it is true. The records of the early travellers in Oceania and the Pacific Isles led to that conception of an ideal “state of nature” on which so much ridicule has been poured by later writers; but, as a matter of fact, scientific investigation has revealed in these races a remarkable wealth of institutions for mutual aid, and the existence of a happy and peaceful society without authority or government. In the tribal state which preceded the family every possession was shared in common, and whatever was held by the individual returned to the tribe at his death. In the village communities of so-called “barbarians,” there was a common ownership of land, and a jury system which settled quarrels by arbitration—intelligence having been developed to this extent out of mutual aid.

In spite of the teachings of supposed scientific authorities, mutual aid exists largely among the poorer classes of to-day; and if we leave printed matter, and go to study the actual facts of life, we find great material to support this belief. It was because Huxley over-looked this law of mutual aid, that he was driven to look for help from another quarter, and so gave some countenance to the idea of a return to supernaturalism.

The process of Mutual Aid has been developed from the first, through countless ages, among animals, and its application to Man is only a continuance of the same law. Let us note the lesson of Nature. In times of scarcity, how do animals and birds act? They migrate; or, like the ants, take concerted measures to provide themselves with food. Yet Man, the highest of animals, thinks he has no option but to rob his fellows, as Englishmen have robbed and spoiled the Matabele. There is no need of any extraneous or supernatural help or admonition. All the elements of morality are inherent in Nature, if we would but study them.

Only those animals who are mutually helpful are really fitted to survive

A Letter from Russia

Le Libertaire, 22 July 1921

Comrades and Friends,

The last war has proven, beyond all doubt, that in today's society it is absolutely mad to hope that a day will come when wars would become impossible as long as the present exploitation of labour by Capital and backward nations by nations more advanced in industry continues to exist. As long as this exploitation lasts, wars will devastate humanity and hinder its development. The four-year war (which still continues) has confirmed once again what socialists of every shade have repeatedly stressed: As long as Capital can buy the strength of Labour and enrich itself by the toil of others, there will be internal wars. And what is true for a nation is also true for the society of peoples. The nation which precedes other nations in its economic development (or else, only believes that they have preceded), will inevitably seek to enrich themselves by force of arms.

Under the present conditions wars will return; and their character, as we have seen recently, will be more and more ferocious, more and more abominable, and more and more disastrous for the generations to come. Under these conditions the need for a profound reconstruction of society upon new bases – that is to say, for a social revolution – becomes more and more obvious. The bourgeoisie itself is beginning to realise it. And that is why it is absolutely essential for those who are most interested in reconstruction to discuss thoroughly the essential features of the changes in the structure of society which it is a question of achieving.

So far, the workers have had little interest in this kind of discussion. They did not believe in the possibility of an impending social revolution. But they must now see that they were wrong. Life itself, and above all the war, has imposed reconstruction. The social revolution knocks at our doors. Furthermore, as you will undoubtedly learn when your delegates return from Russia, the attempt at a Jacobin social revolution which has been taking place on a large scale for nearly three years has not produced the results we were hoping to obtain.

They will explain this failure by the war, which is still on going. But the cause is much deeper.

The Revolution of November 1917 sought to establish in Russia a mixed regime of Babeuf's highly centralised authoritarian Communism; with Pecqueur's equally centralised Collectivism, which has been popularised in Europe for forty years under the name of Marxism. And this attempt – it must be acknowledged – has certainly not given the results hoped for.

The attempt to establish a highly centralised power, imposing the communist revolution by decrees and by armies of bureaucrats [employés] did not succeed. The usual vices of every centralised State gnaw away at this

administration, the mass of the people is excluded from reconstruction, and the dictatorial powers of the communist bureaucrats [employés], far from alleviating the evils, only aggravate them.

It is therefore obvious that the workers of central and western Europe, particularly the Latin ones, when they know the results of the Revolution in Russia should look for more effective means of reaching their goals. Already in the First International, when they were studying "public services in the future society," they sought the solution of the social problem by the socialisation of production and exchange; but they wanted to get there not by the centralised State but by the federation of free Communes, the decentralisation of production and exchange, and the awakening of the local initiative of groups of producers and consumers. In short, they studied the question of how to build the new society not by orders from the centre, but by construction from the simple to the complex, always encouraging local and individual initiative, instead of killing it by armies of functionaries who carry out the will of the centre as best they can.

The experiment conducted in Russia has confirmed the need to develop these tendencies of autonomy and federalism, and it is in this direction that without doubt the efforts of the workers will head, as soon as they delve into the great and difficult questions that confront every revolution, as had been done in the federalist International.

Brothers and friends of Western Europe, history has imposed a formidable task on your generation. It falls upon you to begin to apply the principles of Socialism and to find practical forms. And it is upon you that falls the task of developing the new structures of a society where the exploitation of man by man, as well as classes, will have disappeared and, at the same time, a society where, instead of the centralisation which brings us oppression and wars, will develop a thousand centres of life and constructive forces in free Trade Unions and independent Communes.

History pushes us in this direction.

Well, let us courageously get to work!

Let us break with the two prejudices of benefactor-Capital and the providence-State! And in our groups and congresses, in our Trade Unions and in our Communes, we will find the necessary elements to build a new society, the Society of Labour and Liberty, free from Capital and the State, and from the cult of Authority.

Moscow, August 1920

Kronstadt: The end of the Bolshevik Myth

For most anarchists, the Kronstadt rebellion of early 1921 needs little introduction. Rightly so, as it is one of the critical events of the Russian Revolution and for revolutionaries your position on it indicates your position on a host of other issues (although some more questions are needed to differentiate the Trotskyists from the Stalinists).

The revolt broke out in Kronstadt, a naval base protecting St. Petersburg (then named Petrograd), in solidarity with a strike wave in Petrograd, one of a series of general strikes taking place across Russia at the start of 1921. These strikes, provoked by supply problems but soon raising political demands such as soviet democracy, were subject to immediate Bolshevik repression (martial law, arresting of strikers, arresting Mensheviks, SRs and others, etc.). The sailors of the two main battleships stationed at Kronstadt (the Petropavlovsk and the Sevastopol) held meetings and sent delegates to the city to discover what was happening. These groups reported back and the sailors passed the famous Petropavlovsk resolution (included by Ante Ciliga in his article on the revolt, reprinted below). This was brought to a mass meeting of sailors, soldiers and workers at Anchor Square and was passed almost unanimously (only three Bolshevik functionaries voted against it).

The resolution invoked the spirit of 1917, demanding that the promises of October be kept now that the civil war had been over for months: soviet democracy, trade union autonomy, freedom of speech, assembly and organisation, amongst others. The Bolsheviks replied with an ultimatum: surrender or face the consequences. No attempt was made to negotiate with the rebels, who were slandered as following a White General, while the base was isolated as martial law and providing provisions ensured the end of the strike in Petrograd by March 4th. Kronstadt fell to Bolshevik forces on the 17th of March 1921.

For Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, the crushing of Kronstadt crystallised their steadily growing uneasiness with the regime and they finally broke with it. As news of the revolt spread, libertarians across the world followed their example and any lingering support for Lenin's regime evaporated. At the same time, the Bolsheviks justified the repression, spreading lies to do so.

These events resurfaced 17 years later when Trotsky entered into discussions over its meaning and importance. This provoked Emma Goldman to pen the classic "Trotsky Protests Too Much" (published by the Anarchist Communist Federation in Glasgow, also in 1938) as well as Ciliga's article. This first appeared as "L'insurrection de Cronstadt et la destinée de la Révolution russe" in *La Révolution Prolétarienne*, 10 September 1938 (a syndicalist magazine established by Pierre Monatte in Paris at the beginning of 1925). The article was translated into English for the London-based *War Commentary: For Anarchism* in January 1942 before being issued the following month as a pamphlet entitled *The Kronstadt*

Revolt with an editor's introduction. It soon sold out, necessitating a reprint in July 1942. It then appears to have fallen out of print before last appearing in *The Raven: An Anarchist Quarterly* No. 8 (October 1989), which was a shame as it addresses well the fundamental issues expressed by the revolt and indicates the lessons to be drawn from it as the Editors of the Freedom Press pamphlet suggest:

The revolutionary workers must not only

destroy the bourgeois state: they must also guard against the growth of a new apparatus which may wrest power from them. Any political party seeking to centralise control in its own hands, has to set up instruments to ensure that its plans are carried out; to control not only the defeated bourgeoisie, but also the revolutionary workers themselves. Inevitably, conflicts will arise between it and the economic and social organisations set up by the workers. They can only end in the suppression of one power by the other.

Such a conflict may however be masked by certain aims which both the workers and the "revolutionary government" may have in common. Both aim to overthrow the Bourgeoisie at home and abroad. In withstanding the counter-revolutionary attacks of the Bourgeoisie, the conflict between the workers and the new state is concealed in their common struggle; under cover of which the new state power seeks continuously to entrench itself at the expense of the workers'

“The revolutionary workers must not only destroy the bourgeois state: they must also guard against the growth of a new apparatus which may wrest power from them.”

organisations, until it finally over-throws them altogether.

This consolidation of the power of the governing minority inevitably involves ruthless suppression, and the workers, their liberty lost and deprived of responsibility in the ordering of their lives and economy, sink back into their pre-revolutionary apathy. The revolutionary opportunity has once more been missed. Meanwhile the new state is forced to go further and further down the road to a bleak totalitarianism. To prevent the initial setting up of such a new governing power is the lesson which must be learnt from the Kronstadt tragedy. (*The Kronstadt Revolt* [London: Freedom Press, 1942], 6)

Ciliga (1898-1992) was a co-founder of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia but came to reject Leninism after seeing Stalinism in practice in Russia. As recounted in his book *The Russian Enigma* (1940, 1979), he was arrested by the secret police as a Trotskyist and deported to a labour camp in Siberia. Expelled from the Soviet Union in 1935, he soon broke with Trotsky over the nature of the Soviet Union, which Ciliga correctly argued was state-capitalist, and moved towards a libertarian socialism position for a number of years (see Michael S. Fox, “Ante Ciliga, Trotsky, and State Capitalism: Theory, Tactics, and Re-evaluation during the Purge Era, 1935-1939”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1). As such, he was well placed to refute Trotsky – both theoretically and from experience.

Yet while Ciliga summarises the importance of Kronstadt well, a few extra comments are needed.

First, it must be noted that Kronstadt in 1917 was not a Bolshevik stronghold, although they were influential. The majority trend was SR-Maximalist – a grouping somewhere between the Left-SRs (the main peasant party) and the anarchists – and this resurfaced during the revolt. This explains the clear opposition to wage-labour expressed in the Petropavlovsk resolution and in the articles published during the revolt in the newspaper *Izvestia* (Paul Avrich quotes from these articles extensively in *Kronstadt 1921* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970], as does Voline in *The Unknown Revolution* [Oakland: PM Press 2019]).

Second, Trotsky’s claims that the revolutionary sailors of 1917 had been replaced in 1921 has been debunked by academics. However, as this claim is regularly repeated by Leninists of all types, it is worthwhile summarising this evidence.

Academic Evan Mawdsley concludes that “it seems reasonable to challenge the previous interpretation” that there had been a “marked change in the composition of the men in the fleet . . . particularly . . . at the Kronstadt Naval Base.” From the “statistical data, it would appear that the situation in the DOT [Active Detachment] was” that “the majority of men have been veterans of 1917 . . . and available information indicates that as many as three-

quarters of the DOT ratings – the Kronstadt mutineers – had served in the fleet at least since the World War.” The data suggests “for the DOT as a whole on 1 January 1921, 23.5% could have been drafted before 1911, 52% from 1911 to 1918 and 24.5% after 1918.” In terms of the two battleships whose sailors played the leading role in 1921 revolt, the Petropavlovsk and the Sevastopol, he shows that “at the time of the uprising” of the 2,028 sailors, 20.2% were recruited into the navy before 1914, 59% joined in the years 1914-16, 14% in 1917 and 6.8% in the years 1918-21. So 93.2% of the sailors who launched the



Ante Ciliga (1898-1992)

revolt in 1921 had been there in 1917. In short, the “majority of men seem to have been veterans of 1917”. (“The Baltic Fleet and the Kronstadt Mutiny”, *Soviet Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4, 508-9) Thus:

Although the number of ratings in the Baltic Fleet as a whole rose by 1 December 1920 to 24,914 -- still 1,079 below the establishment -- the basic composition of the DOT did not change greatly. The important point is that the 10,000 new recruits were trainees, not replacements . . . and these men were in training depots in Petrograd, not at Kronstadt; furthermore, as at 1 December only 1,313 of a planned total of 10,384 had arrived. It also seems unlikely that the new volunteers could have been appearing in large numbers by the end of February 1921; those that did were probably in Petrograd and not aboard the ships of the DOT . . . [and so] remobilisation, difficulties in finding suitable replacements . . . [meant] that as many as three-quarters of the DOT ratings – the Kronstadt mutineers – had served in the fleet at least since the World War.

By the time of the rising the demobilisation of the older classes had hardly begun . . . The composition of the DOT had not fundamentally changed, and anarchistic young peasants did not predominate there. The available data suggest that the main difficulty was not . . . that the experienced sailors were being demobilised. Rather, they were not being demobilized rapidly enough. (509-10)

Another academic, Israel Getzler in his excellent account of Kronstadt during the revolution, also investigated this issue and presented identical conclusions. He demonstrated that of those serving in the Baltic fleet on

1st January 1921 at least 75.5% were drafted before 1918. Over 80% were from Great Russian areas, 10% from the Ukraine and 9% from Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Poland. He argues that the “veteran politicised Red sailor still predominated in Kronstadt at the end of 1920” and presents more “hard statistical data” like that just quoted by also investigating the crews of the two main battleships, the *Petropavlovsk* and the *Sevastopol*, showing that of the 2,028 sailors whose years of enlistment are known, only 6.8% were recruited in the years 1918-21 and they were the only ones who had not been there during the 1917 revolution. (*Kronstadt 1917-1921: The Fate of a Soviet Democracy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 207-8)

The available information indicates that by length of service the sailors of Kronstadt in 1921 had been there since 1917 – including the sailors manning the battleships which were “the powder kegs of the rising.” Moreover, “[g]iven their maturity and experience, not to speak of their keen disillusionment as former participants in the revolution, it was only natural that these seasoned bluejackets should be thrust into the forefront of the uprising.” (Avrich, 93, 91) D. Fedotoff-White also noted that “a good many” of the rebels “had had ample experience in organisational and political work since 1917. A number had long-standing associations with Anarchists and the Socialist Revolutionaries of the Left”. The cruiser *Rossiia* joined in the decision to re-elect the Kronstadt Soviet and its “crew consisted mostly of old seamen.” (*The Growth of the Red Army* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944], 155, 138)

So Getzler was right to conclude that it was “certainly the case” that the “activists of the 1921 uprising had been participants of the 1917 revolutions” as had the “1,900 veteran sailors of the *Petropavlovsk* and the *Sevastopol* who spearheaded it. It was certainly true of a majority of the Revolutionary Committee and of the intellectuals . . . Likewise, at least three-quarters of the 10,000 to 12,000 sailors -- the mainstay of the uprising -- were old hands who had served in the navy through war and revolution.” (226)

Third, Ciliga mentions but does not dwell on the ideological context. The notion that the dictatorship of the proletariat required, indeed *was*, the dictatorship of the party had been Bolshevik policy since early 1919 at the latest and practice since July 1918 (ideology often takes a while to adjust to practice). By the time of the Second Congress of the Communist International, leading Bolshevik Zinoviev was proclaiming to the assembled militants seeking to learn the lessons of an apparently successful socialist revolution that “[t]oday, people like Kautsky come along and say that in Russia you do not have the dictatorship of the working class but the dictatorship of the party. They think this is a reproach against us. Not in the least!” This was because “the dictatorship of the proletariat is at the same time the dictatorship of the Communist Party.” (Communist

International, *Workers of the world and oppressed peoples unite!: proceedings and documents of the Second Congress, 1920* [New York: Pathfinder, 1991], vol. 2, 151-2) Such a perspective would hardly accept Kronstadt’s call for soviet democracy under any circumstances.

As such, the crushing of the Kronstadt revolt as well as the general strikes across Russia which inspired it definitely marked the end of the Russian Revolution but this did not come out of the blue but rather reflected a counter-revolutionary process which begun nearly as soon as the Bolsheviks had seized power in 1917. The Bolsheviks had been undermining soviet democracy and disbanding soviets elected with non-Bolshevik majorities from the spring of 1918 (see my “*The State and Revolution: Theory and Practice*” in *Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution*, ed. Friends of Aron Baron [Edinburgh/ Oakland: AK Press, 2017]).

Given this, the events of March 1921 must not be viewed

“activists of the 1921 uprising had been participants of the 1917 revolutions”

in isolation. This also refutes the long-standing Leninist assertion that Kronstadt had to be crushed as “Revolutionary Russia” had to survive until revolutions took place elsewhere. Ignoring the awkward fact that there was nothing left of the revolution, any external revolution would have been marked by the ideology and practice of Bolshevism in Russia.

This included the dogma on the necessity of party dictatorship and so we see, for example, during the Hungarian Revolution which had seen libertarians form the first workers’ councils in December 1917, by 1919 they “felt that the powers of the [Communist] Revolutionary Governing Council [of Bela Kun] were excessive . . . For the syndicalists the legitimate holders of proletarian sovereignty were the workers councils . . . It was not long before they saw their cherished ideals defeated by the united party’s oligarchy. On April 7, 1919, elections were held for the Budapest Council of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies. The syndicalist controlled Budapest Eighth district elected a slate consisting solely of syndicalist and anarchist write-in deputies in place of the single-party ticket. The Revolutionary Governing Council voided the results of the election and a week later the official slate ‘won’”. (Rudolf L. Tokes, *Bela Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic: The Origins and Role of the Communist Party of Hungary in the Revolutions of 1918-1919* [London: Pall Mall Press, 1967], 38, 151-2) As in Russia, the “wrong” people had been elected to the soviets and so the Communist regime simply nullified workers’ democracy.

The same perspective was expressed in other countries. In Italy the pro-Bolsheviks were also raising the necessity of party dictatorship and were being opposed by the libertarians during the revolutionary crisis in 1920:

Up to now, whenever we said that what the socialists term *dictatorship of the proletariat* is only, in fact, the dictatorship of some men who, with the assistance of a party, superimpose and impose themselves on the proletariat, they used to treat us as if we were little short of slanderers . . . Moscow had become the Mecca of the proletariat; the source of light, and . . . peremptory orders as to the ideas that those who, with permission from their betters, wished to call themselves communists ought to profess and the conduct they should observe . . . the official Italian Socialist Party daily, up to now the most authorised mouthpiece for the word from Moscow, . . . *Avanti!* of the 26th [September, 1920] . . . said:

‘In Russia, under the soviet regime, the Party really directs all State policy and all public activities; individuals as well as groups being utterly subordinated to the decisions of the Party, so that *the dictatorship of the proletariat is really the dictatorship of the party and, as such of its central committee.*’

Well now we know what we have to look forward to: the dictatorship of the Leadership of the Socialist Party, or of the as yet unborn Communist Party . . . a revolution made with an authoritarian outlook with dictatorial objectives . . . through authoritarian imposition from above. (Errico Malatesta, “At Last! What is the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat?’”, *Anarchistes, Socialistes et Communistes* [Annecy: Group 1er Mai, 1982], 208-10)

Later, with regards to the Chinese Revolution, Trotsky in May 1927 reiterated this Bolshevik truism when he argued that “[w]ith us the dictatorship of the party (quite falsely disputed theoretically by Stalin) is the expression of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat . . . The dictatorship of a party is a part of the socialist revolution”. (*Leon Trotsky on China* [New York: Monad Press, 2002], 251)

In other words, if the revolution had spread then it would not have meant an end to the party dictatorship. Likewise, the NEP was considered a “retreat” by Lenin from the centralised economic regime which had done so much to make the economic crisis worse. A “successful” revolution in the West – and modern-day Leninists are just as convinced as the Bolsheviks then that is impossible without a vanguard party to seize and wield State power – would have imposed a party dictatorship and a centralised economic structure.

Indeed, leading German Communist Karl Radek defended the crushing of Kronstadt and its lesson of the necessity of

party dictatorship to his fellow countrymen. Victor Serge was doing likewise in French while American Trotskyists were defending the necessity of party dictatorship at the same time and in the same journal that Trotsky was seeking to justify the grim outcome of any such perspective would inevitably produce which took place during March 1921 at Kronstadt (see my “The Trotskyist School of Falsification”, *ASR* 79 [Spring 2020]).

Fourth, Ciligia, like many libertarian Marxists, pointed to the Workers’ Opposition and its programme as the basis of any genuine socialist revival. However, that grouping only questioned Bolshevik ideology on economic issues and supported party dictatorship. Unsurprisingly, its members volunteered at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party to join the forces attacking Kronstadt, although this did not save them from being banned along with other factions (Avrich, 182-3). Even in economic terms, their praise for workers’ economic self-activity was very much nullified both by the predominant role the Party would play and by the centralised economic structures they favoured. As such, their reputation as (to use Lenin’s expression) a “syndicalist deviation” is much exaggerated even if the likes of Ciligia and Goldman suggested it at times.

Fifth, Ciligia correctly notes the role of the State bureaucracy in events. While Trotskyists portray the revolt as a peasant uprising against the “proletarian” regime, in reality, there were three classes at the time: the proletariat, the peasantry (the vast majority) and the bureaucracy. The toilers had been politically and economically dispossessed by the party and the bureaucracy its rule required. By 1921, there were over five million bureaucrats, their numbers, powers and privileges steadily growing from the moment the Bolsheviks had seized power and applied their centralist prejudices.

Thus the new State had swiftly produced an old enemy,

“the new Communist bureaucracy and inefficiency . . . was a crushing indictment against the Bolsheviks, their theories and methods.”

– Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia*

the bureaucracy. Anarchists in Russia saw this development first-hand. Emma Goldman, most famously, recounted her experiences in 1920 of the “cumbersome Bolshevik machine and general inefficiency” as well as “how paralysing was the effect of the bureaucratic red tape which delayed and often frustrated the most earnest and energetic efforts . . . Materials were very scarce and it was most difficult to procure them owing to the unbelievably centralised Bolshevik methods. Thus to get a pound of nails one had to file applications in about ten or fifteen bureaus; to secure some bed linen or ordinary dishes one wasted days.” The “newly fledged officialdom was as

hard to cope with as the old bureaucracy” while the “bureaucratic officials seemed to take particular delight in countermanding each other’s orders.” In short, “the new Communist bureaucracy and inefficiency, and the hopelessness of the whole situation . . . was a crushing indictment against the Bolsheviks, their theories and methods.” (*My Disillusionment in Russia* [London: Active Distribution, 2017], 61, 62, 66, 67, 107)

As such, we should never forget that the Bolsheviks confirmed Bakunin’s warning that “the organisation and the rule of the new society by socialist savants” would be “the worst of all despotic governments!” The “State has always been the patrimony of some privileged class: a priestly class, an aristocratic class, a bourgeois class. And finally, when all the other classes have exhausted themselves, the State then becomes the patrimony of the bureaucratic class and then falls – or, if you will, rises – to the position of a machine.” There “will be a new class, a new hierarchy of real and counterfeit scientists and scholars, and the world will be divided into a minority ruling in the name of knowledge, and an immense ignorant majority. And then, woe unto the mass of ignorant ones!” (*Bakunin on Anarchism* [Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980], 295, 318, 319)

Sixth, Leninists argue that Kronstadt had to be crushed due to the danger of foreign military intervention. Yet this threat was extremely low. The revolt broke out months after the end of the Civil War in Western Russia. Wrangel, the last of the White Generals, had fled from the Crimea in November 1920 after being defeated by the Red Army and Makhnovists (who were then betrayed by the Bolsheviks). His forces were in no state to re-invade Russia as they were “dispersed and their moral sagging” and it would have taken “months . . . merely to mobilise his men and transport them from the Mediterranean to the Baltic” while a second front in the south “would have meant almost certain disaster.” This was acknowledged in a call issued by the Bolsheviks on March 5th, when they asked the rebels: “Haven’t you heard what happened to Wrangel’s men, who are dying like flies, in their thousands of hunger and disease?” The call goes on to add “[t]his is the fate that awaits you, unless you surrender

within 24 hours.” No foreign government moved to intervene. The Bolsheviks were so afraid of renewed military intervention that by early 1921 they demobilised half the Red Army (some 2,500,000 men). (Avrich, 219, 146, 105, 117-9, 13)

Lenin himself admitted on the day before Kronstadt fell, March 16th that “the enemies” around the Bolshevik state were “no longer able to wage their war of intervention” and so were launching a press campaign “with the prime object of disrupting the negotiations for a trade agreement with Britain, and the forthcoming trade agreement with America” for “we see that what they fear most, from the practical angle of international capital, is the resumption of proper trade relations. But they will fail in their attempts to disrupt them.” (*Collected Works* 32: 270) Support for Kronstadt remained verbal, if that. The only “danger” it represented was to the monopoly of power held by the Bolsheviks, the danger represented by the spirit of 1917 to every ruling class regardless of its rhetoric or origins.

Much more could be – and has been! – written. Indeed, there is a substantial appendix on Kronstadt on *An Anarchist FAQ* webpage (www.anarchistfaq.org). Ciliga rightly mentions Ida Mett’s work on Kronstadt, reprinted many times since it was translated by Solidarity in 1967 and which has most recently been published as “The Kronstadt Commune,” in *Bloodstained*. This work has much to recommend it, as does Alexander Berkman’s 1922 pamphlet *The Kronstadt Rebellion*.

To conclude. As libertarian socialist Maurice Brinton put it on the Russian Revolution’s 50th anniversary, Ciliga’s article “is an excellent short account which squarely faces up to some of the fundamental issues.” The Soviet Union did not make its 100th anniversary and on that anniversary of the Kronstadt revolt all genuine socialists must learn the lessons of both as both are intimately bound together. Ciliga can help in this as the Bolshevik Myth will not be debunked by itself in spite of its terrible practice then as now.

Iain McKay

The Kronstadt Uprising and the fate of the Russian Revolution

Ante Ciliga

La Révolution Proletarienne, 10 September 1938.

The correspondence between Trotsky and Wendelin Thomas (one of the leaders of the revolt in the German Navy in 1918, and a member of the American Committee of Enquiry into the Moscow Trials) regarding the historical significance of the events in Kronstadt in 1921, has given rise to widespread international discussion. That in itself indicates the importance of the problem. On the other hand, it is no accident that special interest should be shown in the Kronstadt revolt today; that there is an analogy, a direct link even between what

happened at Kronstadt 17 years ago, and the recent trials at Moscow, is only too apparent. Today we witness the murder of the leaders of the Russian revolution; in 1921 it was the masses who formed the basis of the revolution who were massacred. Would it be possible today to disgrace and suppress the leaders of October without the slightest protest from the people, if these leaders had not already by armed force silenced the Kronstadt sailors and the workers all over Russia?

Trotsky's reply to Wendelin Thomas shows that unfortunately Trotsky – who is, together with Stalin, the only one of the leaders of the October revolution concerned in the suppression of Kronstadt who remains alive – still refuses to look at the past objectively. Furthermore, in his article "Hue and Cry Over Kronstadt," he increases the gulf which he created at that time between the working masses and himself; he does not hesitate, after having ordered their bombardment in 1921 to describe these men today as "completely demoralised elements, men who wore elegant wide trousers and did their hair like pimps".

No! It is not with accusations of this kind, which reek of bureaucratic arrogance, that a useful contribution can be made to the lessons of the great Russian revolution.

In order to assess the influence that Kronstadt has had on the outcome of the revolution, it is necessary to avoid all personal issues, and direct attention to three fundamental questions:

1. In what general circumstances the Kronstadt revolt arose? 2. What were the aims of the movement? 3. By what means did the insurgents attempt to achieve these aims?

The masses and the bureaucracy in 1920-21

Everyone now agrees that during the winter of 1920 to 1921 the Russian revolution was passing through an extremely critical phase. The offensive against Poland had ended in defeat at Warsaw, the social revolution had not broken out in the West, the Russian revolution had become isolated, famine and disorganisation had seized the entire country. The peril of bourgeois restoration knocked at the door of the revolution. At this moment of crisis the different classes and parties which existed within the revolutionary camp each presented their solution for its resolution.

The Soviet Government and the higher circles in the Communist Party applied their own solution of *increasing the power of the bureaucracy*. The attribution of powers to the "Executive Committees" which had hitherto been vested in the soviets, the replacement of the dictatorship of the class by the dictatorship of the party, the shift of authority even within the party from its members to its cadres, the replacement of the double power of the bureaucracy and the workers in the factory by the sole power of the former – to do all this was to "save the Revolution!" It was at this moment that Bukharin put forward his plea for a "proletarian Bonapartism". By placing restrictions on itself the proletariat would, according to him, facilitate the struggle against the bourgeois counter-revolution. Here was manifested already the enormous quasi-messianic *self-importance* of the Communist Bureaucracy.

The Ninth and Tenth Congresses of the Communist Party, as well as the intervening year passed beneath the

auspices of this new policy. Lenin rigidly carried it through, Trotsky sang its praises. The Bureaucracy prevented the bourgeois restoration... by eliminating the proletarian character of the revolution.

The formation of the "Workers' Opposition" within the party, which was supported not only by the proletarian faction in the party itself but also by the great mass of unorganised workers, the general strike of the Petrograd workers a short time before the Kronstadt revolt and finally the insurrection itself, all expressed the aspirations of the masses who felt, more or less clearly, that a "third party" was about to destroy their conquests. The movement of poor peasants led by Makhno in the Ukraine was the outcome of similar resistance in similar

what other programme which is at all socialist could be set up against the bureaucratic oligarchy except that of Kronstadt...?

circumstances. If the struggles of 1920-1921 are examined in the light of the historical material now available, one is struck by the way that these scattered masses, starved and enfeebled by economic disorganisation, nevertheless had the strength to formulate for themselves with such precision their social and political position, and at the same time to defend themselves against the bureaucracy and against the bourgeoisie.

The Kronstadt Programme

We shall not content ourselves, like Trotsky, with simple declarations, so we submit to readers the resolution which served as a programme for the Kronstadt movement. We reproduce it in full, because of its immense historical importance. It was adopted on February 28th by the sailors of the battleship "Petropavlovsk," and was subsequently accepted by all the sailors, soldiers and workers of Kronstadt.

After having heard the representatives delegated by the general meeting of ships' crew to report on the situation in Petrograd this assembly takes the following decisions:

1. Seeing that the present soviets do not express the wishes of the workers and peasants, to organise immediately re-elections to the soviets with a secret vote, and with care to organise free electoral propaganda for all workers and peasants.
2. To grant liberty of speech and of press to the workers and peasants, to the anarchists and the left socialist parties.

3. To secure freedom of assembly for labour unions and peasant organisations.
4. To call a non-partisan Conference of the workers, Red Army Soldiers and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt, and of Petrograd province, no later than March 10th, 1921.
5. To liberate all political prisoners of Socialist parties as well as all workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors imprisoned in connection with the labour and peasant movements.
6. To elect a Commission to review the cases of those held in prisons and concentration camps.
7. To abolish all *politodeli*¹ because no party should be given special privileges in the propagation of its ideas or receive financial support from the government for such purposes. Instead there should be established educational and cultural commissions, locally elected and financed by the government.
8. To abolish immediately all *zagryaditelniye otryadi*².
9. To equalise all the rations of all who work with the exception of those employed in trades detrimental to health.
10. To abolish the communist fighting detachments in all branches of the army, as well as the communist guards kept on duty in mills and factories. Should such guards or military detachments be found necessary they are to be appointed in the army from the ranks, and in the factories according to the judgement of the workers.
11. To give the peasants full freedom of action in regard to their land and also the right to keep cattle on condition that the peasants manage with their own means; that is, without employing hired labour.
12. To request all branches of the Army, as well as our comrades the military *kursanti*³ to concur in our resolutions.
13. To demand that the press give the fullest publicity to our resolutions.
14. To appoint a travelling commission of control.
15. To permit free artisan production which does not employ hired labour.

These are primitive formulations, insufficient no doubt, but all of them impregnated with the spirit of October;

¹ Political sections of the Communist Party existing in the majority of State institutions.

² Police detachments officially created to struggle against speculation, but which actually used to confiscate everything

and no calumny in the world can cast a doubt on the intimate connection existing between this resolution and the sentiments which guided the expropriations of 1917.

The depth of principle which animates this resolution is shown by the fact that it is still to a great extent applicable. One can, in fact, oppose it as well to the Stalin regime of 1938, as to that of Lenin in 1921. More even than that: the accusations of Trotsky himself against Stalin's regime are only reproductions, timid ones, it is true, of the Kronstadt claims. Besides, what other programme which is at all socialist could be set up against the bureaucratic oligarchy except that of Kronstadt and the Workers' Opposition?

The appearance of this resolution demonstrates the close connections which existed between the movements of Petrograd and Kronstadt. Trotsky's attempt to set the workers of Petrograd against those of Kronstadt in order to confirm the legend of the counter-revolutionary nature of the Kronstadt movement, comes back on Trotsky himself: in 1921, Trotsky pleaded the necessity under which Lenin was situated in justification of the suppression of democracy in the Soviets and in the party, and accused the masses inside and outside the party of *sympathising with Kronstadt*. He admitted therefore that at that time the Petrograd workers and the opposition although they had not resisted by force of arms, none the less extended their sympathy to Kronstadt.

Trotsky's subsequent assertion that "the insurrection was inspired by the desire to obtain a privileged ration" is still more wild. Thus, it is one of these privileged people of the Kremlin, the rations for whom were very much better than those of others, who dares to hurl a similar reproach, and that at the very men who in paragraph 9 of their resolution, explicitly demanded equalisation of rations! This detail shows the desperate extent of Trotsky's bureaucratic blindness.

Trotsky's articles do not depart in the slightest degree from the legend created long ago by the Central Committee of the Party. Trotsky certainly deserves credit from the international working class for having refused since 1928 to continue to participate in the bureaucratic degeneration and in the new 'purges' which were destined to deprive the Revolution of all its left-wing elements. He deserves still more to be defended against Stalin's calumny and assassins. But all this does not give Trotsky the right to insult the working masses of 1921. On the contrary! More than anyone else, Trotsky should furnish a new appreciation of the initiative taken at Kronstadt. An initiative of great historic value, an initiative taken by rank-and-file militants in the struggle against the first bloodstained "purge" undertaken by the bureaucracy.

that the starving population, the workers included, brought from the country for their own personal consumption.

³ Cadet officers.

The attitude of the Russian workers during the tragic winter of 1920-1921 shows a profound social instinct; and a noble heroism inspired the working classes of Russia not only at the height of the Revolution but also at the crisis which placed it in mortal danger.

Neither the Kronstadt fighters, nor the Petrograd workers, nor the ranks of the Communists could summon, it is true, in that winter the same revolutionary energy as in 1917 to 1919, but what there was of socialism and revolutionary feeling in the Russia of 1921 was possessed by the rank-and-file. In their opposition to this, Lenin and Trotsky, in line with Stalin, with Zinoviev, Kaganovitch, and others responded to the wishes and served the interests of the bureaucratic cadres. The workers struggled for the socialism which the bureaucracy were already in the process of liquidating. That is the fundamental point of the whole problem.

Kronstadt and the NEP

People often believe that Kronstadt forced the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) – a profound error. The Kronstadt resolution pronounced in favour of the defence of the workers, not only against the bureaucratic capitalism of the State, but also against the restoration of private capitalism. This restoration was demanded – in opposition to Kronstadt – by the social democrats, who combined it with a regime of political democracy. And it was Lenin and Trotsky who to a great extent realised it (but without political democracy) in the form of the NEP. The Kronstadt resolution declared for the opposite since it declared itself against the employment of wage labour in agriculture and small industry. This resolution, and the movement underlying, sought for a revolutionary alliance of the proletarian and peasant workers with the poorest sections of the country labourers, in order that the revolution might develop towards socialism. The NEP, on the other hand, was a union of bureaucrats with the upper layers of the village against the proletariat; it was the alliance of State capitalism and private capitalism against socialism. The NEP is as much opposed to the Kronstadt demands as, for example, the revolutionary socialist programme of the vanguard of the European workers for the abolition

of the Versailles system, is opposed to the abrogation of the Treaty of Versailles achieved by Hitler.

Let us consider, finally, one last accusation which is commonly circulated: that action such as that at Kronstadt could have *indirectly* let loose the forces of the counter-revolution. It is *possible* indeed that even by placing itself on a footing of workers' democracy the revolution might have been overthrown; but what is

certain is that it has perished, and that it has perished on account of the policy of its leaders. The repression of Kronstadt, the suppression of the democracy of workers and soviets by the Russian Communist party, the elimination of the proletariat from the management of industry, and the introduction of the NEP, already signified the death of the Revolution.



Red Army troops attacking Kronstadt

It was precisely the end of the civil war which produced the splitting of the post-revolutionary society into two fundamental groupings: the working masses and the bureaucracy. As far as its socialist and internationalist aspirations were concerned, the Russian Revolution was stifled: in its nationalist, bureaucratic, and state capitalist tendencies, it developed and consolidated itself.

It was from this point onwards, and on this basis, each year more and more clearly, that the Bolshevik repudiation of morality, so frequently evoked, took on a development which had to lead to the Moscow Trials. The implacable logic of things has manifested itself. While the revolutionaries, remaining such only in words, accomplished in fact the task of the reaction and counter-revolution, they were compelled, inevitably, to have recourse to lies, to calumny and falsification. This system of generalised lying is the result, not the cause, of the separation of the Bolshevik party from socialism and from the proletariat. In order to corroborate this statement, I shall quote the testimony regarding Kronstadt of men I have met in Soviet Russia.

“The men of Kronstadt! They were absolutely right; they intervened in order to defend the Petrograd workers: it was a tragic misunderstanding on the part of Lenin and Trotsky, that instead of agreeing with them, they gave them battle,” said Dch. to me in 1932. He was a non-party worker in Petrograd in 1921, whom I knew in the political isolator at Verkhne-Uralsk as a Trotskyist.

“It is a myth that, from the social point of view, Kronstadt of 1921 had a wholly different population from that of 1917,” another man from Petrograd, Dv., said to me in prison. In 1921 he was a member of the Communist youth, and was imprisoned in 1932 as a ‘decist’ (a member of Sapronov’s group of “Democratic Centralists”).

It is *possible* indeed that even by placing itself on a footing of workers’ democracy the revolution might have been overthrown; but what is *certain* is that it has perished

I also had the opportunity of knowing one of the most effective participants in the Kronstadt rebellion. He was an old marine engineer, a communist since 1917, who had, during the civil war, taken an active part, directing at one time a Tcheka in a province somewhere on the Volga, and found himself in 1921 at Kronstadt as a political commissar on the warship “Marat” (ex-“Petropavlovsk”). When I saw him, in 1930, in the Leningrad prison, he had just spent the previous eight years in the Solovietki islands.

The Methods of Struggle

The Kronstadt workers pursued revolutionary aims in struggling against the reactionary tendencies of the bureaucracy, and they used clean and honest methods. In contrast, the bureaucracy slandered their movement odiously, pretending that it was led by General Kozlovski. Actually, the men of Kronstadt honestly desired, as comrades, to discuss the questions at issue with the representatives of the government. Their action, had at first, a defensive character – that is the reason why they did not occupy Oranienbaum in time, situated on the coast opposite Kronstadt.

Right from the start, the Petrograd bureaucrats made use of the system of hostages by arresting the families of the sailors, Red Army soldiers and workers of Kronstadt who were living in Petrograd because several commissars in Kronstadt – not one of whom was shot – had been arrested. The news of the seizing of hostages was brought to the knowledge of Kronstadt by means of leaflets dropped from aeroplanes. In their reply by radio, Kronstadt declared on March 7th “that they did not wish to imitate Petrograd as they considered that such an act, even when carried out in an excess of desperation and hate, is most shameful and most cowardly from every point of view. History has not yet known a similar procedure”. (*Izvestia* of the Revolutionary Committee of Kronstadt, 7 March 1921) The new governing clique

understood much better than the Kronstadt ‘rebels’ the significance of the social struggle which was beginning, the depth of the class-antagonism which separated it from the workers. It is in this that lies the tragedy of revolutions in the period of their decline.

But while military conflict was forced upon Kronstadt, they still found the strength to formulate the programme for the ‘third revolution’, which remains since then the programme of the Russian socialism of the future.¹

Balance Sheet

There are reasons for thinking that granted the relation between the forces of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, of socialism and capitalism, which existed in Russia and Europe at the beginning of 1921, the struggle for the socialist development of the Russian Revolution was doomed to defeat. In those conditions the socialist programme of the masses could not conquer: it had to depend on the triumph of the counter-revolution whether openly declared or *camouflaged* under an aspect of degeneracy (as has been produced in fact).

But such a conception of the progress of the Russian Revolution does not diminish in the slightest, in the realms of principle, the historic importance of the programme and the efforts of the working masses. On the contrary, this programme constitutes the *point of departure* from which a new cycle in the revolutionary socialist development will begin. In fact, each new revolution begins not on the basis from which the preceding one started, but from the point at which the revolution before it had undergone a moral set-back.

The experience of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution places anew before the conscience of international socialism an extremely important sociological problem. In the Russian revolution, as in two other great revolutions, those of England and of France, why is it that it is from the inside that the counter-revolution has triumphed, at the moment when the revolutionary forces were exhausted, and by means of the revolutionary party itself (‘purged’, it is true of its left-wing elements)? Marxism believes that the socialist revolution, once begun, would either be assured of a gradual and continued development towards integral socialism, or would be defeated through the agency of bourgeois restoration.

Altogether, the Russian Revolution poses in an entirely new way the problem of the mechanism of the socialist revolution. This question must become paramount in international discussion. In such discussion the problem of Kronstadt can and must have a position worthy of it.

¹ A comprehensive work on Kronstadt, containing the essential documents on these historic days, has just been compiled by Ida Mett. Her publication should supply, in my opinion, a

timely contribution to the international discussion which is now developing.

Lessons of the Paris Commune

The Paris Commune of 1871 is well-known in socialist circles and so needs little introduction. The revolt began on 18 March when troops refused to open fire on the people protesting their removal of National Guard guns from the butte of Montmartre. The government fled the city while the Central Committee of the National Guard called elections for 23 March and so the Paris Commune – to quote Marx’s *The Civil War in France* – was “formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms”.

For Marx, it was “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour.” He praised such features as the Communal Council being made up of delegates who were “at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents,” that it was a “working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time” and that “the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia.” Economically, it started the process of “transforming the means of production, land, and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour” based on “co-operative production”.



Its 72 days inspired all revolutionary socialists, from Bakunin to Marx, and to this day even Leninists play lip-service to it (renaming a Kronstadt battleship *Parizhskaya Kommuna* after crushing that town’s revolt fifty years after Thiers’ slaughter of the Communards). Yet it is false to suggest, as Marx did, that these ideas had come entirely out of the blue. In fact, the Paris Commune applied ideas which anarchists had been discussing for some time. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon had raised the idea of representatives with binding mandates being elected to executive and legislative assemblies during the 1848 revolution and raised the vision of a free society being a federation of communes in such works as *The General idea of the Revolution* (1851) and *The Federative Principle* (1863). Likewise, the Commune’s support for

co-operative production reflected his long-standing support for workers’ associations to replace wage-labour.¹ Michael Bakunin also repeated the same vision of a federal system of communes based on mandated and revocable delegates and a socialism based on workers’ associations in the late 1860s. Likewise with abolishing the army and replacing it with a democratic people’s militia, with Proudhon suggesting it during the 1848 Revolution and Bakunin calling for a federated democratic militia for the defence of a social revolution. Nothing similar can be found in Marx until *after* the Commune:

the programme [the Commune] set out is . . . the system of Federalism, which Bakunin had been advocating for years, and which had first been enunciated by Proudhon. The Proudhonists . . . exercised considerable influence in the

Commune. This ‘political form’ was therefore not ‘at last’ discovered; it had been discovered years ago; and now it was proven to be correct by the very fact that in the crisis the Paris workers adopted it almost automatically, under the pressure of circumstance, rather than as the result of theory, as being the form most suitable to express working class aspirations.²

This was recognised at the time by Bakunin’s comrade, James Guillaume:

The Paris revolution is *federalist*.

The Parisian people want to have the freedom to organise themselves as they wish, without the rest of France having to involve itself in Parisian affairs; and at the same time, they renounce on their side all interference in the affairs of the departments, by urging them each to organise as they please, in the fullness of communal autonomy.

The various organisations which will be in this way freely constituted may then freely federate to mutually guarantee their rights and their independence. . . *Federalism*, in the sense given

¹ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (AK Press, 2011).

² K.J. Kenafick, *Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx* (M.P. Kennard, 1948), 212-3.

to it by the Paris Commune, and that was given to it many years ago by the great socialist Proudhon, who first scientifically explained the theory, – *federalism* is above all the negation of the *nation* and the *State*. (“Federalism”, *Solidarité*, April 1871)

It is no coincidence that the Communards referred to themselves as *fédérés* (federals) and the wall against which 147 of them were murdered after surrender is named the *Mur de Fédérés*. Indeed, the Commune’s *Declaration to the French People* could have been written by Proudhon (it was drafted by one of his followers). Based on this libertarian-inspired revolt, it is unsurprising that Marx’s defence of it took on a libertarian twist and why *The Civil War in France* is his most appealing work (as Bakunin suggested, the Marxists “saw all their ideas upset by the uprising” and “found themselves compelled to take their hats off to it. They went even further, and proclaimed that its programme and purpose were their own, in face of the simplest logic and their own true sentiments”). Marx, however, did not write much on the Commune and failed to look into the dynamics of the revolt. For this, to learn its lessons, we need to turn to anarchist thinkers.¹

Bakunin, Kropotkin and the Commune

Bakunin’s analysis, entitled *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*, was published after his death but he publicly defended it in his polemics against Italian nationalist-republican Giuseppe Mazzini, winning many Italian radicals to the Federalist-wing of the International. Yet while he championed the Commune, arguing that “revolutionary socialism has just attempted its first striking and practical demonstration in the Paris Commune” and “show[ed] to all enslaved peoples (and are there any masses that are not slaves?) the only road to emancipation”, he also noted that the Communards had “set up a revolutionary government” and so organised “themselves in a Jacobin manner, forgetting or sacrificing the first conditions of revolutionary socialism.” What was needed was “collective ownership of property by freely organised producers’ associations, and by the equally spontaneous federation of communes, to replace the domineering paternalistic State”. The “future social organisation should be carried out from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, starting with the associations, then going on to the communes, the regions, the nations, and, finally, culminating in a great international and universal federation.”²

Peter Kropotkin’s analysis of the Commune took Bakunin’s as its starting point and enriched it. As is clear

from his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, the revolt played a key role in his embrace of anarchism and the development of anarchist-communism. An article marking the anniversary of the Commune appeared in *Le Révolté* every year before imprisonment in 1882 ended his editorship, three of the four being combined to form a chapter in *Words of a Rebel* (1885) along with “Revolutionary Government” in which the Commune was used as an example of that contradiction in terms. After release, he regularly spoke at Commune Commemorations in exile in London, some of which (including “Commune of Paris” and “1848-1871”) were subsequently published in *Freedom*.³ In 1907, he published a pamphlet (*Parizhskaya Kommuna*) based on articles on the Paris Commune written for the Russian anarchist paper *Listki ‘Khleb i Volya’*. The Commune and its importance also appeared in many other works, including *Modern Science and Anarchy* and *Anarchist Action in the Revolution* while many of the arguments in *Conquest of Bread* were inspired by it, sketching a somewhat idealised account of how an explicitly libertarian communal revolt should handle the inevitable problems any social revolution would face.

The lessons Kropotkin drew from the revolt focused on two main issues: “the Commune was not *Communistic enough* . . . the Commune was not *Anarchist enough*.”

First, it “treated the economic question as a secondary one, which would be attended to later on, *after* the triumph of the Commune” when “the triumph of a popular Commune was materially impossible without a parallel triumph of the people in the economic field.” Second, while “proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle” but “they stopped mid-course” and gave “themselves a Communal Council copied from the old municipal councils.” The Commune did not “break with the tradition of the State, of representative government, and it did not attempt to achieve within the Commune that organisation from the simple to the complex it inaugurated by proclaiming the independence and free federation of the Communes.” This resulted in the revolutionaries being isolated from the masses in the town hall, “immobilised . . . by red tape” and losing “the sensitivity that comes from continued contact with the masses . . . Paralysed by their distancing from the revolutionary centre – the people – they themselves paralysed the popular initiative.”

An example of this bureaucratic inertia can be seen from the 16 April 1871 “Decree on convening workers trade councils” which aimed to reopen closed workshops as co-operatives. Facing an economic crisis, mass

¹ For more on the influence of the Paris Commune on anarchism, see Nicholas Walter, *The Anarchist Past and Other Essays* (Five Leaves Publications, 2007).

² Michael Bakunin, *Bakunin on Anarchism* (Black Rose Books, 1980).

³ All these are included in Peter Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (AK Press, 2014)

unemployment and destitution, the Council of the Commune finally passed this resolution (written by Leo Frankel, the only member of the Council who can be considered even remotely a Marxist) over three weeks after it was elected and nearly a month after the revolt started. It promised a commission to conduct an enquiry to send a report to a Communal Commission which then would present its conclusions to the Council (“as soon as possible”, no less) and then this body would finally draft a decree. Hardly swift action. Nor was this the only example for the council debated numerous issues – some hardly relevant to the problems facing Paris – while working-class people of Paris sent their ideas, requests, problems to it. As one Leninist notes in passing, the council was “overwhelmed” by suggestions from other bodies, the “sheer volume” of which “created difficulties”, it “found it hard to cope with the stream of people who crammed into the offices” while reports, letters and motions “piled up” at the Town Hall and in the offices of the secretariat and not discussed.¹ Indeed, it was only pressure from below which made the council decide to issue contracts to workers’ co-operatives for National Guard uniforms rather than capitalist firms.

Sadly, but unsurprisingly, the Leninist concerned did not draw any conclusions from this but then he praises but does not discuss Frankel’s decree nor wonder what would happen if this were implemented on a national scale rather than within the confines of a single city: the size, inertia and corruption of the Bolshevik State bureaucracy answers any such query.² Needless to say, the standard Leninist lessons to be learned from the Commune are superficial – the need for a vanguard party and centralisation – and unconvincing.³ The Municipal Council elected on 26 March 1871 did indeed lack a vanguard party, having 60 members from various tendencies with the largest grouping being Jacobins or Blanquists and a minority being libertarian members of the International Workers’ Association, whether Mutualists (like Eugène Pottier) or Collectivists (like Eugène Varlin). Having a majority from a vanguard party would not change the institutional pressures caused by centralised, hierarchical, top-down structures. The ideas in people’s heads cannot overcome this grim reality, even more so when those ideas are prejudiced in favour of centralisation, top-down structures.

The problems caused by the Commune’s hierarchical structure confirmed Bakunin’s 1870 prediction in “Letters to a Frenchman” that any revolutionary government “could not fail to severely constrict the scope of revolutionary action because it is impossible, even for the most energetic and enterprising authoritarian revolutionary, to understand and deal effectively with all the manifold problems generated by the Revolution. For every dictatorship, be it exercised by an individual or collectively by relatively few individuals, is necessarily very circumscribed, very short-sighted, and its limited perception cannot, therefore, penetrate the depth and encompass the whole complex range of popular life.” This was echoed by Kropotkin:

The practical solution will not be found, nor will it become clear until the change has already

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begun: it will be the product of the revolution itself, of the people in action – or else it will be nothing, for the brains of a few individuals are absolutely incapable of finding the solutions that can only be born out of practical life.

Kropotkin therefore concluded the need for direct action from below and in an anarchist social revolution “the insurgent people will not wait for any old government in its marvellous wisdom to decree economic reforms. They will abolish individual property by themselves . . . They will not stop short at expropriating the owners of social

¹ Donny Gluckstein, *The Paris Commune: A Revolutionary Democracy* (London: Bookmarks, 2006), 47-8, 51.

² Iain McKay, “*The State and Revolution: Theory and Practice*”, in *Bloodstained: One Hundred Years of Leninist Counterrevolution* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2017).

³ Iain McKay, “Anarchism, Marxism and the Lessons of the Paris Commune”, *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 80, 81 and 82; Maurice Brinton and Philippe Guillaume, “The Commune, Paris 1871,” Maurice Brinton, *For Workers’ Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2020).

capital by a decree that will remain a dead letter; they will take possession and establish their rights of usufruct immediately. They will organise the workshops so that they continue production.” This was the *only* way to solve the many economic problems facing the Commune or, indeed, any social revolution.

As he summarised in the article “Insurrections and Revolution”, rather than “let themselves be hoisted into power, let themselves be locked into a government alongside” those “who were hostile toward a people’s economic revolution,” revolutionaries must “remain on the streets, in their own districts, with the people – as propagandists and organisers of the *de facto* equality that they all craved: joining in with the people as they looked to their food and their livelihoods and the city’s defences”, to “their interests, and rebuilding, in the sections, the life of society with them.” This meant “[c]omplete independence of the Commune, the Federation of free Communes, and the social revolution within the Commune, that is to say trade unions for production replacing the statist organisation of the society that exists today” as only “groupings by trades and by professions in addition to groupings by neighbourhoods” would “bring to society co-ordination” and “become the instrument of the liberation of the masses, without resorting to the submission of all to the pyramidal hierarchy of the State.” (*Modern Science and Anarchy*)

It is important to stress that federalism does not preclude expansion and co-operation, the opposite in fact as anarchists have advocated it precisely because we recognise that certain activities and needs require it. Thus Bakunin argued that it was “through the expansion and organisation of the revolution for mutual defence” and it being “transformed into a social revolution” that would ensure it “will triumph”. This was not lost on the Communards, who were well aware of the dangers of isolation as seen for example by the appeal *To the worker of the countryside* which the council distributed by hot-air balloon due to the siege of Paris by French troops. While any revolution will, by necessity, be initially limited to a specific territorial area and forced to rely on its own resources and initiative, both Bakunin and Kropotkin recognised the pressing need for its expansion by other revolts elsewhere. To claim that the Commune failed because it was limited to Paris fails to understand the dynamics of social revolution and the lessons to be gained by looking within and not just outwith its walls.

Looking to the future

Revolutionary anarchism built upon the experience of 1871 with Kropotkin recognising that the “Commune of tomorrow will know that it cannot admit any higher authority; above it there can only be the interests of the Federation, freely accepted by itself as well as the other communes.” It “will know that it must break the State and replace it by the Federation, and it will act in that

way.” Likewise, economically, workers “will not wait for orders from above before taking possession of land and capital. They will take them first, and *then* – already in possession of land and capital – they will organise their work.” Given the limited nature of its reforms and the lack of dynamism of the Commune’s Council, Kropotkin concluded that any such “revolutionary government” should be avoided. Instead the future could only be created by working-class self-organisation from the bottom-up:

Developed in the course of history to establish and maintain the monopoly of land ownership in favour of one class – which, for that reason, became the ruling class par excellence – what means can the State provide to abolish this monopoly that the working class could not find in its own strength and groups? Then perfected during the course of the nineteenth century to ensure the monopoly of industrial property, trade, and banking to new enriched classes, to which the State was supplying ‘arms’ cheaply by stripping the land from the village communes and crushing the cultivators by tax – what advantages could the State provide for abolishing these same privileges? Could its governmental machine, developed for the creation and upholding of these privileges, now be used to abolish them? Would not the new function require new organs? And these new organs would they not have to be created by the workers themselves, in *their* unions, *their* federations, completely outside the State? (*Modern Science and Anarchy*)

While supporting any initial revolt, anarchist action would then encourage the creation of popular self-organisation in the community and workplace rather than seeking to focus the struggle onto electing a few leaders to act on behalf of the working class. In other words, encourage workers to build their own *class* organisations to influence events towards socialist goals directly rather than waiting for orders from bodies structured like bourgeois institutions. In Paris this fatally meant that rather than “acting on its own initiative... the people, confident of its rulers, delegated to them the power of taking initiatives. Here was the first consequence – and indeed the fatal result – of elections.” The various alternative groupings focused more on influencing the Council (and so increased its burden) than creating socialism directly. Having more revolutionaries elected to governing bodies – or labelling it “workers” or preceding it with “new type of” – will not change the dynamic of Statist structures.

The Commune also shows the importance of libertarians being involved in social struggles and spreading their ideas in the masses of the general population during non-revolutionary times. As Bakunin noted, the few socialists in the Commune “felt the lack of support from the great

masses of the people of Paris, and . . . the organisation of the International Association, itself imperfect, compromised hardly a few thousand persons". With a deeper influence in popular organisations, the result may have been different – but this does not change the Communal Council becoming a hindrance to the revolution rather than an aid and the need in future revolutions not to repeat the error.

Challenging all authority...

One aspect of the revolt which was not discussed in the main anarchist accounts was the role of women in the struggle. A notable exception in the English-language was a short article entitled "The Women of the Commune" which appeared in *Freedom* (April, 1888) which concluded with these stirring words:

If such was the energy, the capacity for action and for free self-organisation in new and terrible social conditions, shown by the working women of Paris during a few short weeks of comparative freedom, seventeen years ago, what may we not expect from the spontaneous initiative of the mass of workers-men and women both when at length they take courage to rise in their strength and destroy for ever the tyranny of property and authority throughout the civilized world?

While Louise Michel is the best-known female Commune, all played important roles at all levels of the Commune whether creating the new world or (literally) fighting the old – bar the Commune's council which, following the bourgeois election laws, was elected by *male* universal suffrage alone (a fact Marx failed to consider worthy of note). Her accounts in numerous articles and her memoirs helped keep the flame of the Commune alive in libertarian circles, indeed it was reflecting on the experiences of those days of freedom and struggle while en route to exile in New Caledonia after its defeat that she came to anarchist conclusions.

The first book on women in the Commune was by Édith Thomas, translated into English as *The Women Incendiaries* in 1966 (her biography *Louise Michel* was translated in 1980). More recently, Carolyn J. Eichner's *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune* (2004) recounts the struggle against class and



patriarchy in Paris via the lives of three leading activists: André Léo, Paule Mink and Elisabeth Dmitrieff. All three were members of the International but the first two were libertarians at the time while Dmitrieff was close to Marx and was instrumental in forming the *Union des femmes pour la défense de Paris et les soins aux blessés* (Women's Union to Defend Paris and Care for the Wounded) which announced itself to free Paris on the 11th of April with its "Appeal to the Citizenesses of Paris". This group combined a centralised structure (in whose central committee she held an unelected position) with a mutualist vision of socialism based on federated co-operatives which it shared with many other communards, including Léo and Mink.

These activists show, in the words of André Léo, that you cannot have a revolution without women, that the struggle against non-economic hierarchies cannot wait until economic classes are ended. All social hierarchies are interwoven and one cannot take priority over the others. Rather than being a distraction from the "real" struggle (against capital), challenging patriarchy, racism and homophobia cannot be postponed until later – for later never comes by itself.

Thus on every level the Paris Commune is a great source for both inspiration and, more importantly, lessons. Inspired by the federalist-socialism of Proudhon, it played a key role in the development of revolutionary anarchism when its advocates learnt the lessons of a popular revolt so savagely and bloodily crushed. Like Bakunin and Kropotkin then, we need to learn its lessons now in order to ensure any future revolt does not make the same mistakes and finally frees humanity from its chains.

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Declaration to the French People

Journal officiel de la Commune de Paris, 20 April 1871

To the French people:

In the painful and terrible conflict which once again imposes on Paris the horrors of a siege and bombardment, which causes French blood to flow, which destroys our brothers, our wives, our children, crushed beneath shells and bullets, it is necessary that public opinion not be divided, that the national conscience not be confused.

Paris and the entire nation must know the nature, the reason, and the aim of the revolution that we are making. Finally, the responsibility for the grief, the suffering, and the misfortunes of which we are the victims must fall on those who, after having betrayed France and delivered Paris to the foreigners, pursue with blind and cruel obstinacy the ruin of the capital in order to bury, in disaster for the republic and liberty, the double testament of their treason and their crime.

The Commune has the duty to affirm and define the aspirations and wishes of the people of Paris; to clarify the character of the movement of March 18, misunderstood, unknown and slandered by the politicians who sit at Versailles.

Once again, Paris works and suffers for all of France, whose intellectual, moral, administrative and economic regeneration, its glory and prosperity, it prepares through its struggles and sacrifices.

What does it demand?

The recognition and consolidation of the republic, the only form of government compatible with the rights of the people and the steady and free development of society;

The absolute autonomy of the Commune extended to all the localities of France, and assuring to each one its full rights, and to every Frenchman the full exercise of his faculties and abilities as man, citizen and worker;

The autonomy of the Commune will have as its limits only the right to equal autonomy for all the other

communes adhering to the contract, whose association must ensure French unity;

The inherent rights of the Commune are:

Voting on the communal budget, receipts and expenses; fixing and distribution of taxes; management of local services; organisation of its judiciary, internal police and education; administration of property belonging to the Commune;

The choice by election or competition, with accountability and the permanent right of control and revocation, of magistrates and communal officials of all kinds;

The absolute guarantee of individual freedom, freedom of conscience and freedom of work;

The permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs by the free expression of their ideas, the free defence of their interests: guarantees given for these expressions by the Commune, solely responsible for overseeing and ensuring the free and fair exercise of the right of assembly and publicising;

The organisation of urban defence and the National Guard, which elects its leaders and alone watches over the maintenance of order in the city.

Paris wants no more local guarantees than these, on condition, of course, of finding in the great central administration, delegation of the federated communes, the realisation and the practice of the same principles.

But, thanks to its autonomy and taking advantage of its freedom of action, Paris retains for itself the carrying out, internally, as it sees fit

the administrative and economic reforms called for by its people; to create suitable institutions to develop and spread education, production, exchange and credit; to universalise power and property, according to the necessities of the moment, the wishes of the interested parties and the data provided by experience.

Our enemies deceive themselves, or deceive the country, when they accuse Paris of wanting to impose its will or its supremacy on the rest of the nation, and to claim a dictatorship that would be a real attack on the independence and sovereignty of other communes.



They deceive themselves, or deceive the country, when they accuse Paris of pursuing the destruction of French unity, constituted by the Revolution to the acclamations of our fathers who rushed to the Fete de la Fédération from all corners of the old France.

Unity, as it has been imposed on us until now by empire, monarchy and parliamentarism, is nothing but despotic, unintelligent, arbitrary or onerous centralisation.

Political unity, as Paris wants it, is the voluntary association of all local initiatives, the spontaneous and free concurrence of all individual energies for a common goal, the well-being, the freedom and the security of all.

The communal revolution, begun by popular initiative on March 18, inaugurates a new era of experimental, positive and scientific politics.

It is the end of the old governmental and clerical world, of militarism, of bureaucracy, of exploitation, of speculation, of monopolies, of privileges, to which the proletariat owes its serfdom; the country, its misfortunes and disasters.

May this beloved and great country, deceived by lies and calumny, be reassured!

The struggle between Paris and Versailles is one of those that cannot end in illusory compromises; the outcome cannot be in doubt. Victory, pursued with an indomitable energy by the National Guard, will remain at the idea and at the right.

We call on France!

Notified that Paris in arms possesses as much calm as bravery; that it supports order with as much energy as enthusiasm; that it sacrifices itself with as much reason as heroism; that it only armed itself in devotion to the liberty and glory of all, France must halt this bloody conflict!

It is up to France to disarm Versailles by the solemn expression of its irresistible will.

Called to benefit from our conquests, may it declare itself in solidarity with our efforts; may it be our ally in this fight, which can only end by the triumph of the communal idea or by the ruin of Paris!

As for us, citizens of Paris, our mission is to accomplish the modern revolution, the widest and most fecund of all those which have illustrated history!

Our duty is to fight and win!

Paris, 19 April 1871.

The Paris Commune

Decree on convening workers trade councils

Journal officiel de la République française, 17 April 1871

The Paris Commune,

Considering that a number of factories have been abandoned by those who were running them in order to escape civic obligations and without taking into account the interests of workers;

Considering that as a result of this cowardly desertion, many works essential to communal life find themselves disrupted, the livelihood of workers compromised.

Decreed:

Workers trade councils [*chambres syndicales ouvrières*] are convened to establish a commission of inquiry with the purpose:

1. To compile statistics on abandoned workshops, as well as an inventory of their condition and of the work instruments they contain.
2. To present a report on the practical requisites for the prompt restarting of these workshops, not by the deserters who abandoned them but by the co-operative association of the workers who were employed there.
3. To develop a constitution for these workers' co-operative societies.
4. To establish an arbitration panel which shall decide, on the return of said employers, on the conditions for the permanent transfer of the workshops to the workers' societies and on the amount of the compensation the societies shall pay the employers.

This commission of inquiry must send its report to the Communal Commission on Labour and Exchange, which will be required to present to the Commune, as soon as possible, the draft of a decree satisfying the interests of the Commune and the workers.

16 April 1871

Appeal to the Citizenesses of Paris

A Group of Citizenesses

Journal officiel de la Commune de Paris, 11 April 1871

Paris is blockaded, Paris is bombarded...

Citizenesses, where are our children, and our brothers, and our husbands?... Do you hear the cannon roaring and the tocsin sounding the sacred call?

To arms! The fatherland is in danger!...

Is it the foreigner coming back to invade France? Is it the allied legions of the tyrants of Europe who massacre our brothers, hoping to destroy with the great city even the memory of the immortal victories that for a century we have paid for by our blood and that the world calls liberty, equality, fraternity?...

No, these enemies, these assassins of the people and of liberty are French!...

This fratricidal aberration that seizes France, this fight to the death, is the final act of the eternal antagonism of right and force, of labour and exploitation, of the people and their torturers!...

Our enemies are the privileged of the present social order, those who have always lived on our sweat, who have always fattened themselves on our misery...

They saw the people rise up crying: "No duties without rights, no rights without duties!... We want work, but in order to keep the product. No more exploiters, no more masters!... Work and well-being for all, – the people to govern itself – the Commune, live free by working, or die fighting!..."¹

And the fear of being called to the people's court has driven our enemies to commit the greatest of crimes, civil war!

Citizenesses of Paris, descendants of the women of the Great Revolution, who, in the name of the people and justice, marched on Versailles, bringing back a captive Louis XVI, we, mothers, wives and sisters of this French people, can we stand it any longer that misery and ignorance make enemies of our children, that father turns on son, that brother turns on brother, they kill each other before our eyes just for the whim of our oppressors, who want the destruction of Paris after having delivered it to the foreigner?

Citizenesses, the decisive moment has arrived. It is necessary to be done with the old world! We want to be free! And it is not only France that is rising, all civilised peoples have their eyes on Paris, waiting for our triumph to free themselves in their turn. This same

Germany – whose princely armies devastated our country, vowing death to its democratic and socialist tendencies – is itself shaken and worked by the revolutionary spirit! Also, it has been in a state of siege for six months, and its worker representatives are in prison! Even Russia sees its freedom fighters perish only to greet a new generation, ready to fight and die for the Republic and social transformation!

Ireland and Poland, which die only to be reborn with a new energy – Spain and Italy regaining their lost strength to join the international people's struggle – England, whose entire mass, proletarian and salaried, becomes revolutionary by social position – Austria, whose government must repress the simultaneous revolts of the country itself and of the Slav powers – does this perpetual clashing between the ruling classes and the people not indicate that the tree of liberty, fertilised by the rivers of blood shed over the centuries, has finally borne fruit?

Citizenesses, the gauntlet has been thrown down, we must conquer or die! May the mothers, the wives who say to themselves "What does the triumph of our cause matter to me if I lose those whom I love!" finally persuade themselves that the only way to save those who are dear to them – the husband who supports her, the child in whom she places her hope – is to take an active part in the struggle, to finally put an end to this fratricidal struggle that can only end in the triumph of the people, least it be renewed in the near future!

Woe to mothers, if once again the people succumb! It will be their descendants who will pay for this defeat, because our brother's and our husband's heads will become a plaything and the reaction will have a good game! Neither we nor our enemies desire mercy!...

Citizenesses, all resolute, all united, are ensuring the salvation of our cause! Let us prepare to defend and avenge our brothers! At the gates of Paris, on the barricades, in the faubourgs, no matter! Let us be ready, at the given moment, to join our efforts to theirs; if the villains who shoot prisoners, who assassinate our leaders, mow-down a crowd of unarmed women, so much the better! The cry of horror and outrage of France and the world will complete what we have attempted!... And if all the rifles and bayonets are used by our brothers, we will still have cobblestones to crush the traitors!...

¹ A popular French working class slogan, first used in the October 1831 revolt by the *canuts* (silk workers) of Lyon when they occupied the city, shouting "*Vivre libre en*

travaillant ou mourir en combattant!" ("Live free working or die fighting!"). King Louis-Philippe sent 20,000 soldiers and 150 cannons to suppress the revolt. (BF)

To the worker of the countryside

André Léo

La Commune, 10 April 1871

Brother, they deceive you. Our interests are the same. What we ask for, you want it too. The liberation that we seek is [also] yours. What does it matter if it is in the city or in the countryside that food, clothing, shelter, assistance are lacking for those who produce all the wealth of this world? What does it matter what name the oppressor has: big landowner or industrialist? For you, as for us, the work-day is long and hard, and does not even provide enough to keep the body going. As for you, as for us, freedom, leisure, the life of mind and body, are lacking. We have always been and still are, you and I, the vassals of poverty.

You, peasant, poor day-labourer, have for almost a century been repeatedly told that property is the sacred fruit of labour, and you believe that. But open your eyes and look around you; look at yourself, and you will see that it is a lie. Here you are old; you have always worked; all your days have passed with the shovel or sickle in your hand from dawn to dusk, and yet you are not rich, and you do not even have a piece of bread for your old age. All your earnings have been spent raising children, so that conscription will take them from you, or that, marrying in their turn, they shall lead the life of the beast of burden you led, and will end up as you will end, miserably, for the strength of your limbs being exhausted, you will find hardly any work; you will worry your children with the burden of your old age and will soon see you obliged, rucksack on your back, and bowing your head, to go begging door to door for condescending and bitter handouts.

That is not right, brother peasant, do you not feel it? You can see, then, that you have been deceived; for if it were true that property was the fruit of labour, you would be the owner, you who have worked so hard. You would own this little house, with a garden and a paddock, which was the dream, the goal, the passion of your whole life, but which you have not been able to acquire – or perhaps that you have the misfortune of acquiring it by a debt that exhausts you, gnaws at you and will force your children as soon as you are dead, perhaps before, to sell that roof which has already cost you so much. No, brother, work does not yield property. It is inherited or earned by trickery. The rich are idle;

the workers are poor – and stay poor. The exceptions only prove the rule.

This is unjust. And that is why Paris – which you denounce upon the word of people interested in deceiving you – that is why Paris stirs, demands, rises, and wants to change the laws that gives all power to the rich over the workers. Paris wants the son of the peasant to be as educated as the son of the wealthy, and FOR NOTHING, since human science is the right of all men, and is no less useful for conducting life than having eyes to see.

Paris wants there to be no more king who receives 30 million of the people's money and who moreover fattens his family and his favourites; Paris wants this huge expense no longer, greatly reducing taxation. Paris demands that no more functionaries be paid 20,000 – 30,000 – 100,000 francs – feeding a man the wealth of several families in a single year; and that, and that with this saving, retirement homes are established for the workers' old age.

Paris demands that every man who is not a proprietor pays not a penny in tax; that he who has only a house and his garden again pays nothing; that small fortunes are taxed lightly, and the whole weight of taxation falls on the rich.

Paris says that it is the deputies, senators, and Bonapartists, the authors of the war, who paid five billion to Prussia, and for which they sell their holdings out of what is called the property of the crown, who are no longer needed in France.

Paris demands that justice costs nothing to those who need it, and that it is the people themselves who chooses the judges, from amongst the honest people of the county.

Finally, Paris wants – listen well to this – worker of the countryside, poor day-labourer, small owner whom usury gnaws, strip-farmer [*bordier*], sharecropper, farmer, all who sow, harvest, sweat, so that most of your products go to someone who does nothing; what Paris wants, all told, is **THE LAND TO THE PEASANT, THE TOOL TO THE WORKER, WORK FOR ALL.**

The war that Paris is waging right now is the war against usury, deceit and idleness. They tell you:

the Parisian, the socialists, are dividers [*partageux*]. – Well! Good people, do you not see who is telling you that? Are not those who, doing nothing, live handsomely off the work of others, dividers? Have you never heard thieves, to hoodwink others, shout out thief? And make a run for it while we stop the one accused of theft?

Yes, the fruits of the earth to those who grow them. To each his own; work for all. No more very rich, nor very poor. No more work without rest, no more rest without work. This is possible; for it would be better to believe nothing than to believe that justice is not possible. It only requires good laws, which will be made when workers stop wanting to be duped by the idle.

And at that time, believe us, brother cultivators, fairs and markets will be better for those who produce wheat and meat, and more plentiful for all, than they ever were under any emperor or king. For

then, the worker will be strong and well nourished, and work will be free of the heavy taxes, licences and charges that the Great Revolution did not completely sweep away, as it appeared to.

So, inhabitants of the countryside, you see, the cause of Paris is yours, and it is for you that it works, at the same time as for the worker. Those generals who are attacking it at the moment are the general who have betrayed France [to the Prussians]. Those deputies, whom you have appointed without knowing, want to restore Henri V.¹ If Paris falls, the yoke of poverty will remain around your neck and will be passed onto those of your children. So help it prevail, and, whatever happens, remember well these words – for there will be revolutions in the world until they are achieved: – THE LAND TO THE FARMER, THE TOOL TO THE WORKER, WORK FOR ALL.

THE WORKERS OF PARIS

Revolution without Women

André Léo

La Sociale, 8 May 1871

Do you know, General Dombrowski, how the revolution of the 18th of March was made?

By women.

Early in the morning, troops had been ordered to Montmartre. The small number of National Guards who were guarding the cannons in place Saint-Pierre were surprised and the cannons removed; they were brought down into Paris – without hinderance. The National Guard, without leaders, without orders, hesitated in the face of an open attack. A few more turns of the wheel, and you would never have been a General of the Commune, citizen Dombrowski.



André Léo (1824-1900)

But then, on the square of the abbey, women, citizenesses of Montmartre, went as a crowd, seized the bridles of the horses, surrounded the soldiers, and told them:

– What! You serve the enemies of the people, you, its children! Are you not the instruments of your own oppressors? Are you not ashamed to serve cowards?

Initially stopped by fear of wounding the women and crushing their children, who clung to the wheels of the cannons, the soldiers understood these accusations, and they raised the butts of their rifles into the air. The

people shouted with joy: proletarians, divided beneath different names and under different garbs,

¹ Henri, Count of Chambord (1820-1883), as a result of the July Revolution of 1830, became King of France from 2 to 9 August 1830 as Henry V, although he was never officially proclaimed as such. Subsequently, he was the Legitimist pretender to the throne of France and as the Second Empire

collapsed following its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, royalists became a majority in the National Assembly and agreed to support the aging comte de Chambord's claim to the throne. (BF)

finally understood each other and reunited. No more army, consequently, no more tyranny. Soldiers and National Guards embraced. The cannons were restored; henceforth, confidence, enthusiasm, indomitable courage, filled souls indecisive an instant before the Revolution was made.

Nevertheless, there is a need to reason a little: do we believe we can make the revolution without women? For eighty years this has been attempted and the Revolution has never come to pass.

The first revolution [of 1789] bestowed upon them the title of citizenesses; but not the rights. It left them excluded from liberty, from equality.

Rejected by the Revolution, women returned to Catholicism, and, under its influence formed that immense reactionary force, imbued with the spirit of the past, which stifles the Revolution every time it wants to revive.

the Revolution is the freedom and the responsibility of every human creature, with no limit other than the common right without any privilege of race, nor of sex.

When will we realise that this has lasted long enough? When will the intelligence of republicans rise as far as to understand their principle and their interest?

They demand that woman no longer be under the yoke of priests; and they do not like to see her a free-thinker – They do not want her to work against them, yet they reject her assistance as soon as she wants to act.

Why is this?

I will tell you: it is because many republicans – I do not speak of the genuine ones – have dethroned the Emperor and the good Lord... only to put themselves in their place.

And naturally, with this intent, they need subjects, or at least female subjects. Woman must no longer obey priests; but as before she must not rise above herself. She should remain neutral and passive, under the direction of man, she will have only changed confessor.

Well, this concoction does not have a chance.

God has a great advantage over man at this point, remaining unknown; this is what allows him to be the ideal.

Religion condemns reason and at the same time defends science. Well, that is simple, radical and neat. It is a circle from which you cannot leave unless you break it.

But the Revolution, but the new spirit, on the contrary exists only through the exercise of reason, of liberty, by the search for the truth, the just in all things. Here, it is no longer the circle but the straight line projected into infinity.

Where to stop along this path? Where to place the boundary stone which this or that spirit in motion will not go pass? And who has the right to ask it?

We had better get used to it, the Revolution is the freedom and the responsibility of every human creature, with no limit other than the common right without any privilege of race, nor of sex.

Women will only abandon the old faith to embrace with passion the new. They do not want to, they cannot be, neutral. We must choose between their hostility or their devotion. Some, without doubt, scorning the impediment, strong and confident, persist despite the repugnance; but these natures are rare; most human beings are struck above all by the fact and discouraged by the injustice.

Now, who is suffering the most from the current crisis, the high cost of food, the stoppage in work? – woman; and above all the single woman, in whom the new regime is no more interested than the previous ones.

Who has nothing to gain, immediately at least, from the success of the revolution? Woman again. It is the liberation of man which we are discussing, not hers.

And when, driven by the sublime instinct which fortunately drives all hearts towards freedom in this century, she offers despite everything her devotion to this revolution which forgets her, they reject her with insult and contempt!... – we could, from a certain point of view, write a history from 89 with this title: A History of the inconsistencies of the Revolutionary Party. – The woman question would be the largest chapter, and we would see how this party found a way to drive half its troops, who only wanted to march and fight with it, over to the side of the enemy.



Louise Michel (1830-1905)

Statement before the Military Tribunal

Louise Michel

18 December 1871¹

I do not wish to defend myself, I do not wish to be defended. I belong completely to the social revolution and I declare that I accept complete responsibility for all my actions. I accept it completely and without reservations.

You accuse me of having taken part in the murder of the generals? To that I would reply Yes, if I had been in Montmartre when they wished to have the people fired on. I would not have hesitated to fire myself on those who gave such orders. But I do not understand why they were shot when they were prisoners, and I look on this action as arrant cowardice.

As for the burning of Paris, yes, I took part in it. I wished to oppose the invader from Versailles with a barrier of flames. I had no accomplices in this action. I acted on my own initiative.

I am told that I am an accomplice of the Commune. Certainly, yes, since the Commune wanted more than anything else the social revolution, and since the social revolution is the dearest of my desires. More than that, I have the honour of being one of the instigators of the Commune, which by the way had nothing – nothing, as is well known – to do with murders and arson. I who was present at all the sittings at the Town Hall, I declare that there was never any question of murder or arson.

Do you want to know who are really guilty? It is the politicians. And perhaps later light will be brought on to all these events which today it is found quite natural to blame on all partisans of the social revolution [. . .]

But why should I defend myself? I have already declared that I refuse to do so. You are men who are going to judge me. You sit before me unmasked. You are men and I am only a woman, and yet I look you in the eye. I know quite well that everything I could say will not make the least difference to your sentence. So a single last word before I sit down. We never wanted anything but the triumph of the great principles of the revolution. I swear it on our martyrs who fell at Satory, by our martyrs whom I acclaim loudly, and who will one day have their revenge.²

Once more I belong to you. Do with me as you please. Take my life if you wish. I am not the woman to argue with you for a moment [. . .]

What I claim from you, you who call yourselves a Council of War, who sit as my judges, who do not disguise yourselves as a Commission of Pardons, you who are military men and deliver your judgement in the sight of all, is Satory where our brothers have already fallen.

I must be cut off from society. You have been told to do so. Well, the Commissioner of the Republic is right. Since it seems that any heart which beats for freedom has the right only to a lump of lead, I too claim my share. If you let me live, I shall never stop crying for revenge, and I shall avenge my brothers by denouncing the murderers in the Commission for Pardons [. . .]

I have finished. If you are not cowards, kill me!

¹ Translation: *Fighting the Revolution II* (London: Freedom Press, 1985).

² After the crushing of the commune, those prisoners not executed after summary trials in Paris and buried in mass graves were marched to the Camp de Satory where they were held in extremely crowded and unsanitary conditions until they could be tried by military tribunals. Some 95 were sentenced to death, around 250 to forced labour, around 4,000 to deportation and thousands more to prison. (BF)

Eugène Varlin:

Internationalist and Communard

Eugène Varlin was born on 5th October 1839 near Clayes-Souilly in France into a poor family. His father an agricultural day labourer, also had a small piece of land to grow vegetables. His grandfather on his mother's side had supported the 1848 revolution and he suffered under Louis Napoleon. His stories had a big influence on Eugène.

Eugène's father hoped that his son would study and not be condemned to hard toil all his life like so many others in the neighbourhood. He attended school until 13 and then took an apprentice as a bookbinder with his uncle in Paris. He took evening courses at the same time, even learning Latin and distinguished himself in his studies.

Eugène became conscious of the need to organise and joined the Bookbinders Society at the age of 18. This society concerned itself with sickness benefits and retirement sums and he sought to make it more militant. In 1864, already on police files, he took part in his first strike and became a member of the strike committee. His agitation in the Society led to his expulsion from it and he now set up his own bookbinders' association which grew to 300 members by 1870. At the same time he organised a cooperative restaurant and a cooperative shop.

In an attempt to turn the workers' societies in a more militant direction he called for the creation of a Federation of Parisian Workers' Societies which was created in 1869. During the strike wave of 1869 he set up a strike fund, not devoted to one trade but for all workers on strike.

Eugène became a socialist, adopting the mutualist outlook of Proudhon, situating himself on the left of that current and acting among the anti-authoritarians within the First International which he joined in 1865. He advanced the ideas of federalism within it. He began writing for the weekly paper of the First International. *La Tribune ouvrière*. He was one of the 4 French delegates at the London conference. He was unimpressed by the London leadership of the International, preferring the company of Marx's daughters to that of their father, and



waltzing with them throughout the last evening ! However he felt the need to continue to work within it. He was opposed to the Proudhonist position which said that women should stay at home and not work in the factories. He had meetings with Bakunin and James Guillaume, representing the libertarian current within the International. With the banning of the International in 1868 he was fined and served 3 months in prison. He developed a collectivist position, becoming coordinating secretary of the workers' societies. He believed the societies could be a place to train people for a future society.

At the end of 1870, after having set up sections of the international in Lyon, Lille and Creusot, he had to flee to Belgium.

With the fall of Napoleon III and the setting up of a government of national defence in Paris, he returned there and founded the vigilance committee of the 4th arrondissement. He became delegate to the central committee of twenty arrondissements, where he was in charge of finance. Head of a *Garde nationale* [National Guard] battalion, Eugène, with his libertarian outlook, felt that this had to be aligned to the workers' movement and that its leaders be elected and subject to instant recall. However he resigned from the battalion when it failed to accept his suggestions. He saw that the new government was prepared to make a deal with the Prussians and to flee Paris for Versailles. When this government attempted to seize the cannons at Montmartre Eugène Varlin was among those who took part in the subsequent insurrection, with the battalions of the Batignolles district taking control of the area.

On the 26th March as a member of the International he was elected to the Council of the Commune, being the only delegate to be elected in 3 arrondissements. He served on the finance committee, finally passing to the committee for military supply. With his experience of cooperatives he now set up clothing workshops, one of which was directed by Louise Michel. He also became secretary of the Council of the International, maintaining links between the Commune and the workers' societies.

As a libertarian he was opposed to the moves to set up a Committee of Public Safety to defend the Commune, reminding himself of the role of such an organisation in the 1789 Revolution. He saw in it the danger of a dictatorship in opposition to the grass roots organisations of the masses. He signed the declaration of the minority, fly-posted throughout Paris protesting against these moves.

During the Bloody Week, with the advance of the troops of the Versailles government, he led the defence of the 6th and 10th arrondissements, fighting from barricade to barricade. The *Versillais* troops began massacres, but Varlin denounced the attempts by some Communards to

retaliate with similar massacres, and tried unsuccessfully to stop the execution of 50 hostages.

Recognised by a priest in the street on 28th May he was arrested. He had made no attempt to flee or to hide himself. He was tortured and beaten and then finally put up against a wall and shot, his body lying on the ground for several hours. In front of the firing squad he cried out *Vive la Commune!*

“Eugène Varlin, Martyr of the Paris Commune”,
Organise! For Revolutionary Anarchism No 77
(Magazine of the Anarchist Federation)

The Presidency of Mutual Assistance Societies

La Marseillaise, 20 January 1870

Undoubtedly, personal power falls into ruin.

From top to bottom, the system built by the man of December collapses on all sides.¹

Here is a member of the majority who is also tearing a stone from the edifice. M. Boutelier, in Saturday’s session, has tabled a bill aimed at the repeal of the article of executive order of 52 that allows the head of the State to appoint the presidents of mutual assistance societies.

Although we are not inclined to follow the liberals of the empire in the direction of small reforms and attach little importance to all these small measures, to all these special liberties that they grant to us with such reluctance, we who aspire to achieve the possession of all our rights as soon as possible, to true freedom, that which includes them all, we must not, however, miss an opportunity to undermine the obstacle which hinders us until we can destroy it completely. The more it is shaken, the more it will be weakened and the less trouble will we have when we give it the final shock.

Besides, the institutions of a people cannot change unless their morals are modified. To prepare the Republic, we must get used to practicing the customs as much as we can, on all occasions.

When we are accustomed to managing our affairs ourselves in the ordinary circumstances of life, it will be easy for us to institute direct government, since matters of general interest are no more difficult than matters of specific interest.

This is what practical socialists have long understood, and that is why they are working to group men so that they look after their concerns and strive to organise these

groupings on the most democratic bases, the most consistent with true republican principles.

Although we have often been attacked by some *revolutionaries*, who have reproached us for dealing with superficial details when the whole had to be changed, we claim to have amply contributed to the advent of the revolution by accustoming people to the practice of republican institutions.

See our workers’ societies of all kinds: mutual credit, resistance, solidarity, trades council [*chambre syndicale*], etc. [–] everywhere the authoritarian presidency, last vestige of the monarchical idea, is banished from our organisations, everywhere our statutes and regulations, our own laws, are discussed and voted upon directly by those who must respect them.

The mutual assistance societies, very numerous in France, were unfortunately outside our activity. The empire had laid its claws on them to make it a powerful means of domination. Moreover, it is the only aspect of his social system that the author of *l’Extinction du paupérisme* has applied.²

Organise the poor, discipline them, given them leaders, in order to make sure that they can only act in accordance with the will of the master; to guarantee them against excessive poverty, which is always a danger for the State, by using their own resources to which are added, to bind them through gratitude, some subsidies made on behalf of taxpayers; this is the means employed by the empire to bond with the poor and ignorant mass.

Fortunately, the almost unlimited personal power granted to the presidents of the mutual assistance societies have produced the same result in each of these little

¹ A reference to Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, one time President of the Second Republic, who organised a coup d’état in December 1851 before being crowned Emperor Napoleon III in December 1852. (BF)

² *The extinction of pauperism* was 1844 a work by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte which urged social reform and was influenced by Saint-Simonian ideas. (BF)

associations as the power of the head of State in the great national association.

Almost everywhere, the arbitrariness of the presidents has stirred the most independent members and discord, dissensions have disturbed the societies.

Today the experiment is complete: we recognise that we must let people regulate their affairs themselves, freely choose their officials and revoke them, if they exceed their powers or do not act according to the general will.

We must support this reform.

But since I do not have much confidence in the liberalism of the Legislative Body, nor in the Council of State nor in today's or tomorrow's ministry, what I propose to all citizens who belong to mutual assistance societies and who want the abolition of the official presidents is not to make petitions or submissions, but to immediately ask their co-members to abolish the presidency in their respective societies.

This is a revolutionary process, and I am convinced that it is the only one which allows us to promptly obtain the reform which we all find so necessary.

If we ask, if we petition, the legislators will pass our demands and petitions from office to officer, they will refer the matter, they will postpone to next year, the year following, and we will exhaust our time and our existence waiting for the result.

We must know from experience that laws are usually repealed by legislators only when public customs have annulled them in fact by rendering their enforcement impossible. So let us act!

As for me, I am this very day speaking to the council of bookbinders' mutual assistance society of which I belong to put my proposal to abolish the Presidency on the agenda of the next general assembly.

As for the timorous members who might fear that authority will dissolve their society if they put themselves outside of the law, they can rest assured. It is not possible for the government in the state of discipline to which it is now reduced to face a scandal as that produced by the violent dissolution for this specific reason of societies that aim to support their sick or elders.

Workers Societies

La Marseillaise, 11 March 1870

While our statesmen try to substitute a parliamentary and liberal government (Orleans style) for the regime of personal government, and so hope to divert the advancing Revolution threatening their privileges; we socialists, who by experience know that all the old political forms are powerless to satisfy popular demands, must, while taking advantage of the mistakes and blunders of our adversaries, hasten the hour of deliverance. We must actively work to prepare the organisational elements of the future society in order to make the work of social transformation that is imposed on the Revolution easier and more certain.

So far political states have been, so to speak, only the continuation of the regime of conquest, which presided over the establishment of authority and the enslavement of the masses: Republican Governments, as in Switzerland or the United State; constitutional and oligarchic, as in Belgium or England; autocratic, as in Russia, or personal, as in France since the Empire; it is

always authority charged with keeping working people in respect of the law established for the benefit of a few. This authority may be more or less rigid, more or less arbitrary, but this does not change the basis of economic

Unless you want to reduce everything to a centralising and authoritarian state [...] the workers themselves must have the free disposal of their instruments of labour [...] trade associations (resistance, solidarity, union) [...] are the natural elements of the social construction of the future; it is they who can easily become producer associations

relations, and workers are always at the mercy of the holders of capital.

To be permanent, the next revolution must not stop at a simple change of governmental label, and some

superficial reforms; it must completely liberate the worker from all forms of exploitation, capitalist or political, and establish justice in social relations.

Society can no longer leave the disposition of public wealth to the arbitrariness of the privileges of birth or success: the product of collective labour, it can be used only for the benefit of the collectivity; all members of human society have an equal right to the benefits derived from them.

But this social wealth can ensure the well-being of humanity only on the condition of being put into operation by labour.

If, then, the industrial or commercial capitalist should no longer arbitrarily dispose of collective capital, who then will make them productive for the benefit of all? Who, in a word, will organise the production and distribution of products?

Unless you want to reduce everything to a centralising and authoritarian state, which would appoint the directors of mills, factories, distribution outlets, whose directors would in turn appoint deputy directors, supervisors, foremen, etc. and thus arrive at a top-down hierarchical organisation of labour, in which the worker would be nothing but an unconscious cog, without freedom or initiative; unless we do, we are forced to admit that the workers themselves must have the free disposal of their instruments of labour, under the condition of exchanging their products at cost price, so that there is reciprocity of service between the different specialities of workers.

It is to this last idea that most workers who in recent years have been energetically pursuing the emancipation of their class tend to rally. It is this which has prevailed in the various congresses of the International Workers Association.

But it should not be believed that such an organisation can be easily improvised in every respect! For this a few intelligent, devoted, energetic men are not enough! Above all, it is necessity that workers, thus called to work together freely and on the basis of equality, should already be prepared for social life.

One of the greatest difficulties that the founders of all kinds of [workers] societies tried for the last few years have encountered is the spirit of individualism, excessively developed in most men and even amongst those who understand that only by association can workers improve living standards, and hope for their liberation.

Well! Workers societies, in whatever form they exist at present, already have this immense advantage of accustoming men to social life, and so preparing them for a wider social organisation. They accustom them not only to reach an agreement and understanding, but also to take care of their affairs, to organise, to discuss, to think about their material and moral interests, and always from the collective point of view since their personal, individual, direct interest disappears as soon as they become part of a collectivity.

Together with the advantages that each of these societies can provide to its members, there is, by this fact, the development of sociability, enough to make them recommended to all citizens who aspire to the advent of socialism.

But trade associations (resistance, solidarity, union) deserve our encouragement and sympathy, for they are the natural elements of the social construction of the future; it is they who can easily become producer associations; it is they who will be able to operate social tools and organise production.

Many of their members are often unconscious at first of the role that these societies are called upon to play in the future; at first they think of only resisting the exploitation of capital or of obtaining some superficial improvements; but soon the hard efforts they have to make to achieve insufficient palliatives or even, sometimes, negative results, easily lead them to seek radical reforms that can free them from capitalist oppression. Then they study social questions and get represented at workers congresses.

The congress of the international association held in Basle last September recommended that all workers should group themselves into resistance societies by trade in order to secure the present and prepare for the future. I propose to make a study of the various forms of corporative workers' societies, and their progressive development, in order to make known to workers who are not yet associated the present advantages which they can gather from their organisation, and to make them benefit from the experience bitterly acquired in these past years by other trade associations.

It is necessary that the new groups get in step with the old ones, for it is only through solidarity, widely understood, by world-wide union of workers of all professions and all countries that we will surely arrive at the suppression of privileges and equality for all.

we who aspire to achieve the possession of all our rights as soon as possible, to true freedom, that which includes them all, we must not, however, miss an opportunity to undermine the obstacle which hinders us until we can destroy it completely

Stuart Christie (1946-2020)

John Patten

Stuart Christie, founder of the Anarchist Black Cross and Cienfuegos Press and co-author of *The floodgates of anarchy* has died peacefully after a battle with lung cancer.

Born in Glasgow and brought up in Blantyre, Christie credited his grandmother for shaping his political outlook, giving him a clear moral map and ethical code. His determination to follow his conscience led him to anarchism: "Without freedom there would be no equality and without equality no freedom, and without struggle there would be neither." It also led him from the campaign against nuclear weapons to joining the struggle against the Spanish fascist dictator Francisco Franco (1892-1975).

He moved to London and got in touch with the clandestine Spanish anarchist organisation Defensa Interior (Interior Defence). He was arrested in Madrid in 1964 carrying explosives to be used in an assassination attempt on Franco. To cover the fact that there was an informer inside the group, the police proclaimed they had agents operating in Britain – and (falsely) that Christie had drawn attention to himself by wearing a kilt.

The threat of the garotte and his twenty year sentence drew international attention to the resistance to the Franco regime. In prison Christie formed lasting friendships with anarchist militants of his and earlier generations. He returned from Spain in 1967, older and wiser, but equally determined to continue the struggle and use his notoriety to aid the comrades he left behind.

In London he met Brenda Earl who would become his political and emotional life partner. He also met Albert Meltzer, and the two would refound the Anarchist Black Cross to promote solidarity with anarchist prisoners in Spain, and the resistance more broadly. Their book, *The floodgates of anarchy* promoted a revolutionary anarchism at odds with the attitudes of some who had come into anarchism from the sixties peace movement. At the Carrara anarchist conference of 1968 Christie got in touch with a new generation of anarchist militants who shared his ideas and approach to action.

Christie's political commitment and international connections made him a target for the British Special



Branch. He was acquitted of conspiracy to cause explosions in the "Stoke Newington Eight" trial of 1972, claiming the jury could understand why someone would want to blow up Franco, and why that would make him a target for "conservative-minded policemen".

Free but apparently unemployable, Christie launched Cienfuegos Press which would produce a large number of anarchist books and the encyclopaedic *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*. Briefly Orkney became a centre of anarchist publishing before lack of cashflow ended the project. Christie would continue publishing, and investigating new ways of doing so including ebooks and the internet. His christiebooks.com site contains numerous films on anarchism and biographies of anarchists. He used facebook to create an archive of anarchist history not available anywhere else as he recounted

memories and events from his own and other people's lives.

Christie wrote *The investigative researcher's handbook* (1983), sharing skills that he put to use in an exposé of fascist Italian terrorist *Stefano delle Chiaie* (1984). In 1996 he published the first version of his historical study *We the anarchists : a study of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), 1927-1937*.

Short-run printing enabled him to produce three illustrated volumes of his life story (*My granny made me an anarchist, General Franco made me a 'terrorist' and Edward Heath made me angry* 2002-2004) which were condensed into a single volume as *Granny made me an anarchist : General Franco, the angry brigade and me* (2004). His final books were the three volumes of *¡Pistoleros! The Chronicles of Farquhar McHarg*, his tales of a Glaswegian anarchist who joins the Spanish anarchist defence groups in the years 1918-1924.

Committed to anarchism and publishing, Christie appeared at many bookfairs and film festivals, but scorned any suggestion he had come to 'lead' anyone anywhere.

Christie's partner Brenda died in June 2019. He slipped away peacefully, listening to "Pennies From Heaven" (Brenda's favourite song) in the company of his daughter Branwen.

Anarchism – A Definition

My Granny Made me an Anarchist: The Christie File: Part 1, 1946-1964 (2002)

At this juncture it would probably be helpful to give a summary of the idea which won me over so completely at such a young age.

Anarchism encompasses such a broad view of the world that it cannot easily be distilled into a formal definition. Mikhail Bakunin, a man of action whose writings and example over a century ago did most to transform anarchism from an abstract critique of political power into a theory of practical social action, defined its fundamental tenet thus:

In a word, we reject all privileged, licensed, official, and legal legislation and authority, even though it arise from universal suffrage, convinced that it could only turn to the benefit of a dominant and exploiting minority, and against the interests of the vast enslaved majority.

Anarchism is a movement for human freedom. It is concrete, democratic and egalitarian. It is rooted in normality as opposed to eccentricity. It has existed and developed since the seventeenth century, with a philosophy and a defined outlook that have evolved and grown with time and circumstance. Anarchism began – and remains – a direct challenge by the underprivileged to their oppression and exploitation. It opposes both the insidious growth of state power and the pernicious ethos of possessive individualism, which, together or separately, ultimately serve only the interests of the few at the expense of the rest.

Anarchism is both a theory and practice of life. Philosophically, it aims for the maximum accord between the individual, society and nature. Practically, it aims for us to organise and live our lives in such a way as to make politicians, governments, states and their officials superfluous. In an anarchist society, mutually respectful sovereign individuals would be organised in non-coercive relationships within naturally defined communities in which the means of production and distribution are held in common.

Anarchists are not dreamers obsessed with abstract principles and theoretical constructs, Events are ruled by chance and people's actions depend on long-held habits and on psychological and emotional factors that are often antisocial and usually unpredictable. Anarchists are well aware that a perfect society cannot be won tomorrow.

Indeed, the struggle lasts forever! However, it is the vision that provides the spur to struggle against things as they are, and for things that might be.

Whatever the immediate prospects of achieving a free society, and however remote the ideal, if we value our common humanity then we must never cease to strive to realise our vision. To settle for anything less means we are little more than beasts of burden at the service of the privileged few, without much to gain from life other than a lighter load, better feed and a cosier berth.

Ultimately, only struggle determines outcome, and progress towards a more meaningful community must begin with the will to resist every form of injustice. In general terms, this means challenging all exploitation and defying the legitimacy of all coercive authority. If anarchists have one article of unshakable faith, it is that, once the habit of deferring to politicians or ideologues is lost, and that of resistance to domination and exploitation acquired, then ordinary people have a capacity to organise every aspect of their lives in their own interests, anywhere and at any time, both freely and fairly.

Anarchists do not stand aside from popular struggle, nor do they attempt to dominate it. They seek to contribute to it practically whatever they can, and also to assist within it the highest possible levels both of individual self-development and of group solidarity. It is possible to recognise anarchist ideas concerning voluntary relationships, egalitarian participation in decision-making processes, mutual aid and a related critique of all forms of domination in philosophical, social and revolutionary movements in all times and places.

Elsewhere, the less formal practices and struggles of the more indomitable among the propertyless and disadvantaged victims of the authority system have found articulation in the writings of those who on brief acquaintance would appear to be mere millenarian dreamers. Far from being abstract speculations conjured out of thin air, such works have, like all social theories, been derived from sensitive observation. They reflect the fundamental and uncontainable conviction nourished by a conscious minority throughout history that social power held over people is a usurpation of natural rights: power originates in the people, and they alone have, together, the right to wield it.

Statement by the Black Flag Group

to the Liverpool Conference of the Anarchist Federation of Britain, Sept., 1968

Anarchism is a revolutionary method of achieving a free non-violent society, without class divisions or imposed authority. Whether this is a “utopian” achievement or not is irrelevant; the Anarchist, on any normal definition, is a person who, having this aim in mind, proceeds to get rid of authoritarian structures, and advances towards such a society by making people independent of the State and by intensifying the class struggle so that the means of economic exploitation will be weakened and destroyed.

Confusion

There should be no confusion between anarchism and liberalism however militant the latter might be (e.g. movements towards national liberation). The liberal seeks greeter freedom within the structure of society that he finds himself; he rejects the methods of class struggle which relate to the economic divisions of society. Since there *is* such a confusion, however, we find that there are now TWO contrary conceptions of anarchism.

There are not “as many conceptions as there are anarchists” nor “a thousand fragments” but there are TWO, both of which are probably represented at this Conference. One, which we support and intend to give coherence to as an organisation, is what we are obliged to call *Revolutionary Anarchism* (though anarchism should not need such a qualification) which says that there can be no compromise with the State; that there is a class struggle, and that there is nothing to be gained to [by] adapting to class society. There can only be a revolution, in the streets and in the factories. The other conception we call *Liberal Anarchism* (though it may regard itself as revolutionary, while more usually deriding the word) which seeks to adjust to present day society, without the need for overthrowing the State (regarded as an unlikely contingency). Such adjustment could, of course, be to Capitalism or even in some circumstances to State Communism; and there are many different ways in which it could be main [made].

Peace Movement

In the main, so far as this country is concerned, such social-liberal ideas have come into the Anarchist Movement by way of the Peace Movement which has questioned, or perhaps never understood, certain basic anarchistic conceptions. In saying this, we are not denying that pacifists can be anarchists (though for the sake of coherent action we would exclude them from our own group). So long as their viewpoint does not become a mainstream tendency we can no doubt work with them within the AFB.

We regard the principle of pacifism as irrelevant and on the whole unanarchistic (as would be making a cult of

temperance or vegetarianism or taking pot or ‘dropping out’ – these are all matters for personal decisions, and while often escapes from the main social issues, only become absurd when made into a cult that all are exhorted to follow, and elevated to becoming the main social issue among ourselves and within society as a whole, with matters such as the class struggle relegated or ignored.) Even so, the issue we face in this conference is NOT pacifism as such but the fact that it has opened the door for so many liberal assumptions. For instance, that prisons can be reformed and are incapable of abolition (Vine; Willis); that we should go to the extent of collecting money for policemen injured on demonstrations (Featherstone); that the police are a necessary crutch to society (Rooum); that criminals are the only free people but that we should call on the services of the police if necessary (Schweitzer-Mariconi).

Liberalism

Once one accepts that “anarchism must be related to contemporary society”, capitalism ([Colin] Ward) one may accept participation in management (Topham through to Ostergaard); or the necessity for psychological and sociological adjustments to living in the rat race (various, *Anarchy*); or that taxation is necessary to help the poorer classes ([Vernon] Richards); or that we need merely be in a condition of permanent protest against abuses within society (Sydney Libertarians); adjusted to non-violent methods (*Peace News*) or to such authoritarian bodies as the Catholic Church ([Ammon] Hennacy) or even make our peace within the Communist State (Jeff Robinson).

Anarchism so diluted may be recognised by the monarchy ([Sir Herbert] Read) or be compatible with voting Labour ([George] Melly); or it can be reduced to a mere imaginary mind process leading to intellectual salvation (various, *Minus One*). Those who reject the revolutionary concept may have various views, ranging from a rejection of contemporary values and a mere ignoring of the State hoping it will go away (hippies, diggers) to deliberate provocation of it to use its full repressive powers without, however, preparing for any effective resistance (some at least of the Provo-Situationists).

We do not recognise what we call Liberal Anarchism to be genuine Anarchism, but since it exists, we are obliged to describe ourselves as Revolutionary Anarchists. We do not know to what extent there is general agreement with us in the AFB. Our present intention is to be a membership organisation, within the AFB and local groups. If on the other hand we represent the bulk of the membership of the AFB there is no reason why the organisation cannot take over our

programme. Those who have followed controversies in the Libertarian Press, at least, will know what this leaflet is about. Those who have, by reason of their contemporary experience, rejected the name anarchist, thinking they would identify themselves with what we here call Liberal Anarchist, are invited to re-think their position

International

The situation internationally, has similarities with Britain except that there the tendency to fit into the

A. Meltzer, Ross Flett, Adrian Derbyshire, Stuart Christie, Roger Sandell, Mike Walsh, Jim Duke, Ted Kavanagh

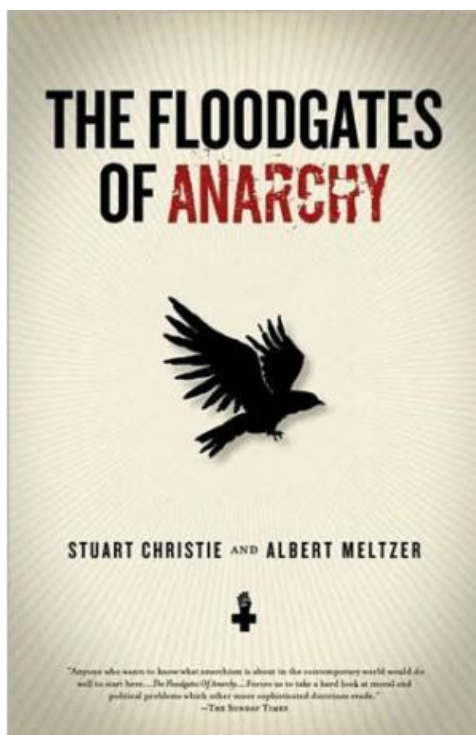
Comments are invited upon the draft "Aims & Principles of Anarchism".

Issued by the BLACK FLAG GROUP, 735 Fulham Road, London, S.W.6.

The first conference of the "Black Flag" group will be held in Brighton in the autumn. Discussion on the formation of another anarchist newspaper.

We do not recognise what we call Liberal Anarchism to be genuine Anarchism, but since it exists, we are obliged to describe ourselves as Revolutionary Anarchists.

Preface to *The Floodgates of Anarchy*



Writing on the subject of anarchism in relation to the class struggle we had few, if any, books to consult, despite the writings of earlier anarchists when class divisions were taken for granted and before the development of current social and economic trends. The anarchist movement owes little to the writings of the "intellectual"-on the contrary, professional writers have dipped into the achievements of anarchist workers to enlighten themselves on social theory or to formulate other theories.

I was helped in my early thoughts by coming from Glasgow and Blantyre where I grew up amongst miners and others who had kept the socialist and libertarian tradition alive for more than sixty years. I subsequently had the advantage of holding discussions with comrades of the clandestine struggle against Franco such as Octavio Alberola; Salvador Gurruchari and Jose Pascual Palacios. I must also add to this list Luis

Andres Edo and Alain Pecunia, a fellow prisoner in Carabanchel, Madrid, Prison. Without them and people like them we would have been gobbled up or annihilated entirely by the machinery of the State.

I may say that this book would never have appeared without the help of my co-author Albert Meltzer, a veteran of the anarchist movement for over a third of a century. Albert has worked with stalwarts of a previous generation of British anarchists-Mat Kavanagh, Frank Leech, Albert Grace, Sam Mainwaring Jnr, and others-as well as collaborating with revolutionaries in Asia and Europe. Our work in the Anarchist Black Cross, an organisation for helping prisoners and activists abroad and in Britain, resulted in this book.

David Graeber (1961-2020)

An anarchist and anthropological farewell to a 'sudden thinker'

Dimitris Dalakoglou¹

When a friend messaged me a few days ago to ask me if I had heard about David's death, before the news had been published, my initial reaction was to search for my cell phone to call him and laugh about the fake news.

Two or three years ago David and I were having a picnic in a London park. When I teased him about his fame, with his usual black New York humour he responded that until fake news of your death circulates, you are not famous enough. He laughed his distinctive laugh, tilted his head slightly, stared into the distance with his vivid eyes half-closed and then looked at me as he was continuing talking. I knew he was about to tell me something he was excited about and he duly shared an idea for a book that would address a theme on such a scale that it would have frightened the vast majority of anthropologists, but not David and his brilliant mind.

This is how I'd always known David. I still remember, in 2009, discussing the revolt of December 2008 in Athens. He started telling me about the book on debt that he was finishing and what an obscure idea debt is, but instead of presenting the book's premise, he was interweaving the Greek case, the ancient Greek history of debt and the history of money throughout the Mediterranean in ways that only David's mind could, drawing spontaneous connections between phenomena that the rest of us would need days of reading and drafting to bring together. I asked him to write a chapter for the book that our collective, Occupied London, was preparing about the revolt of December. He generously contributed a chapter entitled, *The Greek debt crisis in almost unimaginably long-term historical perspective*. A few months later, David published what is the most widely read book an anthropologist and an anarchist has written in the last four decades, if not longer: *Debt: the first 5000 years* (2011).

At the moment of our picnic, *Debt* was still a best seller in various languages and featured on many authoritative Top 10 lists. The first years after its initial publication you would walk in front of big bookstores from London's Charing Cross to Athens, Berlin, Amsterdam or NYC and see the book displayed in the front window. His book on bureaucracy *The Utopia of Rules* (2015) had also been recently published around the time of our meeting and was already becoming popular and influential and was being translated into several languages.



The entire discipline of anthropology has David's work to thank for much of its current popularity among younger generations who grew up in the post-2008 crisis world and the state of exception that has become a permanent form of governance. This generation are fed up with capitalism, and that American anarchist and anthropologist with the funny voice, who often dressed in extravagant second-hand clothes bought in the Portobello flea market, was writing in a way that spoke to them. David's books were introducing anthropological and radical political ideas to the general reader and at the same time innovating our entire discipline, teaching many of us not to be afraid to mix our politics with our anthropology. We are indebted to David for his novel approach to thinking and communicating that can be simultaneously scholarly, engaging and politicised.

As is well known, David grew up in a working-class family in NYC. His father fought in the Spanish civil war with the international brigades against Franco's fascists, then worked as a lithographer, while his mother was a garment worker actively involved in her union. David mastered Mayan hieroglyphic reading as a child and was therefore offered a scholarship from a private high school. He did his Bachelor in Anthropology at SUNY and his PhD in Chicago University, carrying out his ethnography in Madagascar – *The Disastrous Ordeal of*

¹ <https://freedomnews.org.uk/david-graeber-1961-2020-an-anarchist-and-anthropological-farewell-to-a-sudden-thinker/>

1987: *Memory and Violence in Rural Madagascar*. As is the fashion in anthropology, he published this monograph a decade or so after completing the PhD, thereby offering us what many consider his best book: *Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar* (2007). This came a few years after the influential *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (2001) and the celebrated *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004).

From 1998 to 2007 David was working as assistant and associate professor at Yale from where he was fired due to his politics both off, but mostly on, campus. Although Yale never admitted this, there are few who believe otherwise. Petitions and letters of support were signed by entire departments of anthropology all over the world, defending David in his struggle to retain his job.

In spite of the outcry however, and regardless of the fact that David had not broken any rules of academia or Yale, he spent two years applying for jobs in North America and not being shortlisted. Both progressive and conservative academia manages to ostracise and entrap its members who are classified as challenging the authority of those who hold managerial power within the academic workplaces, and this often has wider consequences in the job market. Yet it was very clear to most of us that if he was not already, he would soon become one of the most influential thinkers within the discipline, regardless of being refused academic positions. That was an experience David never forgot, and I know from first-hand experience that when he heard of colleagues who were facing trouble in their workplaces due to their politics on and off campus, he was there to help.

The department of anthropology in Goldsmiths College offered him a refuge in 2007. I still have vivid memories of a rainy Sunday when we first met in London. He had just arrived from the US to start the Goldsmiths job. I do not remember if he reached out to *Occupied London* or if we contacted him. But at that time, the magazine, with Antonis Vradis as its heart, was one of the best known anarchist publications in the British capital and beyond, so it made sense for both parties to be in touch. He came with his companion, smiling and waving from the end of the street as Antonis and I pointed to them from a distance. At that time I was still having Athenian anarchist mindset, and as he walked towards us, I remember saying to my companion that he looked to me like all those nutty American anarchists we had met the previous decade in the big alter-globalisation marches against the IMF, the WB and the G8 in Prague, Genova etc. He was a nutty American anarchist, but he was a very special one.

In London, David's presence did rock the boat of a well-established anthropological scene that was very set and rigid, having its Big Men and Big Women, as he came

full of a new mix of ideas and energy that we desperately needed. Many European colleagues and comrades were excited to have him with us. The European Association of Social Anthropologists in 2008 was held in Ljubljana. One of the organisers, fellow anthropologist and anarchist, Rajko Mursic, asked me for David's contact details in order to invite him to be the plenary speaker. I passed it to him with a warning: "You will really have to remind him and keep him in the loop, he is a creative spirit and his brain is full of good ideas, but he's travelling all the time for demos, for work for personal reasons and he is not always the most organised person in the world". David was announced as the keynote plenary speaker, but he had never made it to Slovenia, for personal reasons, to the explicit disappointment of more than 1,200 delegates from all over the world, with some of them coming to the huge lecture hall looking forward to hear him.

A good friend from the US anarchist scene told me a few years ago: "If you see Graeber in an American Anthropological Association meeting, give him a punch from me." In 2009 his ethnography of direct action groups came out. It is a rich and very pleasant ethnography, introducing and popularising ideas about direct action and even teaching such anarchist activist practices. Yet, some of our finest comrades were not happy with David; he did not efficiently anonymise them, and in the homeplace of the FBI and NSA, this can have serious consequences.

Fearless or reckless, that was David in times. In November of 2010, as the student movement in the UK was on fire due to the rise in student fees and many years of the Tories holding power dismantling everything, and as our throats were rough from screaming 'Tory scum!' all morning, a large group of people ended up in the headquarters of the Conservative Party in Millbank. Soon the familiar sound of the smashing tempered glass was heard and the headquarters of the governing party of Great Britain were being stormed. An ecstatic crowd of 1,500-2,000 pushed forward in the building, cheering loudly in an atrium with echo that multiplied the sound ten times over. During that incredible moment I suddenly found David again in front of the building — I had seen him earlier outside the LSE. The most typical reaction of an experienced activist in such cases is to cover their face, but his face was uncovered and he was picking up a thick piece of broken glass from the smashed windows, putting it into his pocket, smiling. "Why is your face not covered? And why are you putting evidence of a felony in your pocket?" "Souvenirs!" he responded, and laughed loudly.

In 2011 came the Arab Spring, Indignados in Spain, Syntagma square in Athens, clashes with the police everywhere. People were increasingly resisting the authorities and their decisions worldwide. David was in Occupy Wall Street. His involvement with the Occupy Wall Street had cost him a painful eviction from his

apartment in the city where he had grown up. He was credited as one of the leaders of the movement, a title I believe he was not very comfortable with, he was simply one of the knowledgeable, high profile people who happened to be there at the beginning of it all, he had mentioned once.

“At their very simplest, anarchist beliefs turn on to two elementary assumptions. The first is that human beings are, under ordinary circumstances, about as reasonable and decent as they are allowed to be, and can organise themselves and their communities without needing to be told how. The second is that power corrupts. Most of all, anarchism is just a matter of having the courage to take the simple principles of common decency that we all live by, and to follow them through to their logical conclusions. Odd though this may seem, in most important ways you are probably already an anarchist — you just don’t realise it.”

-- David Graeber, *Are You An Anarchist? The Answer May Surprise You!*

We did disagree often with David during our chats, mostly on politics, sometimes over anthropological issues, occasionally we also agreed, but it was always an interesting and rewarding experience talking with him. Although some people may disagree with me, I think David was modest and accessible for someone with his fame as you should expect from a person with an egalitarian ethos. He had many close friends within anthropology and the activist world, and many people had his phone number and knew him in a personal capacity. He was getting very excited that people read his books and by his participation in political projects, most recently his solidarity with Rojava and the movement for the liberation of Kurdistan, but otherwise he would not claim authority and would be one of us in those various contexts.

In 2013 David moved from Goldsmiths’ to take a well-deserved full professorship in London School of Economics. He continued his writing and travelling to various fronts of the global resistance against capitalism and fascism and he will be remembered by many as a friendly, clever American intellectual and activist.

I did not share the information of his death immediately as I was very numb. I only could write “RIP” and upload a video of him from May 2020 giving a short talk about Covid and bullshit jobs. A newspaper approached me to write an obituary but I was not ready and I also know his feelings about newspapers — a feeling many anarchists are sharing: if the papers can get something out of us they will remember us, if not they will ignore us. Most

recently I remember that, although it had hosted his op-eds many times, he was livid with the *Guardian* and its role in undermining Jeremy Corbyn. Then *Freedom* kindly approached me to write an obituary forcing me to absorb the news. *Freedom* feels right and cosy, an anarchist London-based magazine run by friends and comrades. Yet I do feel that no obituary can possibly do justice to David. What to refer to? David as an intellectual? As a comrade? As an anarchist grassroots activist? As an anthropologist? As a friend? As a personality? He was larger than life.

David was gifted in so many ways. Many people will talk about his magnetic personality and captivating ways of talking, which could also be scattered at times, but simultaneously full of good ideas that he explained clearly. He

knew his anthropology, his history, his political science, his political economics, his history of art, and so much more — he would always surprise you with his depth of knowledge about subjects and phenomena you would never expect him to be aware of. He could operate at the abstract and theoretical level as easily as he could pin down, skilled ethnographer that he was, ideas grounded in the real life experience of regular people.

After I left England for Amsterdam in 2015 we no longer met that often, but each time would always feel as though we were simply continuing conversations from our previous meeting, ten months ago or more, as if we had met only the day before. In order to write this obituary, I went through the painful task of looking through our written communication. In July 2018, I received an email from David with the title “sudden thought”. It reads: “Hi Dimitris, I’m off to Greece for a couple of weeks. Mainly going to be hiding on islands but just in the very off chance you are around for summer ... David”. That was David full of sudden thoughts that were good thoughts and many people I know are already missing him and his sudden thoughts that would occur to him and he would not hold them back, but would instantly share them.

David Graeber’s brilliant mind will live through his writings and the legacy of his political actions for generations to come. He became one of the most influential thinkers of the Left of our time and he died in a hospital in Venice on the 2nd of September 2020. He is survived by his wife, the writer and artist Nika Dubrovsky.

On the Invention of Money

Notes on Sex, Adventure, Monomaniacal Sociopathy and the True Function of Economics

13 September 2011¹

A Reply to Robert Murphy's 'Have Anthropologists Overturned Menger?'

Last week, Robert F. Murphy published a piece on the webpage of the Von Mises Institute responding to some points I made in a recent interview on Naked Capitalism, where I mentioned that the standard economic accounts of the emergence of money from barter appears to be wildly wrong. Since this contradicted a position taken by one of the gods of the Austrian pantheon, the 19th century economist Carl Menger, Murphy apparently felt honour-bound to respond.

In a way, Murphy's essay barely merits response. In the interview I'm simply referring to arguments made in my book, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*. In his response, Murphy didn't even consult the book; in fact he later admitted he was responding at least in part not even to the interview but to an inaccurate summary of my position someone had made in another blog!

We are not, in other words, dealing with a work of scholarship. However, in the blogosphere, the quality or even intention of an argument often doesn't matter. I have to assume Murphy was aware that all he had to do was to write something – anything really – and claim it rebutted me, and the piece would be instantly snatched up by a right-wing echo chamber, mirrored on half a dozen websites and that followers of those websites would then dutifully begin appearing across the web declaring to everyone willing to listen that my work had been rebutted. The fact that I instantly appeared on the Von Mises web page to offer a detailed response, and that Murphy has since effectively conceded, writing an elaborate climb-down saying that he had no intention to cast doubt on my argument as a whole at all, only to note that I had not definitively disproved Menger's, has done nothing to change this. Indeed, on both US and UK Amazon, I have seen fans of Austrian economics appear to inform potential buyers that I am an economic ignoramus whose work has been entirely discredited.

I am posting this more detailed version of my reply not just to set the record straight, but because the whole question of the origins of money raises other interesting questions – not least, why any modern economist would get so worked up about the question. Let me begin by filling in some background on the current state of scholarly debate on this question, explain my own position, and show what an actual debate might have been like.

First, the history:

economists thus predicted that all (100%) non-monetary economies would be barter economies. Empirical observation has revealed that the actual number of observable cases – out of thousands studied – is 0%.

1) Adam Smith first proposed in *The Wealth of Nations* that as soon as a division of labour appeared in human society, some specialising in hunting, for instance, others making arrowheads, people would begin swapping goods with one another (6 arrowheads for a beaver pelt, for instance.) This habit,

though, would logically lead to a problem economists have since dubbed the 'double coincidence of wants' problem – for exchange to be possible, both sides have to have something the other is willing to accept in trade. This was assumed to eventually lead to the people stockpiling items deemed likely to be generally desirable, which would thus become ever more desirable for that reason, and eventually, become money. Barter thus gave birth to money, and money, eventually, to credit.

2) 19th century economists such as Stanley Jevons and Carl Menger² kept the basic framework of Smith's argument, but developed hypothetical models of just how money might emerge from such a situation. All assumed that in all communities without money, economic life could only have taken the form of barter. Menger even spoke of members of such communities "taking their goods to market" – presuming marketplaces where a wide variety of products were available but they were

¹ <https://www.nakedcapitalism.com>

² Jevons, W. Stanley, *Money and the Mechanism of Exchange*. New York: Appleton and Company, 1885, and Menger, Carl, "On the origins of money." *Economic Journal* 1892 v.2 no 6, pp. 239-55

simply swapped directly, in whatever way people felt advantageous.

3) Anthropologists gradually fanned out into the world and began directly observing how economies where money was not used (or anyway, not used for everyday transactions) actually worked. What they discovered was an at first bewildering variety of arrangements, ranging from competitive gift-giving to communal stockpiling to places where economic relations centred on neighbours trying to guess each other's dreams. What they never found was any place, anywhere, where economic relations between members of community took the form economists predicted: "I'll give you twenty chickens for that cow." Hence in the definitive anthropological work on the subject, Cambridge anthropology professor Caroline Humphrey concludes, "No example of a barter economy, pure and simple, has ever been described, let alone the emergence from it of money; all available ethnography suggests that there never has been such a thing"¹

a. Just in way of emphasis: economists thus predicted that all (100%) non-monetary economies would be barter economies. Empirical observation has revealed that the actual number of observable cases – out of thousands studied – is 0%.

b. Similarly, the number of documented marketplaces where people regularly appear to swap goods directly without any reference to a money of account is also zero. If any sociological prediction has ever been empirically refuted, this is it.

4) Economists have for the most part accepted the anthropological findings, if directly confronted with them, but not changed any of the assumptions that generated the false predictions. Meanwhile, all textbooks continue to report the same old sequence: first there was barter, then money, then credit – except instead of actually saying that tribal societies regularly practiced barter, they set it up as an imaginative exercise ("imagine what you would have to do if you didn't have money!" or vaguely imply that anything actual tribal societies did do must have been barter of some kind.

So what I said was in no way controversial. When confronted on why economists continue to tell the same story, the usual response is: "Well, it's not like you provide us with another story!" In a way they have a point. The problem is, there's no reason there should be a single story for the origin of money. Here let me lay out my own actual argument:

¹ Humphrey, Caroline, "Barter and Economic Disintegration." *Man* 1985 v.20: 48. Other anthropologists have gone even further, for instance Anne Chapman, "Barter as a Universal Mode of Exchange." *L'Homme* 1980 v22 (3): 33-83), argues

1) If money is simply a mathematical system whereby one can compare proportional values, to say 1 of these is worth 17 of those, which may or may not also take the form of a circulating medium of exchange, then something along these lines must have emerged in innumerable different circumstances in human history for different reasons. Presumably money as we know it today came about through a long process of convergence.

2) However, there is every reason to believe that barter, and its attendant 'double coincidence of wants' problem, was not one of the circumstances through which money first emerged.

a. The great flaw of the economic model is that it assumed spot transactions. I have arrowheads, you have beaver pelts, if you don't need arrowheads right now, no deal. But even if we presume that neighbours in a small community are exchanging items in some way, why on earth would they limit themselves to spot transactions? If your neighbour doesn't need your arrowheads right now, he probably will at some point in the future, and even if he won't, you're his neighbour – you will undoubtedly have something he wants, or be able to do some sort of favour for him, eventually. But without assuming the spot trade, there's no double coincidence of wants problem, and therefore, no need to invent money.

b. What anthropologists have in fact observed where money is not used is not a system of explicit lending and borrowing, but a very broad system of non-enumerated credits and debts. In most such societies, if a neighbour wants some possession of yours, it usually suffices simply to praise it ("what a magnificent pig!"); the response is to immediately hand it over, accompanied by much insistence that this is a gift and the donor certainly would never want anything in return. In fact, the recipient now owes him a favour. Now, he might well just sit on the favour, since it's nice to have others beholden to you, or he might demand something of an explicitly non-material kind ("you know, my son is in love with your daughter...") He might ask for another pig, or something he considers roughly equivalent in kind. But it's almost impossible to see how any of this would lead to a system whereby it's possible to measure proportional values. After all, even if, as sometimes happens, the party owing one favour heads you off by presenting you with

that if pure barter is to be defined as only about the things, and not about the people, it's not clear that it has ever existed—as the cases cited at the end of this essay indeed illustrate.

some unwanted present, and one considers it inadequate – a few chickens, for example – one might mock him as a cheapskate, but one is unlikely to feel the need to come up with a mathematical formula to measure just how cheap you consider him to be. As a result, as Chris Gregory observed, what you ordinarily find in such ‘gift economies’ is a broad ranking of different types of goods – canoes are roughly the same as heirloom necklaces, both are superior to pigs and whale teeth, which are superior to chickens, etc – but no system whereby you can measure how many pigs equal one canoe.¹

3) All this is not to say that barter never occurs. It is widely attested in many times and places. But it typically occurs between strangers, people who have no moral relations with one another. There is a reason why in just about all European languages, the words ‘truck and barter’ originally meant ‘to bilk, swindle, or rip off.’² Still there is no reason to believe such barter would ever lead to the emergence of money. This is because barter takes three known forms:

a. Barter can take the form of occasional interactions between people never likely to meet each other again. This might involve ‘double coincidence of wants’ problems but it will not lead to the emergence of a system of money because rare and occasional events won’t lead to the emergence of a system of any kind.

b. If there are ongoing trade relations between strangers in moneyless economies, it’s because each side knows the other side has some specific product(s) they want to acquire – so there is no ‘double coincidence of wants’ problem. Rather than leading to people having to create some circulating medium of exchange (money) to facilitate transactions, such trade normally leads to the creation of a system of traditional equivalents relatively insulated from vagaries of supply and demand.

c. Sometimes, barter becomes a widespread mode of interaction when you have people used to using money in everyday transactions who are suddenly forced to carry on without it. This can happen, for instance, because the money supply dries up (Russia in the ‘90s), or because the people in question have no access to it (prisoners or denizens of POW camps.) This cannot lead to the invention of money because money has already been invented.³

So this is the actual argument, which Prof. Murphy could easily have ascertained with a glance at the relevant chapter of the book.

It’s easy to see from this that his counter-arguments range from extremely weak to completely irrelevant. Let me take them on in turn, such as they are:

- Murphy argues that the fact that there are no documented cases of barter economies doesn’t matter, because all that is really required is for there to have been some period of history, however brief, where barter was widespread for money to have emerged. This is about the weakest argument one can possibly make. Remember, economists originally predicted all (100%) non-monetary economies would operate through barter. The actual figure of observable cases is 0%. Economists claim to be scientists. Normally, when a scientist’s premises produce such spectacularly non-predictive results, the scientist begins working on a new set of premises. Saying “but can you prove it didn’t happen sometime long long ago where there are no records?” is a classic example of special pleading. In fact, I can’t prove it didn’t. I also can’t prove that money wasn’t introduced by little green men from Mars in a similar unknown period of history. Given the weight of the evidence, the burden of proof is on the Murphys of the world to produce some plausible reason why all observable cases of moneyless societies fail to operate the way Menger predicted, and

¹ Gregory, Chris, *Gifts and Commodities*. New York: Academic Press (1982): pp. 48-49. On gift economies, the classic text is Mauss, Marcel, *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques.* *Année sociologique*, 1924 no. 1 (series 2):30-186. On spheres on exchange in general see Bohannan, Paul “Some Principles of Exchange and Investment among the Tiv,” *American Anthropologist* 1955 v57:60-67; Barth, Frederick, “Economic Spheres in Darfur.” *Themes in Economic Anthropology*, ASA Monographs (London, Tavistock) 1969 no. 6, pp. 149-174; cf Munn, Nancy, *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*, 1986, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, and Akin, David and Joel Robbins, “An Introduction to Melanesian Currencies: Agencies, Identity, and Social Reproduction” in *Money and Modernity: State and Local Currencies in*

Melanesia (David Akin and Joel Robbins, editor), pp. 1-40. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

² Servet, Jean-Michel, 1994 “La fable du troc,” *numero spécial de la revue XVIIIe siècle, Economie et politique*, n°26: 103-115

³ The classic work on the economics of POW camps, whence this argument derives, is Radford, R. A., “The Economic Organization of a POW Camp.” *Economica* 1945 v.12 (48): 189-201. There is an excellent critique of the assumptions underlying it in Ingham, Geoffrey, “Further Reflections on the Ontology of Money,” *Economy and Society* 2006 v 36 (2): 264-65, which notes among other things the obvious point that the entire camp environment was created and maintained by a bureaucratic organization that supplied all actual necessities—food, shelter, etc—through administrative distribution.

therefore, why we have any reason to believe some unknown age would have been any different; and this, he does not even attempt to do.

- Murphy then goes on to produce a straw man saying that a system where people borrow things from one another and then turn to political authorities to regulate the system would not produce money. True enough, but it seems a bit irrelevant considering (a) I never say people would be “borrowing” from each other in the way he describes, (b) I never attribute any role to political authorities in this process, and (c) rather than saying the informal system of favours I do describe would lead to the invention of money, I explicitly say that it would not.
- He then restates Menger’s argument about how money could emerge from barter, an argument that given the weight of evidence so far presented would only be relevant if there was some reason to believe money could not have emerged in any other way. He gives no such reason, other than that he cannot personally imagine money emerging any other way.
- Murphy ends by noting the famous study of how widespread barter between prisoners in POW camps seem to have led to the use of cigarettes as money – an argument which, if he had bothered to read the entire interview, let alone the book, he would have known is actually a confirmation of my argument (see 3c above) and not a refutation.

To be fair, Murphy has one other argument – he adopts the position, first proposed by Karl Marx [!], that money first emerged from barter in the process of international trade. The evidence is as follows: while the first records we have of money are administrative documents from Mesopotamia, in which money is used almost exclusively in keeping accounts within large bureaucratic organisations (Temples and Palaces), the system is based on a fixed equivalence between barley and silver, and that since silver was a trade item, this shows that Mesopotamian merchants must have been using silver as a medium of exchange in spot transactions with long-distance trade partners for that system to then be adopted as a unit of account in administrative transactions within Temples. This merits a bit more of a response – not because it is a particularly cogent argument (it’s basically circular: “since money can only have arisen through barter, if silver was money, it must have arisen through barter”), but because it raises some interesting questions about how money actually did emerge.

As I remarked above, occasional, irregular exchange between strangers will not generate a money system – since irregular, occasional exchange will not produce any kind of system. In ancient times, if you do see regular

exchange between strangers, it’s because there are specific goods that each side knows they want or need. One has to bear in mind that under ancient conditions, long-distance trade was extremely dangerous. You don’t cross mountains, deserts, and oceans, risking death in a dozen different ways, so as to show up with a collection of goods you think someone might want, in order to see if they happen to have something you might want too. You show up because you know there are people who have always wanted woollens and who have always had lapis lazuli. As noted above, logically, what such a situation would lead to is a series of conventional equivalences – so many woollens for so many pieces of lapis lazuli – equivalences which are likely to be maintained despite contingencies of supply and demand, because all parties need to reduce risk in order to be able to continue to the trade at all. And once again, what logic would predict is precisely what we find. Even in periods of human history where money and markets did already exist, merchants often continue to conduct high-risk long distance trade through a system of conventional equivalents, or if money is used, administered prices, between specific commodities they know will be available, or in demand, at certain pre-established locations.

One might of course ask, could not such a system generate something like money of account – that is, the use of one or two relatively desirable commodities to measure the value of other ones, once more items were added to the mix (say, our merchant is making several stops)? The answer is yes. No doubt in certain circumstances, something like this did happen. Of course, it would have meant that money, in such cases, was first created as a means to avoid market mechanisms, and that it was not used mainly as a medium of transactions, but rather, primarily as a means of account. One could even make up an imaginary scenario whereby once you start using one divisible/portable/etc commodity as a means of establishing fixed equivalents between other ones, you could start using it for minor occasional transactions, to measure negotiated prices for spot trade swaps on the side, in a more market-driven way. All that is possible and likely as it did happen now and again – after all, we’re dealing with thousands of years here. Likely all sorts of things happened over this long period. However, there is no reason to assume that such a system would produce a concrete medium of exchange regularly used in making these transactions – in fact, given the dangers of ancient trade, insisting that some medium like silver actually be used in all transactions, rather than a credit system, would be completely irrational, since the need to carry around such a money-stuff would make one a far, far, more attractive target to potential thieves. A desert nomad band might not attack a caravan carrying lapis lazuli, especially if the only potential buyers were temples which would probably know all the active merchants and know that you had stolen the stuff (and

even if you could trade for them, what are you going to do with a big pile of woollens anyway, you live in a desert?) but they'd definitely go after someone carrying around a universal equivalent. (This is presumably the reason why the great long-distance traders of the Classical World, the Phoenicians, were among the last to adopt coinage – if money was invented as a circulating medium for long-distance trade, they should have been the first.)

The other problem is that there is no reason to believe that such a mechanism – which would presumably only be used by that tiny proportion of the population who engaged in long distance trade, and who tended to treat such matters as specialised knowledge to be guarded from outsiders – could possibly create a money system used in everyday transactions within a society or any evidence that it might have done so.

The actual evidence is that in Mesopotamia – the first case we know anything about – these more widespread pricing systems in fact emerged as a side-effect of non-state bureaucracies. Again, non-state bureaucracies are a phenomenon that no economic model would even have anticipated existing. It's off the map of economic theory. But look at the historical record and there they are. Sumerian Temples (and even many of the early Palace complexes that imitated them) were not states, did not extract taxes or maintain a monopoly of force, but did contain thousands of people engaged in agriculture, industry, fishing, and herding, people who had to be fed and provisioned, their inputs and outputs measured. All evidence that exists points to money emerging as a series of fixed equivalent between silver – the stuff used to measure fixed equivalents in long distance trade, and conveniently stockpiled in the temples themselves where it was used to make images of gods, etc. – and grain, the stuff used to pay the most important rations from temple stockpiles to its workers. Hence, as economist and Naked Capitalism contributor Michael Hudson has so brilliantly demonstrated,¹ a silver shekel was fixed as the amount of silver equivalent to the numbers of bushels of barley that could provide two meals a day for a temple worker over the course of a month. Obviously such a ration system would be of no interest to a merchant.

So even if some sort of rough system of fixed equivalences, measured by silver, might have emerged in the process of trade (note again: not a system of actual silver currency emerging from barter), it was the Temple

bureaucracies that actually had some reason to extend the system from a unit used to compare the value of a limited number of rare items traded long distance, used almost exclusively by members of the political or administrative elite, to something that could be used to compare the values of everyday items. The development of local markets within cities, in turn, came as a side effect of these systems, and all evidence shows they too operated primarily through credit. For instance, Sumerians, though they had the technological means to do so, never produced scales accurate enough to weigh

The actual evidence is that in Mesopotamia – the first case we know anything about – these more widespread pricing systems in fact emerged as a side-effect of non-state bureaucracies.

out the tiny amounts of silver that would have been required to buy a single cask of beer, or a woollen tunic, or a hammer – the clearest indication that even once money did exist, it was not used as a medium of exchange for minor transactions, but rather as a means of keeping track of transactions made on credit.

In many times and places, one sees a similar arrangement: two sorts of money, one, a common long-distance trade item, the other, a common subsistence item – cattle, grain – that's stockpiled, but never traded. Still, Temple bureaucracies and their ilk are something of a rarity. In their absence, how else might a system of pricing, of proportional equivalents between the values of any and all objects, potentially arise? Here again, anthropology and history both provide one compelling answer, one that again, falls off the radar of just about all economists who have ever written on the subject. That is: legal systems.

If someone makes an inadequate return you will merely mock him as a cheapskate. If you do so when he is drunk and he responds by poking your eye out, you are much more likely to demand exact compensation. And that is, again, exactly what we find. Anthropology is full of examples of societies without markets or money, but with elaborate systems of penalties for various forms of injuries or slights. And it is when someone has killed your brother, or severed your finger, that one is most

¹ Hudson, Michael, "The Development of Money-of-Account in Sumer's Temples." In *Creating Economic Order: Record-Keeping, Standardization and the Development of Accounting*

in the Ancient Near East (Michael Hudson and Cornelia Wunsch, editors, 2004), pp. 303-329. Baltimore: CDL Press.

likely to stickle, and say, “The law says 27 heifers of the finest quality and if they’re not of the finest quality, this means war!” It’s also the situation where there is most likely to be a need to establish proportional values: if the culprit does not have heifers, but wishes to substitute silver plates, the victim is very likely to insist that the equivalent be exact. (There is a reason the word ‘pay’ comes from a root that means ‘to pacify’.)

Again, unlike the economists’ version, this is not hypothetical. This is a description of what actually happens – and not only in the ethnographic record, but the historical one as well. The numismatist Phillip Grierson long ago pointed to the existence of such elaborate systems of equivalents in the Barbarian Law Codes of early Medieval Europe.¹ For example, Welsh and Irish codes contain extremely detailed price schedules where in the Welsh case, the exact value of every object likely to be found in someone’s house were worked out in painstaking detail, from cooking utensils to floorboards – despite the fact that there appear to have been, at the time, no markets where any such items could be bought and sold. The pricing system existed solely for the payment of damages and compensation – partly material, but particularly for insults to people’s honour, since the precise value of each man’s personal dignity could also be precisely quantified in monetary terms. One can’t help but wonder how classical economic theory would account for such a situation. Did the ancient Welsh and Irish invent money through barter at some point in the distant past, and then, having invented it, kept the money, but stopped buying and selling things to one another entirely?

The persistence of the barter myth is curious. It originally goes back to Adam Smith. Other elements of Smith’s argument have long since been abandoned by mainstream economists – the labour theory of value being only the most famous example. Why in this one case are there so many desperately trying to concoct imaginary times and places where something like this must have happened, despite the overwhelming evidence that it did not?

It seems to me because it goes back precisely to this notion of rationality that Adam Smith too embraced: that human beings are rational, calculating exchangers seeking material advantage, and that therefore it is possible to construct a scientific field that studies such behaviour. The problem is that the real world seems to contradict this assumption at every turn. Thus we find that in actual villages, rather than thinking only about getting the best deal in swapping one material good for another with their neighbours, people are much more interested in who they love, who they hate, who they want to bail out of difficulties, who they want to

embarrass and humiliate, etc. – not to mention the need to head off feuds.

Even when strangers met and barter did ensue, people often had a lot more on their minds than getting the largest possible number of arrowheads in exchange for the smallest number of shells. Let me end, then, by giving a couple examples from the book, of actual, documented cases of ‘primitive barter’ – one of the occasional, one of the more established fixed-equivalent type.

The first example is from the Amazonian Nambikwara, as described in an early essay by the famous French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. This was a simple society without much in the way of division of labour, organised into small bands that traditionally numbered at best a hundred people each. Occasionally if one band spots the cooking fires of another in their vicinity, they will send emissaries to negotiate a meeting for purposes of trade. If the offer is accepted, they will first hide their women and children in the forest, then invite the men of other band to visit camp. Each band has a chief and once everyone has been assembled, each chief gives a formal speech praising the other party and belittling his own; everyone puts aside their weapons to sing and dance together – though the dance is one that mimics military confrontation. Then, individuals from each side approach each other to trade:

If an individual wants an object he extols it by saying how fine it is. If a man values an object and wants much in exchange for it, instead of saying that it is very valuable he says that it is worthless, thus showing his desire to keep it. ‘This axe is no good, it is very old, it is very dull’, he will say...²

In the end, each “snatches the object out of the other’s hand” – and if one side does so too early, fights may ensue.

The whole business concludes with a great feast at which the women reappear, but this too can lead to problems, since amidst the music and good cheer, there is ample opportunity for seductions (remember, these are people who normally live in groups that contain only perhaps a dozen members of the opposite sex of around the same age of themselves. The chance to meet others is pretty thrilling.) This sometimes led to jealous quarrels. Occasionally, men would get killed, and to head off this descending into outright warfare, the usual solution was to have the killer adopt the name of the victim, which would also give him the responsibility for caring for his wife and children.

The second example is the Gunwinngu of West Arnhem land in Australia, famous for entertaining neighbours in

¹ Grierson, Phillip, “The Origins of Money.” In *Research in Economic Anthropology* 1978, v. I, pp. 1-35. Greenwich: *Journal of the Anthropological Institute Press*.

² Levi-Strauss, Claude, “Guerre et commerce chez les Indiens d’Amérique du Sud.” *Renaissance*. Paris: Ecole Libre des Hautes Études, 1943 vol, 1, fascicule 1 et 2.

rituals of ceremonial barter called the *dzamalag*. Here the threat of actual violence seems much more distant. The region is also united by both a complex marriage system and local specialisation, each group producing their own trade product that they barter with the others.

In the 1940s, an anthropologist, Ronald Berndt, described one *dzamalag* ritual, where one group in possession of imported cloth swapped their wares with another, noted for the manufacture of serrated spears. Here too it begins as strangers, after initial negotiations, are invited to the hosts' camp, and the men begin singing and dancing, in this case accompanied by a didgeridoo. Women from the hosts' side then come, pick out one of the men, give him a piece of cloth, and then start punching him and pulling off his clothes, finally dragging him off to the surrounding bush to have sex, while he feigns reluctance, whereon the man gives her a small gift of beads or tobacco. Gradually, all the women select partners, their husbands urging them on, whereupon the women from the other side start the process in reverse, re-obtaining many of the beads and tobacco obtained by their own husbands. The entire ceremony culminates as the visitors' men-folk perform a coordinated dance, pretending to threaten their hosts with the spears, but finally, instead, handing the spears over to the hosts' womenfolk, declaring: "We do not need to spear you, since we already have!"¹

In other words, the Gunwinngu manage to take all the most thrilling elements in the Nambikwara encounters – the threat of violence, the opportunity for sexual intrigue – and turn it into an entertaining game (one that, the ethnographer remarks, is considered enormous fun for everyone involved). In such a situation, one would have to assume obtaining the optimal cloth-for-spears ratio is the last thing on most participants' minds. (And anyway, they seem to operate on traditional fixed equivalences.)

Economists always ask us to 'imagine' how things must have worked before the advent of money. What such examples bring home more than anything else is just how limited their imaginations really are. When one is dealing with a world unfamiliar with money and markets, even on those rare occasions when strangers did meet explicitly in order to exchange goods, they are rarely thinking exclusively about the value of the goods.

¹ Berndt, Ronald M., "Ceremonial Exchange in Western Arnhem Land." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 1951 v.7 (2): 156-176.

This not only demonstrates that the *Homo Oeconomicus* which lies at the basis of all the theorems and equations that purports to render economics a science, is not only an almost impossibly boring person – basically, a monomaniacal sociopath who can wander through an orgy thinking only about marginal rates of return – but that what economists are basically doing in telling the myth of barter, is taking a kind of behaviour that is only really possible after the invention of money and markets and then projecting it backwards as the purported reason for the invention of money and markets themselves. Logically, this makes about as much sense as saying that the game of chess was invented to allow people to fulfil a pre-existing desire to checkmate their opponent's king.

* * *

At this point, it's easier to understand why economists feel so defensive about challenges to the Myth of Barter, and why they keep telling the same old

story even though most of them know it isn't true. If what they are really describing is not how we 'naturally' behave but rather how we are taught to behave by the market – well who, nowadays, is doing most of the actual teaching? Primarily, economists. The question of barter cuts to the heart of not only what an economy is – most economists still insist that an economy is essentially a vast barter system, with money a mere tool (a position all the more peculiar now that the majority of economic transactions in the world have come to consist of playing around with money in one form or another)² – but also, the very status of economics: is it a science that describes of how humans actually behave, or prescriptive, a way of informing them how they should? (Remember, sciences generate hypothesis about the world that can be tested against the evidence and changed or abandoned if they don't prove to predict what's empirically there.)

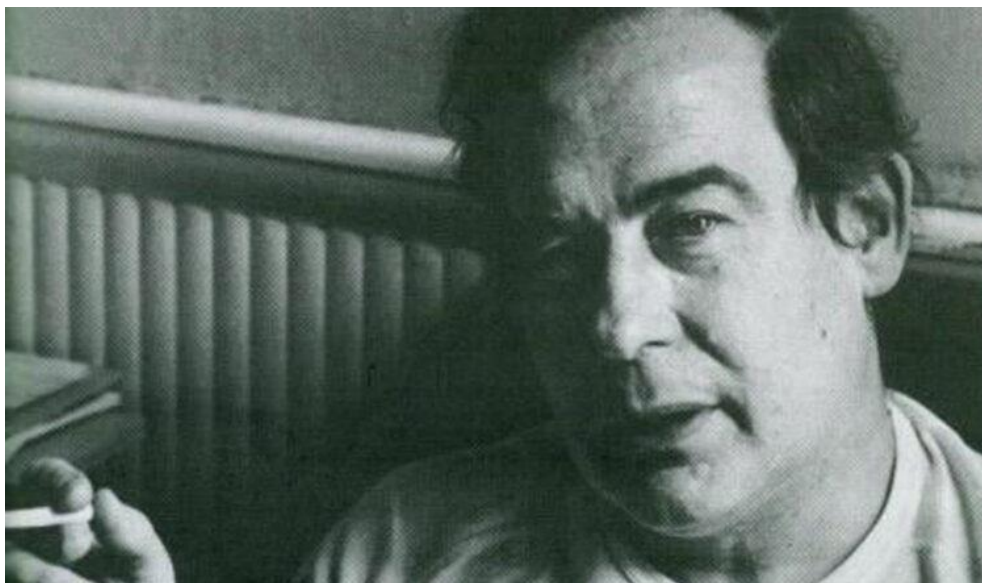
Or is economics instead a technique of operating within a world that economists themselves have largely created? Or is it, as it appears for so many of the Austrians, a kind of faith, a revealed Truth embodied in the words of great prophets (such as Von Mises) who must, by definition be correct, and whose theories must be defended whatever empirical reality throws at them – even to the extent of generating imaginary unknown periods of history where something like what was originally described 'must have' taken place?

² See for instance Dillard, Dudley, "The Barter Illusion in Classical and Neoclassical Economics", *Eastern Economic Journal* 1988v14 (4):299-318.

Ken Weller (1935-2021)

Nick Heath¹

Ken Weller, a former leading light in the libertarian socialist organisation Solidarity, which dissolved in 1992, has died at the age of 85 on January 25th 2021. Born in Islington on June 30th, 1935, to a working class family, Ken joined the youth wing of the Communist Party, the Young Communist League (YCL) in 1951. He was an active member in its Islington branch, the second-largest in the YCL. He was at the large demonstration in Whitehall in 1956, protesting British involvement with Israel and the USA in Egypt, the so-called Suez Crisis. He witnessed mounted police exiting Downing Street to attack the crowd without provocation.



“I saw one knocking over a middle-aged couple who clasped each other in their arms for fear, knocking them flying; and I looked in the gutter and there was a banner pole, like a broom-handle, about five feet long, and I picked it up and the same policeman on a horse came charging at me and I hit him as hard as I could with it, broke the pole, and he turned round and went back into Downing Street. I don’t know what happened to him; and then there was a battle in Whitehall which was quite nasty; the police would grab hold of someone and there would be a battle over their body; in one scuffle I ended up at the back of the crowd with a policeman’s epaulette in my hand, minus the policeman; and then there were marches through the streets with linked arms. It was an emotional event, caused by a combination of factors. At the beginning of that demonstration, some CPers turned up with banners, just a few, you almost had to respect them, and they were booed! This was the party which had dominated left-wing politics, effectively the only people who ever had demonstrations apart from the Labour Party; they turned up for the Suez demonstration and they were booed into the square. A massive change in people’s attitudes and perceptions had taken place over those few months.”

He himself was affected by the emergent rebellious atmosphere, and was involved in a dissident group in the YCL, which produced its own paper with a circulation of

800. Around 1957-58 he moved in the direction of the Club, a Trotskyist formation led by the toad-like Gerry Healy, which became the Socialist Labour League in March 1959.

“A group of us in the YCL all left together, mainly working-class kids, well, we weren’t kids, young men and women, I suppose, and we came in contact with Healy’s people. My own path was through Peter Fryer, who I’d known in the Daily Worker; I’d met him and we’d discussed, and he sort of convinced me that this was the path of the future”. He was to comment later that “the first conference of Healy’s outfit all us dissident CPers went to, I remember how shocked we all were when we saw that many of the organisational and conference methods, you know, like the panel election of conferences, were practised in that organisation as well, to a more extreme extent, because a smaller organisation is much tighter.”

As Ken was to say later, “I began to become more and more of a dissident because I felt that most of the criticisms I’d had of the Communist Party were true, in spades, with Healy.” Healy started to turn the SLL away from industrial work, towards work within the Labour Party. This resulted in an opposition emerging around the building worker Brian Behan.

Ken himself, an engineering worker and shop steward in the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW), was part of this opposition. Behan and his circle were expelled in May 1960, followed by seventy others

¹ <https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/2021/01/29/obituary-ken-weller-1935-2021/>

who walked out in disgust. Ken was among those expelled.

He then took part in an attempt to set up a new group, the Workers' Party, along with other ex-members of the SLL who had left with Behan. During the seamen's strike of 1960, this group helped the militant seaman George Foulser produce a strike bulletin called *Seaman's Voice*, two issues of which were produced. Elements of the group, including Ken, then became interested in the ideas of the French group Socialisme ou Barbarie and its founder Cornelius Castoriadis (alias Paul Cardan). The neurologist Chris Pallis and Bob Pennington, a working class militant, who had both been involved with expelling Ken, had themselves become interested in the ideas of Socialisme ou Barbarie, and when this came out in the SLL, they were both physically assaulted, Pennington in particular receiving some severe injuries. They were then both expelled. As a result, Ken united with Pallis and Pennington in a group at first called Socialism Reaffirmed, which published a journal, *Agitator*. After six issues both the journal and the grouping were renamed Solidarity. Pennington was soon to drift off in the direction of Pabloist Trotskyism.

Ken and other members of Solidarity became involved in the peace movement around CND and the Committee of 100 (C100). Ken and other Solidarists were on the industrial sub-committee of C100. As such he and Solidarity were involved in preparing for a demonstration of C100 in Red Square in Moscow in July 1962 and the distribution of a text, *Against All Bombs*, written by Ken, which called for the abolition of all nuclear weapons and denounced the Soviet regime. *The Guardian* described this as "the most direct challenge to official Soviet policies and ideas to have been presented to the Soviet man in the street since freedom of speech died under Stalin."

Ken was also one of the Spies for Peace. On 16th February 1963 five members of C100 broke into a Regional Seat of Government (RSG) outside Reading. This was one of a network of nuclear bunkers reserved for the ruling elite in the event of a nuclear war. The documents discovered there were then used in a document, *Danger! Official Secret*, signed by the Spies for Peace. Three thousand copies of this document were handed out on the Aldermaston March organised by CND at Easter on 10th April, which were subsequently widely copied and spread further. As the demonstration passed the RSG, a section of it broke away and surrounded the RSG. All of this caused severe embarrassment to the government. None of the Spies for Peace were ever apprehended.

Ken was also involved in organising the incident at the Methodist Church in Brighton on 2nd October 1966, where Harold Wilson and George Brown spoke from the pulpit, hypocritically referring to swords being turned into ploughshares. As leading lights of a Labour Government supporting American war efforts in Vietnam, they were

immediately confronted by political activists who had gained access thanks to forged admission tickets handed out by Ken. Nine demonstrators were to be arrested, among them the anarchists Nicolas Walter and Bernard Miles, and the Solidarists Heather Russell and Andy Anderson.

Ken wrote many of the pamphlets that Solidarity produced during its existence, in particular those around the theme of a particular strike, and these had an influence far beyond the limited membership of Solidarity. Among them were *The BLSP Dispute – the Story of the Strike*, *What Next for Engineers?*, *Truth about Vauxhall*, *The Lordstown struggle and the real crisis in production*, as well as a pamphlet written with Ernie Stanton, *What Happened at Fords*, partly based on his own experiences at Ford Dagenham in the 60s. He also wrote the important pamphlet *GMWU-Scab Union*, under the pseudonym Mark Fore, and contributed a historical section to the Solidarity pamphlet produced by bus workers, including the late Bob Potter, and helped distribute this around London bus garages.

As the ACG wrote in its text *In the Tradition* "Whatever Solidarity's weaknesses (not least their fairly lax attitude to maintaining an international organisation and their lack of political direction after they effectively split around 1980). Solidarity was involved in important revolutionary activity and publishing for at least 20 of its 30 years, producing a wealth of literature defending a coherent vision of libertarian socialism that was unavailable elsewhere. Compared to many of the 'class struggle' anarchists in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s, they developed a consistent body of politics that recognised the need for working class self-organisation outside social democratic and Leninist models." Ken Weller contributed importantly to this work.

Later on, as Solidarity staggered on to 1992, Ken wrote *Don't be a Soldier! The radical anti-war movement in north London 1914-1918*, published in 1985, an important contribution to working class history in Britain. He was always open to sharing his vast knowledge of British working class history with other radical historians. Ken used to phone me regularly for chats about working class history and provided me with much information that helped me write some of my biographies of revolutionaries active in Britain, including Leonard Motler, Gertrud Guillaume-Schack, Johanna Lahr, etc. For example, I remember him sending me photocopies of correspondence by Motler, which proved most helpful. Sometimes I visited him in Lathom Road, where he drank large mugs of tea whilst talking about history and about the iniquities of Gerry Healy and the Socialist Labour League.

As an industrial militant, as a defender of libertarian socialism and as a chronicler of working class history, Ken's life was inspiring and exemplary.

The *Flux* interview

Flux, Autumn 1992

FLUX: Solidarity always called itself 'libertarian socialist', but this probably doesn't mean a lot to most people. So, can you say what you mean by libertarian socialist?

KEN: We didn't think the term counted for anything in itself. We tended to use it to stress the anti-statist side of our politics. We believed that the working class should directly control society and rule their own lives, and that therefore they should directly control their own struggles. So we tended to use 'libertarian' socialist to distinguish ourselves from 'authoritarian' state socialism – in all its forms, from the Leninist left to the social-democratic right.

FLUX: A critique of what you called the traditional left was always central to Solidarity's politics.

KEN: We argued that the traditional left do share a number of fundamental attitudes. Although I'm not making an amalgam because there are many differences. But basically there was the question of achieving state power: Leninists said you seized state power and reformists said you did it by permeating the existing system.

And with this there was the central role of the political elite. With Leninism it was the vanguard party, where the only real discussions take place and where decisions are taken on behalf of the working class. Often the working class didn't even know that the party existed! But it's not only Leninism, it's there on the right too. There's a statist tradition where socialism has meant bureaucratic, managerial elites. One of the forgotten books by the Webbs was a handbook for works managers!¹

FLUX: Of course, a Leninist would suggest a rather different picture...

KEN: Leninists have said many things. So has the Labour Party. And so have the Tories, but what *they* do is not the same as what they write in their manifestos. We have to find the real ideas behind the rhetoric. The whole thesis of Lenin, from *What Is To Be Done* through all his serious writings on the structure of the party and the management of the Soviet economy is that what counted was the elite. For example, in the 'Tasks of the Soviet Government' you have the introduction of one-man management, the complete subordination of

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the worker to the Soviet manager, the introduction of piece rates and so on.

And it's there in Trotsky's 'Transitional Programme' too. This is based on the idea that you put forward demands which can't be achieved under capitalism. And that although ordinary people won't know this, they'll still fight for these demands. So, you'll achieve socialism without the people who carry out the struggle really knowing what's going on!

I'll give you an example of all this. Years ago in Fords we had a Shop Stewards committee controlled by the Communist Party, under a man called Sid Harroway. They called for a one-day strike in support of the nurses and called for a meeting of the body group at Dagenham. They said that South Wales and Halewood had both voted to take action and that we should support them. I was in favour of this. Later we found out that none of the other places had even had meetings! The thing was to go to the most militant place first and tell them the others had voted to strike. After, you'd go to the other places and tell them about the vote and then get these places to support it. What's it all about? Lying and manipulation! And it flows from an ideology which says that it doesn't matter whether workers understand or not. If they do the right thing – it's enough!

There are deep roots here. Seeing the working class as actual or potential clients. Saying the working class needs this elite. And all sorts of things flow from this attitude. If you have an elite it has to live and it needs

¹ Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Fabians that came to support Stalin. (*Flux* Editor)

privileges because, for example, it can't spend all its time in bread queues. And there you have the origins of the self-interested bureaucracy we saw in the Soviet Union.

And when you have people living off other people in this way they have to justify this. And 'socialism' becomes the self-advocacy of an elite!

This is a complex process and there are many lines in the matrix. There was the whole process of bureaucratisation in local government, where more and more focus went on administration and less and less on people. And where did this leave the 'left'? Defending the status quo, and a system that didn't work. And why? Because that's what the 'left' became, hanging onto the control of this apparatus out of self-interest. And take the old GLC [Greater London Council]. There you saw this sort of process of clientelisation at work.

There was this ideology which said 'create a Rainbow Alliance of women, ethnic groups and gays' and so on. Now this wasn't an alliance of women, ethnic minorities and gays but one between people who claimed to represent them – and who expected to be paid to do it – along with the politicians. Now these weren't people who had an interest in overcoming the divisions of society. Rather, you had hierarchies rooted in division which justified their positions by creating myths: all whites are racist, all men are sexist!

Listen to the discussions on this 'left'. And to the denial of free debate. "We won't permit you to talk about this – it's an ethnic question": "Only we're allowed to talk about this – it's a gender question". As I said, there's a whole matrix here. But what you saw corrupt bureaucracies! I'll give you an example. One of the Labour councillors around here came out publicly in support of the killing of Salmon Rushdie. What was that about? Unprincipled deals with minority religious leaders where a councillor or two or a grant or two are exchanged for delivering a Labour vote!

FLUX: So, the role of socialists is not to be an elite in the Leninist – or in the social-democratic – sense. Then what is it?

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KEN: There is a role for all kinds of people and all kinds of discussions, providing they take place in the open. But the role of organisations is not to be a government in exile – that's one thing it's not!

There are a number of very important roles for groups. Open discussion, putting forward ideas, spreading information, putting people in touch with each other,

creating links, helping in the presentation of ideas. Socialism won't happen spontaneously, there are all kinds of structures and networks involved.

But libertarian socialism means that the people involved will decide. And this is a complex thing because if they decide they won't necessarily decide in detail exactly what you want. All you can say is that the direction will generally be a positive one. It doesn't mean there won't be political argument. And you have to fight for what

you think is right as well. But you never substitute yourself. It's not about gaining control.

One of the struggles Solidarity was involved in was the King's Hill struggle of homeless families.¹ I think this illustrates what I mean.

King's Hill was a hostel in Kent. The system was that husbands weren't allowed to stay in the hostel an after three months the family were evicted and the children taken into care. It wasn't that there was an accommodation problem – the place was never full and, in fact, the hostel was made up of a self-contained flats. It was like the old workhouses. It was systematically made unpleasant to force people out. Now one day the place exploded and the husbands refused to leave.

People from Solidarity were involved in the struggle right from the start, along with other unattached socialists. Now, people are products of their society – especially people in difficult circumstances – and there was this feeling that they couldn't do anything for themselves; that they had to manoeuvre other people into doing things for them and to shift responsibility. There was this tendency to say "You do it", but we said "No, we won't. You've got to do it for yourselves".

Now, they made lots of mistakes. People were fragmented. People were trying to inform on each other to save themselves if the struggle was lost. But as it

¹ This occurred in 1966 and was a key event in the formation of the squatters movement. (*Flux* Editor)

continued you found people giving interviews on TV and to the press. They were managing the struggle themselves and in the process they became different people. Ultimately they won.

And this is what I mean by the role of an organisation. With the traditional left the organisation substitutes itself. Often people don't know what's going on. There are all kinds of caucuses and so on. In the end, if it's a victory no one's learnt anything positive, and if it's a defeat there's just a suspicion of being manipulated –

But the point is Marx has to be treated as a human being and he hasn't been. He's been treated like a god, although people deny it. People have justified what they do simply by lifting quotes from Marx and so on! This isn't a rational way of looking at things.

and rightly so.

But there has been this attitude – and it's permeated great chunks of the left – that manipulation is OK. But if you manipulate you're making a very important political statement: that you have the authority and ordinary people don't.

FLUX: You came out of this 'traditional left'. Perhaps this is why the critique has been so central. Can you tell us something about this development?

KEN: Solidarity was formed in 1960, by people who came out of the SLL [i.e., Socialist Labour League – the Trotskyist forerunner of the Workers' Revolutionary Party]. Before that some of us had been in the Communist Party but had left after Hungary 1956. Both the CP and even more so, the SLL were totalitarian in their politics and organisation. There was never any real discussion allowed. So after we left, we started asking questions about the fundamental character of our politics.

We soon discovered that we weren't really Trotskyists, and later that we weren't Leninists. After much longer discussions we decided that we weren't really Marxists. We thought that whilst these things weren't all the same, nevertheless there were connections. In this we were influenced by the French paper *Socialism or Barbarism*.¹

FLUX: People might argue that your attitude towards Marxism was simply an expression of your experience of Leninism...

KEN: People do say that. Of course, there are many variations of Marxism and people are always rewriting Marx. All you can do is base yourself on what he said. I think he was a great man, who created a framework upon which much later discussion could take place. But despite his many valuable insights, on many central things he was wrong, the continual impoverishment of the working class for example. There are many example. But a key thing in Marx is a vision of the working class as simply commodified labour power, and in this dehumanised conception of the working class you can see one of the roots of Leninist authoritarianism. There are other connections. If you read Marx and Engels' correspondence you'll see the justification for the way they acted in the First International. They describe how they lost control and so shipped it off to New York – basically to let it die. The classical justifications for many of the methods used in the Leninist movement are there.

But the point is Marx has to be treated as a human being and he hasn't been. He's been treated like a god, although people deny it. People have justified what they do simply by lifting quotes from Marx and so on! This isn't a rational way of looking at things.

FLUX: I think that one of the problems facing people trying to think through an alternative socialism is that the ground as been occupied by Leninism on the one hand, and the Labour Party on the other. Other traditions are not readily available.

KEN: That's right. When we came out of the SLL we were reading everything. We discovered a whole tradition of socialist critique of Leninism: Pannekoek and Gorter, Pankhurst, Kollontai's Workers' Opposition within the Bolshevik Party, some of the Anarchists. These were ideas that had effectively been suppressed.

But it wasn't just a question of socialist ideas, we found that the practical history of the working class movement

¹ The post-WWII French libertarian socialist journal connected with Cornelius Castoriadis. (*Flux* Editor)

had been distorted by the proponents of the dominant ideas.

Where do we start? Read stuff on the unemployed movement in Britain or the mutinies in World War 1. It's all been distorted in the most crass way!

Take Wal Hannington.¹ I could never work out why the unemployed movement reached its peak before the National Unemployed

Workers' Movement had really been formed. The NUWM was controlled by the CP, who were struggling for leadership of the unemployed movement nationally. And I'll give you an example which has completely been written out of history. One of the leaders of the unemployed movement in London between 1921 - 22 was a man called Gunnar Soderburg, a Scandinavian who'd been in the IWW. In 1923 the CP sent a circular to their members telling them to pack a meeting of the London Unemployed Workers Groups and more or less telling them to get Soderburg out. The archives of the Kentish Town CP are available to us now. They alleged he was a police agent and so on. Hannington refers to this incident in his book without referring to Soderburg by name. Anyway it split the movement wide open with many of the active groups – for example, Poplar – breaking away. After that it went into decline. Hannington never mentions this.

The interesting thing is that when Hannington wrote his book [*Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936*] he must have known that Soderburg was in the States, in Sing Sing, serving a 20 year jail sentence, for leading a major dock strike in New York!

Major episodes of the unemployed struggle were never described, and why? Because the CP – as it was in this case – had to be seen as the begetter of the movement!

Then there were the mutinies after World War 1, which involved hundreds of thousands and which effectively restricted Britain's ability to intervene in Ireland. Except for a few chapters they've gone undescribed. Why? Because they were autonomous movements of the

working class. And although they involved all sorts of people from a socialist background, there was no party there to take the credit!



There's a subliminal line that everything needs to be tight and structured and under the control of the people who understand and so on. And so, there's a richness of history that has been completely suppressed!

FLUX: Finally, I want to consider the situation now. What about the working

class, has it disappeared as some say? And what should socialists be doing?

KEN: Something very important has happened. People have retreated, they feel isolated. They don't think they can influence the society around them. The industrial working class has got smaller and been modified. There are problems. The working class don't work in vast factories producing steel anymore, but in smaller factories, in service industries, in shops and so on. Factories employing thousands were easy, but there are alternatives.

But I don't think it's that the working class has changed so much as the socialist movement has gone elsewhere. The working class has become completely alienated from the socialist movement. It's not only a question of the 'downturn in class struggle' – the classic argument. There is truth in this but it's not a recent phenomena. The seeds were already there in an ideology which didn't see the working class as the revolutionary class but as clients.

First of all socialists have got to re-establish contact with working people, taking their interests as determined by them as being important. There are many different tasks. Rearticulating the vision of socialism, documenting and criticising what went wrong. It's not a monolith, different groups of people can do different things.

You've also got to create an environment of free discussion going beyond political groups, and trying to create an environment – however small to begin with – which reflects the vision of the society you want.

¹ A founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and National Organiser of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. (*Flux* Editor)

The “Black Flag”

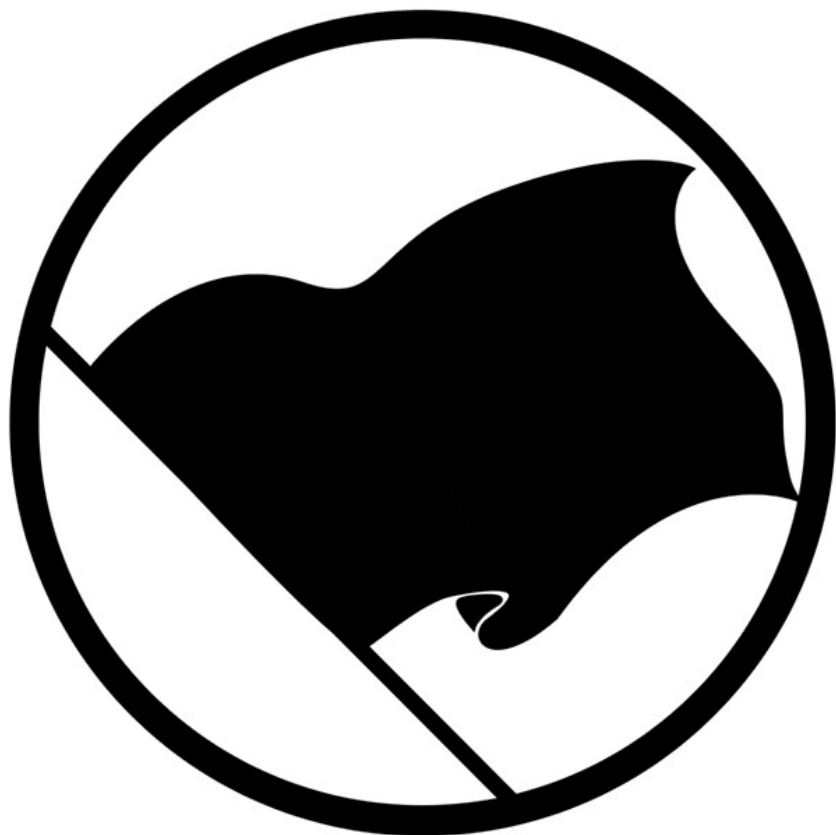
**Live by working
or die fighting.**

It is not only to throw a new challenge to bourgeois society that we have given this newspaper [...] the title of *Black Flag* [...] We also wanted to keep the memory of this glorious workers' insurrection alive ever more [...] we wanted the bourgeoisie to be again well aware that the only flag under which we gather is the one which misery and despair warranted raising in the streets

of Groix-Rousse on 21 November 1831 and that until the day of our future victory we shall have no other. [...] What we want to wage now [...] is the only logical war [...] the social war.

We therefore call those who suffer, those who gasp under the every-increasing burden of misery [...] who have had enough of exploitation and slavery, who want to end forever political and economic domination which overwhelms us [...] it is a duel to the death with bourgeois society that begins [...] and raising the black flag, by waving in the wind the dark folds of the flag of despair is more than a warning, it is better than an appeal, it is the very sign that we sending to the old world of its death that we raise, it is the inescapable promise of its imminent end, and at the same time, for all the poor, for all the wretches, and for all the hungry, the definite announcement of an era of happiness, justice, freedom and peace ANARCHY.

**Le « Drapeau Noir »
Le Drapeau Noir : Organe Anarchiste (Lyons)
12 August 1883**



**From the first issue of the first anarchist journal to take
the name *Black Flag***