

# Black Flag

## Anarchist Review



**Joseph Déjacque, the first libertarian**

**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, harbinger of anarchism**



**Albert Meltzer, after 25 years**

**And much more...**

**Summer 2021**

**Volume 1**

**Number 2**



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## Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of the relaunched *Black Flag*!

It is now 25 years since Albert Meltzer died. Meltzer should need little introduction as he played a key role in the British, indeed international, anarchist movement from when he became an anarchist militant in the 1930s until his death. He helped found *Black Flag* and took an active part in its production, including editing and writing. As such, it is fitting that we remember his life and legacy.

The other focus of this issue is on Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and his legacy. Proudhon, one of the few leading socialist thinkers from the working class, was the first person to proclaim themselves as an anarchist in 1840’s *What is Property?* While not a revolutionary anarchist, his influence was extensive and he influenced the likes of Bakunin and Kropotkin, along with workers across the globe: his followers helped create the First International and played an important part in the Paris Commune. His ideas laid the foundations for revolutionary anarchism and syndicalism.

Yet some accuse him of being a fascist, most notably American academic J. Salwyn Schapiro. Schapiro’s claims have been repeated by Marxists ever since. Here we expose the many distortions and inventions Schapiro inflicted on Proudhon. This is no academic task, given how attacks on Proudhon are generalised to all forms of anarchism, including class struggle ones. It is in the interest of all libertarians to debunk these distortions.

This is not to suggest Proudhon is somehow above criticism: his sexism, for example, was rightly challenged during his lifetime. While many women writers refuted his nonsense, Joseph Déjacque is the best-known critic for he drew revolutionary communist conclusions from Proudhon’s ideas, coining the word “libertarian” to describe it. Déjacque used the best of Proudhon to mock the worst. We also reprint French libertarian communist Daniel Guérin’s excellent account of the links between Proudhon and Bakunin and publish a new translation of one of his articles on Bakunin.

Finally, if you want to contribute, whether its writing new material or letting us know of on-line articles, reviews or translations, then contact us:

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# Keeping Alive the Spirit of Revolt: Some thoughts on Albert Meltzer and his writings

Barry Pateman

Sometime in the July or early August 1940, Albert Meltzer went before the Fulham Tribunal to argue his case as a conscientious objector. He made no claims to be a pacifist instead arguing that his militant anarchism prevented him from supporting this capitalist war and he should be granted conscientious objection as a result of it. He knew he had lost before he began but the statement he had prepared for the hearing is worthy of our consideration if we wish to understand who Albert was. In it he argued that:

“Support for this war...would be for me not only an intolerable compromise to the forces of Capitalism and the State, but a radical betrayal of the international working class”

He went on to assert:

“I believe the working-class of Britain can only achieve its freedom by fighting its own capitalist class in the economic field, by forcing it to grant social and wage concessions and by joining with colonial peoples to end imperialism”

And elaborating that, “I am opposed to *all* Governments” and “I am an anarcho-syndicalist”<sup>1</sup>

Until his death 56 years later these sentences served as the foundation for Albert’s beliefs and actions. There would be changes of nuance and emphasis (they don’t detail his steadfast anti-fascism for instance) but everything he did and



**Albert Meltzer (1920-1996)**

wrote was an attempt to build on these basics and make the new world he carried inside him not a dream or an arguing point but a reality.

The Kate Sharpley Library has a bibliography of over 700 articles written by Albert for anarchist and freethought papers both in the UK and overseas during his life time. More are still out there, waiting to be found under pseudonyms or as anonymous editorials, and we expect we’ll be adding to the list regularly. The sheer number of articles suggests that throughout his life Albert saw the newspaper article as his main weapon against capitalism and its supporters - as well as other anarchists when necessary!!

Much of his earlier writing in papers such as *Revolutionary Youth Movement*, *Reynolds News*, *Revolt*, *War Commentary*, and *Freedom* is commentary on what was happening in the world at the time of writing and was never written with an eye to posterity. His work at this time was urgent and usually written at high speed as the situation demanded. His thoughts were expressed in clear, straightforward language and aimed at those who knew little about anarchism or its basic principles. He saw himself as helping to build an anarchist movement and never veered from that aim until he died. After his experiences writing for comedians in various music halls and summer revues throughout 1941-43 a wry humour began to appear in his writing. Those days on the road had taught him how humour could be used as a means of effectively getting ideas across to people, as well as

<sup>1</sup> His statement can be read at full at <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/hx3gzf>

highlighting the ineptness and stupidity of capitalism.

His writing up until this time had also regularly reflected his commitment to the internationalism identified in his statement to the Fulham Tribunal. It is not by chance that his most consistent pseudonym was “Internationalist”. As well as his articles, this commitment was reflected in his copious correspondence with anarchists overseas offering support or just the odd news briefing. He had contacts all over the world and we might see this internationalism as one of the forces driving the creation of the Anarchist Black Cross in 1968. The ABC took up much of his time in building support networks for those imprisoned as well as regular correspondence with them to combat their isolation.

As he grew older his writing style and its content changed- especially in the pages of *Black Flag*. Albert, I think, became more and more aware of the shadow of posterity as he grew older. Part of this awareness was that he had begun to see himself as one of the few anarchists left standing who identified with the tradition of class struggle anarchism. It was this class struggle anarchism and its ideas that had mentored him — an anarchism which he now felt was being ignored or written out of history as new groups and tendencies appeared to take over the movement. As these differing ideas about anarchism emerged or gained credence he sensed that the anarchist history and culture that had mentored and nurtured him was in danger of disappearing. In his view, if he didn’t challenge what he saw as mis-conceptions of anarchism then his generation would become victims of historical amnesia and anarchism would become something different from what he had devoted his whole life fighting for.

His support for the Kate Sharpley Library also reflected this awareness of posterity and the need to preserve the record of the past. There was so much he wanted to write and as a result he tried to put far more information into his writing. His articles became more and more polemics against other anarchists, far more than his earlier pieces ever had.

If Albert was instinctively aware of the complexities of working-class life and experience, he was just as aware of the role class played within the anarchist movement.

He felt that middle-class anarchists determined what constituted anarchist history and had no

understanding of the day-to-day experiences that shaped working-class life and culture.

Consequently, anarchism often did not appear particularly welcoming to people coming from working-class backgrounds. Albert also felt that anarchist history was not just the intellectual history of great anarchist men and women who wrote books and other material that could be found and read. Anarchist history was equally the undocumented; those who put chairs out at meetings, those who put the stamps on envelopes, those who spoke about anarchism to their friends and relatives in front rooms, cafes and pubs or died alone in prison or camps. These people made anarchism come alive as much as any great speaker or person of action ever did, and they had been a key part of Albert’s world. Much of the history he wrote gave them an identity and presence and rescued them from oblivion.

Albert provided myself and many others with a road map to anarchism we could travel with. We may have found new paths on the journey and one or two of the old paths may have become lost and abandoned, but I still use it nearly every day of my life. The map was built on his writings and through conversation. Conversations with Albert were things of wonder. You began by discussing the merits of Katherine Hepburn as an actress and ended up considering if Rudyard Kipling’s *Soldiers Three* was critical in the portrayal of working-class people and language. I still have no idea how we ended up there but I realize now that these chats enriched my sense of anarchism, people and possibilities in a way that official study never did. As the years passed I gradually realized that from him I had learnt that anarchism was as much founded on relationships and people as it was on theory. Neither, he felt, would be much use without the other.

Albert was lucky enough to be part of our movement both during times of growth — 1936-1939 and the period from the late nineteen sixties onwards were exciting times to be an anarchist — as well as being part of it in the barren times when all you could do was write a letter here and there and go to the odd meeting when they were held. He carried sadness and tragedy from his personal and political life experiences but many would never have known that. Albert brought the same energy and enthusiasm to both good times and bad and encouraged us to do the same. He never gave up and he never stopped thinking or writing. I miss him nearly every day.

# Industrial Britain on the Move!

Albert Meltzer

*Revolt!*, 11 February 1939

The popular myth about the conservatism of the British workers has again been shaken. Gradually, but surely, there is another swing-over to industrial direct action. In spite of all the compromises of the so-called “workers’ parties” (which comprise very little the average worker) we find all the ingredients of a revolutionary labour movement actually in action.

Suddenly – on top of each other, almost – we find some unions giving a blank refusal to offers of co-operation in A.R.P., “National Service,” conscription and speed-up, unemployed demonstrations in the metropolis and elsewhere, and rent-strikes.

The three moves of producer, tenant and workless (it needs only a consumer’s boycott of blacklist firms and Fascist-import firms to complete the four ingredients of a revolutionary movement) are one. The workers have learnt from ex-perience what conscription (under whatever name) means. It is the super-form of industrial warfare: militarisation of industry and almost martial law in time of strikes. A few unions have resisted: that is to the good. But it is not enough! Those who have agreed to co-operate with the Government (and we remember that the International Federation of Trade Unions refused to co-operate with our I.W.M.A. on a boycott of Franco) must be subjected to every criticism from the rank-and-file. The class-collaborationists and pro-conscriptionists, recruiting-sergeants and jobholders of the labour movement must be summarily expelled from the labour movement. If the unions co-operate with the Government, it means no strikes (“official,” that is) are possible, and “unofficial” strikes are rendered more difficult by Government supervision, restriction and use of “agents-provocateur” and industrial spies, as happens today in the dockyards. Those who hope that conscription will be satisfactory – as it will only affect youth – should not be persuaded that they are, from the point of view of their own interests, wrong: they too are not the people who should even be allowed inside a conscious labour movement. They are scabs at heart.

## *The Tenants’ Strike*

The tenants’ strikes are good news. Noticeably, they are all in London. The exodus from the De-pressed Areas

(which the Government orders us to euphemise as “Special” Areas!) in Wales, Ireland, Scotland and the North, to the relatively prosperous South and London (where the new factories, etc., are, presumably to make them more easily bombed from the air) has made landlords inflated with their “prerogative” of choosing tenants. Rents are going up – while, in the London and Southern areas, partly because of A.R.P. scares, partly because of usual stinginess, conditions (even the lawful obligations to keep in good condition and repair) are getting worse.

Three strikes are reported, at the moment of writing. In Flower-and-Dean Street, one of the toughest parts of Spitalfields, a 100 per cent, solid strike demands lower rents and little better conditions. Some-what akin to the wartime Glasgow rent strike, the women are leading the struggle to resist the landlord and his agents. In Quinnsquare Buildings – scene of 1938 rent-strike – the

eviction of a woman (with five children), one of last year’s strikers, is being resisted by the ENTIRE tenement. In the Peabody Estate at Clapham, a similar rent strike is threatened, in solidarity with the secretary of the Tenants’ Association, who is ordered to quit

(victimisation being the reason).

It is interesting to note the re-mark of one of the Quinnsquare Buildings tenants, made to a capitalist-journalist: “THE BAILIFFS SHALL NOT PASS!” The influence of the Spanish Revolution and the resistance of Madrid has reached through France to England!

## *The Unemployed Workers Movement*

The unemployed, barred, by the nature of things, from economic action, have been attacking the forces of the State machinery by demonstrations, which, moreover, were well calculated to win the sympathy of Londoners who, at least, have a sense of humour. The lying-down in the roadways, invasion of the Ritz, throwing-out of the banner at the elevated Monument, demanding a square meal (in para-phrase of the railway “distressed “shareholders demanding a “square deal”), chaining to

the Unemployment Exchanges and so on, were all actions which focussed attention on the unemployed. And did it have effect? To such an extent that the capitalists were scared enough to throw out immediately a red herring to put the unemployed off the scent: the "Sunday Pictorial" in particular and the Fascists endeavoured to linkup the Nazi demonstration in the West End against the German-Jewish refugee cinema appeals with... the unemployed's counter-demonstrations!

The humbug about the refugee menace will be seen. None of these refugees take jobs in this country. The outcry was then against the charity appeals, but the fact of the matter is that the outcriers have not the slightest intention of rifling the funds of the Baldwin Appeal Fund, and giving it to the unemployed. All they intend to do is make a fuss about it, and get the unemployed to do the same, instead of attacking the U.A.B., P.A.C. and Unemployment Exchanges, where, after all something can be done. Fortunately, the unemployed (at any rate, as a whole) have not fallen for it.

It is regrettable that the National Unemployed Workers' Movement is so completely in the hands of then on-revolutionary Communist Party, but even so rank-and-file pressure has forced these demonstrations. In the same way, the trade unions, under the control of Labour Party officials, can be forced to act, on their own bread-

and-butter issues. The rising feeling, actually, could very soon force both C.P. and L.P. officials to become themselves eligible for the N.U.W.M. – and not as officials! The same feeling could organise these strikes – tenant, unemployed, producer – and link them up with consumer's strikes. Tenant, producer, consumer – all are the same, and unemployed also the same (if not today, tomorrow).

#### *Direct Action*

There could be made out of this present feeling a movement towards continued direct action; a movement organised so that it could take control of the industries and dwellings when the bosses and bailiffs had been driven out for the last time. Unfortunately, this feeling is being dissipated. The politicians will make capital out of it, and then it will all disappear, and the workers will, following another economic crisis, do the same things, and again it will be lost, and again, and again. There is only one thing to stop this waste of the workers' efforts, and that is the organised propaganda that this revolutionary action is anarcho-syndicalist, if without the name, and that the only way for its logical outcome to be achieved is by the gradual building of an anarchist labour movement upon the lines indicated by the organisations that, as is seen, do spring into being on these occasions.

# **Anarcho-syndicalism: an outline of constructive anarchism**

**Albert Meltzer**

*War Commentary – For Anarchism, April 1940*

It is no longer possible to take up a negative role with regard to the world revolution. The exigencies of modern capitalism demand that we give up any consideration of "should there be a revolution?" etc., for monopoly capitalism cannot continue without some form of social change either towards totalitarian State control or towards workers' control.

The question today is: "On which *side* in the revolution?" We have frequently outlined the dangers of totalitarianism, whether capitalist, fascist or "communist": the State is not a fit instrument for the liberation of the masses. To this we will allude again. Our point now is to consider the alternative: workers' control. Not merely to consider the negative role of the revolution (the destruction of capitalism and State) but the creative role of the revolution.

It is not practicable to say, with a wave of the hand, "the workers will decide when the time comes." Our job is to consider the methods that the workers do take at such times, since only by that way can we hope for a unification and strengthening of the revolutionary

movement prior to that time. And as John Most said, "Revolutions cannot be made, but they can be prepared for."

#### *The Struggle For A Free Society*

The economic organisation of the working class is the only way in which we can struggle against capitalism, totalitarianism and the State. Considering Britain today and the conditions peculiar to it, we would say that a rebirth of the militant shop-stewards' movement as in the last war, *would be the first step*. (Councils of workers struggling for economic concessions. in the factories and workshops, which in 1917-19 began to link into Soldiers and Workers' Councils).

Such councils, imbued with a revolutionary anti-war spirit, could be joined according to industry, each council becoming a branch of its industrial union. Such industrial unions, freely federated, would be the nucleus not only of the struggle against capitalism and for immediate concessions, but for the taking hold of the places of work. All social functions in the new society

would be controlled by the organisms thus set up – thus, directly, by the workers themselves, and not by any political party or group aspiring to power.

Through a revolutionary labour movement we could prepare the new society.

### *Economic Re-organisation*

These Shop-committees, originally the means of assemblage of the workers for strike purposes would take over the new function of control when the bosses had been locked-out. Then economic control would be directed by the workers at the factory, pithead, minefield, mill, ship, etc. Through representation directly responsible to that meeting, would be formed regional federations (and eventually national and international federations) which, from unifying labour to resist capitalism, would take over the function of controlling industry in general. Around these industrial federations, specialised technical departments would develop in detail, but with direct responsibility to the industrial workers at the point of production, in order to prevent any possibility of technocratic bureaucracy. Production would thus be regulated by the producers themselves. Each industry would be run by the workers in that industry.

### *Social Re-organisation*

Social reorganisation would be carried on by what would approximate to the modern borough or county council, composed, however, not of councillors but of the directly responsible representatives of the workers at their shop-meeting, (and changed or retained at each

meeting). The council would be, in effect, a chamber of labour (a “cartel”) and, under capitalism, would have the approximate duties of a revolutionary syndicalist “trades council.” As the direct representative, then, of the producers (who would also be the consumers), it would have the say in all local matters, as distinct from the local unions in their regional federation, which would organise production. Co-operatives of consumers

would take the function of supplying the demands of the consumers.

Local public works being the responsibility of the local “commune,” national public works would be the responsibility of the federation of communes. Similarly internationally, but with the growth of the free society internationally, such internationalism would be replaced by cosmopolitanism: i.e., the “nation” would be the world, or such part of it as was free *and federated* with the revolution.

**the State is not a fit instrument for the liberation of the masses... Our point now is to consider the alternative: workers' control. Not merely to consider the negative role of the revolution... but the creative role of the revolution.**

### *Public Order*

Clearly at first some form of public order must be taken along with public works. “Fifth Columnists,” recalcitrant capitalists, public nuisances, etc. must be stopped from wrecking the workers’ society. We would have no police force, for in the last analysis this would be a repressive force: a relic of the old capitalism. What then? The best answer is given from Spanish experience: a system of *workers’ patrols* directly responsible to the commune, not a standing police force, but a force recruited from the workers at the point of production. Some of its functions (traffic-directing, etc.) would become the work of a standing body: not the function of security however.<sup>1</sup> Such a system of

<sup>1</sup> Why not a standing force? Because such a body, particularly if armed, could be the beginning of a force towards military dictatorship. The militarist army could become the instrument for military dictatorship. A popular force could only be subjected to the same “ebb and flow” as the administrative posts. No militarism is the one, no bureaucracy is the other. Moreover, the workers’ patrols would only be needed to act on certain occasions of crisis. Let us compare them with the product of capitalist war – voluntary A.R.P.[Air Raid Precautions] wardens! Allowing for considerable differences

(1) of function; (2) of recruitment (arming direct from industry), the method of forming workers’ patrols and workers’ militia can be seen. (Moreover, to prevent the “tin-hat dictatorship,” the right of any citizen to complain to the community of any patrol would have to be recognised). Standing non-repressive bodies with functions usually taken by police can be seen even to-day by such examples as the A.A., R.A.C., etc. Police work of the purely administrative nature could easily be taken over by such a new organisation.

workers' patrols would be a direct heir to the workers' "militia" which would have to be recruited in such a manner during the revolutionary period. And its difference from the capitalist police force, guardian of property rights, is clearly seen. It would be in effect, the people themselves: being composed simply of able-bodied volunteers from the direct ranks of the industrial community. Its aim would not be repressive, but "conductive" and for the purpose of public security.

#### *Administrative Works*

Thus it is seen that social works are the responsibility of the commune. They are carried out by the union concerned (e.g. teachers would run the schools, just as miners would run the mines). It can be seen, though, that certain forms of national administration are necessary: statistical, technical, etc. Here in fact, is where the danger of bureaucracy arises, and has to be guarded against. A continual "ebb and flow", therefore, into administrative posts is necessary: no officials in the new society nor in the movement that has built it. Some permanent administrative (technical especially) posts are necessary: these workers must be members of a separate union, and treated as members of any other union, thus being on terms of equality with everyone else.

#### *Agrarian Society*

The fields would be controlled by the farm-workers in the same way that the industries were controlled by the industrial worker. The peasant problem (not affecting Britain, but all other European countries) would not be solved, practically nor desirable by liquidation: but by free co-operation. The peasant would be at liberty to associate on the general farm collectives. If he did not wish to, no forced collectivisation as in Russia, but the recognition of the peasants status: the peasant to continue with his own field, being given exclusive use of the field by the community provided that it was enough for him to live on (and did not entail his exploiting someone else to work on the field for him, although that would probably not arise in a free society with the chance of working in associated control and

not under domination). Co-operation between peasant-farmer, labourer and townsman is essential: there is, in effect, nothing to divide them in a free society. In the same way we could trace the operation of all industries and other professions, taken over by the workers from the capitalists, or from the State (Post Office, etc.). The wage, money and profit system would be quite unnecessary.

We have traced here the outline of an anarchist society, seen from its creative side, the syndicalist reconstruction of society. Gradually the decentralised forms of control would become even more freer: the need for any form even of workers' patrols disappearing. All wealth would be in common: the masses would be the masters of their own destiny. Could this become a form of majority oppression? No: to consider that would be to take too gloomy a view of human desire for liberty. Tyranny springs out of the unfree social soil: in a free community it would be a thing of the dark past.

Even before the commencement of the revolution, we will have dispensed with all forms of authoritarianism. As before the revolution, we rejected a *party* as a means for social emancipation, so after the revolution we reject a *State* as a means of running a society. It is neither necessary nor desirable.

All economy to the syndicates (workers' unions as outlined above), all social administration to the communes. The abolition of the political oppression of man by man because of the economic exploitation of man by man.

This, then, is what we mean by Anarchy, the very name of which throws our hypocritical politicians into a state of abject terror. So far from our being reduced to chaos if we do not have the politicians, the police, the State, the bureaucrats, the capitalists, the rich, the authoritarians, the state of the world today (suffering from an excess of governmentalism) shows how we shall be reduced to chaos if we retain them. This outline shows the alternative if we neglect them.

## **Social Revolution – Genuine Brand**

### **Albert Meltzer**

*War Commentary – For Anarchism, May 1941*

In the last issue of *War Commentary* I endeavoured to analyse briefly all these fake-revolutionary movements and to show that in reality all reformists were working towards, not reform and certainly not democracy, but towards dictatorship. "Reformism" is no longer synonymous with "democracy": on the contrary, it is

the reformist movements everywhere where they are permitted to exist which are endeavouring to shackle the workers to the governmental war machine, very often in order that the capitalist governments will not suppress them in order to do that job themselves.

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Crimes of robbery, etc. would disappear with the profit system. Most criminals would be psychological, etc. and headed by the patrols to an appropriate body.



Let us now consider the case for the genuine brand of social revolution. What the pre-requisites of a revolutionary movement today?

*In the first place, it must be against the imperialist war.*

All sorts of pseudo-scientific excuses are invented for defending different imperialist regimes. In the socialist movement, there are those who declare it to be of importance to “defend the Soviet Union” – the joint cry of Stalinists and Trotskyists – and those who declare it to be of imperative necessity to “defend democracy” – i.e. British-American imperialism. None of these in reality can be said to be anti-imperialist or opposed to this war whilst they agitate for the defence of empires, dictatorships and the like.

The Stalinists are at least consistent in one thing, the defence of the Soviet Union, which has been their one guiding light for years. In order to defend Stalin’s dictatorship they will quite cheerfully ally themselves with Churchill or with Hitler, according to Russia’s latest friendship. From this point of view they need be considered as nothing more than marionettes dancing on the strings of the Russian Foreign Office. Their bitter opponents, the Trotskyists, have the same policy of defending the same regime, only they adopt different tactics (on the grounds that they are more effective), i.e., they advocate revolutionary defeatism, as

revolutionaries, but (significantly) not in the U.S.S.R. whose workers they urge to rally to the defence of the state, but to turn out the “inefficient” Stalin bureaucracy (adopting the same tactics as the British social-democrats in their fake “struggle” against British capitalism – only stopping short of asking Stalin to declare his war aims). We do not see how anyone claiming to be a revolutionary can assume the responsibility for the calling of the workers of the world to the defence of the Russian dictatorship based on the State exploitation of the worker. Those who, claiming to be revolutionary, call for the support of British-American imperialism, do so on two grounds: (1) the belief that the war can be transformed – with whom I dealt in my last article – and, more particularly (2) the belief that democracy exists in these empires (“it is not now a question of capitalism versus socialism but of a democratic capitalism versus a dictatorial capitalism”), That such a democracy does not exist in the slightest vestige in the colonial empires is notorious. (and the

case of these, admitted). Their belief is that what is to be defended against European fascism is the free speech, association and thought that exists in the metropolis. This, unfortunately, is dwindling. It is not considered by them that Britain’s turn to fascism will leave them as completely helpless as were their fellow-social-democrats on the continent. In the event of a British victory, they will be unable to influence events, and in the event of a German victory, they will be powerless to resist the introduction of fascism from that quarter either. To do them credit, they admit that. Quite cheerfully they declare that if Hitler wins, the world, apparently must cease to live – which, though it is no doubt good as superficial propaganda, is a little deficient insofar as a working-class policy in peace and war, victory and defeat, democracy and dictatorship, is concerned.

**To us, the immediate working-class policy must be one of *self-defence* against encroachment and infringement of liberty from within whatever state, and the preparation for social revolution.**

We Anarchists do not accept responsibility for the defence of any of the governments. To us, the immediate working-class policy must be one of *self-defence* against encroachment and infringement of liberty from within whatever state, and the preparation for social revolution.

*What Is Social Revolution*

Since we understand by “social revolution” the complete expropriation of the means of life by the working class, it is natural that we cannot make the easy promises of the left-wing politicians about a better world following the war; it is certainly impossible for it to be

gained by collaboration with the State.

What we do say is that a revolutionary situation may arise which the revolutionary workers must do their best to exploit, and which they can only exploit by being prepared for it. (By “exploit” is meant utilise for the benefit of the workers themselves, and not for the benefit of any power-hungry set of politicians. By “preparation” is meant clarification of principles and practice.) If there is a sufficiently vigorous body of workers in the places of work, agitating for the means of self-reliance and direct action, any revolutionary situation that may arise will be a potential social revolution of the genuine brand, that alone will bring freedom in the true sense of the word.

The means and the principles we have often elaborated in these columns; namely, the formation of committees of workers in their places of work, in whatever uniform or beneath whatever flag they are forced to appear. The spontaneous linking of these committees must be

encouraged, into the form of industrial unionism, and with the syndicalist programme of direct workers' control. Finally, control by each industrial union of its industry, for the benefit of the community, and with the abolition of the State machinery under whatever name it may adopt.

### *Is World Revolution Possible*

It is clear that the conflicting imperialist powers have made every possible path towards civilisation and peace, other than that of revolution against imperialism and power politics, quite impossible. It is also quite clear that the conflict of imperialism offers all sorts of revolutionary situations that may be utilised by conscious revolutionary movements everywhere.

In many cases serious collision is bound to arise between popular revolution and bourgeois-nationalism. Should the European "New Order" collapse, there are no end of applicants for the cushy jobs that will be going in the re-constituted Europe. All the crowned – and other – heads of State will want their old jobs back, and the queues are already forming in London and New York for the new governments of Germany and Italy. (One can hardly blame some of our harassed politicians for wanting to see the revival of the old German Confederation, with its thirty-six or so sovereigns).

So far as the British Empire is concerned, bourgeois-nationalism will prove a very real obstacle to social revolution in the colonies and in India, although today it appears in a semi-progressive role of anti-imperialism.

Bourgeois-nationalism, therefore, while it is useful today as an anti-imperialist force in conquered Europe, Asia and Africa, must be guarded against as a potential danger.

Most potent is the danger of new tyrannies arising from the ashes – the anarchist message that the destruction of one state by revolution and the reconstruction of another means death to the revolutionary achievements is of vital importance in the world revolution.

The imminence of a revolutionary situation as the imperialist struggle drags on is not to be disputed. It is not so certain that such a struggle will be waged to a successful libertarian issue, unless the revolutionary workers are clear as to the means of revolution. Success for such revolutionary efforts anywhere are certain to spread like wildfire amongst the millions of toilers in all parts of the world. The time for the world revolutionary movement – and this term is once again becoming synonymous with anarchism – to strike, against imperialist world war and for its opposite, working-class revolution may not be in the too-distant future.

## **“National Independence”**

**Albert Meltzer**

*War Commentary – For Anarchism, December 1942*

Hope, it has been said, is a good breakfast but a poor supper. So is the struggle for national independence. Since most oppressor nations force on subject nations the loss of political and social freedom as well as national freedom, which means little by itself, the original struggle for national freedom becomes linked with the struggle for political and social freedom, and is therefore progressive and even revolutionary. Scotland, when she lost her national freedom, did not become politically unfree as separate from England, and so Scottish nationalism has never become a reality, though the demand for social freedom persists there as in every capitalist country. India, when she became part of a foreign empire, lost any chances of political freedom, and the demand for political and social freedom is linked up in a progressive movement.

Above all we see this illustrated in the struggles of the European countries against imperialism in the nineteenth century. Hungary, Finland, Italy, Bulgaria, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Macedonia, Armenia, Albania, Poland. The sympathy for these subjugated nationals was intense in the Western World, and in spite of many bloody struggles and suppressions, liberal republicanism did its best to achieve national

independence from the ruling powers of Europe — Russian, Austrian and Turkish.

Each of these empires was destroyed – the Czarist, the Hapsburg, and the Ottoman. Excepting Macedonia and Armenia, each of the oppressed nations of Europe became free in a national sense following the great split-up that followed the First World War. National independence, the goal of the nineteenth century, became a snare and a delusion. Poland, that had suffered under three despotisms (Austrian, Prussian and Russian) simultaneously, suffered the ignominy of seeing a fourth despotism arise, that of the native Polish landlords. All the blood that had flowed to make Hungary free flowed again beneath its rising fascist dictatorship. The last of the independent nations to retain forms of liberal democracy were Finland and Czechoslovakia; the latter to lose it in the Munich share-out, and the former to suffer beneath the two-pronged drive of Germany and Russia in this war.

National independence cannot be said to have been a boon to the suppressed nations of Europe, now once again suppressed beneath newest imperialism. Since it retains today the Western sympathy it enjoyed in the last century, let us see how genuine much of that sympathy is.

The sympathies of the British Government inclined of course to the balance of power. It supported Italian freedom when the Austrian oppressor was a rival. Under Disraeli and the Tories it supported Turkish Imperialism, though Gladstone denounced its massacre and its possible rivalry to the British Empire. It attacked Austrian Imperialism always, and when Russia became a rival and a menace to the Indian Empire, Russian Imperialism too. That British ruling class 'sympathy for national independence' was hypocritical was shown in the answer by foreign diplomats: "What about your Irish?" At that time, the Irish question was at least as burning as, say, the Finnish. Another ironical – and true – answer came from Nasir Pasha, general of the Sultan, who replied to hostile English critics that he was going to do what the British had just done in the Transvaal (Boer War), before he massacred the Albanians, Bulgarians and Macedonians, after the Monastir rising.

Whenever British policy inclined to a nation, that nation was helped; when it inclined to its ruler, that nation was forgotten. Such was the 'balance of power'. Ruling class sentiment always inclines to its own interests. Today, Germany attacks British Imperialism for its colonial policy – not because her colonial policy is any different; British Imperialism attacks German occupation, not because she was not its tutor; they are neither of them concerned with national independence *as such* but only as a means of attacking their rivals.

The Allies did not pick Poland's cause because they supported Poland, but because (admittedly) at some time they had to stop Hitler's Imperialism before it directly attacked British Imperialism. Wars are not caused through the defence of national independence, or through any 'St George and the Dragon' motive, but through economic causes and for purposes of aggrandisement or retention of aggrandisement. Let us therefore make an end to all the nonsense current that the major powers are moved by feelings of sympathy towards the minor powers.

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## **The Allies did not pick Poland's cause because they supported Poland, but because (admittedly) at some time they had to stop Hitler's Imperialism before it directly attacked British Imperialism.**

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Also, let us finish with the nonsense that certain nations are responsible for wars, insofar as they cause wars between major nations, e.g. Alsace-Lorraine, the Balkan countries, etc. The peoples of those countries can, when unaggregated by senseless national distinctions and deliberate attempts to foster separatism between peoples, live together peacefully. Interests not their own cause trouble between them. Hostile prejudices and inculcated teachings foster dissension, but taking away power politics one takes away those prejudices and teachings. In the future there must be no more of this petty disruption that has so long served a privileged few, but a united Europe and a united world.

Certainly we must take up the struggle for national independence when it becomes a struggle against an imperialism. But that struggle for national independence must be waged by the workers and peasants, and we must dissociate ourselves from any bourgeois leaders – for instance, the exiled governments in London, the bourgeois leaders of the Indian Congress, etc. – and associate ourselves instead with the masses who alone carry out that struggle. And independence must not be a goal, but a lever to oust imperialism; and when that imperialism is ousted, we aim not for an independent bourgeois government, but a revolutionary movement that is going to struggle with other revolutionary movements in other countries for a FREE WORLD.

## **Objections to Anarchism: What's in a name?**

**Albert Meltzer**

*Freedom: Anarchist Fortnightly*, 14 June 1947

Anarchists are often told that they have adopted a name that "prejudices" people. Frankly we would have no objection to jettisoning the name and adopting a comfortable alias if we thought the name "Anarchist" unreasonably hampered the growth of anarchist ideas, but we do not think this is so. It is perhaps true that the term "Anarchist" sends shivers down the backs of the timorous middle-class, but so do the ideas the term

represents. Many of these ideas could be known under other names, but all these names have been adopted by tendencies of a far different nature. For instance, the term "Liberal" means someone who believes in liberty and is a word which has been used by revolutionary thinkers (even by Anarchists — the Mexican Anarchist pioneers using the name in the Revolution) but it has been adopted by one of the (formerly) great capitalist

parties and is now unmistakably associated with that particular party or with Capitalist Democracy generally. The term “Libertarian” which has the same root but different associations, is better, but in so far as it does not explain what Liberty is, can be used by people<sup>1</sup> with all sorts of woolly ideas on Liberty, who avoid the plain fact that Liberty is No Government, not a modified form of Government. The term Anarchy means plainly and simply No Government and is the best “patent” label for our movement.

As regards the economic pattern of Anarchism, “Communism” was a respected revolutionary term, and undoubtedly “Anarchist Communism” perfectly describes our theories. But Lenin borrowed the term Communism to describe Marxism, since “Socialism” was at the time identified with the right wing of the Social-Democrats, to which party the Russian Bolsheviks belonged. “Communism” has since become identified in the public mind with Bolshevism. In the *A.B.C. of Anarchism* Alexander Berkman makes an explanation which at the time he was writing (1928) was quite logical:

“The Bolsheviks are Communists but they want their dictatorship, their government, to compel people to live in Communism. Anarchist Communism, on the contrary, means voluntary Communism. Communism from free choice.”

However, it cannot be said, in my opinion, that this still holds good, because “Communism” is now unalterably identified in the public mind with Bolshevism and present-day Bolshevism — or Stalinism — has in the past ten years become not merely “authoritarian communism” but plainly authoritarianism. Anarchism is a libertarian idea of the communist experiment, but not a libertarian version of Russian State Capitalism which in its Stalinist phase is completely different and divorced even from authoritarian communism.

To describe the means of achieving what we can call anarchist communism but with a definite accent on the anarchism, “syndicalism” is a good term but it has to be qualified. Syndicalism is revolutionary unionism and we use it to describe the method of organisation whereby the workers get together at the place of work, and by organising against the employing class, prepare for the day when they can take over each industry. Of course, this could be done with authoritarian ideas as to the dominance of particular industries, and to show that it must be imbued with the idea of communalism and freedom our qualifying way of saying the word has to be “*Anarcho-syndicalism*.”

You see, the word anarchism is an essential to our movement. Anarchy means no government, and the

only way any social advance can take place is in spite of and against governmentalism. The method of syndicalist organisation and communist reconstruction are essentially bound up with the qualifying fact that this revolutionary process can only be anti-governmental, since the State acts as the grave-digger of any insurrection.

While some Anarchists believe in altering the word in the belief that this may dispel the prejudices which these who have been influenced by capitalist propaganda may have, I am of the opinion that more than ever to-day we need a slogan challenging the basis of State servility and capitalist greed, one incorporated into the name of our movement, and this, even more than the determination to stand by a name with such a glorious history, impels me to underline the following passage from Kropotkin:

‘We are often reproached for using such a name as that of “Anarchists”. “As to your ideas,” we are told, “they might do; I like them pretty well; but what of this unfortunate name! How will you become a powerful party whilst keeping that name which implies disorder, destruction and chaos? ...

‘We prefer “disorder” to that sort of “order” which once “reigned” at Warsaw, or the “order” which was “re-established” at Paris by the slaughter of thirty thousand workers; that “order”, the triumph of which is proclaimed each time that the beginning of a revolution has been stifled in the blood of the working men. That *order*, which is always the same eternal oppression once more re-established, we do not want. We prefer a thousand times the *disorder* of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, of the revolutionists of 1793, of Garibaldi, of the Commune of 1871, and of so many others to whom the bourgeois dedicate the title — quite glorious in our eyes — of “fomenters of disorder”.

‘Moreover, we have often said that word “Anarchy” — apart from its very precise literal signification of negation of the State — has already a glorious past. It dates, in fact, from the great French Revolution, when all true revolutionists who did not stop midway but went to the root of a system, doomed to fall, were called “Anarchists”.

‘As to all other names — “Libertarians”, “Acratists” (no denomination), “anti-Statists”, &c., which are sometimes used to evade the great persecutions — they have one common defect of not giving expression to our character of revolutionists — of men who adopt *revolutionary* means to accomplish *fundamentally, essentially revolutionary changes*.’

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<sup>1</sup> The term “libertarian socialist” now being used by the circles which used to prefer the name “revolutionary socialist”.

# The Lessons of History

*The Syndicalist*, June 1952

The series of articles on syndicalism in various countries has been short, both for reasons of space, and limitations of knowledge. It is unfortunate that many of the revolutionary movements of vital concern to us have not received sufficient documentation. It should be our constant aim to add to this knowledge, as there is something positive to be gained from it.

The cursory reader might regard it as being remote from his interest that such-and-such a revolutionary strike took place in such-and-such a country. Likewise, as most of the material which comes to be published on it in English is in the nature of protests against repression, he might draw the one-sided conclusion that all such revolts are doomed to failure, and find, perhaps, sympathy but not inspiration.

It is in the nature of revolts that many have been successful in lifting countries out of a morass of feudalism that persisted in modern times, but naturally none has finally achieved a free society which exists unchallenged and flourishing. This could not possibly be the case in the political circumstances of the world to-day, with an unabated trend to dictatorship and monopoly. If one thing had not caused a libertarian achievement to go under, another would have followed. Hence the record of foreign intervention in countries like Spain and Mexico on occasions when it was possible that the authoritarian society might collapse.

From the industrial struggles and revolutionary attempts that have taken place we can, however, draw many conclusions. That a consciously Anarcho-Syndicalist movement can be built up is proved by the Spanish experience, and that workers' control can be put into practice was seen in the collectivised undertakings of 1936. We have also found that political influence can creep in (which can be seen in Mexico, when twice the anarchists have abandoned syndicalist movements they had built up, which had later been corrupted, in order to build again on a libertarian basis). The example of the Argentine shows how political influence can be kept out, and the struggles of the F.O.R.A. are closely

parallel to those of the I.W.W. in North America. In both cases, however, we have seen the unavoidable wane of influence when militant workers turned to the Communists under the "glamour value" of the Russian Revolution.

The spontaneous possibilities of the workers, even without a positive syndicalist movement, are seen in the struggles in Germany after the fall of the Kaiser [1918-19]. There the workers were in a position to seize their workplaces, and likewise establish free communes. The latter, a typically anarchistic conception as opposed to the conquest of State power, was something seen in Spain which was a rebellion against the Marxist tradition in Germany.

Syndicalism as an industrial weapon was perfected in France, but with the decline of influence of the Anarchists owing to the rise of social-democracy and chauvinism, such syndicalism became corrupted and used against the workers, both by social-democrats, and later, by communists. In England we have seen that syndicalism faced the possibility of becoming merely a "trend in the labour movement". This proved fatal to it, for revolutionary syndicalism has flourished when it is separate and apart from the reformist labour movement. It might be pointed out to those who wail about "splitting the workers" that in many cases it has been the reformists who set up the dual union (often at governmental instigation or with the blessing of companies) because of the activities of the revolutionary syndicalists (e.g. Italy, Spain, and many South American countries). At other times the revolutionary union has been the challenger, but it has not split the workers according to crafts, as the reformist unionists take for granted.

A libertarian idea cannot be one that rests upon preconceived philosophies and written theories, but one that has been fashioned by experience. It is hoped, therefore, that a historical series such as the present has contributed towards the clarification of the theory of anarcho-syndicalism.

## Workers' Control and the Wage System

**Albert Meltzer**

*The Syndicalist*, September 1952

When we declare our opposition to reformism, we do not mean that we oppose reforms, and obviously any crumb is better than no bread at all. What we oppose is the devotion of the labour movement to the reformist principle, thus gradually taking over from the middle-class do-gooders, and even (as has happened above all

in England) letting those people in turn take over the direction of the labour movement politically, on the grounds that they will thus manage to achieve a few parliamentary and other reforms here and there. The result of this action is that in the end we get some

reforms, but no social change-over such as the labour movement was originally created for.

The new labour movement we hope as syndicalists to achieve is one that will help to bring about that new society, and will therefore not be one concerned with political reformism. At the same time reforms can be obtained without recourse to parliamentary action. The fact of the matter is that the ruling-class, when faced by its subjects in a revolutionary mood, is only too prepared to give them reforms in an effort to appease them. Through industrial action social amelioration can be obtained, not only in wages, but also in many other concessions – compare some of the strikes in and since the war made for liberty rather than economic gains (railwaymen's and dockers' strikes against police action, for instance). When we call ourselves anti-reformists we do not believe we should not act to stop such action. What we say is that a Society for the Prevention of Police Snooping on the Railway will waste a lot of time and achieve nothing. The action of the railwaymen can do the job in one quick strike.

Similarly, although we believe that in the capitalist system it is necessary to achieve wage increases, this does not mean that we believe in the wage system. Whatever we think, the wage struggle continues in the factory in any case. The organisms that arise in the workshop are created mostly on this issue. What we claim is that these organisms should be freed of political control altogether and made instead a movement by which workers' control of the place of work might

ultimately be achieved. As they represent the people doing the job, in them lies the possibility of control being carried out by the workers themselves. Workers' control can only go hand-in-hand with the abolition of the wages system. The idea of different wage rates operating if workers were controlling different places of work is unthinkable. It is impossible to decide which job merits which rate. Instead we put in its place the principle of common ownership – each taking from the community what he needs and giving to the pool of work what he is able.

Syndicalism is therefore the system of workers' control which is operated by the workers themselves, and created by the organisms which they build spontaneously in order to fight the wages struggle, but which take over when the wages system ends and the employing caste are no longer dominant. Because, however, we are alive to the dangers of political control, which might replace the capitalist order, we take our stand against all forms of authority, whether it claims to be representing the masses or not. This, of course, is anarchism (“no governmentism”) and explains the name “anarcho-syndicalist”. Syndicalism, like socialism, has been used as a name by a great many people to cover a great many points of view, but the name Anarcho-Syndicalism has this plain meaning of workers' control of the places of work, absence of government, and the decentralisation of social affairs to the commune.

## **Anarchism and the working class: a reply**

**Albert Meltzer**

*Anarchy* No. 72 (February, 1967)

The higher criticism of anarchism, so neatly summarised in one issue of ANARCHY (No. 68) is not so new as its exponents believe; in the 19th century too, the “philosophical” anarchist wished to avoid any mention of class and imagined it was possible to struggle against an authoritarian mentality solely in terms of individual conduct and without any reference to the facts of economic life. The least danger contained in the doctrines of the ANARCHY 68 school is that it would destroy the anarchist movement as an effective force;<sup>1</sup> it is far more insidious that a movement based on its premises would become the shock troops or Papal Schweitzer-Garde of the working-class-is-always-wrong attitude of the Press, which the political parties, much as they may agree, cannot find it expedient to utter until somebody else makes it intellectually justified in “liberal” terms. These premises were revealingly summed up at a recent meeting (albeit in an “Irish” bull), by a young professional man who claimed “the

working classes do not exist; they are only interested in beer and bingo”.

This pseudo-individualism, professing to condemn the anarchist movement by its own standards and from within, is less the Higher Criticism than the High Camp of the social revolution. It is not against revolution because its supporters are reactionary; that would be absurd and very far from “in”; on the contrary, it is precisely because it is so revolutionary that it must denounce the left, the working-class struggle and the militants in particular! It does not attack the anarchists because they disbelieve in government—that would scarcely fit a reputation for daring thought—and on the contrary, it is precisely because anarchism is so authoritarian that they see no hope for it, and resign themselves to authoritarian government.

I am aware that in replying to this body of criticism one lays oneself open to the charge that one “thinks the

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<sup>1</sup> It is highly significant that to Laurens Otter, in the period just after the war when the anarchist movement most

successfully integrated in industrial struggles, “it virtually died out”

working class can do no wrong”. But the point is whether it is a productive class or not. The “Messianic” conception of the working class is often compared to Jewish Messianism. The Jews as such never believed that the “Chosen People” was a *herrenvolk*. If some did, and consciousness of racial superiority is always an anodyne to worldly distress, it was understandable but far from the actual teaching: the true idea was that “God chose a peculiar people for a particular task”. To state that the working class has a particular role to play in history is not to state that it is a substitute for God’s elect; *all* classes have particular roles to play in history and if they fail to do so, they disappear. The myth of John Pilgrim and others is that somewhere, socialist and anarchist theorists—whose quotations they have yet to track down—stated that the working class could never do wrong. One is however entitled to protest when the workers are accused of indolence, or addiction to gambling, or materialism, or self-seeking, when such accusations apply generally to every single class and probably some of the accusers themselves. Many writers accuse the Jews of “love of gain”; this can certainly be justified, but only on the understanding that it applies equally to Christians, Buddhists, Moslems, Confucians and Secularists. It must then be pointed out that only Christians are humbugs enough to profess a religion which denounces the love of gain, while their actions are otherwise.

The odd reflection from that remark is that none of the writers who attack the workers would dream of attacking any minority group in such a fashion; they feel one is small-minded to resent attacks upon one’s class, or nationality if it is large enough (such as American), but fall over backwards to avoid insults to race or religion or (smaller) nationality, which can be outgrown. In defence of class one is, irritatingly, driven to defend even Marxism from misrepresentation—after all, Marx did not make any of the naive remarks attributed to him<sup>1</sup>—and to spell out in simple fashion

**It is not against revolution because its supporters are reactionary; that would be absurd and very far from “in”; on the contrary, it is precisely because it is so revolutionary that it must denounce the left, the working-class struggle and the militants in particular!**

<sup>1</sup> By those who know little or nothing of either, Bakunin’s fate is to be bracketed with Marx, in remarks such as Otter’s “the sort of society Marx and Bakunin described”. Marx being the “founder” of Marxism, some Anarch is necessary to stand as the “founder” of anarchism—and as Bakunin was

some of the most elementary facts about socialism and anarchism.

### DOES IDEALISM RUN A RAILROAD?

The 19th century Christian scholar was able to produce from the Old Testament a “Jewish Church” foreshadowing the teachings of Jesus; the 20th century sociologist is able to produce from 19th century socialism the “working-class myth” that foreshadows the middle-class Labour Party of today, and to prove, to his own satisfaction, the debt to “Methodism rather than Marx”. But it was the Christian Socialists (so often confused with “Marxism and even Leninism” by the politically illiterate sociologist) who fostered the myth that the working class had a naturally inherent set of virtues of their own. It is a belief some materialist socialists might also hold—but they would agree that it had nothing to do with “running a railroad”.

The Christian Socialist based himself upon an old class myth: one that lingered for centuries, was that the aristocracy, by its natural superiority, breeding and education, attained and deserved its privileges which society was ungrateful to resent. *Noblesse oblige*. The theory could no longer be believed today (though some reactionary writers, cf. Houston Chamberlain, did their best with it by giving it a biological twist). The bourgeoisie had a related myth: a business-like God kept a

careful record of their transactions, and in return for their positive virtues—thrift, economy, honesty, sobriety and so on—they were rewarded by commercial success, a Judao-Christian myth still going strong around the suburbs.

To the Christian Socialist, “the poor” had their virtues—like Rousseau’s “noble savage” there was a “poor but honest” working man. When driven to admit that this was far from reality all too often, they conceded that *unless* the working man became moral, he could not hope for economic or social betterment. Political change, too, was a reward for solid virtue. Did the Irish want their freedom? Well, they could not

Marx’s opponent in the First International, he is elevated accordingly. Proudhon, or perhaps Godwin, might have prior claims for this position. Bakunin’s life was a moving towards anarchism. His critics point to his earlier pan-Slavism and revolutionary democracy as if he were then an anarchist.

expect to be politically free and still wallow in Guinness and beat their wives. Let them reform their manners, and all that would be wanting for their political freedom would be the ending of the British connection! “What use is it for the working man to agitate for the Charter if he is still to revile Christ, beat his wife, get drunk on Saturday nights, and cheat his master?” they asked, without seeing that the capitalist had all the points in the Charter, yet could “revile Christ”, beat his wife, get drunk at any time, and cheat his servants. Only a few weeks ago, a professed economist told a meeting that “there is no such thing as the working-class movement; all the workers think of is beer and bingo”—a familiar claim, yet one could scarcely deny that joint stock companies and finance trusts existed, notwithstanding a penchant of the capitalist for champagne and baccarat, neither more nor less characteristic.

No Christian could give up the feeling that “virtue had its own reward”, and the insistence that the working class movement was synonymous with all the Christian virtues, or it could not exist, is the Messianism against which John Pilgrim rails. It had, however, nothing to do with movements such as Marxism and anarchism which were rooted in materialism, and could not postulate that economic betterment was some sort of heavenly reward on earth for good conduct. It might well be claimed, especially by anarchists, that the minds of men could become changed and their attitudes libertarian, once they were economically and socially free. It was never a “nineteenth century myth” that people could alter their attitudes, and be rewarded by political and social improvements, except among the Christian Socialists, many of whom found their Messianism in the orthodox Labour movement of a later date. (It is perhaps their influence upon a section of the Labour movement, *vide* George Lansbury and others, that coloured the Peace Pledge Union, and has been passed down as if it were traditional left thinking.<sup>1</sup>)

Pilgrim’s “exposure of anarchist myths and concepts” boils down to a spirited attack upon the very Christian Socialism they derided; yet he cannot liberate himself from those Christian Socialist concepts. Sitting at the feet of Prof. Lipset and imbibing sociological jargon of the twentieth century, he has no more advanced than the old “booba” who tells me that Mr. Smith is a bad plumber because he is an antisemite; or the Welsh grocer who does not object to Congregationalists in the office, but prefers a Baptist for working at the counter. He is saying that the workers cannot run their own industries and cannot achieve control of the economic system because their social ideas are illiberal. This is

merely an up-to-date way of expressing the view that economic betterment depends upon moral improvement. And it is, of course, false. There is no reason why the workers at an electrical factory cannot seize control and run the factory because among them are fathers who want their daughters home at 10.30 each night or know the reason why. This is not to support the latter attitude.

The red herring in Pilgrim’s article is that the workers are “racialist” (he seeks to prove this by quoting a casually visiting American journalist’s interview with an apparently half-witted boy). Does it matter, from the point of view of organising a factory, except in an inter-racial society, if some of the workers are racialistic? The very reason why, in inter-racial societies, the Right Wing has an interest in promoting inter-racial strife, is to stop different sections of workers uniting. But this is only in some places a pressing problem; it is not the universal problem suggested by John Pilgrim (though it could become one). In fact, it is easily soluble when it exists, but the abstract idea is more difficult than the fact itself, just because of its illogicality. The races can mix much easier than they are prepared to admit, in fact. What matters is not illiberal attitudes but the bureaucratisation of those attitudes. It is not the working class that owns armies or concentration camps (they never can, so long as they remain workers and not rulers); it is the codification of prejudices into laws by a bureaucracy with power that is harmful. Of course the workers could control the factories and be sufficiently illiberal to have scorn for homosexuals; they could not send them to prison for seven years, however, unless a legislature existed to codify such a prejudice.

One can point to the Israeli kibbutzim as a society which is almost free, yet controlled by people with minds ossified by racial and religious prejudice (in many cases). Perhaps it is some similar society Pilgrim has in mind when he says that a victory for the working class in the foreseeable future “would result in a type of society that would be far removed from anarchism”. This is a misconception of anarchism that characterises the pseudo-individualist, to whom a free society is a Utopia that he does not expect, and possibly does not wish, to see attained. There is, of course, a strong case for Utopia as the vision towards which society should be heading. The military state of perfect discipline is the Bismarckian ideal; the militarists could not get it, but they shaped society in its image. The Utopian free society, in however airy-fairy a concept, is something we neglect at our peril. But even if perfect freedom is not immediately attainable, it is not to say a free society is not a practical concept now.

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<sup>1</sup> I could not help thinking while reading ANARCHY 68 of that popular doggerel version of the *Red Flag*: “The working class can kiss my arse / I’ve got the foreman’s job at last”, which has been quoted and re-quoted over and over again as a critique of militancy. It is, of course, most deplorable that somebody should be a militant and sell out because of promotion; at the same time it is understandable. It is not an

attitude confined to the working class or to those of left conviction, nor was it ever unexpected. A doctor who quoted the above lines to me recently was most offended when I suggested some other lines: “You’ve paid for all my studies, chum, / California, here I come.” Only the working class, which “no longer exists” is expected to be “responsible”.



A free society is not one on which a majority of people have voted anarchist and produced an anarchist government. This, one would have thought, was obvious. A free society is one in which the repressive organs of government have been removed. If the workers seize control--and out of purely selfish and materialistic motives—they will only be able to retain control by dissolving the organs of power. One must spell this out for the pseudo-individualists who have a sneaking regard for the State as a cohesive whole, to come to their aid when “threatened by the majority” (“I would call in the police if . . .”, “you would have a bigger tyranny if . . .”). The Church, already on its last legs, would go. The Police Force (the one institution with which no politician cares to part—every other repressive institution has its particular abolitionists)--that too would go. The Judicature, Legislature and Civil Service as such would all go. None of these institutions could do the work of another. If you abolish the Church, the Police Force will not get you into Heaven, and the Monarchy cannot save you from foreign foes when it has no Army. One assumes at least of a contributor to ANARCHY or of professed anarchists that they do not put up a case for the preservation of the Monarchy, as such, or of the Law, as such, or of Parliament, as such, or the armed forces as such. If one of these institutions can be dispensed with, why not all? If they can go together, why is a free society unlikely? Which is the institution that should linger on? Can it be the police force, the one institution that no politician can bear to be parted from?—for without it, the debates at Westminster are no more important than the debates at the local literary society, and on a far lower intellectual level.

Why then have we to assume that a free society is not possible, purely from a statistical survey that attitudes to certain social problems are less liberal amongst the workers than amongst an unidentified section of the population?<sup>1</sup> One suspects that “freedom and justice”

**A free society is one in which the repressive organs of government have been removed. If the workers seize control--and out of purely selfish and materialistic motives—they will only be able to retain control by dissolving the organs of power.**

are taken to mean merely a sum total of liberal measures.

I am sorry to make John Pilgrim the whipping-boy for the pseudo-individualists, not merely because I like him personally but also because he is probably the first to object to the pseudo-individualistic tribe, following the Press, who persistently break up our meetings vociferously if they feel we are making headway

towards the working class. Mike Walsh has put a good deal of work into trying to organise meetings on working-class problems and anarchism, only to find this hostile element almost at the point of demanding pogroms against the workers.

“They are cowards! screams a young professional man, going around under a false name, for business reasons, when he hears of the seamen’s strike. “Beer and bingo . . . the working class can kiss my arse, etc.” —a concerted breaking-up of meetings that reminds one of the Mosley days and produced the disgraceful scene when Bill Christopher—of some consequence in the working-class movement quite outside his many contributions to the anarchist movement—was shouted down, following (though perhaps not because of) a letter in FREEDOM, “Christopher Must Go”. Why? Because he had presumed to speak of working-class problems. He has a “basic belief in the messianic role of the working class” says Pilgrim—but is it merely that he speaks of them at all? The reverse of this “messianism” is the “jeremiadism” that characterises the whole of this “anti-messianic” school. For when they insist that the whole working class is just after the foreman’s job and (while not adverse to drink themselves) only interested in drink, they do not postulate, say, the professional men, or the technicians, or the military, as an alternative revolutionary class. It comes down to the fact that most

<sup>1</sup> At a recent meeting, one of the supporters of the general conceptions outlined in ANARCHY 68, stated categorically that “the working class are the most reactionary class of all”. I pressed him again and again to state which was the *least* reactionary, or at any rate which class was less reactionary, but got no intelligent response. It is noteworthy that Prof. Lipset is quoted as saying that the working class are the “most nationalistic” sector of the population. But he does not, at least, in the quotation given, show any class as being less nationalistic. Pilgrim does occasionally refer vaguely to the “middle class” but does not define what he means by them.

Everybody nowadays claims to be middle class, as the advertising executive will tell you. Pilgrim quotes Tristram Shandy’s reading of the FREEDOM survey to state that 100% of its teenage readership is middle class. This is flagrantly untrue surely?—one has only to find *one* reader to disprove it. It obviously has a large student readership which cannot be all, or all *yet*, middle class; how many teenagers could attain middle-class status unless born to it? Perhaps the answer is that two law students answered the questionnaire, upon which a socio-economic theory is to be based.

of the Jeremiadists are against any sort of revolutionary change at all (naturally, because they are so revolutionary and not because they are opposed to revolution) and so the most hostile and fanatic interrupters of our meetings expend their passion in opposing any idea that there can be social revolution. They merely want a “permanent protest” sufficient to keep themselves from becoming absorbed in the Liberal Party.

None could be a more enthusiastic Jeremiadist than Martin Wardon in the same issue of ANARCHY. He is too far to the right for the Liberal Party, which would never presume to take up his complaints of the lazy dustmen, the inefficient electrician, the bad-tempered bus conductor and the non-co-operative bookshop assistants. (They, after all, know only too well of solicitors who embezzle their clients’ money and accountants who shoot their business rivals.) His objection to the working class seems to be (one put to a meeting recently by another Jeremiadist) that they simply will not give “a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay”. Such is the economic illiteracy of those who think that “the classical anarchist thinkers”, not to mention poor Karl, are outmoded.

Again, Martin Wardon assumes the Christian Socialist view that “clearly, if there is to be anarchy there must first be a widespread change of values”. (They would have phrased it a little differently.) But it is not true. The plain fact is that providing the workers have the necessary skills, they can run a factory. Either management is necessary or it is not. Either certain oppressive institutions can be abolished, or they are essential. If you want the law courts, if you fear lack of the police force, if you think the legislature essential; say so. If they are not essential, then a free society is possible. Perhaps it might be objected that a free society is not necessarily a perfect society, not even an anarchistic society. This, of course, is true. In a free society, individual attitudes can change. When people are free, they do not need to wear the “Anatolian smile” before the conqueror, which people dislike so much in subject races and Martin Wardon finds objectionable in the people working with him.

I wonder if Martin Wardon, who feels so strongly that a class he dislikes cannot achieve its emancipation, knows how much the English capitalist class was disliked by Heinrich Heine when he visited London? Their beer-and-beef faces and manners represented everything that he found most sordid. They could think of nothing but money; they despised Germans because they ate sauerkraut while they themselves “had twenty religions but only one sauce”; and they detested music. Nothing amused him more than to see their honest burgher faces clad in wigs at the mummeries that went on in the Guildhall. Yet when the King went back on his word and decided to resist the Reform, these same burghers assembled at the Guildhall, troubled in mind because they had vast possessions which would be endangered

in a revolution, but quite determined to risk that revolution. Even at such a sublime moment they could not help talking about money, said Heine (they said they would pay no taxes) and could not refrain from remarks about “sending the King and his ugly fat German sow back to Hanover,” but with all their “gross materialism”, they stood by the cause of liberty “and at that moment I heard the refrain of their music, greater than that of Rossini or Meyerbeer”.

As with the burghers, so with the workers; I have known times when the bad-tempered busmen and the lazy dustmen were capable of that “music”.

The tragedy of the revolutionary movement today has nothing whatever to do with the obvious fact that “the capitalist mentality” affects the working class too. Martin Wardon, like so many others, thinks that he is saying something new by criticising the “capitalist mentality” of the workers. But this was in the anarchist primer. He seems to think that anarchist propagandists are some sort of public relations officers for what exists de facto in the working class. It may have been part of the radical democratic creed, but it certainly was not part of the anarchist doctrine (not even the Marxist, actually), that the mere substitution of workers for middle or upper classes in the positions of power would be of any benefit to anyone whatever, other than the fortunate few concerned. The Marxists in practice did go on to take over positions of power, and to put workers in those positions; obviously they were seldom better and often worse than their predecessors. The classical anarchist case was summed up “no master—high or low”. If they had accepted the idealistic Christian notion of the moral superiority of the dispossessed, they might have felt that to put a few morally superior people into positions of power would benefit society. But the anarchists either accept that there should be no positions of power or they cease to be anarchists. One can stay in the Christian Church and hate one’s enemies, or join the Buddhist Society and eat meat, but there are no meat-eating vegetarians or authoritarian anarchists while those words retain their meaning.

What is the tragedy of the revolutionary movement today? It is one that affects the whole working class. The working class is being slowly dispossessed. Under the smooth phrases “the working class no longer exists; we are all workers now—since coming out Lady Penny herself works in a little boutique—outmoded notions of the class struggle”, the working class is being as steadily alienated from production as was the peasantry. As capitalism gives way to non-profit-making State control, the possessing class is able to rely upon assured dividends rather than speculative profits, and the non-possessing class is shifted from the point of production (and power). The Fabian sociologist will assure us that this is progress. “We will abolish the working classes”; but they will not become with-it advertising executives and television personalities, they will not join the

growing professional classes—though of course there is much more room in a State-controlled society for a professional class than there is in one relying on private profit, as Prof. Parkinson has testified; they simply drift to the peripheral industries. Part of the trend of redeployment—ostensibly to shift workers to the productive industries—is to take them from car factories where they earn big money and represent a major industrial force, to jobs in the post office, and office jobs which begin to proliferate. The mark of the New Bureaucrat is judged by the number of office workers he employs, just as the Roman conqueror was judged by his slaves.

The history of the revolutionary movement in the past thirty years is that of militants being pushed out of industry. We have all faced it and found ourselves out on our ear. Some, like Bill Christopher, remain key men because they are in growing industries. Others tended to go into dying industries (it was difficult to choose other in the thirties, when one was refusing to go into war industry and the rest were still feeling the depression) from which they were ultimately pushed out. But we cannot resist the fact that the plain trend of today is to dispossess the working class out of industry and if it is not being done with as much naked force as was used to dispossess the peasants from the land, it is none the less real. It is difficult amongst militants to stay in industry, and either they find a niche in the service industries, or possessed of some craft they go off into individual trades (the old standby of the revolutionary, especially in exile, and the one which leaves one the most time to think, and the least chance to resist political power with industrial power). Divorced from industry, they either continue to help from outside; or they drift away from the movement while the Jeremiadist triumphantly sings his paean of woeful delight . “got the foreman’s job at Iast”; or perhaps they accept the specious pleading of the Jeremiadist—what, after all, has anarchism got to do with the working class, and as long as one smokes pot, wears tattered jeans off duty and talks of Sartre, is it not a little irrelevant to hear of working-class revolution? So they reject Messianism and sit by the waters of Babylon singing strange songs in the new land and wailing “Eli, Eli” when anyone remembers Zion. . .

#### THE ANARCHIST PHILOSOPHY

One may compare the anarchist movement to a railway terminus. Trains arrive from many points of departure. Some come along by the express train and reach the terminus somewhat before the others. They miss out a lot of the discomforts suffered by some who have come up by other trains (through the Communist or Socialist

stations for instance), but they are apt to get bored pacing the station waiting for others to join them for the connection up to wider activities. Perhaps they occasionally make trips around the station in related causes and activities. Some slower trains arrive fuller than others—this was true of the CND train.<sup>1</sup> The assumption, so glibly made by Laurens Otter that before the CND train arrived, the anarchist movement had “virtually died out” is backed by a fictitious “steady drift back of many old comrades who have not been seen around for the last 15 years”. Anxious not to admit that he took the wrong “train” now that his interest in CND has lapsed, he treats the anarchist movement as if it had been in hiding. May it not be that he did not notice that part of it engaged in social and industrial struggles when he was sitting down? I certainly know of no individual out of any struggle for 15 years who has “drifted back”, far less of a “steady drift” as if (assuming there were such an individual) it were a sociological phenomenon. To go on to say, as he seems to imply, the anarchists were “no longer around when CND was founded” is not just somewhat unfair on those who got to the terminus first; it enables him to justify a piece of “red-baiting” which, amusing in itself, betrays his economic illiteracy, just as surely as his sociological basis against “the workers” proves he has not reached the stage of *De rerum novarum* (even Pope Leo granted the case Laurens Otter rejects):

“Look around you, how many anarchists of yesteryear, *Spugubs* (members of SPGB), or Trots do you know now pulling in comfortable salaries or heavy overtime packets often at the expense of fellow workers and justifying this by saying that while capitalism exists they would be fools not to get as much as they can under the circumstances?”

I have been looking around for a good deal more than fifteen years but I am quite prepared to have another look. Quite frankly, Mr. Otter, you may now scorn me as the press agent for the “anarchists, SPGB and Trotskyites”, but the answer to your specific question “How many?” is none. Perhaps, before quoting some professor’s statistics, you would explain how this economic gymnastic is possible? How exactly do these good people pull in comfortable salaries or overtime packets “at the expense of fellow workers”? If you had been frank and said “at the expense of their unfortunate employers”, I would have understood your political persuasion if I could not have wept tears with you. It is utterly impossible to get comfortable salaries at the expense of other people working in the same place, unless you suppose—with some of the old Christian

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<sup>1</sup> On this particular “train”, I do not know if anarchism recruited those who came from the CND, or if it is not truer to say that a particular movement amongst a particular generation, and perhaps accumulated propaganda too, created a situation in which both CND and a new anarchist “generation” came; if some of the latter were in the former,

this may have been mere coincidence. There seem to be a remarkable number of my friends who certainly “went through” CND as former generations “went through” the CP (thirties) or PPU (forties) but do not think they owe anything but annoyance to those organisations for slowing up their progress.

anti-Socialists—that the employer divides up salaries according to merit. Surely you know by now—you who “came from the materialistic tradition of Leftism”—that he pays the market value for labour. It is possible in a few badly organised trades, but also in the print industry, to get overtime by bribery and keep others out of it, but those who do it keep very quiet about it. They certainly do not “justify it by saying” anything; they keep their mouths shut or deny it. This utterly untrue story—which one should not be so narrow-minded as to expose, because it attacks the “left” is of course Mr. Otter’s sociological whistling of “The working class can kiss my arse” and is not meant seriously; but it reveals that he clearly believes in Lassalle’s “Iron Law of Wages”. If he does not, the whole paragraph is meaningless. The theory expounded by Lassalle and more recently picked up by the Labour Party’s “brilliant” economists, that “as wages rise, so prices must rise, thus all trade union activity is meaningless”, one would have thought well exploded long before the turn of the century. But the exposers of “outdated anarchist myths” are driven back to defending “a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work”; the “Iron Law of Wages”; moral improvement before economic betterment; and ultimately to a defence of oppressive institutions because they do not think that a free society is possible. From whom come the “outmoded myths” but these revisionists? One might not be inclined to treat them seriously but for the need of the new ruling class to have an intellectual-justification for attacking the workers; or for the danger to anarchism of becoming fashionably radical once the possibility of it ever being taken seriously is removed. The mental struggle against authoritarianism is a good excuse for pot parties, no doubt, but could not the “amoral conscious egoist” manage without a moral excuse for once? If a free society is not possible, because the workers are so wicked, perhaps they will spell out in clear terms which is the necessary oppressive institution they wish to retain. By that institution we can know them. Those who advocate workers’ control are quite well aware that even granted it, there is a danger of oppressive institutions being built up again; the workers, at their place of work, do not have armies and bureaucrats and police at their disposal. If the latter go, you have a free society and those who feel that this may be a “greater tyranny because of public opinion” might state which oppressive institution

**But only productive classes—such as the working class or the peasantry—can play a libertarian role. This is not because they have intrinsic virtues (a conception of idealism), but (materialistically) because so long as they are productive classes they have nobody else to exploit.**

mitigates the force of public opinion. Most of them bureaucratise and establish public prejudices, which cannot survive in a non-authoritarian atmosphere.

The working class lost out on its chance of control during the thirties, when major battles were fought on this principle, and lost. The rise of the bureaucracy in Russia, and the corresponding rise of the bureaucracy

within the capitalist systems of the Western world, have proved that a new class is coming to power. Perhaps, in Hegelian dialectic (Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis), Capitalism has given rise to its antithesis, Socialism, and the Meritocracy is its synthesis. This new form of State power—variously described as managerialism, non-profit power, or bureaucracy—has

brought a new class to power. Many classes have had their day of power. Some have seized it and some have not. Many have played a revolutionary role—even the Church once did. But only productive classes—such as the working class or the peasantry—can play a libertarian role. This is not because they have intrinsic virtues (a conception of idealism), but (materialistically) because so long as they are productive classes they have nobody else to exploit. The bourgeoisie had liberal attitudes. They smashed orthodox religion and the divine right of kings and introduced popular representation. But to become libertarian they would have to cease to exploit, that is to say, cease to be bourgeoisie.

I think it likely that one day people will rebel against the holes-in-the-air offices and want to smash up the Automatic Society before it smashes them up. What if, by then, a large part of the working class only existed as doorkeepers and secretaries to the bureaucracy? They would return to production and resume a class role. Do not be too bored with the story of industrial “squabbles”, dear would-be individualists. The factory floor is the first place in society where battles against encroaching State control are being pitched each day. Infringements of individual liberty are always tried first on the dockers, then on the-car workers; and if they get through, ultimately even the professional man finds himself restricted. Do minor “squabbles” sound romanticised? Individual liberty is to be found (like Teresa of Avila’s God) “there, among the saucepans” or nowhere.

# Anarchists & Organisation: Towards Carrara

Albert Meltzer

*The Wooden Shoe* No. 1, July 1967<sup>1</sup>

*NOTE: An International Anarchist Congress is scheduled to take place in Carrara, September, 1968. Debate wages [rages] as to what shall be discussed, and who shall participate.*

In the course of many talks on the subject of anarchism, I have rarely failed to hear the criticism, especially from unorganised people, that Anarchists, of course, “disbelieve in organisation”. One goes on explaining that there is a difference between libertarian organisation on the one hand, and authoritarian organisation on the other; even among Anarchists, however, it is difficult for those proselytising from other movements to understand that the rejection of authority does not necessarily carry with it the rejection of all and any form of association.

It is not in a way surprising that those coming from highly authoritarian concepts might think that if they now reject authority, they have abandoned any method by which organisations could exist, having no experience of FREE ORGANISATION. It is equally the case that those who reduce a diluted anarchism to a mere progressive trend in sociology – inducing a fashionable tinge of radicalism and a comfortable feeling of permanent protest – might well also see no necessity to organise, since nothing can be done save as lies within the well-worn path of liberalism.

The Anarchist movement proper is not to be identified with these parasitical growths; it faces now a problem of organisation not as regards future society but as regards itself. In preparation for the proposed International Congress, the discussions as to what should be placed on the agenda are bound to remain sterile until we can answer the major question: “What is the congress about?” To prepare the way for a “federation OF national federations” (as the Paris

preparatory commission has suggested) and on which the Bulgarian Anarchists have expounded at length? The Bulgarian comrades have explained how, just as groups should combine to form a local federation, and the local federations combine to form a national federation, so finally the national federations can combine. All this, it should be said immediately, takes place on paper. The English movement has challenged it. They ask for fresh thinking as to WHAT IS A FEDERATION? The Spanish comrades, equally with the Bulgarians, lay down a clear plan as to how a

federation “should” work, but, equally with their fellow-exiles, they have no opportunity to put into practice.

WHAT IS A FEDERATION?

The idea now adopted by the Preparatory Commission, which has managed to avoid having English participation upon it, that those not in national federations should be excluded from the conference, means that, while nobody can deny that at

some point some faction must be excluded from any conference, here we have the situation where a group has only to call itself a national federation to be “recognised” as such. A larger group, thus beaten to the post, is left outside – an idea which has bedevilled the syndicalist international for years, and caused it to disappear where it could legally operate, being preserved by its movements “in exile”.

Let us cast a critical look – for the first time, I think – at this notion of anarchist “movements in exile”. I have before referred in articles to the “tragicomic” situation of the political refugee, and each time the editor of the

**For an organisation to be able to genuinely style itself an anarchist federation. i.e. a union of anarchist groups, it must be composed of groups with an active life, and the more active the life the less they will abdicate, or delegate, their responsibilities**

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted as ‘Anarchists on Organisation’ in *Freedom* 29 July 1967. (*Black Flag*)

paper concerned has altered the word – not believing his eyes – to “tragic”. Certainly the lot of the refugee in, say, France 1938/50, was fraught with hazards and danger; this was hardly the case in England, where political exile merges into cafe-keeping and the refugees, looking back at their old countries, petrified into salt like Lot’s wife, were rarely ever to be taken seriously, as a political force; notwithstanding a spectrum ranging from “Free Austrian” Allies to White Russians.

The Polish reactionaries may regard themselves as exiled in Kensington; but why are Anarchists, who reject the nation-state, in exile in any country? Our many Australian friends in the anarchist movement in London would laugh their heads off if it were suggested they form an “Australian movement in exile”; yet the Bulgarian Anarchists in Australia regard themselves in all seriousness as the “Bulgarian movement in exile”. It is true the latter are forced expatriates and the former voluntary (but not always); yet is this why the Bulgarians must remain obstinately Bulgars? The Irish, of all political opinions, never go abroad as political refugees; it is “voluntary” – i.e. economic, or sometimes mere preference – yet they always proclaim they are “EXILES” from Erin. What has this sentimental bunk to do with Anarchism? We well understand the nationalistic sentiment that induces the Irish in England to say they need separate Irish labour organisations in England; we do not understand why Spaniards, many of whom will never go back to Spain, and who are far from nationalists – who indeed risked their lives against the Nationalists – should cling to being “exiles” after 28 years of exile, if indeed they have ever been to Spain at all, to the point of requiring separate organisations. After 28 years, one is not a refugee any, more than one is still an adolescent; the refugee politician is as tragic and comical as the adolescent in his forties.

#### WHAT CAN EXILES DO?

But, you will say, the exile movement has a purpose. I wish I knew what it was. To prepare a Garibaldian expedition to the homeland? To march back in formation, re-taking the cities it lost on the way out? To be re-invited by a revolutionary movement to come back and lead it? Dreams!

It is true the Austrian refugees kept themselves firmly organised, across party lines, and went back, established by foreign arms, as a tightly-knit government and opposition. This would be quite inconceivable from an anarchist point of view; yet because there are anarchist movements “in exile”, voices have not been lacking to suggest, for instance, an “anarchist party” to put up for

the Cortes, perhaps by taking part in another (paper) government and having its stake in a (paper) republic.

Can an exile movement keep in touch with the movement at home? Certainly. But what ties has it that others of us do not have, save those of blood? – and *those* ties it has with the oppressor too! How much more effective would it be if the exile movement had integrated with the local movement, brought its experiences to bear on the local movement’s development, and helped form local working-class support for the underground movement in “the old country”. This was the attitude of the Italian Anarchists for many years. They formed Italian-language movements, but not movements in exile. Their militants helped take part and form local movements all over the world.

They helped the movement in Spain, Argentine, France, for instance, not to mention this country (Malatesta, etc.), retaining their interest in Italian affairs (e.g. sending out comrades to try to assassinate Mussolini) but not to the point of nationalism. The Russian Anarchists went equally far; Bakunin, though coming from a background of Slavophilism, became a thorough-going internationalist; Kropotkin was criticised by the patriotic Russian revolutionaries for “abandoning” Russia in his integration in the French and English movements. Whilst Emma Goldman relates (in “Living My Life”) how, when she and Berkman came to be deported from the USA they found, to their surprise, at addressing a meeting of Russians, they had forgotten how to speak Russian. (Their period in America was comparable to that of the Spanish movement “in exile” in point of time.) Lenin, to be sure, kept more in touch with Russian affairs than that, and he was successful; but he intended to form a government. If the political refugee intends to return and rule, backed by foreign arms or the dreams of a “people’s recall”, he should not forget his national tongue! But for a libertarian to remain a political refugee by choice (i.e. by conviction once his domicile or occupation is settled elsewhere) betrays a tinge of nationalism incompatible with an entire disbelief in imposed leadership. This is not to disparage the Bulgarian and Spanish Anarchists, though they themselves might note such trends in their ranks. Yet in the very suggestion of a “tight” federation is the belief that some such body must keep the exiles together. Yet is it not an impossibility? The Spanish Communist may dream (who may not?) that he will march back victorious with the Chinese Army; or Señor de Madariaga<sup>1</sup> may dream that a Cortes invoked by a

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<sup>1</sup> Salvador de Madariaga (1886-1978) was a Liberal Spanish exile. (*Black Flag*)

liberal Europe will insist he comes back and be President; but how is a “refugee” to go back and liberate his country? Either it liberates itself or it remains unfree. The Emperor Haile Selassie went back to Addis Ababa; this is not the way, surely, the Toulouse CNT dreams of going back to the old offices in the via Layetana?

### IS A FEDERATION A PARTY?

When the Anarchists speak of a federation and renounce the idea of a political party, they must bear in mind that words are of no consequence.

To call oneself a federation, yet go through the same paraphernalia of bureaucracy, abdication of responsibility, membership cards, majority decisions at conferences, etc., is to play with words. If that is not a party, what is?

True, it is equally easy to have no bureaucracy, no membership cards and precious little membership, and pass decisions without any conference to ratify them or intention to carry them out. That is not unknown either!

A “federation of federations” would merely stand in the way of international co-operation by creating a new bureaucracy. At worst it might become something on the lines of the Trotskyist International, which bestows recognition on those who toe the line and uses the International as a disciplinary force against those who do not. (This has only become a farce since the “official” line became less numerous than the “unofficial”.)

For an organisation to be able to genuinely style itself an anarchist federation. i.e. a union of anarchist groups, it must be composed of groups with an active life, and the more active the life the less they will abdicate, or delegate, their responsibilities. Such a federation should correspond with the realities of the situation, and its groups be real ones not paper kites. One can sympathise with those who feel that groups are superfluous since revolution is spontaneous, but at the same time, while the revolution can only be the work of the workers themselves, the idea of anarchism can only come from those who accept the idea.

In looking at the composition of workers’ councils insofar as they exist in industry today, they do in fact reflect the type of council that would arise in a revolutionary situation. The whole of the workers in a factory are represented; but the most active ones are supported by outside organisations with parties and factions. Should not the libertarians also unite, outside the factory, with those who want to keep authority out? It is with this in mind that one calls for the organisation of anarchists; an organisation keeping in touch with each other those who are determined to resist authority,

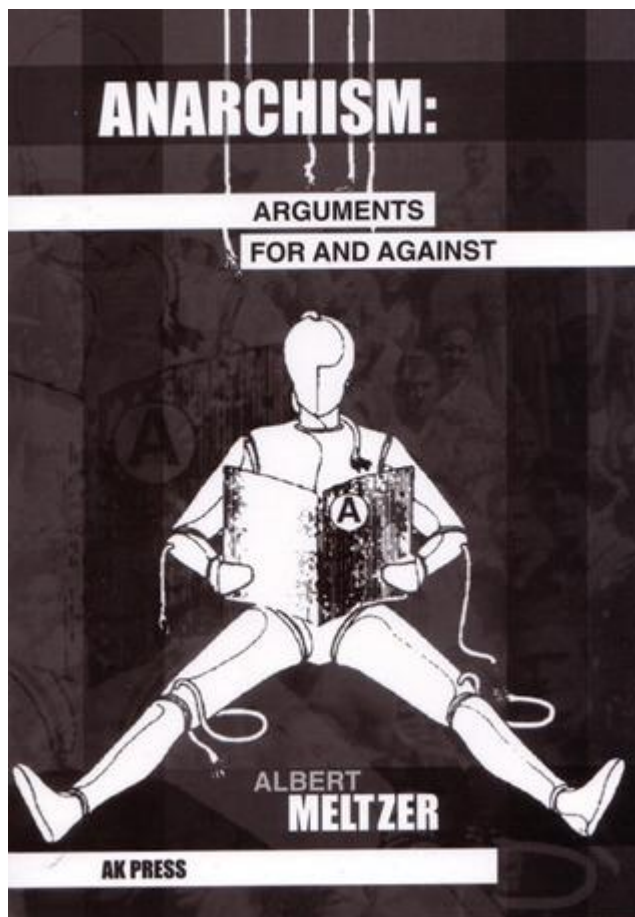
with the necessary physical and moral support to oppose those who wish to impose authority.

To prevent any organisation, even an anarchist one, from becoming a bureaucracy, is a herculean task; it is only by the right of recall that it can be done, and that functional groups can become bureaucratic is a fact of which we are all aware. The problem arises in the case of a local group where all, in theory, can be gathered at a moment’s notice; it becomes more serious in the case of an international that meets perhaps every ten years. It is a sad fact that the FAI and the Spanish libertarian movement generally have not been able to shake off the bureaucracy that was imposed in 1936, and that compromised itself

beyond belief.

Such is the problem facing the formation of an international. And yet, if we could build a non-bureaucratic and libertarian international movement, we would be able to show that anarchism was possible. At present, however, and for many years, the Anarchist movement, and particularly the rarefied air of the international and “exile” movements, have resembled nothing so much as a closely guarded Masonic Lodge, whose initiates guard secrets that have long since ceased to exist. Let us hope, if not too optimistically, that at last we may be able to break through and create a situation where anarchists can discuss mutual problems, and joint action, even criticising each other’s movements without provoking cries of “interference”, and profiting by each other’s success and failure.

“Internationalist”



# Objections to Anarchism: The Marxist-Leninist Critique of Anarchism

Albert Meltzer

*Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* No. 3 (1977)<sup>1</sup>

It is very difficult for Marxist-Leninists to make an objective criticism of Anarchism, as such, because by its nature it undermines all the suppositions basic to Marxism. If Marxism is held out to be indeed *the* basic working class philosophy, and the proletariat cannot owe its emancipation to anyone else but itself, it is hard to go back on it and say that the working class is not yet ready to dispense with authority placed over it. Marxism, therefore, normally tries to refrain from criticising anarchism as such — unless driven to doing so, when it exposes its own authoritarianism (“how can the workers run the railways, for instance, without direction — that is to say, without authority?”) and concentrates its attack not on *anarchism*, but on *anarchists*.

It has — whether one agrees with it or not — a valid criticism of the anarchists in asking how one can (now) dispense with political action — or whether one *should* throw away so vital a weapon. But this criticism varies between the schools of Marxism, since some have used it to justify complete participation in the whole capitalist power structure; while others talk vaguely only of “using parliament as a platform”. Lenin recognised the shortcomings of Marxism in this respect and insisted that the anarchist workers could not be criticised for rejecting so philistine a Marxism that it used political participation for its own sake and expected the capitalist state to let itself be voted out of existence peacefully. He therefore concentrated on another aspect, which Marx pioneered, viz. criticism of particular anarchists; and this has dominated all Leninist thinking ever since.

Because of the lack of any other criticism of the Anarchists, Leninists — especially trotskyists — to this day use the *personal criticism* method. But as Lenin

selected only a few well-known personalities who for a few years fell short of the ideals they preached, the latter-day Leninists have to hold that all anarchists are responsible for everyone who calls himself or herself an anarchist — or even (such as the Russian Social Revolutionaries) were only called such (if indeed so) by others. They, however, are responsible only for fully paid up members of their own party.

Someone pointed out to use a new Leninist body called “World Revolution” which was carrying out a “criticism” of both trotskyists and anarchists. It had the same weary old trotskyist arguments against anarchists

— making them responsible for any and every so-called anarchist — but they themselves could not take responsibility for anyone outside their own group of unknown students numbering a dozen at most. You could repeat this method over and over again.

This wrinkle in Leninism has produced another criticism of anarchism (usually confined to trots and maoists): anarchists are responsible not only for all referred

to as anarchists, but for all workers influenced by anarchist ideas, The C.N.T. is always quoted here, but significantly its whole history before and after the civil war is never mentioned; solely the period of participation in the government. For this, the anarchists must forever accept responsibility! But the trots may back the reformist union U.G.T. without accepting *any* responsibility for *any* period in its entire history. In all countries (if workers) they presumably join or (if students) accept, the reformist trade unions. That is alright. But a revolutionary trade union must forever be condemned forever for any one deviation, Moreover, if

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<sup>1</sup> This is an extract of a longer article which was later issued as a pamphlet entitled *Anarchism: Arguments for and against*. Much reprinted, a revised edition was published after Albert’s death by AK Press in 2000. (Editor)



broken, it must never be rebuilt; tire reformist union must be rebuilt in *preference*. This is the logical consequence of all trot thinking on Spain or other countries where such unions exist, proving their preference for reformist trade unionism (because of the reformist unions negative character which lends itself to a leadership they may capture; as against a decentralised union which a leadership cannot capture).

### *Petty Bourgeois*

Notwithstanding this preference for non-revolutionary unions, and condemnation of the anarchists for unions built from the bottom up, all Marxist-Leninists have a seemingly contradictory criticism of anarchists, namely “they are petty bourgeois”.

This leads them into another difficulty: How can one reconcile the existence of anarcho-syndicalist unions with “petty bourgeois” origins — and how does one get over the fact that most Marxist-Leninists today are professional gentlemen studying for or belonging to the conservative professions? The answer is usually given that *because* anarchism is “petty bourgeois” those embracing it — “whatever their occupation or social origins” must also be “petty bourgeois”; because Marxism is working class, its adherents must be working-class “at least subjectively”. This is a sociological absurdity, as if “working class” meant an ideological viewpoint. It is also a built-in escape clause.

Yet Marx was not such a fool as his followers. “Petty bourgeois” in his day did not mean a solicitor, an accountant, a factory manager, sociologist or anything of that sort (they were “bourgeois” — the term *small* it was, “petit”, not “petty” that qualified the adjective — meant precisely that these were not the same as bourgeois). The small burgher was one who had less privileges, economically, than the wealthy — but had some privileges by virtue of his craft. Anarchism, said Marx, was a movement of the *artisan worker* — that is to say, the self-employed craftsman with some leisure to think and talk, at subject to factory hours and discipline, independently minded and difficult to threaten, not backward like the peasantry. In England, these people tended to become Radicals, perhaps because the State was less oppressive and less obviously unnecessary. In many countries, however, they were much more extreme in their radicalism and in the Swiss Jura, the clockmakers, anarchism prospered. It spread to Paris and the Paris Commune was above all a rising of artisans who had been reduced to penury by Napoleon III and his war, As the capitalist technique spread throughout the world, the artisans were ruined and driven into the factories. It is these individual craftsmen entering industrialisation who become anarchists, pointed out successive Marxists. They are not conditioned to factory discipline which produces good order, a proletariat prepared to accept a leadership and a party, and to work forever in the factory provided it comes under State control.

That this observation was true is seen by the crushing of the communes in Paris and in Spain and throughout the world, especially in places like Italy, in the Jewish pale of settlement in Russia, and so on. It should be the task of an anarchist union movement to seize the factories, but only in order to break down mass production and get back to craftsmanship. *This* is what Marx meant by a “petty bourgeois” outlook, and time term having changed, its meaning totally, the Marxists misunderstand him totally.

### *Vanguards*

The reluctance of Marxist-Leninists to accept *change* is, however, above all seen in the acceptance of Lenin’s conception of the Party. (It is not that of Marx). Lenin saw that Russia was a huge mass of inertia, with a peasantry that would not budge but took all its suffering with an Asiatic patience. He looked to the “proletariat” to push it. But the “proletariat” was only a small part of the Russia of his day. Still he recognised it as the one class with an interest in progress provided he felt it had a direction — of shrewd, calculating, ruthless and highly educated people (who could only come from the upper classes in the Russia of the time). The party they created should become, as much as possible, the party of the proletariat in which that class could organise and seize power. It had then the right and the duty to wipe out all other parties.

The idiocy of applying this policy *today* — in a country, like Britain — is incredible. One has only to *look* at the parties which offer themselves as the various parties of the proletariat (of which, incidentally, there could be only one). Compare them with the people around. The parties’ membership are *far behind* in political intelligence and understanding. They are largely composed of tallow, inexperienced, youthful enthusiasts who understand far less about class struggle than the average worker.

Having translated the Russian Revolution into a mythology which places great stress on the qualities possessed by its leadership, they then pretend to possess that leadership charisma. But as they don’t have it there is a total divorce between the working class and the so-called New Left, which has, therefore, to cover itself up with long-winded phrases in the hope that this will pass for learning; in the wider “Movement” with definitions at second-hand from Marxist-Leninism they scratch around to find someone sally as backward and dispossessed as the *moujik*, and fall back on the “Third World” mythology...

The one criticism applied by Marxist-Leninists of anarchism with any serious claim to be considered is, therefore, solely that of whether political action should be considered or not. This is a purely negative attitude by anarchists. Wherever anarchists have undertaken it, because of circumstances, it has ended in disaster and betrayal of the revolutionary movement much as when Marxists have undertaken it.

# Transition and the right to well-being

Albert Meltzer

*Black Flag*, April 1981

It is a deliberate lie to say that we are in the grip of a *recession*, which is a temporary slump in trade, part of the ebb and flow of normality.

This does not describe the economic situation in Great Britain nor that prevailing in most of the capitalist nations. It is pure governmental propaganda to suggest that it is; and all the slogans of getting the Tories out, “ditch the bitch” and the like are an attempt to trivialise and personalise the issue. It is not Mrs Thatcher’s lack of compassion or dogmatic errors that are responsible for the present slump. She could, as the previous Labour governments did, direct the economy in such a way that the nature of the unemployment crisis is overlooked. Labour governments became adept at cosmetic surgery and also, to do them justice, introduced or permitted to continue what one might call first-aid measures to help the casualties of economic crisis. These are now cut because they are clearly cosmetic and therefore “uneconomic”.

But Labour politicians accepted, and made a great national saga of, the theory that there is an inevitable ebb and flow of world trade, the crisis theory of economics that balances the conspiracy theory of politics. It is untrue. This is not a recession but a transition.

## *Transition*

The capitalist world is undergoing a major change similar to economic revolutions of the past, which have displaced class after class. Now it is the working class who are being displaced. They are losing the right to work. It is not that there is a temporary lull in work: the need for work is disappearing. Technology has displaced the need for many human hands before and is doing so still. What we now see is the whole of heavy industry vanishing, whole towns and regions made redundant – not just in the industrial sense either. It is a problem of “what to do with the people”, which States have often on their hands – which criminal Statism often deals with by genocide but which less totalitarian regimes have to settle by evasive measures. There are now whole regions which the State may as well write off as no longer being financially viable. The work of keeping industry going falls into fewer and fewer hands. The industrial proletariat as such is vanishing. Under rising capitalism an expanding work force was essential, and it had power in its hands: it lost its opportunity to take over and is now paying the price.

## **The right to work is the right to be exploited; it is the right to be slaves**

It was always possible under rising capitalism for an increasing number of the work force employed in industry to think of itself as “middle class” socially because it once had, and in many cases

still has, social advantages – not getting their hands dirty, or getting paid holidays and sickness when these were not general – which have now dwindled solely to having had further educational facilities, but with the same ability to be turned on the dustbin as anyone else – their social advantages reduced to being able to get a better grasp of the small print in DHSS circulars.

## *Consequences of defeat*

The working class movement was defeated long ago, or taken over by others. It has collectively no more idea of what has hit it than any of the social classes dispossessed in the past and most of the protests that have arisen have been diverted into pointless political demands with the only coherent one “the right to work”. A pathetic slogan: The right to work is the right to be exploited; it is the right to be slaves, (which the government does not deny). It is the right not to be subjected to genocide, the logical outcome of redundancy for a class: which is certainly an important right, but surely we have a long way to come to that? The opposite of the right to work – the right to drop out and stagnate – is equally destructive: that is the right to accept what the State propose, capable of realisation, since no government will object to it!

## *Why unemployment*

The capitalist countries face unemployment and “recessions” and not communist countries for a simple reason: the uninhibited free market (to which the Tory Government is devoted) means there is no economic necessity for the people who have been displaced by the technological progress of the twentieth century.

They have therefore to be pushed out of meaningful productive jobs into the “digging holes and filling them in” type of toil, upon which governments, according to the degree of human feeling prevalent, may make variations. (One of the main ones, for instance, is the huge growth of the university industry, not to spread education, or to provide a better educated workforce, but humanely to reduce unemployment and incidentally to brainwash and condition).

The totalitarian countries are able to plan ahead and utilise their workforce as they wish. No need to use the lever of unemployment, or face union opposition through putting workers out of their homes or into jobs far below those for which they have trained. The work force there is like an army and it goes where it is put. There is no point in unemployment, all that is done is to alter the categories when putting them through the educational stage and planning for the future – fewer industrial workers, more psychiatrists; more manual jobs, more servile jobs and less skilled work for the period ten years ahead. In fact (like it or not) unemployment shows the democratic side of capitalism, not its dictatorial side; for in dictatorships there is no unemployment since people are set to work as the government requires. This does not alter the fact that unemployment is a major social evil, but the alternative is not the right to work but *the right to well-being*.

If the community advances all are responsible – if we are not now in the conditions of the Middle ages everyone has contributed in one way or another to what is, and the right to well-being is universal. Not just for

the famous, or the rich, or the well-connected; not just for the proletariat or for all those who work – but *all*.

Since the major advance in technology has meant that there is not enough work for all to do, the solution lies in reducing the amount of work we do, and extending the amount of leisure that we have, and balancing work and leisure, so that work is not a punishment and leisure is not a bore. The fact that no governments of whatever hue, and no States of whatever economic background, wish to achieve this, does not mean that we cannot nevertheless insist on our basic human right to share in *well-being*. The sooner this is realised the better, for even though it needs a complete revolution, the moment this is appreciated [it] colours our attitudes. No one need be ashamed of asking for “too much” when they know we have been deprived of everything, nor regard a mystical “social welfare” and moderate their demands accordingly.

Everything is ours, the government creates nothing. We have the right to live well. The State has no right to exist but force.

## What is the middle class?

**Albert Meltzer**

*Black Flag* No. 206 October 1995

Prime Minister John Major referred to Tories achieving a ‘classless society’. He was referring to the gradual move from the English class system to the American. In England the survival of the old upper class is ensured by the constitutional monarchy, against which the middle class is beginning to rebel, or at least not regard expressions of rebellion as reprehensible.

The old upper class has managed to snatch on to influence (where once it had supreme power) by social snobbery, beginning with the schools, ensuring that people who make huge sums of money are frozen out of the Establishment unless and until they conform to their requirements. The upper class classically retain certain areas within themselves, such as the leadership of the Church and Army, the judges, the Foreign Office and the upper reaches of the Civil Service. But now the bourgeoisie is moving in. Power in the Tory Party has shifted from the patricians to those whose only God is Money and of whom Baroness Thatcher is still the prophet.

The idea that a multi-millionaire could be excluded from an Establishment of which slobs like the Marquesses of Blandford and Bristol, the late Lord Moynihan or Lord Lucan are members by birth has lingered on in Britain. It is now moving to the American conception of class. The middle class, now on top, has finally won its revolution and creates its own myth, not

one of Birth and Breeding, but that anyone with ability can rise to any position regardless of birth. It is equally false.

Many Russians have fallen for the notion that the end of State communism would bring the American dream and they would be driving their Cadillacs at weekends to country cottages complete with swimming pools. The favoured few had this under Stalinism. What was in power, generating wealth for itself, was the Civil Service and the politicians. It was as hereditary as the middle class system, since wealth begets education and opportunity, though not based solely on birth as is the aristocratic system. Trotskyists demur at the term ‘ruling class’ to describe this class, but what else were they? Whatever they should be termed, they are now determined to retain their status in a ruling class capacity.

The myth of Marxist-Leninism was that all in Russia were working-class, including the favoured few with wealth and power. It was supposed to be a workers’ state. The parallel myth of Western capitalism is that all are (or could be) middle class, which is the norm, the middle of nothing!

Just as only vestiges of the old upper class exist on Britain, politicians and the media now have it that only vestiges of the working class exist. They are trying to erode both the aristocratic class and the working class. Eroding the upper class means that they are pushed down from being wealthy landowners to becoming

company directors. Eroding the working class means they are pushed down from productive work to pauperism. The middle class want to put into effect what they have always believed - that the capitalists or the State 'give' work' to the worker, who is parasitic on them. and not vice versa as is so obviously the case.

"But we are all workers now". Humbug! What they mean is everybody functions some way - even the Queen opens bazaars. But a once productive class is being pushed out of productive jobs to go into dead end occupations servicing the rich. Production is being switched to Third World countries so that it can be done as cheaply and shoddily as possible, and the pretence of generosity by aid programmes maintained. On the other end of the scale, the interesting and glamorous jobs that were once entirely working class are becoming available almost exclusively to the gilded young of the middle class, occasionally the formerly upper class too. The theatrical profession is a typical example, where the 'rogues and vagabonds' of Elizabethan times became the trod-upon outcasts of the eighteenth century and the working stiffs of the 19th, but by the second half of the 20th century, pampered darlings, almost exclusively middle class. Journalism, and by extension the media, is another instance. Sub-editors. and even editors, once came from the same class as printers. Now all but a very few specialists come from the posh universities and are in a position to ascertain that authors will be of the same social class.

#### *The Mandarins*

There is in any case another class, thought of as middle class but depending for its status on power, not profit. Like Stalin's bureaucracy, it is a ruling class though it is dependent on the politicians. It may makes a profit or not. it may run a quango or a monopoly, a multi-national or a university, a public company or a State industry or its individual members can pass from one to the other. These are the new lords and occasionally ladies of creation, whether one thinks of them as Soviet commissars, company directors or old-style Chinese scholar mandarins. They call themselves the meritocracy. They are becoming the most powerful in the dominant middle class, the most likely to aspire to becoming a new aristocracy.

#### *The hangers-on*

Marxist-Leninism claimed in Russia everyone was working class, whether proletarian, commissar or gulag slave, while the former aristocracy, hiding out or in exile, were reckoned as scapegoat ruling class to be blamed for all the ills of the system. American capitalism claims all are middle class and there is no class division. British capitalism adds a few more illusions to this by way of educational snobbery or the honours system. The lies put over by the Hollywood Dream Factory or the Lie Factories of Britain's press lead many to suppose that they are not working class

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when they patently are, or even that the working class has ceased to exist.

The middle, now dominant, class embraces the very rich, the parasites on business, the business careerist, the upper ranks of the civil servant, and the hangers-on to certain social values. It does not include those who acquire property instead of spending their wages on booze and fags, or have a mortgage or a car bought by their own work. The working class in good times can prosper, but remain under capitalism. If active in economic struggle they can, when labour is scarce, earn the same as, or more than, the lower middle class. It is a fallacy to suppose that prosperity changes their status.

Those with specialist skills sometimes fool themselves, invariably to their own detriment, that they have different class interests, and identify with the ruling class. Nationalism and patriotism are used for the same purpose: to identify with the State and so with one's own exploitation. This obscures the issue, but does not change it.

We do not have to accept being ground down by parasites upon society. The destruction of heavy industry does not necessarily mean the destruction of the productive class itself but of its organisations within heavy industry. The alternative to heavy industry need not be pauperism, which is being accepted today as if it were a natural catastrophe, but co-operation based on self-employment. Self-employed, small local collectives and a new kind of co-operative movement can link up with other forms of industrial organisation. University-processed Marxism sneers at the independent worker as 'petty bourgeois'. But the value of artisan organisation as part of the working class struggle has been proven time and again in industrial disputes and in revolutions. Today the capitalist not only does not give work but actively takes it away. To be strong enough to fight back we need to set our own work agenda. In fighting back it is not enough make reforms, to curtail profits or to circumvent the effects of wage slavery. These are desirable but leaves the dangerous capitalist beast of prey wounded but all the more dangerous. The class system has to be wiped out

# Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Harbinger of Anarchism

Iain McKay

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) is usually considered as the father of anarchism, someone who both raised the main ideas of libertarian socialist thought and named them when he proclaimed “I am an anarchist” in 1840.<sup>1</sup> Yet he is regularly accused of being contradictory and an inspiration for many political ideologies, from anarchism to fascism.

The latter claim is most associated with American professor J. Salwyn Schapiro and an article published in the prestigious *The American Historical Review* entitled “Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Harbinger of Fascism”.<sup>2</sup> This was expanded four years later as a chapter in his book *Liberalism and the Challenge of Fascism*.<sup>3</sup> Schapiro rested his case on a series of quotations and references which presented Proudhon as hating democracy and socialism, a supporter of dictatorship, an opponent of the labour movement, a racist who viewed blacks as the lowest of all races, a supporter of the South during the American Civil War, an anti-feminist, an anti-Semite and as a despiser of the “common man.”

Schapiro’s argument has been supported by many commentators on Proudhon and anarchism. For historian E.H. Carr, it “depicts [Proudhon] with skill and plausibility as the first progenitor of



**Pierre-Joseph Proudhon  
(1809-1865)**

Hitlerism.”<sup>4</sup> It was later repeated by Socialist writer George Lichtheim in 1969 and, via Lichtheim, Marxist academic Paul Thomas in 1980.<sup>5</sup> More recently, the introductory material to the Cambridge Texts edition of *What is Property* included Schapiro’s book in its list of “most useful studies” of Proudhon (along with six other works which argue the opposite) and suggests his ideas have influenced “all parts of the political spectrum, not excepting fascism”. Peter Marshall felt obliged to mention Schapiro’s claims, if only in passing, in his

well-known history of anarchism.

Within left-wing activist circles, Schapiro’s thesis is best known for its use by Marxist Hal Draper who repeated many of his quotations and claims in the influential pamphlet *The Two Souls of Socialism*.<sup>6</sup> Draper’s account was restated in the 1980s by Leninist David McNally in his pamphlet *Socialism from Below*<sup>7</sup> which, likewise, repeated many of the quotations Schapiro first used. More recently, Marxist academic Alan Johnson championed Draper as a Marxist scholar who defended real socialism and, to illustrate his case, quoted Proudhon via Schapiro: “Proudhon (‘all this democracy disgusts me’).”<sup>8</sup> Thus generations of

<sup>1</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, “What is Property?”, *Property is Theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon Anthology* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), Iain McKay (ed.), 133.

<sup>2</sup> J. Salwyn Schapiro, “Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Harbinger of Fascism”, *The American Historical Review* 50: 4 (July 1945).

<sup>3</sup> J. Salwyn Schapiro, *Liberalism and the Challenge of Fascism: Social Forces in England 1815-1870* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1949).

<sup>4</sup> E.H. Carr, “Proudhon: Robinson Crusoe of Socialism”, *Studies in Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1950), 40.

<sup>5</sup> George Lichtheim, *The Origins of Socialism* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 86; Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the anarchists* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 186.

<sup>6</sup> *The Two Souls of Socialism*, (Berkeley: Independent Socialist Committee, 1966), 10-11. He added his own (non-referenced) quotations into the mix: “For Proudhon, see the chapter in J.S. Schapiro’s *Liberalism and the Challenge of Fascism*, and Proudhon’s *Carnets*”. (27) Much reprinted, this pamphlet was included in a collection of his writings entitled *Socialism From Below* (Alameda: Center for Socialist History, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> David McNally, *Socialism from Below: The History of an Idea* (Chicago: International Socialist Organisation, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Alan Johnson, “Democratic Marxism: The Legacy of Hal Draper”, *Marxism, the Millennium and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), Mark Cowling and Paul Reynolds (eds.), 202.

Marxist activists have had Schapiro's claims on Proudhon as part of their ideological education and, via them, repeated to countless anarchists.

Was the thinker who influenced the likes of Alexander Herzen, Joseph Déjacque, Michael Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, Rudolf Rocker and Daniel Guérin (to name just a few) misunderstood by them and really a proto-fascist?

To ask such a question should answer it but, as noted, Schapiro's claims are repeated to this day. Given this, an evaluation of Schapiro's work is well overdue. While Italian anti-fascist Nicola Chiaromonte<sup>1</sup> provided a succinct critique to his original article at the time, this work is not well-known even though it "is one of the best essays written on Proudhon".<sup>2</sup> One Proudhon scholar simply noted that "to argue that Proudhon was a proto-fascist suggests that one has never looked seriously at Proudhon's writings".<sup>3</sup> Another, based on an extensive analysis of *La guerre et la paix* and its place in Proudhon's thought, likewise dismisses Schapiro's claims: "Proudhon was no fascist".<sup>4</sup>

However, no in-depth analysis of Schapiro's claims has been made by comparing them with the references he provided to support them. This lack has allowed Schapiro's use of quotations and summaries to remain unchallenged and protected by the status of "peer reviewed". Until this is done, any dismissals can themselves be dismissed as it cannot be denied that parts of Schapiro's account are correct, or at least partially so, and this lent credence to the rest. Yet, as will be shown, his case rests on poor scholarship as it is marked by invention, selective quoting, dubious translation and omission.

As Schapiro claims that an "exhaustive examination of his writings convinced the author, reluctantly to be sure, that Proudhon was a harbinger of fascism in its essential outlook and its sinister implications", quoting from these writings is unavoidable. (ix)<sup>5</sup> Once done, Schapiro's claims will be exposed as a complete distortion of Proudhon's ideas and, given their use by Marxists

in their attacks on anarchism, relevant to anarchists today.

### ***On Democracy and Universal Suffrage***

The first, and most repeated, claim that Proudhon was a proto-fascist rests with his views of democracy. Schapiro makes many assertions on these in his original article but provides only three actual quotations. While supplemented by other quotations and claims, these remain the centrepiece of his revised chapter and show his technique at work. The first offered is the most quoted:

Proudhon's contempt and hatred of democracy overflowed all decent bounds, and he descended to a degree of disgusting vilification, reached only by the fascists of our day. "All this democracy disgusts me," he wrote. "It wishes to be scratched where vermin causes itching, but it does not at all wish to be combed or to be deloused. What would I not give to sail into this mob with my clenched fists!" (350)

The reference given is "*Correspondance XI: 197*" yet Proudhon did not write the text provided for Schapiro combines three separate sentences into one passage without indicating any missing text nor that they appear on different pages. Context is likewise removed as is the fact that Proudhon is referring to different things on the two pages.

The first sentence relates to Proudhon bemoaning how others on the left were attacking him as "a false *democrat*, a false friend of progress, a false republican" due to his critical position on Polish independence.<sup>6</sup> Unlike most of the French left, Proudhon opposed the creation of a Polish state as summarised immediately before the words Schapiro quotes:

What is worse is that M. Élias Regnault [... while] not responding to any of the *impossibilities* of reconstitution which I indicated, none the less persists in demanding the *reestablishment of Poland*, on the pretext that nobilitarian [*nobiliaire*], Catholic, aristocratic Poland, divided into

<sup>1</sup> Nicola Chiaromonte, "Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: an uncomfortable thinker", *Politics* (January 1946).

<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Hoffman, *Revolutionary Justice: The Social and Political Theory of P.-J. Proudhon* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 204.

<sup>3</sup> Steven K. Vincent, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984], 234.

<sup>4</sup> Alex Prichard, *Justice, Order and Anarchy: The International Political Theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (London: Routledge, 2013), 171.

<sup>5</sup> Schapiro draws most from Proudhon's correspondence (22 references) followed by *La Révolution sociale démontrée par le coup d'État du 2 décembre* (14 references) and so hardly representative of his writings.

<sup>6</sup> *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon* (Paris: Lacroix, 1875) XI: 196.

castes, has a life of its own, and that it has the right to live this life *regardless!*<sup>1</sup>

Once the context is understood, Proudhon's meaning becomes clear. He is arguing that an independent Poland would *not* be a democracy but rather a regime ruled by a nobility living on the backs of the peasantry. He is mocking those on the left who violate their own stated democratic principles by supporting the creation of a feudal regime as becomes clear from the next paragraph:

*All this democracy disgusts me. Reason serves no purpose with it, nor principles, nor facts. It does not matter to it that it contradicts itself with every step. It has its hobby-horses, its tics and its fancies; it wants to be scratched where the maggots itch, but it will not hear of comb nor scrubbing; it resembles that beggar saint who, gnawed alive by maggots, put them back into his wounds when they escaped.*<sup>2</sup> (*italics* indicates words quoted by Schapiro)

By ignoring the very obvious sarcasm and then removing without indicating most of this paragraph, including the key words that the left “contradicts itself with every step”, Schapiro obscures Proudhon's point, namely that these French democrats are contradicting their own claimed principles by supporting the creation of an aristocratic and caste-divided regime. Proudhon makes this point elsewhere:

May the Polish nobles support the idea of February [i.e., the social and democratic republic], the end of militarism and the constitution of economic right, and, by serving general civilisation, they will serve their country better than by a futile display of nationality.<sup>3</sup>

In 1863, he lamented that “aristocratic Poland [...] enjoys greater authority than universal suffrage itself” in the French left, urging the Polish nobles

to embrace the emancipation of the serfs and land reform as well as looking forward to “a representative constitution, based on universal suffrage” for both Poland and Russia.<sup>4</sup>

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**his most damning quotation, the one repeated by Marxists ever since, is simply selective quoting which turns Proudhon's arguments for democracy – in which he wishes the democrats would be consistently in favour of it – into their opposite**

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Schapiro does not explain why Proudhon opposed the Polish national movement and, like those he mocked, considered support for it as an example of “liberal nationalism”, the “Siamese twin” of democracy. (350) Proudhon's opposition to nationalism is instead portrayed as French nationalist in nature rather than being based on class-analysis.<sup>5</sup>

The last sentence quoted by Schapiro appears on a different page and by then Proudhon had changed subject. Rather than discussing democracy, Proudhon is referring to “certain patriots” who were slandering him as “a conservative, a proprietor, an Orleanist, a bourgeois” and seeking “to stop the sale of my pamphlets” before writing “What would I not give to sail into this mob with my clenched fists!” As can be seen, Schapiro's “this mob” is *not* referring to the people exercising their democratic rights but rather a group opposed to Proudhon's ideas whom he describes as a “hydra” from whose “jaws” he sought to “pull the republican idea from”.<sup>6</sup>

In short, his most damning quotation, the one repeated by Marxists ever since, is simply selective quoting which turns Proudhon's arguments for democracy – in which he wishes the democrats

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<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance* XI: 197.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance* XI: 197.

<sup>3</sup> “La Guerre et la paix”, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Rivière, 1927) VI: 506.

<sup>4</sup> “Si les traités de 1815 ont cessé d'exister ? : actes du futur congrès”, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Rivière, 1952) XIII: 417, 412, 426-7.

<sup>5</sup> Also see Prichard's discussion of Proudhon's views on Poland (59-64). Nor does Schapiro explain why a proto-fascist would be opposed to nationalism nor why one would seek to federalise all nations, including France (Prichard, 57-8).

<sup>6</sup> *Correspondance* XI: 198.

would be consistently in favour of it – into their opposite.

Much the same can be said of the second quotation. Schapiro does not ponder why, if Proudhon included “popular sovereignty” in the “political poverties” upon which he “unleashed a furious, almost obscene assault”, he criticised universal suffrage for resulting in “the strangling of the public conscience, the suicide of popular sovereignty, and the apostasy of the Revolution”? (349) Moreover, the reference for this quotation does not actually provide this passage although it does mention its actual source.<sup>1</sup> It is worth quoting:

Q. — What is your opinion on universal suffrage?

A. — As all constitutions have established it since '89, universal suffrage is the strangulation of the public conscience, the suicide of popular sovereignty, the apostasy of the Revolution. Such a system of votes can well, on the occasion, and despite all the precautions taken against it, give a negative vote to power, as did the last Parisian vote (1857): it is unable to produce an idea. To make the vote for all intelligent, moral, democratic, it is necessary, for having organised the balance of services and having ensured, by free discussion, the independence of the votes, to make the citizens vote by categories of functions, in accordance with the principle of the collective force which forms the basis of society and the State.<sup>2</sup>

Proudhon's arguments that centralised, unitarian democracy is fundamentally undemocratic and in favour of a decentralised, federalist, functional democracy are turned by Schapiro into opposition to democracy as such.

The third quotation, Schapiro suggests, showed that for Proudhon “[u]niversal suffrage created the worst of all governments because it was ‘the idea of the state infinitely extended’”. (349) This is referenced to *Les Confessions d'un révolutionnaire* yet Schapiro fails to mention that Proudhon was *not* referring to universal suffrage as such but

rather “governmental democracy” and how he had “proved” it was “only an inverted monarchy.” An anarchist denouncing Statist universal suffrage is not the same as opposing democracy. Likewise, Schapiro fails to note that Proudhon continued by arguing that such a centralised system “is the union of all agricultural holdings into a single agricultural holding; of all industrial enterprises into a single industrial enterprise”, in other words combining economic power as well as political power into the hands of those at the top of the State.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Proudhon was quoting an earlier work, *La Démocratie*, issued days after the February Revolution in which he had argued that the democracy favoured by the Left – a centralised, unitarian one – denied the sovereignty of the People. It is worth discussing this pamphlet as it summarises Proudhon's argument that bourgeois democracy is, in fact, not that democratic as it empowers the handful of politicians who make up the government rather than the people they claim to represent. Thus, “[a]ccording to democratic theory, due to ignorance or impotence, the People cannot govern themselves: after declaring the principle of the People's sovereignty, democracy, like monarchy, ends up declaring *the incapacity of the People!*” Such a regime is based on “inequality of wealth, delegation of sovereignty and government by influential people. Instead of saying, as M. Thiers did, that *the King reigns and does not govern*, democracy says that *the People reigns and does not govern*, which is to deny the Revolution.” He contrasts democracy to a republic (which he calls a “positive anarchy”) in which all citizens “reign and govern”<sup>4</sup> based on (male) universal suffrage bolstered by measures to make it more than just electing masters:

In the end, we are all voters; we can choose the most worthy.

We can do more; we can follow them step-by-step in their legislative acts and their votes; we will make them transmit our arguments and our documents; we will suggest our will to them, and when we are

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Desjardins, *P.-J. Proudhon: sa vie, ses œuvres, sa doctrine* (Paris: Perrin, 1896). It should be noted that in the pages Schapiro references (II: 214ff), Desjardins had no doubt that Proudhon was an anarchist and links his ideas on federalism to later anarchists like Bakunin, Reclus and Kropotkin as well as the Paris Commune.

<sup>2</sup> “Justice in the Revolution and in the Church”, *Property is Theft!*, 676-7. It should also be noted that immediately before this, Proudhon dismissed dictatorship out of hand (676).

<sup>3</sup> “Les confessions d'un révolutionnaire pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de février”, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Rivière, 1929) VII: 185.

<sup>4</sup> “Solution to the Social Problem”, *Property is Theft!*, 278, 267, 280.



discontented, we will recall and dismiss them.

The choice of talents, the imperative mandate, and permanent revocability are the most immediate and incontestable consequences of the electoral principle. It is the inevitable programme of all democracy.

No more than constitutional monarchy, however, does democracy agree to such a deduction from its principle.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, democracy – considered as a centralised, unitarian representative regime – cannot achieve its stated goals of popular self-government and participation, meaning that Proudhon’s argument which sought to show why governmental democracy was not democratic is turned, again, into an opposition to democracy as such. As Proudhon repeatedly argues, only a decentralised, federal and functional system could achieve a meaningful democracy by applying universal suffrage in every grouping within society (bar the family) whether political or economic:

What then is universal suffrage, considered no longer in its [current] material operations, but in its life, in its idea?... It is the social power or collective force of the nation in its initiating form and now in the activity of its functions, that is to say in the full exercise of its sovereignty. [...] In universal suffrage, in a word, we possess, but on a limited basis, or to put it better in an embryonic state, the entire system of future society. To reduce it to the nomination by the people of a few hundred deputies without initiative [...] is to make social sovereignty a fiction, to stifle the Revolution in its very principle.<sup>2</sup>

A centralised, unitarian republic would not secure democracy in the sense of active participation of the people in managing their common affairs for, as he put it in 1846, “from the moment that the essential conditions of power — that is, authority, property, hierarchy — are preserved, the suffrage of the people is nothing but the consent of the people to their oppression.”<sup>3</sup> Hence the need for

socio-economic federalism to make universal suffrage meaningful as “the division of the country into its natural groups, provinces or regions, departments, cantons, communes, trade associations [*corporations*], etc.” would ensure that “[u]niversal suffrage, with its rational constituencies, is [...] the Revolution, not only political, but economic”.<sup>4</sup> The creation of citizens “can only be achieved through decentralisation” otherwise the people would “enjoy only a fictitious sovereignty”.<sup>5</sup>

Schapiro laments that in *Du Principe fédérative* Proudhon makes it “difficult, very difficult, to get a clear idea of the scheme of economic government that Proudhon called ‘mutualism’.” While Proudhon makes no mention of “two national federations, one of producers and another of consumers” in this work, he does mention a council “chosen by the various associations” to “regulate their common affairs” but Schapiro does not indicate how Proudhon thought these would be chosen. (353) Yet that work is clear on the internal processes within the various associations, arguing that there would be “democratic equality and its legitimate expression, universal suffrage” and so “equality before the law and universal suffrage form the basis” of “groups that make up the Confederation” which would be “governing, judging and administering themselves in full sovereignty according to their own laws”. This ensured that “[i]n the federative system, the social contract is more than a fiction, it is a positive, effective pact which has really been proposed, discussed, voted, adopted and which is regularly modified according to the will of the contractors. Between the federative contract and Rousseau’s and ’93, there is the whole distance from reality to hypothesis.”<sup>6</sup>

As this would refute his case, these – like so many other passages – go unmentioned by Schapiro. As Aaron Norland later summarised, “Proudhon sought to make certain that the sovereignty of the people, which Rousseau held could never be alienated, would indeed never be alienated” and the “surprising thing, particularly in view of the vituperation which Proudhon heaped upon Rousseau, is the extent to which the thought of

<sup>1</sup> “Solution to the Social Problem”, 273; Also see, “Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*”, *Property is Theft!*, 379.

<sup>2</sup> “Les démocrates assermentés et les réfractaires”, *Oeuvres complètes* XIII: 84.

<sup>3</sup> *Système des contradictions économiques ou Philosophie de la misère* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1846) I: 357.

<sup>4</sup> “Les démocrates assermentés”, 86.

<sup>5</sup> “La Révolution sociale démontrée par le coup d’État du 2 décembre”, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Rivière, 1936) IX: 135.

<sup>6</sup> “Du Principe Fédératif et de la nécessité de reconstituer le parti de la révolution”, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Rivière, 1959) XV: 544, 545-6, 318. Also see, “The Political Capacity of the Working Classes”, *Property is Theft!*, 760-1.

Proudhon parallels that of Rousseau on many fundamental points.”<sup>1</sup> Schapiro does mention Proudhon’s critique of Rousseau’s democracy that “it was ‘disguised aristocracy,’ because government was controlled by a few men, called ‘representatives’” and used “the state to dominate the people” and “against the disinherited proletariat in the interest of the propertied class”. (349-350) Yet rather than pursue this class analysis which is the basis of Proudhon’s critique of (bourgeois) democracy, Schapiro hastily moves on.

Space precludes discussing his other claims beyond noting that his evidence for Proudhon’s “hatred” of democracy turn out to be baseless, at best simply a product of selective quoting. It comes as no surprise, then, to discover Proudhon proclaiming that “I am a democrat: my explanations, constantly repeated, of what I mean by *an-archy* testify to that.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***On Revolution and Louis-Napoleon***

Part of Schapiro’s wider argument is that Louis-Napoleon was a proto-fascist Statesman. Given this, he is keen to show that Proudhon supported Louis-Napoleon’s transformation of the Presidency into the position of Emperor and the Second Republic into the Second Empire:

Forcefully and repeatedly Proudhon [*La Révolution sociale démontrée par le coup d’État du 2 décembre*] drove home the idea that a social revolution could be

accomplished only through the dictatorship of one man. Because of party divisions the revolution, so necessary to France, could not come from the deliberations of a popular assembly but from the dictatorship

of one man, supported by the people [...] The “anarchist” Proudhon [...] now welcomed the constitution of the Second Empire that established the dictatorship of Louis Napoleon. (355-6)

There are numerous issues with this.

First, Schapiro does not explain how Proudhon could have “hailed the dictatorial Second Empire as the long awaited, passionately hoped for, historical event that would usher

**“We are socialists [...] under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social* ownership [...] We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers’ associations [...] It is not enough to say that one is opposed to the presidency unless one also does away with ministries [...] It is up to the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power through its joint deliberations and votes. [...] Besides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the imperative mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty!... That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy.”**

– Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*, 1848

in *le troisième monde*” in a book published in July 1852 when the Second Empire was created in December 1852. (354-5) When the book was published, Louis-Napoleon was still the democratically elected President of the Second Republic, albeit one who had disbanded the National Assembly in the name of universal (male) suffrage, rewrote the constitution to expand the powers of his position and had this ratified by 7,600,000 votes in a plebiscite. It could be argued that the differences between the Presidential regime of 1852 and the Second Empire are slight but the fact remains that Proudhon could not have commented upon an Empire that did not exist. Regardless, he had not “welcomed” the coup of December 1851, writing that “I accept the fait

<sup>1</sup> Aaron Noland, “Proudhon and Rousseau”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (January-March 1967), 51, 54.

<sup>2</sup> “Mélanges: Articles de Journaux 1848-1852 III”, *Œuvres complètes de P.-J. Proudhon* (Paris: Lacroix, 1871) XIX: 32.

accompli – just as the astronomer, fallen into a cistern, would accept his accident”.<sup>1</sup>

Second, in spite of Proudhon allegedly “repeatedly” proclaiming the need for dictatorship, Schapiro provides a single page as a reference. On that page Proudhon had this to say:

I have already said how dictatorship, so familiar to the Romans, the abuse of which eventually engendered Caesarean autocracy, disgusted me. I consider it a theocratic and barbaric institution, in every case a threat to freedom; I reject it even more so when the delegation that it supposes is indefinite in its object and unlimited in its duration. Dictatorship then is for me nothing more than tyranny: I do not discuss it, I hate it, and if the opportunity arises, I assassinate it...<sup>2</sup>

Proudhon then *describes* (“It were as if [Louis-Napoleon] had said to the country”) the regime created in December 1851 along the lines Schapiro summarises. It should go without saying that describing does not indicate agreement. Elsewhere, he notes that “I am opposed to dictatorship, and any kind of coup d’État” and as “Government is impossible” then “Personal, or despotic, government is impossible”.<sup>3</sup>

Third, Schapiro makes no attempt to explain Proudhon’s ideas on revolution and social progress. Unless this is understood then his claim that Proudhon “hailed the overthrow of the Second Republic as a great step of progress” can have a superficial appearance of validity. (335) However, once they are then its weakness becomes clear. For Proudhon, social and economic developments were moving in a progressive direction regardless of the political regime or politicians in office:

Proudhon looked upon [revolution] as a slow evolutionary movement according to natural law, continuing in spite of changes in constitutions and forms of government. The laws of social economy he held to be independent of the will of man and of the legislator. The Revolution will be accomplished because there is a *tendency* in

the masses toward well-being and virtue. Society always advances. For these reasons Proudhon could write that the Revolution was furthered by the *coup d’état* of Louis Napoleon, December 2, 1851. His friends could scarcely comprehend the meaning of his book, *La Révolution sociale démontrée par le coup d’État du 2 décembre*. More exactly, it might have been entitled “The Revolution in spite of the *coup d’état* of December 2, 1851” for in reality that is the thesis sustained. [...] The Revolution moves on irresistibly because it is a deep undercurrent undisturbed by winds which ruffle the surface.<sup>4</sup>

Thus “Revolution, both *democratic* and *social* [...] is now for France, for Europe, a compulsory condition, almost a fait accompli”.<sup>5</sup> The political regime could act to encourage or hinder this progress and the various Assemblies and Governments of the Second Republic had very much hindered it (for example, the destruction of the clubs after the July Days of 1848 and the restrictions on universal suffrage passed in July 1850, both of which Proudhon denounced<sup>6</sup>). So not only was socio-economic progress being hindered, the possibility of any reform was stymied. Proudhon argued that such a situation could not be maintained, something had to give. This proved to be the events of December 1851, subsequently ratified by a large majority of the (male) electorate (for Marx, Louis-Napoleon was “the “chosen man of the peasantry”, the “most numerous class of French society” and so “the mass of the French people”<sup>7</sup>). The newly self-empowered President then launched a series of reforms without the conservative National Assembly there to block them or be dismissed as impossible by liberal economists.

Thus the Second of December “demonstrated” the social revolution because it removed what was hindering social progress. However, it had not “demonstrated” the social revolution in its specific policies nor in the regime created. Louis-Napoleon, like all the previous post-February governments, had the choice of encouraging or hindering the

<sup>1</sup> “La Révolution sociale”, 112.

<sup>2</sup> “La Révolution sociale”, 215.

<sup>3</sup> “La Révolution sociale”, 202, 287.

<sup>4</sup> William H. George, “Proudhon and Economic Federalism”, *Journal of Political Economy* 30: 4 (August 1922), 537.

<sup>5</sup> “La Révolution sociale”, 266.

<sup>6</sup> As regards the former, the “organisation of popular societies was the pivot of democracy, the cornerstone of republican

order” for “[u]nder the name of clubs, or any other you please to use, it is a matter of the organisation of universal suffrage in all its forms, of the very structure of Democracy itself.” (“Confessions of a Revolutionary”, *Property is Theft!*, 407, 461).

<sup>7</sup> “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”, *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979) XI: 187.

progress of the Social Revolution. Although recognising the President's support in the bourgeoisie, Proudhon urged him to use the mandate of the plebiscite to implement economic and political reforms. The choice was either "Anarchy or Caesarism [...] you will never escape from this [...] you are caught between the *Emperor* and the *Social [Revolution]!*"<sup>1</sup> As such, to accuse him of supporting Caesarism is staggering.

Moreover, Proudhon recognised that an autocratic regime while perhaps at best suitable to destroy what hindered social progress was unsuited to encourage it. This was why he urged democratic reforms on the President, arguing that he himself had "defended universal suffrage, as a constitutional right and a law of the state; and since it exists, I am not asking that it be suppressed, but that it be enlightened, that it be organised and that it live." The regime should "affirm, without restriction or equivocation, the social revolution" and this required "that it calls to itself, instead of a body of mutes, a true representation of the middle class and the proletariat":

the affairs of individuals prosper only as long as they have confidence in the government; that the only way to give them this confidence is to make them themselves active members of the sovereign; that to exclude them from government is as much as to oust them from their industries and properties; and that a working nation like ours, governed without the perpetual control of the podium, the press and the [political] club, is a bankrupt nation.<sup>2</sup>

In this Proudhon was simply repeating arguments he had made before 1851 and would repeat afterwards. So, for example, ten years later we find him arguing that civilisation "only advances through the influence that political groups wield upon one another, in the fullness of their sovereignty and their independence. Set a higher power over them all, to judge and constrain them and the great organisation grinds to a halt. Life and thought are no more."<sup>3</sup>

Similarly with Schapiro's claim that Proudhon thought it "was possible and desirable [...] that one party should swallow all the other parties", a party

of the working classes (proletarians, artisans and peasants), "had a sinister significance." (356) He fails to mention that Proudhon also stated that "[t]o impose silence upon [parties] by means of the police" was "impossible" and that "that ideas can only be fought by ideas". Parties, like the State, reflected the fact that the "vices of th[e] economic regime produce inequality of fortunes, and consequently class distinction; class distinction calls for political centralisation to defend itself; political centralisation gives rise to parties, with which power is necessarily unstable and peace impossible. Only radical economic reform can pull us out of this circle".<sup>4</sup> It is hardly "sinister" to suggest that elimination of classes would produce the end of parties and the State.

Schapiro, likewise, fails to mention that Proudhon had earlier raised both the hope of seeing the end of parties while also proudly proclaiming that he "belong[ed] to the Party of Labour" for there were "but two parties in France: the party of labour and the party of capital".<sup>5</sup> As such, his use of the term party indicated a tendency which could include a diversity of views and groupings while the latter would disappear naturally along with the classes they reflect.

Rather than support dictatorship, Proudhon in fact argued that the President introduce democratic reforms alongside economic ones for "representative government" was "a necessary transition to industrial democracy" and "industrial freedom and political freedom are interdependent; that any restriction on the latter is an obstacle for the former".<sup>6</sup> Louis-Napoleon, as he constantly stressed, had a choice of promoting the Social Revolution (which was defined as a "social and democratic" movement) or pursuing his own agenda and promoting reaction – the "Anarchy or Caesarism" of the title of the book's final chapter. As the former option meant eliminating the powers that he had just seized, unsurprisingly Proudhon's call fell on deaf ears. By December 1852, over five months after Proudhon's work was published, Louis-Napoleon gave his answer to the question it raised: he chose *Emperor* rather than weaken his power by the democratic political and economic reforms Proudhon called for.

<sup>1</sup> "La Révolution sociale", 294.

<sup>2</sup> "La Révolution sociale", 170-1, 269, 258, 274.

<sup>3</sup> "La Guerre et la paix", 293. This work also sees Proudhon counting himself amongst the "republicans and socialists of 1848" and describing himself "as a democrat". (6, 10)

<sup>4</sup> "La Révolution sociale", 268, 266.

<sup>5</sup> *Property is Theft!*, 397, 475, 381.

<sup>6</sup> "La Révolution sociale", 258, 274.

All this makes attempts to portray Proudhon as advocating dictatorship misleading. However, he did not make himself as clear as he should have:

Hence, despite the caricatures, Proudhon was no sycophantic admirer of the Prince President, willing to go to any lengths to curry favor. On the contrary, the dictator would have to go extraordinarily far in Proudhon's direction to enlist his support. He would have to reform the constitution by making it more democratic [...] Bonaparte would have to carry out social and economic, as well as political, reform. [...] No doubt the book, strictly interpreted, does rule out collaboration. So exacting are the conditions set for collaboration that they could not possibly be met. Such a strict interpretation is too subtle, however, because it overlooks the book's impact on its audience. The rather casuistic argument of the *Révolution sociale* was sure to go over the public's head [...] Hence the book was bound to strengthen the new regime, rather than the cause of freedom, whatever its author's intention.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, knowing the President well (he was, after all, in prison when the coup of December 1851 occurred for publicly attacking him as a demagogue seeking to become Emperor), the book at times flattered Louis-Napoleon and tempted him to reforms by indicating that it would secure him a place in the history books. Such passages when quoted out of context make a flawed work look worse than it actually is.

Which raises an obvious question: why did Proudhon pursue such a work, particularly given the reservations he expressed in letters while writing it? Simply put, he viewed the regime as secure due to its popular support and the lack of any possibility of a successful revolt against it. As Leninist John Ehrenberg suggests, "Proudhon did not really support the coup" and "his hope was not to apologise for Louis-Napoleon but to salvage some good out of what initially seemed a hopeless situation".<sup>2</sup> Rather than express support for dictatorship as Schapiro claims, the reality is much more banal: "I ask nothing better than to see the

[government] I am paying for make some changes and proceed according to my principles".<sup>3</sup>

Fourth, Louis-Napoleon's police understood Proudhon's argument and refused to allow its publication. Proudhon then appealed to the President himself and presumably amused and flattered that his old enemy had written what appeared to be a supportive book about him, ensured its publication. Suffice to say, the authorities did not make the same mistake again and Proudhon was unable to publish under his own name for a number of years and then only on economic matters. With the publication of his first political work (*De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église*) in 1858, Proudhon soon found himself charged with corrupting public morals and went into exile in Belgium where he could publish freely. Schapiro's summary of this period leaves much to be desired, writing that "[d]uring the period of the Second Empire, Proudhon was actively engaged in writing. Book after book and pamphlet after pamphlet poured from his busy pen" before noting his "arrest was ordered but he fled to Brussels". (335) The implied coziness with the regime did not exist and while Schapiro wants to portray Proudhon as a Bonapartist, the Bonapartists themselves were very aware of his politics and acted accordingly.

Fifth, Schapiro fails to mention Proudhon's arguments against having a President in the first place and his articles warning that Louis-Napoleon had eyes on becoming Emperor are summarised as Proudhon being "arrested on the charge of writing violent articles against President Louis Napoleon and sentenced to prison for three years." (335) Nor does he mention Proudhon's writings (published from prison) defending the Constitution and universal suffrage against the attacks upon both by the reactionary National Assembly. This is understandable, given that it would be difficult to portray him as an advocate of dictatorship by the head of the State when he opposed having such a position considering it, amongst other things, "royalty", "the violation of revolutionary principles", and "counter-revolution".<sup>4</sup> If Proudhon had been listened to, then Louis-Napoleon would never have become Emperor.

<sup>1</sup> Alan Ritter, *The Political Thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 188-9.

<sup>2</sup> John Ehrenberg, *Proudhon and His Age* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1996), 129.

<sup>3</sup> "La Révolution sociale", 113. Lest we forget, he had made the same demand of the National Assembly in 1848 and received a similar response.

<sup>4</sup> "The Constitution and the Presidency", *Property is Theft!*, 370.

## **On Capitalism and Socialism**

As well as being a “passionate hater of democracy”, Schapiro claims that Proudhon viewed “socialism” in the same light. (362) He warms to this theme:

In discussing the social and political issues of his day Proudhon did not at all apply his anarchist

views.

They seemed to form no part of his vigorous attacks on the ideas

of his opponents, whether left or right. His hatred of socialism, which Proudhon regarded as the worst of all social poisons, drove him to advocate anarchy as its very opposite. What he really saw in anarchy was not a solution of social problems but an antidote to socialism. (363)

He contrasts Proudhon to socialists who “directed their attacks on the capitalistic system of production; hence they sought to substitute socialization for private ownership – the Utopians, through cooperative societies, and the Marxists, through government ownership.” Proudhon’s “anticapitalism was not the same as that of the socialists [...] Not the system of production, but the system of exchange was the root of evil of capitalism.” (342)

This is a key aspect of his case, with Schapiro quoting Marxist Franz Neumann that “[i]n singling out predatory capital, National Socialism treads in the footsteps of Proudhon who, in his *Idée générale de la Révolution au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle* demanded the liquidation of the Banque de France and its transformation into an institution of public utility”. (366-7) Schapiro fails to mention that Naumann is explicitly repeating Marx on Proudhon and stresses that “National Socialist anti-capitalism has always exempted productive capital, that is, industrial capital, from its denunciations and solely concentrated on ‘predatory’ (that is, banking) capital”.<sup>1</sup>

Proudhon, then, is a proto-fascist because he focused exclusively on finance capital, exempted

productive capital, rejected socialisation of the means of production and co-operatives societies. Yet unlike his claims on democracy, Schapiro provides few references: the reader is given passing comments about Proudhon’s *Système des contradictions économiques*, his opposition to the “right to work” at the start of the 1848 Revolution and his conflicts with the likes of Louis Blanc.

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## ***the organisation of labour must be the downfall of capital and power.***

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(334) This lack of evidence is understandable as every single link in the chain of reasoning to reach his conclusion is wrong.

First, while Proudhon did seek “to find a solution of the social problem other than that presented by the socialists or by the classical economists” in 1846, (334) Schapiro forgets that while the latter mostly agree on what they advocated, the former are marked by a series of schools. This was the case in 1846 and the number of schools has been added to since then, not least by Marxism (itself hopelessly subdivided) and revolutionary anarchism (collectivist, communist and syndicalist). It is perfectly feasible to criticise certain forms of socialism and still be a socialist:

As a critic, having had to proceed to the search for social laws by the negation of property, I belong to the socialist protest: in this respect I have nothing to disavow of my first assertions, and I am, thank God, true to my background. As a man of achievement and progress, I repudiate with all my might socialism, empty of ideas, powerless, immoral, capable only of producing dupes and crooks [...] and here is, in a few words, my profession of faith and my criterion on all past, present and future organisational utopias:

*Whoever calls upon power and capital to organise labour is lying,*

*Because the organisation of labour must be the downfall of capital and power.*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: the structure and practice of national socialism 1933-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), 320-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Système des contradictions économiques* II: 396.

Thus Blanc “is never tired of appealing to authority”, “places power above society” and “makes social life descend from above” while “socialism loudly declares itself anarchistic” and “maintains that [social life] springs up and grows from below”.<sup>1</sup> A

few years later, Proudhon reiterated that “Blanc represents governmental socialism, revolution by power, as I represent democratic socialism, revolution by the people. An abyss exists between us”.<sup>2</sup> He rejected Blanc’s “system of organisation by the State” because it was “still the same negation of

freedom, equality and fraternity” as under capitalism for “the only change is the shareholders and the managers” with “not the slightest difference in the situation of the workers”.<sup>3</sup>

Second, like many commentators, Schapiro does not appreciate that Proudhon separated ownership and use, arguing that while the former must be “undivided”, the latter must be “divided”. If this were not ensured, then the liberty promised by socialism would become the tyranny of community.<sup>4</sup> Thus we find Schapiro quoting Proudhon arguing that mutualism would be created “without confiscation, without bankruptcy, without an agrarian law, without common ownership, without state intervention, and without the abolition of inheritance.” (344) However, looking at the source (Proudhon’s famous speech to the Constituent National Assembly in which he also proudly proclaimed that “Socialism made the

February Revolution”) the term Proudhon actually uses is “community” (*communauté*) and this cannot be translated as “common ownership” without seriously distorting what Proudhon meant by the term, why he opposed it and what he advocated in its stead.<sup>5</sup>

**Proudhon... advocated workers’ associations to achieve what in the 1850s he termed “industrial democracy”.... Indeed, workers’ control is such an obviously core aspect of any genuine form of socialism that even Leninists pay lip-service to it.**

*Communauté* is often rendered as “communism” in English translations of Proudhon’s work which, while closer to what was meant (particularly given the characteristics of the Stalinist regime in the USSR), is not quite correct. Regardless, capitalism was marked by divided use and divided ownership while “Community” was based on undivided

use and undivided ownership. Both, as a result, were exploitative and oppressive and had to be replaced by what, in 1840, Proudhon referred to as a “third form of society, the synthesis of community and property” which he then termed liberty. Invoking the well-known philosophical triad, community was “the first term of social development” (“the *thesis*”) while “property, the reverse of community, is the second term” (“the *antithesis*”) and “[w]hen we have discovered the third term, the synthesis, we shall have the required solution.”<sup>6</sup> This “third social form” would be based on divided use and undivided ownership. The former is needed to secure workers’ freedom to control both their labour and its product, the latter is needed to end master-servant relations (wage-labour) within the workplace by making every new recruit automatically involved in its management (and so control their labour and its product).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “System of Economic Contradictions”, *Property is Theft!*, 205. Proudhon’s returned to the “from below” and “from above” perspectives, which Draper utilised without acknowledgment, in *Confessions of a Revolutionary* (*Property is Theft!*, 398-9).

<sup>2</sup> *Les Confessions*, 200.

<sup>3</sup> “Mélanges: Articles de Journaux 1848-1852 III”, *Œuvres complètes de P.-J. Proudhon* (Paris: Lacroix, 1871) XIX: 118.

<sup>4</sup> “The members of a community, it is true, have no private property; but the community is proprietor, and proprietor not only of the goods, but of the persons and wills.” (Proudhon, “What is Property?”, *Property is Theft!*, 131)

<sup>5</sup> “Address to the Constituent National Assembly”, *Property is Theft!*, 349, 345.

<sup>6</sup> “What is Property?”, *Property is Theft!*, 136, 130 (although “community” is translated as “communism”).

<sup>7</sup> Iain McKay, “Proudhon, Property and Possession,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 66 (Winter 2016), 26-29.

Shapiro ignores this but proclaims that this “new system would inaugurate what Proudhon called *le troisième monde*” yet the page Schapiro references does not contain the term, which is unsurprising as Proudhon never used it.<sup>1</sup> (353) Proudhon did indicate that he opposed private and State ownership in favour of “universal association” (the 1840s) or “agricultural industrial federation” (the 1860s). As he put it in 1846:

Either competition, — that is, monopoly and what follows; or exploitation by the State [...]; or else, in short, a solution based upon equality, — in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than State control or planning, Proudhon argued that each association would control its own affairs and decide what to produce, for whom, when and at what price. Schapiro recognises this when he wrote “[p]rivate enterprise would remain, and competition, the vital force that animated all society, would continue to regulate market prices”. (344) However, he contradicts himself by stating that “[u]nder mutualism there would be organized, in each industry, voluntary autonomous associations of producers with the object of exchanging commodities. Production was to be individual, not collective. Proudhon was an anticollectivist.” (352)

It is not explained how production organised by associations can be individual rather than collective. Proudhon, however, is clear and advocated workers’ associations to achieve what in the 1850s he termed “industrial democracy” but which he had raised repeatedly throughout his quarter century of writing. That Schapiro ignores this core aspect of Proudhon’s economic vision is telling in spite of mentioning works – *Qu’est-ce que la propriété?* (1840), *Système des contradictions économiques* (1846), *Idée générale de la Révolution au dix-neuvième siècle* (1851), *Manuel du Spéculateur à la Bourse* (1857) and *Du Principe fédératif* (1863) and *De la Capacité*

*politique des classes ouvrières* (1865) – where this is advocated.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, workers’ control is such an obviously core aspect of any genuine form of socialism that even Leninists pay lip-service to it. Significantly, while Schapiro notes that Proudhon “denounced capitalism as *féodalité industrielle*” (industrial feudalism) he did not indicate where. (340) This is understandable for Proudhon argued that “industrial democracy must follow industrial feudalism”,<sup>4</sup> which is hard to square with Schapiro’s claim that Proudhon hated democracy in “its ideals, its methods, and its organization.” (349)

Yet economic democracy can take many forms. Rather than one giant all-embracing centralised Association advocated by many of his contemporaries, Proudhon advocated associations united by federal and contractual links. As such, he should be considered one of the first market socialists as well as, as Steven K. Vincent has persuasively shown, a leading thinker of the associationist socialism of mid-nineteenth century France.<sup>5</sup> He did, as Schapiro notes, aim to universalise property but this does not mean opposing socialisation. Recognising the nature of the economy of his time, Proudhon’s theory of “possession” allowed both artisan and peasant production to co-exist with collective production by workers’ associations all united within socio-economic federalism:

Proudhon and Bakunin were “collectivists,” which is to say they declared themselves without equivocation in favour of the common exploitation, not by the State but by associated workers of the large-scale means of production and of the public services. Proudhon has been quite wrongly presented as an exclusive enthusiast of private property.<sup>6</sup>

Proudhon, in short, was not against common ownership but rather State control. As he summarised during the 1848 Revolution, “under universal association, ownership of the land and of the instruments of labour is *social* ownership” with “democratically organised workers’ associations”

<sup>1</sup> Nor does Proudhon use the term *troisième forme de société* on the page Schapiro references. It cannot be a coincidence that “Third Reich” could be, with sufficient perseverance, translated as *troisième monde*.

<sup>2</sup> “System of Economic Contradictions”, *Property is Theft!*, 202.

<sup>3</sup> Extracts from all these works, including relevant sections on workers’ associations, are included in *Property is Theft!*.

<sup>4</sup> “Stock Exchange Speculator’s Manual”, *Property is Theft!*, 610.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent, 140-165.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Guérin, “From Proudhon to Bakunin”, *The Radical Papers* (Montréal: Black Rose, 1987), Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), 32; Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York/London: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 44-9.



forming “that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic and social Republic.”<sup>1</sup> Proudhon, then, advocated workers’ co-operatives because his opposition to capitalism included a critique of industrial capital as the wage-labour it created produced both exploitation and oppression.

Schapiro, ironically, admits as much in passing when, referencing *Idée générale*, he correctly summarised its analysis that “[b]y its perversion of the principle of the division of labour, capitalism made the worker more productive and more dependent at the same time. As a consequence, all the advantages under the new industrial system went to capital, not labour.” (340) By noting this aspect of Proudhon’s ideas, he not only refutes his own claims but Neumann’s which he used as supporting evidence that Proudhon – like fascists – focused exclusively on finance capital. Presumably Schapiro hoped his readers would forget this or consider it Proudhon’s rather than his contradiction.

Third, Schapiro fails to place Proudhon’s ideas on credit within his wider ideas. He rightly notes that Proudhon sought to “universalize bills of exchange” as a circulating medium (rather than “labour notes”, as falsely asserted by Marx) but contrasts Proudhon’s *révolution par le crédit* with socialism. (342-3) Yet this was seen not as an end in itself but rather as the means to a wider economic transformation, namely the replacement of wage-labour by association. As Proudhon put it, thanks to its “over-arching mandate, the Exchange Bank is the organisation of labour’s greatest asset” for it allows “the new form of society to be defined and created among the workers” in which “all the workshops are owned by the nation, even though they remain and must always remain free.”<sup>2</sup>

Recognising the difficulties inherent in State control, for Proudhon labour had to organise itself. To do this working people needed the means of production in their hands and there are two ways to secure this: by seizing it or by buying it. As he opposed the former, only the latter remained. That later anarchists argued for revolutionary

expropriation rather than reforming the credit system should not obscure the similar reasoning behind each.

Fourth, anarchism played a key part in his critique of State socialism as can be seen, for example, in his polemic with Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux between November 1849 and January 1850<sup>3</sup> which fed directly into *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*. These works reflected how the 1848 Revolution “was an important turning point for Proudhon” and “anarchism emerged as central to his thought”.<sup>4</sup> Decades later, Peter Kropotkin pointed to these debates and noted their continued relevance to libertarians: “Many admirable pages can be found there on the State and Anarchy which it would be very useful to reproduce for a wide audience.”<sup>5</sup>

More could be written on this subject, such as Schapiro’s conflation of opposing strikes with opposing the labour movement and, in one quotation, his wilful mistranslation of *ouvrières associations* as “trade unions” rather than co-operatives, his insertion of the word “hostile” and the failure to indicate that this was discussing Proudhon’s views on a specific form of workers’ association (those advocated by the Louis Blanc influenced Luxembourg Commission of 1848-9). (347-8) However, enough has been discussed to show that Proudhon attacked capitalism as system of production *and* exchange, denounced industrial capital *and* banking capital, combining his call for the transformation of the Banque de France with the replacement of capitalist firms with democratically-run workers’ associations (indeed his analysis of how exploitation occurred within production was the basis of his vision of socialism rooted in transforming production<sup>6</sup>).

Socialism, as Schapiro rightly suggested, “aimed to destroy the bourgeois ruling class in the only way that it could be destroyed as a class, namely by abolishing property altogether”. (338) Proudhon agreed but the current regime of property and classes can be abolished in many ways. It was to the Frenchman’s credit that he predicted that nationalising property, placing it into the hands of

<sup>1</sup> “Election Manifesto of *Le Peuple*”, *Property is Theft!*, 377-8.

<sup>2</sup> “Letter to Louis Blanc”, *Property is Theft!*, 296-7.

<sup>3</sup> These articles are included in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Rivière, 1923) II along with “Idée générale de la Révolution au dix-neuvième siècle”. A few of these articles are contained in *Property is Theft!* (“Resistance to the Revolution,” “Letter to Pierre Leroux,” and “In Connection with Louis Blanc”)

while another has been published elsewhere: “Regarding Louis Blanc: The Present Utility and Future Possibility of the State,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 66 (Winter 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Ehrenberg, 116.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchy* (Chico/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2018), 205; Also see, 227.

<sup>6</sup> Iain McKay, “Proudhon’s Constituted Value and the Myth of Labour Notes,” *Anarchist Studies* 25: 1 (Summer 2017).

the State, would not abolish the ruling class but simply create a new one – the bureaucracy.

### ***On War and Peace***

The next charge against Proudhon is that he was a warmonger and militarist. This is his argument from the original article:

What astounded Proudhon's contemporaries [...] was his glorification of war. Hatred of war and longing for universal peace has been an almost universal characteristic of all modern revolutionary thinkers [...] The contradictions between the revolutionist Proudhon and the revolutionary thought of his day became even more puzzling, even more strange, when Proudhon appeared as a glorifier of war for its own sake. His book *La Guerre et la paix*, which appeared in 1861, was a hymn to war, intoned in a more passionate key than anything produced by the fascists of our time. [...] War was the revelation of religion, of justice, and of the ideal in human relations. [...]

In the view of Proudhon war was not a social evil that would be eradicated in the course of human progress. He was convinced that war was an instinct inherent in the very nature of man and was itself the prime source of human progress. Therefore it would last as long as man existed and as long as moral and social values prevailed in human society [...] Almost every page of *La Guerre et la paix* contains a glorification of war as an ideal and as an institution. ("Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Harbinger of Fascism", 729-30)

Schapiro clearly assumes his reader's ignorance of Proudhon work for this summary is a complete distortion of its argument. Likewise, he does not seek to explain how his admission that Proudhon "repudiated violent methods" and advocated a "peaceful revolution" can be reconciled with this portrayal of Proudhon as a warmonger and precursor of the violent methods of fascism. (341)

This summary fails to mention that while the first volume of *La Guerre et la paix* does indeed extol "the right of war", the second volume discusses how war becomes corrupted (so generating numerous social evils) and how to end it by

understanding its root cause.<sup>1</sup> This may lead the impatient reader to draw the wrong conclusion: indeed, in Book One, Proudhon, as if he is aware that he may be tempting the patience of his reader, notes that "I shall conclude by opposing the warmongering *status quo*, opposing the institutions of militarism"<sup>2</sup> As he put it in a letter:

How could you have supposed that I wanted, by a sort of panegyric or apotheosis of war, to perpetuate the military regime? [...] my thesis: *War is finished, society no longer wants it.* [...] I will confine myself to pointing out to you, so that you may understand me with less difficulty, that in order to put an end to war, it was not a question of declaring against it as *the friends of peace* do; it was necessary to begin by recognising [...] its principle, its role, its mission, its purpose; this done, it was proved then, and only then, that the goal being reached or on the eve of being reached, war was finished, and finished not by the good pleasure of nations and governments, but by the fulfilment of its mandate.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the somewhat abstract discussion of "the right of war" and how it generated other rights (including political, social and economic ones) lays the ground for the denunciation of warfare as barbaric (particularly in an age where indiscriminate killing was becoming the norm as war was increasingly industrialised) and how to end it. The contrast between the ideal and the practice was due to the "primary, universal and ever constant cause of warfare, however ignited and whatever prompts it" being "the BREAKDOWN OF ECONOMIC EQUILIBRIUM". Thus "war, even between the most honourable nations, and whatever the officially professed motives, henceforth does not appear to be anything other than a war for exploitation and property, a social war. Suffice to say that, until such time as economic rights are secured, both between nations and between individuals, war can do nothing else on the globe."<sup>4</sup>

If war is primarily driven by economic forces, then "peace cannot be established permanently, other than by means of the abolition of the very cause of war". A new economic regime in which labour governs "must replace the political or war regime"

<sup>1</sup> For good introductions to this book and its major themes, see Prichard (2013).

<sup>2</sup> "La Guerre et la paix", 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon* (Paris: Lacroix, 1875) XI: 118-9.

<sup>4</sup> "La Guerre et la paix", 326, 465.

and “universal disarmament will take place” only when “war has found its successor.” Under mutualism, struggle would exist “but not a bloody, armed struggle, but rather a struggle involving labour and industry”. In short, “[o]nly working humanity is capable of putting an end to war, by creating economic balance, which presupposes a radical revolution in ideas and morals.” The “constitution of right in humanity is the very abolition of war; it is the organisation of peace [...] We need PEACE today; the world does not understand and no longer wants anything else.”<sup>1</sup>

War could now be ended because “the Revolution has made the public conscience the sole interpreter of right, the sole judge of the temporal and the sole sovereign, which constitutes true democracy and marks the end of priesthood and militarism.” Thus, in a mutualist society, “war no longer has the slightest reason to be waged” as it would ensure “the abolition of the military regime and the subordination of political right to economic right.” This was because “nationality, no more than war, serves no purpose. Nationalities have to be increasingly erased by the economic constitution, the decentralisation of states, the mixing of races and the permeability of continents.”

Unsurprisingly, the work’s final sentence is “HUMANITY DOES NOT WANT ANY MORE WAR.”<sup>2</sup>

Parts of the first volume can make uncomfortable reading because Proudhon is describing the world as it is, the world where might indeed made right regardless of the fine words used to justify reasons of State. He plays the part of devil’s advocate to better convince his critics when, in the second volume, he shows how the instincts and forces which create conflict can be transformed to create peace. Likewise, Schapiro fails to mention that Proudhon’s anti-militarism is reflected in other works. In 1851, it was the case that “[i]n place of standing armies, we will put industrial associations”<sup>3</sup> while in 1863 he noted that a “confederated people would be a people organised for peace; what would they do with armies?”<sup>4</sup>

Schapiro, then, shamelessly distorts Proudhon’s ideas. These were hardly difficult to grasp. For

example, a contemporary review in the *New York Times* correctly summarised it:

According to him, there exists one cause [...] which tarnishes war [...] which will long hinder its perfection: it is the rupture of the economic equilibrium [...] This is the origin of most wars. The vice is chronic, incurable, and sullies forever the divine ideal [...] But in the very midst of this despairing doctrine a ray of light appears – namely, Peace. For we must not mistake him – he, like the rest of us, wishes to attain that. He does not pretend to do away with war [...] but he hopes to transform it, to bring it into a second state, purer and more perfect than the first, and this state is simply -- Peace. [...] He deifies war and recommends peace. The process is curious and the result instructive.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, anarcho-pacifist Bart de Ligt correctly summarised Proudhon’s conclusion that “it was therefore necessary [...] to change the military society into an industrial society as swiftly as possible.”<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the structure and aim of *La Guerre et la paix* are noted by every other commentator on it.<sup>7</sup> The introduction to the edition Schapiro uses also indicated this so perhaps this explains why he rewrote his argument and admitted that “Proudhon comes to the paradoxical conclusion” that war’s “primal cause is poverty, and only when poverty is abolished will war disappear”, making a mockery of his earlier claim that Proudhon did not think war could be eradicated nor wished it to.

### ***On Slavery and Race***

Schapiro is correct to note Proudhon’s anti-Semitism and uses it as means to generalise about his views on race:

Anti-Semitism, always and everywhere, the acid test of racialism, with its division of mankind into creative and sterile races, led Proudhon to regard the Negro as the lowest in the racial hierarchy. During the American Civil War he favored the South, which, he insisted, was not entirely wrong in maintaining slavery. The Negroes, according to Proudhon, were an inferior

<sup>1</sup> “La Guerre et la paix”, 477, 485, 498, 487.

<sup>2</sup> “La Guerre et la paix”, 508, 507, 503, 506, 540.

<sup>3</sup> “General Idea of the Revolution”, *Property is Theft!*, 592.

<sup>4</sup> “The Federative Principle”, *Property is Theft!*, 719.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, 2 September 1861.

<sup>6</sup> Bart de Ligt, *The conquest of violence: an essay on war and revolution* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1937), 76.

<sup>7</sup> Prichard; 132-3; George Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography* (Montreal: Black Rose: 1987), 233-5; Hoffman, 262-6; Ehrenberg, 143-5.

race, an example of the existence of inequality among the races of mankind. Not those who desired to emancipate them were the true friends of the Negroes but those “who wish to keep them in servitude, yea to exploit them, but nevertheless to assure them of a livelihood, to raise their standard gradually through labor, and to increase their numbers through marriage.” (359)

Schapiro references a single page in *La Guerre et la paix* and there are numerous issues with this summation.

First, Proudhon made no reference to Negroes being “the lowest in the racial hierarchy” nor the “division of mankind into creative and sterile races” and so these are an invention by Schapiro.

Second, in terms of “inferior” and “superior” races, the position expressed by Proudhon was commonplace at the time as was its rationale, namely the conquest of other races by whites. Given how prevalent this perspective was, it would have been noteworthy if Proudhon had not subscribed to it in some form.

To take a pertinent example, “Marx and Engels were endowing ‘races’ with inferior and superior qualities all the time” and “[f]or present-day standards, the racism displayed by Marx and Engels was outrageous and even extreme. For nineteenth-century standards, though, it was not.”<sup>1</sup> The latter’s public comments on Slavs and other peoples he deemed “non-historic” and so suitable for being, at best, civilised by their superiors or, if needed, wiped out down to their very names is a notable example of these views.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly with John Stuart Mill, who took it for granted that there were “superior” peoples (“from difference of race, more civilized origin, or other peculiarities of circumstance”) and those who are an “inferior and more backward portion of the human race”.<sup>3</sup> Liberty, however, “is meant to apply

only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties” and so “we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage.” “Despotism,” Mill stressed, “is a legitimate mode of government in dealing” with such peoples, “provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, war to bring civilization to such inferior races was justified as it will “be for their benefit that they should be conquered and held in subjection by foreigners.”<sup>5</sup> Schapiro fails to mention this when proclaiming Mill a “Pioneer of Democratic Liberalism” (256)<sup>6</sup> but more recent commentators do.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of what Schapiro implied, Proudhon – like Marx, Engels and Mill – did not view existing inequalities between races as fixed. He argued that “the human person remains sacred, and that all that we have to do ourselves, as a superior race, with regard to the inferior ones, is to raise them up to our level, that is to attempt to improve, fortify, instruct and ennoble them.”<sup>8</sup> Paternalistically racist, to be sure, but hardly the biological deterministic racism Schapiro suggests and rather than being proto-Nazi were similar to almost all the progressive liberal and socialist thinkers of his time.

Third, Proudhon submitted his manuscript at the end of October 1860 and it was finally published, by a different company, on 21 May the following year, a few weeks after the War broke out on the 12 April. As such, his comments cannot be considered as “favor[ing] the South” during a war which had not yet started as Schapiro must have been aware of, as these dates are mentioned in the introduction to the edition he quotes from. Likewise, it is clear from the text of the book itself that war had not yet erupted and that in this chapter he is “putting forward is not so much my own opinion as

<sup>1</sup> Erik van Ree, “Marx and Engels’s theory of history: making sense of the race factor”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 24 no. 1, 66, 67.

<sup>2</sup> Roman Rosdolsky, “Engels and the ‘Nonhistoric’ Peoples: The National Question in the Revolution of 1848”, *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory* 18/19 (1986). This provides an excellent overview, although Rosdolsky tries to downplay the ethnic cleansing aspects of Engels’ articles.

<sup>3</sup> John Stuart Mill, “Considerations on Representative Government”, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977) XIX: 418-9, 549.

<sup>4</sup> “On Liberty”, *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977) XVIII: 224.

<sup>5</sup> John Stuart Mill, “A Few Words on Non-Intervention,” *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) XXI: 118.

<sup>6</sup> Schapiro dispassionately recounts Mill expressing views which are heatedly denounced as proto-fascist when Proudhon utters them. Why similar notions provoke different responses when written in French rather than English is not explained.

<sup>7</sup> Don Habibi, “The Moral Dimensions of J. S. Mill’s Colonialism”, *Journal of Social Philosophy* 30: 1 (Spring 1999); Beate Jahn, “Barbarian Thoughts: Imperialism in the Philosophy of John Stuart Mill”, *Review of International Studies* 31: 3 (July 2005).

<sup>8</sup> “La Guerre et la paix”, 179.

forecasts regarding disputes that may possibly be settled by force of arms.”<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, Proudhon’s “defense of Negro slavery” must be placed in context. (359) The first volume of *La Guerre et la paix*, as noted above, is marked by a desire to play devil’s advocate and, as such, these comments cannot be taken as completely reflective of his views. As is clear from the text, Proudhon is commenting upon the debates in America in the period immediately *before* the outbreak of the Civil War. He did not think that

White Americans wanted to wage war to free their compatriots and limited his comments to the two positions articulated in respectable debate: retain slavery or turn the slaves into proletarians. As he put immediately before the words quoted by Schapiro, the latter “knowingly or unknowingly, it matters not, seriously consider making [the former slaves] perish in the desolation of the proletariat”<sup>2</sup>. Thus:

Do we forget that, since abolition of the feudal system, in our industrialist society liberty is, for individuals weak in body and mind, whose family has not been able to guaranteed an income, something worse than slavery – the proletariat? Force requires it to be so, as long as it remains the dominant law of society; and I say that the right which still dominates us today is not the right of labour, which is still not recognised, [...] it is still, whatever we say, the pure right of force.

Certainly, I have no intention of renouncing here my own thesis and combating precisely what I intend to rehabilitate, when I stand, on behalf of the blacks, against the hypocritical thought that, under the pretext of emancipating them, tends to do nothing less than cast them under the pure regime of force, and turn them into a proletarian

sludge a hundred times more hideous than that of our capitals.<sup>3</sup>

Schapiro ignores all this but, by limiting his comments to these two positions, Proudhon failed to articulate his own stance and effectively discusses what was possible in America under the prevailing circumstances. This is suggested by Proudhon failing to ponder why the American ruling class – who, at best, wished to cast blacks into “the desolation of the proletariat” or, at worse, were slavers – would allow the placing of slavery

“under the supervision of governments” for the benefit of anyone other than themselves. He was well aware that the law is hardly “the protector of the weak” nor the proletariat of the so-called superior

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**“Two things would have been necessary [...] to save the Union: 1) free the blacks and give them citizenship [...] 2) energetically fight the growth of proletariat, which did not enter the views of anyone”**

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aces.<sup>4</sup>

During the war Proudhon raised a libertarian alternative to these two forms of exploitation and oppression which rejects the pathetic suggestion in *La Guerre et la paix* of regulating slavery to reform it away. Given that this book argued that war could only be ended by socio-economic transformation, a work expressing his ideas on this is far more reflective of his views on race and slavery than the deliberate exaggerations of its first volume. He did so in an important book which *did* appear during the conflict, namely 1863’s *Du Principe federative*, which Schapiro references but ignores its discussion of these issues, undoubtedly because to do so would refute his claims.

Proudhon first raises these issues in a footnote:

The federative public law raises several difficult questions. For example, can a State with slaves belong to a confederation? It seems not, no more than an absolutist State: the enslaving of one part of the nation is the very negation of the federative principle. In

<sup>1</sup> “La Guerre et la paix”, 167.

<sup>2</sup> “La Guerre et la paix”, 179.

<sup>3</sup> “La Guerre et la paix”, 178.

<sup>4</sup> “La Guerre et la paix”, 179-80.

this respect, the Southern States of the United States would be even more justified to ask for separation since the Northern States do not intend to grant, at least for quite some time, the emancipated Blacks their political rights. However we see that Washington, Madison and the other founders of the Union did not agree; they admitted States with slaves into the federal pact. It is also true that we now see this unnatural pact tearing itself apart, and the Southern States, to maintain their exploitation, tend towards an unitarist constitution, whilst the Northern ones, to maintain the union, decree the deportation of the slaves [to Africa].<sup>1</sup>

For Proudhon, “a better application of the principles of the [Federative] pact” would include “progressively raising the Black peoples’ condition to the level of the Whites” but “Lincoln’s message leaves no doubt on the matter. The North cares no more than the South about a true emancipation, which renders the difficulty insoluble even by war and threatens to destroy the confederation.”<sup>2</sup> He expanded on these comments in a subsequent chapter (“Slavery and the Proletariat”).

It must be remembered that while the war has long been portrayed by the winners as a crusade against slavery, in reality while maintaining slavery was undoubtedly one of the main driving forces for the secession of the Southern States, its ending was not a factor for the North: not only did slave States fight for it, Northern politicians also explicitly argued that it was waging war solely over maintaining the Union. Ending slavery came to the fore as a war measure with the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862 which applied only to the rebel States, so freeing those slaves it could not reach and keeping those it could liberate in chains. Lincoln himself personally opposed slavery but did not view black people as equals, aiming to free the slaves but then deport them to Africa.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in late 1861 Lincoln took

steps to initiate a formal colonisation programme and the following year saw Congress passing legislation providing funding for this under the direct guidance of the White House.<sup>4</sup>

Readers of Schapiro’s work would be surprised to discover Proudhon criticised all this. Both races were equal (“psychology sees no difference between the constitution of the negro conscience and that of the white, no more than between the comprehension of one and the other”) and any attempt to deport blacks was “a crime equal to that of the slavers” for “by a century of servitude” they have “acquired the right of use and of habitation on American soil”. He urged Whites in both the North and the South to “receive [blacks] in comradeship and welcome them as fellow citizens, equals and brothers” as well as “granting to blacks hitherto kept in servitude, along with freedmen, equal political rights”. However, to ensure “they do not fall into a worse servitude than whence they came”, reforms were needed that “also bestows upon them land and ownership” and “providing possessions for the wage-workers [of both races] and organising, alongside political guarantees, a system of economic guarantees”. This was because “the principle of equality before the law must have as a corollary, 1) the principle of equality of races, 2) the principle of equality of conditions, 3) that of ever more approached, although never achieved, equality of fortunes”.<sup>5</sup> In short:

Two things would have been necessary, by common accord and energetic will, to save the Union: 1) free the blacks and give them citizenship, which the States in the North only half granted and which those of the South did not want at all; 2) energetically fight the growth of proletariat, which did not enter the views of anyone.<sup>6</sup>

If this were not done, then “it is clear that black servitude will only change its form” as they would now join the White proletariat at the mercy of the capitalist class. Proudhon mocked the liberalism which “applauds the conversion of the slavery of

<sup>1</sup> “The Principle of Federation”, *Property is Theft!*, 698-9.

<sup>2</sup> “The Principle of Federation”, 699.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Zinn, Chapter 9, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492-Present* (New York: HarperCollins Books, 2003). This is reflected in Proudhon’s letters in which he noted “the care taken by the North not to speak of slaves, and thereby to retain a part of the southern States” while the South demanded “separation” in order to “maintain the slavery without which they pretend not to be able to live”. (*Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon* [Paris: Lacroix, 1875] XII: 17, 80) If the South were “brazen slavers”, the North are

“hypocritical exploiters” and both share a “horror” of different races expressed in the former “who exploit blacks” and the latter “who exterminate the Redskins”. (*Correspondance de P.-J. Proudhon* [Paris: Lacroix, 1875] XIV: 277, 77-8)

<sup>4</sup> Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> “Du Principe Fédératif”, 538, 539-40, 542.

<sup>6</sup> “Du Principe Fédératif”, 535.

the Blacks into the proletariat” as it “does not support slavery, of course!... but accommodates itself wonderfully to the most brazen exploitation”. It cannot see the Northern ruling class was fighting for economic interests rooted in “the cold calculation” that “it is more to the advantage of the capitalist” to “use *free* workers, who support themselves with their wages, than enslaved workers who give more trouble than wage-workers and produce proportionally less profit regardless of [the costs of] their subsistence”.<sup>1</sup>

While this falls foul of the perfectionist fallacy, it rests on an analysis which Schapiro denies Proudhon had, an opposition to the social relations within production under capitalism:

But it would be naive to think that it is just the peculiar institution of slavery that Proudhon detests. He finds in the North also the principle of inequality and class distinction. If he is critical of both sides in the war, it is because the federative principle is incompatible with inequality, whether the agrarian variety of master and slave or the modern version of capital and labour [...]

Proudhon didn't really believe that the Union side would emancipate the Negro, but would fix on deportation as the solution to the problem. The union could be saved only by the liberation of the Negroes, granting them full citizenship, and by a determination to stop the growth of the proletariat. For what is gained for the former slaves, if emancipation means that they will become members of the proletariat? He notes that the situation in Russia after the emancipation of the serfs (1861) is analogous. Liberated serfs without land would be helpless. Economic guarantees must be developed alongside political ones.<sup>2</sup>

This opposition to both sides is a far cry from Schapiro's account. Yet it can be criticised for “Proudhon suggests that nothing will have been gained if the blacks were freed only to become wage earners, as if the condition of the wage-earner

were not closer to the realization of personal autonomy than the condition of a well-treated slave.”<sup>3</sup> While undoubtedly downplaying the specific horrors of slavery, Proudhon (given his opposition to violence and war) had little option for he could not call for slave revolts as did his contemporary Joseph Déjacque who pointed to the example of abolitionist John Brown.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Proudhon's analysis was astute, given the fate of the newly liberated slaves. Rather than being provided with the resources to labour for themselves, they were cast as Proudhon feared into the proletariat. This, as one contemporary Black newspaper rightly argued, meant the “slaves were made serfs and chained to the soil... Such was the boasted freedom acquired by the coloured man at the hands of the Yankees.”<sup>5</sup> The failure after the war to provide a solid economic footing for the freed slaves is now considered a cause of the failure of Reconstruction and W.E.B. DuBois captured that failure well in 1935: “The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery”.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than favour the South, Proudhon opposed both sides as they were “fighting only over the type of servitude” and so should “be declared equally blasphemers and renegades of the federative principle, and shunned by [other] nations”.<sup>7</sup> While Proudhon's positions on black slavery, race, and the American Civil War all have their issues and can, and should, be critiqued, Schapiro preferred method of invention and omission should play no part in it.

### ***On Legacies***

Proudhon during his lifetime was, rightly, considered a man of the left and demonised by the right. This changed, as Schapiro recounts, around 50 years after his death thanks to the activities of French neo-royalists before the First World War, when sections of the right celebrated certain aspects of Proudhon's ideas. From there to fascism, with Schapiro noting that three fascists claimed Proudhon as an intellectual precursor. (363-4, 368-9)

Yet this appreciation by the right was as selective as Schapiro's own account and, as such, can be

<sup>1</sup> “Du Principe Fédératif”, 536, 539-40.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Nelson, “The Federal Idea in French Political Thought”, *Publius* (Summer 1975) 5: 3, 41

<sup>3</sup> Nelson, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Déjacque, “La Guerre Servile”, *À bas les chefs! Écrits libertaires (1847-1863)* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2016), 186-191.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Zinn, 196-7.

<sup>6</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 26.

<sup>7</sup> “Du Principe Fédératif”, 541.

dismissed. As Individualist anarchist Benjamin R. Tucker noted with regards to the neo-royalists, “[o]ne of the methods of propagandism practised by these agitators is the attempt to enrol among their apostles all the great dead who, if living, would look with scorn upon their ways and works. Every great writer who has criticised democracy and who, being in his grave, cannot enter protest, is listed as a royalist, a nationalist, and an anti-Dreyfusard.” However, “it is not to be inferred that, because Proudhon destroyed Rousseau’s theory of the social contract, he did not believe in the advisability of a social contract, or would uphold a monarch in exacting an oath of allegiance. [...] All this, however, is carefully concealed” while the group “utterly ignores the affirmative statements of its stolen hero”.<sup>1</sup>

That reactionary ideologues (whether *Action française* or Nazis) tried to attract socialists to the right by seeking to appropriate the legacy of socialists long dead comes as no surprise. That self-proclaimed anti-fascists unquestionably repeat their claims and, worse, their techniques does. Yet the fact remains that Proudhon expressed some horrible things at times. Few thinkers are completely consistent, and Proudhon’s most blatant inconsistencies were the sexism and anti-Semitism which Schapiro rightly points to.

Yet Proudhon’s defence of patriarchy hardly squares with his advocacy of anarchy and his claim “that the social revolution is the negation of all hierarchy, political and economic”.<sup>2</sup> In this, sadly, he did not rise above the dominant ideas and attitudes of his time as he did in other areas (Kropotkin dismissed his writings on woman as something “which most modern writers will, of course, not agree”<sup>3</sup>). Schapiro attributes Proudhon’s anti-feminism to him being a warmonger but as he was no militarist its roots reflect his cultural background. (361) Still, Schapiro quite rightly criticised Proudhon’s anti-feminism yet, unlike his earliest critics on this issue like Joseph Déjacque and André Léo, did not note the very obvious contradiction between this aspect of his ideas and his associationism (perhaps because Schapiro fails to discuss that accurately). These critics used Proudhon’s core ideas against him and argued for association within the family as elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin R. Tucker, “Lego et Penso: Proudhon and Royalism”, *The New Freewoman: An Individualist Review*, Vol. 1 No. 8 (10 October 1913), 156-7.

<sup>2</sup> “La Révolution sociale”, 283.

**We want legislation of the people by the people, without representatives;**  
**government of the people by the people, without that supernatural person called the prince or the state;**  
**industrial centralisation, administrative, without hierarchy;**  
**guarding of the people by the people, without any other army than a citizen militia;**  
**justice of the people by the people, without unremovable magistrates;**  
**education of the people by the people without university monopolies and without Jesuits;**  
**finally we want the organisation of labour by the workers, without capitalists or masters**  
**– draft prospectus for *Le Peuple*, 1847**

Déjacque proclaimed Proudhon “a *liberal* and not a LIBERTARIAN, you want free trade for cotton and candles and you advocate protectionist systems for man against woman in the circulation of human passions; you cry out against the high barons of capital and you wish to rebuild the high barony of the male upon the female vassal”. It was “understandable” and “revolutionary to “place the question of the emancipation of woman in line with the question of the emancipation of the

<sup>3</sup> “Ethics: Origin and Development”, *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Edinburgh/Oakland/Baltimore: AK Press, 2014), Iain McKay (ed.), 218.



proletarian”.<sup>1</sup> Léo, challenging Proudhon’s followers after his death, stressed the obvious contradiction:

These so-called lovers of liberty, if they cannot all take part in the direction of the State, at least they will be able to have a little kingdom for their personal use, each at home. When we put gunpowder to divine right, it was not for every male (Proudhonian style) to have a piece. Order in the family without hierarchy seems impossible to them. – Well, then, and in the State?<sup>2</sup>

Neither thought this position nullified his other ideas and demanded consistency by applying associationist ideas in the home.

Then there is his anti-Semitism, the other bigotry Schapiro gets correct. Yet this is hardly the proof of fascism which Schapiro claims as it predates fascism by centuries and not all fascist movements or regimes expressed it. While Nazism did, Italian (initially) and Austrian fascism did not (indeed, notable Jewish Italians were senior fascists until the late 1930s). A few passing anti-Semitic comments in private letters and in published works shows how central it was to Proudhon’s ideas. Indeed, the reader of his most important works would not realise that Proudhon was anti-Semitic, an awkward fact which Schapiro does his best to hide.

So while it would be possible to go through the thousands of pages of the 26 volumes of Proudhon’s *Oeuvres complètes* (in the Lacriox edition), the 8 volumes of his *Oeuvres posthumes*, the 14 volumes of correspondence and four volumes of his *Carnets* to extract all anti-Semitic remarks and so create a small pamphlet, it would achieve very little other than save a neo-Nazi some time and effort. Proudhon’s anti-Semitism was a personal bigotry, reflective of his culture and time, which played no role in his politics while he regularly raised ideas which rose above it:

There will no longer be nationality, no longer fatherland, in the political sense of the words: they will mean only places of birth. Whatever a man’s race or colour, he

is really a native of the universe; he has citizen’s rights everywhere.<sup>3</sup>

The best of Proudhon can be used to critique his worst and it should never be forgotten that almost all of Proudhon’s writings (published, unpublished and private) could be read without coming across a single anti-Semitic utterance.

So any neo-Nazi seeking inspiration in Proudhon’s works after reading Schapiro would feel cheated. Even those who pay lip-service to decentralised ethnically pure communities would be horrified by Proudhon’s advocacy of racial equality and mixing, his opposition to the expulsion of blacks from America as well as what became known as segregation. His few scattered anti-Semitic remarks would give little comfort.

### **Conclusions**

Articles about Proudhon usually tell us more about the authors and their political drives than about their subject. Rather than take the time to understand Proudhon and the era which shaped his views, commentators have tended to be dismissive of him and proclaim his ideas as contradictory. This, in turn, made it easy to treat any contradictions and inconsistencies in Schapiro’s argument about Proudhon’s alleged fascist tendencies as if they were Proudhon’s instead. Likewise, while some may point to these very different interpretations as showing the much-asserted inherently contradictory nature of his ideas, in reality some interpretations are simply weak or baseless: Proudhon being claimed as both an anarchist and a fascist reflects nothing more than the quality and accuracy of the interpretations the is subject to.

A hostile engagement with a thinker can be productive and shed light on the subject, one also driven by bad-faith is counter-productive and misleading. As shown, Schapiro’s account of Proudhon’s ideas was such an endeavour, expressed by invention, selective quoting, mistranslation and omission. He was clearly of the opinion that context – whether in terms of wider society, chronology, texts quoted or other relevant works by Proudhon – is a burden to both the writer and the reader. It is Schapiro himself who created the “sinister overtones that haunt his pages of which the present-day reader becomes aware”

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Déjacque, “De l’être-humain mâle et femelle – Lettre à P.J. Proudhon”, *À bas les chefs!*, 119, 118.

<sup>2</sup> André Léo, *La Femme et les Mœurs : monarchie ou liberté* (Paris: au journal *Le Droit des femmes*, 1869), 128.

<sup>3</sup> “General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century”, *Property is Theft!*, 597.

(336) and Chiaromonte was right to argue that Schapiro had gone beyond “misunderstanding and lack of sympathy” into “being inexcusably devious, and should know much better.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet without being championed as Schapiro was by Draper, Chiaromonte’s article has been unfortunately forgotten. Indeed, in the 1980s Draper felt able to proclaim that he “basic study of Proudhon’s authoritarian ideology was published by the liberal historian J. Salwyn Schapiro [. . .] After four decades, no one has even tried to refute it.”<sup>2</sup> Yet incisive as it was, Chiaromonte did not show the depths that Schapiro went to twisting Proudhon’s ideas to fit into his thesis. So the main reason for the subsequent lack of engagement with Schapiro’s “basic study” was that no one familiar with Proudhon’s ideas would take it seriously and, moreover, would appreciate how much work it would take to systematically debunk its many distortions and inventions.

In short, bad faith and being spectacularly wrong has its advantages – particularly when discussing a thinker’s whose ideas are relevantly unknown outwith their native tongue. This does not mean that Proudhon’s ideas are somehow above criticism. Draper was, for example, right to critique and mock his repulsive and pathetic defences of patriarchy but he unsurprisingly erred by seeking to portray it as consistent with anarchism rather than – as Joseph Déjacque rightly argued – being in contradiction to it. Given Draper’s influence in the Trotskyist-left, this makes debunking Schapiro relevant to all libertarians.

The best that can be said of Schapiro’s work is that it based on an implicit de-contestation of the concepts he is discussing. Words like democracy, socialism, republic, association, and so on, do not have the single (bourgeois) definitions he assumes. For Schapiro democracy is the democratic State and socialism is State socialism and anyone who criticises these is opposed to both democracy and socialism – even if, like Proudhon, they constantly

stress that they are both democrats and socialists while defending libertarian forms of these against authoritarian ones. As Proudhon put it in 1863:

Whoever says republic, says federation, or says nothing;

Whoever says socialism, says federation, or yet again says nothing.<sup>3</sup>

Once this is understood, the confusion that Louis Blanc, for example, felt as regards Proudhon’s ideas is understandable for he was a Jacobin who desired a centralised, unitarian, “One and Indivisible” Republic and a Socialist who desired centralised, State owned and controlled non-market

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## **Given Draper’s influence in the Trotskyist-left, this makes debunking Schapiro relevant to all libertarians**

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economy. Someone like Proudhon who advocated a republic based on socio-economic federalism as well as a socialism based on workers’ control within a market economy of peasants, artisans and workers’ associations would obviously puzzle him as it went against his assumptions of what Socialist Democracy meant. Likewise, Proudhon pointed out that certain ideas would fail to produce their stated goals. Instead of popular sovereignty, Statist democracy would empower a few politicians and bureaucrats; instead of ending exploitation, Statist socialism would change the exploiter from the boss to the bureaucrat. Rather than show Proudhon’s opposition to socialism or democracy, it shows his opposition to very specific forms of both and, in this, latter anarchists like Bakunin, Kropotkin and Tucker followed him.

Once the extent of Schapiro’s bad-faith is understood, then – for all his failings – Proudhon can be seen for what he is: the harbinger of anarchism.

**“Whoever says socialism, says federation, or... says nothing”**

<sup>1</sup> Chiaromonte, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Hal Draper, *Women and Class: Towards A Socialist Feminism* (Alameda: Center for Socialist History, 2011), 181-2.

<sup>3</sup> Proudhon, “Du Principe Fédératif”, 383-4.

# Joseph Déjacque, the first libertarian

Robert Graham

Joseph Déjacque (1821-1864) was one of the first self-proclaimed anarchists, and probably the first person to use the term “libertarian” as a synonym for “anarchist.” He may also have been the first person to describe anarchist alternatives to other political perspectives as “anarchism.”

In the span of a decade, as an impoverished refugee, Déjacque wrote and published an impressive body of work, advocating a kind of revolutionary anarchist communism, in contrast to the “mutualism” developed by his older contemporary, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first self-proclaimed anarchist.

Déjacque took Proudhon to task for not being “wholly anarchist,” calling on Proudhon to join in the struggle to achieve “the anarchistic community” where “every individual,” man and woman, “might be free to produce and to consume at will and in accordance with [their] dreams, without having to exercise or endure oversight from anyone or over anyone” (*Anarchism*, Vol. 1, page 68).

Déjacque was born in Paris in 1821 and raised by his single mother. He began working at the age of 12 in the paper hanging business. By 1847, he had become involved in the French socialist movement. Then came the French Revolution of 1848, which overthrew the “citizen King,” Louis-Philippe, and proclaimed a new French Republic.

At the beginning of the 1848 Revolution, Déjacque participated in “various socialist clubs” and activities, and became involved with a group of socialist feminists who advocated “Women’s Emancipation” (Hartman and Lause, Introduction

to *In the Sphere of Humanity*, page 7). Many of these women were later to suffer the same fates as their male counterparts at the hands of the counter-revolutionaries in France, being shot, imprisoned, executed and forced into exile. Déjacque gave a moving tribute to one of them, Louise Julien, upon her death in 1853, hailing her as “a heroic apostle of the social revolution” (Déjacque, 1853, page 7).

Déjacque fought on the barricades during the June 1848 workers’ uprising in Paris. The uprising was violently put down, with thousands of workers being killed by “Republican” troops. Déjacque survived the uprising, but was imprisoned, along with

thousands more of the French working class. That a “Republican” government would act so brutally against French workers turned many socialists, including Déjacque, away from any alliance with bourgeois republicans, even after Napoleon III seized power in a coup d’état in December 1851 and transformed the Republic into the Empire.

Déjacque was “released in March 1849,” only to be rearrested “in June 1849 when the royalists” came into control of the National Assembly (Hartman and Lause, page 9). He was arrested again in 1851, for publishing “a collection of romantic poems and

**Mr. Croissant, attorney general, spoke for the prosecution. “Mr. Déjacque,” he said, “is one of those hateful socialists who hold society in horror, and who have no other aim, no thought but to constantly excite the wicked passions of those who possess nothing against those who do possess, so that their detestable doctrines may triumph. This is how one foments the hatred of tenants towards landlords and especially of workers towards bosses.”**

The trial of Joseph Déjacque  
*Journal des Débats*, 23 October 1851

vignettes on class struggle” (Hartman and Lause, page 9).

After his release from prison, he went into exile, first in Belgium, then in England and the United States. Speaking in 1852 on the anniversary of the June uprising at a funeral in London for another working class French refugee, attended by exiled French politicians, bourgeois republicans, and socialists, Déjacque shocked the politicians and republicans by telling them that, for the working class, the “common enemy” was “all who, in London and Paris, dream of governing to better guarantee their social privileges against proletarian demands, the one in the name of Empire, the other in the name of the Republic” (Hartman and Lause, page 13).

Déjacque and other working class refugees in England lived in poverty. They had difficulty accessing donations from their compatriots back in France, much of which was controlled by the bourgeois politicians and republicans. Déjacque’s fearless denunciations of the bourgeois republicans for their betrayal of the French workers during the June Days did not help matters, and in 1854 he left for the United States.

He spent some time in New York, where he joined the “International Association,” a precursor of the First International, which also had a significant anarchist component, mostly from among the working class French exiles in England and the United States. French anarchists in London formed a “Club of Free Discussion,” and would end their meetings with cries of “Vive L’Anarchie!” (R. Graham, ‘*We Do Not Fear Anarchy, We Invoke It*,’ page 59).

Déjacque wrote one of his first substantial political essays while in New York in 1854, “The Revolutionary Question” (in *Anarchism*, Vol. 1, pp. 60–63). He took an explicitly anarchist stance, calling for the abolition of “government in all its guises, be they monarchist or republican.” He extolled the virtues of anarchy, which he defined as “individual sovereignty, complete, boundless, utter freedom to do anything and everything that is in human nature.” In place of the state, he proposed the creation of a revolutionary commune.

In 1855, Déjacque left New York for New Orleans. Shortly after his arrival, he gave a speech urging “armed slave rebellion within hearing of the slaves themselves” (Hartman and Lause, page 20). It was from New Orleans that Déjacque also published his

open letter to Proudhon, “On Being Human, Male and Female” (in *Anarchism*, Vol. 1, pp. 68 – 71).

Déjacque took Proudhon to task for his patriarchal anti-feminism. Déjacque prefaced his Letter with a parody of the masthead of Proudhon’s revolutionary newspaper from the 1848 French Revolution, *Le Representant du Peuple*, which had asked “What is the Producer? Nothing. What should he be? Everything!” Instead, Déjacque asked “What is man? Nothing. What is woman? Nothing. What is the human being? EVERYTHING” (Graham, 2015, page 51).

Déjacque wrote that he did not wish to “establish hierarchic distinctions between the sexes and races, between men and women, between blacks and whites” (*In the Sphere of Humanity*, page 31). He urged Proudhon to “speak out against man’s exploitation of woman,” and told him not to describe himself as an anarchist unless Proudhon was prepared to “be an anarchist through and through” (*Anarchism*, Vol. 1, page 71).

While still in New Orleans, Déjacque wrote *L’Humanisphere, utopie anarchique*, a kind of anarchist communist utopia. In 1858 he returned to New York, where he began publishing his own anarchist newspaper, *Le Libertaire* (“The Libertarian”), likely making him the first person to use “libertarian” as a synonym for anarchist. It was also in the pages of *Le Libertaire* that Déjacque first used the word “anarchism.” Instead of posing the choice confronting revolutionaries as one between “socialism or barbarism,” as Marx did, Déjacque posed the alternatives as being between Jesuitism or anarchism (Shawn Wilbur, 2016).

Déjacque returned to France around the beginning of the U.S. Civil War in the Spring of 1861. He hoped that the Civil War would turn into a proletarian social revolution, with white workers uniting with black slaves to destroy capitalism and the U.S. “fossil Republic” (Hartman and Lause, page 31).

Not much is known of Déjacque’s fate upon his return to France. He was likely dead by the time the International Workingmen’s Association was founded in London by mainly French and English workers in September 1864. According to the anarchist historian, Max Nettlau, his ideas were not discussed by the Internationalists, despite the fact that many of the International’s French members had been his comrades (Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, page 80).

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# On the Male and Female Human-Being – Letter to P.J. Proudhon

## Joseph Déjacque

What is man? *nothing* – What is woman? *nothing* – What is the human being? – EVERYTHING

From the depths of Louisiana, where the ebb and flow of exile deported me, I read in a United States journal, *Revue de l'Ouest*, a fragment of the correspondence between you, P.J. Proudhon, and a woman d’Héricourt.

The few words of Madam d’Héricourt<sup>1</sup> quoted in that paper made me fear the female antagonist does not have the strength – polemically speaking – to struggle with her brutal and male adversary.

I know nothing of Madam d’Héricourt, nor of her writings, if she writes, nor of her position in the world, nor of her person. But to argue well with women, as to argue well with men, spirit is not enough; one must have seen much and reflected much. He should, I believe, have felt his personal passions run into all corners of society; from the caverns of misery to the peaks of fortune; from the silvery summits from which the avalanche of happy vice is shaken in a compact mass, to the bottom of the ravines where sickly debauchery rolls. Then logic, that

spark of truth, could spring forth from this human stone thus polished by impact after impact.

I should like to see the question of the emancipation of woman dealt with by a woman who has loved a lot, and loved variedly, and who, by her past life, belonged to the aristocracy and the proletariat, especially to the proletariat: for the woman of the garret is more capable of penetrating by sight and thought into the heart of the formal, or secret, luxurious life of the great lady than a lady of the lounge is able to envisage the life of deprivation, visible or hidden, of the daughter of the people.

However, in the absence of this other Magdalene spreading the fertile tears of her heart at the feet of crucified Humanity and the striving of her soul for a better world; in the absence of this voice of civilised repentance, a believer in Harmony, an anarchic daughter; in the absence of this woman loftily and openly repudiating

all the prejudices of sex and race, of law and customs, that still bind us to the previous world; well! I, a human being of the male sex, I will try to discuss with and



**Jenny d’Héricourt  
(1809-1875)**

<sup>1</sup> Jeanne-Maries Poinard (1809-1875), known as Jenny d’Héricourt, was a feminist activist, writer, and a physician-midwife. An enthusiastic supporter of Étienne Cabet, the

French utopian socialist, she – like Proudhon and Déjacque – took part in the Revolution of 1848. (*Black Flag*)

against you, Aliboron-Proudhon<sup>1</sup>, this question of the emancipation of woman which is none other than the question of the emancipation of human beings of both sexes.

Is it really possible, famed publicist, that under your lion's hide there is so much nonsense?<sup>2</sup>

You who have such powerful revolutionary heartbeats for everything in our societies concerning the labour of the arm and the stomach, you have no less fiery outbursts, but of a complete reactionary stupidity, for everything related to the labour of the heart, the labour of feeling. Your vigorous and uncompromising logic in matters of industrial production and consumption is no more than a frail reed without strength in matters of moral production and consumption. Your virile intellect, complete for everything that relates to man is as though castrated when it comes to woman. Hermaphrodite brain, your thought has the monstrosity of two sexes within the same cranium, the enlightened-sex and the benighted-sex, and twists and turns upon itself in vain without being able to bring forth social truth.

A masculine Joan of Arc who, it is said, has kept your virginity intact for forty years, the pickling of love has ulcerated your heart; rancorous jealousies seep out; you cry out "War on women!" like the Maid of Orleans cried: "War on the English!" – The English burned her alive ... Women have made you a husband, O saintly man, long a virgin and still a martyr!<sup>3</sup>

Hold on, father Proudhon, would you like me to tell you: when you speak of women, you remind me of a schoolboy who talks very loudly and very strongly, willy-nilly, and with impertinence to give himself airs of knowing them and who, like his adolescent listeners, does not have the slightest clue.

After forty years profaning your flesh in solitude, from wet-dream to wet-dream, you have arrived at publicly profaning your intelligence, elaborating its impurities and besmirching woman.

Is this then, Proudhon-Narcissus, what you call manly and honest civility?

I quote your words:

"No, Madame, you know nothing of your sex; you do not know the first thing about the issue

that you and your honourable fellow league members agitate about with so much noise and so little success. And if you do not understand this question: if, in the eight pages of replies that you have made to my letter there are forty fallacies, that is as I told you, precisely because of your *sexual infirmity*. I mean by this term, whose exactness is perhaps not beyond reproach, the quality of your understanding which allows you to grasp the relationship between things only so far as we men place it at your fingertips. There is in you, in the brain as well as in the belly, a certain organ incapable by itself of overcoming its native inertia and which the male mind alone is capable of making function, and even then it does not always succeed. Such, madam, is the outcome of my direct and positive observations; I give it to your obstetrical sagacity and leave you to calculate its incalculable consequences for your thesis."<sup>4</sup>

But – old boar who is merely a pig – if it is true, as you say, that woman cannot give birth from the brain as from the belly without the assistance of man – and this is true – it is equally true – the thing is reciprocal – that man cannot produce from the flesh or from the intellect without the assistance of woman. This is logic and good logic master Madelon-Proudhon, that a student, who has always also been a disobedient subject, may well snatch from your own hands and throw back in your face.<sup>5</sup>

The emancipation or non-emancipation of woman, the emancipation or the non-emancipation of man: what is there to say? Can there – naturally – be rights for the one that are not rights for the other? Is the human being not the human being in the plural as in the singular, the feminine as in the masculine? Is it not to change nature to sunder the sexes? And the drops of rain falling from the cloud any less raindrops whether these droplets fall through the air in smaller or larger numbers, whether they are one size or another, this male configuration or that female configuration?

To place the question of the emancipation of woman in line with the question of the emancipation of the proletariat, this man-woman, or, to put it differently, this human-slave – flesh for the harem or flesh for the factory – this is understandable, and it is revolutionary; but to

<sup>1</sup> Aliboron is the nickname of the donkey from La Fontaine's *Les Voleurs et l'âne* [The Thieves and the Ass] (see book I, fable 13, where it talks about the "ass Aliboron"). More generally, being pretentious and stupid. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> Déjacque once again echoes La Fontaine (*L'Âne vêtu de la peau du lion* [The Ass dressed in the skin of the lion], book V, fable 21). (*Black Flag*)

<sup>3</sup> Proudhon was nearly 41 years old when he married Euphrasie Piégard (1822-1900) in December 1849. He had made no secret of his unattractiveness to things of the flesh, which he considered both physically and morally disgusting. This did not stop him fathering four daughters, two of whom did not survive childhood. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>4</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, "Lettre à Madame J. d'Héricourt", *La Revue philosophique et religieuse* (Paris: Bureaux de la Revue, 1856), vol. VI (January 1857), 164–5. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>5</sup> A reference to Proudhon's original letter in reply to d'Héricourt: "When I was three years and a half old, my mother, to get rid of me, sent me to a school-mistress of the neighbourhood, an excellent woman, called Madelon. One day Madelon threatened to whip me for some piece of mischief. It made me furious. I snatched her switch from her hand, and flung it in her face. I was always a disobedient subject." ("Lettre à Madame J. d'Héricourt", 168)

put it opposite and below that of man-privilege, oh! then, from the point of view of social progress, it is meaningless, it is reactionary. To avoid all ambiguity, it is the emancipation of the human being that should be spoken of. In these terms the question is complete; to pose it thus is to solve it: the human being, in its every day rotations, gravitates from revolution to revolution towards its ideal of perfectibility, Liberty.

But man and woman thereby walking with the same step and the same heart, united and fortified by love, towards their natural destiny, the anarchic-community; but all despotism annihilated, all social inequalities levelled; but man and woman thereby entering – arm in arm and face to face – into this social garden of Harmony: but this group of human-beings, dream of happiness achieved, a lively picture of the future; but all these egalitarian murmurings and all these egalitarian radiances jar in your ears and make you blink. Your understanding tormented by petty vanities makes you see the man-statue erected upon woman-pedestal for posterity, as in previous ages the man-patriarch stood over the woman-servant.

Whipper of woman, serf of the absolute man, writer Proudhon-Haynau, who has as a knout the word, like the Croatian executioner, you seem to enjoy all the lubricious lecheries of lust in stripping your beautiful victims of torture on paper and flagellating them with your invectives.<sup>1</sup> Moderate [*juste-milieu*<sup>2</sup>] anarchist, a *liberal* and not a LIBERTARIAN, you want free trade for cotton and candles and you advocate protectionist systems for man against woman in the circulation of human passions; you cry out against the high barons of capital and you wish to rebuild the high barony of the male upon the female vassal; bespectacled logician, you see man through the lens which magnifies objects and woman through the one that diminishes them; myopic thinker, you can only perceive what is poking you in the eye in the present or in the past

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<sup>1</sup> Julius Jacob von Heynau (1786-1853) was an Austrian general infamous for his extreme violence against the Italian and Hungarian minorities of the Empire in 1848 and 1849, which earned him the nickname “the hyena of Brescia.” (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> The July monarchy regime was, in theory, based on the idea of the “middle ground” (*juste-milieu*), which was meant to distance it from political extremes (whether popular or royal). Opposition journalists and cartoonists liked to mock this slogan. Proudhon had previously said this about the *juste-milieu*: “The golden mean [*juste-milieu*], known to philosophers under the name eclecticism, comes from this selfish and lazy mindset, which prefers to frank solutions impossible compromises; which accepts religion, but made at its convenience; which wants philosophy, but on condition;

and can discover nothing of what is elevated and distant, what anticipates the future: you are a cripple!

Woman, know this, is the mover of man just as man is the mover of woman. There is not an idea in your

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## **To place the question of the emancipation of woman in line with the question of the emancipation of the proletarian, this man-woman, or, to put it differently, this human-slave – flesh for the harem or flesh for the factory – this is understandable, and it is revolutionary**

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deformed brain, as in the brains of other men, that has not been fertilised by woman; not an action of your arm nor of your intellect that has not had as its objective attracting the attention of a woman, of pleasing her, even those that seem the most contradictory, even your insults. Everything beautiful that man has made, everything great that man has produced, all the masterpieces of art and industry, the discoveries of science, the titanic ascents into the unknown, all the achievements and all the aspirations of the male genius are attributable to woman who imposes them on him, like the queen of the tournament on a knight in exchange for a favour or a sweet smile. All of the heroism of the male, all his physical and moral worth comes from this love. Without woman, he would still be crawling on his belly or on all

which supports monarchy, but accommodating, democracy, but submissive; which proclaims freedom of commerce, but covering itself in protections; which would arrange for the gratuity of circulation and credit, but stipulating interest for its capital; which, finally, makes wisdom consist of striking the right balance, as far as possible, between authority and liberty, the *status quo* and progress, the private interest and the general interest; without ever understanding that authority inevitably engenders liberty, that philosophy is the inevitable product of religion, that monarchy is continually transformed into democracy, and, consequently, that the last term of progress is that in which, by the succession of reforms, the individual interest is identical to the general interest, and freedom synonymous with order.” (*Les Confessions d'un révolutionnaire* [Paris: Garnier, 1851], 25-6). (*Black Flag*)

fours, he would still be grazing weeds or roots; he would have the same intelligence as the ox, as the beast; he is something higher because woman told him: Be it! It is her will that created him, what he is today, and it is to satisfy the sublime demands of the feminine soul that he has attempted to accomplish the most sublime things!

This is what woman has made of man; let us now see what man has made of woman.

Alas! to please her lord and master she did not need a great expenditure of intellectual and moral strength. Provided that she mimics the monkey in her expressions and mannerisms; that she should fasten beads or trinkets to neck and ears; that she should dress in ridiculous rags and pad her hips like a mother Gigogne or a Hottentot Venus with the aid of crinoline or wicker; provided she could hold a fan or handle the sieve;<sup>1</sup> that she devotes herself to tinkling on a piano or boiling the pot; that is all that her sultan asked of her, all that was needed to put the male soul into jubilation, the alpha and omega of the desires and aspirations of man. That done, woman conquered the handkerchief.<sup>2</sup>

She who, finding such a role and such a success as shameful, wished to show good taste and grace, to join merit to beauty, to provide evidence of her heart and intelligence, was pitilessly stoned by the multitude of Proudhons past and present, pursued by the name blue-stocking<sup>3</sup> or some other imbecilic sneer and forced to withdraw into herself. For this mob of heartless and brainless men, she had sinned by having too much heart and too much intelligence: they stoned her; and very rarely has she met with the man-type who, taking her by the hand, said to her: woman, arise, you are worthy of love and worthy of Liberty.

No, what man, that is to say he which usurps that name, needs is not a woman in all her physical and moral

beauty, a woman of elegant and artistic form, with a haloed face of grace and love, with an active and tender heart, keen thought, with the soul of a poetic and perfect humanitarian; no, what this simpleton gawker at funfairs needs is a waxwork in rouge and feathers; what this bestial gastronome, in ecstasy before the stalls of the butchers, needs, I tell you, is a haunch of veal decorated with lace! So much so that, satisfied by the man whom she found so moronic, indifferent to the one in whom she searched in vain for the organ of sentiment, woman – it is history that tells us this, I want to believe it is a fable, a tale, a Bible – woman – oh! cover yourselves, chaste

eyes and chaste thoughts – woman have gone from biped to quadruped... An ass for an ass, it was natural, after all, that she let herself be seduced by the bigger animal. Then finally, as nature had endowed her with moral faculties too robust to be broken by fasting, she turned away from Humanity and sought in the temples of superstition, in religious aberrations of the mind and the heart, nourishment for the passionate

**Moderate anarchist, a  
*liberal* and not a  
LIBERTARIAN . . . you  
cry out against the  
high barons of capital  
and you wish to  
rebuild the high  
barony of the male  
upon the female vassal**

aspirations of her soul. In the absence of the man she has dreamt of, she has given her feelings of love to an imaginary god and, for feelings, the priest has replaced the ass!<sup>4</sup>

Ah! If there are so many abject female creatures in the world and so few women, men whom should we blame? Dandin-Proudhon, what are you complaining about?<sup>5</sup> You wanted it...

And yet you, you personally, I acknowledge, have delivered formidable blows in the service of the Revolution. You have cut deeply to the core of the age-old trunk of property and sent splinters flying into the distance; you have stripped the thing of its bark and you have exposed it in its nakedness to the eyes of the

<sup>1</sup> Crinoline refers to large and bulky skirt, comprising of rigid frames often made of wicker; mother Gigogne is a puppet-theater character, a strong woman from out of whose her skirts many children appear; The Hottentot Venus refers to Sawtche (c.1770s-1815), renamed Saartjie Baartman by her masters, a black slave woman from southern Africa who became a fairground attraction in freak shows in Europe due to the large size of her hips and buttocks. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> Conquer the handkerchief refers to obtaining the favours of master (referencing an Ottoman custom according to which the Sultan threw a handkerchief to the women of the harem whom he desires). (*Black Flag*)

<sup>3</sup> Blue-stocking (*bas-bleu*) was a derogatory term used against women considered to be pedantic and ridiculous, especially in the domain of literature. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>4</sup> Déjacque here refers again to two stereotypes which were common in anti-clerical writings of the time, namely that they were animal-lovers and controlled by priests. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>5</sup> *George Dandin ou le Mari confondu* (*Georges Dandin or the Confounded Husband*) is a comedy by Molière (1668) which depicts a rich peasant, eager to join the nobility, who is constantly ridiculed by his acquaintances and especially by his upper class wife who makes him cuckold. (*Black Flag*)



proletarians; on your way, you have snapped and toppled, like so many dried branches or dead leaves, the powerless authoritarian rebuttals, the revamped Greek theories of the constitutional socialists, your own included; you have brought with you, in a breakneck race through the twists and turns of the future, the whole pack of moral and physical appetites. You have blazed a trail, you have made others do likewise; you are weary, you want to rest; but the voice of logic is there to oblige you to pursue your revolutionary deductions, to march forward, always onwards, disdainful of the fateful warning, for fear of feeling the fangs of those who have legs rip into you.

Be frankly, fully anarchist and not one quarter anarchist, one eighth anarchist, one sixteenth anarchist, as one is a quarter, an eighth, one sixteenth partner in trade. Press on to the abolition of contract, the abolition not only of the sword and of capital, but of property and authority in every form. Arrive at the anarchic-community, that is to say, the social state where everyone would be free to produce and to consume at will and according to his fancy, without controlling anybody or being controlled by anyone else; where the balance between production and consumption would naturally be established, not by preventive and arbitrary constraint by the hands of others but through the free circulation of energies and needs of each. The human tide has no use for your dykes; let the free waves be: do they not find their level every day? Do I need, for example, to have a sun for myself, an atmosphere for myself, a river for myself, a forest for myself, all the houses and all the streets in a town for myself? Do I have the right to make myself the exclusive owner, the proprietor, and to deprive others of them, when I do not need them? And if I do not have this right, do I have any more right to wish, as in the system of contracts, to measure for each one – according to his accidental forces of production – what ought to belong to him from all these things? How many rays of sunlight, cubic metres of air or water, or square metres of forest path he can consume? How many houses or parts of houses he shall have the right to occupy; the number of streets or paving stones in the street where he will be allowed to set foot and the number of streets or paving stones where he will be forbidden to walk? – Will I, with or without contract, consume more of things than my nature or temperament requires? Can I individually absorb all the rays of the sun, all the air in the atmosphere, all the water in the river? Can I then take over and burden my person with all the shade of the forest, all the streets of the town, all the paving stones in the street, all the houses in the town and all the rooms of the house? And is it not the same for all that is for human consumption, whether it be a raw material like air or sunshine, or a finished product, like the street or the house? What then is the good of a contract which can

add nothing to my freedom and which may infringe and which would certainly infringe upon it?

And now, as far as production is concerned, is the active principle that is inside me more developed because it has been oppressed, that it has had shackles imposed upon it? It would be absurd to maintain such an assertion. The man called free in current societies, the proletarian, produces far better and much more than the man called negro, the slave. How would it be if he were really and universally free: production would be multiplied a hundredfold. – And the lazy, you will say? The lazy are an expression of our abnormal societies, that is to say that idleness being honoured and labour despised, it is not surprising that men tire of toil that brings them only bitter fruits. But in the state of an anarchic-community with the sciences as they have been developed in our day there could be nothing similar. There would be, as today, beings who are slower to produce than others but as a consequence beings slower to consume, beings quicker than others to produce therefore quicker to consume: the equation is natural. Do you need proof? Take any hundred workers at random and you will see that the greatest consumers amongst them are also the greatest producers. – How can we imagine that the human being, whose organism is composed of so many precious tools and the use of which produces in him a multitude of pleasures, tools of the arms, tools of the heart, tools of the intellect, how can we imagine that he would voluntarily let them be consumed by rust? What! In the state of free nature and of industrial and scientific marvels, in the state of anarchic exuberance in which everything would remind him of activity and every activity of life. What! The human-being can only seek happiness in an imbecilic inactivity? Come on! The contrary is the only possibility.

On this ground of true anarchy, of absolute freedom, there would undoubtedly be as much diversity between beings as there would be people in society, diversity of age, sex, aptitudes: equality is not uniformity. And this diversity in all beings and at all times is precisely what renders all government, constitutional or contractual, impossible. How can we commit ourselves for a year, for a day, for an hour when in an hour, a day, a year we might think differently than when we committed ourselves? – With radical anarchy, there would therefore be women as there would be men of greater or lesser relative worth; there would be children as there would be old people; but all would be indiscriminately none the less human beings and would also be equally and absolutely free to move in the circle of their natural attractions, free to consume and to produce as they see fit, without any paternal, marital or governmental authority, without any legal or contractive<sup>1</sup> regulations to hinder them.

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<sup>1</sup> A neologism created by Déjacque from the word “contract.”  
(*Black Flag*)

Society thus understood – and you must understand it so, you, anarchist, who boasts of being logical – what do you have to say now about the *sexual infirmity* of either the female or male human being?

Listen, master Proudhon, do not speak about woman, or, before speaking, study her: go to school. Do not call yourself an anarchist or be an anarchist all the way. Speak to us, if you wish, of the unknown and the known, of God who is evil, of Property which is theft. But when you speak to us about man, do not make him an autocratic divinity, for I will answer you: man is evil! – Do not attribute to him an intellectual capital which only belongs to him by right of conquest, by commerce in love, an usurious wealth which comes to him entirely from woman and which is the product of her own soul, and do not dress in clothes stripped from others, for then I will answer you: property is theft!

On the contrary, raise your voice against this exploitation of woman by man. Tell the world, with that vigour of argument that has made you an athletic agitator, tell it that man can only pull the Revolution out of the mud, drag it from its muddy and bloody rut, with the assistance of woman; that alone he is powerless; that he needs the support of woman's heart and head; that on the path of social Progress they must both walk together, side by side and hand in hand; that man can only reach the goal, overcoming the exertions of the journey, only if he has for support and for strength the glances and caresses of women. Tell man and tell woman that their

destinies are to bond and to better understand each other; that they have one and the same name, as they are one and the same being, the human being; that they are, by turns and at the same time, one the right arm and the other the left arm, and that, in human identity, their hearts could form only one heart and their thoughts a single bundle of thoughts. Tell them again that on this condition alone will they be able to shine upon each other, pierce in their luminous march the shadows that separate the present from the future, the civilised society from the harmonic society. Finally tell them that the human being – in its relative proportions and manifestations – the human being is like the glow-worm: it shines only by love and for love!

Say it – Be stronger than your weaknesses, more generous than your resentments: proclaim liberty, equality, fraternity, the indivisibility of the human being. Say it: it is public salvation. Declare Humanity in danger: summon in mass men and women to throw invading prejudices outside of social boundaries: awaken a Second and Third of September against this masculine high nobility, this aristocracy of sex that would rivet us to the old regime, Say it: you must! Say it with passion, with genius, cast it in bronze, make it thunder... and you will be worthy of others and of yourself.

New Orleans,

May 1857

# Authority — Dictatorship

Joseph Déjacque

*Le Libéraire*, 7 April 1859<sup>1</sup>

What assurance have I gained?

What conclusion can I draw?

...

The knowledge that I have gained is that there is only one right in the world: it is the right of the strongest.

...

Thus, no more doubt, no more uncertainty, no more equivocation: might is right; there is no other right than force, for that right is the only one which is inviolable, the only one which carries in itself its own inevitable guarantee and its effective sanction.

If that conclusion is true, “transforming force” is the only object that can suggest itself to the man desiring to remove himself more and more from the state of barbarism.....

But how is it to be transformed?

By applying ourselves, relentlessly and without exception, to taking from the material force all that which it will be possible to withdraw from it, in order to add it to the immaterial force. I call “material force:” every corporeal power, every numerical power.

I call “immaterial force:” every intellectual power, every scientific power.

I call “material force:” every artificial law, any law for the performance of which the evidence of its necessity does not suffice.

I call “immaterial force:” every natural law, any law for the performance of which the evidence of its necessity suffices.

I call “material force:” the force by which man is like an animal.

I call “immaterial force:” the force by which man is superior to all other animated beings.

...

Wars, conquests, authorities, what are you? You are the right of the strongest, materially, nationally.

Sciences, discoveries, liberty, what are you? You are the right of the strongest, intellectually, individually.

...

Such is my conclusion, and by it I come to make human thought no less inviolable than human life.

A man has no more right to prevent another man from thinking, though he is mentally deformed and infirm, than he has to

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<sup>1</sup> Translator: Shawn P. Wilbur. Also known as “À bas les chefs!” (“Down with the bosses!”)

prevent a man from living, though he is deformed and infirm in body.

Society has no more right against evil thinking than it has against evil conduct.

But how shall we battle evil conduct?

By not proceeding in an allopathic, but a homeopathic manner, proceeding by similarities and not by contraries; by not opposing material force to intellectual force, but by opposing force intellectual force to intellectual force.

Either Right is nothing, or Right is human inviolability: intellectually and corporeally.

When we return from laws to rights, as one goes from the mouth of a river to its source, we recognise that right cannot exist by halves.

What is the right assuring man property in his body and not assuring him property in his mind?

Is the body of a man worth a greater source of value than his mind? Is his mind less sacred than his body?

The right which puts the corporeal value of the man at a price so high, and his intellectual value at a price so low, is a right which closely resembles a human body from which the mind is absent: it is an idiotic right.

And this is the right that of which we boast! And it is this right before which I am supposed to bow my knee in respect! that I should incline my head in superstition! — No.

That right is still barbarism.

Where barbarism has not ceased to reign, man has no more property in his body than he has property in his mind; ..... it is that complete property in himself which constitutes the only right that it would be possible for my reason to recognise distinctly, the individual right of the strongest “intellectually, scientifically, industrially, .....” succeeding everywhere the collective right of the strongest “materially, numerically, legally, territorially,” the only Right, finally, which would not be a vain word.

Émile de Girardin

We are no longer in the fabulous times of Saturn, when the father devoured his children, nor in the times of Herod, when one massacred an entire generation of frail innocents—which, after all, did not prevent Jesus from escaping the massacre, or Jupiter the devouring. We live in an era in which we no longer kill many children, with the sword or the teeth, and it appears natural enough that the young bury the old. Hercules is dead; why seek to resuscitate him? We could at the most only galvanise

him. The club is less mighty than saltpetre, saltpetre is less mighty than the electric battery, and the electric battery is less mighty than the idea.

To every idea, present and to come, welcome! Authority had reigned so long over men, it has taken such possession of humanity, that it has left garrisons everywhere in our minds. Even today, it is difficult, other than in thought, to chip it away completely. Each civilised person (*civilizée*<sup>1</sup>) is a fortress for it, which, guarded of prejudices, stands hostile to the passage of that invading Amazon, Liberty. Thus, those who believe themselves revolutionaries and swear only by liberty,

proclaim nonetheless the necessity of dictatorship, as if dictatorship did not exclude liberty, and liberty dictatorship. What big babies there are, if the truth be told, among the revolutionaries!—and big babies who cling to their daddy—for whom the democratic and social Republic is inevitable, doubtless, but with an emperor or a dictator—it’s all one—for the governor; people mounted side-saddle, and faced towards the rump, on their donkey’s carcass, who, with eyes fixed on the prospect of progress, move away from it the more they try to approach

it,—the feet in this position galloping in the opposite direction ahead of the head. These revolutionaries, bare-necked politickers, have preserved, along with the imprint of the collar, the moral stain of servitude, and the stiff neck of despotism. Alas! They are only too numerous among us. They call themselves republicans, democrats and socialists, but they have fondness, they have love only for authority with an iron grip: more monarchistic in reality than the monarchists, who could nearly pass for anarchists beside them.

Dictatorship, whether it is a hydra with a hundred heads or a hundred tails, whether it is autocratic or demagogic, can certainly do nothing for liberty: it can only perpetuate slavery, morally and physically. It is not by regimenting a nation of helots under a yoke of iron, since there is iron, by confining them in a uniform of proconsular wills, that the people will be made intelligent and free. All that which is not liberty is against liberty. Liberty is not a thing that can be allocated. It does not pertain only at the

<sup>1</sup> According to the historical scheme of Charles Fourier, the *civilizée* is anyone who lives in the era of Civilisation, the

very imperfect present age, which will be succeeded by eras of Guarantee and Harmony. (Translator)

whim of whatever personage or committee of public safety orders it, and makes a gift of it. Dictatorship can cut off the people's heads, but it cannot make the people increase and multiply; it can transform intelligences into corpses, but it cannot transform cadavers into intelligences; it can make the slaves creep and crawl under its boots, like maggots or caterpillars, flattening them under its heavy tread,—but only Liberty can give them wings. It is only through free labour, intellectual and moral labour, that our generation, civilisation or chrysalis, will be metamorphosed into a bright and shiny butterfly, will assume a truly human type and continue its development in Harmony.

Many men, I know, speak of liberty without understanding it; they know neither the science of it, nor even the sentiment. They see in the demolition of reigning Authority nothing but a substitution of names or persons; they don't imagine that a society could function without masters or servants, without chiefs and soldiers; in this they are like those reactionaries who say: "There are always rich and poor, and there always will be. What would become of the poor without the rich? They would die of hunger!" The demagogues do not say exactly that, but they say:

"There have always been governors and governed, and there always will. What would become of the people without government? They would rot in bondage!" All these antiquarians, the reds and the whites, are just partners and accomplices; anarchy, libertarianism disrupts their miserable understanding, an understanding encumbered with ignorant prejudices, with asinine vanity, with cretinism. The plagiarists of the past, the retrospective and retroactive revolutionaries, the dictatorists, those subservient to brute force, all those crimson authoritarians who call for a saving power, will croak all their lives without finding what they desire. Like the frogs who asked for a king, we see them and will always see them exchange their Soliveau for a Grue, the government of July for the government of February, the perpetrators of the massacres of Rouen for those of the massacres of June, Cavaignac for Bonaparte, and

tomorrow, if they can, Bonaparte for Blanqui... If one day they cry: "Down with the municipal guard!" it is in order to cry at the next instant: "Long live the guard mobile!" Or they swap the guard mobile for the imperial guard, as they would swap the imperial guard for the revolutionary battalions. Subjects they were; subjects they are; subjects they will be. They neither know what they want nor what they do. They complained yesterday that they did not have the man of their choice; they complain the next day of having too much of him. Finally, at every moment and every turn, they invoke Authority "with its long, sharp beak, helved on its slender neck," and they find it surprising that it bites them, that it kills them!

Whoever calls themselves revolutionary and speaks of dictatorship are only dupes or rogues, imbeciles or traitors. They are imbeciles and dupes if they advocate it as the auxiliary of the social Revolution, as a mode of transition from the past to the future, for this is always to conjugate Authority in the present indicative; rogues and traitors if they only envision it as a means of taking their part of the budget and of playing representative everywhere and at all times.

Indeed, how many little men are there

who would like nothing better than to have official stilts: a title, a salary, some representation to pull themselves out of the quagmire where ordinary mortals flounder and give themselves the airs of giants. Will the common people always be stupid enough to provide a pedestal for these pygmies? Will they always be told: "You speak of suppressing those elected by universal suffrage, to throw the national and democratic representation out the windows, but what will you put in its place? For, in the end, something is necessary, and someone must command: a committee of public safety, perhaps? You do not want an emperor, a tyrant. This is understood, but who will replace them: a dictator?... because everyone can not drive, and there must be someone who devotes himself to governing the others..." Well! Gentlemen or citizens, what good is it to suppress it, if it is only in order

**Thus, perhaps, he could indeed command *in the name of the people*, I do not deny it, but without fail, *against the people*. He will deport or have shot all those who have libertarian impulses... he would forbid all progress which goes beyond him.**

to replace it? What is needed is to destroy evil and not displace it. What does it matter to me whether it bears one name or another, whether it is here or there, if, under this mask or that appearance, it is still and always in my way.—One removes an enemy; one does not replace it.

Dictatorship, the sovereign magistracy, the monarchy, so to speak,—for to recognise that the Authority which is evil can do good, is this not to declare oneself monarchist, to sanction despotism, to renounce the Revolution?—If one asks them, these absolute partisans of brutal force, these advocates of demagogic and compulsory authority, how they would exercise it, in what manner they will organise this strong power: some will respond to you, like the late Marat, that they want a dictator in ball and chains, and sentenced by the people to work for the people. First let us distinguish: either the dictator acts by the will of the people, and thus will not really be a dictator, and will only be like a fifth wheel on a carriage; or else he will really be a dictator, will have the leads and whip in his hands, and he will act only according to his own good pleasure, for the exclusive profit of his divine person. To act in the name of the people is to act in the name of everyone, isn't it? And everyone is not scientifically, harmonically, intelligently revolutionary. But I admit, in order to conform to the thought of the blanquists, for example—that tail-end of carbonarism, that ba-be-bou-vist freemasonry, those invisibles of a new species, that society of secret... intelligences, ——— that there is a people and a people, the people of the initiated brothers, the disciples of the great popular architect, and the uninitiated. These affiliates, these outstanding characters, do they always agree among themselves? Let one decree be issued on property, or the family—or *you-name-it*—some will find it too radical, and others not radical enough. A thousand daggers, for the moment, are raised a thousand times a day against dictatorial slavery. Whoever would accept a similar role would not have two minutes to live. But he would not accept it seriously, he would have his coterie, all the men scrabbling for gain who will squeeze around him, and they would be for him a consecrated battalion of menservants in exchange for the left-overs of his authority, the crumbs of power. Thus, perhaps, he could indeed command *in the name* of the people, I do not deny it, but without fail, *against* the people. He will deport or have shot all those who have libertarian impulses. Like Charlemagne or whatever other king, who measured men by the height of his sword, he would decapitate all the intelligences that surpassed his level, he would forbid all progress which goes beyond him. He will be like all men of public safety, like the politicals of 93, followers of the Jesuits of the Inquisition, and he will propagate the general dumbing-down, he will crush individual initiative, he will make the night of the dawning day, cast shadows on the social idea. He will plunge us back, dead or alive, into the charnel house of Civilisation, and will make for the people, instead of intellectual and moral autonomy, an automatism of flesh and bone, a body of

brutes. Because, for a political dictator as for a Jesuit director, what is best in man, what is good, is the carcass!...

Others, in their dream of dictatorship, differ somewhat from these, in that they do not want the dictatorship of one alone, of a one-headed Samson, but the jawbones of a hundred or a thousand asses, a dictatorship of the *small wonders* of the Proletariat, deemed intelligent by them because they once reeled off some banalities in prose or verse, because they have scribbled their names on the polling lists or on the registers of some small politico-revolutionary chapel; the dictatorship, in the end, of heads and arms hairy enough to compete with the Ratapoils, and with the mission, as usual, to exterminate the aristocrats or the philistines. They think, like the others, that the evil is not so much in the libercidal institutions as in the choice of tyrants. Egalitarians in name, they are for castes in principle. And by putting the workers in power, in the place of the bourgeois, they do not doubt that all will be for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Put the workers in power! In truth, we need only to think back. Haven't we had Albert in the provisional government? Is it possible to imagine anything more idiotic? What was he, if not a plastron? In the constituent or legislative assembly we have had the delegates from Lyons; if it was necessary to judge the represented by the representatives, that would be a sad specimen of the intelligence of the workers of Lyon. Paris gave us Nadaud, a dull nature, intelligent enough for a porter, who dreamed of transforming his trowel into a presidential sceptre,—the imbecile! Then also Corbon, the reverend of the Atelier, and perhaps much the least Jesuitical, for he, at least, was not slow to cast off the mask and to take his place in the midst of, and side by side with, the reactionaries.—As on the steps of the throne the lackeys are more royalist than the king, so in the echelons of official or legal authority the republican workers are more bourgeois than the bourgeoisie. And that is understood: the freed slave who becomes master always exaggerates the vices of the planter who has trained him. He is disposed to abuse his command just to the extent that he has been prone or forced into submission and baseness by his commanders.

A dictatorial committee composed of workers is certainly the thing most inflated with self-importance and nullity imaginable and, consequently, the most anti-revolutionary. If we could take the notion of public safety seriously, it would be a matter of, first and always, of unseating the workers from all governmental authority, and then and always to unseat, as much as possible, governmental authority itself from society. (Better for power to have suspected enemies than doubtful friends.)

Official or legal authority, whatever name one decorates it with, is always false and harmful. Only natural or anarchic authority is true and beneficial.

Who had authority in fact and in law, in 48? Was it the provisional government, the executive commission, Cavaignac or Bonaparte? None of the above. Although they possessed violent force, they were themselves only instruments, the meshed gears of the reaction; they were not motors, but machinery. All governmental authorities, even the most autocratic, are nothing but that. They function at the will of a faction and in the service of that faction, except for chance intrigues, and the explosions of compromised ambition. The true authority in 48, the authority of universal salvation, cannot be in the government, but, as always, outside the government, in individual initiative: Proudhon was its most eminent representative (among the people, I mean, not in the Chamber). It was he who personified the revolutionary agitation of the masses. And for that representation, he had no need of a legal title or mandate. His only title came to him from his work, his science, and his genius. He did not hold his mandate from another, from the arbitrary suffrage of brute force, but from itself alone, from conscience and from the spontaneity of his intellectual power. Natural and anarchic authority had the full share of influence to which it was entitled. And that is an authority which has no use for praetorians, for it is the dictatorship of the Intelligence: it stirs and it invigorates. Its mission is not to bind or shorten people, but to grow them all the full height of a head, to develop in all of them the expansive force of their mental nature. It does not produce, like the other dictatorships, slaves in the name of public liberty; it destroys slavery in the name of private authority. It does not impose itself on the plebs by walling itself up in a palace, by armouring itself with iron mail, by riding among its archers, like a feudal baron;—it becomes apparent in the people, as stars become apparent in the firmament, by shining on its satellites!!

What greater power would Proudhon have had being a governor? He would not have had more of it, but much less, supposing that he could have preserved his revolutionary passions while in power. His power coming to him from his brain, anything which would have tended to impede the labour of his brain would have been an attack on his power. If he had been a dictator, in boots and spurs, armed from head to toe, invested with the suzerain sash and cockade, he would have lost, politicking with his entourage, all the time that he employed to socialise the masses. He would have created

reaction instead of revolution. Think instead of the chatelaine of the Luxembourg, Louis Blanc, perhaps the best-intentioned in all the provisional government, and yet the most perfidious, the one who has delivered the sermonised workers to the armed bourgeois; he has done what all preachers in vestments or authoritarian badges have done, preached Christian charity to the poor in order to save the rich.

The titles and government mandates are only good for those non-entities who, too cowardly to be anything by themselves, want to be seen. They have no reason to be, except reasons of these runts. The strong man, the man of intelligence, the man who is everything by labour and nothing by intrigue, the man who is the son of his works and not the son of his father, of his uncle or of any patron, has nothing to sort out with these carnivalesque attributions; he despises and hates them as a travesty which will sully his dignity, as something obscene and infamous. The weak man, the ignorant man, who still has the feeling for Humanity, must also fear them; he needs for that only a little common sense. For if every harlequinade is ridiculous, it is more horrible when it carries a stick!

Every dictatorial government, whether it be understood in the singular or the plural, every demagogic Power can only delay the coming of the social revolution by substituting its initiative, whatever it may be, its omnipotent reason, its civic and inevitable will to anarchic initiative, to the reasoned will, to the autonomy of each. The social revolution can be made only by all, individually; otherwise it is not the social revolution. What is necessary then, what it must tend towards, is to give each and every person the possibility, the necessity of

acting, in order that their movements, communicating with each other, give and receive the impetus of progress and thus increase the force tenfold or a hundredfold. What is necessary in the end, is as many dictators as there are thinking beings, men or women, in society, in order to shake it, to rise up against it, to pull it from its inertia,—and not a Loyola in a red hat, or a general politics to discipline, to immobilise one another, to settle on chests, on hearts, like a nightmare, in order to suppress their pulsations, and on foreheads, on brains, as a compulsory or catechismal instruction, in order to torment their understanding.

Governmental authority, dictatorship—whether it is called empire or republic, throne or chair, saviour of

Publication des « TEMPS NOUVEAUX » — N° 61

J. DÉJACQUES

**A bas les chefs !**



Prix : 0 fr. 10

1<sup>er</sup> Tirage, 10,000 Exemplaires

PABIS  
LES TEMPS NOUVEAUX  
4, Rue Broca, 4

1912

order or committee of public safety; whether it exists today under the name of Bonaparte or tomorrow under the name of Blanqui; whether it comes out of Ham or Belle-Ile; whether it has in its insignia an eagle or a stuffed lion...—dictatorship is only the violation of liberty by a corrupted virility, by the syphilitic; it is a caesarian sickness inoculated with the seeds of reproduction in the intellectual organs of popular generation. It is not a kiss of freedom, a natural and fruitful manifestation of puberty; it is a fornication of virginity with decrepitude, an assault on morals, a crime like the abuse of the tutor towards his pupil. It is humanicide!

There is only one revolutionary dictatorship, only one humanitarian dictatorship: the dictatorship of the intellectual and morals. Is not everyone free to participate there? The desire is sufficient to the deed. There is no need apart from it, and no need, in order to make it recognised, for battalions of lictors nor of trophies of bayonets; it advances escorted only by its free thoughts, and has for sceptre only its beam of enlightenment. It does not make the Law, it discovers it; it is not Authority, but it makes it. It exists only by the will of labour and the right of science. He who denies it today will affirm it tomorrow. For it does not command the manoeuvre by buttoning itself up in inactivity, like the colonel of a

regiment, but it orders the movement, teaching by example, and demonstrates the principle of progress by its own progress.

— Everyone marching in step! says one, and it is the dictatorship of brute force, the animal dictatorship.

— Let he who loves me follow me! says the other, it is the dictatorship of force intellectualised, the human dictatorship.

One has the support of all the shepherds, all the herders, all those who command or obey in the fold, all those who live in Civilisation.

The other has had the support of individualities that have become truly human, decivilised intelligences.

One is the last representation of the modern Paganism, the eve of final closure, its farewells to the public.

The other is the debut of a new era, its entry onto the scene, the triumph of Socialism.

One is so old that it has one foot in the grave; the other so young that it has one foot in the cradle.

— Old one! It is the Law, — you must perish!

— It is the law of nature, child! — you will grow!!

# The Servile War

Joseph Déjacque

*Le Liberaire*, October 26, 1859<sup>1</sup>

Property is robbery.  
Slavery is murder.

— P. J. PROUDHON.

We are Abolitionists from the North, come to take and release your slaves; our organisation is large, and must succeed. I suffered much in Kansas, and expect to suffer here, in the cause of human freedom. Slaveholders I regard as robbers and murderers; and I have sworn to abolish slavery and liberate my fellow-men.

— JOHN BROWN.

A handful of *free soilers* have just attempted a relief of slaves on the frontiers of Virginia and Maryland. They have not won and they are dead, but they have at least died fighting; they have sown the future victory in the fields of defeat. John Brown, who had previously fought in Kansas, where one of his three sons had been killed by the slave-holders and whose other two sons have just perished at his side. John Brown is the Spartacus who called the modern helots to break their irons, the blacks to take up arms. The attempt has failed. The blacks have

not responded in any numbers to the call. The standard of the revolt is sunk in the blood of those who carried it. That standard... it was that of liberty... and I salute it! and I kiss its bloody folds on the pierced bosom of the vanquished, on the battered brow of the martyrs! — Let it sparkle in my eyes, standing or fallen. Let it provoke the slaves, black or white, to revolt: let it unfurl on the barricades of the old continent and the new. Let it serve as a screen to the *soldiers* of the legal order. Let it be pierced by the bullets of the bourgeois assassins of Washington or Paris; trampled under foot by the national guards and *gardes mobiles* of France or America, insulted by the prostitutes of the press of the *model* Republic or of the *honest* and *moderate* Republic; from far or near, whether there is peril or not in approaching it, that flag, it is mine! Everywhere that it appears, I rise to its call. I answer: *Present!* I line up behind it. I proclaim moral complicity, solidarity with all its acts. Whoever touches it, touches me: — VENDETTA!!

The insurrection of Harper's Ferry has passed like a flash. The clouds are dark once again, but they contain

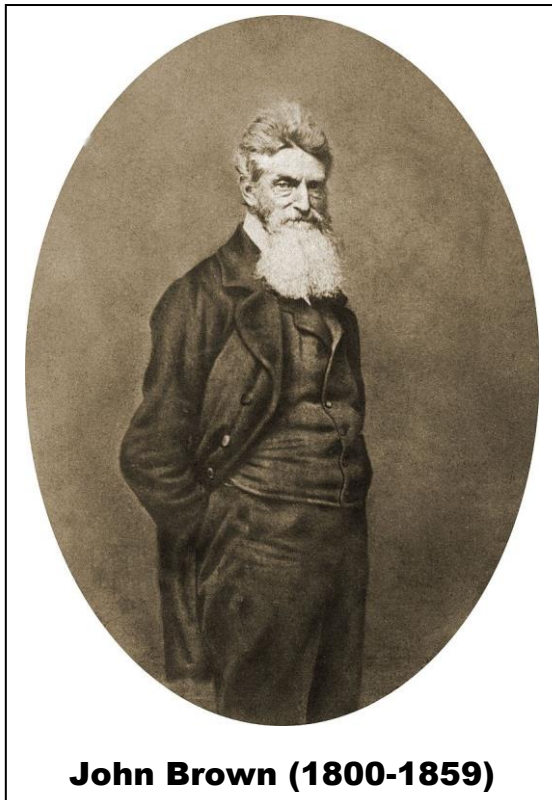
<sup>1</sup> Translation: Shawn P. Wilbur

electricity. After your flashes the thunderbolt will erupt, oh Liberty!...

In France, in 39, another John Brown, Armand Barbès, also made a skirmish. That political riot was one of the precursory flashes of which February was the lightning strike. (June 48, the first exclusive uprising of the Proletariat, commences the series of precursory social flashes of the libertarian Revolution.) The privileged have treated Barbès as a mad assassin, as they treat Brown as an insane bandit. The one was a bourgeois, the other a white, both enthusiasts for the freedom of slaves. Like Barbès in 39, Brown is a heroic fanatic, an enthusiastic abolitionist who marches to the accomplishment of his designs without seriously considering the causes of success or failure. More a man of feeling than of thinking, given over entirely to the impetuous passion that inflames him, he has judged the moment opportune, the place favorable for action, and he has acted. Certainly, I won't be the one to blame him for it. Every insurrection, be it individual, be it vanquished in advance, is always worthy of the ardent sympathy of revolutionaries, and the more audacious it is, the more worthy it is as well. Those who today disclaim John Brown and his companions, or insult them with their drivel: — the makers of abolitionist banalities who lie tomorrow in their daily spreads, should at least have delicacy about the mouth, for want of the heart that they lack; — the mercenaries of the French empire, these henchmen of the throne, these scribes of the altar, these traitors who daily chant *Te Deum* to the glory of the armies and sprinkle with holy-ink the brave harvesters of laurels, the heroes of the battlefield crowned with the turban of the zouaves or the turcos; those especially should recall that the *free soilers* of Harper's Ferry, these fighters for liberty, have at least on virtue which merits their feigned respect: valour in the face of the enemy! It is then to the soldier of the emperors or kings that they would know how to say: "Honour to the courageous in misfortune"? These insurgents, whom the *soldiers* and volunteers of slavery have murdered with arms or that the bought judges will murder with the law, they have fought one against one hundred, even... and those who have been left for dead and who, like Brown, have survived their wounds, will be hung, it is said... Infamy! That these mercenary pens who hammer away with a cold rage on the bodies of the defeated and distort the features eagerly. Hideous scribblers, they only have only the faces of men; their skulls conceal the instincts of a hyena. It is

those or their ilk who, eighteen hundred years ago, before another gallows, cast in the face of Jesus, bloodied Jesus, the bloody muck of their words!!

But let us leave these *daughters* of the press to their abject state. There are insults that honour as there are kisses that sear: these are the insults and the kisses of prostitution!



**John Brown (1800-1859)**

Let us examine the facts and draw out the lessons.

For a successful insurrection in the slave states, is the initiative of a few fired-up, free, white abolitionists enough? No. The initiative must come from the blacks, from the slaves themselves. The white man is suspect to the black man groaning in helotism and under the whip of the whites, his masters. In the so-called free states, the people of colour are regarded like dogs; they are not permitted to go by public carriage, nor to the theatre, nor elsewhere, if there is not a spot reserved: they are lepers in a lazaretto. The white aristocracy, the abolitionists of the North hold them at a distance and drive them back with contempt. They cannot take a step without encountering idiotic, absurd, and monstrous prejudices which bar them

passage. The ballot box, like the public coach, the theatre and the rest, is refused them. They are deprived of their civil rights, treated always and everywhere as pariahs. The black people of the slave states know this. They know that they are the subject and stake of all sorts of intrigues; that for the masters of the North, the exploiters of the proletariat and the electors, the owners of white slaves, abolitionism means industrial and commercial profits, nominations for political employment, government appointments, piracy and sinecures. They also mistrust some whites, with good reason; so that the good, those who are sincerely fraternal towards them, suffer for the bad. And then, what is that liberty to which we generally invite them? The liberty to die of hunger... the liberty of the proletarian... So they show little urgency to risk their lives to obtain it, though their lives might be most miserable and liberty their greatest desire. Many of the negroes, moreover, are held in such a profound ignorance, such a rigorous captivity, that they hardly know what happens a few miles outside the plantation where they are penned up and they readily take those limits for the limits of the world!... The foray of John Brown is good, in that the story will resound, with echoes upon echoes, to the remotest of shanties, that it will stir the independent streak of the slaves, will dispose



them to sedition, and will be a recruiting agent for another insurrectional movement. But the uprising of Harper's Ferry had one fault, and a grave one: it is to have been insanely generous, when he was master of the field; to have spare the lives of the legal criminals; to have been content to take prisoners, to take hostages, instead of putting to death the planters that he had in hand, traffickers in human flesh, and to have thus given hostages to the rebellion. Property in man by man is murder, the most horrible of crimes. In such a circumstance, one does not negotiate with the crime: one suppresses it! When one has recourse, against legal violence, to the force of arms, it is in order to use it: he must not be afraid to shed the blood of the enemy. For slaves and masters, it is a war of extermination. Steel must be brought first, and then, in case of setbacks, flame must be brought to all the Plantations. There must be—if victorious—not one planter,—if vanquished—not one Plantation left standing. The enemy is more logical. He gives no quarter!...

Every producer has a right to the instruments and products of their labour. The Plantations of the South belong by right to the slaves who cultivate them. The masters should be expropriated in the cause of public morality, for the crimes against Humanity. This is what John Brown seems to have recognised in the Provisional Constitution that he wanted to proclaim, an elaboration of ideas barely lucid and full of darkness, but which testify to the need for justice and social reparations with which his valiant heart was animated, and, as a consequence, with which the hearts of the masses, source and seat of his own, is animated. Sooner or later, the drop will become a flood, the spark will become a flame! So demands Progress, natural and enduring Law.

## **Discourse Pronounced July 26, 1853 at the tomb of Louise Julien, exile**

**Joseph Déjacque<sup>1</sup>**

Again a grave is opened... And this time, it is not a man. It is a woman that exile... that the circus devours to the applause of Caesar and his praetorian rabble.

A poor and valorous woman, a humble martyr for an idea, which, like the Christian idea eighteen centuries ago, when it was a revolutionary idea, — rises in its turn on the fragments of the old idols, a heroic apostle of the social revolution, a woman-Christ! No, your death will not be useless in the reform of society. It is necessary, alas! that women also suffer the tortures of prison and exile, that they are crucified by the dictatorial reactions in order to redeem by suffering and death, — by struggle,

1860 will soon dawn over the world, the daybreak of great revolutionary events.

All Europe is under arms:  
It is the last rattle of the kings...

Kings of high and low degree. In America, let the proletarian of the North and the slave of the South outfit themselves for the great war, the proletarian and servile war, the war against "the master, our enemy;" and, then, let the old and the new continent utter with one fraternal voice that cry of social insurrection, that cry of human conscience: — LIBERTY!!!

And you, Martyrs! John Brown, Shields, Aaron C. Stephens, Green, Copie, Copeland, Cook, you will be no more, perhaps! Given over to the executioner, strangled by the cord of the laws, you will have re-joined your companions, fallen before iron and lead... And we, your accomplices in the idea, we will have been powerless to save you... we have even, I say, been the accomplices of your murderers!... by not taking up arms to defend you, by acting only with speech or pen, with sentiments, instead of also acting with the sword and rifle, with the muscles. What! We, your assassins? Alas! yes... It is horrible! Isn't it? — Ah! Let that blood fall back on us and our children... let our consciences and theirs be soaked in it... let it make them overflow with hatred and insurrection against Legal Crime!... — The time of Redemption is near. Captives that we are in the web of civilised institutions, we will redeem then our forced faults, our painful inaction... Martyrs! You will be avenged!...

Oh! Vendetta! Vendetta!

— their sisters from submission to man, from the sin of slavery.

Oh! Let the Republic come, and who then would dare to contest equal rights to those who have sealed with their liberty and their blood the confession of their revolutionary faith?

Today it is an obscure female citizen, with the heart and brow of a poet; it is the feeble voice of a woman buried in the depths of the proletariat, but a voice heightened by the idea, a stylus-voice, which makes successful crime pale and shakes a throne bristling with thousands of cannons and a hundred thousand bayonets! It is a sick and infirm woman, who, — her body supported by a crutch,

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: Shawn P. Wilbur

her soul was supported by a thought of the future, — challenged a sceptre, and broke under the effort, but did not bend...

Yesterday, it was Pauline Roland, succumbing, like Louise Julien, at the bloody gallows of brutal force. Touching and sublime rivals in heroic sacrifices, vanquished? No. Killed in the bodily struggle, but living and imperishable in the martyrology of socialism, triumphant and dazzling under their torture-victim's halo with the propaganda which wins hearts and minds by the distressing and dolorous spectacle of their agony and their end.

But it is not today only nor tomorrow that the woman of progress, — the woman, that nature sensible and frail, — pays the minotaur of the resistance her tribute of blood and tears! Just a few years ago, — under another Caesarism, — it was some socialist workers, some chaste young girls, some dignified mothers as well, that were thrown to the wolves in the bilges of the prisons, to those monsters of stone and mud which are called St.-Lazare and Clairvaux! I have seen in 49 — what a horrible thing! — an unfortunate mother restored to liberty and — cruel irony, — to her affections. I saw her ask again and again in vain for the two little children that had been snatched from her arms the day when she and her husband were each cast into one of the sheds of the prefecture: the upholders of the family no longer knew what had been done with them...

Well! Despite this terrible sacrifice, this butchery of human flesh and feelings that all the governments which pass by spill on the altar of the old society, oh worshippers of force, is there then one of these government saviours which has been able to save themselves for sixty years? The foolish, they devote themselves to the persecution even of women, and they do not notice that it is above all by the martyrdom of women that in the past Christianity was able to invade pagan populations, and that in this way Socialism will conquer the popular masses.

Before this earth covers your shroud, Louise Julien, I salute you, woman, for all the women who, like you, break by strength of heart and thought from the narrow little circle of the family, that collar that grips social sentiments around the throat, — thrust into the great human family and spread there their ineffable and extravagant love, that infinite love that Christ, expiring on the cross, exhaled in a last sigh.

Oh, you whose death was necessary for us to learn about life, sister, whom few of us have known, go! It is not the sombre oblivion, the funerary angel which has breathed on your eyes today closed, it is the angel of memory, the angel of renown which, laying you on its robe of light, has kissed you on the forehead, spreading its wings.

Those die who, having lived walled up in a corner of their being, descend into the coffin wrapped in their idiotic selfishness; but when one has lived in humanity and for humanity, when one has left their heart in all hearts, left their tears on all the miseries, left their blood in all the massacres, oh! then, one does not die: the tomb is only the cradle of immortality.

On this grave whose gravedigger is not here, but at the Tuileries, in the salons of the aristocracy, under the frock of the priest and soldier's coat, on the flagstones of the Exchange and the parquet of the boutiques, under the skull shrunken by mercantilism and agio; on this grave—Well! No!—we will not invoke the furies of vengeance. What would be the good? Socialism does not take revenge; it destroys obstacles—whether men or things—without regard for their past. It does not chastise, it clears away. But, victim that we mourn, I wish at least to embalm you with

this wish that I form; and it is to labour without rest and with all my strength for the realization of my dream, the edification of your idea; it is, — contrary to paganism which denies one of the faces of human nature, to Christianity which denies the other, — it is — according to the new science which understands the individual with all its physical and moral sensations, the entire human being — it is, I say, to unite everywhere and always the cause of the proletarians to that of women, the emancipation, the liberation of the first to the emancipation, the liberation of the others; it is to push all those oppressed with the sabre and the strong-box, with the toga and the aspergillum, the disinherited of our terrestrial hell, to the hatred and scorn of the exploiters; it is to employ in the service of the social revolution, at the triumph of the egalitarian idea, thoughts and words, arms and action, ink and saltpetre; it is to march, finally, to the overturning of the old society and the promised land of liberty and harmony, the torch in one hand and the blade in the other: the light in one hand in order to spread it, and iron in the other, to guard the worker's way.

LONG LIVE THE DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIAL REPUBLIC!

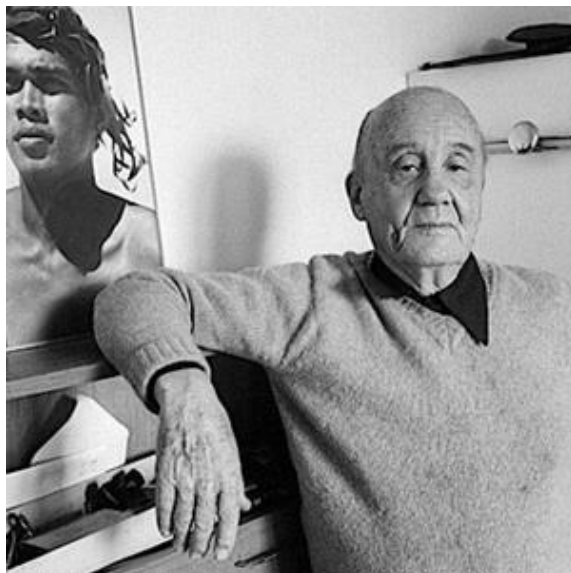


# Daniel Guérin, Proudhon and Bakunin

David Berry<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Guérin (1904-88) is probably best known among readers of *Black Flag* for his ‘rehabilitation’ of anarchism in the 1960s and for his writings arguing in favour of a synthesis of Marxism and anarchism—libertarian Marxism or libertarian communism—from 1968 onwards. (He was also a lifelong anti-colonialist, and, after coming out in 1962, a leading light of the gay liberation movement.) But he had not always been an anarchist—in fact it is debatable whether he ever was, and he wrote once that he could not accept the ‘anarchist’ label without some form of qualification.

As a young man, having rebelled against the Parisian *grande bourgeoisie* from which he sprang, he embarked in 1930 on a long voyage to what was then French Indochina, taking with him a small library: “Of all the reading I did on the cargo boat that took me to Indochina and brought me back, including amongst others Marx, Proudhon, Georges Sorel, Hubert Lagardelle, Fernand Pelloutier, Lenin and Trotsky, it was Marx who had the greatest impact on me. Reading Marx opened my eyes, unveiled the mysteries of capitalist surplus value, explained dialectical and historical materialism. Joining the revolutionary movement, I turned my back on the life of a bourgeois. Always a visceral anti-Stalinist, I became at the same time a leftwing socialist with Marceau Pivert and a



**Daniel Guérin (1904-1988)**

revolutionary syndicalist with Pierre Monatte. Later, reading the complete works of Bakunin—the six-volume edition produced by Max Nettlau and James Guillaume—was like a second cataract operation: it made me forever allergic to any version of authoritarian socialism, whether Jacobin, Marxist, Leninist or Trotskyist.”<sup>2</sup>

In fact, his transition away from Leninism to some kind of class-struggle anarchism had begun much earlier. He was strongly

influenced by the pre-1914 French syndicalist tradition even before he campaigned alongside Monatte—widely seen after the First World War as the embattled incarnation of Amiens Charter-type syndicalism—in the early 1930s, and although he had enormous admiration for Lenin and Trotsky (and corresponded with the latter during the Popular Front), and even appears to have been a member of the Fourth International during the 1940s, he was always critical of their dogmatism and what he increasingly came to see as their ‘Jacobinism’.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, he described his two-volume, revisionist study of the class struggle between the *sans-culottes* and the bourgeois leadership of the Jacobins in the French Revolution—*La lutte de classes sous la Première République, 1793-1797* (1945)—as an introduction to a proposed synthesis of Marxism-Leninism and anarchism. He seems to have been influenced not

<sup>1</sup> Also see David Berry’s “The Search for a Libertarian Communism: Daniel Guérin and the ‘Synthesis’ of Marxism and Anarchism” in *Libertarian Socialism Politics In Black And Red* (Oakland: PM Press, 2017). This was reprinted as the introduction to the English translation of Guérin’s *For a Libertarian Communism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2017). (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> *A la recherche d’un communisme libertaire*, p.9. Guérin was even a CGT organiser during the 1936 general strike. Pivert led the ‘Revolutionary Left’ faction within the Socialist Party, and later the Workers’ and Peasants’ Socialist Party, after their expulsion from the PS.

<sup>3</sup> Trotsky’s writings on Nazism were the main influence on Guérin’s ground-breaking *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), first published in 1939.

only by Marx's, Engels' and Kautsky's analyses of the history of 'bourgeois revolutions', but also by Kropotkin's landmark study, *The Great French Revolution, 1789-1793*, with its emphasis on the central importance of the spontaneous uprisings of the peasants and urban workers, on the equally spontaneous appearance of autonomous, federally organised 'communes', and on the conflict between the *sans-culottes*' preference for direct democratic structures and the centralising, bourgeois authoritarianism of Robespierre *et al.*

Guérin began to have contact with the anarchist movement in the 1950s, especially the *Fédération Communiste*

*Libertaire*. The ideological stance of the FCL ("libertarian Marxism") and its position on the Algerian war ('critical support' for the nationalist movement in the context of the struggle against French bourgeois imperialism) proved doubly attractive to the anticolonialist

Guérin. (Indeed, it is noteworthy that he would include a section on decolonisation in his 1965 book, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, and found material from Proudhon and Bakunin which supported the FCL's position.<sup>1</sup>)

A collection of articles published in 1959—*Jeunesse du socialisme libertaire* [*Youth of Libertarian Socialism*—saw Guérin's first real foray into the history of the nineteenth-century labour movement, and in particular the First International. There is little specifically about either Proudhon or Bakunin, but the basis of the book is his developing critique of authoritarian socialism, and includes what is, as far as I know, his first published study of anarchist ideas (with occasional references to or quotations from Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Stirner, Voline and others). This marked the beginning of what Guérin would later refer to as his "classical anarchism"

<sup>1</sup> *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); introduction by Noam Chomsky. Originally published in France in 1965.

phase, and saw the publication in 1965 of both his *Anarchism* and the accompanying anthology, *No Gods, No Masters*.<sup>2</sup>

Both books were hugely important, because at the time it was extremely difficult to find anarchist books in the shops, and the far left and the trade union movement were utterly dominated by the Stalinists and their systematic misrepresentation of working-class history. As a result, these books influenced an entire generation of young activists and made a major contribution to the resurgence of anarchism.

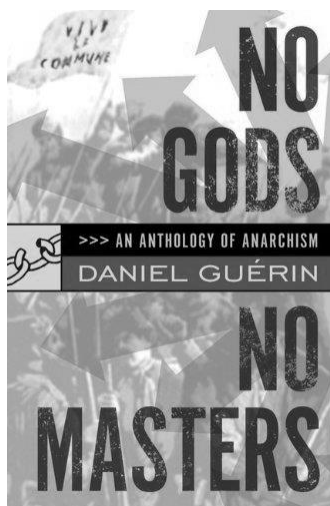
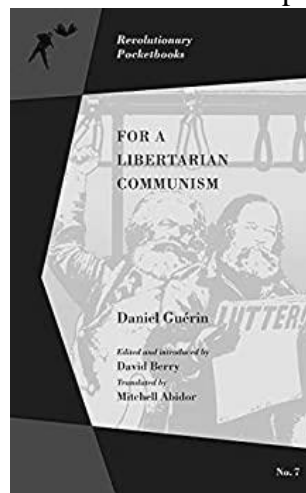
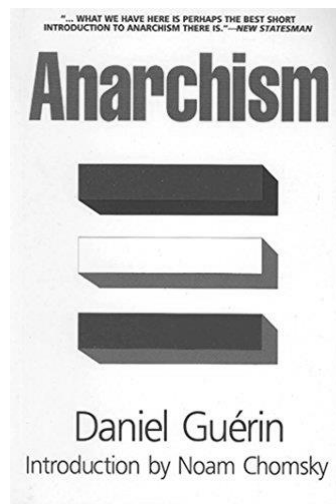
Later—thanks to his experience of homophobia in the labour movement—Guérin became interested in Stirner: note the reference in 'From Proudhon to Bakunin' to "the necessary de-alienation of the individual". But at the same time he was alienated from anarchism by the 'spontaneism' of the 1968 student movement (which he held partly responsible for the failure of the 'revolution'); he began studying Rosa Luxemburg and argued for a 'libertarian

Marxism'.

His preferred version of anarchism thus remained one which was closest to Marxism, i.e. a socialist or syndicalist anarchism based on revolutionary class struggle. Proudhon he was interested in above all as the "father of self-management", and in Bakunin as representative of revolutionary, working-class anarchism, close to Marxism yet remarkably prescient about the dangers of statist communism: "Bakunin's libertarian collectivism", he had written in 1956, "was an attempt to reconcile Proudhon and Marx. [...] The true synthesis of these two currents, however, remains to be achieved."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998), 2 vols.; translated by Paul Sharkey.

<sup>3</sup> 'La Révolution déjacobinisée', in *Jeunesse du socialisme libertaire*, p.62.



# From Proudhon to Bakunin

Daniel Guérin

The late Georges Gurvitch considered it “shocking to compare Bakunin and Proudhon” and maintained that one could write a book, *Bakunin and Proudhon*, to show how far Bakunin is, in fact, from Proudhon. No doubt Gurvitch had swallowed the reputation of destructive violence which has been stuck on Bakunin. The eminent sociologist dismissed as ‘aberrant’ any comparison between the two men. I propose to make here an indispensable reassessment of this subject.

First of all, the two were contemporaries and friends. Bakunin was only five years younger than Proudhon (whilst Marx was nine years younger). Their contributions are reciprocal, with a preponderance of influence from Proudhon to Bakunin. At least that is the opinion of Y.M. Steklov, a Russian biographer of Bakunin<sup>1</sup> Both were the founders of libertarian socialism. Certainly their paths as men, as theoreticians, and as activists did diverge. One was a sedentary Frenchman, the other an exiled, cosmopolitan Russian. One a son of the peasantry, the other of landed gentry. One taught himself only dead languages, the other was a consummate polyglot. Above all, as Marcel Body has reminded us, Bakunin was removed from the struggle by imprisonment and then deportation for twelve years. A precocious and fecund writer, Proudhon was able to publish an immense amount of work between 1839 and his death in 1865. It was slightly before Proudhon’s death that Bakunin, taking up the torch, entered upon his fiery career as an anarchist. He left behind a vast quantity of written work, which is still only partially accessible.

The impetus which, as he approached the age of fifty, made Bakunin branch off towards anarchism was due in large part, no doubt, to the influence of Proudhon, whom he visited in late 1863 and 1864. He had begun reading Proudhon’s works before being cast into chains, reading which incubated in the solitude of prison cells, and was completed, with the devouring haste of someone making up for lost time, after his escape and

return to Europe. Perhaps he even had some books by Proudhon at his disposal during the last two years of exile, when he was under house arrest in Siberia.

Nevertheless, it was only at the end of 1863, after the fiasco of the Polish uprising, into which, needlessly, he would have liked to have been able to throw himself, that Bakunin became a libertarian. Concerning that event, we should note that the positions of Proudhon and Bakunin were quite similar: Proudhon did not wish to support the insurgents, for he saw in them members of the nobility who were oppressing their peasants; Bakunin would agree later that “the

programme of the Poles” did not conform to “socialist ideas,” that “precisely for this reason” it neglected “the people’s cause,” and that the uprising which had been made “against the people,” to the exclusive benefit of the privileged classes, was a “retrograde, deadly, counter-revolutionary”<sup>2</sup> movement.

Well before 1863, as we shall see, Bakunin admired Proudhon’s writings and revolutionary action during the French revolution of 1848, but he had not yet come around to what he called, in German, with a touch of irony, his *Systemchen*, his ‘little system.’<sup>3</sup> As early as 1842, when he arrived in Dresden, he had been

**‘From Proudhon to Bakunin’ in *Our Generation* vol. 17, no.2 (Spring/Summer 1986), pp.23-33 (translated by Robert Mayo); republished in Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), *The Radical Papers* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987), pp.23-33. This text was originally a paper given at a colloquium on Bakunin in Paris on 28-29 January 1977, and was first published in Daniel Guérin, *Proudhon oui et non [Proudhon Yes and No]* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), pp.153-62. As well as a number of previously unpublished writings by Proudhon on the French Revolution, this book contains two other texts by Guérin: ‘Proudhon père de l’autogestion’ [Proudhon, the father of self-management] and ‘Proudhon refoulé sexuel’ [Proudhon, sexually repressed]**

<sup>1</sup> Yuri Michailovich Steklov, *Michael Alexandrovich Bakunin: 1814-1876*. Moscow, 1926-1927.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Si les traites de 1815 ont cessé d’exister?*, 1863, ed. Riviere, 1952, pp. 399-422; Michael Bakunin, *Works*, ed. Stock, Vol. IV, 1910, p. 464; “Fragments formant une suite de l’Empire Knouts-germanique,” 1872; letter from Bakunin to Herzen, 20 April 1867, and *Nota* on p. 246 in *Correspondance de Michel*

*Bakounine, Lettres a Herzen et a Ogareff 1860-1874*, published by Michel Dragomanov, Paris, 1896, pp. 246 and 257; “Programme de la Fraternite revolutionnaire,” 1865, in Max Nettlau, *Michael Bakunin. Eine Biographic*, 3 vols., London, 1896-1900, reproduced in my anthology of anarchism, *Ni Dieu ni Maitre*, 1970, vol. 1, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> *Briefe von and an Georg Herwegh: 1848*, Munich, 1896, pp. 22-23, letter from Bakunin to Herwegh, Aug. 1848.

fascinated by a book of a German writer, Lorenz von Stein, entitled *Socialism and Communism in Contemporary France*. Amongst other revelations Bakunin discovered there the challenges hurled at property by the young Proudhon.

In 1845, in Paris, Bakunin formed bonds of friendship with the anarchist writer, whom he considered “one of the most remarkable Frenchmen” of his time.<sup>1</sup> In the intimacy of this relationship, Bakunin both learned and taught. On the one hand, he familiarized himself with anarchism, and, on the other, as a brilliant young Hegelian, he attempted to acquaint Proudhon with Hegel’s thought, for Proudhon, who did not know any

German, had some difficulty assimilating dialectics. One evening one of their friends left the pair engrossed in an animated philosophical discussion. The next morning he found them in the same place, in front of the embers in the fireplace, still palavering.<sup>2</sup>

When, at the end of 1847, Bakunin was expelled from France to Belgium for having spoken at a meeting in commemoration of the Polish revolution of 1831. Proudhon expressed in his *Notebooks* the indignation which this arbitrary measure inspired in him.<sup>3</sup>

Yet Bakunin quickly returned to, Paris to participate with passion in the revolution of February 1848,<sup>4</sup> and he was to consider later that “in all that revolutionary phantasmagoria there were only two really serious men, albeit quite dissimilar to one another: they were Proudhon and Blanqui.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bakunin, *Confession*, 1851; ed. P.U.F., 1974, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Herzen, *Sobranie*, vol. X, pp. 190-191, in Arthur Lehning, *Michel Bakounine et les metres*, Paris, 10/18, 1976, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> Proudhon, *Carnets*, vol. II, Paris, 1961, p. 336; H.-E. Kaminski, *Bakounine: La Vie d’un revolutionnaire*, 1938, pp. 80-83.

<sup>4</sup> Bakunin, *Confession*, op. cit., pp. 79-82.

<sup>5</sup> Bakunin, *Works*, op. cit., vol. II, 1907, p. 128, “Lettres a un Francais sur la crise actuelle,” 15 Sept. 1870.

<sup>6</sup> Cf this speech in vol. of *the Complete Works* of Proudhon, “Deuxieme Memoire sur la propriete,” etc., ed. Riviere, 1938,

Some months later he departed for Germany. It was there that echoes reached him from the session of the National Assembly of 31 July 1848, when Proudhon, who had been elected as a representative, took on all comers.<sup>6</sup> The workers’ uprising at the end of June had just been savagely repressed. The entire throng of

parliamentarians, except for two representatives, one of whom was Proudhon, anathematized and insulted, as Bakunin would describe it later, “the heroic socialist who alone had had the courage to cast the challenge of socialism at that wild pack of bourgeois conservatives, liberals and radicals.”<sup>7</sup> With the exception of Proudhon and Louis Blanc, Bakunin further noted, “almost all the

historians of the Revolution of 1848... have never deigned to dwell upon the crime and upon the criminals of June.” Why? “The crime of June affected only the workers.”<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after the parliamentary harrying, Bakunin wrote to his friend, the German poet Georg Herwegh: “Proudhon is the only one in Paris — the only one in the world of political writers — who understands anything. He has displayed great and admirable courage. His speech was, at that wretched and hypocritical time, a noble act.”<sup>9</sup> Bakunin was grateful to Proudhon for assailing the republican party of 1848, in the bosom of which “reactionary thought was conceived,” and for having stigmatized “its governmental zeal.”<sup>10</sup> He added: “There was against Proudhon, on the part of the official representatives of republicanism, a sort of conspiracy of silence.”<sup>11</sup> Then

pp. 359-406, and briefly summarized in my anthology, *Ni Dieu ni Maitre*, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 61-62,

<sup>7</sup> Bakunin, *Works*, op. cit., vol. V, 1911, p.18; newspaper *L’Egalite*, Geneva, 21 Aug. 1869.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 367--368, *L’Empire Knouts-germanique et la revolution sociale*, 1871.

<sup>9</sup> Herwegh, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

<sup>10</sup> Bakunin, *Works*, op. cit., vol. II, p. 325, quoting Proudhon, *Idee generale de la Revolution au XIe siecle*, 1851, ed. Riviere, 1924, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Bakunin, *Works*, vol. IV, 1910, p. 318, “Avertissement pour l’Empire Knouts-germanique.”

he exclaimed: “Ahl How right Proudhon was when he said: ‘In 1848, as in 1793, the revolution had as destroyers the very same people who were representing it’”<sup>1</sup>

In the wake of the unsuccessful uprising in Dresden, Bakunin was arrested on 10 May 1849. Having been handed over to Austria, the two books which Proudhon published the same year: *Revolutionary Ideas*, a miscellaneous collection of his speeches during the revolution of 1848, and *Confessions of a Revolutionary*. These two books Bakunin was to quote and recommend later,<sup>2</sup> and his friend, the federalist Arnold Ruge, translated them into German in 1850.<sup>3</sup>

Their Parisian friendship left some indelible memories for both Proudhon and Bakunin. When Proudhon announced in his paper *The People* the arrest of Bakunin, he described him as “the friend of all of us.”<sup>4</sup> After being imprisoned himself in Sainte-Pelagie, Proudhon wrote to Alexander Herzen in November 1851, on the occasion of a rumour that Bakunin had died, that he ‘weeps’ for him and that he ‘loves’ him. In his *Notebooks*, in the entry for 25 October 1851, again relating to the rumour, published by the newspaper *The National*, he had declared: “Bakunin was my friend; his was a true intellect, abreast of all ideas; a fine character, full of devotion. Without writing much at all he effected extraordinary propaganda. Socialism and philosophy cannot forget him. His death is one more argument for them against the State, the Church, and Capital.”<sup>5</sup> After the premature death of the older friend, on 19 January 1865, Bakunin spoke of the “tender respect” which he felt “for the memory of Proudhon.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet this fidelity in friendship, and, later, their shared libertarian option, would not proceed without serious divergences. Bakunin referred to Proudhon, without necessarily adding sufficient qualification, as an “incorrigible idealist” and as a “metaphysician to the tip of his fingers,” led astray into an “abstract notion of right,” “in logic more powerful than his revolutionary peasant instincts.”<sup>7</sup> He wrote of Proudhon in 1870 to the journal *Liberty* in Brussels: “If he had lived longer, driven on by the same logic, he would have reconstructed the good Lord, for whom he had always

reserved a small place in his sentimental and mystical notion of the Ideal. He would have had to do it and he was preparing to do it; he told me so himself, in his half-serious, half-ironic manner, two months before his death.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, God was already etched into the great work of Proudhon on *justice*.<sup>9</sup>

To be sure, Bakunin defended Proudhon against the “filthy things” which Marx wrote against him, for “this great name and this so legitimate reputation put him in the shade.”<sup>10</sup> But he agreed that “in the pitiless criticism” which Marx directed at Proudhon, “there is no doubt much that is true” and that the theoretician of historical materialism was justified in contrast to Proudhonian idealism.<sup>11</sup> He provided a lively encomium for *Capital*, which he considered a “magnificent work,” “a death sentence, scientifically grounded and pronounced irrevocably” against capitalist exploitation. Yet, in a different vein, Bakunin added, “the instinct of liberty is lacking” in Marx. “He is from head to toe an authoritarian.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, he reckoned that “Proudhon understood and felt liberty much better than he.”<sup>13</sup>

Besides, Bakunin moderated his criticism of Proudhonian idealism when he observed that “the ideal, as Proudhon said, is only a flower, of which the material conditions of existence constitute the roots,”<sup>14</sup> and when he congratulated Proudhon “for saying that socialism has no other mission than to realize rationally and effectively on earth the illusory and mystical promises, the realization of which has been relegated to heaven by religion.”<sup>15</sup> He approved of Proudhon when he wrote (after Feuerbach) that “men... have always only adored in their gods the other side of their own image.”<sup>16</sup> And then how he savoured that audacious broadside from Proudhon in *justice*, saluting Satan as “one who has been slandered by priests and kings” and invoking the demon in these unwonted terms: “Come, Satan, come, let me embrace you, let me clasp you to my bosom, oh most blessed of my heart!”<sup>17</sup> Bakunin admired his friend for having greeted Satan “with eloquence full of love” the “creator of liberty.”<sup>18</sup>

In sum, Proudhon, as seen by Bakunin, was “a perpetual contradiction, a vigorous genius, a revolutionary thinker

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 360, quoting Proudhon, *Idee ggnerele*, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-34.

<sup>2</sup> Bakunin, *Complete Works*, vol. I, 1961, p. 170, Fragment M, copy from Nettlau, note at the foot of the page by Bakunin.

<sup>3</sup> Note 87 on p. 431 of vol. III of *Complete Works*, 1967.

<sup>4</sup> Newspaper *Le People*, 2 June 1849, in Lehning, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Proudhon to Herzen, 27 Nov. 1851, in Lehning, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-86; Proudhon, *Carnets*, vol. IV, 1974, p. 367.

<sup>6</sup> Bakunin, *Complete Works*, vol. II, 1965, p. 199, “Ecrit contre Marx,” 1872.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317, p. 437, note 104, manuscript of 1872.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 3, letter to the newspaper *La Liberte* in Brussels, 12 Jan. 1870.

<sup>9</sup> Proudhon, *De la Justice dans la Revolution et dans l'Eglise*, 1859-60, ed. Riviere, 4 vols., 1930.

<sup>10</sup> Bakunin, *Complete Works*, vol. I, 2nd part, p. 217, “Lettre aux internationaux de la Romagne,” Jan. 1872.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 317, *Etatisme et Anarchie*.

<sup>12</sup> *Works*, *op. cit.*, vol. III, pp. 208-9, “Appendice 1 l’Empire Knouts-germanique,” Nov.-Dec. 1870.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437, note 104, manuscript of Bakunin.

<sup>14</sup> *Works*, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 18, *L’Empire...*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270, note by Bakunin, “Appendice.”

<sup>16</sup> *Complete Works*, vol. I, 1st part, p. 9, “Reponse d’un international 1. Mazzini.”

<sup>17</sup> Proudhon, *De la justice... op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 433.

<sup>18</sup> Bakunin, *Works*, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 434, *L’Empire...*

always debating against the phantoms of idealism,” a “realistic revolutionary” straddling an “idealistic philosopher.” But it was of the revolutionary, and of him alone, that Bakunin considered himself to be the successor. He proposed to “enlarge, develop, liberate from all its metaphysical, idealistic, doctrinaire baggage the anarchist system of Proudhon,” at the same time that he would add to it Marxist historical materialism.<sup>1</sup>

In one of his works, produced in 1867-1868, Bakunin paid this homage to Proudhon:

“Rule making was the common passion of all socialists before 1848, with one exception. Cabet, Louis Blanc, Fourierists, Saint - Simonians, all had a passion for indoctrinating and organizing the future, all were more or less *authoritarian*.

“But then along came Proudhon: son of a peasant, and, in fact and by instinct, a hundred times more revolutionary than all those doctrinaire and bourgeois socialists, he armed himself with a critique as profound and penetrating as it was merciless, in order to destroy all systems.

“Contrasting liberty to authority, against these State socialists, he boldly proclaimed himself an anarchist and, in the face of their deism or their pantheism, he had the courage to call himself simply an atheist. His own socialism, founded upon liberty, both individual and collective, and upon the spontaneous action of free associations, obeying no other laws than those general laws of social economy, discovered or yet to be discovered by science, beyond all governmental regulation and all protection by the State, moreover subordinating politics to the economic, intellectual and moral

interests of society, had to later necessarily end in federalism.”<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of January 1870, Bakunin declared that he was absorbed in reading Proudhon, for he was considering writing a book on the destruction of the State, a book which was to become *Statism and Anarchy*.<sup>3</sup> In a document dating from September of the

same year, he reckons that Proudhon had “demonstrated very well” that “the State... is the historical consecration of all despotism, of all privileges, the political reason for all economic and social reduction to slavery.”<sup>4</sup>

Late in 1873, Bakunin contributed to the publication of a book, translated into Russian, which appeared in London in 1874. Michael Dragomanov, in the postscript to his *Correspondence of Michael Bakunin*, published in 1896, attributes the book to Bakunin. We know

today that this claim is not quite correct.<sup>5</sup> In fact, this little book was put together by Bakunin’s closest disciple in the International, James Guillaume.<sup>6</sup> The book translates from the Russian as *Anarchy According to (or After) Bakunin*. We know, moreover, thanks to another disciple of Bakunin, Arman Ross (and I have been able to check this myself), that Guillaume restricted himself to summarizing, with numerous quotations, the two books by Proudhon preferred by Bakunin: *Confessions of a Revolutionary* and *General Idea of Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Bakunin, having been informed of Guillaume’s project, encouraged him to proceed with it.

Arthur Lehning considers that Guillaume’s preface was probably revised by Bakunin himself. This would lend more weight to the following passage:

“We deem it... useful to convey Proudhon’s socialism with its genuine features and to expound, in simple and clear terms, the

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**Proudhon and Bakunin  
were ‘collectivists,’ which is  
to say they declared  
themselves without  
equivocation in favour of  
the common exploitation,  
not by the State but by  
associated workers, of the  
large-scale means of  
production and of the  
public services.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Complete Works*, vol. III, p. 437.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 38-40, “Fecleraisme, Socialisme et Antitheologisme,” 1867.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p.736, Preface by James Guillaume; *Etatisme et Anarchie*, 1873, *Complete Works*, vol. III.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 108, “Lettres a un Francais...” 7 Sept. 1870.

<sup>5</sup> Dragomanov, op. cit., postscript, p. 371.

<sup>6</sup> James LGuillaume, *L’Internationale... 1864-1878*, vol. III, 1909, p. 187; also from Guillaume, “Notice biographique” (of Bakunin), *Works*, vol. II, p. LII, note.



essentials of the ideas which he defended with such energy and talent.”

Putting aside any intention of dealing with Proudhon’s idealistic and metaphysical “varied oddities,” they limited themselves to “commenting only upon the part of his theories which Proudhon put forward in 1848 and which, taken up again in the programme of the International Working Men’s Association..., constitute the essence of his theoretical concepts, namely the abolition of the political state, the organization of society in economic Federalism... the Federalist doctrine concerning the organisation of work.”

In his introduction to Volume V of the *Archives*, Lehning provides both a facsimile of the title page and some extracts retranslated into French from the preface and from the book itself, a photocopy of which the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam was kind enough to let me consult. The original manuscript in French has since been burnt.<sup>1</sup>

It remains to me to sketch, in broad outline, the parallelism in the libertarian views of Proudhon and Bakunin.

Both use the word ‘anarchy’ (which they sometimes spell *an-archy*) in its etymological sense of absence of authority or of government. Yet they also use it in the common, and older, sense of social chaos. Perhaps they deliberately maintain this ambiguity in order to suggest that anarchy, through colossal disorder, complete disorganization of society, would install a new, stable, and rational social order founded upon liberty and solidarity.<sup>2</sup>

Both Proudhon and Bakunin fulminate against the State and against authority. Both challenge the “swindle” of the ballot box. Neither wanted political power, but they did want to destroy both capital and the State. Both reject any socialism which would not be libertarian; that is, any form of socialism which would aggrandize the State at the expense of liberty and which would tamper with the rights, the creativity, and the necessary de-alienation of the individual.

Proudhon and Bakunin were both resistant to Marxist ‘dogmatism’ and the Marxist ‘cane.’ That is what Proudhon expresses with force and alarm in his letter to Marx of 17 May 1846. It is equally evident in his personal copy of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in which his marginal notes refer to Marx’s bad faith, lies, libel, absurdities, and plagiarism in his vicious attack upon *The Philosophy of Poverty*.<sup>3</sup> But what was in Proudhon still only a summary retort was to be developed by Bakunin with infinitely greater richness when, long after Proudhon’s death, he experienced the antinomies — which had become crystal clear — between anarchism and Marxism.



**Michael Bakunin (1814-1876)**

Both saw power and social revolution as incompatible. Proudhon exclaimed: “Put a Saint Vincent de Paul in power: there will be a Guizot or a Talleyrand.” And Bakunin: “Take the most fervent revolutionary and give him the throne of all the Russias... and in the space of one year that revolutionary will be worse than (the tsar) himself”; and “Take the most sincere democrat and put him on any throne, he will without fail become a scoundrel.”<sup>4</sup>

They were both at one and the same time individualistic and sociable. Both counted on the revolutionary spontaneity of the masses. They believed in the necessity, in the first case, of intervention by a few wise heads, in the second case, of a specific organization which would

precede the awakening of the masses, and subsequently ensure unity of revolutionary thought and action, but without reviving any sort of authority. Both were communalists and federalists.

Proudhon and Bakunin were ‘collectivists,’ which is to say they declared themselves without equivocation in favour of the common exploitation, not by the State but by associated workers, of the large-scale means of production and of the public services. Proudhon has been quite wrongly presented as an exclusive enthusiast of private property. The confusion was to some extent created by himself, to be sure, but far more so, after his death, by his false disciples in the International, Tolain

<sup>1</sup> Bakunin, *Complete Works*, vol. V, pp. LXIV-LXVII, commentary by Arthur Lehning.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. my book *L’Anarchisme*, 1965, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, *Misere de la Philosophie*, ed. Costes, 1950.

<sup>4</sup> Proudhon, *Confession d’un révolutionnaire*, 1849, ed. Riviere, 1929, p. 285; Bakunin, *Complete Works*, vol. V, p. 282, “La Science et la question vitale de la Révolution,” 1870; *Programme de la Fraternité... cit. in Ni Dieu ni Maître, op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 199.

and others. At the Bale congress in 1869, Bakunin did not hesitate to risk allying himself with the statist Marxists against them in order to ensure the triumph of the principle of collective property. He had nothing but contempt for that “little workers’ coterie which had been formed in the last years of Proudhon’s life,” adding that “moreover, all that so-called Proudhonian coterie was a stillbirth.”<sup>1</sup>

Both of them, in advance of their time, were anti-colonialist. Proudhon denounced the crimes committed by the French military in Algeria and envisioned separation. He predicted: “One day independence will come for Algeria.”<sup>2</sup> Bakunin anticipated a vast

federation, at first Euro-American, then extending to Africa and Asia.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, I should like to disabuse those of my present-day libertarian socialist comrades who misjudge Proudhon only to magnify Bakunin, and, conversely, the overly zealous Proudhonians who belittle Bakunin. Certainly the work of the latter shows undeniable progress in relation to that of the former, whose strokes of genius are too often overlaid with tiresome dross. Yet I hope that I have proved that Bakunin reaped the harvest sown by Proudhon — the father of anarchism — filtering, enriching and surpassing it.

**...it must be pointed out that Marx never examined in detail the ways in which workers’ control could function, whereas Proudhon devoted pages and pages to it. The latter, who began life as a worker, knew what he was talking about; he had observed attentively the “workers’ associations” born during the course of the 1848 revolution. The reasons for Marx’s attitude is probably that it was inspired by disdain and that he considered the question to be “utopian”. Today, anarchists have been the first to put workers’ control back on the agenda, whence it has become so trendy that it has since been confiscated, rehabilitated, altered, by anyone and everyone.**

Daniel Guérin, “Anarchism and Marxism” (1981)

**It is Proudhon who, in 1851, had the merit of having drawn from the French Revolution a truly profound analysis of the problem of the state. The author of *The General Idea of Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* started with a critique of bourgeois and parliamentary democracy, of democracy from above, and of democracy by decree. He denounced its fraudulent nature. He attacked Robespierre, an open enemy of direct democracy. He stressed the failings of the democratic constitution of 1793, a departure point, to be sure, but a bastard compromise between bourgeois democracy and direct democracy, which promised the people everything and gave them nothing and which, in any case, was no sooner promulgated than its implementation was indefinitely put off.**

Daniel Guérin, “The French Revolution De-Jacobinised” (1956)

**In his collectivism he was, however, as categorically opposed to statism. Property must be abolished... Proudhon sought a combination of property and community: this was association. The means of production and exchange must be controlled neither by capitalist companies nor by the State... they must be managed by associations of workers, and only thus will collective powers cease to be “alienated” for the benefit of a few exploiters.**

Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (1965)

<sup>1</sup> James Guillaume, “Notice...” *op. cit.*, *Works*, vol. II, pp. XXXVI-XXXVII; Bakunin, *Complete Works*, vol. I, p. 241, 1st part, Fragment T.

<sup>2</sup> Proudhon, *La Guerre et la Paix*, 1861, ed. Riviere, 1927, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> Bakunin, *Complete Works* vol. V, p. 299, “Circulaire a mes amis d’Italie,” 1871.

# Bakunin: a libertarian communist before the term was coined

Daniel Guérin<sup>1</sup>

Our debt to Michael Bakunin is manifold. But it is clear which prevails above all the others. The libertarian communists of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century owe him above all, far beyond his polemics with Marx, far exceeding these, for having seen what Bolshevism would one day be in the distant future. To do this, undoubtedly, he showed himself excessive, often unfair, towards his contemporary, the founder of so-called scientific socialism. At most, certain authoritarian traits and taints of statism were detectable in Marx, although still only manifesting themselves in an embryonic state. The power grab at the Hague Congress of 1872 which expelled Bakunin from the International aggravated these inclinations. Bakunin in his polemics lashes out less at his rival than at the People's State (*Volksstaat*) of the Lassallians and Social Democrats, which Marx and Engels took too long to disown.<sup>2</sup>

But, having detected the embryo, Bakunin had the brilliant divination of its future growth. So much so that his excessive and somewhat biased bashing can be justified in hindsight when it applied to epigones who have abused Marx. Bakunin's foreknowledge of the perverse deviations, before they become monstrous, which will improperly take the name of "Marxism" therefore merits on our part great respect.

Even before arguing with the inspirer of the First International, the Russian profit had warned against authoritarian "communism".<sup>3</sup> On July 19, 1866, in a letter to Alexander Herzen and Nicolai Ogarev, referring to his two correspondents as if they were one person, Bakunin wrote: "You who are a sincere and devoted socialist, surely, would be ready to sacrifice your well-being, all your wealth, your very life, to contribute to the destruction of this State, whose existence is compatible neither with freedom nor with the well-being of the people. Or you are creating State-socialism and you are able to reconcile yourself with

this vilest and most formidable lie that our century has produced: formal democracy and red bureaucracy."<sup>4</sup>

In the condemnation of authoritarian "communism", Bakunin resumed the imprecations of his master Proudhon. At the second congress of the League of Peace and Freedom, in Bern, at the end of September 1868, before breaking with this expression of bourgeois liberalism, he proclaimed: "I detest (authoritarian) communism because it is the negation of freedom and I cannot conceive of anything human without freedom. I am not a communist because communism concentrates and absorbs all the forces of society into the State, because it necessarily leads to the centralisation of property into the hands of the State. (...) I want the organisation of society and collective or social property from the bottom up, by means of free association, and not from top to bottom by means of any authority whatsoever. In that sense I am a collectivist and not at all a communist."<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless in July 1868 Bakunin became a local member of the International Workers' Association in Geneva and he wrote to Gustave Vogt, president of the League of Peace and Freedom, in September: "We cannot and must not ignore the immense and valuable significance of the Brussels Congress (of the First International). It is a great, it is the greatest event today and, if we ourselves are sincere democrats, we must not only desire that the International League of the workers ends up embracing all the workers' associations of Europe and America, but we have to co-operate with all our efforts because it can constitute today the real revolutionary power which must change the face of the world."<sup>6</sup>

In the same vein, Bakunin wrote to Marx on December 22, 1866: "I am no longer committed to any society, to another milieu, than the world of the workers. My homeland now is the International of which you are one of the principal founders. So you see, dear friend, that I

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<sup>1</sup> "Bakounine, communiste libertaire avant la lettre" (1983), reprinted as "Ce que les communistes libertaires doivent surtout à Bakounine" in *A la recherche d'un communisme libertaire* (Paris: Spartacus, 1984), pp.56-61. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Guérin is being far too generous to Marx and Engels here as the paper of their main supporters in the German Socialist movement was entitled *Volksstaat* and it regularly published their works. Likewise, any criticism of the term remained private during Marx's lifetime and, as such, Bakunin's linking of the concept with Marx is perfectly understandable, not least because the notion was used in the same way as the "dictatorship of the proletariat". (*Black Flag*)

<sup>3</sup> Marx played no role in the formation of the First International but did lay a crucial role after it was formed. This, presumably, is what Guérin is referring to here. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>4</sup> *Correspondance de Mikhaïl Bakounine: lettres à Herzen et à Ogarev*, éd. Perrin, 1896; in *Archives Bakounine*.

<sup>5</sup> *La première Internationale*, Edited by Jacques Freymond, vol. 1, p. 451.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 1, p. 450.

am your disciple and I take pride in being so.”<sup>1</sup> Marx, immediately knowing it is disingenuous, remains silent.

I hereby open a parenthesis, to close it as soon as possible. On his return to Western Europe, after his long years of captivity in Russia, Bakunin had embraced anarchist ideas, borrowed from Proudhon although developed in a more revolutionary direction. But this new conviction had overlapped within him with an inveterate taste for the clandestinity of conspiracies. He had somehow garnered the legacy of Babeufism, Carbonarism, Blanquism, and even more so the secret revolutionary activities appropriate to the struggle against Tzarist despotism. An internationalist at heart, he had successively hatched several international “Fraternities” whose members he recruited in various Latin countries.

The last of these initiatives, the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy, was created the day after his break with the League of Peace and Freedom in 1868, an organisation, he said, “half-secret, half-public”, and which in fact served as a cover for a more restricted and secret society: the Revolutionary Organisation of International Brothers. Having done this, Bakunin, sincerely attracted by the workers’ movement, requested the membership of his Alliance into the International (IWA). The distrust of Marx and his central position in the General Council in London was not entirely groundless. Indeed, the application of the Alliance, a new version of the secret societies instigated by Bakunin, could make it appear as “destined to become an International within the International.”<sup>2</sup>

How did Bakunin manage to reconcile his fiercely anti-authoritarian options with this thinly disguised attempt at “infiltration”? Here is the justification which he made

a point of expounding in the secret statutes of the Alliance, a copy of which fell into the hands of the General Council of the IWA led by Marx: “This

organisation excludes any idea of dictatorship and tutelary ruling power. But for the very establishment of this revolutionary alliance and for the triumph of the revolution over reaction, it is necessary that in the midst of the popular anarchy which will constitute the very life and all the energy of the revolution, unity of revolutionary thought and action finds an organ (...), a sort of revolutionary general staff made up of devoted, energetic, intelligent individuals, and above all sincere friends of the people, not ambitious or conceited, capable of serving as

intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and popular instincts. (...) A hundred strongly and seriously allied revolutionaries are enough for the international organisation across Europe.”<sup>3</sup>

The dissonance between direct democracy and revolutionary elitism was already striking amongst the Babouvists.<sup>4</sup> We find it today in certain libertarian communist controversies.

This parenthesis closed, let us return to the Alliance’s request for membership of the IWA. The London General Council initially reacts very unfavourably. In its meeting of December 22, 1868, it considered “that the presence of a second international body operating within and outwith the International Workers’ Association would be the most infallible means of disorganisation” and, therefore, declared that the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy “is not admitted as a branch of the International Workers’ Association.” This verdict is written by the hand of Marx. But, a few months later, on March 9, 1869, from

**“We do not accept even as a revolutionary transition national conventions, constituent assemblies, provisional governments, or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution (...) when it is concentrated in the hands of a few ruling individuals, inevitably and immediately becomes reaction.”**

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. 1, p. 451 E Kaminski, *Bakounine, la, vie d'un révolutionnaire*.

<sup>2</sup> “Les prétendues scissions dans l'Internationale,” in, Bakounine, *oeuvres complètes*, Champ libre, vol. III, p. 271.

<sup>3</sup> “l'Alliance de la démocratie socialiste et l'Association internationale des travailleurs”, in Freymond, op. cité, 11, pp. 474-475.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Bourgeois et bras nus, 1792-1795*, Gallimard, 1973, pp. 312-313 (épuisé) ; les Nuits rouges, 1998.

the pen of the same Marx, the General Council, correcting itself, no longer saw any obstacle to the “conversion of sections of the Alliance into sections of the International”. The Alliance accepts these conditions and is thereby admitted.<sup>1</sup>

Bakunin attended the Basel Congress of the International in September 1869 and joined forces with Marx’s supporters against Proudhon’s degenerate epigones who supported individual property against collective ownership [of land].<sup>2</sup>

It will only be two years later that relations become strained; at the London Conference which opened on September 17, 1871, Marx revealed an authoritarianism incompatible with Bakunin’s libertarian arguments. In short, Marx tries to increase the powers of the General Council in London, Bakunin would like to reduce them. One wants to centralise, the other to decentralise. The final outcome will be the Hague Congress, at the start of September 1872, where Marx, by dishonest methods and with the help of fictitious mandates, succeeded in expelling Bakunin and his friend James Guillaume before consigning the International’s General Council to the United States.

It was then that Bakunin, outraged by the coup, lashes out against Marx and authoritarian “communism” in earnest. It is to this anger that we owe the curses which today seem prophetic to us since, beyond the Marxist intrigues, it challenges and denounces a whole process which, long after the death of Bakunin and Marx, takes on a remarkable relevance for us.

First of all, Bakunin foresees what the dictatorship will one day be, under the deceptive term of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the dictatorship of the Bolshevik party. In a letter to the Brussels newspaper *La Liberté*, written from Zurich on October 5, 1872, he thundered against the confiscation of the revolutionary movement by a clique of leaders: “To claim that a group of individuals, even the most intelligent and the best intentioned, will be able to become the directing and unifying thought, the soul, the will of the revolutionary movement and of the economic organisation of the proletariat of all lands, this is such a heresy against common sense and against historical experience that

one wonders with astonishment how a man as intelligent as Marx could have conceived of it.”<sup>3</sup>

And Bakunin continues to foretell: “We do not accept even as a revolutionary transition national conventions, constituent assemblies, provisional governments, or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution (...) when it is concentrated in the hands of a few ruling individuals, inevitably and immediately becomes reaction.”

The disastrous experience of a powerful International scuppered by the arbitrary will of a single man led Bakunin to distrust an authoritarian internationalism such as that, much later, of the Third International under Bolshevik leadership: What can be said of a friend of the proletariat, of a revolutionary, who claims to seriously want the emancipation of the masses and who, by posing as supreme director and arbiter of all the revolutionary movements that may break out in different countries, dares to dream of the subjugation of the proletariat of all these lands to a single thought, hatched in his own brain?

Bakunin could not believe it. Marx’s blindness seemed inconceivable to him: “I wonder how he fails to see that the establishment of a universal dictatorship, collective or individual, of a dictatorship that would somehow perform the task of chief engineer of the world revolution, regulating and directing the insurrectionary movement of the masses in all countries pretty much as one would run a machine, that the establishment of such a dictatorship would suffice in itself to kill the revolution, to paralyse and distort all popular movements.”<sup>4</sup>

And the kind of dictatorship that Marx had exercised from the General Council in London led Bakunin to fear that such an example will grow and take on aberrant proportions: “And what is one to think of an International Congress which, in the alleged interest of this revolution, imposes on the proletariat of the entire civilised world a government invested with dictatorial powers, with the inquisitorial and pontifical right [within the International] to suspend regional federations, ban whole nations in the name of an alleged official principle which is nothing other than the Marx’s

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<sup>1</sup> “Procès-verbaux du Conseil général de la 1<sup>è</sup> Internationale, 1868-1870”, in Freymond, op. cit., II, pp. 262-264 and 272-273.

<sup>2</sup> As Guérin noted elsewhere, “Proudhon is too often confused with what Bakunin called ‘the little so-called Proudhonian coterie’ which gathered around him in his last years. This rather reactionary group was stillborn. In the First International it tried in vain to put across private ownership of the means of production against collectivism. The chief reason this group was short-lived was that most of its adherents were all too easily convinced by Bakunin’s arguments and abandoned their so-called Proudhonian ideas to support collectivism [...] this group, who called themselves

*mutuellistes*, were only partly opposed to collectivism: they rejected it for agriculture because of the individualism of the French peasant, but accepted it for transport, and in matters of industrial self-management actually demanded it while rejecting its name.” (*Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* [London: Monthly Review Press, 1970], 44). (*Black Flag*)

<sup>3</sup> Lettre au journal *La Liberté*, 5 octobre 1872, in Bakounine, vol. III, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> As Marx wrote to Engels on September, 11 1867: “And when the next revolution comes, and that will perhaps be sooner than might appear, *we* (i.e., you and I) will have this mighty ENGINE at our disposal.” (*Marx-Engels Collected Works* 42: 424). (Editor)

own idea, transformed by the vote of a fictitious majority into an absolute truth?”

The following year, in 1873, still smarting at the misfortune of the Hague, Bakunin write a book with the title *Statism and Anarchy* in which he deepened his reflections and clarified his vituperation.<sup>1</sup> The connecting thread of his argument is, without doubt, the pages of the *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* by his master Proudhon. With and after him, Bakunin asks the question: “If the proletariat becomes the ruling class, it may be asked, then who will it rule? (...) Whoever says State necessarily says domination and, consequently, slavery. (...) From whatever point of view we take, we arrive at the same execrable outcome: the government of the immense majority of the popular masses by a privileged minority. But this minority, say the Marxists, will consist of workers. Yes, certainly, of former workers but who, as soon as they become rulers, will cease to be workers and will begin to look at the proletarian world from the heights of the State, will no longer represent the people but themselves and their claim to govern it.”

And Bakunin wages war against the pretensions of authoritarian socialism to be “scientific”. “It will be nothing but the despotic government of the proletarian masses by a new and very narrow aristocracy of real or purported scholars. The people are not learned, so they will be completely liberated from the concerns of government and completely incorporated into the governed herd.”

Elsewhere, Bakunin delights in portraying the particularly foreboding features of this future State with scientific pretensions and which so closely resembles that of the USSR today: “there will be an extremely complex government which will not be content with governing and administering the masses politically (...) but which will also administer them economically, concentrating in its hands the production and proper distribution of wealth, the cultivation of land, the establishment and development of factories, the organisation and direction of commerce, and finally the

application of capital to production by the sole banker, the State. All that will require immense knowledge and many heads bursting with brains in this government. It will be the reign of *scientific intelligence*, the most aristocratic, the most despotic, the most arrogant, and the most condescending of all regimes.”<sup>2</sup>

But will this despotism be permanent? For Bakunin: “The Marxists console themselves with the thought that this dictatorship will be temporary and brief. According to them, this statist yoke, this dictatorship, is a transitional stage necessary to reach the total

emancipation of the people: anarchy or freedom is the goal, the State or dictatorship, the means. So, in order to liberate the popular masses, one must begin by enslaving them. (...) To this we reply that no dictatorship can have any other end than to endure as long as possible.”<sup>3</sup> One would think that this an anticipatory libertarian refutation of *The State and Revolution* by “comrade” Lenin!

Bakunin even foresaw the reign of the apparatchiks. In a text of March 1872, even before the power grab in the Hague, he announced the birth “of a small and privileged bourgeoisie, that of the managers, representatives and functionaries of the so-called popular State.”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, in a text of November-December 1872, which will serve as a conclusion, Bakunin accused Marx of having “failed to kill the International by his criminal attempt at the Hague” and sets as a condition to be admitted into the anti-authoritarian International which survives the coup the following condition: “Understanding that, since the proletarian, the manual worker, the toiler, is the historical representative of the last slavery on earth, his emancipation is the emancipation of everyone, his triumph is the final triumph of humanity, and that, consequently, the organisation of the power of the proletariat in every land (...) cannot have as its goal the constitution of a new privilege, a new monopoly, a new class or a new domination.”<sup>5</sup>

Bakunin was a libertarian communist before the term existed!

## **Bakunin delights in portraying the particularly foreboding features of this future State with scientific pretensions and which so closely resembles that of the USSR**

<sup>1</sup> Bakounine, *Etatisme et Anarchie*, 1873, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. IV

<sup>2</sup> Bakounine, “Ecrits contre Marx”, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol III, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> *Etatisme et Anarchie*, op. cit., pp. 346-347.

<sup>4</sup> “L'Allemagne et le communisme d'Etat”, in Bakounine, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. III, p. 118.

<sup>5</sup> “Ecrit contre Marx”, op. cit., pp. 182-183.

# Ungovernable: An Interview with Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

Introduction and Interview by William C. Anderson<sup>1</sup>

The novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, has highlighted the daily disasters of capitalism. A lack of healthcare, a safe environment, housing, and food are an everyday question for a growing segment of vulnerable people. This has brought about a noticeable interest in anarchism for many. The failures of the state were made plain by ineffective solutions, wilful neglect, and utter disregard for human life. It exposed deeper questions (for some) about the plausibility of statist solutions. In concert with all this, authorities began to take notice, evidenced by its mounting attacks and scapegoating of anarchists. President Trump and many others seemingly identified a set of politics they found threatening and worthy of blame. This is no coincidence and it follows a historical pattern.

As usual, anarchism was denied its complexity by shallow, wilful misreadings. The intricacy of various sets of anarchist politics, principles, and approaches were reduced to the trope of the terroristic bomb-thrower. Even as anarchists organize and take part in mutual aid projects around the country during this pandemic, this is not what anarchism represents to many people. In the midst of a global pandemic, the effectiveness of these sorts of projects paired with other survival programs has become especially relevant. Although, for opponents, so did the necessity to attack these politics from all sides. Still, growing interest in Black anarchism has remained undeterred.

Black anarchism has long been sustained by the works of often overlooked thinkers and revolutionaries. Among them is Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin. I first met Lorenzo in 2012 at an organizing workshop I helped lead alongside different organizers across the South. My friend (who'd come up with the idea) invited Lorenzo to speak based on the recommendation of someone she knew. It didn't take long for Lorenzo and his partner JoNina Ervin to make the truths of anarchism clear to me. It started me on my journey to fully embracing Black anarchism.



Lorenzo has lived a revolutionary life to say the least. After being introduced to anarchism by Martin Sostre, a jailhouse lawyer that was one of the architects of the prisoner's rights movement as we know it, he's had to battle and flee U.S. authorities more than once. He's lived all over

the world while teaching and organizing. These are just some of the reasons it's important to hear his insights about the current predicament we're facing.

I spoke with Lorenzo about Black autonomy, fascism, and what's needed as we confront the crisis.

*This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.*

**William C. Anderson (WCA):** What do you think about the current uprisings happening throughout the country in response to police violence?

**Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin (LKE):** I think the uprisings are good but we're seeing that they have limitations as a revolutionary uprising. These limitations allow the state to subvert the nature of uprisings as well as the issues as mere reforms. The state and the liberal politicians and others are able to utilize that against the movement. This kind of cooptation has been happening for a while. I've watched 60 years of protests and so-called "riots" and rebellions and uprisings in major cities and small towns like Ferguson, Missouri. I've watched 60 years of them going back to 1964 with the Harlem rebellion in Harlem, New York. It was always something to do with the police. One form or another, they kill somebody, beat somebody, or just came in the community and did some kind of atrocity. And the people responded with a fight back. What's been allowed to happen in this instance is that the people rebel, the people fight back, and people put up a mass front of protests. Then the politicians and the others claim to be using their issues or their drive to then turn around and propose some liberal reforms, which aren't liberal at all, actually.

What we see is that each time the police terror or racism becomes worse or it just becomes prolonged. So we have to ask ourselves, "Okay we're having protests.

<sup>1</sup> <https://blackrosefed.org/ungovernable-interview-lorenzo-komboa-ervin-anderson/>

We're going up against the man. But are we also not understanding that the role here now is to transform the society as a whole?" We're not trying to just get some "defund the police" or whatever. The government is not giving anything, and even with the protests pressuring them, they have yet to come up with anything in terms of any kind of program to prevent further atrocities against Black people. There have been thousands of people killed by the police in the United States and the government has given impunity to the killer cops.

This is a form, in my estimation, of class warfare or fascist policing, and we need to understand that. They are using the most violent statist agents, especially in the Black community and in poor communities. They are using them to beat down any grassroots political opposition as well.

They're using them to create a new kind of criminal system where they *are* summarily charging people and putting them in prison for long periods of time with draconian sentences. And this has been going on for quite some time. So, rebellions are great.

They're wonderful, it's great to see people standing up. The only thing is, you know my standpoint as an old

long-term activist and everything, I try to look at the actual essence of a struggle, not just the fact that it's happening. The orientation of the struggle today is very similar to what I saw in the final stages of the civil rights movement. You see them win reforms, but not transform the system itself. That's the difference between revolutionaries and reformers, we want to smash the state entirely.

We can't organize the way we organized back in the 60s, we can't organize the way we organized even 30 years ago, 20 years ago. We've got to break new political ground and have new political theory and new political tactics.

**WCA: What sort of advice would you have for young radicals then who want to transform this society? What advice do you have for those who are politicized and looking for some direction on how to go about doing the things you think need to be done?**

**LKE:** We as activists, as organizers, have to make ourselves and our communities ungovernable. I know you've heard that term before. That means what it says. We have to make it so that we create a new kind of political system of our own, whether it's dual power or

revolutionary direct democracy, whatever we want to call it in this period. We need to create that kind of movement, a mass anti-fascist movement on one hand. And on the other hand, we need to have the capacity on a mass scale to build a community-based mass economic survival tendency, based on cooperatives in the ghetto for housing the poor, rebuilding the cities, and taking care of the material needs of the poor. We need to be able to build that. I'm not opposed to some of these groups that are coming about because although not now radical, potentially they could turn into something else. But what needs to happen is that we need to be reaching the masses of urban poor people with these programs. We're not fighting just to have a cult or a group, or some leaders. We're fighting to put

power in the hands of the people in a new society. Presumably, revolutionaries know some things in some areas of organizing that people don't know. So we need to be training them, we need to be equipping them to be independent of this political structure. I also

think the Black Panther Party was right, we need to have survival programs and we need to be going beyond just what they had. We should be trying to build the survival economy in this period right now.

We should go from this period where there are some people who understand or are practicing mutual aid, but the masses do not. So we need to go beyond "just helping," to working toward some sort of different economy, a survival economy on the way to full on anarchist communism. Maybe that's the name we know of, as anarchists, but in some parts of the world, they call it a "solidarity economy" to help them survive capitalism. Whatever it's called, we need to have that so we're not totally dependent on the capitalist state. I don't claim to know it all, but I do know some things and I know one thing that's not going to work—is when you allow the same corrupt, racist cops to claim that they're reformed now or you got the same politicians claiming "Well, this is not the same system, we've never found a way to defund the police, but we're reorganizing it, so be patient!" George Jackson, a radical prisoner in California and member of the Black Panther Party in the 1960's, himself, said that such police or prison reforms are nothing but the further rise



of fascism. They help fascism become acceptable to the people.

We've dealt with that for years because you see how the police have been using different kinds of psychological warfare and pseudo campaigns like Weed and Seed, or community policing over the years. That stuff was designed to put the police in power over the community. They were intentional racial profiling and control measures, and we need to understand what's been happening up to this point. This stuff with Trump is just the culmination or the end stage of their building of fascism. They built the prison system which is the biggest in the world. They built that back years ago. They started using paramilitary policing years ago, especially in the Black community. All these things that we see, these forms of what would constitute a fascist state in another country, they don't have to build it. They've already got segments of it built in America.

You have to ask yourself some critical questions like how is this ever being allowed to happen at a time when you've got all these so-called anti-racist, anti-fascists in name. But they even don't do anything to deal with this kind of fascist struggle against itself. They go and get in the street and fight some drunk Nazi, some low grade kind of organizing campaign. We need more than that in this period, now coming up especially. We need the ability to have a mass base, not just youth but communities, a broad segment of the people. We need that mass base added to a new kind of politics where the people are being put in control, rather than the politicians or preachers or whomever all these people they've chosen. Tell the youth to build movements from the grassroots up. Build resistance movements and build a large enough movement that cannot be controlled by the state so that, as I said before, it's *ungovernable*. And ungovernable means a number of things to people in the movement right now: it means the kind of tactics you engage in in the street, it means how the community is organized that they don't have to depend on these politicians, it means a mass boycott of capitalist corporations, a new transitional economy, and many others things as part of a resistance.

One thing I'll be most anxious to say to people is we can't organize the way we organize back in the 60s, we can't organize the way we organized even 30 years ago, 20 years ago. We've got to break new political ground and have new political theory and new political tactics. These don't come from one person or group alone, it must be decided by the people themselves.

**WCA: Can you talk a little bit about why you started Black Autonomy, what it is?**

**LKE:** Black Autonomy was something I started to try to deal with the fact that inside the anarchist movement, there were very few black people. Black Autonomy was designed also to be a pressure group against the institutionalized racism within the anarchist movement.

At that time, white anarchists in the USA were not really relating their political direction to the Black community or interested in Black organizers. Truthfully, it was not really a true anti-racist movement in that period. And I eventually reached the stage where I said what we will have to do is create an African American/Black tendency within the anarchist movement that is strong enough to stand on its own. And that can challenge the white fixed nature of the anarchist movement. That was the same reason I started writing *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, which was a book that raised the contradictions around race and colonialism and oppression, and called for Anarchists to raise their consciousness. They had never looked at it as a problem or issue before; they never thought about Africans or Blacks in America at all unless they were merely trying to recruit Black people into their tendencies, but even that was not happening when I came along in the early 1970's. I was the only Black Anarchist in the USA and even other parts of the world for years, actually decades.

In the United States, Black people's labor and living conditions have always been different from the white population, going all the way back to slavery. Something that Marx himself has said is the "pedestal" for the creation of capitalism in the USA was Black slavery. I tried to get anarchists to understand and think more critically about it, but they would become very angry and defensive at me for saying. So we created our own ideological construct and organization that wasn't perfect and it was created under some really tough odds, but we created it. It was in the face of fear, guilt and hostility by white anarchists. They gave Black Autonomy no real support, began to call us "narrow nationalists" and this and that.

We created what was essentially a collective first in Atlanta. You know, myself and I think there were seven other community organizers, and seven or eight students from Clark College and Morehouse University. They became part of this collective right at that time. Eventually the group built a ten city national federation and a group in London.

We were doing political discussions and so forth in Atlanta on the direction we should take. So, the ones from the street said, "Well, look, we gotta be organizing the Black community against the conditions that are happening to us." And we started organizing around the Atlanta PD police assassination of a brother named Jerry Jones in 1995, and we also started organizing around the attempt by the city government to take the transit system away from the poor and working people inside the city and give it to people in the suburbs. You know they were going to up the transit fare so much that people who lived in the city wouldn't be able to pay for it. So we started the Poor People's Survival Movement, a group we had started. And out of that came the Atlanta Transit Riders Union. We were fighting against

the authorities that ran the transit system and we began raising contradictions around race, class, and poverty that had existed for years by city authorities. That was a successful campaign. We were able to beat the transit officials back for years against implementing the fare hike. We made the rich, the city government, and corporations underwrite it, instead of poor people or workers who had no other transit options.

Black Autonomy itself was an anarchist organization, but it also understood that its politics were based around the reality of the oppression of Black people in the United States and around the world. We organized around the things that we still see happening today: mass imprisonment of Black people and murderous shootings by the police or fascist vigilantes. We have been organizing in a number of cities in the 1990s and even in the 2000s. The 2013 anti-klan demonstration in Memphis, Tennessee was the largest anti-fascist demo that year with 1,500 to 2,000 people. We had been organizing a number of cities against police terrorism for years as well.

So Black Autonomy also started organizing and trying to create a dual power political structure trying to create ideas that can reach the youth and trying to combat prisons as an entity. Not just combating judges and all this other garbage, but actually dealing with the prisons being used as a tool of oppression of Black and poor people. And unfortunately, we weren't able to get enough forces around us on that question to build a broad based movement against mass imprisonment. We tried to get groups like the Anarchist Black Cross to help us, but we failed when they united with the authoritarian left.

**WCA: Why do you think the current administration is honing in on anarchists and Antifa (Anti-Fascists)?**

**LKE:** Trump needs a scapegoat for one thing. Antifa are willing to combat these fascists in the street and they have been doing so for quite some time. So Trump's able to utilize that "violence" to justify his policies, and he'll become more repressive about it as time goes by. I really do think he wants to prosecute them in federal court for "treason." They want to project Antifa as "enemies of the state." I think he would have used the DOJ and his federal goon squad to try to smash them by

now, if it were not for the fact that he has had to run for office and he has not had a totally free hand. And also, I think that he believes, and to some extent it may be true, that a lot of the stuff that's happening in the street is by anarchists that seem to have mass support.

The thing is, for almost 100 years, the government has always seen anarchists as a serious threat for disruption. In years past, there have always been waves of repression of anarchists. But in recent years, anarchists haven't been exactly doing very much that would warrant this kind of repression. I'm surprised that it's coming now but I'm not surprised in one sense, because we are a convenient scapegoat as the most dangerous tendency on the left. The communists? Oh the communists are all sold out! (*laughter*) They've all sold out and they're running for office or whatever. And to some extent (*laughter*) that's true to be quite honest. I'm not saying in every instance, but you have got a lot of communist elements that are in bed with the state and in bed with the capitalists right now.

The Department of Justice and FBI want to scapegoat

the Black protest movement. They haven't been able to do it with the Black movement yet, although, you know, they came up with this so-called state security program some time back where they were going to

**The other thing is, I stand for a type of anarchism that's a class struggle anarchism. My perspective and my understanding going back reading years ago is that anarchism comes from the socialist movement. It is in fact self-governing socialism or libertarian socialism.**

go after Black activists, you know, "extremists."

"The protest movement is pushing the government back, pushing it up against the wall, but it's not choking the life out of it. What we need is the kind of revolutionary movement that can choke the life out of it and create a new society all together."

**WCA: "Black identity extremists."**

**LKE:** That's exactly what they called it, and they tried to use it for intimidation, but for whatever reason they weren't able to get the public support to that extent. He wants to do it with Black Lives Matter. But I think a lot of people have been convinced now that Black Lives Matter is just using non-violent tactics. So the American people are not so much in favor of the idea of the state or the government coming after them like that. It may still happen before or after he leaves office, if the Black protest tendency becomes more radical or switches tactics.

**WCA: I wanted to ask you about the increasing popularity of Black anarchism. There are a lot of Black people who are becoming more interested in anarchism. A lot of these Black people are getting interested in your work. Can you speak about this and why you think it's happening? And can you also kind of speak to what you will hope that they get out of your work and Black anarchism?**

**LKE:** First, it was a surprise to me to even find out that there were new anarchist tendencies, Black anarchist tendencies, on the scene. And I only found that out in the last year, this year actually. But on the one hand that speaks to the work we did with Black Autonomy. Whatever mistakes we made and our failure to build a mass tendency years ago, it speaks to that work. I think if I hadn't written *Anarchism and the Black Revolution* and done other things that I did with the comrades that I worked with, people wouldn't even know about the ideas of Black Anarchism.

The other thing is, I stand for a type of anarchism that's a class struggle anarchism. My perspective and my understanding going back reading years ago is that anarchism comes from the socialist movement. It is in fact self-governing socialism or libertarian socialism. The ideas of self-governing socialism and all this came from Bakunin, and the anarchist movement was part of the first international communist movement. So my thing is, if people are going to want to get an anarchist perspective or Black anarchist politic, they have to understand that we have to build a movement that's about struggling for power to the people. That's not just a term of art, but we are fighting not to just have a party or cult or some leadership. We're fighting so the people on the ground, on the bottom, can begin to build a new life for themselves and a new society. There's all kinds of debates on what that society could look like or what transitional stages of fighting and building a new society we have to go through.

I do believe we'll have to go through a transitional stage. But at this point, at this moment, it is about revolutionary community organizing, not just "peaceful protests" to appeal to the government. We must adopt new thinking about resistance and rebuilding communities so that we can be ungovernable by the state. We have to think about people building revolutionary communes and building other forms of independent political entities. Right now we have to think about millions of homeless people coming, and talk about how we give them some place to live. How do we deal with the government to force them to provide those resources and, how do we fight the government to take over housing entirely? We're going to have to do widespread fight back in the form of squatting or just going in physically taking over buildings. With the kind of class warfare that exists in the United States, you will have to pick up the gun if

you want to change society. I mean, I'm not saying using armed struggle as a only tactic, but the revolutionary civil war is coming inevitably. The government will make war on you, whether you are ready for war or not.

I acknowledge a mass tendency which uses non-violence at a certain historical stage can push the government back, and that's what's happening right now. Yes, the protest movement is pushing the government back, pushing it up against the wall, but it's not choking the life out of it. What we need is the kind of revolutionary movement that can choke the life out of it and create a new society all together. These organizations we're talking about, are stifled by petty bourgeois consciousness, petty bourgeois organizing, petty bourgeois leadership and so forth creates a certain kind of movement. A certain kind of movement that will not go to the point of "going for it all" as they used to say back in the day. I really think that they have built in limitations on their ability or their willingness to overthrow the state or even talk about it. The funny thing is, we have to continue to think about things just like that, overthrowing the state, not getting some reforms. I'm not gonna tell you that you never should get reforms if you can in the immediate sense. But at this stage, we've gone too far now to just settle for this reformism over and over again especially in this moment. This moment is a revolutionary moment and other things have happened to make it that way, not just the protests.

The system itself is tottering because of the COVID virus and everything that's happening with Wall Street. All these things are happening and it puts the state on the weakest point it ever has been. Even Trump or whomever taking over the state and trying to create a fascist state is not doing it from a position of strength. They're not trying to impose dictatorship from a position of strength, they're trying to impose it from a position of weakness, and fear. So that's why I said we have to build an alternative, radical force, so that it can then work in a way that it never has before to overthrow the entire system. Not just the *Democrats* or the *Republicans*—you know the rulers want that sort of bullshit. They want it, because it's trivial. It means *nothing whatsoever*. In the final analysis, Trump may want a personal dictatorship. But the other guy [Biden], he's an agent for the state and he's an oppressor in his own right. He's helped to get the prison system to the point where it is. His running mate, Kamala Harris,—well she is just as much of an establishment Democrat as he is. She's just as much in favor of using the police and the government against *the poor*. We need to be able to educate masses of people about these things while we're creating an alternative, so they will not be fooled. We need a new society and a new world, not more capitalism.

# **‘Illusions should not be strengthened, but dispelled’: An Interview with Vadim Damier**

An interview by Alexander Migursky of the historian and activist given to *Egalité* magazine about the radical left movement in Russia, its difficulties and prospects, the problem of alliances, and difficult but much needed alternatives.<sup>1</sup>

**What place do you think Russia and the CIS countries occupy in the system of world capitalism and how does this position determine the form of exercising the power of their states?**

Well, you correctly pose the problem: what we observe in the former Soviet Union or, as I sometimes say, in the 1/6th, cannot be considered an exception in the world, although, of course, some phenomena and tendencies appear more sharply or prominently. Capitalism is really a ‘world-system’ where there is a ‘centre’ and its own ‘periphery’. The countries of the former Soviet Union undoubtedly belong to the ‘periphery’ or to the ‘semi-periphery’ from the point of view of their place in world capitalism. Their economic role is a raw material appendage and a location for production with cheap labour. But this does not exclude several additional points that complicate the picture.

First, corporations operating in these countries - primarily in Russia - can also act as transnational corporations, very active and sometimes influential not only in other countries of the ‘periphery’, but also in countries of the capitalist ‘centre’: take, for example, the Russian gas and oil companies. Second, within the region of the former Union, a contender for the role of a regional superpower - the Russian state - is emerging. It is trying to establish itself in this capacity and is seeking recognition of this right from competitors in the world arena, including from the powers of the capitalist ‘centre’. Nevertheless, his economic weakness and peripheral raw material role enable him to act only as a junior partner in the ongoing processes of the formation of new imperialist blocs or ‘centres of power’ in the world, primarily in the confrontation between the United States and China. Such a political and economic place of the ‘post-Soviet’ region in the capitalist world undoubtedly leaves an imprint on the nature of power in its states. Another influencing factor can be considered the fact that, in all these countries, the ruling class largely grew out of the Soviet ruling *nomenklatura* and the technical bureaucracy. As a result, authoritarian or semi-authoritarian oligarchic regimes, pursuing an extreme neoliberal policy in the social sphere, have

more or less clearly established themselves in all states of the ‘1 / 6th’.

**What ideological and practical evolution did the post-Soviet left movement undergo from the late 90s to the present day?**

To begin with, I think, it follows that the left movement in the region initially suffered from congenital ‘wormholes’. The left opposition in the USSR had always been subjected to severe repression and was cut off from the main trends in the development of radical left thought in the world. Hence its initial ... well, let's just say, ‘provincial’, ‘home-grown’, or something, ideological mess and an attempt, as they say, to reinvent the wheel. Very many people have vestiges of the CPSU ideology, Leninism, authoritarian-state capitalist moments or sentiments. Another such ‘wormhole’ dating back to Soviet times is the inability to formulate and take up one's own principled position in the social struggle. Just as the majority of the ‘new left’ acted during the perestroika period as appendages of the *demonomenklatura*-liberal opposition, even after the dissolution of the Union by the ruling *nomenklatura* class, the left most often becomes a kind of junior partner of one or another faction of the ruling class waging a struggle for power. For example - a de facto ally of the liberal opposition in the struggle for ‘fair elections’ or ‘democracy’.

As for the changes over the past 20 years ... I would put it harshly: the situation on the left has not improved, but worsened. New wormholes have been added to the old ones. Even in the 1990s, the left did not have ideological and cultural hegemony in society, but at least the then situation in society - the shock from the consequences of ‘market reforms’ on the one hand, and the still fresh memory of the undesirable effects of Soviet neo-Stalinism - opened, at least in theory, the opportunity and space to search for some kind of left alternative. Hence the significant interest in non-traditional left-wing and anarchist ideas among the youth of the 1990s. Now the situation is different. New generations of people have grown up, already accustomed to private market capitalism and perceiving

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<sup>1</sup> published by KRAS-AIT: <https://aitrus.info/node/5656>

it as the only reality that can be improved, in the spirit of an idealised, imaginary 'West', but impossible, utopian to destroy. But the memory of the realities of Stalinism and state capitalism has been erased, young people have not experienced this and do not know. As a result, some young people attend Navalny's events, while others join Leninist groups. The consequences of the processes of constructing capitalist nations in the post-Soviet countries also affect - nationalism in one form or another has become almost a political consensus and has also spread to a significant part of the left. If in the 90s the 'new left' and anarchists, unlike the Stalinists, shunned patriotic 'troubles', then in the 21st century some Marxists, 'antifa' and anarchists began to declare that patriotism should not be left "at the mercy" of the ultra-right.

Politically, the non-independence of the role and actions of the post-Soviet left in Russia is reinforced by the very situation of the transition of political power from the liberal faction of the ruling class in the 90s to its now ruling conservative faction. Under the new conditions, many leftists consider the main and direct enemy not to be capitalism as such, but to be the conservative regime, pinning naive hopes on changes for the better in the event of its removal from power. And the last point, which cannot be ignored: due to the traditional 'provinciality' of the post-Soviet left, they with zealous readiness and completely uncritically borrow from the world left movement what they think is the latest squeak of the left fashion, but which is often already questioned and revised in this movement. Thus, especially in recent decades, various identity, postcolonialist and other similar trends have penetrated into the Russian left milieu, inclined to consider the class problem, class struggle, socio-economic aspects of exploitation "outdated", "unimportant" or "secondary".

The unilateral orientation of many leftists on the preferential protection of the interests of one or another non-class 'stratum', segment, 'oppressed nation', 'oppressed race' or hierarchical 'community' within the framework of capitalism undermines the possibility of forming solidarity of the working class and awareness of its interest in the elimination of capitalism and the state, in the destruction of any hierarchy at all.

### **Why does the 'new left' in Russia and the CIS consider the conquest of Western-style democracy to be the first step on the road to socialism?**

There are again many reasons here. The very first is the initial idealisation of political democracy as a system of government. Let me remind you that this discussion dates back to the time of the split in the First International. For us anarchists, democracy is also a *kratos* ('rule'); it is also a form of man's power over man. And where there is power, there can be no freedom, no real equality, no solidarity. In the ancient Greek *polis*, it was still possible to talk about the direct

solution of all issues by everyone, at a general meeting. In modern society, democracy is a myth. Our ideal is universal self-government, in which people themselves directly resolve all issues of their lives and activities, collectively or individually. Any representation of people's needs or desires by any political institution of power, elected or not, inevitably distorts these actual needs.

Moreover, even the most 'advanced' of modern democracies in the world does not hesitate to resort to the most brutal repression and trampling on freedoms and rights as soon as it feels threatened. In other words, democracy as a system of power is, in essence, a fiction. As Marcuse rightly said, the freedom to choose the master does not abolish the existence of masters and slaves, rulers and subordinates.

Meanwhile, most leftists who do not come from the anarchist tradition consider representative democracy to be entirely possible. Moreover they, unlike the anarchists, do not believe in the possibility of an immediate and real transition to a stateless and classless society. For them, since the time of the First International, the transition to a future free society is presented only in the form of a series of successive stages: first - the conquest of 'democracy', then - the conquest of political power, then the 'first period' of the new society, as a kind of compromise with elements of the old, and only then - in foggy and almost unrealisable distances - 'communism'. The second reason is, in a way, a consequence of the substitution of concepts. For example, no one will deny that civil and human rights, the so-called 'negative freedoms', create more favourable conditions for the activities of left-wing forces and social movements. In the history of anarcho-syndicalist trade unions in various countries, there are many examples when strikes were held against repressive laws, repression, the prohibition of trade union and workers' organisations, etc. Fighting against all this is logical. But it is a dangerous illusion that these 'negative freedoms' are indeed guaranteed by an elected system of representative government. Perhaps she is less arrogant and cynical in her actions, and even then not always. But if she needs to drop or suspend such freedoms, she always finds a way to do it. That is why we say: freedom - yes, democracy as a system of government - no, because, as power, it is no better than a dictatorship. We are definitely for freedom of assembly, demonstration, unions, organisations, etc. But we will never support the campaign for free elections' by the slaves of our masters. Illusions must be destroyed, not reinforced.

### **What, apart from the nationalisation of large companies and corporations, can the 'new left' offer to post-Soviet society politically and economically?**

First of all, they can and should offer an alternative to society of universal self-government and coordination

of actions 'from below' - both politically and economically. This means that we should not advocate for nationalisation, that is, nationalisation of the economy, but for its socialisation, real socialisation. Enterprises and services belonging to society should be managed on its behalf not by the state, which can never be a real spokesman for the interests of society, but by those who work at these enterprises and in these services, in coordination with consumers and residents. This requires universal self-organisation from below, both at the place of work and at the place of residence. And it can only grow out of concrete and everyday social and economic struggles. It is precisely on such self-organisation that the 'new left' should work. In the future, the very structures of 'anti-power' could grow out of it, which would replace the state and capitalism.

### **Can the anti-militarist, ecological and feminist agendas give a start for the development of the class struggle?**

I do not think that they can really "give a start" if they are viewed as independent and self-valuable movements. Separated from more general social and socio-economic problems, they are able, on the contrary, to strengthen the illusion in the common interests of the exploited and exploiters affected by the same environmental or feminist problems, problems of equality of minorities, etc. It seems to me that it makes more sense, on the contrary, to weave such a 'non-economic' theme into the socio-economic struggle, thereby expanding the formulation of the question to a comprehensive opposition to any dominance and any hierarchy.

### **How do you assess the experience of grassroots protest activity in Russia and the CIS in recent years (environmental protest camps, strikes by precarious workers, the struggle for 'fair elections')?**

Of course, it is good when society begins to wake up from hibernation. But, unfortunately, the scale of resistance lags far behind the real challenge, from the problems faced by the exploited and subordinate people. Opposition 'from below' lags behind the class war 'from above'. An illustrative example is the fight against the pension reform in Russia in 2018. It, as in a mirror, reflected all the weaknesses of modern protest. Even the pro-government press admitted that if millions of people took to the streets, whose interests were affected by this reform, robbing them on a scale unseen since the early 90s, the government would be forced to retreat. But this is a real shame when tens or hundreds of thousands of people go to actions for the right and the opportunity to choose their own master, president or deputy, and miserable hundreds of people go to the fight in defence of their immediate everyday interests, say, affordable medicine and healthcare at best, thousands. As for the strikes, they do occur, but there are not many of them, and they are most often not too radical and not

very long-lasting. To this should be added the absolutely deplorable state of the trade union movement ... However, this is no longer a purely 'post-Soviet' problem.

### **Why are so many people in the post-Soviet space ready to support political and not socio-economic struggle?**

On the one hand, this is a consequence of a naive and illusory belief in democracy as a system of government, in conjunction with belief in the coming of an 'honest politician' - that is, a 'good master'. Partly it is also the result of the conviction that the choice is only between dictatorship and democracy, with no third option. In addition, the idea that everything should be changed 'from above' and not 'from below', plays a role. Many believe that some kind of 'pure', honest, uncorrupted and civilised capitalism is possible, as in the 'West' invented by the inhabitants. Well, and finally, there is one more reason - quite trivial. It is much easier, in fact, to oppose the regime and the government than to be against the immediate boss or boss at the place of work. In a big 'political' protest, the participant dissolves into the masses, at risk only in case of great personal bad luck. In a socioeconomic protest at the workplace, a participant risks being fired and left without a livelihood.

### **How can the modern post-Soviet left successfully fight an authoritarian state and comprador capital?**

First of all, by developing the socio-economic struggle, the struggle for the daily needs and interests of working people, ordinary people, at the place of work, residence, study, etc. It will inevitably, sooner or later, confront the workers and the system as a whole, if it is conducted non-hierarchically and self-organised.

### **Why does Lenin's 'stages theory' in the modern context not satisfy anarchists?**

To begin with, it has never satisfied the anarchists. The Great Russian Revolution of 1917-1921 began by no means as according to Lenin - as supposedly two different revolutions, the February bourgeois-democratic and the October socialist. In fact, socialist elements in the revolution appeared already in February, in the form of proletarian and peasant self-government and the movement for socialisation. The revolution was on the rise, at least until the spring of 1918, one of its stages continued the other, but socialist self-government did not follow from the structures of bourgeois democracy, but just waged a life or death struggle with them. It is all the more incomprehensible how those who believe in the 'bourgeois-democratic stage' of the future revolution in Russia are going to move from it to socialism. Perhaps they are observing some kind of alternative self-organisation of workers, from which self-government and 'anti-power' will grow, given their scheme of events? I wonder where they found this and

what planet do they live on? How can an understanding develop from the movement for 'fair elections' and the replacement of the first, second or third person in the state that one should not exchange an awl for soap and look for a 'good master'? Or do the Leninists expect that after one or several 'breakdowns' the people will be disappointed and will stop 'stepping on a rake'? But where did they get it? After all, calling for a fight to strengthen the illusions of democracy and 'honest capitalism', they will in no way help to dispel them. If we want a social movement to develop - and social revolution is the highest form of social protest movement - it must follow its own logic, and not deny itself.

#### **What is the anarcho-syndicalist alternative to post-Soviet capitalism today?**

Our alternative is still the same everywhere. It can be expressed by the formula, "resistance - self-organisation - self-government". Everything can start small. An increasing number of people will begin to feel not only dissatisfaction with the existing order of things, but also a desire to resist the constant onslaught of capital and the state on their vital interests. It is possible and even quite likely that at first the workers - for the umpteenth time - will try to resort to the help of traditional methods of indirect action (appeals to the authorities, politicians, parties, deputies, courts, etc.) and the usual bureaucratic structures (bureaucratic trade unions, non-governmental organisations, etc.). But experience will quickly convince them that these methods and ways are already useless. Failures and defeats will motivate people to act independently. The situation will begin here and there to get out of the control of parties and bureaucrats, and the course of the struggle will demonstrate that only where and when working people act on the basis of sovereign general meetings and resort to methods of direct action can success be achieved. So, in the process of struggle, self-organisation structures will appear - general meetings and delegates responsible to them. Initially, such self-organisation of people is unlikely to be long-term. However, sooner or later, people who are already accustomed to struggle can become convinced that a more stable and independent self-organisation is needed - self-organisation that becomes more systematic and long-lasting. For example, general meetings of workers of an enterprise or residents of a community will not stop meeting after resolving or reducing the severity of

### **Only when people are able to put their self-organisation, which periodically manifests itself in the course of the struggle, on an increasingly stable basis, will it be possible to seriously believe that the process of real restoration and regeneration of society**

a particular conflict, but will continue their meetings (for example, in order to independently control the further development of the situation, without entrusting this task to political representatives). An important role in the dissemination of such positions and initiatives can

and should be made by activists who constantly campaign in favour of self-government in the struggle and expose the impotence and falsity of the system of representing interests on which all existing power is based. Only when people are able to put their self-organisation, which periodically manifests itself in the course of the struggle, on an increasingly stable basis, will it be possible to seriously believe that the process of real

restoration and regeneration of society and, along with this, the formation and spread of the anarcho-communist idea, has begun.

At the same time, the task of social revolutionaries is not only to maintain the fire of hatred in people for the existing structures of power and capital, but also to insist that only constant self-organised activity, only the elimination of the state, power and property, is able to solve the pressing problems of mankind and, once and for all, eradicate the causes and preconditions for the torment, suffering, crises, wars and catastrophes we are experiencing today. In other words, self-organised structures will have to agree not only on the negative, but also on the constructive, not only on what needs to be destroyed, but also on what and how to create and build. Only when the beginnings of self-organisation and self-government spread sufficiently can a situation arise in which there will be a constant accumulation of experience, almost every strike, every protest will show an increasingly clear tendency to go beyond the framework and limits of the existing system, revolutionary actions and general meetings will become more regular, systematic. Then the revolutionary forces will be able to throw a real challenge to the entire current order, creating structures of self-government that will eliminate the state and capitalism. As you can see, nothing is predetermined here. We do not believe in the automatism of 'iron-necessary' economic or social laws. It is only a question of an opportunity determined by the activity of the people themselves. But there is simply no other way.

# Reviews

## The Cost of Racism

Wayne Price

Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us; What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (Profile Books, 2021)

In 2020, there were massive Black Lives Matter/George Floyd demonstrations in the U.S.A. and internationally. The protests were followed by a flood of books about U.S. racism. (See my review of Wilkerson's *Caste*; Price 2021.) One of the most influential has been Heather McGhee's *The Sum of Us*. McGhee was the head of a liberal think tank and now chairs the board of another racial justice organization. An African-American woman professional, she has testified before Congress, drafted legislation, and advised presidential candidates. Her book has been highly praised by African-American activists and by scholars, Black and white. It has also been popular, making the Best-Seller lists. A fairly large book, it is well-written, with an important thesis. However, there is a basic contradiction at the centre of her book, as I will try to show.

McGhee begins by asking, "Why can't we have nice things?" (p. xi) By "nice things," she means "adequately funded schools or reliable infrastructure, wages that keep workers out of poverty or a public health system to handle pandemics." (p. ix) She asks, why have "the schools and parks where most of us lived [fallen] into disrepair"? (p. ix) Why do "indicators of economic inequality become starker year after year"? (p. xii)

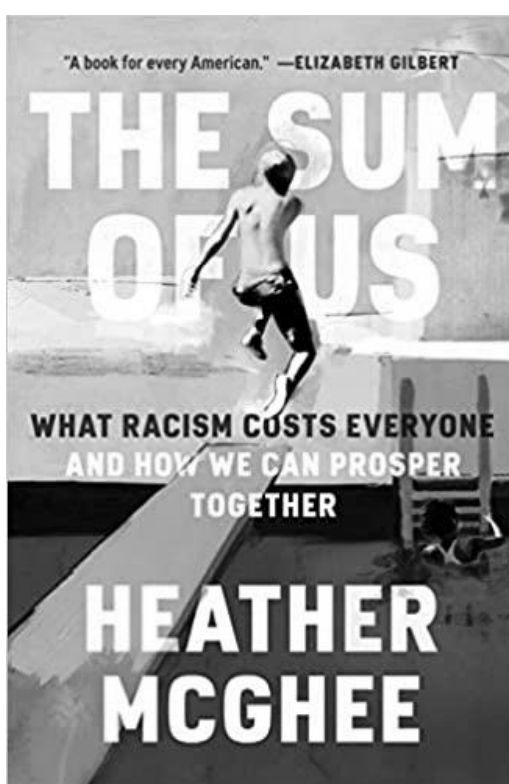
Her answer is "racism." "Racism is actually driving inequality for everyone." (p. xix) This covers a lot of ground. Racism includes "institutional racism"—that is, "structural" forms which suppress People of Color, without necessarily depending on current or conscious discrimination. For example, Northern urban schools are racially segregated, which is largely due to racially segregated housing and differences in income. Racism also included the specific Jim Crow laws of legal Southern segregation. These sets of laws were finally ended by the late sixties, due to the blood and struggle of masses of African-Americans and (to a lesser extent)

their white allies. Racism today is also the personal prejudices of white people, ranging from the hysterical hatred of fascists to the "racial blind spots" and ignorance even of subjective anti-racists (such as myself).

When the author writes of the relation between racism and "we" and "us," she is writing about the white supremacy within the U.S.A. The U.S. has a history of African enslavement, of the defeat of Reconstruction after the Civil War, of the legal imposition of segregation, discrimination against Blacks even during the New Deal and the post-war "welfare state." White supremacy was used to justify stealing land from Indigenous peoples as well as seizing half of Mexico. There continues to be oppression of People of Color, by the police, employers, some unions, and the banks, among other forces.

Historically this is different from the European countries, where the color line did not run so much **through** the country but **between** the home country and its colonial ("colored") exploited subjects—at least through World War II. (The U.S. developed its own imperialism, also justified by racism, although more of a supposed "Open Door" approach than seizing its few official colonies.) There were also types of white supremacy within the colonized countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The book is flawed in not discussing the similarities and differences among various forms of racism. It does not put U.S. racism in the context of imperial and colonial white supremacy.

What McGhee focuses on, within the U.S., is the "zero-sum hierarchy." This is the belief of a great many white people that whatever improves the lot of African-Americans (or other People of Color) must be a loss for European-derived Americans. It's us or them. However,





she is not saying that white racism is the **cause** of U.S. poverty, poor public health, and so on. Rather she sees zero-sum consciousness as the reason why U.S. people do not solve these problems and end their suffering.

As an example—and a metaphor for “zero-sum” racism as a whole—she cites the history of Southern towns at the end of legal segregation. They were told by the courts that they could no longer limit their nice town swimming pools to white people. After all, the pools were paid for by taxes on all the town’s inhabitants. Rather than share their pools, the white-ruled town councils shut them down. They were emptied of water, filled-in with dirt or cement, and covered over with grass. For most white people, they had cut off their noses to spite their faces. They preferred to have no pool in the hot summer than to share one with their African-American fellow citizens.

Similarly, rather than vote for unions, which would improve the living and working standards of all workers, including Blacks, many white workers vote against them. Rather than endorse healthcare insurance for all (as in European countries), which would also benefit People of Color, white people vote for politicians who oppose it. Rather than voting for Democrats (which McGhee sees as in the kitchen-table interests of all workers), the majority of white people voted for Donald J. Trump. He is an obvious fraud, blowhard, incompetent, and an anti-labor businessperson. However, he attracted white voters by opposing Mexican and Muslim immigrants as well as Black people. The majority of white women voted for him. The majority of non-college-graduate whites (working class and middle class) voted for him. Trump lost the popular vote both times he ran for president, but won the white vote. What is going on?

### Two Conclusions

Relying on the importance of “zero-sum” beliefs of white people, Heather McGhee leads herself to contradictory conclusions. First, she asserts that **all white people** are hurt by this self-defeating racial prejudice. “*The ‘we’ who can’t seem to have nice things is Americans, all Americans.*” (p. xi) Her subtitle is explicit: “*What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together.*” She cites, “*the hidden costs of racism to us all.*” (p. xx) She ends with a claim that if U.S. people were to “*live our lives in solidarity across color, origin, and class, ... all of us would prosper.... We are so much more when the ‘We’ in ‘We the People’ is not some of us, but all of us.*” (p. 289)

But she also writes something quite different: **a rich minority of white people** benefit from racism. “*The old zero-sum paradigm... has only ever truly served a narrow group of people. To this day, the wealthy and the powerful are still selling the zero-sum story for their own profit, hoping to keep people with much in common from making common cause with one another... a*

*multiracial coalition....*” (p. xxii) “*Many in power have made it their overarching goal to sow distrust about the goodness of the Other.*” (p. 288)

Using her example (and metaphor) of the shut-down community pool, it is worth noting that white people who could afford it joined pool clubs. The upper crust already had their own pools. She concludes, “*Save for the ultra-wealthy, we’re all living at the bottom of the drained pool now.*” (p. 273)

The political difference between these two conceptions is enormous. If everyone suffers from racism, rich and poor alike, then it may be possible to build a multiclass coalition. It would be in the self-interest of the “ultra-wealthy” to work together with the poorest of the poor, of all colors. It would be in the self-interest of working people to look for big businesspeople to ally with, to aim for “*solidarity across color, origin, and class.*”

On the other hand, if her second conclusion is right, it is not in the self-interest of the rich and infamous to oppose racism and the zero-sum beliefs of white U.S. people. It is not in the interest of white working people to try to ally with any wing of the ultra-wealthy. (This does not rule out a “cross-class alliance” in the sense of a coalition of the very poor, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, the salaried middle class, and possibly very small businesspeople.)

Of course, sections of the bourgeoisie, and their agents, may have different ideas of how to maintain their system. Some promote explicit racism. Others pay lip service to anti-racism, but have no intention of changing the institutional roots of systemic racism. They will not pay higher wages to their poorest workers (mostly People of Color) nor higher taxes for rebuilding impoverished sections of the country (from the inner city to the rust belt). They will not make it easier for Black and white workers to form unions. (That factions of the ruling rich have different strategies is why they find it useful to maintain a—limited—representative democracy, so they can make decisions and settle differences without much bloodshed.)

White supremacy pays off for business in two ways. One is the division of the working class, by making white workers (and their communities) feel superior to—and hostile to—African-Americans. This keeps the working class and oppressed from uniting in a “multiracial coalition.” The other is to maintain People of Color as a pool of relatively cheap labor, of workers who can be forced to work for less than the white majority. (After all, this is why Africans were brought to the Americas, to work as slaves for almost nothing.)

McGhee’s book actually demonstrates, in chapter after chapter, in area after area, from education to the environment, that her second conclusion is the correct one. The rich and powerful maintain racism out of the needs of their system. White working class and middle

class people are vulnerable to racism because they really are oppressed and exploited. This is especially true since the post-World War II prosperity which ended around 1970; since then conditions and wages have gone downhill overall—with ups and downs. “*What stopped advancing, however, was the economic trajectory of most American families—and it was on this terrain that racial resentment dug in.*” (p. 30-1)

White working people and small businesspeople feel oppressed and look for enemies. But their exploitation is by the capitalist class, which lives off their labor. The ruling rich and their political agents do all they can to direct their unhappiness toward Blacks, immigrants, the country of China, and anyone else except the capitalists and their system.

*“The result is a racially skewed system of influence and electoral gatekeeping that invalidates the voices of most Americans.... Our political system has been rigged, from the drafting of the Constitution onward, chiefly to diminish Black political participation. This flawed system has also limited the choices and voices of poorer white Americans and thwarted working class coalitions....”* (pp. 160, 163-4)

Early in her political career, McGhee went to lobby Congress for a program of bank reforms which her liberal think tank had worked up. “*A Democratic senate staffer told us point-blank not to bother, that the banks ‘owned the place’.*” (p. 72)

Yet McGhee insists on the benevolence, or at least neutrality, of government. “*A functioning society rests on a web of mutuality, a willingness among all involved to share enough with one another to accomplish what no one person can do alone. In a sense, that’s what government is.*” (p. 21)

No it isn’t. Not at least the basic skeleton of government called the state. Its primary purpose is to maintain the rule of the rich section of society (more-or-less the “one-percent”)—to make sure that they continue to drag off the lion’s share of the wealth produced by the whole of society. In order to do that, of course, the state has to maintain civil peace and provide some benefits to the majority of the population. Under popular pressure, the rulers may provide more benefits, but there are always limits. “*Almost every clause of the American social contract had an asterisk. For most of our history, the beneficiaries of America’s free public investments were whites only.*” (p. 21) Her book is full of examples, historical and contemporary, of how government has maintained white supremacy as well as the exploitation of the whole working class of every background.

### **Reformism is Not Enough**

McGhee believes that racism is bad even for the corporate rich. She argues that the Great Recession of 2008 affected everyone, including the wealthiest, “*in*

*every country in the world.*” (p. 96) She cites the failure of Lehman Brothers, “*one of the eldest and most successful financial firms on U.S. history, setting off a financial contagion we still feel today.*” (p. 97) “*And all of it was preventable....*” (p. 96) The lesson is that “*a society can be run as a zero-sum game for only so long.*” (p. 98)

U.S. capitalism is a chaotic and competitive economy where even the largest, semi-monopoly, multinational, super-corporations, are still affected by the “invisible hand” of the world market. It has always run through cycles of boom and bust, growth and stagnation, over longer and shorter cyclical periods. Ending racism under capitalism—were such a thing possible—would not end capital’s internal conflicts and contradictions. (The state-capitalist regimes of the type of the Soviet Union also were unable to consistently manage their economies, without bottom-up democratic control and industrial self-management.)

The upper class promotes racism in order to keep the population under control, fighting each other. This does not mean that its own members will not suffer losses. Even more, it does not guarantee that the whole system will not collapse, in war, economic catastrophe, or climate cataclysm. That would bury the rich along with the poor, white along with Black. But decline or cataclysm cannot be indefinitely avoided so long as we maintain the existence of capitalists as a class or whites as a dominant racial caste.

McGhee is a reformist; she wants a better, more democratic, capitalism, without white supremacy (or sexism). She identifies with the liberal Democratic wing of U.S. politics. She is delighted with the election of Biden. She reports hopefully on several community organizing efforts. She admires “*the Nordic countries’ social-democratic policies*” (p. 204) At no point does she consider that the decline of U.S. capitalism and its benefits for working people in the 70s (which she reports) might be a long-term decline. It might not be something which could be overturned through liberal government policies.

A more radical perspective would be like this: “*Racial capitalism refers to the mutually constitutive entanglement of racialized and colonial exploitation within the process of capital accumulation.... Capitalism... would not have been possible if not for imperialism, colonialism, racial slavery, expropriation, and super exploitation. Capital accumulation would not be possible today if not for these ongoing logics.... Moreover... Black women face a triple or interlocking oppression in the racial capitalist system, along the axes of race, class, and gender.*” (Edwards 2021; pp. 22—23)

The consistent implication of what I call her second conclusion is that racism cannot be abolished without overturning capitalism and its state—that the wealth of

the ultra-wealthy should be taken away from them, their state dismantled, and a radical, participatory, cooperative society be built. This would require a multiracial alliance of the working class and all the oppressed against the ruling rich. It does not preclude fighting for immediate reforms, but provides a revolutionary goal.

If Heather McGhee really accepted this, she could not serve in liberal think tanks and NGOs, nor testify before Congress, draft legislation, or advise presidential candidates (presumably Democrats). All these are supporters of capitalism, of the rule of the ultra-wealthy, and seek to maintain the system. I do not doubt that she is sincere, but she is a liberal.

McGhee concludes her book by declaring, “*We must make changes in the rules in order to disrupt the very notion that those who have more money are worth more in our democracy and our economy.*” (p. 289) But those who have more money truly **are** worth more in politics and—obviously—in the economy. This is not a “notion” but a reality.

McGhee, like a good reformist, wants to have her cake and eat it too. To end racism, she wants a society which still has people who “*have more money*”—a society with distinct classes (so there could be “*solidarity across...class*”). But she doesn’t want the richest people to be “*worth more*,” to have enough power and wealth to dominate society and promote white supremacy. If I may say so, her lack of a truly revolutionary approach to racism may be part of her book’s popular attraction. But it is not enough.

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## A Towering Flame

### Aubrey Dawney

Philip Ruff, *A towering flame : the life & times of the elusive Latvian anarchist Peter the Painter* (Breviary Stuff, 2019)

When I first got involved with the Direct Action Movement in 1986, my local group included a couple of older anarchists from the 1970s. One, Phil Ruff, had just “retired” and was beginning the research which led to the publication of this book, first in Latvian in 2012, since twice revised and now available for the first time in English.

The story of the Houndsditch Murders and the Siege of Sidney Street was very much part of the political discussion at the time. Which may seem like we were a historical society, or a bunch of revolutionary traspotters, but was actually significant in explaining the principles on the basis of which anarchists use force. Since we were involved in opposing fascists physically on the streets, this was not merely an abstract theoretical discussion.

The debate about “Anarchism and violence” is an old chestnut, but having veterans of the 70s movement, which started in solidarity with the Spanish resistance to the Franco regime, in your anarcho-syndicalist group means the anarcho-pacifist and liberal-anarchist positions don’t hold water. Neither does the concept of “by any means necessary” because sometimes what is necessary to stop an NF march, for example, may be wildly inappropriate. Sometimes you have to let the march go ahead and try to mitigate its impact both in the immediate vicinity and politically.

Rather than “by any means necessary”, our concept of force was “by all means appropriate”. That is to say, any force used must be justified, discriminate, proportionate, and consistent with the present state of the class struggle and of working class consciousness. This was explicitly in contrast with the opportunistic and ruthless methods of Bolshevism, and of authoritarian socialism generally, with state and fascist terror, and with nationalist guerrilla movements, for example ETA bombing supermarkets in working class districts of Barcelona while declaring their struggle to be in solidarity with the working class.

Which leaves the anarchist with a few thorny questions. While Emile Henry was correct that “There are no innocent bourgeois”, his bombing was indiscriminate and even if its victims had all been bourgeois not all of them would have merited being blown up. Then there’s the Houndsditch Murders, as gunning down unarmed coppers was not really appropriate in the circumstances (as was the wild shooting of the earlier Tottenham Outrage).

At the time I joined the group the thinking, informed by Phil’s initial research was that the shooting was done by Latvian Bolsheviks, not anarchists. Phil initially shared Donald Rumbelow’s conclusion that Jekabs Peterss, a Bolshevik, fired the fatal shots at Houndsditch. The anarchists ended up carrying the can, however, as it was

they who held off the Metropolitan Police and the Scots Guards at Sidney Street.

About 25 years later, while undertaking a second stage TUC Health & Safety course, I was introduced to the detailed definition of what is “reasonable” in English law. Namely, a provision or practice has to be “reasonable in all the circumstances” as determined by a quasi-judicial test. It occurred to me that what we had discussed all those years before was a definition of reasonable force. So, anarchists do not “believe in violence”, we subscribe to a definition of reasonable force. Try that one out some time, it will confuse a lot of idiots, and not just coppers.

But what about the book? It begins with a dramatic reconstruction of the Houndsditch incident in December 1910 and the discovery of the corpse of a Latvian anarchist at 59 Grove Street, Whitechapel, in the room rented to Peter Piatkov, also known as Peter the Painter. This follows an outline of Phil’s search for the latter and how he came to identify him as the Latvian anarchist Janis Zaklis.

Then there is an account of Zaklis’ early life in Czarist Latvia and his entry into the

revolutionary movement before the 1905 revolution in the Russian empire. The period of the revolution itself is recreated as one of violent repression and desperate armed resistance, the latter fuelled by massacres of demonstrators, and the torture and shooting of prisoners “while trying to escape” by the Czarist secret police and army. By 1906 Zaklis had broken with the Latvian Social Democratic Workers’ Party and was identifiably an anarchist. This account reminded me of the author’s background as a member of the Anarchist Black Cross in the 1970s. At that time, the international movement also faced repression including judicial murder and extra-judicial killings of anarchist militants, and was involved in smuggling literature and arms into fascist Spain and funding activities through expropriation as part of the resistance to Franco. He describes the

Latvian militants’ activities with a sympathy and understanding I would attribute to this background.

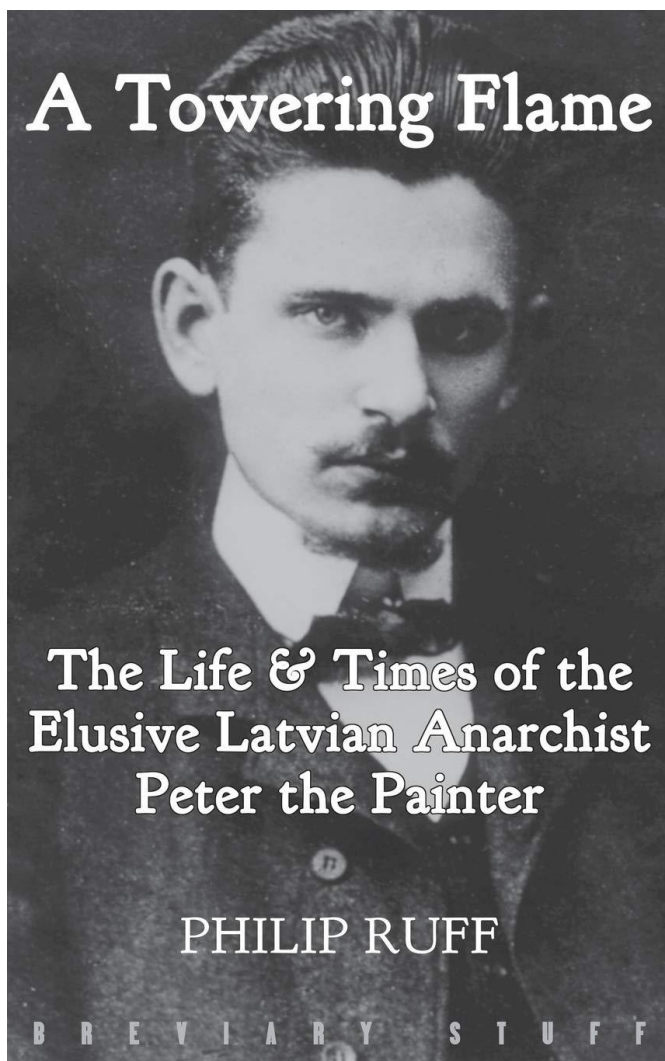
Towards the end of 1906 or the beginning of 1907 Zaklis was in exile. Here the story becomes one of how the various actors came to be at Houndsditch and Sidney Street. In 1908 there were shootings by Latvians in Woburn, Massachusetts and during a bank robbery in Motherwell. In each case, one gunman escaped. Later the same year, there was another robbery and shooting

in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1913 two of the participants in the last of the above were identified as Puika Hartmanis (the dead man in Grove Street and identified by Phil as the killer of the police officers at Houndsditch) and Fricis Svavs, who died at Sidney Street. Both were anarchists and associates of Janis Zaklis.

The action moves to London, after putting the events to come into the context of exiled revolutionary community in the city. The Tottenham Outrage of January 1909 is linked to the smuggling of arms and revolutionary literature back into Latvia from London. Svavs and Hartmanis properly enter the story offering firearms to settle an industrial dispute, and at this point the author comments: “The ‘boys from Liepaja’ had been conditioned by the workers’ struggle in Latvia to see the class war as literally just that: *war*. The inability (or refusal) to accept that different social conditions require different methods of

struggle contributed in no small measure to the tragic outcome of the events that lay ahead of them.” Future Bolshevik and Svavs’ cousin, Jekabs Peterss also appears.

In the aftermath of the Houndsditch incident, Peterss was arrested along with Juris Laivins and Osip Federov. Svavs and William Sokolov were besieged at 100 Sidney Street in January 1911, with Home Secretary Winston Churchill getting personally involved. They died at the scene. Those arrested were acquitted in May. The tale follows the fortunes of all those involved, but with particular reference to Peterss as both he and the Latvian Bolsheviks played a crucial role in the events of 1917 and after. The Latvian Rifle battalions, unable to desert and go home as Latvia was under German occupation in collusion with the local Baltic German



barons, were the most reliable and effective military force in revolutionary Russia due to the hatred of Great Russian imperialism engendered by the experience of post-1905 repression in their homeland. And they came under Bolshevik control. Peterss became a leading member of the Bolshevik secret police, the CHEKA, and was executed as part of Stalin's purges in 1938.

Zaklis, Peter the Painter, is tracked down to the author's satisfaction in Australia but never found. The real story, however, is not of one individual but of the Latvian revolution and the struggle for independence.

A cracking read.

## Parish Notices

Friends, family and comrades of Stuart Christie are commemorating his life by creating an archive at London's Mayday Rooms ([maydayrooms.org](http://maydayrooms.org)) and online. The Stuart Christie Memorial Archive will include photographs, letters, personal mementoes, art works, his writings, as well as the output of his publishing arms, Cienfuegos Press & Christie Books, and his Anarchist Film Archive. All donations gratefully accepted: [gofundme.com/f/stuart-christie-memorial-archive](https://gofundme.com/f/stuart-christie-memorial-archive)

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Similarly, *in memoriam* of David Graeber, friends and comrades have established the online Museum of Care. "In the Museum of Care, art is not the pinnacle of the symbolic or the production of works that can't be touched, but a practice of building better worlds. *Everyone deserves the same care and attention that we now direct towards monuments and masterpieces, and should for all eternity.* The network of solidarity formed during #Carnival4David is being transformed into the Museum of Care (and Freedom). It will be a network of residences, distributed worldwide, related to reading groups, public art projects, conferences and educational programs": [museum.care](http://museum.care)

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There is now a 'Friends of the IWA' group in India, the Muktivadi Ektra Morcha (Libertarian Unity Front): [muktivadi.blackblogs.org](http://muktivadi.blackblogs.org)

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The latest group to join IFA-IAF is the Federazione Anarchica Siciliana (Sicilian Anarchist Federation): [fasiciliana.noblogs.org](http://fasiciliana.noblogs.org)

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Here at *BFAR* we're old enough to remember the last time *Virus* was re-named amidst a global pandemic. Anyway, Issue Two of the Theoretical Journal of the Anarchist Communist Group has been published, now called *Stormy Petrel*. Available from the ACG: [anarchistcommunism.org/stormy-petrel/](http://anarchistcommunism.org/stormy-petrel/)

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The 1 in 12 Club, Bradford's Anarchist social centre, venue, and home to the Albert Meltzer Memorial Library, first launched in 1981. Not just a building, they are celebrating 40 years o't'club. Birthday greetings and solidarity messages to: [1in12club.wordpress.com](http://1in12club.wordpress.com) & [facebook.com/1in12](https://facebook.com/1in12)

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Comrades in Glasgow continue to produce their *Keelie* newssheet: <http://glasgowkeelie.org/>

### Albert Meltzer Quotes...

**Working-class theoreticians who express and formulate theories are totally ignored as of no consequence: what they say is attributed to the next available "Intellectual".**

– 'Only a few intellectuals' *Black Flag* vol. 3 No.19 April 1975

**The histories of whole peoples were wiped out for precisely the same reason that the history of the working class movement in recent times is wiped out: it does not suit the conquerors for it to be known, because traditions keep alive the spirit of revolt.**

– Review of *British syndicalism* by Bob Holton, *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review* no.2 (1977)

**If I can't have a revolution, what is there to dance about?**

# A New World in Our Hearts

**“For us”, said Durruti, “it is a matter of crushing Fascism once and for all. Yes; and in spite of the Government”.**

**“No government in the world fights Fascism to the death. When the bourgeoisie sees power slipping from its grasp, it has recourse to Fascism to maintain itself. The Liberal Government of Spain could have rendered the Fascist elements powerless long ago. Instead it compromised and dallied. Even now at this moment, there are men in this Government who want to go easy on the rebels.”**

**And here Durruti laughed. “You can never tell, you know, the present Government might yet need these rebellious forces to crush the workers’ movement . . .”**

**“We know what we want. To us it means nothing that there is a Soviet Union somewhere in the world, for the sake of whose peace and tranquillity the workers of Germany and China were sacrificed to Fascist barbarians by Stalin. We want revolution here in Spain, right now, not maybe after the next European war. We are giving Hitler and Mussolini far more worry with our revolution than the whole Red Army of Russia. We are setting an example to the German and Italian working class on how to deal with Fascism.”**

**“I do not expect any help for a libertarian revolution from any Government in the world. . . . We expect no help, not even from our own Government, in the last analysis.”**

**“But”, interjected van Paasen, “You will be sitting on a pile of ruins.”**

**Durruti answered: “We have always lived in slums and holes in the wall. We will know how to accommodate ourselves for a time. For, you must not forget, we can also build. It is we the workers who built these palaces and cities here in Spain and in America and everywhere. We, the workers, can build others to take their place. And better ones! We are not in the least afraid of ruins. We are going to inherit the earth; there is not the slightest doubt about that. The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world here, in our hearts. That world is growing this minute.”**



**Buenaventura Durruti (1896-1936)  
Anarcho-syndicalist militant**