Black Flag

Anarchist Review

Marie-Louise Berneri (1918-1949)

William Morris: Libertarian Communist

Charlotte Wilson (1854-1944)

And much more...

Spring 2024

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Contents

Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of *Black Flag* in 2024!

We start with William Morris, with Brian Morris giving an excellent overview of his ideas. Friends with Kropotkin, he influenced the likes of Tom Mann and G.D.H. Cole with his distinctive libertarian communism. In the Socialist League, he rejected parliamentarianism and advocated anti-parliamentarian tactics (such as the general strike) similar to the anarchists in that group. While he moved – as least publicly – to a more orthodox social democratic position before his death, it is early anti-parliamentarian writings which secured his lasting influence and we reprint a selection of articles from the Socialist League's paper, *The Commonweal*. These show there is more to Morris than *News from Nowhere* and wallpaper patterns.

We then move onto Charlotte M. Wilson who helped found *Freedom* with Kropotkin and became its first editor. As such, she played a key role in the creation of the British anarchist movement and should be far better remembered. Nicholas Walter helped resurrect her memory in a biographical article for *The Raven* which we reproduce as well as editing the collection *Anarchist Essays* (London: Freedom Press, 2000). As well as the articles from *Freedom* included in that book, we reprint other editorials and articles from that paper.

Next is G.D.H. Cole, one of the most influential figures of the short-lived Guild Socialist movement. It is with his writings that Guild Socialism came closed to anarchism, although its advocacy of workers' control meant it was a libertarian form of socialism. While after the decline of Guild Socialism and the rise of Bolshevism after the First World War, Cole moved to a more Labourist position, this does not mean his earlier libertarian works lose their importance – particularly as it is clear that at heart he remained a Guild Socialist even if "trapped" in the Labour Party.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of Marie-Louise Berneri's untimely death early death (due to complications in childbirth) was a terrible blow to the British and International anarchist movements. The daughter of leading Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri – see *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Volume 2 Number 2 (Summer 2022) – she was a key member of the British anarchist movement in her own right, taking a leading role in *Spain and the World*, *War Commentary* and then *Freedom*. We include a selection of her writings which show why she was so important.

Also included is a new translation of Peter Kropotkin's pamphlet *Anarchist Morality*. This is complete, unlike the most easily accessible version in the collection *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets*. Why having a full version of this important work available should be obvious.

We end with reviews, starting with one of yet another work on *The Communist Manifesto* which seeks to place it in both its historical context and relate it to subsequent activity, unlike the book in question. We then reprint critical reviews of Cole's *Guild Socialism Restated* which focuses on its distribution by deed rather than need and E.P. Thompson's 1950s biography of William Morris. We then present a more sympathetic review of a new collection of Cole's writings. Finally, Ben Franks provides a critical review of two books seeking to challenge "old" anarchism.

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

The Revolutionary Socialism of William Morris

Brian Morris

Social Anarchism Issue 45 (Spring 2012)

The poet and designer William Morris has been described as a sentimental socialist with a nostalgia for the medieval period. He has also been described as a Marxist, as an anarchist, and as the inspiration for many members of the British Labour party. Motivated by the issue of whether or not Morris can be described as an anarchist, this essay outlines the historical context and the nature of Morris's unique version of revolutionary socialism.

Introduction

The political philosophy of William Morris has always been viewed as something of an enigma, which is one reason why he has been acclaimed as the founding inspiration for three very different political traditions — the British labour Party (social democracy), the Socialist Workers' Party (Marxism) and various anarchist groups that still cherish his memory. In his well-known history of anarchism peter Marshall devotes four pages to Morris and suggests that he belongs more to the extended "anarchist" family rather than to authoritarian socialism, the usual depiction of Morris being that he was in some important respects a Marxist (1992: 171–75).[1]

William Morris (1834-1896)

Marshall places William Morris alongside John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter, as a British libertarian, although neither Mill nor Spencer could be described as "anarchists," and Morris was a libertarian socialist rather than simply a libertarian, as Marshall acknowledges.

In contrast Lucien van de Walt and Michael Schmidt's (2009) history of anarchism and revolutionary class politics makes no mention of William Morris, or of the anarchists with whom Morris was closely associated, Frank Kitz and Joseph Lane. Yet all three men could be described as revolutionary libertarian or anti-parliamentarian socialists, and thus close to anarchism. Even so, neither Morris nor Lane would care to describe themselves as anarchists. So this essay is a journey along a well-trodden trail, and attempts to assess whether or not William Morris can be described as an anarchist.

After some initial remarks on William Morris's romantic background, the essay consists essentially of two parts. In the first part I discuss Morris's important role during the decade of the 1880's when socialism emerged as a distinctive political tradition in Britain. In the second part I explore some of the key themes that constitute Morris's libertarian socialism, aiming to re-affirm the importance of revolutionary communism (of which Morris was an exemplar) in an era when the only alternatives to the hegemonic neo-libertarianism that are offered by academic scholars are either some variant of liberal democracy (Rorty1999, Sen 2009), or a revamped form of Marxism (Derrida1994, Bensaid2002, Callinicos2003), or an atavistic appeal to ideas and theories that were in fact antecedent to the emergence of historical anarchism. These include an appeal to Nietzsche (poetic terrorism), anarcho-primitivism, Stirner (ultra-individualism), or Proudhon

[1] Morton (1973), Thompson (1976), Meier (1978) and Mahamdallie (2008), for example, all emphasize that Morris was essentially a Marxist in spite if the fact that he consistently advocated an anti-parliamentary strategy.

(mutualism). The latter, together, comprise what is nowadays described as the "new anarchism."[1]

Some of the themes that I discuss in the second half of the essay are Morris's writings on the rise of capitalism, socialism and the state, and Morris's conception of a future communist society.

The Background

William Morris (1834–1896) was an extraordinarily talented and energetic individual, a truly creative artist. Unlike his friend Peter Kropotkin, he has, however, been the subject of numerous biographies and studies, many of them of high quality. These studies have all attempted to explore and integrate the many different aspects of his life and work.[2] For, as many have noted, William Morris had many different talents. Indeed he has been described as having several distinct lives or personalities.

He was, for instance, an extremely talented artist and designer, having trained as an architect as well as being a close friend of two renowned pre-Raphaelite artists, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones. Throughout his life Morris thus produced and designed furniture, stained glass windows, wallpaper, tapestries, carpets and books, and even today these designs are still popular. Morris also had a sound business sense, and along with some friends he established a small company known as "the firm" which produced printed fabrics, furniture and stained glass for a middle-class clientele. But Morris was also a talented poet and writer, and with such works as "The Earthly Paradise" and "Sigurd the Volsung" he was considered to be one of the leading romantic poets of his own generation. Influenced by John Ruskin, Morris had a particular fascination for the medieval period and for the Nordic and Icelandic Sagas. Thus from his earliest years Morris was an inveterate romantic, his poems and prose romances celebrating a past golden age. Yet it has to be recognized that such a romantic sensibility implied for Morris a deep seated antipathy towards industrial capitalism — with regard to both its "brutal squalor" and its social inequalities.

Morris declared himself a socialist in January 1883 when he joined the Democratic federation. He was already a well-known and well-respected public figure. He was then almost fifty years of age. But this "transition", as he described it, from a romantic poet and designer with liberal sentiments, to a revolutionary socialist certainly caused consternation among his many friends, as well as among the general public. The poet Alfred Tennyson thought that Morris had "gone crazy" (Henderson 1973: 305), while his relationship with Edward Burne-Jones became severely strained. This was particularly upsetting as he and "Ned had been close friends ever since their undergraduate days at Oxford University. But it marked the beginning of a decade when Morris became actively engaged in socialist politics.

The Socialist Decade

Morris' involvement in politics began when he joined the liberal campaign against the Tory government's plan to take Britain into war against Russia. It was, however, his decision to join the Democratic Federation in 1883 that essentially marked the beginning of Morris' political career as a revolutionary socialist.

The Democratic federation was formed in June 1881 by Henry Myers Hyndman, who has been described as the "father of English socialism." He was, however, something of a political maverick, a wealthy "Tory Democrat" who always wore a frock coat and a top hat. Around 1880 Hyndman had read Marx's "Capital" and produced a booklet "England for All" that was mainly based on Marx's ideas. The Federation consisted largely of members of radical clubs, although it also included a number of gifted working class men, such as Harry Quelch, Tom Mann and John Burns.[3] But the Federation also included such people as the Marxist economist Ernest Belfort Bax and Andreas Scheu, and Austrian socialist and furniture maker — both of whom became close friends of Morris. Bax is said to have taught Morris the elements of Marx's economic theory, and co-authored with Morris the book "Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome")1893). The book was based on a series of articles "Socialism from the Root Up" that had earlier been published in "Commonweal" (1886–1888). Marx's daughter Eleanor also became a member of the democratic Federation, along with her partner Edward Aveling, a talented free-thinker and intellectual, who was also, by all accounts, a thoroughly disreputable character. It has been suggested that the Democratic Federation consisted

[1] See my critique of the "new" anarchism. Morris (2009)

[2] See for example: Mackail (1912), Henderson (1973), Thompson (1976), Meier (1978), McCarthy (1994) and Kinna (2000).

[3] John Burns, a radical engineer who was once known as the "man with the red flag" eventually became a cabinet minister in the liberal government of Campbell -Bannerman in 1905. A renegade, to many, from socialist politics. On John Burns life and politics see Cole (1973).

only of about two hundred members (Thompson 1976: 287–300, MacCarthy 1964: 464–6).

Given its increasing socialist orientation in August 1884 the Federation adopted the name Socialist Democratic Federation, having earlier launched a propaganda paper "Justice," the first weekly socialist periodical. Morris was a member of the executive committee of the SDF, along with Joseph lane, Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx, and the name of the organization was declared to be:

> "The socialization of the means pf production, distribution and exchanged to be controlled by a Democratic State in the interests of the entire community, and the complete emancipation of labour from the domination of capitalism, with the establishment of social and economic equality between the sexes." (Thompson1976: 344).

But at the same time that the Social Democratic federation was being formed, a deep schism was already emerging within the embryonic socialist movement. Scheu and Morris, in particular, had come to thoroughly dislike Hyndman, with regard to both his personality and his politics; for Hyndman was seen as dictatorial, dogmatic, jingoistic and given to political intrigue. But as Morris wrote to his daughter Jenny in January 1884, the "real subject" of the dispute was on the question of the "parliamentary programme" whether or not to utilize the state in order to further the cause of socialism (Thompson1976: 338). Morris had by then come to adopt an anti-parliamentarian stance.

The split in the Social Democratic Federation became final in December 1884 when a majority of the council resigned from the organization. The "cabal". besides Morris, included Eleanor Marx, Aveling, Ernest Belfort Bax, and the "anarchists" Joseph lane and Samuel Manwaring. At that time Frederick Engels, whom Hyndman famously and disparagingly described as "the Teutonic Grand Lama of Regents Park Road" — acted as a kind of political advisor to both Aveling and Eleanor Marx. He too thoroughly disliked Hyndman, whom he described as a "petty and hard-faced John Bull" — vain and jingoistic (MacCarthy 1994: 494). Towards Morris Engels was more positive, and although he acknowledged Morris' talents and integrity, he had little sympathy with his medieval romanticism, and thought Morris "impractical". Engels thus tended to dismiss Morris as a "very rich but politically inept art lover", or as a "sentimental dreamer pure and simple" (Hunt 2009: 327).

After resigning from the SDF Morris and his associates formed the Socialist League — on December 30th, 1884. On the provisional council of the league were not only Eleanor Marx, Aveling and Scheu, but also the libertarian socialists that Morris identified as anarchists — Joseph Lane, Charles Mowbray, Frank Kitz and Sam Manwaring. Both lane and Kitz have been described as "class conscious workers in revolt against intolerable conditions", and although they expressed a strident individualism and were against party discipline, to suggest, as Edward Thompson does, that they inherited their libertarian politics from the "ultra-Jacobin tradition" is quite fallacious (Thompson 1976: 376–77). They were both, like Morris, libertarian socialists. Morris had a high regard for both men in spite of their later differences — and this affection and respect was reciprocated. Lane and Kitz had both been involved in forming the Labour Emancipation League in 1882, which was based in the East End of London. A group of anti-state socialists, its membership became affiliated to the League on the latter's foundation. Lane became joint publisher with Morris of the Socialist league's monthly paper the "Commonweal." [1]

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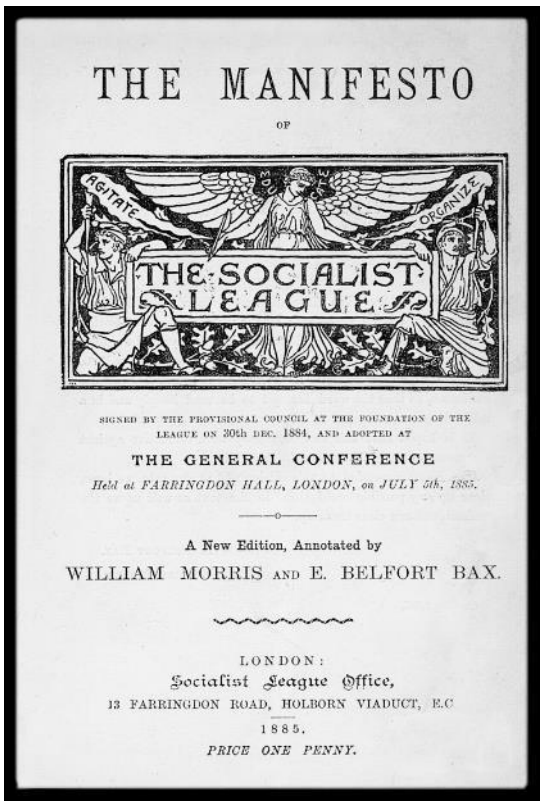
At the annual conference of the Socialist League in July, 1885 its membership adopted its "manifesto" drafted by William Morris. This "splendid

[1] On the role of Lane, Kitz and other anarchists in the Socialist League see Quail (1978), Lane (1978), and Oliver (1983: 50-64).

document", as Thompson describes it, began with the words:

> "Fellow citizens — we come before you as a body advocating the principles of Revolutionary International Socialism; that is, we seek a change in the basis of society — a change which would destroy the distinctions of classes and "nationalities"

It was stridently anti-capitalist, seeking to put an end to a system of production that was based on profit and competition. It repudiated land nationalization and state socialism, and sought through education of the people, the realization of complete revolutionary socialism. It ended with the words that the religion of socialism was "the only religion which the Socialist League professes" (Thompson 1976: 732–37). On the Manifesto John Quail writes:


THE MANIFESTO

OF

AGITATE ORGANIZE

THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE

SIGNED BY THE PROVISIONAL COUNCIL AT THE FOUNDATION OF THE LEAGUE ON 30th DEC. 1884, AND ADOPTED AT

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

Held at FARRINGDON HALL, LONDON, on JULY 5th, 1885.

A New Edition, Annotated by

WILLIAM MORRIS AND E. BELFORT BAX.

LONDON:

Socialist League Office,

13 FARRINGDON ROAD, HOLBORN VIADUCT, E.C

1885.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

> "The document, if not anarchist, is clearly libertarian in its commitment to revolution, its view of the role of socialist groups, and its depreciation of state and party hierarchy" (1978: 38).

Yet within two years a further schism emerged within the Socialist League itself. It occurred at a time when there was political turmoil throughout Britain, with mass demonstrations of the unemployed, which often developed into riots, and widespread strikes — especially of miners. At the third annual conference of the Socialist League in May 1887 a clear division became evident over the issue of parliamentary action. In fact, it was a deep division between those who advocated parliamentary action, such as Edward Aveling, Eleanor Marx, Ernest Belfort Bax and John Mahon and those who, like Morris, were anti-parliamentarians. The first group, encouraged by Engels, were committed to a form of state socialism — the advocacy of parliamentary action — that was based on the German Social Democratic (Marxist) model. In contrast, the political outlook of the anti-parliamentarians was clearly expressed by Joseph Lane in his "An Anti-Statist Communist Manifesto", which Lane presented to the annual conference as "minority report". It is a remarkable document considering the fact that Lane was not an accomplished writer or public speaker, but mainly a local organizer and a working class agitator.

Lane's manifesto suggests that:

> "the object of socialism is to constitute a society founded on labour and science, on liberty, equality and solidarity of all human beings"

It expresses opposition to all "those who desire by means of parliamentarianism to achieve a conquest of political power" as Marx and Engels had advocated in the "Communist Manifesto" (1968: 52–53).

Thus Lane writes: "If we are atheists in point of philosophy, and anti-statists in point of politics, we are communists as regard the economic development of human society" (1978: 30–32).

Thus lane's "Manifesto" was opposed to the democratic state and to the parliamentary system, as well as to the individualism (mutualism) — as expressed by several of his contemporaries. Lane concluded by declaring his commitment to Free Communism, or anti-state communism, or International revolutionary Socialism — and he seems to regard these as synonymous. (1978: 37–39).

Like Morris, Lane used the term "anarchism" to describe various kinds of individualist anarchism, especially that advocated by the mutualist Henry Seymour:[1] but, in fact, the Manifesto is essentially an anarchist tract. Morris, of course, was a staunch anti-parliamentarian at this time, and threatened to resign from the Socialist League if it adopted a parliamentary strategy. For Morris, involvement with the parliamentary system implied reformism, careerism,

[1] Henry Seymour (1862-1938) helped to establish and edit the first English language anarchist publication "The Anarchist" in 1885. Seymour, a follower of Spencer and Proudhon, was essentially an advocate of mutualism see Quail (1978: 47-52), Oliver (1983: 33-36).

opportunism and political corruption. (Thompson 1976: 453, 510).

Yet the departure of the parliamentarians (Eleanor Marx, Belfort Bax, Aveling) from the Socialist league, meant that the League by the time of the Fourth Annual Conference in may 1888 had been virtually taken over by the anarchists, most of whom were working class activists. They included, besides the anti-[parliamentarians like Lane, Kitz and Mainwaring — who were also essentially anarchists — working men like Fred Charles Slaughter, David Nicoll, Charles Mowbray and James Tochatti.

Several factors were involved in this resurgence of anarchism; namely the events surrounding what came to be known as Bloody Sunday (November 13, 1887), when a large demonstration approaching Trafalgar Square were attacked by police and the cavalry with great brutality, which led to three people being killed, more than two hundred injured, and scores of people arrested;[1] and the sympathy and the outrage invoked by the execution of the Chicago anarchists on the eve of Bloody Sunday. One final factor, Thompson suggests, that may have motivated the socialist League to move in an anarchist direction — besides the two events above — was the teachings of Peter Kropotkin (Thompson 1976: 506).

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Kropotkin had arrived in Britain in 1886, after spending several years in prison in France. Like Morris, he was a libertarian communist, and they had much in common, especially a deep interest in ecological issues. By all accounts they were close friends, and Kropotkin often gave lectures at the Hammersmith branch of the Socialist League and visited Morris' family. Throughout 1887 Kropotkin toured the country giving lectures and engaged in socialist propaganda — and was widely acclaimed as an "apostle" of revolutionary socialism. But it is significant that Kropotkin tended to maintain his independence, and was mainly associated with the Freedom group. He thus kept aloof from the Communist League, including the working class anarchists, like Kitz and Lane, from the East End of London. Max Nettlau always regretted that there was never any real political collaboration between Morris and Kropotkin (Quail 1978: 59).[2]

Feeling isolated within the Socialist League which by 1890 had become a largely anarchist organization, and repelled by the actions and pronouncements of many anarchists who were advocating revolutionary violence and insurrectionary tactics, Morris severed connection with the League in November1890. This marked the beginning of the end for the Socialist League. The paper "Commonweal", now edited by Kitz and Nicoll — it became in May 1891 a revolutionary journal of anarchist communism" — did however publish in 1890 in serial form Morris' classic utopian novel "News from Nowhere." The book essentially outlined Morris' conception of a future socialist society.[3]

In his last years Morris is said to have abandoned his rather intransigent stand on "anti-parliamentarianism" and, as the only alternative to armed insurrectionism, seems to have accepted the necessity of following the so-called "parliamentary road" to socialism. He this reconciled himself with the politics of the Social Democratic Federation, and supported one of their candidates, George Lansbury, in the 1894 elections. But he insisted, according to Thompson, in making a distinction between the revolutionary and reformed use of parliament (1976: 617–619).

[1] See Morris' account of the Bloody Sunday demonstration: "London in a State of Siege" COMMONWEAL 3/7 (1887), Morton (1973: 204 -8).

[2] With regard to Kropotkin's relationship with Morris see Woodcock and Avaku Movic (1971: 213-17) and McCarthy (1994: 544).

[3] For interesting and useful discussions of Morris' utopian novel see Coleman and O'Sullivan (1990).

Morris died peacefully on October 3, 1896, apparently because, according to his doctor, of his enthusiasm for spreading the principles of socialism." (Thompson 1976: 635)

Revolutionary Socialism

Throughout the socialist decade 1883–1894 Morris spent an extraordinary amount of time and energy endeavouring to further the cause of revolutionary socialism. Indeed, he practised the socialist imperatives that he had inscribed on the membership card of the Democratic federation: educate, agitate, organize. He thus wrote numerous letters, tracts and articles relating to socialism which were published in "Justice" or in "Commonweal". And he travelled throughout Britain addressing open-air meetings and giving lectures on a wide variety of topics relating to art and socialism, as well as being involved in popular demonstrations against the iniquities of capitalism. His collected essays are a unique contribution to socialist theory, as well as to radical ecology. Although Engel may have dismissed Morris as a "sentimental" or "emotional socialist", Morris was, as John /Quail affirmed "a powerful and original thinker" (1978:28). Here, in this final part, I want to simply outline some of the essential themes which emerge from Morris' political writings.

On the Rise of Capitalism

Morris, following Marx and Engels, was very much a historical materialist, and viewed European history over the past millennium as essentially a history of class struggle. Although, as he put it, he always felt a "strange emotion" when he recalled the medieval period (1973:161), Morris viewed medieval society as a rigidly ordered class system based on hierarchical principles that were sanctified by religion. It was a society in which feudal lords enacted "the robbery of the workers" — the agricultural serfs — openly through taxation and coercive power. Capitalism, or what Morris described as the "great commercial epoch" began essentially around the 17th and 18th century with the destruction of aristocratic privileges and the rise of the capitalist farmer/landowner. This essentially entailed a "portentous" change in agriculture, as it became focussed on the generation of profit not on livelihood.[1] This led to the growth of towns, as the landless peasants drifted into urban areas. These peasants eventually developed into a definite proletarian class, with the emergence of industrial production — manufacture — under the control of an embryonic bourgeoisie.

The French revolution though fought under the banners of liberty, fraternity and equality, was, according to Morris, essentially a class struggle that freed the commercial class from the fetters of "feudalism", and put an end to aristocratic privilege.[2] But the bourgeois leaders of the French Revolution always defended the rights of "property", and the revolution ended with the dictatorship of Napoleon. In Britain, by contrast, Morris suggests, there was a "covert alliance" between the landed aristocracy and the rising "middle class" — the industrial capitalist (1973: 164).

The development of industrial capitalism not only led to a protracted war between France and Britain with regard to the possession of colonial markets, but to the complete destruction of the "individuality" of the working man. The industrial worker became a mere appendage of the machine, and enslaved to the profit-seeking industrial capitalist. Morris argued that at no point in English history "was the condition of the workers worse than in the early years of the nineteenth century" (1973: 170).

Such conditions gave rise to what Morris described as two "currents of hope"; the paternalistic socialism of Robert Owen and the Chartist movement of the 1840's. Morris emphasized that Chartism was a thoroughly working class movement and a genuinely popular revolt; but that it was limited in that it focussed purely on political demands. Such demands constantly led to "palliative" measures and reforms being accepted by the British government; the Factory Acts, the repeal of the laws against the formation of trade unions and the right to strike. But the Chartists did not understand, Morris wrote;

> "that true political freedom is impossible to people who are economically enslaved" (1973: 172).

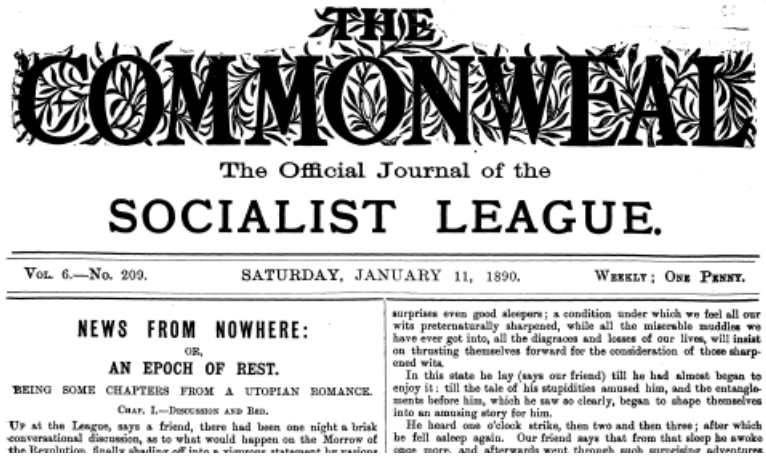
Morris suggested, however, that the "flame of discontent" eventually lost its fervour, and until the formation of the Social Democratic Federation in the 1880's there was little sign of any "revolutionary feeling" in England. On the continent it was different. France, under the influence of such socialists as Fourier and Proudhon, retained a tradition of revolutionary socialism, and the Paris Commune of 1871 was an attempt to establish a society "on the basis of freedom of labour" (1973: 174). In Germany

[1] See Wood (1999) on the agrarian origins of capitalism.

[2] On the French Revolution as a form of class struggle see Lefebvre (1967) and Morris (1996).

Lassalle had formed the German Workers' Party in 1863, and it was the German economist Karl Marx, Morris suggested, who made "modern socialism what it is" — the "new school" — of historical materialism (1973: 175).

Capitalism, for Morris, was a class society, consisting of a propertied class, the "modern slave owners" as Morris described them, who, controlling the means of production, exploit the labour of working men (as well as women and children). The only alternative to capitalism, Morris argued, was the creation of pure communism which Morris defined as the "absolute equality of condition" (1973: 177). He is thus extremely critical of those — his contemporaries — who preached the importance of "thrift" and "industry" or advocated the "shame co-operation" between the two classes. But Morris clearly felt, like Kropotkin and other socialists, that with the rise of socialism, the capitalist system was in a state of "decay" and that it now seemed — and Morris was writing in 1885 — as if capitalism was "sickening towards its end" (1973: 179).



THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the

SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

Vol. 6.—No. 209. SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 1890. Weekly; One Penny.

NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

OR,

AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

Chap. I.—Discussion and Bed.

Up at the League, says a friend, there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion, as to what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution, finally shading off into a vigorous statement by various

surprises even good sleepers; a condition under which we feel all our wits preternaturally sharpened, while all the miserable muddles we have ever got into, all the disgraces and losses of our lives, will insist on thrusting themselves forward for the consideration of those sharpened wits.

In this state he lay (says our friend) till he had almost began to enjoy it: till the tale of his stupidities amused him, and the entanglements before him, which he saw so clearly, began to shape themselves into an amusing story for him.

He heard one o'clock strike, then two and then three; after which he fell asleep again. Our friend says that from that sleep he awoke once more, and afterwards went through such surprising adventures

Alas, capitalism as an economic system has proved to be extremely resilient, and more than a hundred years later, it continues to develop and expand, penetrating through so-called "privatization" into every aspect of social life and culture.

Art and Labour Under Capitalism

"History so-called has remembered kings and warriors, because they destroyed; Art has remembered people, because they created" (1947: 42)

Although Morris by no means romanticized the medieval period, recognizing that the history of the period reflected the "evil deeds of kings and scoundrels" and the exploitation of the agricultural serfs; he always emphasized the art of the period essentially reflected the cooperation of many craftsmen, and was a form of popular art. Medieval art was thus the art of the people.

Morris had a clear distinction between wealth and riches: wealth is "what nature gives us and what a reasonable man can make out of the gifts of nature for his reasonable use" (1947: 179). Wealth signifies the means of living a decent life; it consists both of material things such as food, raiment and shelter, and of "mental wealth" specifically art and knowledge (1947: 126), as well as human fellowship. But it also consisted of the sunlight, the fresh air, and the unspoilt aspects of the natural world — all things, in fact, that give pleasure to humans and are conducive to human well-being (1947: 179). Riches on the other hand, for Morris meant the exercising of dominion over other people — and was thus to be deprecated.

To obtain wealth, or what he also described as people's livelihood, humans had to labour; for Morris, as for Marx, labour was thus a key concept. In his well-known pamphlet "Useful Work Versus Useless Toil" (1885) Morris stressed that labour was a necessary activity for humans and that they must "either labour or perish", for nature "does not give us our livelihood gratis" (1947: 175). He was critical of those who made a cult of work, who insisted that all labour was good in itself, a convenient belief, he wrote, "for those who live on the labour of others" (1947: 175).

Acknowledging that humans, like all living things, find pleasure in the exercise of their energies, work, as an essential human activity involved, according to Morris, three distinct forms of pleasure: "the hope of pleasure in rest; the hope of the pleasure in our using what it makes, and the hope of pleasure in our daily creative skill" (1947: 177).

Under capitalism, however, it was not wealth that had been created, but riches, which for Morris, had the inevitable accompaniment of poverty and wage slavery. For while the landed aristocracy did little work, living mainly off their rents, the middle classes, particularly the industrial capitalists, essentially derived their riches from exploiting working people through a system of wage slavery. Forced to work for the capitalist or "manufacturer", as they had no other source of livelihood, the "surplus labour" of the worker was extracted by the capitalist as profit — Morris, in his political essays, largely following Marx's critique of the capitalist political economy.. The worker thus became an appendage of the

machine, and work under capitalism became useless toil, lacking any artistic creativity or pleasure. The worker had little or no control over the labour process, which usually involved long hours of labour in unhealthy conditions, or of the product of his or her labour.

As the Marxist historian Al Morton indicated, Morris' emphasis on the exploitation of the worker through the extraction of "surplus value" and the inhumanity of the labour process under capitalism, was pretty well "identical" — although these writings were unknown to Morris and not in fact translated and published until 1959. (1973: 14, see Fromm 1961).

Art for Morris was motivated by the imagination and a sense of beauty, and was essentially defined as "the expression by man of his pleasure in labour" (1947: 50.) In the past, both in tribal society and in medieval Europe, art was essentially made by people for people and was conducive to the happiness or pleasure of both the artist (or craftsman) and of the user of the product — whether this was a building or a household utensil, or the everyday surroundings in which people lived and worked. Art, Morris stressed, was an expression of the society in which people lived; its aim was to increase the happiness of human life, to give people a sense of beauty and an interest, thus giving them pleasure in both their work and leisure (1947: 84–85).

But again, with the advance of western conquest (colonialism) and commerce, genuine art under capitalism had been largely destroyed or devalued. Morris acknowledged that there had been something of a revival of the fine arts in the nineteenth century, and an increasing interest in art education; but there had also been a devaluation of handicrafts, and of art generally; and art had become "art for arts sake" cultivated and possessed by a few rich men. While such men pretend to value art, their own commercial activities had led to the pollution and despoliation of the landscape, as well as to the destruction of beautiful and ancient buildings in the pursuit of profit (1947: 71–73). Art, under capitalism had produced, Morris argued, simply luxury goods for the indulgent rich and cheap and shoddy goods for the poor., who live ands work under the most appalling conditions — utterly devoid of any aesthetic sensibility. Real art, Morris concluded, the expression of human pleasure in the labour of production, made by people for people, had been virtually destroyed under capitalism.

Morris therefore advocated, as a political strategy, a "policy of abstention" from "parliamentary action". Like the anarchist-communists he was radically opposed to political action, that is, becoming involved in parliamentary or electoral politics

Socialism and the State

It is evident that Morris, like Kropotkin, often used the terms "socialism" and "communism" as virtual synonyms. He did, however, make a clear distinction between what he described as moderate or "state socialism" and revolutionary socialism or communism. The state socialists, exemplified by both the Marxists within the Social Democratic Federation (Edward Aveling, Eleanor Marx and Ernest Belfort Bax) and the more reformist Fabian Socialists (Bernard Shaw and Annie Bessant)[1] believed , Morris wrote, in sending socialists to parliament

> "who should try to get measures passed in the interests of the working class, and gradually transform the present parliament, which is a mere instrument in the hands of the monopolizers of the means of production, into a body which should destroy monopoly, and then direct and administer the freed labour of the community" (1996: 438).

Such state socialists:

> "accept as a necessity a central all-powerful authoritative government, a reformed edition, one might say, of the state government at present existing" (1996: 437).

Like both Marx and Kropotkin, Morris argued that parliament (or representative government) largely functioned to maintain the hegemony of the capitalist system. Its essential purpose was to maintain the stability of "robber society", upholding its system of wage slavery (1996: 439). Parliament, he felt, was a "contemptible thing" that falsely pretended to be "representative" of the whole society, when in reality

[1] For a classic history of Fabian Socialism see Cole (1961).

it served only the interests of the capitalist class. What is the aim of parliament? He wrote:

> "the upholding of privilege: the society of rich and poor; the society of inequality; and the consequent misery of the workers" (1994: 481).

Morris therefore advocated, as a political strategy, a "policy of abstention" from "parliamentary action". Like the anarchist-communists he was radically opposed to political action, that is, becoming involved in parliamentary or electoral politics. As he put it in the organ of the Socialist League, the "Commonweal" (1890):

> "our policy is …abstention from all attempts at using the constitutional machinery of government" (1994: 480).

It is clear that Morris associated parliaments with intrigue and corruption, and that involvement with parliamentary elections was simply reformist, leading only to "palliative" measures that would tend to support and bolster rather than undermine capitalism — the system of wage-slavery.

What socialists should be engaged in, Morris argued, was propaganda, and as a preliminary step should be involved in the "making of socialists! By preaching the principles of socialism (1996: 441). What such propaganda should entail was to make all workers freely conscious of the nature of the capitalist system, namely, that it was a form of exploitation based on wage-slavery, and that there was an irreconcilable opposition between the interests of labour and that of the capitalist. Although Morris advocated holding aloof from parliamentary action and being engaged solely in socialist propaganda, he nevertheless envisaged that when workers had achieved "full consciousness" of their oppression, then their political action would involve a perpetual "struggle of labour against capitalism". By organizing boycotts, strikes, and through trade unions becoming masters of their own destinies, administering their own affairs and their own business, the workers would come to form one "vast labour organization" that would change the basis of society. As Morris wrote:

> "The workers can form an organization which without heeding parliament can force from the rulers what concessions may be necessary in the present, and whose aim would be the total abolition of the monopolist classes and rule" (1996: 452).

The workers themselves through their own organization, independent of parliament, would put an end to capitalism — class rule. This is very reminiscent of both council communism and the anarchist-communist strategy, anarcho-syndicalism.[1]

But Morris perceived that this would inevitably lead to a reaction by the capitalist class and to a political "crisis"; then, he argued, socialists would be "obliged to use the form of parliament in order to cripple the resistance" of the revolutionary capitalists. He saw this as the "last act" when "socialists are strong enough to capture the parliament in order to put an end to it" (1994: 482).

Whereas Marx and Engels in the "Communist Manifesto"(1968: 52–53) and elsewhere, advocated utilizing a highly centralized state in order to eradicate capitalism, which would then, in the process, simply "wither away". Morris tends to put an emphasis on the workers' struggle against capitalism, the state being utilized only as a last resort to counter the reactionary politics of the capitalist class — the "last act" of the state. Either way, the use of "state power" is thought necessary to engender a socialist revolution. Thus although Morris may be conceived as a libertarian Marxist he was not exactly an anarchist.[2]

In his pamphlet "True and False Society" (1888) Morris made a distinction between socialism and communism in relation to the future society. The former concept implied, he wrote, that a centralized state would possess all the means of production and be the "sole employer" of labour, while communism suggested a "federation of communities" in which all wealth would be held in Common. But Morris argued that these were not opposed categories, for socialism implied a "transition period" and that communism was simply a "necessary development of the former" (1947: 315).

In a lecture five years later on "Communism" he reiterated the same view: communism would be "the completion of socialism" (1973: 233). This, of course, simply expresses the typical Marxist conception of the

[1] On council communism and anarcho-syndicalism see the classical accounts of Pannekoek (2003) and Rocker (1938).

[2] Interestingly, while state socialists including the Marxists, seek to utilize the power of the nation-state to destroy capitalism, anarcho-capitalists, by contrast aim to utilize the power of capital to eradicate the state. According to anarchists (Kropotkin, Goldman, Rocker) the former, whether it involves the democratic state or a party dictatorship, inevitably leads either to reformism or to state capitalism, while anarcho-capitalism is simply laissez-faire capitalism supported by private armies.

role of the state in the revolutionary transformation of capitalism.

Communism: The Society of the Future

"The term revolution" as Morris admitted, had many negative connotations, implying riots and all kinds of violence. For Morris, however, it simply meant "a change in the basis of society", namely the eradication of the capitalist mode of production, and thus an end to a society based on class divisions. He employed the term "revolution" specifically in contrast to that of "reform" which simply implied palliative reforms to the capitalist system, as advocated, for example, by the Fabian society and the Independent Labour Party.

A socialist visionary rather than a utopian socialist, Morris outlined his own vision of a future communist society in many essays/lectures as well as in his utopian novel "News From Nowhere" (1891). Especially important are his lectures "How we live and how we might live" (1884) and "The Society of the Future" (1887).

The communist society of the future, as Morris envisaged it, would… not "know the meaning of the words rich and poor, or the rights of property, or law and legality, or nationality; a society which has no consciousness of being governed"

The communist society of the future, as Morris envisaged it, would entail the abolition of private property and the transformation of the means of production from individual into common property. It would be a society which does not "know the meaning of the words rich and poor, or the rights of property, or law and legality, or nationality; a society which has no consciousness of being governed" (1973: 201).

It would be a society where land and means of production would be communally owned — although there would be no sense of exclusive "ownership" as such; where politics would involve a federation of independent communes; and where production would be organized through free associations and co-operatives — people working according to their capacity and receiving from the collectivity what they needed (1973: 147). It would be a society based on co-operation and mutual aid — not on competition. For Morris was convinced that under capitalism competition (and war) was an inherent motivating factor — competition between rival capitalists, national rivalry with regard to overseas markets and the exploitation of colonial peoples; as well as involving the class struggle between owners of capital and the working class, (1973: 137–44).

In contrast, production in a communist society would be communal, directed towards enhancing people's livelihood and well-being, rather than for profit. When Morris suggested that as a socialist he had a "hatred of civilization" (1973: 192), by the term "civilization" he clearly meant the industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century.

The aim of social life, according to Morris, was human happiness. This could only be achieved if humans had a "free and full life"; freedom both to express themselves as creative individuals and to enjoy life. I demand, he wrote: "a free and unfettered animal life", the liberty to be amorous, merry, hungry or sleepy — and to enjoy the simple pleasures of earthly existence (1973: 192). Morris was no ascetic. The aim of existence, he felt, was to enjoy life to the full, and for a decent life he wrote, besides human fellowship, a person needed a healthy body, an active mind in sympathy with the past, present and future, a worthwhile occupation, and a "beautiful world to live in" (1973: 156).

Conclusion

Although an advocate of communism and essentially a libertarian socialist, Morris always distanced himself from anarchist-communism. He seems to have equated anarchism both with extreme [right-wing] libertarianism and insurrectionist politics — the "terrorist tactics" of those advocating propaganda by the deed" — and with the suggestion that in a future anarchist society there would be absolute freedom, and the "absolute negation of society! (1973: 210).

This was not, of course, what anarchist-communists like Kropotkin actually envisaged, and Kroptkin's and Morris' vision of a future communist society were virtually identical; they differed only in their revolutionary strategy.

There have been numerous interpretations of Morris' political philosophy. His first official biographer J.W.Mackail (1912), completely downplayed Morris' political involvements, emphasizing his stature as a poet and designer. The Scottish socialist John Bruce Glazier, who knew Morris well and much admired Morris as a man of "genius", was not only

unsympathetic towards anarchism (considering anarchism and socialism to be incompatible ideas) (1921: 125), but tended to play down the Marxist influence on Morris. Glasier firmly argued that |Morris was not a utopian socialist and not a Marxist-scientific-socialist (1921:143). E.P. Thompson has questioned whether Glasier's recollections of Morris are altogether trustworthy (1976: 749) and emphasized that Morris had a profound admiration for the work of Marx and Engels, even though Morris admitted that though he enjoyed the historical parts of "Capital" he had difficulty in understanding Marx's economic theory (1973:241).It is important to recognize, of course, that Glasier was a keen member of the Independent Labour Party, and thus tended to be hostile towards both anarchism and Marxism. He therefore interpreted Morris as a precursor of the labour Party.[1]

E.P. Thompson (1976) in his well-known study, essentially interprets Morris' life history as involving a transition from a liberal romantic to that of a revolutionary communist or Marxist, even if a rather unorthodox Marxist. Many scholars over the past decades have tended to affirm that |Morris was indeed one of Marx's "legitimate heirs", as Ruth Kinna puts it (2000:13) and so largely repudiated his earlier romanticism. (See Arnot 1934, Meier 1978, Mahamdallie 2008).

What is clear, however, is that Morris' writings during the socialist decade, certainly reflect some of the key themes of Marxist theory, namely, a historical materialist perspective that postulated a series of modes of production (tribal, ancient, feudal, capitalist);the importance of the labour theory of value; an emphasis on class struggle and class analysis; and finally, a firm acknowledgement that it would be the workers themselves who would bring about a revolutionary transformation.

Other scholars, however, have tended to emphasize Morris' romantic heritage, and to place him outside the Marxist tradition. He has been seen as essentially a "sentimental socialist pining for the middle ages" as Morton (1977:11) put it, and Engels certainly felt; or as someone who tried to combine the ideas of John Ruskin (romanticism) and Karl Marx (socialism) — with little success. Stanley Pierson (1973) suggested that Morris' socialism was little more than a veneer, and, like Engels and Glasier, he argued that Morris was at best a Utopian Socialist — and that his socialism was "regressive" and "escapist" (Thompson 1976: 779).

More recently, Fiona MacCarthy has suggested that Morris uniquely combined "the tradition of socialism as a critique of political economy with the tradition of Romantic anti-industrialism" (1994: xix). And she rightly suggests that Morris would have repudiated the kind of politics adopted by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party in Russia.

The literary Marxist Raymond Williams long ago suggested that there was more life in Morris' political lectures than in any of his prose and verse romances (1963:159) and that his work still has a contemporary relevance. Yet although, as Williams and others have stressed, Morris' romantic sensibility and his deep-seated interest in the arts and culture, undoubtedly influenced his socialism, Morris was at heart a libertarian or revolutionary socialist. This made him a rather unorthodox Marxist, given that he tended to downplay parliamentary action as a means to socialism. There is, therefore, certainly some truth in G D H Cole's suggestion that Morris seemed to be "more than half an anarchist" (1954: 415).

But the key point is that in an era of capitalist triumphalism, Morris should not be looked upon as an interesting and compelling historical figure, but rather as a "contemporary voice and an inspiration to all those today who still strive for radical change." (Mohamdallie 2008: 5)

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[1] Even stranger; we are informed that Tony Blair was inspired by the writings of Morris when he was a student at Oxford University (Mahamdallie 2008: 3). Completely devoid of any socialist sensibility, Blair's politics are in fact akin to the American neo-conservatives. (see Stelzer 2004).

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From *The Commonweal*

Socialism and Politics (An Answer to 'Another View')

William Morris

The Commonweal, July 1885

A friend, R.F.E. Willis, whose letter we publish, seems inclined to answer the question, 'Shall Socialists enter the Parliamentary struggle?' in the affirmative. The question is such a serious one that I make no excuse for answering our friend at some length.

I must admit that as a matter of policy it might be prudent to affect a belief in the Parliamentary method of revolution, even if we did not really believe in them, and this all the more in the face of the coming election, which has aroused such hopes in the minds of Democrats — hopes likely to be disappointed, even on the mere Democratic side. But I am convinced that all such dishonesty is sure to fall back on the heads of those that practise it, and that it is no use enrolling recruits who do not really agree with us, and will fall away before the first sincere declaration of our principles. Therefore I think that Socialists ought not to hesitate to choose between Parliamentarism and revolutionary agitation, and that it is a mistake to try and sit on the two stools at once; and, for my part, I hope that they will declare against Parliamentarism as I feel assured that otherwise they will have to retrace their steps at the cost of much waste of time and discouragement.

I now ask our friend — what is the object of Socialism? Do we not hope to see society transformed, to be changed into something quite different from what it now is? On the other hand the object of Parliamentary institutions is the preservation of society in its present form — to get rid of defects in the machine in order to keep the machine going. Liberal legislation (and there is no other, for the Tories are forced to legislate liberally when they are in office) means yielding what is absolutely necessary to popular demands in the assured hope of hushing those demands, so that the fleecing of the people may not come to an end.

Let us take the Factory Acts instanced as an example by our friend, and see how the thing works. It was necessary (as it still is) to our capitalist manufacture that the auxiliary labour of women and children should be employed, so as to keep down the cost of production by lowering the wages of adult males. But in the earlier years of the great machine industry, the monstrous abuses in the employment of women and children, which could no longer be hushed up, threatened the existence of that employment. Necessity therefore compelled the manufacturers to submit to the palliation of these abuses, so that now the burden of this still shameful labour is lightened, and thereby the system is saved — which means that the wives and children of our factory workmen cheapen labour for the manufacturers at the expense of their own husbands and fathers. Meantime there is still left a large mass of 'auxiliary labour', untouched by the Factory Acts, which will remain till Socialism has transformed our civilization.

This is the regular course of Parliamentary legislation, which acts like a doctor trying to heal his patient by attacking the symptoms and letting the cause of disease alone. In short, for the purpose for which it is intended, the support of the class-state, Parliamentary legislation is valid, otherwise it is a delusion.

On the other hand, therefore, the slavery of the better-off workers, though lightened, is confirmed. On the other, the fringe of labour, *which is absolutely necessary to our present system of manufacture*, is left untouched or even changed for the worse.

This is the regular course of Parliamentary legislation, which acts like a doctor trying to heal his patient by attacking the symptoms and letting the cause of disease alone. In short, for the purpose for which it is intended, the support of the class-state, Parliamentary legislation is valid, otherwise it is a delusion.

I should like our friend to understand whither the whole system of palliation tends — namely, towards the creation of a new middle class to act as a buffer between the proletariat and their direct and obvious masters; the only hope of the bourgeois for retarding the advance of Socialism lies in this device. Let our friend think of a society thus held together. Let him consider how sheepishly the well-to-do workers to-day offer themselves to the shearer; and are we to help our masters to keep on creating fresh and fresh flocks of such sheep? What society that would be, the main support of which would be capitalists masquerading as working men! Shall the ultimate end of civilization be the perpetual widening of the middle classes? I think if our friend knew as well as I do the terrible mental degradation of our middle-classes, their hypocrisy, their cowardice, their joylessness, it would scare him from attempting to use their beloved instrument of amelioration — Parliament.

It is a new Society that we are working to realize, not a cleaning up of our present tyrannical muddle into an improved smoothly-working form of that same 'order', a mass of dull and useless people organized into classes, amidst which the antagonism should be moderated and veiled so that they should act as checks on each other for the insurance of the stability of the system.

The real business of Socialists is to impress on the workers the fact that they are a class, whereas they ought to be Society; if we mix ourselves up with Parliament we shall confuse and dull this fact in people's minds instead of making it clear and intensifying it. The work that lies before us at present is to make Socialists, to cover the country with a network of associations composed of men who feel their antagonism to the dominant classes, and have no temptation to waste their time in the thousand follies of party politics. If by chance any good is to be got out of the legislation of the ruling classes, the necessary concessions are much more likely to be wrung out of them by their fear of such a body, than they are to be wheedled and coaxed out of them by the continual life of compromise which 'Parliamentary Socialists' would be compelled to live, and which is deadly to that feeling of exalted hope and brotherhood that alone can hold a revolutionary party together.

Misanthropy to the Rescue

William Morris

The Commonweal, 28 August 1886

A paper read by Mr Wordsworth Donnisthorpe at the Fabian Conference has been printed in the *Anarchist.* It excited much interest at the time when it was read, and aroused no little indignation in the minds of some of the Socialists that heard it; but printed, it does not seem a very remarkable piece, being simple an example of the ordinary pessimistic paradoxical exercises which are a disease of the period, and whose aim would seem to be the destruction of the meaning of language. Thus Mr Donnisthorpe declares himself an evolutionist, but his evolution simply runs round the circle; and in fact what he really means is the ordinary assertion that no condition of things but the present one is really natural and enduring; or, to put it in another way, that slavery is a necessity and that the latest development is the best, as it is the most veiled and therefore the safest for the slave-holder. This is indeed the due conclusion for the secretary of the Liberty and Property Defence League to arrive at; but it is a little curious that some people should have been ensnared by his not very ingenious fallacies, and supposed that he was covertly supporting some advanced doctrine or other. To these I commend his concluding sentences: 'The best system that I could bethink myself of if my opinion were asked would be the system of private property. To every man the fruits of his labour. If this view was adopted a state of things would arise exactly like what we have now,' etc. 'To every man the fruits of his labour.' Might one make bold to ask Mr Donnisthorpe what are the fruits of the labour of a duke, a shareholder, or a lawyer? The worst enemy of the non-producing classes would scarcely grudge them the fruits of *their* labour – nothing, to wit. If Mr Donnisthorpe is not misreported, this sentence is a curious one to come from a man who affects such exactness of thought.[1]

The worst enemy of the non-producing classes would scarcely grudge them the fruits of *their* labour – nothing, to wit.

[1] Wordsworth Donisthorpe (1847-1914) was an English barrister and capitalist-individualist. He was associated with the Liberty and Property Defence League and edited their journal (*Jus: A Weekly Organ of Individualism*) until his split

But indeed all these abstractions of Donnisthorpe's are but Politics in the Moon. In spite of his dyspeptic pessimism, human beings will always take interest in one another, and will have some sort of common aspirations; even, what doubtless will be a frightful word to Mr Donnisthorpe, some religion, some bond of responsibility to each other. It is impossible for no other relations between men to exist long save those between the bester and the bested, the slave and the slave-holder; society will arise and grow in spite of all calculations founded on a one-sided view of men's struggles for self-preservation: nay, it exists now outside the world held together by those arbitrary rules which are sustained for the upholding of private property, and which Mr Donnisthorpe really means when he speaks of liberty; and indeed it is just that rudimentary and as yet vague society of well-wishers, into which people are attracted by the interest in each other as human beings, which holds the world together until it shall be forced into a completer society by the march of economical events. It is true, as Mr Donnisthorpe says, that the working-classes are degraded, though whether they are more degraded than their degraders is another matter; but it is not because they produce that they are degraded, but because they are kept poor by arbitrary rules in favour of property. But poor as they are, they now have before them the prospect of getting poorer, while at the same time they are growing less ignorant; or say the luxury of keeping masters to employ them is getting so expensive that it threatens to ruin both master and man, and that while the masters have no way of escape, the men have a simple one to wit, the getting rid of their masters. This they are beginning to learn and when they get more perfect with their lesson, and come to understand that they can produce without the help of the lookers-on who pocket so large a part of their product, in spite of all abstractions, and in spite also of misanthropical prophecies they will insist on having 'the fruits of their labour'. Nay, they will be forced to take steps to having them from the breakdown of that very slave-system of which Mr Donnisthorpe is such a sedulous supporter. That slave-system is at best preparing widespread commercial ruin, and thereby is performing the last action that it is capable of; it is expending the last force that it has in giving force to the new order of things, it is putrid, but still useful – as dung.

It is true, as Mr Donnisthorpe says, that the working-classes are degraded, though whether they are more degraded than their degraders is another matter; but it is not because they produce that they are degraded, but because they are kept poor by arbitrary rules in favour of property

Let us, then, take to heart some of Mr Donnisthorpe's taunts, and use them for what they are worth. He tells us in a great many words, considering the simplicity of the statement, that if the workers can take over the artificially protected property of the useless classes they have a right to do so, and sarcastically cheers them on in the attempt. It is our business to accept the challenge; and we may at least thank him for not hypocritically deprecating the use of force as a wickedness and immorality in the ordinary fashion of the day. But though the day of change will come at last, surely it will come the quicker if we take to heart those taunts aforesaid. True it is that it is the surroundings of the workers acting on exactly the same material as that of the useless classes which has produced their degradation; but it is possible for men who have once had a religion implanted in them to make that surrounding overcome the others – at least for the practical purposes of revolution. It has been seen over and over how a religion, a principle – whatever you may chose to call it – will transform poltroons into heroes, by forcing men to make the best of their better qualities and making the excess of what they have got in them that is good supply the defects of their lacking qualities. So I think we may, in spite of Mr Donnisthorpe, each one of us make ourselves good enough for revolutionists, though in this generation we may fall short of perfection. Yet I admit that it is a difficult thing to do, for it means giving a sense of responsibility in greater or less degree to a great many people; so once more let as take warning by the enemy, and remember that the Religion of Socialism which our manifesto speaks of does call us to be better than other people, since we owe ourselves to the *society* which we have accepted as the hope of the future.

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from the League in 1888. The Liberty and Property Defence League was founded in 1882 by Lord Elcho for the support of laissez-faire capitalism and served as a lobby group for industrialists and landowners who were alarmed by Georgism ("Single Tax"), trade unionism and socialism. (*Black Flag*)

Facing the Worst of It

William Morris

The Commonweal, 19 February 1887

Though we Socialists have full faith in the certainty of the great change coming about, it would be idle for any one of us to attempt to prophesy as to the date of the realization of our hopes; and it is well for us not to be too sanguine, since overweening hope is apt to give birth to despair if it meets with check or disappointment. Although the oppression and robbery of the past and the present is preparing a certain revenge in the future, yet history has shown us over and over again that retribution is halt-foot; or perhaps, to put it with as little metaphor as language will allow of, great revolutions have to wait till the force which is to destroy the old order and create the new is so overwhelming that there is no chance of any real or serious reaction marring the effects of the hopes and necessities which make great revolutions.

There are two streams of the force which is creating the new order of things, and which, already visible to thoughtful persons, will one day rise into a great flood-tide of change visible to every one, and make a new world. On the one hand the system under which we now live and which is, we are firmly convinced, the last development of the oppression of privilege, is of its own weight pushing onwards towards its destruction. The energy and ceaseless activity which made its success so swift and startling are now hurrying it towards its end; there is no turning back possible, no pausing for the tide of that commerce which bears all life with it in the present; it is not only that its goal is ruin, but the goal is now within sight. Yet though the energy which is now sweeping onward to the sea of destruction cannot falter, yet it may itself create checks – eddies, to keep up the metaphor – in which we now living may whirl round and round a long time. So, that we may not be disappointed and be taken unawares, it is well to consider what these may be.

At the same time, although commercial ruin *must* be the main stream of the force for the bringing about revolution, we must not forget the other stream, which is the conscious hope of the oppressed classes, forced into union and antagonism by the very success of the commercial system which their hope now threatens with destruction. The commercial or capitalistic system is being eaten out by its own energy; but that energy may on the one hand create partially new conditions for it, yet, on the other hand, in doing so it will stimulate the energy which is consciously attacking it; and these attacks will be more powerful than its struggles to resist its coming fate, the eddies in the stream above said.

As for these, let us look a little closer to see what form they are likely to take.

First, the downward tendency of commerce may and probably will be checked by recoveries something of the nature of the rebounds from depression which were the rule for the last forty years before the depression of the six or seven years just passed set in, but far less complete and much shorter lived. We are threatened with such a recovery at present, and there may be some foundation for the threat, of course if it is realized we shall have plenty of discourses addressed to us of the 'I told you so' kind, and the advocates of the capitalists who have any power of pen or tongue will be jubilant and noisy. We Socialists, however, need not trouble ourselves much about their joy, because such a period is sure to be fruitful of disputes between the trades' unionists and the capitalists; and it will be our business to stimulate and support the claim to a higher standard of livelihood which the brisker business and consequent bigger profits of the manufacturers will enable the workmen to make with success. The period of recovery will certainly be followed by another depression, and the discontent of the workmen will be much increased by their losing, or their dreading to lose, the advantages gained in the better times; so that after all even this apparent check to the progress of the disintegration of the present system will but lead us so much nearer to revolution by making clearer to the workers the antagonism which exists between them and the thief-class – the employers.

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Such recovery as above mentioned would come in the ordinary condition of things, and would mean simply an emptying more or less of the shelves of the salesman. But recovery may come from another and more dramatic cause – to wit, the great European war with which we are now threatened. Such a war would give a great stimulus to trade while it lasted; just as if half London were burned down, the calamity would be of great service to those who were not burned out, – all this, of course, applying only to the idiotic system of rewarding labour under which we now suffer, and

having nothing to do with a system in which work means production or service of some sort to the community.

But 'good' as the war might be for trade, it could not last for ever; and quite apart from the more specially political results which might come of it, the time would come when some one would have to say, as Owen said after the end of the great war of the beginning of the century, 'the war, our best customer, is dead'.

Then would come the inevitable reaction, and what between falling prices, and crowds thrown out of employment, and the certain disappointment and disgust which would attend the exhaustion of the finish of the struggle, our present thief-society would receive a rude shake, which one might hope it would scarcely recover. But whether that were so or not, at least the inflation of the war-time would be far more than counterbalanced by the depression of the following peace. Only the most shortsighted of the capitalists can pray for war in the times we are now in, one would think, because behind the brilliant 'respectable' war stands its shadow, revolution.

And yet though they may dread war, still that restless enemy of the commercial system, the demon which they have made, and is no longer their servant but their master, forces them into it in spite of them; because unless commerce can find new capacities for expansion it is all over, or will be in a very few years; the partial and brief recovery of trade before mentioned is too insignificant to be worth much notice; the one thing for which our thrice accursed civilization craves, as the stifling man for fresh air, is *new markets;* fresh countries must be conquered by it which are not manufacturing and are producers of raw material, so that 'civilized' manufactures can be forced on them. *All wars now waged, under whatever pretences, are really wars for the great prizes in the world-market.* And certainly if the countries, the chances for whose monopolization (distant chances too) are now leading Europe into a war the end of which no one can foresee, can be opened up to commerce, and when opened up satisfy the expectations of the national pirates who are 'on the account' in this matter, the dissolution of our present system may be somewhat checked. Yet, on the other hand, this very success would stimulate the cut-throat competition of the commerce-gamblers; and once more, since of their plunder they would only yield to the workers as much as the latter compelled them to yield, whatever 'prosperity' might follow such enterprises, would, now that the idea of Socialism has taken root amongst the workmen of Europe, be accompanied by fresh demands on their part; and these demands again would necessarily act as a spur to the competition of the gamblers, and make the pace faster and more furious; so that perhaps even the glorious hope of flooding Central Africa and China with trade 'goods' which nobody wants, will turn out when attained but Dead Sea apples to the capitalist.

These three chances of checking the onward course of capitalistic commerce to its annihilation, are the only visible ones I think: – 1st, The lessening of stocks and consequent slight temporary recovery; 2nd, A great European war, perhaps lengthened out into a regular epoch of war; and 3rd, The realization of the hopes of important new markets, which hopes are the real causes of hostility between nations. How far they might act as checks on Socialism it is not possible to foretell; but that they will not be unmixed advantages to Capitalism is, I think, certain nor is there anything about the possibility of their happening which need discourage us. Probably none of them would have much influence in checking the growing tendency towards the union of the workers in England. Certainly they would have no power to break that spirit of union which already exists among the great nations of the Continent.

All wars now waged, under whatever pretences, are really wars for the great prizes in the world-market.

Besides these obvious resources of the system we are attacking, there are less obvious possibilities about which one may speculate, perhaps with some profit; these more speculative possibilities point to attempts of Capitalism at avoiding its doom, which would lead to more ruin and suffering than are likely to be involved in even those above-mentioned. I have not space to call our reader's attention to them at present, so I will end by saying that our part as acknowledged and organized Socialists is, while we watch keenly the development of the causes which would lead to the destruction of the present system, even if there were no acknowledged Socialists at all, to do all we can to aid the conscious attacks on the system by all those who feel themselves wronged by it. It is possible that we may live to see times in which it will be easier than now for the labourer to live as a labourer and not as a man, and there is a kind of utilitarian sham Socialism which would be satisfied by such an outcome of times of prosperity. It is very much our business to meet this humbug by urging the workers to sustain steadily their due claim to that fullness and completeness of life which no class system can give them. The claims of non-Socialist workmen go little beyond the demand for a bigger ration, warmer coat, and better lodging for the slave; and even Socialist workmen, I think, are apt to put their claims too low, at least in this country; for, indeed, one must say with a sense of shame in ones own better luck not possible to express, that the conditions under which they live and work make it difficult for them even to conceive the sort of life that a man should live.

The Policy of the Socialist League

William Morris

The Commonweal, 9 June 1888

Since the Socialist League was founded to support the principles of International Revolutionary Socialism, and since there has been some difference of opinion amongst us as to the meaning of those words, the Council of the League thinks it its duty to point out what in its opinion that meaning is, as expressed by publications of the League, which at the time of their publication were not challenged by any of its branches or members; and in doing this the Council wishes to disclaim any narrowing of the principles of the League beyond what it believes has been recognized from the first as necessary to give it a reason for existence separate from that of other Socialist bodies.

The aim of the Socialist League, therefore, is the realization of a society based on equality of condition for all persons without distinction of race, sex or creed; a society which will not recognize the right of any privilege to interfere with that equality, whether such privilege rests its claim on birth, wealth or capacity in the individual.

The League holds that the necessary step to the realization of this society is the abolition of monopoly in the means of production, which should be *owned* by no individual, but by the whole community, in order that the use of them may be free to all according to their capacity: this we believe would necessarily lead to the equality of condition above-mentioned, and the recognition of the maxim '*from* each according to his capacity, *to* each according to his needs'.

It is necessary to explain here that some Socialists believe this first step, the abolition of monopoly in the means of production is the *end* of Socialism, and that the society so founded will admit of competition for the relative shares of the wealth produced for use; although it is obvious that success in such competition can only be attained by the successful at the expense of the unsuccessful, and thus new classes would be formed which would take the place of those destroyed by the abolition of monopoly. On this point, therefore, the Socialist League differs in its aim or ideal of society from some other Socialists.

Again, the League believes, when it speaks of *International* Socialism, that the word internationalism applies only to the present state of slavery, as expressing that the workers do not recognize the national distinctions made by their masters, and that in the society of the future, nations as political entities will cease to exist, and give place to the federation of communities bound together by locality or convenience. Here again the League differs from some Socialists who cannot see so far as the abolition of nationality, and this again implies a difference in ideal.

As to the means for the attainment of the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production, and through that to equality of condition for all persons, the League believes that the first and most indispensable of such means is the putting before the people its aims, ultimate and immediate, plainly and honestly, and has always acted on that belief; in the confidence that however strange these aims may be to the greater number of persons, the time will come when circumstances will force the workers to accept them as their own, and that it is no waste of energy meantime to familiarize them with these aims and thereby to quicken their desires and give something for their intelligence to seize hold of, and for their hope to feed on. The education of the vague discontent which (happily) is now so prevalent among the workers into a definite aim, is the chief business of the Socialist League; nor can this work ever be dispensed with even on the very eve of the first obvious and open steps towards revolution.

There are other Socialists, however, and they are numerous enough, who are not contented with the slow and patience-trying work of getting the workers to understand their position and the remedies for it. They cannot believe that anything is being done unless attempts are being made to get Socialists into Parliament, and other elected bodies; although it is clear that these bodies are the most direct expression of the power of our enemies, and their intention to put down all attempts towards the regeneration of society; and though the passing of a few palliative measures is the utmost that could be hoped from Socialists in Parliament until the time when the people are strong enough to destroy Parliament itself.

The Socialist League has declared over and over again its sense of the futility of Socialists wasting their time in getting such palliative measures passed, which, if desirable to be passed as temporarily useful, will be passed much more readily if they do not mix themselves up in the matter, and which are at least intended by our masters to hinder Socialism and not to further it. Over and over again it has deprecated Socialists mixing themselves up in political intrigues; and it believes no useful purpose can be served by their running after the votes of those who do not understand the principles of Socialism, and who therefore must be attracted by promises which could not be fulfilled by the candidates if by any chance such candidates were returned to Parliament. The two last Annual Conferences of the League have declared by large majorities of the delegates assembled that it was the policy of the League to abstain from parliamentary action, and have refused to allow any alteration of this policy.

The Council of the Socialist League therefore feels itself bound frankly to point out the impossibility of propaganda by electioneering coexisting with the educational propaganda in *the same body* to any good purpose. Those holding the two sets of ideas will and must mutually hamper each other, even where their root-principles do not differ widely; and this all the more as the advocates of propaganda by electioneering must feel how heavy their task is, and that they *must* begin at once with it and insist early and late on the necessity, of turning all our attention to getting Socialists into Parliament by any means feasible. The Council of the Socialist League believes that there will for a long time be this difference of opinion as to the method of propaganda, and thinks itself justified not only in pointing out the evil effects of contesting the point within the League itself, but also in appealing to those Socialists who agree with the League and who now belong to other bodies, to join it, rather than impair their usefulness also by remaining in those bodies when they feel themselves out of harmony with their tactics.

At the same time, the Council wish it to be clearly understood that they have stated the differences between the League and other Socialists in no contentious spirit, but only to justify the continued existence of the League as a separate body, and to deprecate any alteration in its principles and tactics, which, if carried out would put it into a position of mere factious opposition to other Socialist organizations. The Council desires further to say that it thinks it the duty of the League and its members to co-operate in the most cordial way with other Socialists on all occasions when it can do so without loss of principle, and without prejudice to the form of propaganda which it has from the first believed it to be its duty to press forward.

The Lesson of the Hour

William Morris

The Commonweal, 7 September 1889

The labour revolt in the East-end, whatever the result of the dock-labourers' strike may be, will leave a lasting impression behind it, at least on the working men. The wiseacre Norwood, in his speech of Tuesday last, made the very remarkable discovery that 'the strike was aimed at capital and employers generally', and seemed to think that this *discovery* was a set-off against his other shortcomings.[1]

As matter of fact, it is just this element of conscious or semi-conscious attack on the slave-drivers generally which distinguishes this strike from the ordinary trades-union bickerings. These latter, as individual struggles, have been usually little more than business disputes between the two parties to a contract, recognized as such by both parties to it. But this is a revolt against oppression: a protest against the brute force which keeps a huge population down in the depths of the most dire degradation, for the benefit of a knot of profit-hunters; and there is no doubt that nothing except the physical force of the executive which is, as it were, keeping the ring in this fight between the public and the shareholders, prevents the revolt from achieving far more success than the attainment of its immediate and declared aims.

In short, other strikes have been, on the surface, strikes of the business-accessories of the factory against its financial managers; this is a strike of the poor against the rich.

Let us hope that those of the respectable classes who have so loudly expressed sympathy with the strikers understand this: because if they do, it gives us a dawning hope that they will be prepared to meet us half-way when the crisis comes, when the workmen have come to understand definitely their full claim. For indeed they may be sure that this will be the only way to prevent those terrors which haunt the dreams of the useless rich; it will be worth more to the pleasure of their lives than all the array of brute force, which they will certainly not always be able to depend upon; since, after all, that force is necessarily made up of men who are *workmen* forced by ill-luck into the ranks of the soldiery and the police.

As Burns hinted when the Guards passed the meeting on Tower Hill the other day, they who are now hapless

[1] For more details of the strike, see Iain McKay, "The London Dock Strike of 1889", *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* No. 63 (Winter 2015). (*Black Flag*)

tools of the rich will presently become their hapless slaves once more, as they were before they put on their livery-coats.[1]

Meantime, do not let us deceive ourselves as to the amount and quality of this respectable sympathy. We will not be ungenerous; we are quite sure that with many of the well-to-do the sympathy is genuine; that the horrible poverty of the East-end workers (and how many thousands outside the East-end) has touched their hearts; and these people will become Socialists of some kind before the end. But I fear they are in the minority among the respectables (or rather I know it) and that the rest have been rather cowed into silence, or into venting their irritation against the strike, by falling foul of Norwood and his gang; who, after all, are only following the necessary custom of the *whole gang*.

If this were not so, why do not the subscriptions to the strike fund amount to £20,000 or £30,000 instead of what they amount to now? They are workmen's pennies, somewhat eked out by contributions from a few of the better off; mostly those who can least afford it.

One word about the withdrawn manifesto of the Strike Committee. It was to have been expected that it would be attacked furiously by the capitalist press, but it was not to be expected that any calling themselves Socialists should have attacked it; and it is most lamentable that they should have done so, as they may perhaps see by the avidity with which their opinions were recorded by the capitalist press. For us surely the mere fact that it was thought possible to bring about a general strike in London remains the central point in the history of the strike; let us hope that the aspiration toward the use of such an effective weapon against Capital may remain in the minds of the more considerate of the workers and bring forth fruit before long.[2]

'A good man will be contented fast enough if he be fed and clothed sufficiently; but if a man be not well fed and clad, he is a base wretch to be contented.' So says William Cobbett[3], and certainly the strikers might have one more banner with this inscription written on it. We have learned a good deal since William Cobbett's time, and some of us have become very 'refined' indeed; but still on this foundation of victuals and shelter without anxiety must you build 'refinement' and all.

Those who are 'discontented' on the grounds given by Cobbett, know all about the meaning of that phrase so often used, 'insufficiency of food and shelter'; and I am afraid it says little for the keenness of imagination at the present day, that those who have *not* suffered the insufficiency have so very little an idea of what it means. From that unimaginative content of the well-to-do comes all that covert hatred of the poor as inconvenient people, which is so common amongst us, and will one day (who can doubt it?) be so bitterly revenged.

For us surely the mere fact that it was thought possible to bring about a general strike in London remains the central point in the history of the strike; let us hope that the aspiration toward the use of such an effective weapon against Capital may remain in the minds of the more considerate of the workers and bring forth fruit before long

This is the cause of the filling of the jails with manufactured criminals, a sort of criminal capital to be used for the production of more criminals; the preaching of thrift to people earning precarious starvation wages; the horrors of the workhouse, where poverty is punished for being poor; the horrors of the slum, which mocks the beauty of the earth outside the city, and the attempt to get rid of which is thrust aside as an insoluble problem; while all sorts of miracles, chemical, mechanical, and what not, are being invented for the benefit of capitalistic man, each one of them a million times more difficult than the due feeding and housing of all industrious persons. – *If* we could but once have the wits to cease oppressing others for our own discomfort.

One thing is to me certain, that anyone of the well-to-do class whose imagination is sufficiently touched for him to have a vision of poverty and to gain an inkling of what it means, must either become a Socialist of some sort, or else join Mr Justice Stephen's Religion of Inhumanity; and rather than that they had better, for their own sakes, have been knocked on the head while

[1] John Burns (1858-1943) was an English trade unionist and politician. A member of the Social Democratic Federation, he played a leading role in the Great Dock Strike of 1889 before becoming a Liberal Member of Parliament in 1892 and later a Minister. (*Black Flag*)

[2] For how anarchists responded to the strike, see "Anarchism and the General Strike", *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 3 No. 1 (Spring 2023). (*Black Flag*)

[3] William Cobbett (1763-1835) was an English radical pamphleteer, journalist, politician, and farmer. He sought to reform Parliament, abolish "rotten boroughs", raise wages and reverse commons enclosures. (*Black Flag*)

they were young enough to be innocent of cynicism at least. I say to all rich men, 'Once feel what poverty is, and you must either be a socialist or a cruel tyrant conscious of your tyranny'. Are there such men? I should hope only a very few, and that the rest who sin against the people do so out of sheer stupidity.

The Great Strike does seem (as such things sometimes will) to have enlightened these last a little, to have touched their sluggish imaginations. If that could last, it would be something of a gain if there were no other. Yet I cannot help thinking that fear was an element of that enlightenment, at all events with many.

Meantime, surely a man of any imagination must have felt both puzzled and disgusted at the sentences on the men for intimidation. Here was the public sympathizing with the efforts of the men to gain a better livelihood, and scolding at their immediate tyrants the Dock Companies; and yet through their magistrates and police-courts these very same sympathizers were punishing the strikers for doing what was necessary to carry on the strike. And this although the capitalist papers – *e.g.*, the *Daily News* – admitted that the intimidation was probably merely formal, and that the men were quite willing to accept the intimidation as an excuse for coming out. Certainly hypocrisy is a very useful – virtue – and one cannot wonder that it is so sedulously cultivated in the first commercial country, the *most practical* people in the world.

The recovery of trade, the cessation of depression, has been crowed over considerably of late; and some persons, both foes and friends, have seen in it the herald of the disappearance of Socialism; a most stupid assumption, and on the part of friends most cowardly, as has been pointed out in these columns a week or two back. But in any case a full recovery of trade to the period of Mr Gladstone's 'leaps and bounds' is a very unlikely event. Even now in the full flush of the 'recovery' we find the cotton-trade in a disastrous condition; Blackburn, e.g., which but less than a year ago, was, as I was told when there, doing as brisk a business as might be, now shutting up mills on all hands.

By all means no fatalistic folding of the hands for Socialists! Let us go on with our work as briskly as possible, whatever temporary discouragements we may meet with. But this we may be sure of: first, that modern capitalism is doomed to destroy itself; and secondly, that no new form of capitalism can arise from its ashes: that nothing but Socialism can arise from them.

Anti-Parliamentary

William Morris

The Commonweal, 7 June 1890

Most of those into whose hands this paper will fall know that as the organ of the Socialist League the *Commonweal* advocates abstention from Parliamentary action; that the Socialist League neither puts forward candidates, nor advises its members to vote for this that or the other candidate; that the readers of these columns will indeed find Parliament mentioned in them, but never with respect, and most commonly only to point the moral of the corruption of these latter days of capitalism. Our policy is, in short, abstention from all attempts at using the constitutional machinery of government, whereas to some Socialists this seems the only means of bringing us to the verge of the Social Revolution. Now this policy of abstention seems to some mere folly, and perhaps to others seems inexplicable. Let us, then, try to explain it, and leave others to call us fools if they needs must after having listened to our explanation.

What is the purpose of Socialist propaganda? Surely it intends to make it clear to all the working-classes that society (so-called) as it exists today, is founded on the robbery of the 'lower' classes by the 'upper' of the useful by the useless, of the many by the few; that so long as this privileged robbery goes on, those who do all the useful work that is done will be constantly deprived of the refinements of life which are supposed to make the difference between the civilised man and the savage; while their lives will be much more laborious and much more pleasureless than the lives of most savages. In short, thorough discontent with their position and a sense of its unfairness is the first thing we want to impress on the minds of the workers.

Next, we want to make it clear to them that this position of slavery, this unfairness which makes them so wretched and so bitter, is not a necessary condition for those who live by producing the wealth of the country (that is, the only people in it who have a chance of being honest); that these working-men and women could still work, live, and be useful if they were working for each other, that is to say, for their friends and not for their privileged masters, ie., their enemies.

Again, we have to make it clear to the workers that this privilege of a few to compel the many to live miserably, is merely an explanation of the phrase, The *institution of private property*; that he who declares that he wishes to abolish privilege means to say that he wishes to abolish the institution of private property; that he who defends the Institution of private property defends privilege, the gross inequality of rich and poor, the consequent misery of all genuine workers, and the consequent degradation

of people of all classes. Let it be clearly understood that only two systems of society are possible, Slavery and Communism; all who know the ABC of Socialism know that this is so. Communism or the abolition of the individual ownership of property is our aim, the aim of all real Socialists.

Will Parliament help us towards the accomplishment of this aim? Take another question as an answer to that first question. What is the aim of Parliament? The upholding of privilege; the society of rich and poor; the society of inequality, and the consequent misery of the workers and the degradation of *all* classes.

Clearly if this is *its* aim, its reason for existence, it will only exchange its aim for *ours* if it be compelled to do so, or deluded into doing so.

Can it be forced? Well, Parliament is the master of the Executive; that is to say, of the brute force which compels the useful classes to live miserably; it will use that brute force to compel those classes into submission as long as it dares. When it no longer dares, it will practically no longer exist. Now I, for my part, say as I have always said, that in the last act of the Revolution the Socialists may be obliged to use the form of parliament in order to cripple the resistance of the reactionists by making it formally illegal and so destroying the power of the armed men on whom the power of the parliament and the law-courts really rests. But this can only come in the last act; when the Socialists are strong enough to capture the parliament in order to put an end to it, and the privilege whose protection is its object, the revolution will have come, or all but come. Meantime, it is clear that we cannot compel parliament to put an end to its own existence; or, indeed, to do anything which it does not believe will conduce to the stability of Privilege, or the slavery of the workers.

Well, then, can we jockey parliament into Socialism, into Communism? It seems to me a most hopeless enterprise. We shall not find it difficult, perhaps, to put so much pressure upon it as to make it pass measures for 'the amelioration of the lot of the working classes'. But what will that mean save the 'dishing' of the Socialists? – who, if they do not take care, will find that instead of *using* parliament, they will be used by it. Let us remember, too, that the knowledge of Socialism is growing with tremendous rapidity, and that even MP's and their wirepullers will soon get to know what it means, and will then strain their ingenuity to take the sting out of any measures that look Socialistic on the outside; or at last, and perhaps before long, will stiffen themselves up into mere rejection of anything that looks like Socialism. The failure of the attempt to capture the *Star* for the parliamentary Socialists ought to be a sufficient lesson to them of the power of the reactionists, Liberal as well as Conservative, and the way in which they will refuse to be driven into a corner.

Well, then, if we cannot force Parliament to declare its function of safeguarding privilege at an end, when it is obviously in vigorous life; if we cannot jockey it into furthering the very thing which it hates most, and has most reason to hate – Socialism, to wit – what can we do? Nothing', say our parliamentary friends. I cannot see that. Is it nothing to keep alive and increase discontent with the vile slavery of today? Is it nothing to show the discontented that they can themselves destroy that slavery? Is it nothing to point out to them what lies beyond the period of struggle, and how workers can be happy when they are not robbed of all the pleasure of life by the idlers that live upon their labour?

Ignore Parliament; let it alone, and strengthen your own organisations to deal directly with your masters in the present, and to learn how to manage your own affairs both now and for the future, and keep steadily in mind, and work for… *the general strike*

Moreover, the events of the last twelve months are producing a different spirit in the mass of the workers, and they are now beginning to learn how to combine in earnest. It is now far more hopeful than it was five years ago to turn their attention from the Parliament of their masters to their own organisation. In short, the true weapon of the workers as against Parliament is not the ballot-box but the *Boycott.* Ignore Parliament; let it alone, and strengthen your own organisations to deal directly with your masters in the present, and to learn how to manage your own affairs both now and for the future, and keep steadily in mind, and work for, the day when you will have to use the great weapon which your own wretched position of unrewarded toil puts into your hands, the weapon of *the general strike.* See to this, and let politicians elect politicians; let the upper and middle-classes by themselves choose for themselves members of the Committee for the Continuance of Slavery, which should be the name of the House of Commons, and you will see what terror you will inspire in the hearts of the canting hypocrites who call themselves statesmen. A terror which will be fully warranted by events; for such an anti-parliamentary boycott will show your determination to be free, and will give you the instrument of attaining your freedom.

From *Freedom* and *Liberty*

William Morris on Communism

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, May 1893

March 10th at Grafton Hall, Grafton Steet, W, in aid of the *Freedom* Publication Fund, William Morris delivered a lecture on Communism, of which we give the notes as follow:

My friends, I perceive you have no chairman here, a good custom, when you can manage to do without him. I have no objection to begin straight off. Well then, as to the possible means by which Communism can be obtained. I have considerable doubt as to various things which have been done, and I really want to consider it with various groups. I am in point of fact in a rather puzzled condition. The real difficulty is as to what actual steps should be taken, for all sensible men must think Communism a right thing in itself. There are many measures towards this end which is advancing upon us, mostly honest and put forward with much ability. But I have doubts what would be gained by them. The question is whether the steps advocated would bring us further on the road. There is indeed a mass of things which the general public call socialism, but of this a great deal, it seems to me, is not of the essence of socialism, but merely machinery, which socialism must use in its militant condition—and perhaps afterwards. There is good in the scheme of business-like administration we have now in London as compared with the old Whig *laissez faire* methods, worked by corruption. The London County Council is a much more useful body than the Metropolitan Board of Works, and is instinct with a different spirit, a spirit which is promise of a better day. There is now an attempt to give a certain dignity to the life of London, as a whole, which did not exist before. No one can quarrel with the attempts to remove some of the sordidness of town life by the provision of parks, public libraries and so on. The advantages, however, are rather unequally distributed. Free libraries are gains for the middle rather than the working classes. Our socialist machinery must be pushed further. Why in Ancient Rome, under chattel slavery, more was provided for the public than we have to-day in London. Industry is now being carried on by the municipalities; the homes of working people are to be improved by being taken out of the hands of private speculators, and more time is to be given to education. These are indications that the public conscience is awakening.

The real difficulty is as to what actual steps should be taken... There are many measures towards this end which is advancing upon us, mostly honest and put forward with much ability. But I have doubts what would be gained by them.

On the other hand, great as is the gain, the amount of real progress depends very much on the spirit in which these things are done. For equality of condition is the thing to be aimed at, and a new standing-ground must be gained by the effort of sweeping away all privilege. The proprietary classes are suffering to some extent, and will struggle to minimise the movement. Power may be gained in this way by the useful class to overcome the resistance, stupidity and selfishness of the ruling classes. The non-working classes along with their parasites, it should be remembered, are, even numerically, very strong, and they hold the nine points of the law, *i.e.* possession. As soon as they begin to fear for their livelihood they will begin to resist to the utmost of their power.

The gains of municipal collectivism are to be considered in regard to their effect on the minds of the workers in arousing a pure longing for Socialism itself; a condition of somewhat less misery would be a costly gain were it to dull the hearts of the workers and make them indifferent to the hope of gaining a real society of equals. This consideration is not merely speculative, for a partial betterment of the people might become an obstacle; half a loaf might be better than no bread. Perhaps the useless might become to some extent a useful class – a fact which would enable them to keep their power over the commonwealth – and equality, in this way, become further off than ever. But I think myself that such a state of things could be possible only on the condition that the working-classes became satisfied with merely the machinery of socialism – supposing that there went with this extension of machinery some increased prosperity to the working-classes owing to the better organisation of labour. The change must be slow in coming, and we must all therefore cultivate a longing for it. It can perhaps only arrive through a period of great suffering and misery, through the absolute breakdown of our present civilization. The minimum of suffering is desirable. The Socialistic idea must be well planted. If the people reject Socialism as an ideal we may cease to trouble ourselves about the future. We shall in that case perhaps have to make terms with Tories and benevolent Whigs, and ask them to govern us as wisely as possible at to exploit us only in moderation.

Not by obvious violence, however, can we make an advance.

I must beg the workers to get rid of their intellectual slavery to the ideas of their masters. I hope that some spark of enthusiasm may vivify the masses. This might be done if a great crisis were close at hand. The question is – is capitalism coming off its hinges. Some, perhaps, myself included. did believe in the inevitableness of a speedy change in society, but alas! we must remember how hard other tyrannies have died, tyrannies which added palpable violence to their other dark deeds. The impulse due to direct and open incitements and attack is not likely to come, what then are we to do without the sting of hope and enthusiasm. We must use all means to draw the worker into Socialism. I am driven to the conclusion that the progressive measure of to-day are necessary to give form to the aims we desire to attain.

We have to inspire the trade-union leaders with the notion that the system in which the masters live upon the labour of the workers is not a necessary one.

We have also to raise the standard of life of the workers. At present they are desperately lacking in the power of organisation. Education in this respect must be supported by efforts to inspire a longing for the complete change. Social Democratic measures may be either mere shifts or they may be means for leading us towards a new country of equality. The Socialistic spirit should vivify the use of such machinery. The enemies of the public, if we work under the impulse of the true social instinct, may after all be defeated in their efforts to use public machinery for the purpose of exploiting the worker.

I shall now try to explain what to my mind is Communism, but briefly, for the subject is very large. Perhaps Socialism and Communism are names as good as one another, but I call Communism the completion of Socialism. The Socialist is clearly willing to aim at a true society. Communism comes in when Socialism is triumphant. The resources of nature, land and other things, which can be used only for the reproduction of wealth, must be owned by the whole people for a common benefit. Nowadays the owners of the means of production do practically own the workers, inasmuch as they dictate to them what life they shall live. The land, the plant, the stock of a country should be communised, and in this way the accumulation of riches would be checked; for no man can become very rich unless by force or cajolery. The utmost that a most acquisitive man could gain would be the higher salary he might exact from his fellow-citizens. But the producers of specialities will not presently be able to exact any such enormous remuneration. Under socialism, again, there would not be the waste there is now. The labour that is thrown away in the making of fashionable luxuries would be diverted to what is useful. The market price now gives us no standard of value. In a society of inequality the standard of usefulness is necessarily utterly confused. In such a society the price is fixed by the necessities of the poor and the cravings of the rich, for these last must spend their accumulations some way or other. In a society of equality the demand for an article would be based on its utility. Look up and down the London shops to-day and see what wastefulness there is in producing the fripperies exhibited; while, on the other hand, what sordid makeshifts are produced for the supply of the poor as a set-off to the waste in making the luxuries of the rich. What waste there is in the mere process of business, the buying and selling of Commerce; in the endeavour of each to get the monopoly of the market. A society only tending towards equality would make us all wealthy. Genuine well-made articles would then be available for others than those who can buy them now. Beautiful objects would be produced, beautiful houses built for the public use. For a wealthy society, such as a Communist one would be, would demand the erection of fine buildings.

When all are living comfortably the keenness of competition will abate. Many men get rich nowadays, not because they wish to do so, but because they are anxious to escape the chance of being poor. When no one is allowed to defile the natural beauty of the earth, the sky, or the rivers, there will be no advantage for one man to be nominally richer than his neighbour. If we made the means of industry common property we should soon reach conditions of complete equality.

By Communism, or course, I do not mean what so many silly people suppose, the communal use of clothes and toothbrushes. Most sure I am that every state of society but that of Communism is grievous to all that belong to it. Most anti-socialists and some Socialists confuse Communism with what is the machinery of the socialistic state. Take a ship, with its captain and sailors, there you have an instance of a social body acting under a leader, in which each will do his work for the benefit of each and all, instead of trying to make a profit on his own account.

You sometimes hear people commiserating the unemployed, and the general public, when it thinks about them, would like to see them absorbed. But each employer really knows it would be against his interests if this were the case; for the employer and capitalist to-day are necessarily, through their economic position, the enemies of society. Time will teach reasonable men to submit, when necessary, without demur. The unreasonable man must find consolation by damning the nature of things.

Some questions were then put. Comrade Wess asked: Was a leader to enforce his orders by authority? To which Morris replied, Nature will compel men to obey, otherwise they might starve. Some State would then be established, pursued Wess, and would not that be a

hindrance to the development of the individual? But Morris declared we must emancipate ourselves from the tyranny of words: administrative entities will be necessary which people will find themselves generally compelled to obey and Philip sober will, if need be, have to be protected from Philip drunk. Man's will, when ordered to be carried out, will require the full consent of the society to which he belongs. As to the complaints against Board School and South Kensington Art school teaching, it is in all probability poor enough, but is that any reason for doing without teaching at all? such teaching as the State gives to-day is as good as you are likely to get in a commercial society such as ours; for the object of our teaching is, unfortunately, to make a man a fit slave for the purposes of commercialism.

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Morris was then asked, What line do you advise us to take? and replied: Upon my word, I don't know. I came here to see if I could learn myself what to do. People must go their own road. It is no use asking me to become a vestryman. There are some people I know who can be vestrymen, and who can be nothing else. The intention of a movement is, after all, the most important thing: the actual development of a thing is always very different from our conception of it. Ten years ago, to talk big about Socialism was the necessary thing. Now as to what people ought to do today, I am not altogether unsanguine. As to what some working-men leaders propose to do, if their parliamentarism turns out well, well and good; I should be pleased, although it goes against my own theories to urge Socialists to become M.P.'s.

Comrade Leggatt then asked why a few believers did not go out from the present society and combine to prove a communistic state possible. Morris said, he thought communistic societies are impossible to-day, because of the money power. Small communistic societies are apt to become monasteries. Besides, to withdraw from the struggle – is that not to give up the struggle?

Another comrade having asked, should not each man do what was good in his own eyes, Morris said that he thought the Anarchists have done very much that was wrong with their "this or nothing." The working-people of this country are prepared only for constitutional action. At one time there were no working-men in the socialist movement. Now it has become a working-class movement. As a movement spreads, however, people become less certain about its meaning. As working-men become better circumstanced they will feel themselves to be in an inferior position through no fault of their own, they will resent being slaves. We have to withdraw ourselves out of the present condition of social war into a condition of social peace. "I am not a practical socialist," he went on, "I am not fully satisfied with all this talk about statistics and progress. I have simply an honest desire to bring about a happier state of things.

H. Samuels then rose indignantly to express his disappointment at Morris's coming to lecture without having anything really definite to say, and maintained that the force that kept the workers enslaved could only be removed by force. Morris, in reply, said: Anarchism was a negation of society and, it seemed to him, but the present condition of things with the present authority removed – practical war. In answer to Merlino he said, he objected to the revolutionary movement as being necessarily a movement by force, as this could not always be done – that is, as movement which proposed to alter the whole basis of society. Anarchists were pedantic in their demands, and are apt to set private misery over against public misery. W. Wess asked, should not the workers be taught to depend upon themselves rather than to work through parliament, to which Morris replied: he thought there should be some form of organisation, although he had no desire to lay down the law as to what its particular form should be.

Morris was next asked, if the expression of private misery did not sometimes call attention to the misery of the class to which the individual belonged, which otherwise might have gone unheeded for centuries. This he admitted to be the case, but added "we don't want any martyrs now, but common-sense practical people." To a question by A. Henry, Morris replied: What is Anarchism? Many folks in the Socialist League were merely disturbandist. Your Anarchist proper is a man like Tucker, who wants the dissolution of all society. Socialism, on the other hand, says that all our acts should be directed towards the welfare of society. He did not agree with the negation of government, though the question of how to minimise the interference of society was a difficult question, but to the end of time there must be some friction between the individual and society. Anarchism, it seemed to him, made Communism impossible. As to the hatred of force expressed by Anarchists, we cannot get rid of force in society. To denounce majority rule is a mistake: the advantage of a majority is that it simply declares where lies the greater force.

Tucker Pleased

Freedom, August 1893

In *Liberty*, May 27th, Benj. R. Tucker comments on the fag end of our report of William Morris's lecture on Communism, published in May *Freedom*.[1] He rejoices over our supposed indignation at hearing Morris speak his mind concerning Anarchism according to Tucker, but we cannot for the life of us see why we should be supposed indignant at that. It was not the first time we heard Morris declare that Tucker's Anarchism, being the negation of all society, is a state of things quite inconceivable to him (Morris), and that he thinks the English Anarchists are in reality Communists. Sometimes we are tempted to exclaim, apropos of both, Tucker and Morris, that there are none so blind as he who will not see! To us there is no Communism worth striving for that is not voluntary, and no possibility of Anarchy unless men are living in brotherhood, holding all necessaries of-life in common and being, like the Trinity, "neither afore nor after" each other. Tucker complains that he was misrepresented when-Morris said he wanted the dissolution of all society, but for all that he himself misrepresent. Morris, a sentence or two higher up, when he says that Morris, "being determined there shall be no property, abandons freedom." Of course Morris has done no such thing. At present he is in the atmosphere of Fabianism and S.D.F.-ism, and is almost persuaded that there will always be a strong minority wanting to maintain some of the present day evils; or something equally foolish, which will necessitate somebody or another's undertaking to keep everybody else in order. Further-more, Tucker must have read the report of the lecture in haste, and muddled his brains in so doing; otherwise how could he interpret Morris's saying that "many folks in the Socialist League were mere disturbandists" as meaning that the Freedom Group, who invited Morris to lecture, "are simple disturbers of the peace." The mere disturbandist, however, wherever he be, is a useful man at present; for a good deal of what exists must be disturbed, and uprooted, before there is room for newer and better growths.

Why I am a Communist

William Morris

Liberty: A Journal of Anarchist-Communism (London), February 1894

Objection has been made to the use of the word "Communism" to express fully-developed Socialism, on the ground that it has been used for the Community-Building, which played so great a part in some of the phases of Utopian Socialism, and is still heard of from time to time nowadays. Of Communism in this sense I am not writing now; it may merely be said in passing that such experiments are of their nature non-progressive; at their best they are but another form of the Medieval monastery, withdrawals from the Society of the day, really implying hopelessness of a general change; which is only attainable by the development of Society as it is; by the development of the consequences of its faults and anomalies, as well as of what germ of real Society it contains.

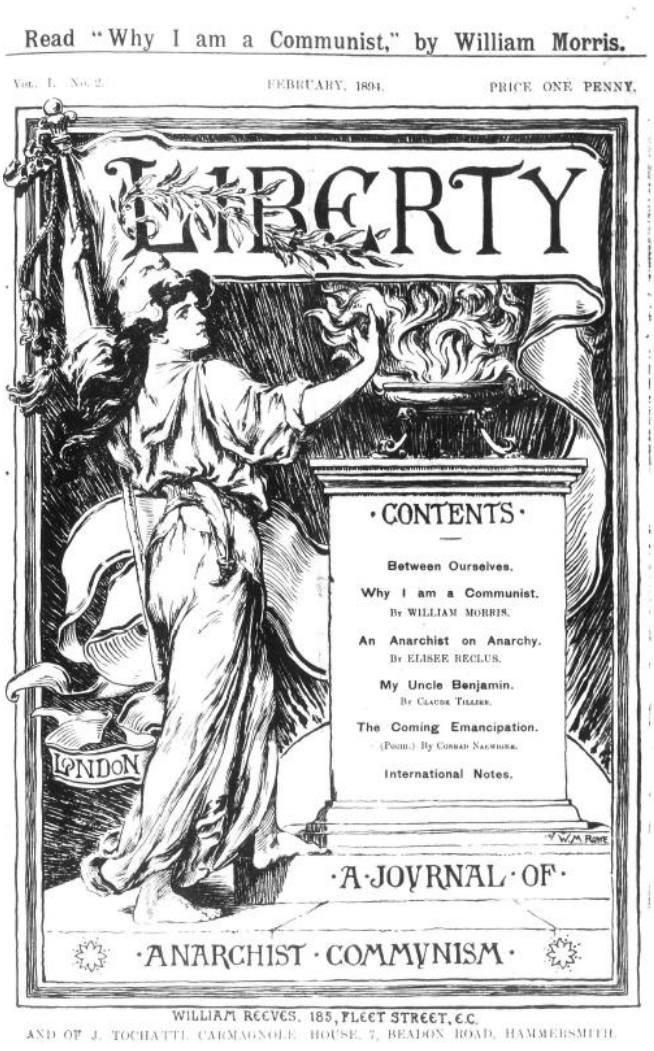
This point of mistaken nomenclature being cleared off, it remains to ask what real Communism is, and the answer is simple: it is a state of Society the essence of which is *Practical Equality of condition*. Practical, *i.e.*, equality as modified by the desires, and capacity for enjoyment of its various members. This is its economical basis; its ethical basis is the *habitual* and full recognition of man as a social being, so that it brings about the habit of making no distinction between the common welfare and the welfare of the individual.

I am a Communist, therefore, because — 1st, it seems to me that mankind is not thinkable outside of Society; and 2ndly, because there is no other basis, economical and ethical, save that above stated, on which a true Society can be formed; any other basis makes waste and unnecessary suffering an essential part of the system. In short I can see no other system under which men can live together except these two, Slavery and Equality.

The first of these two says, some standard of worth having been determined (of course not as a result of the immediate agreement of men living under such and such a system, but of the long development of many centuries) those who have attained to that standard are the masters of those who have not so attained, and live as well as surrounding circumstances, together with a quasi-equitable arrangement amongst the worthy, will allow them, by *using* those who have not come up to the standard above mentioned: in the dealings between the worthy with the non-worthy there is no attempt at any equitable arrangement (I was going to say no *pretence*,

[1] Benjamin R. Tucker (1854-1939) was a leading American individualist anarchist (which he called "anarchist socialism"). He was the editor and publisher of the American individualist anarchist periodical *Liberty* (1881–1908) and regularly excommunicated anarchist-communists from the anarchist movement believing, falsely, that they aimed to force everyone into communism. In reality, anarchist-communists advocated voluntary communism and that all would have possession of the land and tools needed to live as they see fit. (*Black Flag*)

but at the present day that would not be quite true); the worthy use their advantage to the utmost, and it is a recognized assumption that the non-worthy are in a state of permanent inferiority, and their well-doing or ill-doing must be looked at from quite a different point of view from that of the worthy. For instance at the present day, the income which would imply ruin and disgrace to a member of the worthy class, would mean success and prosperity to a working man. It must be added that the standard of superiority is always an arbitrary one, and does not necessarily mean any real superiority on the side of the worthy; and that especially in our own days, when the unworthy or disinherited class is the one class which has any real function, is, in fact, the useful class; the functions of the worthy amongst us being directed solely towards their own class; they being otherwise a burden on the *whole* public.



Now this theory of society has been that held for the most part from early historical periods till our own days, though from time to time there have been protests raised against it. The standard of worthiness has varied, but the essential assertion of the necessity for inequality has always been there. In its two earlier phases; birth and race, i.e., the belonging, really or theoretically, to the lineage of the original conquering tribe, conferred the privilege of using the labour of those not so recognized; and Chattel Slavery was the method of using their labour in Ancient, and Serfdom in Mediæval times. In our own days the method of exercising privilege has changed from the use of the arbitrary accident of birth, to the acquirement (by any means not recognized as illegal) of an indeterminate amount of wealth which enables its possessor to belong to the useless class.

It would not be very profitable to discuss which of these three systems of inequality, to wit, Chattel Slavery, Serfdom, or Wage-Earning, is *per se* the better or the worse; it is enough to say that since the present one has come down to us in due course of development from the others, it gives us a hope of progress which could not have belonged to them. And in fact a new theory of Society can now be put forward, not as a mere abstraction, but as a root change in Social conditions which is in actual course of realization.

This theory is Communism; which says: In a true Society the capacities of all men can be used for their mutual well being; the due unwasteful use of those capacities produces wealth in the proper sense of the word and cannot fail to produce it; this wealth produced by the Community can only be fully used by the Community; for if some get more than they need, that portion which cannot be used must of necessity be wasted, and the whole Community is impoverished thereby; and again further impoverished by the necessity for the producers having to work harder than they otherwise need; which in its turn brings about grievous and burdensome inequality; for all men feel unnecessary work to be slavish work. Again, though men's desires for wealth vary, yet certain needs all men have, and since we have seen that it is the *Community* which produces wealth in a true society, to force on any class lack of these needs is to practically thrust them out of the Community and constitute them a class of inferiority; and since we know that they can all work usefully, on what grounds can we do this? Certainly on no grounds that they as men can really agree to. We must *force* them into submission, or cajole them into it. And when force and fraud are used to keep any men in an artificial inequality, there is an end of true Society.

Communism, therefore can see no reason for inequality of condition: to each one according to his needs, from each one according to his capacities, must always be its motto. And if it be challenged to answer the question, what are the needs of such and such a man, how are they to be estimated? The answer is that the habitual regard towards Society as the real unit, will make it impossible for any man to think of claiming more than his genuine needs. I say that it will not come into his mind that it is possible for him to advance himself by injuring someone else. While, on the other hand, it will be well understood that unless you satisfy a man's

needs, you cannot make the best of his capacities. We are sometimes asked by people who do not understand either the present state of society or what Communism aims at, as to how we shall get people to be doctors, learned scientists, etc., in the new condition of things.

The answer is clear; by affording opportunities to those who have the capacity for doctoring etc.; the necessary cost of such opportunities being borne by the Community; and as the position of a doctor who has mistaken his vocation would clearly be an uncomfortable one in a society where people knew their real wants, and as he could earn his livelihood by engaging himself to do what be *could* do, he would be delivered from the now very serious temptation of pretending to be a doctor when he is not one.

I might go through a long series of objections which ignorant persons make to the only reasonable form of Society, but that is scarcely my business here. I will assert that I am a Communist because, amongst other reasons, I believe that a Communal Society could deal with every problem with which a Capitalist Society has perforce to deal, but with free hands and therefore with infinitely better chance of success. I believe that a Communal Society would bring about a condition of things in which we should be really wealthy, because we should have all we produced, and should know what we wanted to produce; that we should have so much leisure from the production of what are called "utilities," that any group of people would have leisure to satisfy its cravings for what are usually looked on as superfluities, such its works of art, research into facts, literature, the unspoiled beauty of nature; matters that to my mind are utilities also, being the things that make life worth living and which at present *nobody* can have in their fulness.

I believe in the final realization of this state of things, and now I come to the method by which they are to be reached. And here I feel I shall be dealing in matter about which there may be and must be divers opinions even amongst those who are consciously trying to bring about Communal conditions.

In the first place I do not (who does really) believe in Catastrophical Communism. That we shall go to sleep on Saturday in a Capitalistic Society and wake on Monday into a Communistic Society is clearly an impossibility. Again I do not believe that our end will be gained by open war; for the executive will be *too strong* for even an attempt at such a thing to be made until the change has gone so far, that it will be *too weak* to dare to attack the people by means of direct physical violence.

What we have to do first is to make Socialists. That we shall always have to do until the change is come. Some time ago we seemed to have nothing else to do than that, and could only do it by preaching; but the times are changed; the movement towards a communal life has spread wonderfully within the last three or four years; the instinctive feeling towards Socialism has at last touched the working classes, and they are moving toward the great change; how quickly it is not easy for us, who are in the midst of the movement, to determine; but this instinct is not leading them to demand the *full* change directly; rather they are attacking those positions which must be won, before we come face to face with the last citadel of Capitalism, the privilege of rent, interest, and profit. Broadly speaking they see that it is possible to wrest from their masters an improved life, better livelihood, more leisure, treatment in short as citizens, not as machines. I say from their masters: for there is nowhere else whence it can come. Now to show sympathy with this side of the movement, and to further those who are working for it, is a necessity, if we are to make Socialists nowadays. For again I say it is the form in which the workers are taking in Socialism; the movement is genuine and spontaneous amongst them; and how important that is, those know best who remember how a few years ago the movement was confined to a few persons, of education and of superior intelligence, most of whom belonged by position to the middle classes. Neither need we fear that when the working classes have gained the above mentioned advantages they will stop there. They will not and they cannot. For the results of the struggle will force on them the responsibilities of managing their own affairs, and mastership will wane before Communal management almost before people are aware of the change at hand.

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This will bring us at last to the period of what is now understood by the word Socialism when the means of production and the markets will be in the hands of those who can use them, *i.e.*, the operatives of various kinds; when great accumulations of wealth will be impossible, because money will have lost its privilege; when everybody will have an opportunity of well-doing

offered him; and this period of incomplete Socialism will, I believe, gradually melt into true Communism without any violent change. At first indeed, men will not be absolutely equal in condition; the old habit of rewarding excellence or special rare qualities with extra money payment will go on for a while, and some men will possess more wealth than others; but as on the one hand they will have to work in order to possess that wealth, and as on the other the excess of it will procure them but small advantage in a Society tending towards equality, as in fact they begin to understand that in a Community where none are poor, extra wealth beyond the real needs of a man cannot be *used*, we shall begin to cease estimating worth by any standard of material reward, and the position of complete equality as to condition will be accepted without question. I do not say that gifted persons will not try to excel; but their excellence will be displayed not at the expense of their neighbours but for their benefit.

By that time also we shall have learned the true secret of happiness, to wit, that it is brought about by the pleasurable exercise of our energies; and since opportunity will be given for everyone to do the work he is fitted for under pleasant and unburdensome conditions, there will be no drudgery to escape from, and consequently no competition to thrust ones neighbour out of his place in order to attain to it.

As to what may be called the business conduct of Communism, it has been said often, and rightly as I think, that it will concern itself with the administration of things rather than the government of men. But this administration must take form, and that form must of necessity be democratic and federative; that is to say there will be certain units of administration, ward, parish, commune, whatever they may be called, and these units all federated within certain circles, always enlarging. And in each such body, if differences of opinion arise, as they would be sure to do, there would be surely nothing for it but that they should be settled by the will of the majority. But it must be remembered that whereas in our present state of society, in every assembly there are struggles between *opposing interests* for the mastery, in the assemblies of a Communal Society, there would be no opposition of interests, but only divergencies of opinion, as to the best way of doing what all were agreed to do. So that the minority would give way without any feeling of injury. It is a matter of course that since everybody would share to the full in the wealth and good life won by the whole community, so everybody would share in the responsibility of carrying on the business of the community; but this business of administration they would as sensible people reduce as much as possible, that they might be the freer to use their lives in the pleasure of living, and creating, and knowing, and resting.

This is a brief sketch of what I am looking forward to as a Communist: to sum up, it is Freedom from artificial disabilities; the development of each man's capacities for the benefit of each and all. Abolition of waste by taking care that one man does not get more than he can use, and another less than he needs; consequent condition of general well-being and fulness of life, neither idle and vacant, nor over burdened with toil.

All this I believe we can and shall reach directly by insisting on the claim for the communization of the means of production; and that claim will be made by the workers when they are fully convinced of its necessity; I believe further that they are growing convinced of it, and will one day make their claim good by using the means which the incomplete democracy of the day puts within their reach. That is they will at last form a wide spread and definite Socialist party, which will, by using the vote, wrest from the present possessing classes the instruments which are now used to govern the people in the interest of the possessing classes, and will use them for effecting the change in the basis of society, which would get rid of the last of the three great oppressions of the world.

This is the only road which I can see toward the attainment of Communism. Some time ago we, or some of us scarcely saw it; but growing hope has now pointed it out to us, and it seems to me that we are bound to use it if we are in earnest in wishing to see Communism realized. I am opposed to Anarchism then (among other reasons) because it forbids the use of the only possible method for bringing about the great change from privilege and inequality and property to equality and general wealth. So much for its tactics. As to its theory, I must say that I cannot recognize Anarchism (as it has been expounded to me) as a possible condition of Society, for it seems to me in its essence to be a negation of society; I rather look upon it as a mood engendered by the wrongs and follies of our false society of inequality, and which will disappear with them. A kind of idealized despair, surely not justified by the state of the socio-political movement of today; which is most certainly setting towards Socialism in its narrower sense, and consequently towards Socialism in its wider sense, which is what I have been speaking of as Communism.[1]

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[1] This final paragraph was omitted when this article was reprinted as part of the series of *The Why I Ams* pamphlets published by *Liberty*'s editor, James Tochatti, in the same year. Morris' article was paired with *Why I Am an Expropriationist* by Louisa Sarah Bevington (which appeared in the May 1894 issue). (*Black Flag*)

Communism and Anarchism
An Anarchist's Reply

Liberty: A Journal of Anarchist Communism (London), March 1894

I have read with considerable satisfaction William Morris' reasons for being a Communist. Morris says "I am a Communist because, amongst other reasons, I believe that a Communal Society could deal with every problem with which a capitalist Society has perforce to deal, but with free hands and therefore with infinitely better chance of success. I believe that a Communal Society would bring about a condition of things in which we should be really wealthy, because we should have all we produced and should know what we wanted to produce ; that we should have so much leisure t any from the production of what are called 'utilities,' that group of people would have leisure to satisfy its cravings for what are usually looked upon as superfluities, such as works of art, research into facts, literature, the spoiled beauty of nature ; matters that to my mind are utilities also, being the things that make life worth living but which at present *nobody* can have in their fulness." To this *Credo* I, as an Anarchist, heartily subscribe. And when Morris further states that add he does not believe in Catastrophical Communism, neither do I, nor that our end will be gained by open war. How then? Morris believes that we shall reach it by using the Parliamentary method, that is, by sending guaranteed Socialists into Parliament who will decree for the workers an improved life, "better livelihood more leisure, In short treatment as citizens, not as machines."

The advocates of the use of state machinery ask Anarchists… what they propose as a substitute…. The workers… must through their trade combinations make those terms with their present masters that William Morris wants made by Socialist M.P.s for them

That is all very well. I am never sorry to see our fellow beings in the Houses of Parliament show evidence of their humanity, but when these individuals have expressed their views on such matters, wrangled over them, written them on parchment, dated them Vie. so and so, and Cap. such a one, sealed them with seals, they have done their share of the work and there still remains the putting of their laws into practice, which is immeasurably the more important part. Men and women are now asking themselves all over the world – why can we not improve our lives without waiting for Parliament to decree that we shall do so? Many have come to see that this very waiting for someone outside to order a new state of things, is just as futile as attempts at catastrophical reform, that the direction of men's thoughts and hopes towards benefits to result from deputed duties is misleading, that, in short, the immediate and active participation of each individual to the best of his ability in changing his own life is the only real way to change the vile system of competition into one of true co-operation and is the thing most needed to develop healthier conditions. The individual efforts towards the realization of our hopes, however small, are and can be the only signs of our growth towards Socialism. Anarchist Socialism demands these signs. Its development depends upon them, as indeed must every development whether of a nation as a whole, or of its component parts, the human beings, now artificially divided into governed and governors.

Perhaps there are among us still many who, like the sheep that Panurge sent leaping overboard by throwing their bellwether into the waves, will not act without following a leader. Well, the Anarchists cannot but regret that there should be such, and think that at least they ought to have some better reason for following than those sheep had, and that when they move, they should do so, not because their leader jumped in a certain direction; but because they want to go that way themselves.

The advocates of the use of state machinery ask Anarchists from time to time what they propose as a substitute. We propose certainly to use existing organizations, but none that are so cumbrous and unwieldy as parliamentary ones. The workers, whose lives are admittedly most harassed by present conditions must through their trade combinations make those terms with their present masters that William Morris wants made by Socialist M.P.s for them. Each trade union knows what things its members lack, or rather each member knows what is needful for him and his fellow, and these they should straightway demand in return for what they produce. They want primarily, decent homes to live in, suitable garments to wear, wholesome food to eat and leisure to enjoy these things. The rest will follow.

The wonder is that the workers have not insisted long since on these wants being supplied out of the wealth they produce. Surely this has been because they were not fully conscious of their needs and of their powers. Socialist teachings have helped and are helping the dullest among them to attain this knowledge: without it the most beneficent acts of parliament would be so much waste-paper; with it what need is there for traveling roundabout parliamentary road.

Again we say that supposing the workers to have obtained the sanction of the Houses of Lords and Commons to their living a decent life, they have still to organize so as to live that life and herein lies the whole and true difficulty.

The business of Socialists is to keep the development of the individual as a most necessary part of the development of the Community he lives in, ever before the minds of those they wish to socialize. Man, it has been said, cannot exist outside Society. Society we know could not exist without the individual. Both are necessary to each other and of equal importance. No Socialists can be more fully aware of these facts than the Anarchists, therefore, for William Morris to suppose that Anarchism is a negation of Society, shows clearly that his exponents of Anarchism did not make themselves understood or that William Morris is at present incapable of understanding it by reason of his head being too full of schemes for the socializing of Parliament.

Perhaps the best thing for Anarchists to say to such Socialists as William Morris would be, "If you think you will reform society through the ballot box by all means try to do so, but I claim the right to use other methods. Your ballot, box shall no have control over my life. My methods shall not hinder yours. If we are honest and our methods just, we must meet eventually at the point towards which we are both trending. Good luck go with us!"

There is no despair, idealized or otherwise among the Anarchists of England. Why should there be? We are gaining adherents every hour, and in the "genuine and spontaneous" growth of socialism among the workers there is more cause for hope to the Anarchist, who believes in organization without domination, than to the State-socialist, who can only exist where the masses remain in ignorance of their power. All things are setting our way. The greatest thinkers, dreamers, poets, (including William Morris) men of science, the more intelligent among the professors of religion are all teaching that only in fellowship can men live truly, and fully, and they are, as well as we, demanding the change as speedily as possible.

The spirit of the age first changes and then the form. We see or rather hear of rich men ashamed of their riches because they doubt the purity of their source. Poor men are around us, unashamed of their poverty because it testifies in these days to their honesty: workmen are refusing to become foremen over their fellows, lest they should lose that touch of fellowship which become to them more precious than increase of Nate trade-union officials are choosing to re-enter the ranks of their union, because they find they can be more helpful to their societies as ordinary members and they not care to sell their help for coin; our youths prefer to swell the ranks of the unemployed to joining the army in which they may one day be ordered to shoot down their fellow-countrymen as at Featherstone.

Such men are truer signs of the times than those who strive to climb into power upon the shoulders of their comrades. Of such will come the fellowship of True Communism.

As To Bribing Excellence

William Morris

Liberty: A Journal of Anarchist-Communism (London), May 1895

Objections to Socialism founded on the difficulty of getting necessary work done when people will be free to choose their own work are common in the mouths of anti-socialists; and also it has been and still is not uncommon to hear persons saying that no great works of art, no product of a high intellect will be possible under a condition of things in which a reward is not given for such work out of all proportion to the average of work, the hewing of wood and drawing of water. Even Socialists themselves are sometimes hazy on these subjects; and sometimes they seem ready to accept the view that when people are free they will no longer care for anything more than what are now called the necessities of life. Let us look into this matter a little. And first we shall find that what lies at the root of these misconceptions is that reading of the present into the future, which is so often a stumbling-block in the way of a frank acceptance of the new Society.

For as things now are, though a certain amount of utilities are of necessity produced, yet it is at the expense of a waste of human labour, mental and bodily, which is absolutely appalling. In spite of all the marvellous inventions of modern times, and above all of the invention of the organisation of labour for production of market wares, the bulk of the population of this country is not better, but worse off, than in the days when a great part of the country was wood, waste, and marsh, when there was no machinery to take the place of mere drudgery in production; when there were

no appliances to resist the accidents of the seasons and the rigour of the climate. The mere statement of this fact which cannot be seriously contravened, shows how desperately wrong we have gone in some way or other.

The truth is that our system of Society is essentially a system of *waste*. We are, all of us, engaged in making our livelihood, or accumulating our riches, not by means of collaboration, but at each other's expense; the result of this is that inevitably we do not, and as a rule cannot think of the things we make as pieces of utility, but rather as weapons for the defeat of others; so that not hundreds or thousands, but millions of skilled and intelligent men are engaged in producing things which people can be forced to buy, but which they don't want at all. Space fails me to give examples of this kind of waste, but a walk down a street of "flash" shops – in Regent Street or Bond Street, *e.g.* – will illustrate it sufficiently. How many of the articles exhibited in this dreary show would any man in his senses carry home if he were not *compelled* to buy them? The compulsion of the market is on all of us, and not only forces us to pay for vulgarities and shabby gentilities, but, worse still, forces a vast number of workmen to waste their lives in producing them.

Now in a Communistic Society all this would be altered; the demand for wares would be real and not factitious: people would ask for what they really wanted, and not for futilities and make-shifts. Labour would be expended on things worth doing: and it is a fact past discussion that so soon as things worth doing are made, the intellect, the skill, the artistic feeling of the makers are called out by their production; in a word they exercise men's pleasurable energies, and therefore make them happy.

Such wares as this are works of art, each according to the necessities of its own use, and I have not the slightest doubt that when the opportunity is offered then vast numbers of workmen will take it, and will become artists, working well but pleasantly, and also leisurely, because they would not have to expend their energy defeating other workmen, but in developing their own best faculties.

In truth it was in this way that those great works of art which are still left us from the past were produced: in those times whatever inequalities existed otherwise, amongst the handicraftsmen there was a much nearer approach to equality than most people imagine, *e.g.*, the architects of an ancient building were not "gentlemen" sitting in offices, surrounded by an army of clerks and draftsmen, ghosting their work for them, but workmen abiding by their work, helping the masons and carpenters certainly, directing them no doubt, but paid little more than they were. The carvers again, who, mind you, were free to *design* their ornaments, were paid no more than the ordinary masons: and so it was through all the crafts. And did they do their work the worse for this approach to equality; did they neglect it because they were not bribed into excellence? There stands their work to-day, unapproachable in excellence to answer the question. Go to Westminster Abbey, and ask who raised that mass of loveliness. No one knows; their names have perished. But you can have the names of almost every fool who has damaged the building since the epoch of the artist-workman has passed away: the persons were bribed to do their conceited trash by money and position, but those who made its beauty needed no bribing to do their best, because their work was a pleasure to them from day to day. On the one hand they worked for livelihood and on the other for the works sake itself. They were men of the people, doubt it not; and if their names have died, their work in more ways than one has lived.

And when we win equality in its full measure we shall do what we want in the like spirit. Work without unceasing anxiety, without waste, without contention is bound to be happy work, and from happy work comes beauty and pleasure and self-respect.

Even amidst the present turmoil of commercialism there are men who, working in a comparatively humble sphere, can resist it, and who work for the works sake. I will give one instance of such men, a man I knew: he was a book-binder, to say truth the only man I have known who could be trusted to repair a fine old book-binding: nothing would make him spoil his work or hurry it; he would give the utmost care and attention to it, and produce results quite wonderful doing the work with his own hands. Now he did not need to be bribed; in fact he refused it, always working for ordinary book-binders wages. If he had employed a number of men and done the work a little worse he would have made a good income: but as it was he lived poor, and died poor; an artist, but a wage earner. That was a shame to all of us. Yet I cannot pity him, for all his work was a pleasure to him; and his friends also, which I am sure he had a good right to.

But you see, he could not now be an example to other workmen. As things go, I am glad there are not many like him, or we should not get on toward our goal. In our condition of inequality it is better that we should *feel* our oppression, even at the expense of good work, and beauty.

We are not fit for such things now, nor shall we be till we are working as equals and friends, all of us. But when we are thus equal in some such way shall we work; and there will be no fear then of our doing nothing but dry utilitarian work. Have we not our wonderful machines to do that for us, to save us from drudgery? What are the said machines about now, that the mass of the people should toil and toil without pleasure? They are making profits for their owners, and have no time to save the people from drudgery. When the people are their owners – then we shall see.

Charlotte M. Wilson, 1854-1944

Nicolas Walter

The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly No. 21 (January-March, 1993)[1]

Charlotte M. Wilson (1854-1944)

Charlotte Wilson, the best-known of the group of middle-class intellectuals who played an important part in the emergence of the British anarchist movement during the 1880s, was the main founder and the first editor and publisher of *Freedom*, and the leading figure of the Freedom Group during its first decade.

Charlotte Mary Martin came from a professional family. She was born on 6 May 1854 at Kemerton, a village near Tewkesbury on the Gloucestershire-Worcestershire border. She was the only child of Robert Spencer Martin, a doctor and surgeon from a prominent local family, and of Clementina Susannah Davies, from a prosperous commercial and clerical family. She received the best education then available to girls, going to Cheltenham Ladies' College (where she was very unhappy) and then to Cambridge University (where she was very happy). From 1873 to 1874 she attended the new institution at Merton Hall which later became Newnham College (not, as has often been said, Girton College); she took the Higher Local Examination (roughly equivalent to the later GCE Advanced Level) at a time when women couldn't take university examinations or degrees at Cambridge.

In 1876 she married Arthur Wilson (a distant cousin, who was born in 1847, went to Wadham College, Oxford, and became a stockbroker in 1872), and they lived at first in Hampstead. After a process of political development which remains obscure, they both adopted progressive views. At the end of 1885 they adopted the fashionable 'simple life' by moving to Wyldes, a cottage in what was then open country at North End on the edge of Hampstead Heath, and she refused to live on her husband's earnings. She took part in the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, which was inspired by the Russian revolutionary exile Stepniak, and in the Men and Women's Club, which was organised by Karl Pearson to arrange frank discussion of sexual problems. But above all she took part in the socialist and anarchist movements. One of the elements in her political development was the mass trial of anarchists at Lyon in January 1883, at which Peter Kropotkin and dozens of French comrades were sent to prison, and which was widely reported in the British press. During the following year she became a public advocate of socialism and anarchism.

Her first known public political action was a letter about women workers which appeared in March 1884 in *Justice*, the paper of the Democratic Federation (later the Social Democratic Federation). But her progress on the left was extremely rapid. In October 1884 she joined the Fabian Society, which had been formed in January 1884 as a group of progressive intellectuals with ambitious ideas but no particular line, and she was the only woman elected to its first executive in December 1884. Her fellow members included such people as Annie Besant,

[1] This essay was later revised for the introduction to *Anarchist Essays* (London: Freedom Press, 2000) which Nicolas Walter was editing shortly before his death in March 2000. (*Black Flag*)

Hubert Bland, Sydney Olivier, Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas, and Sidney Webb, and she had no difficulty in holding her own with them. In the later memoirs of early Fabians, she is remembered mainly as a hostess, like Edith Nesbit, but she was in fact a leading member of the society for a couple of years. Also, in October 1884 she formed a study group which met at her house to read and discuss the work of Continental socialists such as Marx and Proudhon (which was not then available in English) and the history of the international labour movement, and which provided much of the early philosophical and factual background for the lectures and pamphlets which became the main Fabian contribution to socialist propaganda.

Her particular contribution was to inspire an anarchist fraction within the Fabian Society. As Shaw put it with his customary exaggeration in the first of his unreliable histories of the society, when she joined 'a sort of influenza of Anarchism soon spread through the Society' (*The Fabian Society: What It Has Done and How It Has Done It*, 1892). In fact, the fraction didn't have much influence, and it didn't last long, but for a time it was significant. In November 1884 she gave a talk on anarchism to the Fabian Society which was the basis of four articles signed 'An English Anarchist' (*Justice*, 8 November - 6 December 1884). This was one of the first English-language expositions of anarchist communism at a time when virtually none of Kropotkin's writings had appeared in English.

During 1886 she published three important essays: 'Social Democracy and Anarchism', another talk given to the Fabian Society during 1885 and published in the first issue of *The Practical Socialist*, the short-lived paper of the Fabian Society (January 1886); 'The Principles and Aims of Anarchists', a talk given to the London Dialectical Society in June 1886 and published in one of the last issues of *The Present Day*, a short-lived secularist paper (July 1886); and half of a pamphlet called *What Socialism Is*, Fabian Tract number 4 (June 1886). The latter consisted of two parts — a section on 'Collectivism' (i.e., state socialism), which Friedrich Engels was invited but declined to write and which was instead extracted by Bernard Shaw from August Bebel's book *Women Under Socialism* (published in Germany in 1883); and a section on 'Anarchism', which was 'drawn up by C. M. Wilson on behalf of the London Anarchists'. The anonymous introduction (also by her) explained:

> In other parts of the civilised world the economic problem has been longer and more scientifically discussed, and Socialist opinion has taken shape in two distinct schools, Collectivist and Anarchist. English Socialism is not yet Anarchist or Collectivist, not yet definite enough in point of policy to be classified. There is a mass of Socialistic feeling not yet conscious of itself as Socialism. But when the unconscious Socialists of England discover their position, they also will probably fall into two parties: a Collectivist party supporting a strong central administration, and a counterbalancing Anarchist party defending individual initiative against that administration. In some such fashion, progress and stability will probably be secured under Socialism by the conflict of the ineradicable Tory and Whig instincts in human nature. In view of this probability, the theories, and ideals of both parties, as at present formulated, are set forth below.

Charlotte Wilson's essay, putting libertarian against authoritarian socialism, ended as follows:

> Anarchism is not a Utopia, but a faith based upon the scientific observation of social phenomena. In it the individualist revolt against authority, handed down to us through Radicalism and the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, and the Socialist revolt against private ownership of the means of production, which is the foundation of Collectivism, find their common issue. It is a moral and intellectual protest against the unreality of a society which, as Emerson says, 'is everywhere in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members'. Its one purpose is by direct personal action to bring about a revolution in every department of human existence, social, political, and economic. Every man owes it to himself and to his fellows to be free.

In all this work she repudiated any claim to originality, and repeated that she was simply translating into English terminology the anarchist communism already developed on the Continent, especially by Peter Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus, and was merely speaking on behalf of her fellow anarchists in Britain. In fact, it isn't clear how far she really spoke for the growing anarchist movement in general. She doesn't seem to have had

much contact with the working-class militants in the growing trade unions and socialist organisations. Henry Seymour, a former secularist who had become an anarchist individualist, with whom she collaborated and later quarrelled in 1886, discounted her contact with anyone. When she attended a Fabian Congress in June 1886 as a representative of the 'London Anarchist Group of Freedom', he suggested that she probably did so only in the sense that she had written her contribution to the Fabian Tract 'on behalf of the London Anarchists'; and he commented: 'Unfortunately she admitted in my presence that she wrote on her own behalf only, and without consulting the London Anarchists at all.'

But she was certainly the leader of the anarchists in the Fabian Society. On 17 September 1886, the Society organised a meeting at Anderton's Hotel in Fleet Street, where representatives of the various socialist organisations in London debated the question of forming an orthodox political party on the Continental model. A motion to this effect was proposed by Annie Besant (the former colleague of Charles Bradlaugh in the National Secular Society, and later successor of Madame Blavatsky in the Theosophical Society) and seconded by Hubert Bland (husband of Edith Nesbit). William Morris (the leading member of the Socialist League, and the best-known socialist in Britain) proposed and Charlotte Wilson seconded the following amendment:

> But whereas the first duty of Socialists is to educate people to understand what their present position is and what the future might be, and to keep the principles of socialism steadily before them; and whereas no Parliamentary party can exist without compromise and concession, which would hinder that education and obscure those principles: it would be a false step for Socialists to attempt to take part in the Parliamentary contest.

The parliamentarians defeated the anti-parliamentarians by a two-to-one majority, and the Fabian Society — and the bulk of the British socialist movement — was set on the course which it has followed ever since. She resigned from the Fabian executive in April 1887, and took no active part in the society for two decades, though she maintained her membership. By that time, she had anyway committed herself entirely to the anarchist movement. She was closely involved in the first English-language anarchist paper, *The Anarchist*, which Henry Seymour produced from March 1885. She helped to start it, got Bernard Shaw to write, for its first issue, his famous article on anarchism. She contributed money and material to it for more than a year, and became the leading member of the 'English Anarchist Circle' which was formed around it. She corresponded with Kropotkin's wife while he was in prison in France, and when he was released in January 1886 he soon settled in England, partly as the result of an invitation from her group. For a time, they continued to work with Seymour, and the April and May issues of *The Anarchist* were produced under 'conjoint editorship' as a journal of anarchist communism. But the experiment failed, the group parted from Seymour, *The Anarchist* reverted to individualism in June, and he published his attack on Charlotte Wilson in July. Relying on Kropotkin's cooperation and prestige and on Wilson's contacts and ability, the group decided to start a new anarchist paper on the model of Kropotkin's own paper *Le Révolté* (which started in Geneva in 1879, moved to Paris in 1885, and as *La Révolte* and then *Les Temps Nouveaux* remained the leading French anarchist paper until the First World War).

The most prominent person involved was of course Kropotkin, but Charlotte Wilson was the organiser of the group, the editor and publisher of *Freedom*, and its main supporter and contributor.

The first issue of *Freedom* was dated October 1886, though it was published in time for the Anderton's meeting, and the Freedom Group eventually became the Freedom Press, which for more than a century has remained the main publisher of anarchist literature in Britain. The most prominent person involved was of course Kropotkin, but Charlotte Wilson was the organiser of the group, the editor and publisher of *Freedom*, and its main supporter and contributor. She was normally responsible for the editorial article in each issue — such as the eloquent article on 'Freedom' which opened the first issue

and has frequently been reprinted, and also for most of the political and international notes. She contributed few signed articles, signing herself austerely as 'C.M.W.' or 'C. M. Wilson'; the most important of these was a series on 'The Revolt of the English Workers in the XIX Century' (June-September 1889). During her editorship she attracted a remarkable group of contributors, including Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Edith Nesbit, Henry Nevinson, Sydney Olivier, Bernard Shaw, and Ethel Voynich, as well as many obscure but devoted anarchists. She was also involved in establishing discussion meetings in London and local groups outside, and for a few years she was an active lecturer and debater at various kinds of meetings all over the country.

As well as *Freedom* itself, she helped to produce a series of Freedom Pamphlets from 1889 onwards, editing and translating some of them and writing one herself. Freedom Pamphlet number 8 was *Anarchism and Outrage*, a reprint of her unsigned *Freedom* editorial of December 1893, explaining the anarchist view of terrorism at the time of the bomb scare on the Continent (reprinted again in 1909 at the time of the judicial murder of Francisco Ferrer in Spain). She emphasised that homicidal outrage is not part of anarchism, either in theory or in practice, but that it has sometimes been perpetrated by anarchists as by other political groups, and that while anarchists condemn such actions, they do not condemn those who are driven to take them.

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In January 1889 *Freedom* was temporarily suspended because of her illness, and when it was resumed in March 1889 it was edited by James Blackwell with the help of 'a committee of workmen'. When Blackwell left, she took over again in February 1891 and continued for another four years, with occasional gaps because of illness, when Nannie Dryhurst deputised for her. In January 1895 *Freedom* was temporarily suspended again because of illness in her family. This time she resigned permanently as both editor and publisher, and when the paper was revived, in May 1895, it was edited by Alfred Marsh, who continued for two decades. She ceased to take an active part in the group, though she kept in touch and continued to contribute money and material for a few years, and in particular she produced the draft for 'A Brief History of *Freedom*', an anonymous account of the paper's beginnings (December 1900).

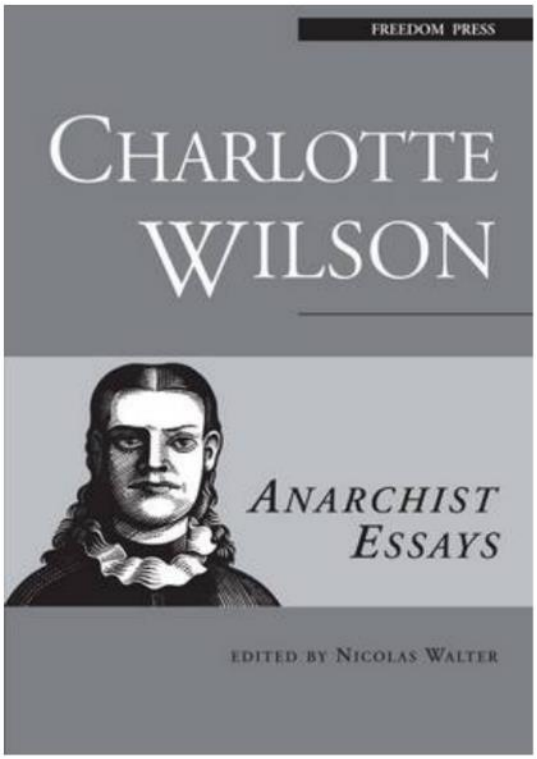
She took no part in left-wing politics for a decade, during which both her parents died, and when she did resume political activity, she returned not to the anarchists but to the Fabians. In 1905 the Wilsons moved to St John's Wood, and in 1906 she became involved in the Society again. In 1908, at the time of the rise of the militant campaign for women's suffrage, she was the main founder of the Fabian Women's Group, which met at her home, and she was its first secretary and most active member until she resigned because of illness in 1916. The group did much research and campaigning work for women. She was again a member of the Fabian executive from 1911 until 1914. She also joined the Independent Labour Party and several other parliamentarian organisations.

But by the time of the First World War, she left politics altogether. By then she had settled in the country near Reading; at the end of the First World War, she was honorary secretary of the Prisoner of War Fund of the Oxford & Buckinghamshire Regiment. Her husband died in 1932, and she was looked after until her death by their distant cousin, Gerald Rankin. They went to the United States, and she died in an old people's home at Irvington-on-Hudson on 28 April 1944, a few days before her 90th birthday.

For a decade Charlotte Wilson was the best-known native anarchist in Britain. Her work as a writer and speaker was distinguished by reticence, reliability, and respectability; she always remained very much an intellectual, and very much in the background. She steered her way between the militants and the moderates in the anarchist movement, but she was definitely a communist rather than an individualist, and she later moved from revolutionary to parliamentary socialism. It is notable that when she concentrated on anarchism she showed little interest in feminism, and that when she concentrated on

feminism, she showed no interest in anarchism. Her particular contribution to *Freedom* and the Freedom Press was to set them up and to set them on their way as a serious paper and publisher with a solid basis, providing a model which they have tried to follow ever since.

She has been little more than mentioned by historians of British socialism — usually inaccurately — but for a decade she was a familiar figure on the left. She was frequently reported in the socialist and liberal press at the time, and she was frequently remembered in subsequent memoirs of the period. Socialists were generally hostile but respectful, but liberals tended to be patronising as well. A good example is an anonymous report of her contribution to the meeting at South Place commemorating the Paris Commune on 17 March 1887:



> ...a slender person, bordering on middle age, but on the right side of the border, dressed becomingly in black, and with hair trained forward in an ordered mass to form a sort of frame of jet for a thin thoughtful face. T he type is the South Kensington or British Museum art-student, the aesthete with 'views', and Mrs. Wilson quite realised it as to the views. She was decidedly anarchical. ... What she did say was delivered with great clearness of enunciation, with great purity of accent, with a certain appearance of effort, not to say of fatigue, as though the hall taxed her voice beyond its powers, and with the monotonous calm that is perhaps the most common outward sign of the born fanatic. She was quite womanly and lady-like to use the good old-fashioned word. ... (*Daily News*, 18 March 1887)

She also became the model for characters in several political novels. The best-known of these is Gemma in *The Gadfly* (1897), a romantic evocation by Ethel Voynich of the Italian Risorgimento, in which she is an Englishwoman living in Italy who is small and dark, quiet, and calm, and the heart and soul of a Republican group in Florence; but the book says nothing interesting about her true character. (Incidentally, the occasional claim that Charlotte Wilson was the lover of Kropotkin seems to be derived from recollections of Ethel Voynich in old age.) A more direct but very brief portrait appears in *A Girl Among the Anarchists (1903)*, a satirical evocation by 'Isobel Meredith' (the pseudonym of Helen and Olivia Rossetti) of the bomb era of the early 1890s in which the authors were involved. Charlotte Wilson is introduced as Mrs Trevillian, 'an aesthetic, fascinating little lady', but she plays no part in the plot.

The most striking portrait appears in *The Anarchists* (1891), an ideological 'Picture of Civilisation at the Close of the Nineteenth Century' by John Henry Mackay, a German-Scottish follower of Max Stirner who was active in the British anarchist movement during the 1880s. The autobiographical hero Auban describes the various tendencies and personalities in the movement, and includes in his account of the meeting of 14 October 1887 at South Place protesting against the impending execution of the Chicago Anarchists the following description of Charlotte Wilson:

> Beside the table on the platform was standing a little woman dressed in black. Beneath her brow which was half hidden as by a wreath by her thick, short-cropped hair, shone a pair of black eyes beaming with enthusiasm. The white ruffle and the simple, almost monk-like, long, undulating garment, seemed to belong to another century. A few only in the meeting seemed to know her; but whoever knew her, knew also that she was the most faithful, the most diligent, and the most impassioned champion of Communism in England. ... She was not a captivating speaker, but her voice had that iron ring of unalterable conviction and honesty which often moves the listener more powerfully than the most brilliant eloquence.

More than a century later, that epitaph may stand unchanged.

Note

Charlotte Wilson's writings have been almost totally neglected. Fabian Tract number 4 was never reprinted, but her own contribution was reprinted as the first Free Commune pamphlet in 1900 and has occasionally been reprinted by the anarchist press since then. All the 1886 essays were reprinted in a pamphlet as *Three Essays an Anarchism* (Cienfuegos Press 1979, Drowned Rat 1985). Charlotte Wilson's life has also been generally neglected. References to her appear in letters, memoirs, or biographies of her contemporaries, and in accounts of the Fabian Society and of British anarchism. There is an unpublished biography by Hermia Oliver, and an academic thesis by Susan Hinely *Charlotte Wilson: Anarchist, Fabian, and Feminist* (Stanford University, 1986). See also 'Freedom: People and Places' (*Freedom: A Hundred Years*, October 1986) and 'Notes on *Freedom* and the Freedom Press, 1886-1928' (*The Raven* 1, April 1987). The present article is a revised and expanded version of the introduction to *Three Essays on Anarchism* and of the article on Charlotte Wilson in *Freedom: A Hundred Years*.[1]

Freedom

[Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, October 1886

Through the long ages of grinding slavery behind us, Freedom, that unknown goal of human pilgrimage, has hovered, a veiled splendour, upon the horizon of men's hopes. Veiled in the trembling ignorance of mankind, their misty unreasoning terror of all that revealed itself as power, whether it were an apparently incomprehensible and uncontrollable natural force, or the ascendancy of superior strength, ability or cunning in human society the inward attitude of slavish adoration towards what imposes itself from without as a fact beyond our understanding, that is the veil which hides Freedom from the eyes of men sometimes it takes the form of the blind fear of a savage of his "medicine" or his fetish, sometimes of the equally blind reverence of an English workman for the law of his masters, and the semblance of consent to his own economic slavery wormed out of him by the farce of representation. But whatever the form the reality is the same, ignorance, superstitious terror, cowardly submission.

What is human progress but the advance of the swelling tide of revolt against this tyranny of the nightmare of ignorant dread which has held men the slaves of external nature, of one another, and of themselves? Science and the arts, knowledge and all its varied shapes of practical application by ingenuity and skill, the binding and enlightening force of affection and social feeling, the protest of individuals and of peoples by word and deed against religious, economic, political and social oppression, these, one and all, are weapons in the hands of the Rebels against the Powers of Darkness sheltered behind their shield of authority, divine and human. But they are weapons not all equally effective at all times. Each has its period of special utility.

We are living at the close of an era during which the marvellous increase of knowledge left social feeling behind, and enabled the few who monopolised the newly acquired power over nature to create an artificial civilisation, based upon their exclusive claim to retain private, personal possession of tile increased wealth produced.

Property – not the claim to use, but to a right to prevent others from using – enables individuals who have appropriated the means of production, to hold in subjection all those who possess nothing but their vital energy. and who must work that they may live. No work is possible without land, materials, and tools or machinery; thus the masters of these things are the masters also of the destitute workers, and can live in idleness upon their labour, paying them in wages only enough of the produce to keep them alive, only employing so many of them as they find profitable and leaving the rest to their fate.

Such a wrong once realised is not to be borne. Knowledge cannot long, be monopolised, and social feeling is innate in human nature, and both are fomenting within our hide-bound Society -as the yeast in the dough. Our age is on tile eve of a revolt against property, in the name of tile common claim of all to a

[1] These essays plus others were included by Walter in the collection *Anarchist Essays* (London: Freedom Press, 2000). We have published the articles from *Freedom* ("Freedom", "Work", "Democracy and Anarchism" and "Anarchism and Homicidal Outrage") included in this collection as well as others (such as "The Revolt of the English Workers in the Nineteenth Century") which were not, as indicated in Susan Hinely, "Charlotte Wilson, the 'Woman Question', and the Meanings of Anarchist Socialism in Late Victorian Radicalism", *International Review of Social History*, Volume 57, Issue 1 (March 2012). (*Black Flag*)

common share in the results of the common labour of all.

Therefore, we are Socialists, disbelievers in Property, advocates of the equal claims of each man and woman to work for the community as seems good to him or her – calling no man master, and of the equal claim of each to satisfy as seems good to him, his natural needs from the stock of social wealth he has laboured to produce. We look for this socialisation of wealth, not to restraints imposed by authority upon property, but to the removal, by the direct personal action of the people themselves, of the restraints which secure property against the claims of popular justice. For authority and property both are manifestations of the egoistical spirit of domination, and we do not look to Satan to cast out Satan.

FREEDOM

A JOURNAL OF ANARCHIST SOCIALISM.

Vol. I.—No. 1. OCTOBER, 1886. Monthly: One Penny.

FREEDOM.

THE COMING REVOLUTION.

We have no faith in legal methods of reform. Fixed and arbitrary written law is, and has always been, the instrument employed by anti-social individuals to secure their authority, whether delegated or usurped, when the maintenance of that authority by open violence has become dangerous. Social feeling, and the social habits formed and corrected by common experience, are the actual cement of associated life. It is the specious embodiment of a portion of this social custom in law, which has made law tolerable, and even sacred in the eyes of the people it exists to enslave. But in proportion as the oppression of law is removed, the true binding force of the influence of social feeling upon individual responsibility becomes apparent and is increased. We look for the destruction of monopoly, not by the imposition of fresh artificial restraints, but by the abolition of all arbitrary restraints whatever. Without law, property would be impossible, and labour

Therefore, we are Anarchists, disbelievers in the government of man by man in any shape and under any pretext. The human freedom to which our eyes are raised is no negative abstraction of licence for individual egoism, whether it be massed collectively as majority rule or isolated as personal tyranny. We dream of the positive freedom which is essentially one with social feeling; of free scope for the social impulses now distorted and compressed by Property, and its guardian the Law; of free scope for that individual sense of responsibility, of respect for self and for others, which is vitiated by every form of collective interference, from the enforcing of contracts to the hanging of criminals; of free scope for the spontaneity and individuality of each human being, such as is impossible when one hard and fast line is fitted to all conduct. Science is teaching mankind that such crime as is not the manufacture of our vile economic and legal system, can only be rationally as well as humanely treated by fraternal medical care, for it results from deformity or disease, and a hard and fast rule of conduct enforced by condign punishment is neither guide nor remedy, nothing but a perennial source of injustice amongst men.

We believe each sane adult human being to possess an equal and indefeasible claim to direct his life from within by the light of his own consciousness, to the sole responsibility of guiding his own action as well as forming his own opinions. Further, we believe that the acknowledgment of this claim is a necessary preliminary to rational voluntary agreement, the only permanent basis of harmonious life in common. Therefore, we reject every method of enforcing assent, as in itself a hindrance to effectual co-operation, and further, a direct incentive to antisocial feeling. We deprecate as a wrong to human nature, individually, and therefore collectively, all use of force for the purpose of coercing others; but we assert the social duty of each to defend, by force if need be, his dignity as a free human being, and tile like dignity in others, from every form of insult and oppression.

We claim for each and all the personal right and social obligation to be free. We hold the complete social recognition and acknowledgment of such a claim to be the goal of human progress in the future, as its growth has been the gauge of development of Society in the past, of the advance of man from the blind social impulse of the gregarious animal to the conscious social feeling of the free human being.

Such, in rough outline, is the general aspect of the Anarchist Socialism our paper is intended to set forth, and by the touchstone of this belief we purpose to try the current ideas and modes of action of existing Society.

Education By Force

[Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, November 1886

The London School Board have for years past been making themselves generally odious to the people whom they nominally exist to serve, the working classes. When a family can barely scrape together enough to buy food and clothes, and too little of those, it seems hard that the bigger children should be carried off forcibly to school just when they could be earning a shilling or two and so getting something better than bread and tea every day for dinner, something more to nourish their bodies. For after all, in these days of machinery and unskilled labour, it is bodies that count more than minds in getting a job-bodily strength, and that sort of sharpness which does not come from book-learning so much as from knocking about at home and in the streets, from having to shift for one's self and go early to work. This is what the poor learn from their experience, and it is hard on them when they are forced not only to act in contradiction to it-to lose the children's earnings and the chance of starting them betimes in life-but to pay school fees as well. It is very hard on them, for, like all compulsion, it outrages their sense of justice.

The government after all is merely a collection of more or less dunderheaded individuals, guilty of the supreme impertinence of trying to manage other people's business

"Hard on individuals," admits your social reformer (one of those ,excellent persons who are always doing other people good against their will), "bard, perhaps; but every one must be educated, and as no -other means avail, we must educate them by force."

Where is the necessity? Knowledge must be free. Yes; who has a right to conceal or forbid it I To know, to understand, is one of the ,deepest and most universal of human cravings; hardly a child is born without it, and in each and all it must be satisfied. Yes; who has a right to thwart the desire I Large numbers of thin era are filled with -an eager longing to impart their Ideas, to explain the facts they have understood, and enjoy the intense pleasure of feeding growing human minds with the great world treasure of the generalised results of human experience; such men and women must be unshackled in their self chosen social labour. Yes; what better could their fellows demand of their energies? The "must" of all this appeals to no external force; it justifies itself by the immediate response of the inmost sense of what is just and fitting within each one of us. In this sense we must have education; and in the future we shall have it, because it is a pressing need of human nature, a need which we have the means to satisfy when we so choose. We shall necessarily have free education when we choose to be free.

But what of the "must" of education by force? It is immediately expedient, says the practical man. Parents are too degraded to see that their children ought to be fed with knowledge as well as bread. Employers are too brutal in their chase of cheap labour to withstand the temptation to increase profits by preying upon the life energy of little children. Parents are too selfish and too desperate in their misery not to yield to the capitalists' offers. And so, says our practical man, the great, good, wise government must step in and coerce all these foolish people for their good; must force the capitalists to employ older hands, the parents to send the children to school, the children to go and everybody who has money to pay for the whole process, education and coercion both.

So the -rest, good, wise government, which knows what every one really needs before he knows himself, and can give it like the fairy godmother in the stories, has interfered. It has interfered, through its local agent the London School Board, a little too much during the last few weeks; and the spirit of the workmen who have any spirit left, has rebelled, and the wire-pullers are beginning to talk about "free" education. Now this talk is at bottom simply a wrangle as to who shall pay the piper, the middle-class people whose representatives passed the Education Act, or that other set of people who are theoretically supposed to benefit by it. As the coercers have some money and the coerced have next to none, the first will probably have to pay the cost of their experiment, and quite right too. But in fact the very poor do not pay school fees as it is, and to the well-to-do workman they are the lightest of his many burdens. So what this sort of "Socialism"-and-water has to do with freedom may be left to social reformers to determine.

Turn we to enquire what it is that stands in the way of the really free education we have spoken of above. What but the great, good, wise government itself, the government whose interference is supposed so necessary?

The government after all is merely a collection of more or less dunderheaded individuals, guilty of the supreme

impertinence of trying to manage other people's business. It is not wholly their own fault, but we will not here say anything of the wisdom of those who helped to put them in such a position. Well, the government's idea of managing this business is to strictly maintain the right of lucky and clever people to keep for themselves all the social wealth they can extract from other men's labour, so long as they extract it according to rule, and pay the government for making the rules and protecting the right. One of these payments is the education rate.

The government, representing the interests of property, is forced by the growth of human feeling in society to do something for the children of the poor, or conscientious people would be discontented, and all discontent is dangerous to property. Of course ceasing to protect the monopoly of the few, which is the cause of the misery and degradation of the many, is not to be thought of, though that alone could set the people free with regard to education as well as everything else. No, the monopoly of property must be protected at all costs, even that of levying a tax on the monopolists. And then the money can be used to instruct the children carefully in the sacredness of property and the goodness, wisdom, and might of governments. Fortunately life is educating them energetically in another direction, or our children might grow up more abject than their fathers. As it is, they are crammed in flocks like geese, without any regard to individual capacity, with a mass of useless, isolated facts, which stultify the brains of as many as they develop. Further, children are encouraged to compete with one another until the weak and stupid are overstrained, or crushed mind and body, and the strong and intelligent are made conceited and overbearing, ready to seize every opportunity of climbing to selfish prosperity on the shoulders of their fellows. As for the teachers, the very love of teaching is worried out of them with over-work, red-tape officialism, and inspections, and the children feel the natural consequences. They feel them in the hurried, impatient, perfunctory, dry or inappropriate teaching they get, and still more in the bright, loving, patient, interesting, individually appropriate teaching they lose.

All this is a heavy price to pay for an imperfect knowledge of the three R.s, which is all the valuable information most children pick up at a Board School. And after all, the vast majority would pick up so much if no Board Schools were in existence. The School Board has failed as yet in reaching the waifs and strays, and it has checked voluntary efforts to do so. No doubt a much larger number of children go to school now than ten years ago, but that cannot be entirely credited to forcible education. The Education Act was merely a concession to the growth of social feeling and the sense of the importance of knowledge. It was effect, not cause; and the same causes, if that outlet had not been found for them, would necessarily have found other and probably more effective channels of operation.

No; education by force is only a necessity in the eyes of those who consider private property and the economic slavery of the people also a necessity. The government in this matter is like a cruel cab-driver who reins in his horse and flogs him at the same time; it holds the people down in the condition of wage-slaves, and then attempts to whip them into the energy and virtue of free citizens.

And you, fellow countrymen, how long will you be contented to play the part of cab-horse?

Women's Labour

[Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, July 1887

Many Socialists have joined in the outcry of certain Trade Unionists and Radicals against the employment of women in work which the women think suitable and the men do not. They have done so on the plea that the women's labour is simply used by capitalists to reduce men's wages. Their argument is perfectly correct as far as it goes, but it goes a very little way. Roughly speaking, it is probably true that the total of men's wages is decreased by something like the amount they would require to support the said women as their chattel-slaves. The women become the wage-slaves of the capitalist, and the workman is deprived of his dependent domestic serf. A man and woman both working often earn between them only about as much as the man alone could earn before the competition of women came into his labour market; or, putting it in another way, about as small a share of the fruit of their labour falls into the hands of the wage-workers as a class, if women are employed in productive labour, or if they were not so occupied. *But* if the women work outside their homes, they become independent of their lovers and male relatives, and the family is broken up.

After all this is the great point. Amid the misery of this period of transition, and its misery would be hard to exaggerate, this solid good remains; the individualist family system, i.e., the dependence of the individual woman upon the individual man, is being slowly and surely undermined, and with it one of the bases of our detestable civilisation.

It is a necessary step towards the realisation of a free Socialism that men and women alike should learn to recognise their direct relation to society; that they should be loosed from individual dependence and individual obligation, and learn to live and work

directly for the commonwealth, for each and all—not for this person and that.

True, landlord and capitalist effectually stand in the way of any such common and social life and work in the present ; but landlord and capitalist are frankly recognised as enemies to be overcome by every worker who is at all awake to his position; whereas, the idea that each individual man must necessarily have the support of his wife and children hung round his neck like Christian's burden of sins, is fixed in the minds of many as a law of the Medea and Persians. Nevertheless, the increasing competition of women in the labour market is a direct negative to this assumption. This competition, with all its attendant ills, is yet one of the disturbing forces at work in our rotten social system, preparing the way for the growth of new and more healthy human relations in the future. In the present, too, it is helping to form the army of the down-trodden workers into line.

When a large number of women have come into direct personal conflict with the masters, they will cease the opposition to revolutionary action, which at present hang a dead weight upon the cause. How many a well-meaning fellow accepts a dog's terms from his master today because his wife is so afraid he will lose his place if he dares to resist. Whereas, if she were directly and personally galled by the employer's brutality, she would be ready to face any privation rather than submit. The time is passing when factory owners found their female "hands" so humble and submissive. When men and women work together and a strike is agreed upon, e.g., in the chain trade, the women are by no means the first to give in. And when women are brought into direct conflict with the cruelty and injustice, as in the land war in Scotland and Ireland, they often display, as Michael Davitt truly said at Bodyke, more revolutionary spirit than men.

To turn from general considerations to the special subject of discussion now before the public, the employment of women at the pit brow.

I suppose if there is one universal medical prescription which might safely and advantageously be given to the whole mass of puny and ailing women in the United Kingdom, it is, adopt a comfortable and rational style of dress, and take up some useful and sociable out-of-doors occupation which will exercise and develop your muscles. Those of us who have lived in the country know how gladly many women We in - Ironer field work, heavy and exhausting as it is, for the health-giving change it brings them. The work of a pit-girl may be dirty and hard, but she leads a healthier life and one more worthy of a human being than most of the fine ladies who live on her labour, or the maid-servants who wait on those ladies' whims and caprices.

As for us, our cause is that of the down-trodden and oppressed of humanity, whether they be men or women, not the temporary relief – such relief is never more than temporary – of this section or that at the expense of the others.

One more word out of the many to be said on this matter. What claim have any class or section of the community to forcibly decide for another what is or is not a "suitable" occupation for them? What has become of the old Radical precept, wholesome as far as it went, about class legislation? Have our Radical fellow-workers found the legislation of capital for labour such an unmixed blessing, that they set about the analogous business of the legislation of men for women? As for us, our cause is that of the down-trodden and oppressed of humanity, whether they be men or women, not the temporary relief – such relief is never more than temporary – of this section or that at the expense of the others. Surely our Socialist comrades, of any school, fall short of their own beliefs when they espouse a sectional dispute amongst the workers, whose cause, could they but realise it, is one and indivisible.

The Women of the Commune

[Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, April 1888

We have all been so drilled from our youth up in the prejudices of property and authority that even the workers, for whom property and authority have done so little, are not free from superstitious belief in their necessity. Especially we are all too much inclined to believe that mere confusion must follow on a popular revolt, unless some central or local authority be immediately set up to control social life and reorganise the people.

During the Commune of 1871, the newly-elected Municipal Government was too deeply engaged by the enemy at the gates to make many attempts at social reconstruction. Was the city, in which so much of the old order had been overthrown, given up to disorder or

to merely aimless individual effort? Did its social life run down, like a watch with a broken spring?

Historians – friend and foe – have been almost wholly occupied with the official doings of the Communal Council, and have left unchronicled the spontaneous action of the people. And yet that authoritative Communal Organisation was a mere compromise between the ideas of the past and the new spirit of social revolution stirring in the masses and it is to the free initiative of the people themselves that we must look for the indications of the real meaning and scope of the insurrection.

Little as we know of the social life of the workers during those few brief weeks of partial freedom from property rule, that little is of a kind to raise high our hopes for the future.

Take, for instance, the conduct of that part of the people who are generally supposed to have least spontaneous initiative, to be most completely creatures of habit and routine, least strong and courageous, least fit to act for themselves-the women.

When the treachery or faint-heartedness of the men entrusted with authority by the people allowed the cannon over which the federated battalions of the National Guard were keeping watch in the name of the city, to be surprised by the troops of the middle-class Government, and the Central Committee knew nothing of the treachery or the danger, the working women of Montmartre waited for no centralised Organisation, no word of command, but marched up the open streets against the levelled muskets of the soldiers, and by their heroic daring won over the wavering hirelings of Thiers to be the allies of the people. Those women seized the critical moment for action, and acted boldly; and Paris was won for the Commune.

But the working women showed not merely courage and cool promptitude in the face of danger, but, when the fighting was over, bestowed equal energy upon such reorganisation of social life as the terrible conditions of the siege rendered possible. An active official of the Commune writes as follows:

> "The Commune being obliged to fight against Versailles from the very beginning, there was scarcely any room left to women for an *official* part to take in the movement. However, in my *arrondissement*, and, I am sure, in several others, some rudimentary steps were taken. For instance, I took possession of the different schools conducted by nuns, and replaced them by lay female teachers. I did the same with the *salles d'asile*, that is, the buildings where very little children, too young to go to school, are kept. All ambulances were likewise kept by women. So were the *cantines*, or eating houses, which had been founded during the first siege.
>
> "But in an unofficial capacity their conduct was truly beyond praise. So far as my district is concerned, they had formed committees to inquire into the wants of every family, especially of girls; to organise labour for women as far as the stormy events through which we had to pass would allow, cutting and making flannel shirts for the men who had to fight *extra muros*; attending at houses where wounded men or patients lay, etc. At night they crowded public meetings, took part in the proceedings, encouraged men to resist, proposed motions interesting their sex, which were afterwards transmitted to the Commune, etc.
>
> "Lastly, during the hot days, when the fight was raging in the streets, they were seen everywhere, assisting in erecting barricades, bringing refreshments and food to the combatants, nursing the wounded, shrouding the dead after washing them, risking their life every minute to protect and screen the escape of the defeated men after the taking of a barricade, bearing with the most stoic courage affronts, ill-treatment, and even death, to which they were subjected by infuriated, stupid soldiers. If so many of us could escape immediate death, and even manage to escape to a foreign land, nine out of every ten at least have to be thankful to one or more women. That influence of women, as well as their energy, was so well felt by Versailles that they charged them with every kind of atrocious crime, which, however, all their courts-martial could never succeed in bringing home. The greatest of all, Louise Michel, is for me just an enlarged personification of what an immense number of women have been at that time.

Lefrançais tells in his memoirs how, on that terrible morning when the bloodhounds of Versailles had Paris by the throat and the scattered remnants of the National Guard retreated within the city, they found barricades ready erected in the most defensible streets by the women of the various quarters. And be mentions that on that morning of despair the first organised contingent of defenders whom he met was a troop of women, fully armed, marching down to garrison one of these barricades.

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

Work

[Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, July 1888

"In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread" is an ancient curse, dating from the days of slavery. And truly for the slave work is a weariness to the flesh.

What enjoyment is there in his labour for the modern wage-slave, for instance, as he toils hour after hour and day after day at some exhausting routine work, in which he sees no special utility, and for which he has no special taste; toils wearily on and on, with no prospect but the same dull round, until he breaks down and is sent to the work-house, like some worn-out cart-horse to the knackers? How can work be anything but a hateful burden in such circumstances? How can such workers have any inclination but to exert themselves as little as possible? Any interest but the amount of the miserable pittance they gain by this prostitution of their manhood? No wonder that to the majority of the workmen of to-day wages are the one inducement to work, and the idea of working except for wages seems an absurdity. No wonder that when they can avoid working, they loaf, or that they seek physical or mental relief for their deadened and jaded nerves in spirits or beer or gambling.

What enjoyment is there in his labour for the modern wage-slave, for instance, as he toils hour after hour and day after day at some exhausting routine work, in which he sees no special utility, and for which he has no special taste…?

The nature of the modern machine industry and factory system is in itself enough to account for the so-called idleness of the working classes; but there are many other causes which all unite to render the very idea of work distasteful to the masses at this moment.

Manual work is looked on as a brand of inferiority to the worker. Whatever his skill, he is regarded as belonging to the lower rank in society. Cap in hand he stands meekly before the brain-worker, the organiser, the mere monopolist of property, awaiting their permission to employ himself and their direction of his efforts. He is their hireling, their thing, a part of their wealth-producing machinery. How can he joy in the toil which degrades him in the eyes of his fellows and is associated with the loss of his personal dignity?

And then he is never secure even in this inferior position, which at least allows him to live. Any week, any day he may be thrown upon the streets to beg from door to door for the permission to work that he may earn a subsistence. This insecurity nips in the bud such growing interest as he may be inclined to feel in his special occupation. He may be interested in finishing some job, in thinking out some improvement, but all the while the knowledge lurks in the background that he has neither the final utility of his work, that to-morrow he may be a wanderer, his connection with his present employment broken off for ever.

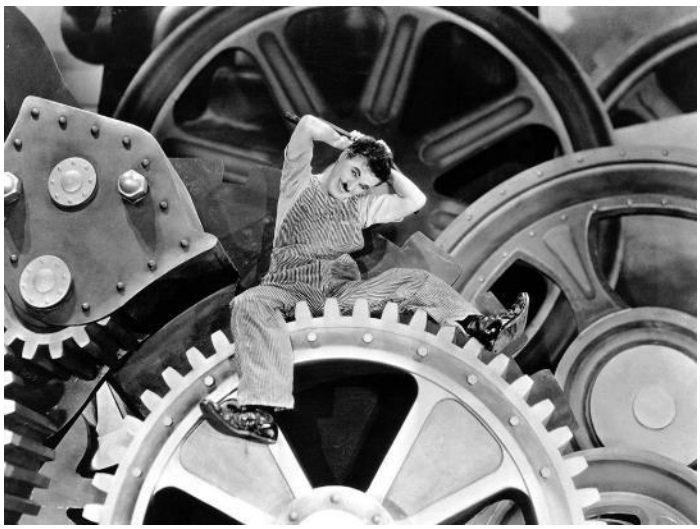
So much for the character of the work; let us turn to the physical conditions of the lives of the workers. Insufficient food from earliest childhood; if not insufficient in quantity, insufficient in nourishing elements, unwholesome and adulterated, as are all the wretched provisions sold in the cheap shops of our large towns. Insufficient clothing; shoddy cotton and cloth, and paper soled boots, and not enough even of these. Bad air; dirty, badly ventilated factories and workshops all day, damp or dusty ill-smelling streets to go home by, hot, close rooms to sit and eat and sleep in. Such conditions alone are enough to depress the nervous energy of the strongest and healthiest amongst us, and men and women who have lived for generations in such misery are not strong and healthy. A moment's reflection astonishes us not at the idleness but the industry of the working classes.

But the property monopolists? There is a strong tendency amongst them also to believe that the only end of useful effort is to fill one's own pocket, and a pronounced distaste for work in itself; and yet their lives are not fettered like those of their wage-slaves.

Not in the same way, but still fettered, and by the same hateful social system. The majority of men and women of whatever class have capacity for hand-work. Those whose organisation fits them exclusively for brain work are few and far between. Yet the iron tyranny of custom ordains that for a man or woman of the upper classes brain work alone is "respectable"; they must exercise their muscles only in games. If such a person is caught by his neighbours in the act of digging potatoes, or scrubbing the floor, or making any useful article, he or she apologises with a blush and explains that it is only a hobby, or he has been obliged to do it "just for once" by some accident. As to bringing up his children as shoemakers or cooks, he would as soon

educate them for the hulks. And yet not every bourgeois child has a taste for figures, or the organisation of industry, or scientific research, or the higher walks of art.

Again, the weight and pressure of needless clothing, and curtained rooms, and padded seats, and a hot-house atmosphere, and luxurious living, and artificial isolation from the first elementary needs and cares of humanity, are not healthy, are not in the truest sense natural. Such conditions depress nervous energy and discourage exertion, and make the real interests and larger purposes of life dull and meaningless. And such conditions as these have grown up around the rich, punishing them for their unjust monopoly by enervating their nerves and stupefying their brain, shutting them away from the keen, fresh pleasure of living, and turning work and repose alike to weariness.



And if the enervating and isolating "comfort" of the rich and the cramping and depressing misery of the poor, the difficulty for either class of choosing the occupation which best suits them, and the dreary and monotonous character of most modern labour, were causes not sufficient to account for such disinclination to useful and continued exertion of energy as we see around us, we have only to add the social influence of an idle aristocracy. The example of an upper class whose pride is that for many hundred years they have been absolutely useless, cannot but corrupt the whole community. They set before every man an ideal of idleness as the goal to which all his labour should tend; so that for the hand workers and commercial class being a gentleman means that, being rich, one has nothing to do, and to many of them the object of working is to attain such gentility as fate will allow.

For the taskmaster as for the slave there is but little joy in labour, and our social conditions make most men and women one or the other. Little cause have we for surprise that idleness is no uncommon vice amongst all classes and that but too many men are ready to cast their burden of toil upon the shoulders of others.

But now let us contrast this distaste for work, this tendency to shirk it which is the direct outcome of present social conditions, with the mighty volume of active energy, which, in spite of these adverse conditions, actually animates society from day to day.

This display of spontaneous energy in useful work is such a common factor of ordinary life that it passes unnoticed, until something rouses us to reflect that our whole social progress depends on it and that if it ceased for one single day society would come to a stand-still, even though all slavish labour went on as before. I do not dwell here upon the endless voluntary associations for every imaginable object, public or private, from the reform of society or the protection of vested interests to the exercise of the muscles or the amusement of leisure moments. Of course these involve a very large amount of unpaid and avoidable exertion; but the energy summed up in them is but as a drop in the bucket compared with the free, spontaneous effort ceaselessly expended in the common daily work of life; effort which can never be measured, never be paid for, and for which we can find no definite, determining necessity, unless we look for it in the inmost nature of man himself.

One begins to realise this if one tries to imagine the results to any sort of work if the spontaneous human element were entirely excluded. The capitalist machine industry has done its best in this direction, and in proportion as it has succeeded, the produce has grown not only mean and base but useless and hurtful. In proportion as the human worker has become a mere steam-engine with wages for coal, the fruit of his labour has degenerated into shoddy, losing not only the higher utility, the beauty that satisfies the mind, but the most elementary fitness to supply primary needs. Our tin teapots for instance, not only degrade our imagination and deform our sense of proportion by their hideousness, but they melt on the hob, they leak when boiling water is poured into them, and they poison us with the leaden "tea tasters" in the spout; our cheap cottons are not only frightful in their stiffness and mean in their flimsiness, but they neither wash nor wear; and so on.

It is only amongst the weakest and most stunted victims of industrialism that we see what sort of thing human labour is when the spontaneous element is utterly crushed out of it. Even amidst the most degraded and hopeless routine work, spontaneous energy is often only diverted from ingenuity to speed, and concentrated upon producing the greatest quantity possible, regardless of quality. In many a hard-driven workman the impulse to produce is so strong, that if he can do nothing else, he will find satisfaction in putting, e.g., as many poisonous lumps of lead as possible into the spouts of teapots and joy in beating the record,

even though the increased pay be infinitesimally small and he knows that he is merely raising the intensity of labour that will eventually be exacted from him by the capitalists. It is this impulse to put one's best self into what one is doing quite as much as the desire to earn, which is so vilely exploited by employers in all piece work.

The same spontaneous impulse manifests itself in the perpetual improvements and inventions made by workmen. These ceaseless minor inventions are one of the great main springs of economic progress. The workers personally gain nothing by their ingenuity but loss or uncertainty of employment, yet they are always improving and inventing.

In every condition of life people are constantly exerting themselves more than they are compelled to by any external necessity; from the artist like Watts, who pours his whole soul into pictures the public will neither buy nor appreciate, to the dustman who carefully fills the corners of his cart and pats down the edges of his load, though the Vestry will never pay him one penny the more for it. In fact we are not all ourselves conscious, when we come to think of it, that we continually do things for the mere pleasure of doing them or of attaining some end that cannot be measured in hard cash; and also that in work which is paid we perpetually exert ourselves far more than we are absolutely obliged to do to earn our money.

In healthy children the impulse to make something is one of their earliest and most vigorous developments. If they cannot do anything else, they will make mud pies. But most children are far the most eager to do something "real", by which they mean socially useful. They eagerly aspire to the dignity of taking active part in the occupations of grown up people; but till the idea is put into their heads, even the children of this commercial age are not so corrupted by heredity as to think of payment. They obey their own spontaneous impulse to exert themselves to some purpose, just for the pleasure of it.

Physiologists explain to us how this comes about. How exertion of brain and nerves and muscles in work is an exercise of functions and faculties which nature has formed to be exercised, so that there is just as much animal pleasure in working when one is well and strong, as in eating when one is hungry. Starvation of the impulse to work is a physical misery, just like starvation of the impulse to eat. We say impulse to work, rather than merely to exert one's self, because useless or purposeless exertion does not satisfy the mind, and the same may be said of work which is not, at least indirectly, social in character.

If this seems somewhat doubtful to any overworked reader, let him remember the misery of prisoners in solitary confinement. When the nervous exhaustion following the excitement of the trial has passed away, the prisoner's strongest desire is to be allowed some occupation; any work however disagreeable, so that he may escape from the maddening irritation of enforced idleness. And if the deprivation is long continued, the strongest man will sink into a semi-idiotic condition of bodily and mental apathy, just as one of our arms will first be cramped and then become feeble and nerveless if it be tied up and not exercised.

Therefore the question of supreme importance in social organisation is – not how can men be induced to work, but how can their spontaneous desire to work be allowed the freest scope and guided into the most useful directions.

Another consideration suggests the existence of a spontaneous impulse amongst men to produce, to create. It is the enormous wealth which the human race has acquired beyond what is necessary for bare subsistence. Think, for example, of the means of communication, from language to railways and steamboats, and try to realise the volume of creative energy they imply, not in a few individuals, but in the millions whose labours of mind and body have formed them during long ages. If men had contented themselves with merely providing for their bare necessities, none of the arts of life would have grown and developed, and we should still be existing like our ancestors, the cave men. But no, the cave men have left behind them evidences of their human creative genius. We find their stone and bone knives and hatchets, not only sharpened, but shaped and ornamented, and since their day we have gone on shaping and ornamenting, and thinking and creating, until we have accumulated the vast stores of knowledge and of material wealth amidst which we live to-day. Where was the compulsion to do all this, but in our own nature?

There is little room to doubt, when one thinks seriously about the matter, that the expenditure of energy in creation, in productive work, is a natural human impulse, common to all normally developed individuals, and idleness a disease developed and fostered by unhealthy conditions. Therefore the question of supreme importance in social organisation is – not how can men be induced to work, but how can their spontaneous desire to work be allowed the freest scope and guided into the most useful directions.

The Marriage Controversy

[Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, October 1888

MOST of the letters on marriage in the *Daily Telegraph* have been well worthy of the silly season; none of them have thrown fresh light on the most difficult of social problems. And what else could be expected when the editor boasts that he has excluded every correspondent who might perchance "bring a blush to the cheek of the Young Person" by any ill advised attempt to go to the root of the matter, socially, economically, physiologically or psychologically? Nevertheless, in spite of all the platitudes of all the prudes, the controversy as a whole is highly significant.

It would have been of some importance if only from the fact that the question "Is marriage a failure?" has stared at every passer by from the notice board of every news-agent in the country, day after day and week after week. The continual spectacle of that heading in big type can hardly have failed to set many vaguely discontented people thinking as they never ventured to think before; to lead them to question what before never occurred to them as seriously questionable.

If our existing marriage system were generally suited to our present desires and needs, such questioning would be a comparatively small matter. But the enquiry claims special notice as a passing indication of a wide-spread social movement. It is but a feather on the stream, but it shows how the current runs. Twenty years ago would any editor of a respectable middle-class newspaper have dared to raise a question about marriage? Would it have been a paying speculation to admit even the faintest murmurs of discontent with the modem family system? For as one of the "Pillars of Society" says in Ibsen's play, "The family is the kernel of Society." If the kernel may even be suspected of being unsound, what of the whole nut?

Do we at all realise the meaning of the social revolution which must ensue if women succeed in making good their claim to equality?

The connection of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondence with one of the least generally recognised and most important movements in the world of advanced thought is in itself curious and interesting.

Since Darwin drew attention to the great part played by sexual selection in the evolution of animal life, a small number of thinkers have been impressed by the deep interest attaching to the various forms of sex relation that have existed, and are existing, amongst human beings. Writers like Morgan and Maclaren (not to mention foreign authors, whose books are not yet generally known in England) have brought together much information on this subject, and it has begun to be recognised that the history of sex relations is a study of fundamental importance; for without it no clear understanding is possible either of the growth of society in the past or of the social problem with which we are confronted to-day.

This year Mr. Karl Pearson, Professor of Mathematics at University College, London, has published a valuable contribution to the new branch of enquiry in the three concluding essays of his book "The Ethic of Free Thought." These essays profess to be nothing but outlined suggestions of the nature of the problems to be considered and the method by which they may be solved. They sketch out in broad lines the subject matter of the coming science of sexualogy. Even as sketches their author claim for them no sort of completeness. They are intended to suggest lines of thought for others and to draw attention to the vast social significance of the questions involved, rather than to set forth any special conclusions. Mr. Pearson has not yet arranged for publication the facts from which he has drawn the few generalisations be permits himself, and be is too profoundly imbued with the scientific spirit to ask his readers to accept on faith even a working hypothesis. But his ideas are luminous with thought-provoking originality, and the pure and noble spirit in which he handles questions too long obscured and degraded by morbid sentiment is in itself an enormous contribution towards their right understanding. It is like a current of fresh air, a gleam of sunshine, in a close, dark room.

The first essay, on "The Woman's Question," passes in rapid survey the complex problem raised by the growing movement towards female emancipation Do we at all realise the meaning of the social revolution which must ensue if women succeed in making good their claim to equality? The second is "A Sketch of the relations of sex in Germany", showing how fundamentally changes in the form of sex relationship have modified social life; with some suggestion as to the causes from which these changes may have sprung. The third essay is on "Socialism and Sex."

The historical school of economists in Germany, and with them Karl Marx, have dwelt very strongly upon the fundamental importance of economic development in the history of society. The way in which wealth has

been produced and distributed in any nation is the great root fact, and from that all those social institutions and movements, with which historians have too long been exclusively occupied, have sprung. Laws and governments, class struggles and foreign wars, the deeds of kings and legislators, all originate in the economic condition of the race; all take their significance from the economic relations between men and from the form in which they hold property.

Mr. Pearson contends that sex relations have played as fundamental a part as economic relations in social evolution. To each form of the ownership of wealth has corresponded a particular form of sex relation, and the latter has by no means always been the result of the former. Sometimes a change in sex relation has been the cause which would appear to have revolutionised economic conditions. Each has acted and reacted upon the other. The two together lie at the foundation of social life. On their variation depends the growth of society. And they have continually varied. It is sheer blindness to fail to perceive that the great economic changes, which all intelligent men are beginning to recognise as inevitable to-day, will be accompanied by equally wide changes in sex relationship.

It is sheer blindness to fail to perceive that the great economic changes, which all intelligent men are beginning to recognise as inevitable to-day, will be accompanied by equally wide changes in sex relationship.

We Communist-Anarchists disagree with Mr. Pearson's State Socialism; we disagree with the moral basis on which he builds it; but his rough outline of the probable future of sex relationship is radiant with the belief in Man which is the key-note of Anarchism,

He holds that the entire absence of the organised interference of the community in the personal relation of men and women will be the natural accompaniment of Socialism, and that complete freedom of intercourse, common education, and economic equality between the sexes will do what marriage laws and social restraints have failed to accomplish in destroying the mental depravity and heartless licence which disgrace modem social life.[1]

In the July number of the *Westminster Review* Mrs. Mona Caird, a young novelist, has summarized a portion of Mr. Pearson's essays, in an article entitled "Marriage," though without acknowledging by more than a passing allusion the source from which her material has been obtained. Without the reservation and qualification with which Mr. Pearson has put forth his views, and without Socialism, Mrs. Caird's article appears somewhat strained and vague, but it is written in popular language, it is the utterance of a woman's cry of revolt, and it has done what Mr. Pearson's essays have not done, arrested public attention. The outcry in the daily papers has been the result.

After all, the thinkers are only engaged in consciously seeking, investigating and formulating what Society as a whole is dimly and unconsciously yearning and striving after. Where darkness is pain, these are they who go forth to search for light.

Just now the pain is very real. From year to year it grows more acute, as the new life bruises itself in the darkness against the outworn forms that crush it back.

For many ages an individualising process has been going on among us. A tendency has developed in the single human being to separate himself in his own consciousness, and consequently in his attitude and conduct, from his fellows; to look on himself not merely as a part of a group of kinsmen, or a patriarchal family, or a tribe, but as a distinct unit in the society to which he belonged, to count himself as one, and not merely a fraction. Gradually men have begun to recognise that each is, for himself, the centre of all things; and as the conscious recognition of this fact has grown, the claims of the individual have grown with it. After a fight of many ages he has won freedom of opinion; now he is claiming freedom of action, the acknowledged responsibility of self-guidance. But, it may be objected, is such a self-centred individual still a social being, does not his claim to independence imply antagonism to his fellows? He is still so essentially social that life except in association is a misery, a mutilation to his nature. Unless his social instinct is fully gratified, his whole being is distorted and his existence a weariness, as we see in the case of the unsocial monopolists of power and property to-day. But the terms of the association must be enlarged for the free individual. They must acknowledge his full individuality. They must be rational, not arbitrary, or they become an insufferable bondage to be cast off at all costs.

[1] 'Socialism and Sex,' was published last, year as a pamphlet (W. Reeves. 185 Fleet Street, E.C., price 2d.) and reviewed at length in *Freedom* for April 1887. In that review we pointed out our one difference with the author. We do not believe that the over-population difficulty will exist in a free communistic community, nor that the interference of even public opinion will be called for in the matter.

At the present time this process of individualisation has advanced to such a point that every man of ordinary capacity thinks it right that he should manage his own personal affairs and be responsible for his own thoughts and conduct. He would consider it shameful that his family, or his relations, or the circle of families amongst whom he lives, should openly guide him and be responsible for him.

Every *man*, who is worthy to be called a man, thinks this; but not by any means every *woman*. Until the present generation, the family, in its narrowest modern sense (*i.e.*, the father, mother and children under age), has been the real unit of society. True, the man counted as one individual amongst other men; but he was always supposed to represent and control his wife and children.

Moreover within the narrowed family circle the ancient patriarchal communism still legally lingered down to the present decade, and the father possessed the right to administer the wealth of the whole group, no matter by whose labour it was gained.

The passing of the Married Woman's Property Act in 1883 was the first signal that the process of individualisation had reached women, that the last composite or artificial social unit was being broken up by the development of humanity. Reactionary as our legislators are, they were driven at last to recognise that even a married woman is an individual human being who has a claim to independent existence, and not economically a mere appendage to some man, or fraction of a family group.

Driven, we say, but what drove them? There are two powerful forces at work in society, between which as between am upper and nether mill-stone the modern family system is being ground to powder. One is the mad race for wealth of our competitive industrialism. The other the spread of knowledge and education. The first is dissolving the family, as an economic group, and at the same time placing the possibility of economic independence within the grasp of women; the second is inspiring them with the desire to claim that independence and the capacity to use it.

Women's labour is cheaper than men's, not so much because they have less muscular strength or technical skill, as because they have married or unmarried prostitution as an alternative profession to productive labour; a providential circumstance of which the capitalist is delighted to avail himself. Hence modern mechanical invention tends more and more to create increasing facilities for women to become independent wage-earners, with smaller wages for men in consequence of female competition and the destruction of the family amongst the working class as a result. With the loss of his exclusive control of the common purse strings, the authority of the man is at an end so soon as the woman chooses to dispute it; and the education of a personal struggle with the world, and even such odds and ends of intellectual training as girls get now, all dispose our young women to rebellion.

An educated, thoughtful woman, whose mind has been trained to regard truth rather than custom as the measure of right, refuses as an educated thoughtful man refuses, to throw the responsibility of her life upon other people. She insists on guiding her own conduct and living according to her own nature and not some one else's idea of what that nature ought to be. She insists that the people with whom she is associated shall recognise her claim to a free expression of her individuality as equal to their own. She will not be deluded into an irrational self-mutilation by high-sounding commonplaces about duty and self-sacrifice. She will insist on knowing, weighing, deciding for herself according to her own instincts of self-development.

It is possible to conceive a tolerably intelligent man advocating palliative measures and gradual reform; but a woman who is not a Revolutionist is a fool.

There are not many such women amongst us to-day; but there are ever-increasing numbers of women tending in this direction, as the spread of education puts the opportunity of mental growth within their reach.

The tendency to revolt is spreading, but the prospect before the rebels is dismal in the extreme. Those who have the courage of their opinions can as things are dispense with the insulting interference of church and state in their personal relations with their lovers; but what then? From chattel-slaves they have become wage-slaves. It requires a high courage to relish the sweets of economic independence when ones energy is largely absorbed by the cares of motherhood, and the merciless rush of competition perpetually reduces one's wages below starvation level. Yet this is the only prospect before the majority ef emancipated women as long as our present economic condition lasts. The dread of it causes many a victim of marriage to smother her conscience and her suffering and hug her chains-many a girl who has had dreams of better things to sell her beauty and her soul because she is terrified by the difficulty of finding a market for her labour force. Women who are awake to a consciousness of their human dignity have everything to gain because they have nothing to lose, by a Social Revolution. It is possible to conceive a tolerably intelligent man advocating palliative measures and gradual reform; but a woman who is not a Revolutionist is a fool.

The Revolt of the English Workers in the Nineteenth Century

[Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom, April to September 1889[1]

Introduction --- Why They Should Revolt.

Universal dissatisfaction is abroad. No man worth his salt who works and thinks in England to-day can be other than dissatisfied. The difficulty of making a living, to say nothing of leading full and complete human life, even if we have been so exceptionally fortunate as not to feel it for ourselves, is continually burnt into our consciousness by the efforts and struggles of our friends and neighbours – efforts crowned as often with failure as success in spite of honest endeavour – struggles frequently ending in the indifference of despair.

A few succeed. A few even force their way out of the class of workers, to live idly on the labour of others, but the vast majority exist always upon the edge of an abyss, into which they can only save themselves from failing by a never-ceasing round of toil. If they stop for a moment; if from illness or ill-luck, or any other cause for which they are not responsible, they drop out of the ranks, no one knows but themselves what a long, weary hopeless fight it is to regain the lost position.

Many never regain it. They sink into "the Residuum"; into that wretched, struggling mass of human beings whose one interest in life is how they shall get their next meal; who stand ever ready to undersell their fellow-workers for a starvation-wage; who live the life of beasts a careless enjoyment of the present: who in the midst of the pleasures and luxuries, the knowledge and culture of our modern civilization would have been ten thousand times happier if they had been born savages.

"To me at least," said Mr. Frederic Harrison at the Industrial Remuneration Conference, "it would be enough to condemn modern society as hardly an advance on slavery or serfdom, if the permanent condition of industry were to be that which we now behold, that 90 percent of the actual producers of wealth have no home that they can call their own beyond the end of the week; have no bit of soil, or so much as a room that belongs to them; have nothing of value of any kind except as much old furniture as will go on a cart; have the precarious chance of weekly wages which barely suffice to keep them in health; are housed, for most part, in places that no man thinks fit for his horse... This is the normal state of the average workman in town or country."

they have lost their control over both land and capital, and so have nothing to work with, and consequently nothing to live upon, unless they can come to terms with some one who possesses these necessary means of production

Out of a population of about 7,000,000 families, the insecurity poverty described by Mr. Harrison is the lot of 5,000,000 or thereabouts, in the richest country in the world. How is it that the great mass of Englishmen have fallen into such miserable and helpless degradation?

It is because they have lost their control over both land and capital, and so have nothing to work with, and consequently nothing to live upon, unless they can come to terms with some one who possesses these necessary means of production; unless they can find an employer in the class which own, property. And no property owner will employ men, that is to say will let them use his land or capital, unless he can make a profit for himself out of their labour over and above the wages he pays. It is on this profit that he lives, often lives luxuriously and without doing it stroke of work himself.

Now the land of this country, and the wealth created by past labour, have been stolen from the people by certain selfish and cunning individuals. The history of this sort of robbery, says Karl Marx[2], "is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire." Suppose we turn to the last page of our own history and see.

I. The Robbery of Land

Now-a-days out of a population of over 35,000,000 souls, there are only 180,524 people who own more than a house or field; and this handful of men own

[1] It should be noted that *Freedom*'s subtitle changed from *A Journal of Anarchist Socialism* to *A Journal of Anarchist Communism* from the June 1889 issue. (*Black Flag*)

[2] In the section on "Primitive Accumulation" in volume 1 of *Capital*. (*Black Flag*)

between them 10-11ths of the soil of the United Kingdom.

At the beginning of the last century, out of a population of somewhere about 5,499,5201 there were 940,000 free holders in Great Britain, something like one-sixth of the population, and of these 660,000 were small yeoman farmers, each his own master, with no landlord over him, tilling his own 12 or 15 to 100 acres.

These little farms were mostly arable land, cultivated on the old three field system, one third of the farm lying fallow every year to rest the land. The farmer and his family cultivated their bit of land themselves, with the help, on the bigger farms, of two or three hired laborers, who often lived in the farm-house and ate at the farmer's table with the family.

Of course there was no yawning gulf of class distinction between those who thus lived and worked together. Their interests were in common and a labourer would very often remain on one farm all his life. When be married he would remove to a cottage on the village common which belonged to all the villagers, had been their heritage from the dim far-off days when their ancestors first colonized the country side. Here all the people, farmers and laborers, had free right to pasture their cows, sheep, pigs, donkeys and geese, and to cut timber, firewood and turf. Besides the common, many cottagers had from two to four acres of ground for vegetables and corn. Of course laborers in such a position as this were independent men, vastly different from the unhappy hirelings of to-day.

The last century, which at its beginning saw a comparatively large portion of the population of Great Britain enjoying free access to the soil, witnessed, ere its close, the climax of that terrible agricultural 'evolution that finally drove the mass of Englishmen off the lanai of their native country.

This revolution was itself but the last act of the long process of land-grabbing that has been carried on by divers methods all through our history; hut space here fails us to dwell upon the earlier scenes of that woeful tale'. Suffice it to remark that ever since the rise of the new aristocracy of court - favourites and adventurers and of the wealthy middle class, these gentry had run the old nobles and squires hard in their greed for land, and had neglected no opportunities of snapping up big slices as their own private property, "to use and abuse," as the Roman lawyers phrase it. But during the century from 1700 to 1800, this itch for title deeds in the lingers of the upper classes seems to have grown to a mania. Men who hail made fortunes in business – especially the businesses of wringing wealth from the wretched natives of Italia and the colonies, from the slave trade anal from usury retailed from abroad or retired front trade at home, with the one object of buying land. For in those days, far more than now, the mere possession of land meant the possession of wealth and power.

A hundred and fifty years ago the House of Lords consisted the big landlords anal the house of Commons of their nominees. Large estates meant pocket boroughs and bands of obedient voters and the power to govern the country, or, if one preferred gold to authority, the possibility of selling one's political influence to the highest bidder and living in luxury on the proceeds.

That was one way of making a fortune out of land. There was a second. England in those days largely produced and even exported raw material, especially wool anal wheat. Now wool could he most profitably obtained from large sheep runs, and wheat most profitably grown for the market on large amble farms, "capital" or "merchant" farms as they were called. Farms where the old three field system was set aside by chemical manures and rotation of crops where wage-labour and machinery replaced the ancient family cultivation: where the protium was raised, not to supply the wants of the working farmer, his labourers. and the people of the neighbourhood, but to be sold at a profit to the capitalist fanner in sonic distant market.

Now these capitalist fanners were very different. men from the yeomen. They aped the fine gentleman. lived apart and at ease, scorned to be seen between the plough stilts, and despised the hired labourers who did all the work, their only connection with whom was to screw as much labour force out of them as possible for the lowest possible reward. They were hard masters, but just because of this, joined to their knowledge of improved methods of fanning, they were good tenants and could afford a heavy rent. It paid well to be a landlord in those days.

More especially did it pay when, at the close of the last century, the great war broke out between England and revolutionary France, accompanied, as it was, by a succession of bad harvests. In times when wheat was £5 15s 11d a quarter, when a quartern loaf was 1s 10d, and people were eating boiled nettles without salt (the salt tax was so heavy), huge fortunes were to be made by lucky corn speculators. With those who made no scruple of seeking wealth for themselves out of the sharpest need of their fellow countrymen, wheat gambling became the order of the day, and in consequence there was furious competition for arable hind, and rents rose enormously.

Tempted by the dazzling possibility of obtaining wealth and power by the mere possession of title-deeds without doing one stroke of honest work, it is small wonder that covetous rich men set themselves to lay field to field and eat up the small proprietors. And the work was easy, as the small man was harder and harder pressed by the competition of the big capitalist-farmers and the loss of the common grazing ground, of which more anon. It was always easy for the steward of a large proprietor to harass and persecute the unlucky yeomen in his neighbourhood till he forced them to sell their little

farms, often at ridiculously low prices. There is a curious old book, published in the last century, where, amongst other duties, "a good steward" is instructed how best to accomplish this service to his master's interests. The success with which this legal expropriation was carried on may be judged by two instances. Thomas Wright, in 1772, mentions "24 farms in Hertfordshire, which have melted into three." William Cobbett, in 1826, speaks of "one of lord Carnarvon's farms, which had in the memory of the inhabitants of the district, been divided into 14 holdings." Throughout the country numberless small freeholders and small tenants were ousted in favour of a few large ones, and nothing but ruined farmhouses and sheds remained to tell of the little homesteads that from time immemorial had sheltered so many free and happy lives.

All this was bad enough; but the land greed of the rich took a less excusable form than the expropriation of peasant proprietors and small tenants: the enclosure of the commons.

With parliament composed of landlords and their creatures, there was. no difficulty about enclosure bills. The people wronged were poor and ignorant, shut out by bad reads and the absence of conveyances, by the expense of postage and want of newspapers, from all real knowledge of the doings of the fine gentlemen who sat up in London making laws for them and taxing them. They tried indeed in some eases to club together to resist the enclosures; even to turn the law itself against their masters who made the law; but it was useless. Those masters bought of the claims of a few of the bigger farmers and rode rough shod over the rest. Between 1710 and 1843 seven millions and three hundred thousand acres of communal land were stolen from the people.

When a land-grabber had stolen a common, he next proceeded to improve and clear his estate. That meant not only that he turned all the peasants' cattle, pigs, sheep, geese, etc., off their grazing ground and forbid the cutting of turf or firewood, but that he set to work to pull down cottages and plough up gardens. He did not want his newly enclosed fields encumbered by "nests of beggars' brats," and so left only as many cottages standing as were required to house the wage-labourers of the capitalist tenant farmers.

In fact, the English land thieves of a hundred years ago acted as we see Irish and landowners acting to-day. Wielding the law as a weapon against the poor and defenceless, they excused themselves behind lawyers' tricks from all considerations of justice or compassion, and unscrupulously drove hundreds and thousands of men and women from the houses that they or their forefathers had built and the soil that they and their forefathers had made fruitful.

By such means were large estates and large farms created throughout the country, with the result that the total amount of agricultural produce was increased, and the rich profited largely thereby: whilst the free peasantry, who had been the backbone of England, were finally and utterly destroyed.

We have seen how the working men and women of England were driven off the soil by the greed of the rich and idle. The desire to secure their ill-gained possessions led the robbers to spare no pains to crush out the sturdy self-respect and self-reliance of the people they had wronged.

We have seen how the working men and women of England were driven off the soil by the greed of the rich and idle. The desire to secure their ill-gained possessions led the robbers to spare no pains to crush out the sturdy self-respect and self-reliance of the people they had wronged. It is startling to find how large a part of the public activity of the upper classes has been directly devoted to breaking the spirit of the poor and degrading them into the position of wage-slaves, wholly dependent on the owners of land and capital.

In the earlier days of land-grabbing, the law, always a whip by means of which the rich lash the poor into subjection, empowered Justices of the Peace to settle how much the evicted men forced to seek employment from some property owner might venture to demand from what their labour produced. Naturally this maximum wage, fixed by the landlords, was not too high; but if a man refused employment on these terms, or simply could not find any, he might be imprisoned, whipped, branded, even hanged, as a vagrant, 11 wandering about without any visible means of subsistence."[1]

As land stealing progressed, however, the numbers of landless, propertyless people became so great that there was no need to limit wages. Wages were reduced to starvation point by the competition of the would-be wage-workers, and it became necessary to supplement them instead from the rates. if the wronged and destitute people of England were not to break out into open rebellion like the peasantry of France. The old poor law

[1] In the reign of Henry VIII. 72,000 such vagrants were hanged according to Holinshed.

was a bribe by means of which the ruling classes soothed the rising discontent, which showed itself continually by rick-burning, bread riots, and tumultuous gatherings. It was also a necessary method for the cultivation of the food for powder, required by the said classes in their continual wars with France for colonial and commercial supremacy, and more especially, at the close of the last century, in the great war against the Revolution; for they were sorely afraid that the revolutionary spirit would spread into England. The evicted peasantry must be encouraged to breed not only wage-laborers, but soldiers and sailors (480,000 of them were consumed in that last named war) and therefore men and women received parish relief in proportion to the number of their children.

The poor law was administered in such a manner as to cut the roots of all remaining self-respect among the people. It was entirely in the hands of the land-grabbers and their satellites, and the man who knew best how to toady the squire and the parson got the best out of doors allowance. As for the miserable indoors paupers, they were crowded together men, women and children, the healthy, the sick and the insane, in filthy hovels, where they were maintained as prisoners on prison fare and in enforced idleness. except when the able-bodied or the children were let out to farmers or manufacturers by the parish authorities, like beasts of burden or machines.

This degrading public charity which the ruling classes insulted the people by offering to them in place of their natural claim to the soil of their native land, was supplemented by the most ferocious laws for the protection of private property. Down to the beginning of this century men and women were banged for taking a shirt from a bleaching ground or a yard or two of ribbon from a shop; and of course for every larger theft, until one comes to robbery on the biggest scale of all, which was reckoned a legal and honourable pursuit as the robbers made the laws.

A long course of such shameless, wholesale spoliation and oppression ended by reducing almost the whole agricultural population of this country to the state of houseless, landless paupers. It went nigh to destroy the free spirit of the English people and created among them a vast proletariat, a mass of propertyless, degraded, despairing human beings, who little by little drifted away from the country towards the industrial centres, there to fall helpless victims into the clutches of the rising class of capitalist manufacturers.

II The Robbery of Capital

England in the last century was undergoing not only an agrarian but an industrial revolution.

Before about 1760 when one spoke of a manufacturer, one meant literally a man who made articles with his own hands. A man who had his raw material, and the simple tools or machine tools he used, in his own cottage and was completely his own master in his work. He fetched material he wanted it from market or other workers' houses in a bag on his shoulder or on a pack horse.

Suppose he were a weaver, most probably he would get his wool from the farms in the neighbourhood where it had been carded by the women folk of the farm, and the members of his own family would be the spinners who made it into yarn for him, or perhaps he would get yarn from the spinners in cottages near. He had his own loom in his own house, and there he wove just as he felt inclined, doing as much as was enough to supply his needs, together with his other occupations and means of support. If he were in a large way, perhaps he might have journeymen and apprentices to help him: all men in the same rank of life as himself, preparing to be master weavers themselves one day. Then when his piece of cloth was finished. he would take it straight to his customers or to market, or perhaps send it thither by packman or pedlar. If the market he supplied were very distant he might even send it by water. But as a rule he went himself. In the market hall at Leeds e.g., each clothier had his own stall. The market was held twice a week. At 6 a.m. a bell rung, the pedlars and merchants came in and made their bargains and two hours after the clothiers were off to their homes and work again.

Under these circumstances each clothier, spinner, lace-maker or whatnot, knew the demand he had to supply as well as the average village butcher or baker does to-day. There were no sudden and mysterious fluctuations in his trade as a rule; no long seasons of slackness, followed the strain of overtime and then perhaps by the loss of employment altogether. None of that terrible helpless uncertainty and dread which make the hell of the modern wage-worker.

Such workmen were not rich. They lived very simply indeed. Meat twice a week; tea and plenty of good ale to drink, with abundance of bread, and vegetables, formed the staple fare. They were not much educated, many could not read and write. But they led a healthy, varied life with its interests centred in their work and its perfection. Most of them had their little houses on the common rent free, for in those days,[1] out of a population of 6,500,000, 5,000,000 lived in the country, and as commoners, had their common rights of fuel and pasturage.

Of course production was a slow affair when a man often combined many branches of trade, and was farmer as well as manufacturer. And such methods had many drawbacks as regards economy of effort. For instance, the collection of material was a difficulty when roads were so very bad. Arthur Young talks in his travels of

[1] 1750

"that infernal road between Preston and Wigan where the ruts were four feet deep and he saw three carts broken down in the course of a mile." Sometimes a weaver might have to walk three or four miles over such roads in one morning before he could get enough yarn for his day's work. When the extension of English trade with her colonies increased the demand for her goods, and every minute of a worker's time became increasingly valuable to him, these inconveniences grew to be much felt.

To meet the difficulty many larger traders began to make it their business to give out materials; such things as linen warp, raw cotton, yarn, etc., and by degrees these "*putters out*," as they were called, began to collect round them a little group of workers, who became in a sort dependent on them. This was the earliest form of the factory system.

But the great revolution in industry did not occur until the era of mechanical invention and steam power set in, during the last half of the 18th century.

The result of these inventions was a change in the way of producing manufactured articles which had just the same sort of effect on the lives of the producers of such goods as the change in the farming system on the agricultural population. It became necessary that the workers should be massed together in big mills and factories to use elaborate machinery driven by water power or steam. This machinery, these large factories, like the large farms cultivated on scientific principles, could only be started and kept going by men who had some capital, and like those farms, they turned out an enormously increased amount of produce at a reduced expenditure of labour; produce not intended to supply the needs of the workers, but to be sold at a profit to the capitalist. This competition ruined the small manufacturers, just as the large farms had ruined the small farmers. Thus the industrial workers, like the agricultural, gradually sank from being their own employers, their own masters, into a helpless proletariat with no property but their labour-force; and gradually they, too drifted away from the country into the towns, which sprung up like mushrooms round the mills and mines and factories. They exchanged, perforce, their pleasant cottages on the common for dismal dens, where they were crowded together in squalid misery, their existence one dreary round of hopeless, endless toil,[1] white slaves of masters whose one aim was to wring the largest profit for themselves from the labour of their human machines, the supplements of those of wood and iron.

Some of these masters haul been "putters out" in the old state of things, some merchants or factors, usurers or the sons of such, some manufacturers or small landowners who had been lucky or thrifty. But whatever they had been, the temptations put in their way by the new inventions and distress caused amongst the people by the agricultural revolution, were too great for their social feeling. The close of the last century saw an outburst of selfish brutality amongst those who had succeeded in scraping together by fair means or foul a little capital, which capped that of the landgrabbers, and equalled in the horrors it produced the great war then devastating Europe.

We have seen that at the beginning of our century the majority of English men and women found themselves excluded by law from the free use of the soil of their native land, and of the machinery which the new developments of industry were rendering as much a necessity of productive labour as raw material or land itself.

And this war itself became its ally. It stopped for the time being the progress of industry upon the Continent and made England the *workshop of the world*. A great workshop, in which the despoiled propertyless masses of the people, bound hand and foot in the chain of their necessities, were handed over to the wealthy minority, to struggle with one another for the employment that means bread, whilst their struggle with one another for the profit, that means luxury and power.

III The Revolt

We have cast a brief glance at the way in which the English people have been robbed. Though we have only touched in barest outline upon the economic history of the last century, that bare outline is enough to show how deeply the masses have suffered from the narrow, self-interested greed of those individuals who have succeeded in establishing a right to private property in of means of production. We have seen that at the beginning of our century the majority of English men and women found themselves excluded by law from the free use of the soil of their native land, and of the machinery which the new developments of industry were rendering as much a necessity of productive labour as raw material or land itself. With a sense of blind rage

[1] According to the report of the first factory commission women worked 18 hours a day, and little children were beaten with straps if they flagged during a working day of from 12 to 16 hours.

and despair they found themselves helpless in the hands of landlords and capitalists, forbidden to resist their claims to monopolise the necessities for working, not only by the terrors of the law but by the teachings of religion and morality. Priests and teachers assured them that resistance, protest even, was not only dangerous, but wicked. God had ordained that some should be rich and others poor. The duty of the poor was to submit, to be content to toil to the utmost of their ability and gratefully to accept whatever pay might be offered them from the piles of wealth they created for their masters.

Thus caught in the net of property and law; thus robbed, ground down, exploited, to whom could the people turn in their misery? where look for relief?

It is a proof of the extent to which the minds as well as the bodies of the poor have enslaved by the ruling classes, that large numbers of workers have been so effectually confused, terrorised or deluded by this talk of the sacredness of law and order and the morality of submission and self-sacrifice, that they have seen no prospect of relief but in attempts to act constitutionally and obtain the protection of a government which obviously exists just for the purpose of preserving the "rights" of the men in possession. They have seen no hope but in forlorn appeals to the robber class for a little less cruelty in the process of fleecing; a tiny portion more of food and raiment. And this slavish temper has been encouraged and maintained by the fact that there have always been well-meaning, good-natured robbers. The majority of them have not realised what wrong they were doing or how they were doing it. Some of them have been sincerely grieved and outraged by the sight of the suffering inflicted; a few, and that few increasing in numbers as the years of wrong and misery rolled by, have even attempted in their own fashion to set things right. These humane individuals have tried to soften the hardships of the workers by government interference and aid, and encouraged the people to demand it. And to a certain extent they have succeeded. Whenever the ruling class of property owners have felt either that the violent cruelties and restraints of existing law were needless to accomplish their purpose of holding the people in subjection. or that it was necessary to make some concession to bribe the workers into quietness, then the influence of the more social individuals amongst them has found an opportunity of making itself felt and, amidst a great flourish of trumpets, some miserable farthings of the great debt of justice have been handed over to the poor.

For example, the hanging and branding and flogging of the unemployed was given up as the numbers of landless and propertyless men and women increased to such an extent as to keep down wages by competition. Again. some of the worst horrors of the criminal code have been toned down; people are not now murdered in cold blood for taking unlawful possession of a sixpence or a sheep; such barbarities defeated their own end, for the social feeling of jurors forbid them to convict and the poor lawbreaker often escaped scot free. Then the restraints of the old landlord poor law have been removed. A man is not tied in the same fashion to his own parish: that was an arrangement inconvenient to capitalists on the look out for cheap labour; so a brand new capitalist poor law was invented by the middle class friends of the people, an experiment in teaching the human beasts of burden how best to exist on one straw a day; it was the first social measure and crowning glory of the first reformed Parliament after 1832. In like manner the laws against combination were modified when it was found that they were useless to prevent the workers from combining and that Trades Unionism was not so very dangerous to property after all; an aristocracy of labour making common cause with the Haves against the Have-nots might be the best of protection against the Red Spectre, in spite of a little cantankerousness about wages now and again. As for the positive measures, such as Factory Acts, they have generally been obtained from the timely spirit of concession in the landlord class, anxious to preserve itself against the temporary alliances of middle-class Radicalism with the workers. Thus Lord Ashley carried the Factory Act of 1833 on the backwash of the terror that had forced through the Reform Bill of the year before, and a Conservative majority carried that 1847 in the midst of the Chartist agitation and in the teeth of the Radical manufacturers.[1]

So it has gone on; a sop of justice here, a shaving of humanity there, has been all that the life-long passionate devotion a few lovers of their kind, the general good nature of a great many well-meaning indifferentists, and the pressure of the terrible needs and wrongs of the masses have been able to obtain trout the fears and the humanitarianism of governments. What little freedom, what space to breathe and to live, what hope of future deliverance, exists for the workers, has been kept or won by their own direct action and endeavour.

All through this period of shame and wrong the brave spirit of revolt never died amongst the people. We have spoken of rick-burning and riots amongst the evicted peasants. Even the unhappy paupers under the old poor law had some spirit left. They are constantly complained of as insolent and insubordinate by their masters, and Toynbee tells us of a man who was employed in Bamfette to look after the paupers, but they threatened to drown him and he withdrew.

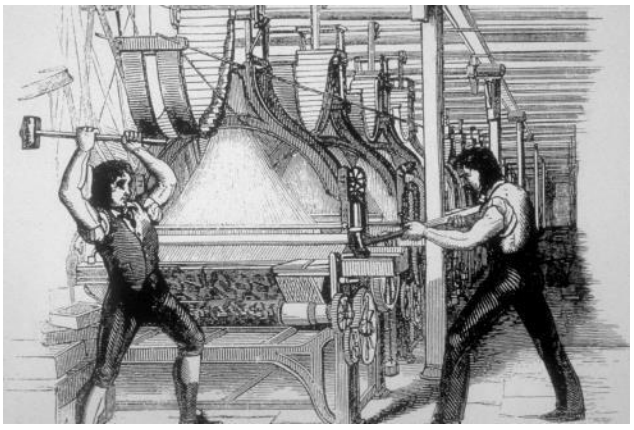
Then again in spite of the Law which treated all combination amongst the workers as a criminal conspiracy to be put down if necessary by armed force, and punished by imprisonment, the workmen of the towns determinately organised themselves in trade

[1] Toynbee's "Industrial Revolution."

unions and took what advantage they could of every embarrassment of the common enemy, the employer, to exact from him a little more of the wealth they produced than he cared to dole out to them.

But the manly and social spirit of independence amongst the masses took a more decided shape than the passive resistance of trades unionism. In the early part of this century it broke into open flame in the so-called Luddite riots.

Lud was a Leicestershire village innocent who, once upon a time, broke two stocking frames in a rage, because a naughty little boy, who had been teasing him, was hidden behind them. The machine breakers of a generation later took his name and followed his policy. They did not know how to prevent the oppression of the human beings who tyrannised over them and ruined their lives, and so they revenged themselves on the unconscious implements by means of which the wrong was accomplished.



Luddite riots first broke out in Nov. 1811, in Nottingham. One Sunday evening the streets were crowded with hosiers. angrily discussing their wrongs. New stocking frames had been introduced by the masters and on Saturday numbers of hands had been turned off with no work for next week and no prospect of getting any. After a hot debate in the street it was finally decided to destroy the new frames which had turned them out of their places. Monday evening they marched to the premises of a manufacturer at Bidwell and asked that the frames should given up to them or else destroyed. The manufacturer, barricaded in his house, refused. There was firing on both sides and as weaver amongst the assailants was shot dead. Then the workers became furious. They burst into the house and wrecked it, whilst the master and his family fled by the back door. The next day the insurgents broke more frames and attacked a corn mill, vowing vengeance against all millers and corn-dealers who held back the food of the people to raise the price in those times of scarcity.

In a few days the revolt hail spread into Derbyshire and Leicestershire. The blackened faces or masks of little parties of Luddites appeared suddenly in the gloaming at the door of factory, or loom-shed, or mill. Quietly and swiftly they entered, wrecked the obnoxious machinery and were gone before the astonished and alarmed owner could take any measures for resistance. If he fired on them he discovered that they were armed and frequently he was shot. If police or soldiers were on the scene, the Luddites showed fight and resisted to the death. Otherwise they injured no man who did not interfere with them, nor did they touch any property other than arms or the machinery they came to destroy. Their measures were so well taken and the sympathy of the people was so thoroughly with the movement, that a Luddite was rarely captured. If he were, his doom was that of the Russian revolutionist: transportation or death. But according to the report of the parliamentary committee on the riots, no instance occurred of the betrayal of a comrade or of any of the secrets of the organisation. The workers seem to have co-operated with the most perfect unanimity and mutual trust. And even in this report. drawn up by the bitter enemies of the people, there is no accusation of wanton cruelty against the Luddites. It is even *expressly noted* that they never injured any property but that of the manufacturers who had introduced the labour saving machinery and the corn middle men who notoriously traded on the needs of the people. But their humanity and their desire to injure no one who had not wronged them, did them no service when they fell into the hands of the ruling class. Five Luddites were hanged at Chester in May 1812, and eight sentenced to transportation. At Manchester eight were hanged in June of the same year and seventeen more at York in the next November. But in spite of these ferocious sentences passed by a special commission on those arrested, and in spite of the presence of police and troops in the disturbed districts, the people refused to submit. And though the better harvest of 1813 temporarily relieved the general distress, and the active expression of discontent subsided, it was only to revive again with redoubled energy in 1816.

By this tune the propertied classes were thoroughly frightened. The most stringent laws were passed against every sort of freedom of speech, of writing, of public meeting. The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended, all gatherings, public or private. forbidden unless convened with the approval of the authorities. and Lord Sidmouth sent round a circular commanding Justices of the Peace to put a stop to all “blasphemous and seditious libels,” i.e., all pamphlets, papers and books which ventured to state that all was not for the best in the best of all possible worlds: this they were to do by issuing warrants against the publishers and throwing newsagents and booksellers into prison, by means of a judicious reading of the Hawkers and Pedlars Acts. All this in the “free and constitutional England” of seventy years ago.

On the other hand there were public meetings (*with* the approval of the government) to discuss what was to be done for the working classes spasmodic attempts to find

employment for the unemployed that somehow remind one of what happened in London after the smashing of a few windows at the West End one February, not a hundred years since. Some fine ladies are said to have suggested that the economic problem should solved by the return to hand corn-mills, the shelling of peas and beans in the open fields! All agreed that the great point was so to arrange matters as to cause the world to progress backward and ignore the fact that the conditions of human life were changed, and that in the process of changing, the majority, the workers, had been cruelly wronged by the minority who had possessed themselves of property in land and capital. In truth that minority were beginning to feel their ill-gotten monopoly extremely insecure. If the masses learn to see clearly the cause of their suffering and seriously determine to destroy it, the rule of the propertied classes was over.

A great deal of nonsense has been talked by middle-class economists and their disciples about the Luddite revolt against machinery. No doubt the destruction of labour-saving machines is in itself an unwise proceeding; but in this case it was probably the only protest in the power of the English workers against the sacrifice of men's lives to the mechanism that created wealth only for a class; a protest which would never have been necessary if the individuals who had gained this newly invented power over nature bad been content to use it for the general good instead of merely to enrich themselves by exploiting the labour of the poor. The conduct of these individuals was a moral wrong to the whole community, a wrong which has resulted in the misery and degradation we see around us to-day. All honour to the machine-breakers that they felt and resented it. If they could have seized upon the machinery and used it for the public benefit, that would, of course, have been the wisest; but men only learn wisdom by the sharp lessons of experience, and even if the idea of Socialism had entered their minds they would have been powerless at that time to put it in practice.

It is not the blindness of the Luddite, revolt that has rendered middle-class opinion so bitter against it; but the fact that like all genuine popular movements it hit the nail on the head. It was an economic rebellion and one that went straight to the root of the privileges of the property-holders and, as such, it was terrible and hateful to the ruling-classes. If the people had been left at the beginning of this century to fight their own battle, probably they would have learned for themselves that something better might be done with machines than breaking them and we should now be nearer to social equality and justice than we are to-day.

Unfortunately besides the workers there was another section of the population with a grievance in the England of the early nineteenth century, namely the owners of the machinery, the newly enriched middle-class.' These "upstart tradesmen," as the older aristocracy called them, aspired to a direct share in the government, which they only swayed by indirect influence. Especially they craved it when, after the Peace of 1815, they began to discover that free trade was for their interest and not for that of the landed gentry. There was nothing for it but to swallow their pride, make common cause with the people, and use their misery and despair as a lever to force the ruling oligarchy to allow a reform of parliament which would make that assembly a body really representative of the ruling interests of the country.

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This the more energetic spirits of the middle claw not only understood to be desirable, but actually succeeded in doing. They caught the economic revolt of the workers at the rebound and persuaded them to drop machine breaking and demand the franchise. In other words, to cease fighting for their own rights and become the cat's-paw of their masters.

Fine earnest fellows some of those early Radical Reformers were in their way; men honestly persuaded that representative government was the best means of Securing freedom, peace and good will among classes divided by conflicting economic interests. For they were not able to imagine a society without classes, without rich and poor, masters and wage-slaves, where no government would be required to hold the balance between warring class interests. Accordingly Orator Hunt, W. Cobbett, Major Cartwright, Sir Francis Burdett, and their like, spared no pains to persuade the workers that bread and independence would be restored to them by a reformed parliament and that the one rational method of relieving the distress into which the great agricultural and industrial changes had plunged the people was a Reform Bill. A most excusable mistake for honest men when as yet representative government had bad no fair trial; but what shall we say of those who are urging the same old political nostrums upon the discontented workers after fifty-seven years! experience of failure!

The assault of the middle-class and the workers combined upon the power of the ruling class was, of course, met by the most determined opposition. For fifteen years England was honeycombed with clubs and societies secret and open, Hampden clubs, Reform clubs, Spencean clubs[1]; there were meetings, demonstrations, riots, dispersed with violence and bloodshed at Peterloo and elsewhere, talk of a universal uprising and considerable secret preparation for it. and then at last the landowners gave in, and admitted the capitalist class to a direct share in the government. Parliament was reformed in 1832, the middle classes were triumphant, but what of the economic deliverance of the workers that was to have followed I The chestnuts were pulled out of the fire; who was to eat them? Were they to be a meal for the starving or a dessert for those who bad already dined?

There is no need to dwell on the result. The workers got the Poor Law and a Factory Act or so; the capital-monopolisers added power to their wealth and henceforth ruled society.

Yet after the first bitterness of disappointment was passed, the workers returned to the false hope that had been so persistently dinned into their ears by the middle-class when they needed their assistance; perhaps they saw no other. Still clinging to the hope of bettering their economic condition through political action, they returned to the demand for the extension of the franchise; but this time under the guidance of men like Ernest Jones, Bronterre O'Brien, and the like; men who by no means lost sight of the economic question, as the earlier Radical leaders had done, but who wrote and spoke openly against land monopoly and usury. With the political reforms of the Charter, the revolted workers took courage to avow such principles as the Workmen's Association had printed upon its card of membership: "The man who evades his share of useful labour diminishes the public wealth and throws his burden upon his neighbours."

In fact, the workers left to themselves were struggling back to the right road, the revolt against the monopoly of property and the exploitation of labour by the property-holders. Once more the revolt was becoming economic, and once more the middle-class "friends of the people" took bold of the rising agitation and turned it from a danger threatening the capitalist class into a convenient engine for their own purposes. The radical manufacturers wished to extort free trade from their ancient foes the landed aristocracy, whom they had beaten but not crushed in 1832. The Chartist agitation was a convenient weapon. The more intelligent radicals handled it with skill. They encouraged the political side of the movement. Help us, they said, to extend the suffrage, to reform parliament, and we will give you bread; but be always constitutional; above all things no direct action, no "physical force," no outrage upon law and order. The old refrain that has rung in the ears of the workers so many times during this century that it is not surprising they grow a little tired of it now. But in 1845-48 they were still charmed by it. The middle class politicians who mingled in the Chartist movement persuaded a large section of the workers to disown the "physical force" or revolutionary party, to wait, to push the Charter first and foremost, to leave, the economic question to be settled after; they coquetted with parliamentary action and gained thereby what they wanted-time to dish Chartism, with Free Trade.

So ended the Second act of the Revolt of the English Workers in the Nineteenth Century, in the triumph of middle-class radicalism and the shelving of the economic wrongs of the people. Temporarily better times succeeded the stimulus to production and commerce and the cheaper food supplies, and for many years revolutionary agitation in England sunk beneath the surface, only re-appearing very occasionally in a Hyde Park riot, a monster political demonstration or a hard-fought strike. The profound continental movement which found expression in the International Working Men's Association and reached its climax in the insurrection of the Commune in 1871, only produced faint echoes in this island. For forty years English discontent has been almost inarticulate and yet it has never ceased to exist, the sense of wrong has never died out of the hearts of the people. The third act of the drama of Revolt during this century has yet to be played; to-day it is already upon the stage.

A late Royal Commission upon the State of Trade warned the workers of England in so many words that they have now reaped the full benefits which the capitalist system of production has to offer to it. wage-slaves. Any further demands on their part would wreck England in the competitive struggle. And yet misery is rather on the increase than the decline and the masses of our countrymen live the lives of beasts. Again we are awakening to the fact that we are confronted by an unsolved economic problem, one which no juggling Political tricks cam do more than evade. Again the smouldering spirit of revolt is appearing among the people; and this time it is taking a more definite and rational form. It in reappearing as conscious Socialism.

Socialism, the common ownership of land, of the means of production, by the workers, is no new thing in the world, not even in our particular corner of it. On the contrary such common ownership is historically the

[1] Followers of Thomas Spence (1750-1814), an English working class Radical and advocate of the common ownership of land and a democratic equality of the sexes. Spence was one of the leading revolutionaries of the late 18th and early 19th centuries: see Brian Morris, "The Agrarian Socialism of Thomas Spence" in *Ecology and Anarchism: Essays and Reviews on Contemporary Thought* (Malvern Wells: Images Publishing Ltd, 1996). (*Black Flag*)

oldest form of the holding of wealth; an arrangement which has been in these days driven out of sight, underground as it were, by the triumph of the appropriators of private property, a form of ownership which is reappearing in theory, as it is certain to reappear sooner or later in practice; for it is the only system under which every worker can be a free man, with our highly developed and complex ways of working. A worker to be free, in say true sense, must be a man able to develop all his powers and to joy in his work and throw his best energy into it, feeling that he is giving his utmost for the common benefit, and will be able to take from the wealth of society what he requires to supply his needs in return. Personal, individual freedom is, as J. S. Mill says, the most passionate and intense of permanent human needs next to bread. A man cannot thus be free unless he is his own master: unless he is able to arrange his work as he likes with his fellow-workmen, having an equal right with them to make use of such land and tools and machines and workshops as he requires. But as long as these necessary things are appropriated by some private individuals, no one can he free. All those who have no property must work as the property owners like, suffer for their mistakes and be thrown out of employment if the property-owner cannot make a profit out of their labour. Therefore the workers all over the civilized world we steadily making their way toward Socialism and preparing to revolt against the oppression of private property which denies them the justice of freedom.

the workers all over the civilized world we steadily making their way toward Socialism and preparing to revolt against the oppression of private property which denies them the justice of freedom.

The spirit of revolt rises, the agitation becomes more and more general, and here in its midst we find, as before, the politicians. Again they are appealing to the workers with their ancient nostrums. A. little more voting, they cry, a little more reform of parliamentary institutions, and the time will come for the judicious consideration of the economic question; step by step we, the true friends of the people, will gain you all you want; only put your trust in us and do not frighten the electors by even talking about a revolution; support us at the polling-booths, demonstrate to our order in Hyde Park and you shall have Socialism as the lower middle-class understand it. Nationalisation of land, to wit, and perhaps (for we are real Socialists, no mere followers of George[1]) of a few big monopolies too and plenty of nice snug places for every one in managing these new state departments: almost as delightful as in France, where they say that one man in every seven electors is some sort of a functionary exercising authority.

Are we going to be fooled a third time in one hundred years? Not if we learn in time to keep our eyes open and think for ourselves.

What Anarchist Communism Means

[Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, August 1889

Anarchist-communism means, first of all, absolute freedom for every human being of either sex, freedom not only of thought, of speech, of publication, of public meeting, but freedom in choice of work and in choice of friends and associated in every walk of life. Here is one distinction between us and the Social Democrats who want to have a Central Body, or a number of Central Bodies, organising and directing the labour of the community.

To that view of theirs we oppose the great modern principles of decentralisation and federation; that is, the abolition of all government, central well as municipal, of the army, police, law courts, parliaments, big and little, taxes, and all other such humbug.

We wish men to associate freely for the purpose of work and production and of satisfying their needs. Face associations of workmen in each locality will be quite able to agree amongst themselves as to their interests.

Each man ought to be regarded as the equal of all his fellows; each ought to have the right to withdraw from any association and seek other opportunities to combine with other men. Each association, or federation ought likewise to

[1] A reference to Henry George (1839-1897), an American social reformer who was immensely popular in the 19th century. He argued that the economic value of land (including natural resources) should belong equally to all members of society and advocated a single tax on land values which would, he argued, create a more productive and just society. While advocating the nationalisation and municipalisation of land and utilities which were natural monopolies, he did not oppose wage-labour nor argue that industry be treated in the same manner. (*Black Flag*)

be considered as the equal of the others and to he enabled to act freely by commanding the use of the means of labour. No laws, no officials, no functionaries, no red tape, no despotism, in short. however disguised; no parliamentarianism, no men chattering and hair-splitting whilst their fellows work and pay expenses.

The fundamental principle of the new society, for which we look, is the freedom of the individual, the economic freedom of the man working for himself, not for the enrichment of a master. Hence we look for the abolition, and the moral impossibility in the future, of the wage-system or any modification of it.

Men rise to your true dignity! Conquer the means of labour. Refuse to work for the sole benefit of certain others and to let others work for your sole benefit. So shall you not only win a momentary equality, but, what is infinitely more important, remain permanently equal. No one will govern you, bemuse no one will hold over you the terrible power of wealth, no one of you will submit to such power. All will he engaged, in different directions, in work equally useful and productive.

Individual independence, political independent, economical independent, that is freedom, when it is the independence of truly social human beings, each of whom recognises that freedom for one implies the love and reverence of all for each and each for all.

Workmen rally to us or rather, rally to yourselves and to the principles which sum up your true interests.

Democracy or Anarchism

[Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, February 1890

It is surely a somewhat arbitrary definition of the word Socialism to use it as a term of exclusion for the complete socialisation of all wealth, viz., Communism, and to confine it to the partial socialisation of wealth aimed at by certain Socialists who would limit their endeavours to the socialisation of land and certain of the agents of production. This sort of Socialism is obviously a compromise between the idea of the absolute individual right to monopolise wealth, i.e., to prevent others from using what one calls one's own, whether one is using it or not, and the idea of the common and equal claim of all to the use of the collective wealth of the whole society.

We are living exactly at the moment when the conflict between these two ideas of right and justice in economics is beginning to wax hot and strong and is rapidly becoming general throughout civilised society, and the sort of Socialism referred to is the natural creed of all peaceable folks, who convinced of the injustice and woeful consequences of private property or individualism in economics, are prepared to introduce the new or rather the growing idea of social justice as gradually and smoothly as possible; a sort of boring of the rock that has fallen athwart the stream of human progress. Some people seem to incline to bore it with a gimlet. As the idea of land nationalisation was the thin end of the wedge which opened a way for the idea of the socialisation of capital, so the idea of the socialisation of those means of production which afford a special instrument of exploitation when monopolised, is opening a path for the socialisation of all wealth. And the word Socialism, though it covers all these approximations to common ownership, should also, and of greater right, cover that Communism which is their logical and natural result.

We do not use the word Democracy in the vague and poetic sense in which it is employed, by Walt Whitman and Edward Carpenter, for the whole progress of mankind from political, economic and social bondage towards liberty, equality and fraternity, but according to its exact political meaning — the rule or government of the many. Democracy is the natural and inevitable political form of the period of economic transition in which we are now living – for it too is a compromise – a transition phase of thought between two definite principles of human association.

There are two definite principles, on which human beings can associate for any purpose whatever, the principle of authority and the principle of free consent. Men associate on the understanding that one or some of them have a claim to over-rule the opinions or the actions or both of the others, or they associate on the understanding that they are all equals, meeting on equal terms, each one having as much claim as the rest to think and act on his own initiative, and therefore that common action must be decided upon unanimously. As far as we can judge human association began unconsciously on this latter principle. And after passing through a long phase of development, during which authority first became paramount, unconsciously, and was afterwards consciously adopted as a principle of social order, it would appear that humanity is returning to the association of free consent, but this time consciously and of deliberate intention, to escape the evils of the other system.

What we call the Saxon period in English history was one long struggle of the principle of authority in association against the principle of free consent; of the efforts of the land-grabbers to obtain ascendancy in the folk moots of the village communities and the larger moots of the various federations, and of the biggest practising land-grabber who made himself king, to secure the ascendancy of himself and his companions in arms in all the public business of the community which, it would appear, was being carried on without his interference on the basis of free association and unanimity. We have scarcely any records of the working of the old principle in the purity of its unconscious ascendancy, we see its strength only in the long struggle that was made to retain it, re-appearing again (as in the guilds and the early days of the free cities) every time that anything like economic equality was restored in any section of society. The jury is a vestige of it that has lingered in a curious distorted medium down to our own times. In less civilised communities, in the mir in Russia and the hill communities of India for example, we see it still remaining in its ancient form — in Russia curiously overlaid by one of the foulest examples of the rival principle that history has furnished.

There are two definite principles, on which human beings can associate for any purpose whatever, the principle of authority and the principle of free consent. Men associate on the understanding that one or some of them have a claim to over-rule the opinions or the actions or both of the others, or they associate on the understanding that they are all equals

Of the dolorous history of that rival principle of authority we need no examples. We all know how the wretched fate of humanity has led us through the rule of a number of small tyrants, distinguished by strong muscles, to the rule of one big tyrant distinguished by superior cunning, and then again to the rule of a. minority distinguished by superior capacities for land-grabbing and wealth-appropriating in general till it has landed us in the rule of the large minority of property holders over the propertyless masses. Each of these forms of over-rule has fought desperately both in the spiritual and the material sense with the form preceding it: first for bare survival and then for supremacy, and each has prolonged its existence far into the over-lordship of its successor. At the present moment the recently victorious plutocracy is engaged in a conflict for dear life with that strange, shapeless monster, called vaguely democracy, which from being the obedient support and catspaw of the rule of the rich, has lately threatened to transform its accustomed gullible stupidity into an unknown aspect of threatening defiance.

Democracy is the political theory that assumes that all members of a community meet as equals on equal terms, but that nevertheless the majority have an absolute right to over-rule the minority. And it is worth while to look closely into the real significance of this curious non sequitur, which starting with the formula of free association ends with the formula of authority.

Where does the majority get its absolute right from? Right is a dubious word that one gets in the way of using without explanation; but I suppose that we mean by it in a general way, a claim put forward by members of a society and allowed by the rest, either because they feel it to be just or because they are afraid or unwilling to contest it — a socially recognised claim in fact. It is often said that men have no rights as against one another individually and collectively but such as they are able to maintain by superior force. And I think that though this barbarous and inhuman theory is perfectly untrue of many social rights, it is the universal explanation of the acceptance of a claim to rule. But can majority rule claim its right on these grounds?

Is it not a plain and obvious truth that supremacy in brute force by no means rests with the majority. History and daily life show us examples thick as blackberries of an energetic and resolute minority utterly defeating the majority in the most desperate trials of actual physical strength, ever since the days when a handful of Greeks defeated the mighty hosts of Persia on the plain of Marathon and Horatius and his two comrades held the Tiber bridge against the army of Lars Porsena. Providence fights on the side of the strongest battalion, but not by any means on those of the largest. And this is even more obviously true when the contest is transferred to the intellectual field.

No; the history of authority has consisted of a series of minority rules, each one of which has existed in virtue of the superior possession of the real strength of vital energy in one form or another. And where is the evidence that the dominating force is about to become or is becoming the portion of the majority? The majority today retains the relation it has always retained to the energetic minority of the population. It represents the dead blight of a blind adherence to habit and

custom, of insensibility, dullness and apathy, of lazy inclination to avoid all responsibility, all reform; all enlightenment, in fact all departure from the beaten track, all need for unwonted exertion even in thought. If it is to exercise authority it will exercise it only by the dead weight of inertia, the blind force of unreasoning and irresponsible stupidity — in the sense, in fact, in which it exercises it now and always has exercised it.

No doubt "the public collectively", as Mill says, "is abundantly ready to impose not only its generally narrow views of its own interests, but its abstract opinion and even its tastes upon individuals".[1] And if it has machinery at command for doing this without trouble it will oppress without mercy. Do you think that the majority of American citizens were any more unwilling that the Chicago men[2] or John Brown[3] should be hanged than the majority of Jews that Christ should be crucified? Do you think that a plebiscite of London citizens, or the inhabitants of England would maintain the right of meeting in Trafalgar Square?[4] In the name of human progress and the spontaneous individual initiative on which it depends, we may thank our stars that the majority as yet show no sign of acquiring that right to rule founded on superior force. But if the theory of democracy or the rule of the majority cannot be based on the appeal to force which has been the basis of all other over-ruling, what, then is its basis? Shall we say expediency? It is a first approximation — a blundering attempt to return to the principle of free association, still hampered by the ideas of authority yet current in society. On all occasions for common action, or where a general understanding is desirable, one must have some principle of decision and the recent development of social feeling has rendered an appeal to the old species of authority as morally odious, as it is intellectually contemptible. It is a matter of common experience that men, like sheep and all other gregarious and social animals, have a pretty general tendency to go in masses and act together unless they are prevented by some abnormal division of interests. Each one of us is inclined by our social feeling to like in a general way to do what the rest like. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred where a number of people are met together to decide upon some common course of conduct, they will all in the end come to some definite decision in favour of one thing; because those who were at one time inclined to dissent, prefer in the end to act with the majority, if the matter is of practical importance; not because they are forced to do so by the majority over-ruling, but because the largest body of opinion has so much weight with them that they choose not to act contrary to it.

The so-called advent of democracy means not that authority is transferred from the minority to the majority, but that authority is dying, and the masses and each individual man and woman of them, are preparing to throw off the yoke of property and authority together and assume the attitude of equality – politically as well as economically.

We all admit this general fact. It would be quite impossible to take any common action at all if it were not so. But the special theory of democracy is that the general tendency of humanity which becomes so apparent whenever men associate on anything like terms of economic equality, should be made by men into an arbitrary law of human conduct to be enforced not only in the ninety-nine cases where nature enforces it, but by the arbitrary methods of coercion in the hundredth where she doesn't. And for the sake of the hundredth case, for the sake of enforcing this general natural tendency where nature does not enforce it, democrats would have us retain in our political relation that fatal principle of the authority of man over man which has been the cause of confusion and disorder, of wrong and misery in human societies since the dawn of history.

"Men are not social enough to do without it," it has been said. For our part we do not know when they will be social enough to do with it. Experience has not yet revealed the man who could be safely trusted with

[1] John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy, with some of their applications to social philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1878), 570. (*Black Flag*)

[2] A reference to the Chicago Anarchists judicially murdered and imprisoned in 1887 for a bomb explosion during the 8-hour day strikes of May 1886 – see "Anarchy in the USA: The International Working People's Association", *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 3 No. 2 (Summer 2023). (*Black Flag*)

[3] John Brown (1800-1859) was a prominent leader in the American abolitionist movement in the decades preceding the Civil War. He was captured, tried, and executed by the Commonwealth of Virginia for a raid and incitement of a slave rebellion at Harpers Ferry. (*Black Flag*)

[4] Presumably a reference to Bloody Sunday when, on 13 November 1887, a crowd of 30,000 marchers protested about unemployment and the Irish Coercion Acts. Public meetings had been banned from Trafalgar Square a few days earlier and when the demonstrators, organised in marches from all over London, converged on the Square, they were confronted by mounted and foot police. The Riot Act was read and mounted armed troopers called in. Two demonstrators died of their injuries and 160 served prison sentences. (*Black Flag*)

power over his fellows; and majority rule is nothing else in practice than putting into the hands of ambitious individuals the opportunity to crush their fellows by the dead weight of the blind mass of which we have spoken. If the principle of authority in human association survives the destruction of the plutocracy, the next ruling minority will probably be the wits and apostles of reason-worship. But we do not think they will have a long innings, even if they ever take their turn in the field at all. The real strength of democracy, its real terror for the ruling-classes of to-day, its real hold over the minds of the people lies in the fact that after all it is but the somewhat uncouth and misleading mask beneath which the principle of free and equal association is advancing to victory. The so-called advent of democracy means not that authority is transferred from the minority to the majority, but that authority is dying, and the masses and each individual man and woman of them, are preparing to throw off the yoke of property and authority together and assume the attitude of equality – politically as well as economically.

Fifty years ago it would have been a scandal to deny the authority of the husband over the wife… and yet now… anyone in the more enlightened society of our time who disputed the perfect equality of the man and woman… would be looked on as a barbarian.

It is a commonplace to say that every man who chooses has thrown off the yoke of authority, even of majority rule in matters of opinion; and generally speaking it is true, in spite of the occasional bursts of atavism in the form of some petty persecution. It is needless to dwell on the growing disrespect for the existing forms of authority in every relation of life. Let us only instance the change of spirit which has come over one sort of association — the smallest possible — that of marriage. Fifty years ago it would have been a scandal to deny the authority of the husband over the wife. Association would be impossible on any other terms than the authority of one of the partners, said the superior wisdom of the nation; and yet now, despite the prayer-book and the lawyers, anyone in the more enlightened society of our time who disputed the perfect equality of the man and woman as regards a right to decide on their common interests and action, would be looked on as a barbarian. It is only one instance of a change of attitude which permeates the whole public opinion of our time.

Briefly, then, let us note what line the political organisation is likely to take in a state of society where the principle of authority in all forms of association — in action as well as in opinion — is no longer recognised as moral or just. First, it will be decentralised. Except in moments of extraordinary popular excitement, when a whole people may be said spontaneously to act as one man, we cannot have a centralised administration of public affairs by unanimity. That ancient tendency to the local management of affairs which has been mixed up with the principle of free association all through our history and is now declaring itself in the present attitude of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, in the demands for a local government bill, local government for London, etc., will take much wider scope. Each town, village, locality, each trade and craft and art knows its own needs and affairs best, and each such group like each individual man can serve humanity in general best by themselves setting about what they see wants doing in their locality — instead of either sending someone else to do it elsewhere, or waiting for orders or permission from any central authority before beginning to act. Each commune, each association, will settle their own general affairs amongst themselves, every sane, grown-up person in the society having an equal voice in deciding what is to be done. This sort of decision by unanimity does not take so long or require so much patience after all when people know that they must reach such a decision on pain of losing some advantage and that they have no means of coercion to force their individual will or wills on their fellows.

But public business includes not only local affairs but matters of general concern to all the communes of. a nation, not to speak of international federation of nations. How shall we manage them?

How are they managed now?

Each commune concerned will, we think, meet and discuss the affair in question and then send one or two of their number to meet like delegates from the other localities concerned. The congress will discuss the particular business in hand and after arriving at some general decision, the delegates who have each represented the ideas of their own locality, will return to their own communes, not with laws in their pockets to be enforced with soldiers and machine guns, or even "moral miracles in blue", but with proposals for some line of common action, as scientists or commercial men return from a congress now. Proposals which are not acceptable to the commune will not be acted on, but further discussed until some common understanding can be arrived at. The delay will be less costly in human effort and human suffering than any system of coercion.

Anarchism and Homicidal Outrage

The Freedom Group [Charlotte M. Wilson]

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism, December 1893

"The propagandists of Anarchist doctrines will be treated with the same severity as the actual perpetrators of outrage."—Telegram from Barcelona, *Times*, Nov. 10. [1893]

Is the above-quoted decision of the Spanish Government a measure for the protection of human life, justified by the peculiar doctrines of Anarchism, or is it merely one of those senseless and cruel persecutions of new ideas distasteful to the class in power that may be expected in the ancient home of the Inquisition?

This question must have struck many thoughtful men and women in England, who have heard for the first time of Anarchism as existing in their midst though the recent vituperations of the capitalist press, and certain Conservative members of the House of Commons. And, we, the publishing group of the oldest and most widely circulated Communist Anarchist paper in England, wish to meet this question fairly and frankly, and in reply to plainly state our own convictions on the subject.

Human beings have sometimes held beliefs of which murder was the logical and necessary outcome, as, for instance, the Thugs in India, who looked upon the murder of travellers as a religious obligation: is Anarchism such a belief? If it is, then the Spanish people are certainly justified in clearing their country of Anarchists; even though the perpetration of the Barcelona outrage be never directly traced to them; and the English people will be justified in regarding their Anarchist countrymen as enemies, dangerous in proportion as they are energetic and sincere.

We propose to enquire, firstly, if homicidal outrage is the logical outcome of Anarchist principles; secondly, if such outrage is a necessary method in the practical attempt to introduce Anarchism as a principle of conduct, a transforming agency, into existing society; thirdly, we propose to give our view of homicidal outrage as an actual social phenomenon, the existence of which, whatever be its cause, cannot be disputed.

I — Is homicidal outrage the logical outcome of Anarchist[1] convictions

The Communist Anarchist looks upon human societies as, essentially, natural groups of individuals, who have grown into association for the sake of mutually aiding one another in self-protection and self-development Artificially formed Empires, constructed and held together by force, he regards as miserable shams. The societies he recognises are those naturally bound together by real sympathies and common ideas and aims. And in his eyes, the true purpose of every such natural society, whether it be a nation or a federation of nations, a tribe or a village community, is to give to every member of it the largest possible opportunities in life. The object of associating is to increase the opportunities of the individual. One isolated human being is helpless, a hopeless slave to external nature; whereas the limits of what is possible to human beings in free and rational association are as yet unimagined.

To the Anarchist, the state of the public conscience which permits these two principles of authority and property to hold sway in our social life seems to lie at the root of our miserably desocialised condition

Now the Anarchist holds a natural human society good in proportion as it answers what he believes to be its true purpose, and bad in proportion as it departs from that purpose, and instead of enlarging the lives of the individuals composing it crushes and narrows them.

For instance, when in England a comparatively few men claim a right to exclusive possession of the soil, and thereby prevent others from enjoying or using it except upon hard and stinting terms, the Anarchist says that English Society, in so far as it recognises such an arrangement, is bad and fails of its purpose; because such an arrangement instead of enlarging the opportunities for a full human life for everybody, cruelly curtails them for all agricultural workers and many others, and moreover is forced on the sufferers

[1] When using the term Anarchism in this article we throughout mean Communist or Socialistic Anarchism, and under the term "homicidal outrage," we are, of course, not dealing with violence used in direct and immediate self-defence.

against their will, and not arrived at, as all social arrangements ought to be. by mutual agreement.

Such being his view of human societies in general, the Anarchist, of course, endeavours to find out, and make clear to himself and others, the main causes why our own existing society is here and now failing so dismally, in many directions, to fulfil its true function. And he has arrived at the conclusion that these causes of failure are mainly two. First, the unhappy recognition of the authority of man over man as a morally right principle, a thing to be accepted and submitted to, instead of being resisted as essentially evil and wrong. And second, the equally unhappy recognition of the right of property, i.e., the right of individuals, who have complied with certain legal formalities, to monopolise material things, whether they are using them or need to use -them or not, and whether they have produced them or not. To the Anarchist, the state of the public conscience which permits these two principles of authority and property to hold sway in our social life seems to lie at the root of our miserably desocialised condition; and therefore he is at war with all institutions and all habits which are based on these principles or tend to keep them up. He is not the enemy of society, never of society, only of anti-social abuses.

He is not the enemy of any man or set of men, but of every system and way of acting which presses cruelly upon any human being, and takes away from him any of the chances nature may have allowed him, of opportunities equal to those of his fellow men.

Such, in general terms, is the mental attitude of the Anarchist towards Society, and beneath this attitude, at the root of these theories and beliefs lies something deeper: a sense of passionate reverence for human personality; that new-born sense—perhaps the profoundest experience which the ages have hitherto revealed to man—which is yet destined to transform human relations and the human soul; that sense which is still formless and inexpressible to most of us, even those whom it most strongly stirs, and to which Walt Whitman has given the most adequate, and yet a most inadequate and partial voice :

> "Each of us inevitable,
>
> Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the earth,
>
> Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,
>
> Each of us here as divinely as any is here."

Is this an attitude of heart and mind which must logically lead a man on to commit homicidal outrage? With such feelings, with such convictions must we not rather attach a peculiar sanctity to human life? And, in fact, the genuine Anarchist looks with sheer horror upon every destruction, every mutilation of a human being, physical or moral. He loathes wars, executions and imprisonments, the grinding down of the worker's whole nature in a dreary round of toil, the sexual and economic slavery of women, the oppression of children, the crippling and poisoning of human nature by the preventable cruelty and injustice of man to man in every shape and form. Certainly, this frame of mind and homicidal outrage cannot stand in the relation of cause and effect.

II —Though Anarchist principles do not in themselves logically lead to the commission of homicidal outrages, do they practically drive the active Anarchist into this course by closing other means of action?

It is true that his convictions close to the conscientious Anarchist one form of social action, just now unfortunately popular, i.e., parliamentary agitation.

He cannot conscientiously take part in any sort of government, or try to relieve the cruel pressure upon human lives by means of governmental reforms, because one of the worst possible evils he could do his fellow men would, in his eyes, be to strengthen their idea that the rule of man over man is a right and beneficial thing. For, of course, every well-meant attempt of the men in power to better things tends to confirm people in the belief that to have men in power is, after all, not a social evil. Whereas the aim of the Anarchist is to convince his fellow lawn that authority is no essential part of human association, but a disruptive element rather, and one to be eliminated, if we would have social union without unjust and unequal social pressure. The current political means of action and protest, therefore, are barred to the Anarchist, by the new-born conception of social relations which is the keynote of his creed. On this point he differs from all other Socialists and social reformers.

But is homicide the necessary antithesis of parliamentary agitation? Must the man who looks upon political action, as commonly understood, as useless and worse, necessarily endeavour to spread his views or improve society by outrages upon his fellow men?

The question is obviously absurd. If one particular way is barred, an infinite variety of other ways are open. The great changes in the world's history, the great advances in human development have not been either set agoing or accomplished by the authority of kings and rulers, but by the initiative of this man and that in making fresh adaptations to changing material conditions, and by the natural and voluntary association of those who saw, or even blindly felt the necessity for a new departure. And now, as always, the great social change which the most callous feel to be at our doors, is springing from the masses, the inmost depths of the nation in revolt against unendurable misery and fired with a new hope of better things. We, Anarchists, have the whole of this vast sphere for our action: —the natural and voluntary social life of our countrymen. Not a society founded on

principles of voluntary association for any useful purpose whatever, but our place is there. Not a natural human relationship, but it is our work to infuse it with a new spirit. Is not this field wide enough for the zeal of the most fiery propagandist? More particularly in England, at this moment, we find as a field for our endeavours the vast force of the organised labour movement; a force which, rightly applied, could here and now bring about the economic side of the Social Revolution. Not the parliament, not the government, but the organised workmen of England—that minority of the producers who are already organised—*could*, if they would, and if they knew how, put an end to capitalist exploitation, landlord monopoly, to the starvation of the poor, the hopelessness of the unemployed. They have, what government has not, the *power* to do this; they lack only the intelligence to grasp the situation and the resolution to act. In face of such a state of things as this, has the propagandist of Socialism, who will none of parliamentary elections, no sphere of action left but homicide? Such a question, we say again, is absurd, and we only raise and answer it here because certain Social Democrats have now and again considered it worth asking.

Anarchists… find as a field for our endeavours the vast force of the organised labour movement; a force which, rightly applied, could here and now bring about the economic side of the Social Revolution. Not the parliament, not the government, but the organised workmen…

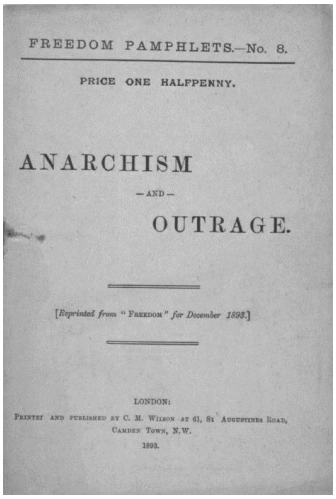
III — While homicidal outrages are neither a logical outcome of Anarchist principles nor a practical necessity of Anarchist action, they are a social phenomenon which Anarchists and all Social Revolutionists mat be prepared to face.

There is a truism that the man in the street seems always to forget, when he is abusing the Anarchists, or whatever party happens to be his *bête noir* for the moment, as the cause of some outrage just perpetrated. This indisputable fact is that homicidal outrages have, from time immemorial, been the reply of goaded and desperate classes, and goaded and desperate individuals, to wrongs from their fellow men which they felt to be intolerable. Such acts are the violent recoil from violence, whether aggressive or repressive; they are the last desperate struggle of outraged and exasperated human nature for breathing space and life. And their cause lies not in any special conviction, but in the depths of that human nature itself. The whole course of history, political and social, is strewn with evidence of this fact. To go no further, take the three most notorious examples of political parties goaded into outrage during the last thirty years: the Mazzinians in Italy, the Fenians in Ireland, and the Terrorists in Russia. Were these people Anarchists? No. Did they all three even hold the same political opinions? No. The Mazzinians were Republicans, the Fenians political separatists, the Russians Social Democrats or Constitutionalists. But all were driven by desperate circumstances into this terrible form of revolt. And when we turn from parties to individuals who have acted in like manner, we stand appalled by the number of human beings goaded and driven by sheer desperation into conduct obviously violently opposed to their social instincts.

Now that Anarchism has become a living force in society, such deeds have been sometimes committed by Anarchists, as well as by others. For no new faith, even the most essentially peaceable and humane the mind of man has as yet accepted, but at its first coming has brought upon earth not peace but a sword; not because of anything violent or antisocial in the doctrine itself; simply because of the ferment any new and creative idea excites in men's minds, whether they accept or reject it. And a conception like Anarchism, which, on the one hand, threatens every vested interest, and, on the other, holds out a vision of a free and noble life to be won by struggle against existing wrongs, is certain to rouse the fiercest opposition, and bring the whole repressive force of ancient evil into violent contact with the tumultuous outburst of a new hope.

Under miserable conditions of life, any vision of the possibility of better things makes the present misery more intolerable, and spurs -those who suffer to the most energetic struggles to improve their lot, and if these struggles only immediately result in sharper misery, the outcome is often, sheer desperation. In our present society, for instance, an exploited wage-worker, who catches a glimpse of what work and life might and ought to be, finds the toilsome routine, and the squalor of his existence almost intolerable; and even when he has the resolution and courage to continue steadily working his best, and waiting till the new ideas have so permeated society as to pave the way for better times, the mere fact that he has su ch ideas, and tries to spread them, brings him into difficulties with his employers. How many thousands of Socialists, and above all of Anarchists have lost work, and even the chance of work, solely on the ground of their opinions. It is only the specially gifted craftsman who, if he be a zealous propagandist, can hope to retain permanent employment. And what happens to a man with his

brains working actively with a ferment of new ideas, with a vision before his eyes of a new hope dawning for toiling and agonising men, with the knowledge that his suffering and that of his fellows in misery is caused not by the cruelty of Fate but by the injustice of other human beings,—what happens to such a man when he sees those dear to him starving, when he himself is starved? Some natures in such a plight, and those by no means the least social or the least sensitive, will become violent, and will even feel that their violence is social and not anti-social, that in striking when and how they can, they are striking not for themselves but for human nature, outraged and despoiled in their persons and in those of their fellow sufferers. And are we, who ourselves are not in this horrible predicament, to stand by and coldly condemn these piteous victim s of the Furies and the Fates? Are we to decry as miscreants these human beings, who act often with heroic self-devotion, sacrificing their lives in protest where less social and energetic natures would lie down and grovel in abject submission to injustice and wrong? Are we to join the ignorant and brutal outcry which stigmatises such men as monsters of wickedness, gratuitously running amuck in a harmonious and innocently peaceful society? No! We hate murder with a hatred that may seem absurdly exaggerated to apologists for Matabele massacres, to callous acquiesers in hangings and bombardments, but we decline, in such cases of homicide or attempted homicide as those of which we are treating, to be guilty of the cruel injustice of flinging the whole responsibility of the deed upon the immediate perpetrator. The guilt of these homicides lies upon every man and woman who, intentionally or by cold indifference, helps to keep up social conditions that drive human beings to despair. The man who flings his whole soul into the attempt, at the cost of his own life, to protest against the wrongs of his fellow men, is a saint compared to the active and passive upholders of cruelty and injustice, even if his protest destroy other lives besides his own. Let him who is without sin in society cast the first stone at such an one.


FREEDOM PAMPHLETS.—No. 8.

PRICE ONE HALFPENNY.

ANARCHISM

—AND—

OUTRAGE.

[Reprinted from "Freedom" for December 1893.]

LONDON:

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1893.

But we say to no man: "GO AND DO THOU LIKEWISE."

The man who in ordinary circumstances and in cold blood would commit such deeds is simply a homicidal maniac; nor do we believe they can be justified upon any mere ground of expediency. Least of all do we think that any human being has a right to egg on another person to such a course of action. We accept the phenomena of homicidal outrage as among the most terrible facts of human experience ; we endeavour to look such facts full in the face with the understanding of humane justice; and we believe that we are doing our utmost to put an end to them by spreading Anarchist ideas throughout society.

Suppose a street where the drainage system has got thoroughly out of order, and the foulness of the sewer gas is causing serious illness throughout the neighbourhood. The intelligent inhabitants will first of all seek the cause of the illness, and then, having traced it to the condition of the drainage, will insist upon laying the sewer open, investigating the state of the pipes, and where needful, laying new ones. In this process it is very probable indeed that the illness in the neighbourhood may be temporarily increased by the laying open of the foulness within, and that some of those who do the work may be themselves poisoned or carry the infection to others. But is that a reason for not opening and repairing the drain? Or would it be fair or rational to say the illness in the neighbourhood was caused by the people who did this work or insisted upon it being done? Yet such is much the attitude of those critics of Anarchism who try to make it appear that we Anarchists are responsible for what is the natural result of the social evils we point out and struggle against.

And how about those Anarchists who use bloodthirsty language? No words can be too strong to denounce the wrongs now inflicted by one human being upon another; but violent language is by no means the same as forcible language, and very often conveys an impression of weakness rather than of strength. Savage talk is often a sort of relief, which half desperate men give to their tortured nerves; sometimes it is the passionate expression of the frenzy of indignation felt by an enthusiastically social nature at the sight of oppression and suffering: or it may be only the harebrained rattle of a fool seeking a sensation; but whatever its nature, cur position with regard to it is well expressed by Mr. Auberon Herbert in his letter to the *Westminster Gazette*, Nov.22 [1893]: "Of all the miserable, unprofitable, inglorious wars in the world is the war against words. Let men say just what they like. Let them propose to cut every throat and burn every house—if so they like it. We have nothing to do with a man's words or a man's thoughts, except to put against them better words or better thoughts, and so to win in the great moral and intellectual duel that is always going on, and on which all progress depends."

Every man, Anarchist or not, must speak as he thinks fit, but if an Anarchist cannot resist using the language of bloodthirsty revenge, he would do very well to follow the example recently set by the editor of the *Commonweal*, and plainly say, "This is not Anarchism."

People and ideas:
[G.D.H. Cole] Professor of Socialism

Colin Ward

Freedom: The Anarchist Weekly, 24 January 1959

G. D. H. Cole (1889-1959)

Of the academic mentors of the Labour movement in this century, Professor G. D. H. Cole, who died last week at the age of 69. was perhaps the most likeable, and certainly the most libertarian; differing from Professor Tawney and the late Harold Laski in his assessment of the role of the State, and in his life-long pre-occupation with the question of self-government in industry. Cole's influence as a teacher spread far beyond Oxford, his scholarship and his literary output were so immense that if you have read anything in the fields of economics, social and trade union history. sociology and political science, you are bound to have read several of his books. Something of his personal predilections emerges when you think of the historical characters of whom he wrote with most affection and understanding: Defoe, Cobbett. Robert Owen, William Morris.

Douglas Cole's first book *The World of Labour* was published in 1913. It was followed by his work with William Mellor on the idea of *The Greater Unionism*. In 1915, with others, they started the National Guilds League as a successor to the Guilds Restoration League which had introduced the idea of guild socialism. In the brief life of this movement, (admirably described by Geoffrey Ostergaard in his FREEDOM series "The Tradition of Workers' Control"), Cole and his associates sought to hammer out a coherent philosophy of industrial autonomy. In his *Self-Government in Industry* (1918) he differentiated it from anarchism and syndicalism thus:

> "Anarchism set out to destroy State Sovereignty without replacing it: Syndicalism denied the sovereignly of the State only to enthrone the General Confederation of Labour in its stead. Guild Socialist, recognising that a purely industrial sovereign is no advance on a purely political sovereign, must create a political theory to fit the Guild idea."

By 1920. in his *Guild Socialism Restated*, he had reached the conclusion that the territorial concomitant of industrial guilds was. not a single parliamentary assembly, but a system of co-ordinated functional representative bodies:

> "The omnicompetent State with its omnicompetent Parliament . . . must be destroyed or painlessly extinguished . . . (for) whatever the structure of the new society may be, the Guildsman is sure that it will have no place for the survival of the factotum State of to-day."

Ostergaard in his discussion of Cole's important modifications of the guild theory, (important because the discussions between Cole. Hobson and Tawney in those days, will sooner or later have to be argued through all over again, unless you think that the present structure of industry with its two poles of private and state capitalism is going to last forever), comments that Cole's Guild Commonwealth, "was, in fact, much nearer to the federalist society envisaged by the anarchists than it was to the Fabian Collectivist State".

In presenting the case of the Miners' Federation to the Sankey Commission in 1919, Cole made the Royal Commission a sounding-board for discussing the theory of industrial democracy, but in the next few years both the syndicalist and the guild socialist movements were fading out with the post-war slump, the government's financial policy which killed the hopeful beginnings of the Building Guilds, and the disastrous transfer of radical loyalties to the Soviet Union. The guild movement itself split, with a rightwing frightened off by the Bolshevik bogy, a left-wing which became the Bolshevik mouthpiece, and a centre faction which Douglas and Margaret Cole tried to steer clear of political involvements.

Maurice Reckitt, from the right wing, wrote at the time:

"Mr. G. D. H. Cole
Is a bit of a puzzle,
A curious role
That of G. D. H. Cole,
With a Bolshevik soul
In a Fabian muzzle;
Mr. G. D. H. Cole
Is a bit of a puzzle."

***

Cole resolved his puzzle in the next three decades with historical research and writing, with the efforts to rescue the Fabian Society from Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, with

his work at Oxford, becoming successively Reader in Economics and Professor of Social and Political Theory, and with his dozens of volumes for the general reader on economic and political topics. His political attitudes grew closer to those of the Labour Party leadership, and he was once a parliamentary candidate. With the coming of the Labour government after the second world war however, his role changed and he became one of its most forthright critics from the left. The *Manchester Guardian*, in its obituary last week, erroneously I am sure, reduced his criticism to the level of disappointed careerism, remarking that the Labour government "made little or no use of his services and – to his own annoyed disillusionment – showed few signs of ever wanting his advice on any matter of importance."

But it *is* perfectly true, and it applies not only to Cole, that there was an element of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds about his continuing to lend his support and his moral authority with generations of students, to the party whose policy was quite contrary in many respects to his beliefs.

At the beginning of 1951 Cole resigned from the chairmanship of the Fabian Society because of its support for the Labour government's policy over the Korean War. A leading article in the *Guardian* commented pertinently at the time, that

> "Professor G. D. H. Cole is declaring that he wants the North Koreans (against whom British soldiers, sent by the Labour government happen to be fighting) 'to win' . . . How can Labour 'supporters' who make no secret of their disapproval of the Government's, major policies continue to claim that they 'support' the Government?"

The defeat of the Labour government in the general election of that year removed this particular dilemma for its supporters. Cole's misgivings about the Party's programme continued, and he wrote (in the *New Statesman* 23/7/55),

> "Many of us have been saying to ourselves. these latter days, reflecting on what has happened since 1945, 'The Welfare State is not Socialism; it is only a way of re-distributing sonic income without interfering with the causes of its maldistribution'; and 'nationalisation is not Socialism: it is only a change from one form of wage-slavery to another form'.
>
> "In effect, both the Welfare State and nationalisation, as they exist at present, far from breaking away from the class system. rest on its acceptance and seek only to render conditions under it more tolerable. In nationalised industry the worker is 'consulted', but he has no power or responsibility save that which he gets from his trade union and an outside pressure group; and in the social services he remains subject to a measure of class-inferiority. His contribution, and even his direct taxes, are collected from him by his employer – a method which Hilaire Belloc used to speak of as an evident hallmark of the 'Servile State'!"

He went on to say that within the structure of capitalism, there are nevertheless 'real and substantial achievements which it is folly to deny or minimise on the grounds that they 'are not Socialism', and he denied that he "was trying to draw men away from the everyday political struggle on the ground that it is not directed to the establishment of Socialism".

But in the conclusion of his pamphlet of this period *Is This Socialism?* he remarked,

> "Some who regard themselves as Socialists will object to it on the ground that it is bad electioneering. To them I answer that I do not care if it is – for the time being. I am a Socialist and a believer that Socialism means, above all else, a classless society. 1 am not in the least interested in helping the Labour Party to win a majority in Parliament unless it means to use its majority for advancing as fast as is practicable towards such a society. I do not expect a majority of the electorate to agree at present with what 1 have said, for the simple reason that it differs from what they have been used to hearing. For the same reason 1 do not expect a majority even of the active leaders of the Labour Party to agree; for it is not what they have become used to saying."

***

As a result of Cole's questioning articles of the early nineteen-fifties, an International Society for Socialist Studies was formed, but. like the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda which he founded after the defection of the Labour Party leadership in 1931, this has come to nothing, principally, I should say, because of the confusion of aims in seeking the kind of socialism which Cole defined as *a classless society in a classless world of brothers', and in advocating at the same time, the machinery of the state as a means of accomplishing it.

He himself was moving in his last few years to a position close to that of his guild socialist days, closer indeed, to our own. Writing in the French *Esprit* (May, 1956) he declared,

> Centralism is always the enemy of democracy and must necessarily be the enemy of socialism. But unfortunately, among those who call themselves socialists a great many are, in fact, ardent advocates of centralisation and count on socialism to strengthen it. This has always been the defect of German Social Democracy which, following Marxist precepts, has confused the

> march towards socialism with the ever-growing unification of the means of production and has emphatically rejected the libertarian socialism of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, William Morris, as well as that of the Belgian theoretician César de Paepe. Communism has inherited from this tendency its infatuation with bigness and has simply forgotten that man does not become bigger as the dimensions of the instruments he uses increase."

And in the *New Statesman* (22/3/58) he reiterated his view that

> "to stake the future on larger and larger aggregates of routine operatives docs not hold out, to me at least, the prospect of a Socialism under which men would be happy or making the best use of their creative qualities . . . The most notable writers who have stood out against the acceptance of this trend have been not Socialists, but Anarchists such as Kropotkin and original thinkers like Gandhi. These, I know, are unpopular authorities to quote to present-day Socialists; but may they not prove to have been prophetic?"

The last time I saw Douglas Cole, at a lecture on William Morris two years ago, he smiled wanly when I described him in the discussion as a "crypto-anarchist", but surely his greatest ultimate service to the Labour movement in this country, will be in his reminder (in, for instance, his profoundly libertarian *Essays in Social Theory*), that although "it is part of the traditional climate not only of Oxford, but of academic teaching and thinking in Great Britain, to make the State the point of focus for the consideration of men in their social relations", our century requires in fact, "not a merely Political Theory, with the State as its central concept", but a Social Theory, starting "not from the contrasted ideas of the atomised individual and of the State, but from man in all his complex groupings and relations, partially embodied in social institutions of many sorts and kinds, but always changing, so that the pattern of loyalties and of social behaviour changes with them."

Or as he put it at the end of one of his very last articles (*New Statesman* 15/11/58):

> "the great task is that of making a kind of society in which the individual can express himself in friendly collaboration with his neighbours, without becoming a mere unit in a machine too vast for him to control—or even influence."

Self-Government in Industry

G.D.H Cole

1917

II The Case for National Guilds

[…]

What, I want to ask, is the fundamental evil in our modern Society which we should set out to abolish?

There are two possible answers to that question, and I am sure that very many well-meaning people would make the wrong one. They would answer POVERTY, when they ought to answer SLAVERY. Face to face every day with the shameful contrasts of riches and destitution, high dividends and low wages, and painfully conscious of the futility of trying to adjust the balance by means of charity, private or public, they would answer unhesitatingly that they stand for the ABOLITION OF POVERTY.

Well and good! On that issue every Socialist is with them. But their answer to my question is non the less wrong.

Poverty is the symptom: slavery the disease. The extremes of riches and destitution follow inevitably upon the extremes of license and bondage. The many are not enslaved because they are poor, they are poo because they are enslaved. Yet Socialists have all too often fixed their eyes upon the material misery of the poor without realising that it rests upon the spiritual degradation of the slave.

[…]

Inspired by the idea that poverty is the root evil, Socialists have tried to heal the ills of Society by an attempt to redistribute income. In this attempt, it will be admitted that they have hitherto met with no success. The gulf between rich and poor has not grown an inch narrower; it has even appreciably widened. It is the conviction of Guild-Socialists that the gulf will never be bridged, as long as the social problem is regarded as pre-eminently a question of distribution.

[…]

Those of us whose hopes of working-class emancipation are centred round the Trade Unions must be specially anxious today. When the war broke out Trade Unionism was passing through a critical period of transition, and it is just at such times that external shocks are most dangerous. Weary of their long struggle to secure 'reforms,' weary of trying at least to raise wages enough to meet the rise in prices: weary, in fact, of failure, or successes so small as to amount to failure, the Unions were beginning to take a wider view and to

adopt more revolutionary aims: Mere collective bargaining with the employers would, they were beginning to feel, lead them nowhere; mere political reforms only gilded the chains with which they were bound. Beyond these men began to seek some better way of overthrowing Capitalism and of introducing into industry a free and democratic system.

The first effect of this change of attitude was seen in the more militant tactics adopted by the Unions. The transport strikes of 1911 and the miners' strike of 1912, little as they achieved in comparison with the task in prospect, served as stimulants throughout the world of Labour. The Dublin strike and the London building dispute quickened the imaginations thus aroused and set men thinking about the future of Trade Unionism. If there were comparatively few Syndicalists, Syndicalist and Industrial Unionist ideas were having a wide influence throughout the movement, while the new doctrine of National Guilds was slowly leavening some of the best elements in the Trade Union world. In short, wherever the Unions were awake, the thoughts of their members were taking a new direction, and growing bodies of Trade Unionists were demanding the control of industry by the workers themselves.

This idea of the control of industry, which was forced, to the front by the corning of Syndicalism in its French and American forms, is not new, but is a revival of the first ideas of working-class combinations. It represents a return, after a long sojourn in the wilderness of materialism and reform, to the idealism of the early revolutionaries. But this time the idealism is clothed not only with a fundamentally right philosophy, but also with a practical policy. The new revolutionaries know that only by means of Trade Unionism can Capitalism be transformed, and they know also by what methods the revolution can be accomplished. They aim at the consolidation of Trade Union forces, because beyond the Trade Union lies the Guild.

Out of the Trade Unionism of today must rise a Greater Unionism, in which craft shall be no longer divided from craft, nor industry from industry. Industrial Unionism lies next on the road to freedom, and Industrial Unionism means not only 'One Industry, One Union, One Card,' but the linking-up of all industries into one great army of labour.

But even this great army will achieve no final victory in the war that really matters unless it has behind it the driving force of a great constructive idea. This idea Guild Socialism fully supplies. The workers cannot be free unless industry is managed and organised by the workers themselves in the interests of the whole community.

But even this great army will achieve no final victory in the war that really matters unless it has behind it the driving force of a great constructive idea. This idea Guild Socialism fully supplies. The workers cannot be free unless industry is managed and organised by the workers themselves in the interests of the whole community. The Trade Union, which has been till now a bargaining force, disputing with the employer about the conditions of labour, must become a controlling force, an industrial republic. In short, out of the bargaining Trade Union must grow the producing Guild.

In the Middle Ages, before the dark ages of Capitalism descended on the world, industry was organised in guilds. Each town was then more or less isolated and self-sufficient, and within each town was a system of guilds, each carrying on production in its own trade. These guilds were indeed associations of small masters, but in the period when the guilds flourished there was no hard-and-fast line between master and man, and the journeyman in due course normally became a master. The mediaeval guilds, existing in an undemocratic society, were indeed themselves always to some extent undemocratic; and, as Capitalism began to take root, inequality grew more marked and the guild system gradually dissolved. Our age has its own needs ; and the guilds which Guild Socialists desire to see established will he in many ways unlike those of the mediaeval period; but both are alike in this, that they involve the control of industry by the workers themselves.

In the earlier half of the last century there flourished a society, animated, no doubt, by, the best intentions, which called itself 'The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.' It was the aim of this body, which had a most influential backing among capitalists, politicians and University professors, to demonstrate to the working class the benefits which they had received from the introduction of machinery and the growth of the industrial system. In its pamphlets, which were widely circulated, it pointed to the immense increase in the supply of material commodities which machinery had made possible, and to the consequent greater prosperity of the whole community. It also demonstrated to the workers the appointed functions of

capital and labour in the industrial system, and the laws of political economy which finally determined their relative positions. Having done this, it paused satisfied, and thanked God that things were as they were.

It is as a disturber of this commercial complacency that William Morris take a foremost place among democratic writers. As poet and craftsman alike, he found his impulse to self-expression thwarted by commercialism; lie opened his eyes and saw around him the products of commercialism, and knew they were not good. He strove, in a commercial to make beautiful things that were not commercial but, though he made beautiful things and made them a commercial success, he was not satisfied. He desired to make beautiful things for the people; but he found that the people had neither money to buy, nor fast to value, what he made. The more he sold his wares to the few rich, the more conscious he became that under commercialism there could be for the many no beauty and no appreciation of beauty.

Thus it was that Morris passed from Art to Socialism because he saw that under Capitalism there could no art and no happiness for the great majority. As an artist, he based his Socialism upon art, as each of us who is a Socialist must base it upon that in life which he knows best and values most. For commercialism is a blight which kills every fine flower of civilised life.

[...]

I have dwelt thus upon the Socialism of William Morris because I feel that he, more than any other prophet of revolution, is of the same blood as National Guildsmen. Freedom for self-expression, freedom at work as well as at leisure, freedom to serve as well as to enjoy that is the guiding principle of his work and of his life. That, too, is the guiding principle of National Guilds. We can only destroy the tyranny of machinery – which is not the same as destroying machinery itself – by giving into the hands of the workers the control of their life and work, by freeing them to choose whether they will make well or ill, whether they will do the work of slaves or of free men. All our efforts must be turned in that direction: in our immediate measures we must strive to pave the way for the coming free alliance of producers and consumers.

The workers must be free and self-governing in the industrial sphere, or all their struggle for emancipation will have been in vain… Out of the Trade Union shall grow the Guild; and in guild alone is freedom for the worker and a release from the ever-present tyranny of modern industrialism

This is indeed a doctrine directly in opposition to the political tendencies of our time. For today we are moving at a headlong pace in the direction of a 'national' control of the lives of men which is in fact national only in the sense that it serves the interests of the dominant class in the nation. Already many of the Socialists who have been the most enthusiastic advocates of State action are standing aghast at the application of their principles to an undemocratic Society. The greatest of all dangers is the 'Selfridge' State, so loudly heralded these twenty years by Mr. 'Callisthenes' Webb.[1] The workers must be free and self-governing in the industrial sphere, or all their struggle for emancipation will have been in vain. If we had to choose between Syndicalism and Collectivism, it would be the duty and the impulse of every good man to choose Syndicalism, despite the dangers it involves. For Syndicalism at least aims high, even though it fails to ensure that production shall actually be carried on, as it desires, in the general interest. Syndicalism is the infirmity of noble minds: Collectivism is at best only the sordid dream of a business man with a conscience. Fortunately, we have not to choose between these two: for in the Guild idea Socialism and Syndicalism are reconciled. To it Collectivism will yield if only all lovers of freedom will rally round the banner, for it has a message for them especially such as school of Socialism has had. Out of the Trade Union shall grow the Guild; and in guild alone is freedom for the worker and a release from the ever-present tyranny of modern industrialism.[2]

[1] Sidney James Webb (1859-1947) was a British reformist State socialist and a leading member of the Fabian Society. He presented a thoroughly elitist vision of socialism (more accurately, state-capitalism); Callisthenes (c360–327BCE) was Greek philosopher who lavishly chronicled Alexander the Great's conquests before becoming increasingly critical of him. Cole was referring to two works written by Webb with his wife Beatrice entitled *The History of Trade Unionism* (1894) and *Industrial Democracy* (1897) and their subsequent virulent opposition to revolutionary trade unionism (syndicalism) and its calls for genuine industrial democracy. Needless to say, they also opposed Guild Socialism. (*Black Flag*)

[2] Obviously, Cole is not referring to the Anarchist-Collectivism raised within the First International but rather the aim – as expressed by Fabians like the Webbs – that the (current) State should own and run all aspects of social life, by means of a bureaucracy which would be as likely to be as benevolent as it was efficient. (*Black Flag*)

IV Abolition of the Wage-System

[…]

We are all familiar with those critics of the economics of National Guilds who protest that the difference between 'pay' and 'wages' is purely nominal, and refuse to recognise the abolition of the wage-system 'as a reasonable or practicable aim. Always, they tell us, there will have to be some form of payment for service rendered, or for citizenship, and to then, it makes no difference whether this is called 'wages' or something else. National Guildsmen are inevitably impatient of such critics; because, in their minds, the abolition of the wage-system is present as the economic postulate of National Guilds. They do not mean by 'wages' merely 'some form of payment': they mean a quite definite form of payment which is an economic postulate of capitalism. In speaking of the wage-system, they are speaking of the system under which labour is bought and sold in the labour market as an article of commerce. In demanding the abolition of wagery, they are repudiating utterly the idea that labour is a commodity, or that it ought to be bought and sold for what it will fetch in a 'labour market.' By 'wage,' they mean the price paid for labour as a commodity, and for this method of payment they wish to substitute another and a better method.

by 'wages'… they mean a quite definite form of payment which is an economic postulate of capitalism. In speaking of the wage-system, they are speaking of the system under which labour is bought and sold in the labour market as an article of commerce

National Guildsmen have always recognised that there is more than one alternative to the wage-system. In general, they have contrasted chattel-slavery, wage-slavery, and National Guilds, and, with special reference to the propaganda of nationalisation, they have pointed to the danger that the wage-system might continue under State Socialism, and the State continue to buy its labour as a commodity. Just as the labour of postal or tramway workers is treated as a commodity today, even though their employer be a Government department or a local authority, the labour of all workers might be so treated under a universal regime of Collectivism, It might, or, again, it might not. The omnipotent State *might* decree the abolition of rent, interest, and profits, and thereafter pay its employees on some basis other than the wage-system – perhaps equality. Or again, it might not. There is no assurance that State Socialism would abolish the wage-system indeed, there is every probability that it would not. For. it would not strike directly at the wage-system, which is the root of the whole tyranny of capitalism; and only a direct blow at the root is likely to avail.

There are four distinguishing marks of the wage-system upon which National Guildsmen are accustomed to fix their attention. Let me set them out clearly in the simplest terms,

1. The wage-system abstracts 'labour' from the labourer, so that the one can be bought and sold without the other.

2. Consequently, wages are paid to the wage-worker only when it is profitable to the capitalist to employ his labour.

3. The wage-worker, in return for his wage, surrenders all control over the organisation of production,

4. The wage-worker, in return for his wage, surrenders all claim upon the product of his Labour.

If the wage-system is to be abolished, all these four marks of degraded status must be removed. National Guilds, then, must assure to the worker, at least, the following things:

1. Recognition and payment as a human being, and not merely as the mortal tenement of so much labour power for which an efficient demand exists.

2. Consequently, payment in employment and in unemployment, in sickness and in health alike.

3. Control of the organisation of production in co-operation with his fellows.

4. A claim upon the product of his work, also exercised in co-operation with his fellows.

[…]

The control of production is important both as an end and as a means. It is an essential part of that system of industrial self-government which I desire to see established, and it is an essential means to the establishment of that self-government.

There is no need to waste words in showing that the control of production is a part of the end; for that follows naturally, and inevitably, from the whole idea of industrial freedom upon which the Guild system rests. The *idée maîtresse* of National Guilds is industrial self-government, and, clearly, that idea must find a primary expression in the democratic control of the productive process. Control of the factory by the workers employed in it is the corner-stone of the edifice of National Guilds.

[…]

VI State Ownership and Control

[…]

We have too long repeated the Marxian phrase that the emancipation of Labour must be the work of Labour without understanding it. The Syndicalists and the National Guildsmen are fundamentally right in regarding the industrial consciousness of the workers as the pivot on which the whole social system swings. The fundamentally important thing about the various forms which the capitalist organisation of industry assumes is not whether they are harsh or gentle, whether they feed the workers well or ill, but whether they foster or destroy the spirit of liberty in men's hearts. Wherever, under the present system, we find growing up a revolt that is not merely blind anger or blind despair, wherever we find in revolt the constructive idea of industrial democracy, there is the social structure best fitted to further the cause good men have at heart. Wherever there is no such spirit of construction, there, whatever the material position of the workers, no hope of the ending of Capitalism exists,

This gives us a measure of the new spirit which is not merely quantitative. Not where men are most angry or most rebellious, but where they realise most clearly what needs ending or mending and how it may be ended or mended, is the cause of Labour most hopeful. Only an idea can slay an idea: until the workers are animated with the desire to be their own masters they cannot supplant the idea that their class is born for wage-slavery.

[…]

VII Freedom in the Guild

[…]

That community is most free in which all the individuals have the greatest share in the government of their common life. In every struggle for liberty, the enslaved have always demanded, as an essential preliminary to all self-government, the right to choose their own rulers. This applies in industry no less than in politics. While the citizen has his King and his Parliament imposed on him independently of his will, he cannot he free. Similarly, while the workman has his foremen and his managers set over him by an external authority, then, however kindly they use him, he has not freedom. He must claim, as a necessary step on the road to industrial emancipation, the right to choose his own leaders. To deny this is to adopt towards industrial democracy exactly the attitude that the defenders of autocracy or aristocracy adopt towards political democracy.

The reception of the Guild idea among Socialists has shown that many Socialists have forgotten their democracy… Their theory is inhuman, because they neglect will, which is the measure of human values.

The reception of the Guild idea among Socialists has shown that many Socialists have forgotten their democracy. In political self-government they see nothing more than a convenient practice of 'counting heads to save the trouble of breaking them.' They regard government as essentially a mechanism, designed with the object of securing mechanical efficiency; they do not see that the problem of self-government is a moral problem, and that the task of social organisation is that of expressing human will. Their theory is inhuman, because they neglect will, which is the measure of human values.

The Guildsman approaches the problem in a more philosophic spirit. He desires not merely to provide a mechanism for the more equal distribution of material commodities; he wishes also, and more intensely, to change the moral basis of Society, and to make it everywhere express the personality of those who compose it. He seeks, not only in politics, but in every department of life, to give free play to the conscious will of the individual. Admitting the failure of political democracy to achieve all that its pioneers promised, he refuses to be disillusioned or to give alp his belief in the ideal for which they strove. Behind the failure of actual political democracies his eyes are keen enough to descry the eternal rightness of democracy itself, and his wits sharp enough to understand why we have failed in applying it. We have erred because we have had too little faith: driven by the logic of events, we have pressed for democracy in the political domain, but we have still regarded it mainly as a means of securing certain material ends. We have never really believed in democracy; for, if we had, we should have tried to apply it, not to politics alone, but to every aspect of human life. We should not have been democrats in politics and autocrats in industry: we should have stood for self-government all round.

Democracy rests essentially on a trust in human nature. It asserts, if it asserts anything, that man is fit to govern himself. Yet every criticism passed upon the Guild system by Collectivists, who are loud in their lip-service to the democratic principle, reveals that they are

fundamentally distrustful of human nature and human capacity. They admit the right of the worker, as a citizen, to a vote in the choice of his political rulers; but they refuse to the same man the right to elect his industrial rulers. The contradiction is flagrant: the explanation of it is discreditable.

Political democracy is accepted because it has so largely failed: it is the very fact that it has not made effective the will of the individual citizen that has caused the opposition to it to die down. The fear of many of those who oppose industrial democracy is that it would be effective, that the individual would at last conic to his own, and that, in learning to control his own industry, he would learn also to control the political machine. The day on which he learnt that would certainly be a black day for the bureaucratic jugglers in human lives whom we still call statesmen – or sometimes New Statesmen.[1]

Collectivists may take their choice: they are knaves, who hate freedom, or they are fools, who do not know what freedom means, or they are a bit of both. The knaves are not Socialists at all; they are divorced by their whole theory of life from the democratic idea that is essential to all true Socialism. The fools may become Socialists if they get a philosophy: if, ceasing to think of social organisation as a mere mechanism and of self-government merely as a means, they try for themselves to understand the moral basis on which Socialism rests. If they do that, they cannot but realise that political democracy by itself is useless and that industrial democracy is its essential foundation: the expression of the same principle in another sphere. They will see that the Collectivist theory is built upon distrust, and, if they are good men, they will reject it on that ground alone.

It is a view deeply rented in the British mind that the nastiest medicines are the most wholesome. In the same way, we have been too ready to believe that the most nauseating system of social organisation will be the most efficient. How many Socialists of the old sort really believe in their hearts that Collectivism would lead to a system of production more efficient, in the capitalistic sense, than that we have now? The fact that they hasten to advance against National Guilds the very arguments that Anti-Socialists have always urged, with at least equal justice, against themselves, proves that they have always doubted. They reject as absurd the Guildsman's argument that a good system of production demands good men, and that a man cannot be good, as a maker or producer, unless he is free. Collectivism is the 'doubting Thomas' of the Socialist faith; there is but a veneer of humanitarianism over its belief in the mid-Victorian heresy of original sin. Upon such a gloomy gospel of despair, no great Society can be built. And, after all, if men are like that, is it worthwhile to build anything?

[…][2]

Guild Socialism Restated

G.D.H. Cole

1920

Chapter III A Guild in Being

[…]

Clearly, we cannot seek to restore the mediaeval that is, the communal spirit in industry by restoring the material conditions of the Middle Ages. We cannot go back to "town economy," a general regime of handicraft and master-craftsmanship, tiny-scale production. We can neither pull up our railways, fill in our mines, and dismantle our factories, nor conduct our large-scale enterprises under a system developed to fit the needs of a local market and a narrowly-restricted production. If the mediaeval system has lessons for us, they are not parrot-lessons of slavish imitation, but lessons of the spirit, by which we may learn how to build up, on the basis of large-scale production and the world-market, a system of industrial organisation that appeals to the finest human motives and is capable of developing the tradition of free communal service. I fully believe that, when we have established these free conditions, there will come, from producer and consumer alike, a widespread demand for goods of finer quality than the shoddy which we turn out in such quantity today, and that this will bring about a new standard of craftsmanship and a return, over a considerable sphere, to small-scale production. But this, if it comes, will come only as the deliberate choice of free men in a free Society. Our present problem is, taking the conditions of production substantially as we find them, to reintroduce into industry the communal spirit, by re-fashioning industrialism in such a way as to set the communal motives free to operate.

The element of identity between the mediaeval Gilds and the National Guilds proposed by the Guild Socialists today is thus far more of spirit than of organisation . A National Guild would be an association

[1] A reference to the British journal *The New Statesman*, founded in 1913 by Sidney and Beatrice Webb with the support of George Bernard Shaw and other prominent members of the Fabian Society. It was a leading journal of (State) Collectivism in twentieth century Britain. (*Black Flag*)

[2] This extract appears in volume 2 of *A Libertarian Reader* (Active Distribution, 2023). (*Black Flag*)

of all the workers by hand and brain concerned in the carrying on of a particular industry or service, and its function would be actually to carry on that industry or service on behalf of the whole community.

Thus, the Railway Guild would include all the workers of every type from general managers and technicians to porters and engine cleaners required for the conduct of the railways as a public service. This association would be entrusted by the community with the duty and responsibility of administering the railways efficiently for the public benefit, and would be left itself to make the internal arrangements for the running of trains and to choose its own officers, administrators, and methods of organisation.

I do not pretend to know or prophesy exactly how many Guilds there would be, or what would be the lines of demarcation between them. For example, railways and road transport might be organised by separate Guilds, or by a single Guild with internal subdivisions. So might engineering and shipbuilding, and a host of other closely-related industries. This is a matter, not of principle, but of convenience; for there is no reason why the various Guilds should be of anything like uniform size. The general basis of the proposed Guild organisation is clear enough: it is industrial, and each National Guild will represent a distinct and coherent service or group of services.

It must not, however, be imagined that Guildsmen are advocating a highly centralised system, in which the whole of each industry will be placed under a rigid central control. The degree of centralisation will largely depend on the character of the service. Thus, the railway industry obviously demands a much higher degree of centralisation than the building industry, which serves mainly a local market. But, apart from this, Guildsmen are keen advocates of the greatest possible extension of local initiative and of autonomy for the small group, in which they see the best chance of keeping the whole organisation keen, fresh and adaptable, and of avoiding the tendency to rigidity and conservatism in the wrong things, so characteristic of large-scale organisation, and especially of trusts and combines under capitalism today. The National Guilds would be, indeed, for the most part coordinating rather than directly controlling bodies, and would be concerned more with the adjustment of supply and demand than with the direct control or management of their several industries. This will appear more plainly when we have studied the internal organisation of the Guilds.

The members of the Guild will be scattered over the country, in accordance with the local distribution of their particular industry, and will be at work in the various factories, mines, or other productive units belonging to their form of service. The factory, or place of work, will be the natural unit of Guild life. It will be to it great extent, internally self-governing, and it will be the unit and basis of the wider local and national government of the Guild. The freedom of the particular factory as a unit is of fundamental importance, because the object of the whole Guild system is to call out the spirit of free service by establishing really democratic conditions in industry. This democracy, if it is to be real, must come home to, and be exercisable directly by, every individual member of the Guild. He must feel that he is enjoying real self-government and freedom *at his work*; or he will not work well and under the impulse of the communal spirit. Moreover, the essential basis of the Guild being associative service, the spirit of association must be given free play in the sphere in which it is best able to find expression. This is manifestly the factory, in which men have the habit and tradition of working together. The factory is the natural and fundamental unit of industrial democracy. This involves, not only that the factory must be free, as far as possible, to manage its own affairs, but also that the democratic unit of the factory must be made the basis of the larger democracy of the Guild, and that the larger organs of Guild administration and government must be based largely on the principle of factory[1] representation. This raises, of course, important financial considerations, which will be dealt with in their place, when we discuss the financial basis of the Guild Socialist community.

A Guild factory, then, would be a natural centre of self-government, no longer, like the factories of today, a mere prison of boredom and useless toil, but a centre of free service and associative enterprise.

[…]

A Guild factory, then, would be a natural centre of self-government, no longer, like the factories of today, a mere prison of boredom and useless toil, but a centre of free service and associative enterprise. There would, of course, be dull and unpleasant work still to be done in the world; but even this would be immeasurably

[1] It should be understood throughout that, when I speak thus of the "factory," I mean to include under it also the mine, the shipyard, the dock, the station, and every corresponding place which is a natural centre of production or service. Every industry has some more or less equivalent for the factory.

lightened if it were done under free conditions and if the right motives were enlisted on its side.[1]

In this factory there would doubtless be workshop committees, meetings, debates, voting, and all the phenomena of democratic organisation; but, though these are essential, they are not so much of the quintessence of the new thing as the co-operative spirit which they exist to safeguard. Given free choice of leaders and free criticism of them when chosen, a good deal of the mere machinery of democracy might remain normally in the background.

[...]

This factory of ours is, then, to the fullest extent consistent with the character of its service, a self-governing unit, managing its own productive operations, and free to experiment to the heart's content in new methods, to develop new styles and products, and to adapt itself to the peculiarities of a local or individual market. This autonomy of the factory is the safeguard of Guild Socialism against the dead level of mediocrity, the more than adequate substitute for the variety which the competitive motive was once supposed to stimulate, the guarantee of liveliness, and of individual work and workmanship.

With the factory thus largely conducting its own concerns, the duties of the larger Guild organisations would be mainly those of coordination, of regulation, and of representing the Guild in its external relations. They would, where it was necessary, co-ordinate the production of various factories, so as to make supply coincide with demand. They would probably act largely as suppliers of raw materials and as marketers of such finished products as were not disposed of directly from the factory. They would lay down general regulations, local or national, governing the methods of organisation and production within the Guild, they would organise research, and they would act on behalf of the Guild in its relations both with other Guilds, and with other forms of organisation, such as consumers' bodies, within the community, or with bodies abroad.

This larger Guild organisation, as we have seen, while it need not conform in all cases to any particular structure, must be based directly on the various factories included in the Guild. That is to say, the district Guild Committee must represent the various factories belonging to the Guild in the district, and probably also in most cases must include representatives of the various classes of workers, by hand or brain, included in the Guild. The national Committee must similarly represent districts and classes of workers, in order that every distinct point of view, whether of a district or of a section, may have the fullest possible chance of being stated and considered by a representative body. To the choice of the district and national officers of the Guild much the same arguments apply as to that of other leaders, save that, as we saw, over the larger areas in direct may often afford a more truly democratic result than direct election.

The essential thing about this larger organisation is that its functions should be kept down to the minimum possible for each industry. For it is in the larger organisation and in the assumption by it of too much centralised power that the danger of a new form of bureaucracy resulting in the ossification of the Guild may be found. A small central and district organisation, keeping within a narrow interpretation of the functions assigned to it, may be an extraordinarily valuable influence in stimulating a sluggish factory; but a large central machine will inevitably at the same time aim at concentrating power in its own hands and tend to reduce the exercise of this power to a matter of routine. If the Guilds are to revive craftsmanship and pleasure in work well done; if they are to produce quality as well as quantity, and to be ever keen to devise new methods and utilise ever fresh discovery of science without loss of tradition; if they are to breed free men capable of being good citizens both in industry and in every aspect of communal life; if they are to keep alive the motive of free service – they must at all costs shun centralisation. Fortunately, there is little doubt that they will do so; for men freed from the double centralised autocracy of capitalist trust and capitalist State are not likely to be anxious to make for themselves a new industrial Leviathan. They will rate their freedom high; and highest they will rate that which is nearest to them and most affects their daily life the freedom of the factory, of the place in which their common service to the community is done.

Chapter VII The Structure of the Commune

[…]

We have so far passed in review four distinct forms of organisation, each of which has subdivisions of its own. First, we reviewed the *producers*' organisation of the economic Guilds; then, the *consumers*' organisation of the Co-operative Movement and the Collective Utility Councils; then the *civic service* organisation of the Civic Guilds; and lastly, the civic, or *citizen* organisation of the Cultural and Health Councils. In addition, we have already discussed, in a number of different aspects, the probable interrelation and interaction of the various groups, both internally and one with another, both nationally and locally. But what we have not yet done is to give any idea of the working

[1] Moreover, how much of the world's really dull or unpleasant work could we do away with if we really gave our minds to that instead of to profit-mongering! Machinery would make short work of much; and much we could simply do without.

of all the groups as parts of a single system, that is to say, of the *communal*, as distinct from the functional, organisation and working of Guild Society.

We have to see, not merely how producer and consumer would meet and co-operate, or how civic servant and citizen are to meet and co-operate, but also how the communal spirit of the whole Society can find expression, in so far as such expression can be found at all in any form of social organisation.

This leads us directly to a further consideration of the position of "the State"; for orthodox social theorists usually claim for ''the State" the supreme task of expressing the spirit of the community, and the positive power of co-ordinating and directing the activities of all the various parts of the social structure. We have so far attacked the notion of universal State Sovereignty from two distinct points of view, and have, I think, made large breaches in the theory, without as yet destroying it altogether. First, we criticised the structure of the State from the point of view of functional democracy, showing that its undifferentiated representative theory unfitted it to be the expression of a democratic spirit which ought to find utterance in every separate aspect of social activity. By this criticism we destroyed the idea of State "omnicompetence." Secondly, in dealing with Collectivist theories in the economic sphere, we destroyed the idea that the State represents the consumer, and so excluded it from functional participation in the control of industry or service. Inferentially, this criticism applied also to the civic services in relation to which we showed that representation must equally have a functional basis. We have thus, besides destroying the notion of State " omnicompetence," definitely excluded it from a place in the control of economic and civic services alike. We have not, however, as yet overthrown the notion of State Sovereignty in a form in which it has been re-stated with the definite purpose of meeting these objections.[1]

This revised theory rejects State omnicompetence and agrees, at least in general terms, to the exclusion of the State from the normal working of all social functions; but it retains in the background a State "whose function is Sovereignty," that is, which has no other task than that of co-ordinating the activities of the various functional bodies in Society. Now, it is, of course, perfectly clear that the functional democracy which we have been expounding requires and must have a clearly recognised co-ordinating agency, and there would be no objection to calling this agency "the State," if the name did not immediately suggest two entirely misleading ideas. The first is that this new body will be historically continuous with the present political machinery of Society : the second is that it will, to a great extent, reproduce its structure, especially in being based on direct, non-functional election. The co-ordinating body which is required cannot be, in any real sense, historically continuous with the present State, and it must riot reproduce in any important respect the structure of the present State. That it will not inherit most of its functions we have seen already.

Now, it is, of course, perfectly clear that the functional democracy which we have been expounding requires and must have a clearly recognised co-ordinating agency, and there would be no objection to calling this agency "the State," if the name did not immediately suggest two entirely misleading ideas

The new co-ordinating body will not be continuous with the present political machinery of Society for two good and sufficient reasons. The first, clearly laid down in modern Marxist teaching, and most clearly of all by Lenin,[2] is that the present political machine is definitely an organ of class domination, not merely because it has been perverted by the power of capitalists, but because it is based on coercion, and is primarily an instrument of coercion. Its essential idea is that of:' an externally imposed "order," and its transformation into a form expressive of self-government and freedom is impossible. Agreement with Lenin on this point does not involve agreement with him on the necessity of replacing the capitalist State by a temporary "proletarian State," equally based on coercion – a point which is discussed later in connection with the problem of transition – but it does involve agreement that, in a truly Socialist Society, there will be no room for any body continuous with the present political machine.

In the second place, this machine, where it has adapted itself to so-called "political democracy," is based essentially on the false idea of representative government which assumes that one man can represent another, not *ad hoc*, in relation to a particular purpose or group of purposes, but absolutely. This false notion of

[1] For instance, in a series of articles in the *New Age* a few years ago.

[2] See his book, *The State and Revolution*.

representation we have already rejected in favour of the functional idea.

But it may be argued that the defence of the State, in its new form, meets this argument; for the new "function of the State'' is simply co-ordination, and nothing else. This contention, however, will not hold water; for the co-ordination of functions is not, and cannot be, itself a function. Either coordination includes the functions which it co-ordinates, in which case the whole of social organisation conies again under the domination of the State, and the whole principle of functional democracy is destroyed; or it excludes them, and in this case it clearly cannot co-ordinate. In other words, the State "representative" either controls the economic and civic spheres, or he does not: if he does, the representatives in these spheres lose their self-government; if he does not, he cannot regulate their mutual relationships.

This second argument against the historical continuity of the new co-ordinating body with the present political machine also serves to demonstrate that it will not reproduce the latter 's essential structure. It could do this only if it were based on the false theory of undifferentiated representation.

We can, then, safely assume that not only will the present political machine lose its economic and civic functions to new bodies, but that the task of co-ordinating these functions will also pass out of its hands. It will thus, at the least, "wither away" to a very considerable extent, and I have no hesitation in saying that, in my belief, it will disappear altogether, either after a frontal attack, or by atrophy following upon dispossession of its vital powers. Conceivably, some fragments of it may linger as formal instruments of the new Society, as the Privy Council and other obsolete survivals, including the Crown, linger today; but in any case it will be of no real importance.

We have, then, to seek a new form of coordinating body which will not be inconsistent with the functional democracy on which our whole system is based. This can be nothing other than a bringing together of the various functional bodies whose separate working we have already described. Co-ordination is inevitably coercive unless it is self-co-ordination, and it must therefore be accomplished by the common action of the various bodies which require co-ordination.

This problem of co-ordination has two separate aspects. It is first a problem of co-ordinating the functional bodies of the various types into a single communal system, and it is secondly a problem of co-ordinating bodies operating over a smaller with bodies operating over a larger area. Both these problems have to be solved in the structure of the co-ordinating, or as I shall henceforward call it, the *communal*, organisation of Guild Socialist Society.

In order, for the first discussion, to reduce the problem to as simple elements as possible, let us take it in the form in which it presents itself in a single town say Norwich. In Norwich there will be at least the following bodies possessing important social functions :

(a) A number of Industrial Guilds organising and managing various industries and economic services united in a Guild Council of delegates or representatives drawn from these Guilds; (b) a Co-operative Council; (c) a Collective Utilities Council; (d) a number of Guilds organising and managing various civic services Civic Guilds; (e) a Cultural Council; and (f) a Health Council.

All these, not necessarily in the same proportions, have clearly a right to be represented on the communal body, which I shall call hereafter simply the *Commune*. I have no desire to lay down in detail any definite numerical basis of representation; but the number of representatives from the Industrial Guilds, who might be chosen either by each Guild or through the Guild Council, would probably be approximately equal to the number from the Co-operative and Collective Utilities Councils taken together, and the number from the Civic Guilds to the number from the Cultural and Health Councils together. The proportion assigned to the economic and the non-economic groups would certainly vary from case to case.

The bodies so far mentioned, however, do not necessarily complete the composition of the Commune. In any instance, there might be special organisations to which it would be desirable, on account of their importance in the town, to give representation. Again, what is far more important, the town as a whole cannot be treated as an undifferentiated unit. In electing their representatives to serve on the four Councils mentioned above,[1] the citizens, if the town were of any size, would almost certainly vote by Wards and each member on a Council would sit there as a Ward representative in relation to his particular function. It is of the first importance, if this representation is to be a reality, that the Ward should exist, not merely as a polling district for various elections, but also as an active centre for the expression of local opinion, which requires, for its successful eliciting, to be made articulate within the smallest natural areas of common feeling. Indeed, in the sphere both of consumers' and of civic organisation, the Ward in the town and the village in the country form the natural equivalents for the workshop in the sphere of industry or the school in the sphere of education.

The Wards, then, in our case of Norwich, must have a real existence, and the Ward representatives must report

[1] I.e., Councils as distinct from Guilds, which would have their own varying electoral methods.

back regularly to, and receive instructions and advice from, Ward Meetings of all the dwellers in the Ward who choose to attend. The Ward Meeting would also exercise, within the limits to be discussed hereafter, the right of recalling from any Council the Ward representative. It would also, especially in the larger towns, have assigned to it certain administrative functions which are best carried out over a very small area, and would execute these either in full Ward Meeting, or by the appointment of *ad hoc* and usually temporary committees or officers. Where, in a large centre, the functions of the Wards expanded, standing Ward Committees might be developed, and it might be desirable that these Ward Committees should have direct representation, in respect of their functions, on the Town Commune.[1] In such cases, these representatives would form a third group distinct both from the Guild and from the Council representatives.

Having laid down the essential structure of the Norwich Commune, let us try to see more explicitly what work it would have to do. What we say under this head will apply, with small changes, to the other types of Commune hereafter described. Clearly, it would be, in the main, not an administrative but a coordinating body. The various services would be managed by their Guilds and their policy would be determined by the co-operative working of the Guilds and the appropriate citizen Councils. Five essential tasks would remain for the Commune itself. First, it would have to agree upon the allocation of the local resources among the various services calling for expenditure that is, it would have essential *financial* functions, and would be, indeed, the financial pivot of the whole Guild system in the area. Secondly, it would be the court of appeal in all cases of difference between functional bodies of different types. Thus, if the Co-operative Society could not agree on some point of policy with the Guilds operating in the sphere of "domestic" production and distribution, the Commune would have to hear the case and give its judgment. Thirdly, it would determine the lines of demarcation between the various functional bodies, where any question concerning them arose.[2] Fourthly, it would itself take the initiative in any matter concerning the town as a whole and not in any functional capacity, such as a proposed extension of town boundaries or a proposal to build a new town hall. The original suggestion, in such cases, would probably come from one of the functional bodies or from a Ward; but they would be matters for the Town Commune itself to decide. Fifthly, so far as coercive machinery, such as a police force, remained, it should be controlled, not by any single functional body, but by all jointly that is by the Commune. This, as we shall see, applies also in the realm of law. The Commune could decide to hand over, and would, wherever possible, be wise to hand over actual administrative functions falling within its sphere to the Wards, in order to preserve the most direct form of popular control. Thus, I should like to see the Wards appoint and control the. police a reversion to the days of the town or village constable.

The real safeguard for the voter is to preserve the fullest form of democracy, including the right of recall, in the small units within which real contact is possible, and to rely on this contact and power of recall for the carrying out of the popular will in the larger bodies

[...]

Clearly, then, there must be regional Co-operative Societies or Unions, regional Collective Utilities Councils, and regional Cultural Councils and Health Councils. These, I believe, would be best constituted of representatives from the various local functional Councils of the Towns and Townships within the Region. This, it is true, involves indirect election, to which many professing democrats take objection; but I have no faith at all in the virtues of direct election except when it can be combined with a constant touch of the body of voters with their representative. Thus, direct election is good in the Village or the Ward, because all the electors can meet with, question, and instruct their representative face to face; but it is a farce in the case of Parliament, where the constituency is too large for the elected person to preserve any real contact with those who elected him. The real safeguard for the voter is to preserve the fullest form of democracy, including the right of recall, in the small units within which real contact is possible, and to rely on this contact and power of recall for the carrying out of the popular will in the larger bodies. These larger bodies can themselves best be composed of delegates from the bodies working within the smaller areas, always

[1] I assume that the election of the various Council representatives would be by ballot of the Wards, but that these Ward Committee representatives would be chosen either by the Ward committee, or, better, from the Ward Committee by the Ward Meeting Uniformity, however, is not necessary.

[2] I do not mean, of course, that if two Industrial Guilds fell out, the Commune would settle the matter. It would go to the Guild Council. But if the Guild Council failed to settle it, even such a difference might go to the Commune.

provided that these delegates themselves preserve constant contact with the smaller bodies which choose them, and are subject to the right of these bodies to recall them at any time.

[…]

According to our current terminology, all the foregoing Communes would be regarded as organs of Local Government. At present, however, we draw a sharp and almost absolute distinction between Local and Central Government. In the decentralised Guild Society of which we are speaking, no such sharp distinction would exist; for by far the greatest part of the work of the community would be carried on and administered locally or regionally, and the central work would be divided, according to function, among a considerable number of distinct organisations. There would therefore be neither need nor opportunity for a centre round which a vast aggregation of bureaucratic and coercive machinery could grow up. The national co-ordinating machinery of Guild Society would be essentially unlike the present State, and would have few direct administrative functions. It would be mainly a source of a few fundamental decisions on policy, demarcation between functional bodies, and similar issues, and of final adjudications on appeals in cases of dispute; but it would not possess any vast machinery of its own, save that, as long as military and naval force continued to be employed, it would have to exercise directly the control of such force, as it would indirectly and in the last resort of the law. Foreign relations, so far as they did not deal exclusively with matters falling within the sphere either of the economic or of the civic bodies, would fall to its lot; but the victory of democracy in other communities would tend to reduce these non-functional external activities to a minimum. The existence, which we have already assumed, of national functional organisations, based on the local and regional bodies, in all the various spheres of social action, would functionalise national equally with local and regional activities.

Into the National Commune, then, would enter the representatives of the National Guilds, Agricultural, Industrial and Civic, of the National Councils economic and civic, and of the Regional Communes themselves. Its general structure would thus be essentially the same as that of the smaller Communes which, equally with the national functional bodies, it would exist to co-ordinate. It would be a much less imposing body as the central organ of Society than the Great Leviathan of today, with its huge machinery of coercion and bureaucratic government. But it would be none the worse for that; for where the spirit of community is most at home, there is the machinery of central government likely to be least in evidence.

[…][1]

Guild Socialism

G.D.H Cole

Encyclopaedia Britannica, Twelfth Edition, 1922.

GUILD SOCIALISM, the name given to a school of socialist thought which originated in England early in the 20th century, and has since spread to other parts of the world, particularly to the English-speaking countries – the United States, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa – and to Japan. As its name implies, it had, in the minds of those who originated it, a definite relation to the forms of industrial organisation which existed throughout the mediaeval world, and it was an attempt to apply to the solution of modern industrial problems certain of the principles which were in active operation in the economic organisation of mediaeval society. This does not mean that Guild Socialism is an attempt to restore the mediaeval guild system, or that it has any necessary relation to the restoration of a system of hand craft in place of the modern system of machine production. In harking back to the mediaeval organisation of industry, Guild Socialists for the most part have in mind not the forms of production which prevailed in the Middle Ages, but the mediaeval principle of industrial self-government.

The origin of the Guild Socialist movement is to be found in *The Restoration of the Gild System* (1906), a book written by A. J. Penty, the well-known architect and craftsman, and in an article published at about the same time in the *Contemporary Review* by A. R. Orage, editor of the *New Age*, which was, during the following decade, very closely associated with the guild propaganda. In both these articles Guild Socialism appeared in an essentially preliminary form, and the emphasis was laid, far more than by the more recent guild writers, on an actual restoration of the mediaeval system. Mr. A. J. Penty, who has perhaps the best claim to be regarded as the originator of the modern guild movement in this form, took the craftsman's point of view and set himself in direct hostility to the modern systems of large-scale production and trading.

From 1906 to 1912 the guild idea developed gradually and almost unnoticed in the columns of the *New Age*;

[1] This extract appears in volume 2 of *A Libertarian Reader* (Active Distribution, 2023). (*Black Flag*)

but during this period a gradual transformation of the theory was taking place, and the emphasis was coming to lie, not upon the return to craft organisation or the restoration of a system closely similar to that of the Middle Ages, but upon the utilisation of the modern trade-union and working-class movement as the basis for a system of industrial self-government, directly related to modern conditions and to large-scale production. During this stage the propaganda for the "restoration of the gild system" was developing into the propaganda of National Guilds, the emphasis on the word "National" indicating the necessity for a different kind of guild system corresponding to the "National Economy" of modern times.

This transition was made definite, and the first attempt to expound the new guild theory as a complete system of socialism began to be made in the *New Age* in 1912, when a series of articles, subsequently reprinted in the volume, *National Guilds*, which was written by S. G. Hobson, and edited by A. R. Orage, was published week by week. It was with the publication of these articles that the guild theory first became a definite force in the British socialist movement.

The theory became steadily less Utopian and remote; and its advocates applied themselves more and more to a study of actual, pressing trade-union problems, and to the working-out of proposals for the "next steps" to be taken.

While this process of theoretical development was going on the situation in the British industrial world was rapidly changing. The earlier years of the 20th century were years of comparative industrial tranquillity, during which the main attention of the working-class movement was concentrated on political questions and on the building-up of the Labour party. From 1909 and 1910 onwards, however, a big wave of industrial unrest passed over the country. Big strikes broke out in a number of the most important industries, and a great stimulus was given to the movement for wider industrial combination. This industrial ferment also served to arouse a corresponding ferment in the realm of ideas. New socialist theories, based mainly on the working-class industrial organisations, sprang rapidly into prominence, and in particular the "Industrial Unionist" ideas, which had entered Great Britain from America a few years earlier, and the syndicalist ideas derived from contemporary developments in the French labour movement, gained for a time a large number of adherents and excited vigorous controversy. It was in the midst of this controversy and of this industrial ferment that the guild idea developed from a "Utopian" plan for the restoration of mediaeval conditions into the outline of a practical policy of industrial self-government, appealing particularly to the British organised working-class movement. The transition, however, was not fully completed with the publication of the "National Guilds" series of articles in the *New Age*; for the influence of the *New Age*, although it was during these years steadily growing, reached only a comparatively narrow circle of intellectuals in the middle and working classes. It was when a group of the younger men took up, from 1913 onwards, the wider dissemination of these ideas, particularly through the then newly founded Labour paper, the *Daily Herald*, that the movement began to exercise an influence over larger circles. This wide appeal, moreover, also resulted to some extent in a transformation of the Guild Socialist theory itself. The theory became steadily less Utopian and remote; and its advocates applied themselves more and more to a study of actual, pressing trade-union problems, and to the working-out of proposals for the "next steps" to be taken.

Up to this point the guild movement had remained entirely unorganised, save for the small degree of cohesion secured through the medium of the *New Age*. It was in 1914 that the idea of creating an organisation for the propaganda and study of Guild Socialism in England first took shape at a private conference of the younger Guild Socialists. This led, at Easter 1915, to the formation of the National Guilds League, which immediately set on foot an active propaganda in the working-class and professional movement. There is no doubt that this propaganda was largely helped by the conditions of war-time industry. Workshop problems were constantly arising owing to the operation of dilution and to war-time changes in the methods and forms of production. This situation served to awaken a critical spirit in the workers, and made them more ready to listen to plans for a change in the industrial system.

It is legitimate to say that by 1921 the guild propaganda, while it had not made any direct appeal to the larger masses of the workers in Great Britain or other countries, had come to exercise a powerful influence over a steadily growing number of the younger local and national leaders of the Labour movement and in the professions. This influence could be seen in the changing policies and programmes both of trade unions and professional associations and of socialist societies. For example, the Miners' Federation, which before the war advocated a measure of nationalisation of the mines which would have placed them under direct State administration, laid before the Coal Industry Commission, in 1919, a scheme which was in substance

an adoption of the Guild Socialist proposals for industrial self-government. Similar influences have been at work in other industries, notably in the post-office, on the railways and in the building industry. The influence of the Guild Socialist propaganda has also been considerable in the professions, and especially in the teaching world; while in the sphere of socialist organisation the policy and programme of the Independent Labour party, the Labour party and other organisations have been largely changed so as to incorporate the idea of control of industry by the workers more or less on the lines advocated by the Guild Socialists.

The National Guilds League, which is the only organisation directly representing the Guild Socialist movement in Great Britain, defines its objects in the following terms: "The abolition of the Wage System, and the establishment by the workers of Self-Government in Industry through a democratic system of National Guilds, working in conjunction with other democratic functional organisations in the community." An examination of this definition will serve to indicate clearly the main ideas upon which Guild Socialism is based.

The central idea, undoubtedly, is that of self-government in industry. The guild propaganda is above all connected with the advocacy of a change in the system of industrial administration which would result in placing the power and responsibility of administration in the hands of the workers engaged in each particular industry or service. Guild Socialists have always stressed the point that by "workers" they mean not simply the manual workers engaged in industry, but the whole necessary personnel. Indeed, the oft-used phrase "workers by hand and brain" seems to have been coined by the Guild Socialists, and was used by them from the beginning of their propaganda. They have stressed, moreover, not only the need for common action by all the workers "by hand and brain," but also the need for the recognition, in any form of democratic industrial organisation, of vital functional differences between one grade of workers and another. The democracy which they have advocated has been not the government of industry by indiscriminate mass voting, but a system in which power and responsibility would be definitely related to the particular function which each individual or group of individuals is called upon to fulfil in the service of the community.

The central idea of Guild Socialism is thus the idea of functional democracy, or, in other words, the application of democratic principles to the organisation of all forms of industry and public service. This advocacy is closely combined in Guild Socialist propaganda with a critique of the current conceptions of democracy. Guildsmen are fond of pointing out that the present forms of democratic organisation, which may be called, for short, "parliamentary democracy based on universal suffrage," are not in reality democracy at all, and do not in fact provide for the direction of the affairs of the community by the positive wills of its members. They urge that it is useless to look for effective democracy in the political sphere as long as the principle on which industry, which so largely dominates men's lives in modern communities, is organised is the principle of autocracy, or, at best, of fundamental class divisions. In this aspect their teaching may be regarded as a precise application of the Marxian "materialist conception of history" to the criticism of modern parliamentary democracy. If industry is democratically organised, they hold that real democracy in the political sphere will follow almost as a matter of course; but, as long as men, in their daily work, are compelled to submit to external dictation and have no recognised voice in the ordering of their service, these class conditions, they hold, will inevitably reproduce themselves in the political sphere. Guildsmen say that "economic power precedes political power."

The central object, then, of the Guild Socialists is to establish democracy in the sphere of industry, and thereby to secure that it shall be applied throughout the whole sphere of social organisation. In advocating such a change they recognise that their hope of success rests on relating their ideal definitely to actual movements existing within the world of capitalism, but capable of being so transformed as to supplant capitalism and replace it in the organisation of industries and services. They have therefore always based their propaganda directly upon the organisations which the manual and professional workers have created for the purpose of protecting their interests and improving their position under the wage system, and they have sought to persuade these organisations to accept the principle of industrial self-government, and to work for the realisation of it by endeavouring, in proportion as their power increases, to extend their actual control over capitalist industrialism. Mention has been made above of the transformation which has taken place in the programmes of many trade unions and other working-class bodies, largely under the influence of Guild Socialist ideas. The members of these bodies, from regarding the purpose for which their organisations are built up as limited to the protection of their members' interests under the wage system in face of those by whom they are employed or the securing of useful legislation, are gradually broadening their conception of the function of these organisations so as to include the assumption of direct "control" and responsibility for the organisation of industry. Nor is this influence manifest only in the changing programmes of the working-class organisations, but also in their positive policy and action. It was particularly plain in the "shop stewards' movement" in the British engineering and kindred industries, which, during the war, endeavoured to establish in the workshops a wider measure of direct trade-union "control of industry." It is also manifest in

the widening of the range of industrial disputes, and in the putting forward by the unions of claims which involve the recognition of their right to interfere and negotiate on behalf of their members in connexion with questions of "discipline" and "management." It appears further in demands that foremen and supervisory workers should be members of the trade unions, and even that they should be appointed by, and responsible to, those who have to work under them.

The most remarkable outcome of the guild propaganda, and also the only important practical experiment which the Guild Socialists have so far been able to make, is to be found in England in the Building Guild movement. Towards the end of 1919 a movement arose, largely fostered by the local branch of the National Guilds League, among the building operatives in the Manchester area, for the formation of a guild which would be prepared directly to undertake work, especially on behalf of the public authorities, in the sphere of house-building. A local Building Guild organisation, governed by representatives from the local management committees of the various building-trade unions, was set up in the Manchester area, and the movement spread very rapidly throughout the country, so that during the following year something like a hundred local Building Guild committees, linked up in a central organisation, were brought into being. These guild organisations proceeded to make tenders to the local authorities for the carrying-out of the housing schemes which were then being brought forward in most parts of the country, and after some difficulty the Ministry of Health was induced to sanction a limited number of contracts on an experimental basis. In March 1921 work was already proceeding on about 20 such contracts.

Some of the difficulties which arose in the starting of the Building Guild movement serve to illustrate very clearly certain of the fundamental principles underlying the Guild Socialist movement. When the Building Guilds first tendered for contracts they were asked by the local authorities and by the Ministry of Health, as a private contractor would have been asked, what "financial guarantees" they were willing and able to give. They replied that they would give no financial guarantee, even if they were in a position to do so, since their intention was not to produce for profit, but to produce for the public absolutely at cost price. There is in the constitution of the Building Guilds not only no provision for capital or for interest or profits, but a definite clause which prohibits the distribution, under any circumstances, of any form of dividend or bonus or profit to the workers. This is one of the features which clearly differentiate the Building Guild movement from the movement for "Cooperative Production" with which it is sometimes confused. In their refusal to give financial guarantees the Building Guilds stressed the fact that they were in a position, as a private contractor was not, to give a "labour guarantee," i.e. a guarantee that they could and would supply all the labour, including technical and supervising ability, necessary for the execution of the job. Stress has been laid, throughout the guild propaganda, on the idea that the power of the workers is based on their possession of a "monopoly of labour," and the Building Guild movement itself is based on this monopoly, largely possessed by the trade unions which control the Building Guilds.

Guildsmen thus claim the recognition, not only of the principle that the responsibility for industrial administration should be placed in the workers' hands, but also of the principle of economic security for every worker in the widest sense.

In the second place, difficulties arose because the Building Guilds firmly insisted that all workers employed by them must have security against unemployment, and must receive full-time wages irrespective of bad-weather conditions which so often cause an interruption of building work, of sickness, and of the other factors which serve to make the wages of the worker, especially in the building industry, vary so largely from week to week, and thus throw him into a position of permanent insecurity. This condition was accepted in the contracts actually signed by the Building Guilds and endorsed by the Ministry of Health; but considerable trouble subsequently arose over it in consequence of the opposition of the building-trade employers, who regarded it as "preferential treatment."

This point is very important, and is fundamental to the whole guild theory. In the statement of objects of the National Guilds League quoted above, it will be noticed that the Guild Socialists set out first of all to secure the "Abolition of the Wage System." A part of what they mean by this is that the conditions under which the workers at present receive wages involve permanent insecurity and are therefore degrading, and such as to place the worker at the mercy of the "governing class in industry." Guildsmen, therefore, have always made the principle of "continuous pay," or, as it is sometimes called, "industrial maintenance," a fundamental part of their propaganda. They have insisted that all those who are willing to do service for the community have a right to continuous pay in return for that willingness to serve, and that the maintenance of the "reserve of labour" is a necessary and legitimate charge upon the various

industries, and forms a real part of their costs of production. This principle of "industrial maintenance" has undoubtedly been one of the most favourably received and influential aspects of the Guild Socialist policy.

Guildsmen thus claim the recognition, not only of the principle that the responsibility for industrial administration should be placed in the workers' hands, but also of the principle of economic security for every worker in the widest sense. They recognise fully that this involves changes far more fundamental than any mere alteration of the machinery of industrial administration. They are not simply Guildsmen: they are also Socialists. They are in agreement with other schools of socialist thought in holding that it is necessary to transfer the means of production and distribution and exchange from private hands to some form of communal ownership. They are, however, strongly hostile to the older schools of collectivism or "State" Socialism, which contemplate the nationalisation of industry in a sense which would involve its direct administration, after transference to public ownership, by the governmental organisation of the political State. Guildsmen have always laid great stress in their propaganda on the evils of bureaucracy and political control in industry; and their system of direct workers' control is put forward as an alternative to State administration.

This, however, does not mean that they hold that the entire control of the various industries and services ought to pass into the hands of the workers organised as producers. They have always contemplated the exercise of direct producers' control over administration in close conjunction with a control over policy in which the representatives of the organised citizen-consumers would have an effective voice. This is what they mean when they say that self-government in industry will be exercised through guilds "working in conjunction with other democratic functional organisations in the community."

Guildsmen differ in their conception of the precise changes which are required in order to give effect to this principle. They are united in recognising that the working-class cooperative movement is destined to play an important part as the representative of the organised domestic consumers in the society to which they look forward. But there is much difference of opinion amongst them concerning the character and role of the State. The majority in the National Guilds League has taken a view concerning the State which is closely similar to that of the Marxians. They regard the State as a form of capitalistic organisation – "an Executive Committee for administering the affairs of the whole capitalist class" – and they look forward to its supersession "by forms of organisation created by and directly expressing the will of the workers themselves. . . . It (the N.G.L.) holds, however, that the exact form of organisation required in any country cannot be determined in advance of the situation which calls it into being." There is a minority, however, in the Guild Socialist movement which holds that the State is capable of adaptation to the function of acting as the political representative of the community in a state of society in which economic organisation is based on the Guild Socialist principle of industrial self-government.

The Guild Socialist theory concerning the precise forms of socialist organisation which would replace the present machinery of industry and the capitalist State is still in the making, or rather, to some extent, in the unmaking. Different Guild Socialist writers have put forward different views on this question; and on the whole the recent tendency of the Guild Socialist movement has been towards the abandonment of any attempt to define at all precisely the structure of the future society, and towards a concentration rather upon the principles and policies which are to guide the transition to it, preserving only in general outline a common conception of the character of the future organisation. The movement has undoubtedly been influenced, as it has been sharply divided, by events in Russia from 1917 onwards. The National Guilds League in England has affirmed its "solidarity with the Russian Soviet Republic," but has refused to commit itself as an organisation to Communist principles, or to declare for the adoption, in Great Britain, of methods similar to those which the Communists have applied in Russia. It is important to point out that the Guild Socialists and their organisation, the National Guilds League, must not be regarded as a party or group at all parallel to other socialist organisations such as the Independent Labour party or the Communist party. Guild Socialists in many cases belong to, and work within, one or other of the socialist parties; and they are held together not so much by a common attitude on the question of socialist political policy, as by a common belief as to the principles which must guide the making of the new society – principles which are compatible with varying views as to the policy which it may be necessary to pursue in the political field. Differences on this question of method have not prevented the guildsmen from working together in their endeavour to promote in the trade-union world, and to a less extent in the cooperative movement, a policy designed to strengthen the demand for workers' control, and to bring about substantial encroachments by the workers on the capitalist control of industry, even while the capitalist system as a whole remains in being. Mention has been made before of the development of the Building Guild organisation. Side by side with this practical object-lesson, guildsmen have worked out policies for adoption in those industries in which it is not possible at present to establish guild organisations in rivalry with the existing capitalist system. They have supported, in the case of the railways, the mines and certain other industries, demands for nationalisation, always,

however, coupling their support with the demand that nationalisation must be accompanied by a large measure of democratic control over administration. At the same time they have pressed, in industry generally, the policy known as "encroaching control." "Encroaching control" means the attempt by the trade unions, while not at once overthrowing capitalism or dispossessing the present owners of the means of production, to transfer into the hands of the organised workers as many as possible of the functions of control which are at present exercised by employers or their representatives. The two outstanding forms of this propaganda of "encroaching control" are to be found: (a) in the demand put forward by the guildsmen for the election of foremen and supervisors by the rank-and-file workers; and (b) in the policy known as "collective contract."

(a) Guildsmen are never weary of urging that in place of the present system, under which the foremen and industrial supervisors are appointed by the employers, usually from the ranks of the manual workers, the workers, through their trade unions, should take into their hands the right to appoint their own foremen and supervisors. This demand has not at present been conceded save in an insignificant number of instances; but the trade unions have taken certain steps towards it by securing, in numerous instances, the dismissal of foremen to whom their members have taken objection. The carrying-through of this policy of democratic election of foremen is closely bound up with the policy of "collective contract."

(b) By "collective contract" is meant a scheme capable of assuming a number of different forms, under which the whole of the workers in a particular shop, factory or department would make with their employer a single agreement as to their terms of service, the amount and character of their output, and the payment for it. Instead of the present system, under which the employer engages and pays each worker individually, and appoints his own representatives to exercise discipline in the workshop, the trade unions themselves, under this system, would make a contract with the employer to supply the necessary labour, including workshop supervision, and to carry out the work required, and would thus control engagements and dismissals as well as workshop discipline. The employer, instead of paying each worker individually, would pay to the union, or to the works committee on its behalf, a lump sum, which the workers would then distribute amongst themselves in such a way as they might agree upon. By this arrangement, it is contended, the employer would be directly excluded from a certain sphere in which he now exercises control. The workers would thus not only get a valuable lesson and experience in the work of controlling industry, but would also greatly strengthen their position for a subsequent further assumption of power, which 'would involve the winning of industrial control over a wider area, including commercial as well as purely productive operations. This system, too, has not yet been adopted anywhere in full; but certain approximations to it have been made.

the worker must have a sense that, in putting his best into his work, he is serving, not the private interest of any individual, but the whole community, and that his work is being directed to that end which will most conduce to the common benefit… the responsibility for doing his best must be placed upon the worker himself, and that he must be given freedom, in the form of self-government, in the organisation of his work.

The guildsmen stress, in the whole of their propaganda, the need for an appeal to a new motive in industry if men are to be persuaded to put out their best efforts, and to do their best work in the service of the community. They claim that in the past, since the coming of large-scale industry, production has been secured mainly by the operation of two motives fear (of unemployment and starvation) and greed (for higher remuneration secured, e.g. by "payment by results"). They contend that these two motives are showing themselves more and more inadequate to secure the continuance of production, and that this is shown both by the increasing frequency and severity of industrial disputes, and by the diminished willingness on the part of the workers to do their best. They maintain that a different spirit can be made to prevail in industry only if two conditions are satisfied. The first of these conditions is that the worker must have a sense that, in putting his best into his work, he is serving, not the private interest of any individual, but the whole community, and that his work is being directed to that end which will most conduce to the common benefit; the second condition is that the responsibility for doing his best must be placed upon the worker himself, and that he must be given freedom, in the form of self-government, in the organisation of his work. These two ideas are often put together in the phrase "free communal service," which is regarded by guildsmen as the condition of the creation of reasonable industrial order. It is recognised that such an order

would make higher demands upon the will and good-will of the mass of the people than the capitalist system; but guildsmen contend that, if the right appeal is made and the above conditions satisfied, the workers will rise to the occasion and will be prepared to do their best in the service of the public, because they will feel that they "count," and that the responsibility for the good conduct of industry rests directly upon them. Guild Socialists always insist that the power which goes with responsibility must be diffused to the widest possible extent among the whole mass of the people, and that this is the necessary condition of democratic efficiency and healthy social organisation.

References. – There is a large and growing literature dealing with Guild Socialism. See *National Guilds*, by S. G. Hobson; *Guild Socialism Re-stated*, by G. D. H. Cole; *The Meaning of National Guilds*, by M. B. Reckitt and C. E. Bechhofer; *Old Worlds for New*, by A. J. Penty; *Self-Government in Industry*, by G. D. H. Cole; other works by Hobson, Cole and Penty; and the various publications of the National Guilds League (39 Cursitor St., London, E. C. 4.). For hostile criticism see *Guild Socialism*, by G. C. Field; *Our Social Heritage*, by Graham Wallas; and *The Case for Capitalism*, by Hartley Withers. For the social theory of Guild Socialism see *Social Theory*, by G. D. H. Cole; *Authority, Liberty and Function*, by Ramiro de Maeztu; *The Sickness of an Acquisitive Society*, by R. H. Tawney; and *Roads to Freedom*, by Bertrand Russell. For its industrial policy see *Chaos and Order in Industry*, by G. D. H. Cole; *The Nationalisation of the Mines*, by Frank Hodges, and the evidence volumes of the Coal Industry Commission, 1919 (evidence of Cole, Straker, Slesser, and others). The National Guilds League publishes a monthly journal, *The Guildsman*, in which questions of Guild Socialist and trade-union policy are regularly dealt with, and news given of the movement in various countries.

Building Houses Without Private Profit

G.D.H Cole

Labor Age, January 1922

The Building Guilds are based on the recognition of these three principles: They are producing not for profit, but for use; they are completely democratic and self-governing; and the workers on a Guild job have the utmost measure of security which it is in the position of the Guilds under the capitalist system to afford to them. This, the Guildsmen believe, is why better work is being done, and why the cost of production is brought down while the quality is being improved.

How the Building Guild Works

Let me explain the actual method of working which exists within the Building Guild. In the first place, they are based fully and completely upon the trade union movement. In each locality the Guild Committee consists of trade union representatives from each of the sections into which the industry is divided. Thus, on a typical Guild Committee, there will be two representatives of the wood-workers; two of the painters ; two of the bricklayers ; two of the builders' laborers; and so on. Special provision is also made for the representation of the technical and administrative, as well as the manual-working grades, and for the appointment to the Committee of representatives from the workers employed on any large contract within the district. The Guild is distinct from the trade unions, and neither interferes with the working of the trade unions in their own sphere, nor is interfered with by them. But the exclusively trade union basis of the Guild organisation is the guarantee of its working-class point of view and of its solidarity with the working-class movement.

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Not only is the local Guild organisation democratic, and based on the trade unions. What is far more important, the work is executed under strictly self-governing conditions. On each contract the workers actually employed have their own job organisation, and choose, as a rule, their own foremen and supervisors; the Guild Committee choosing only the general foreman who supervises the job as a whole. Guild discipline is an entirely different thing from discipline under capitalist conditions, and foremen and supervisors are regarded not as officials imposed from above, but as co-workers appointed by the groups of operatives themselves. Each representative of a trade or section of the industry upon the Guild Committee is responsible, in conjunction with

the local Guild secretary, for the supply, conditions of employment, and discipline of the workers belonging to his own craft; and, if any question touching trade union rules or regulations, arises, the local Management Committee of the trade union is called into consultation, and the matter is decided jointly between it and the local Guild Committee. Generally speaking, the foreman on the Guild jobs acts, not as a disciplinary official, but as an organiser of the work and a natural leader of the work group. His authority is not resented, and indeed, he seldom needs to exercise authority in the ordinary sense. The democratic choice of foremen and supervisors is developing a new form of leadership under which the old problems of the "never-ending audacity" of officials hardly arises. Every man on a Guild job, or at least the great majority of the men, is actively interested in the best possible organisation of the work; and the process of getting the work done as well as possible thus becomes a cooperative concern in which everybody pulls his full weight and tries to work in as well as possible with his fellows.

The National Guild

The regional and national organisation of the Building Guild is based upon the local organisation. The Guild Committees within a regional area, such as the Metropolitan area or the North Western region of England, are organised into a Regional Council, which consists of the representatives from each of the Guild Committees within the region. The Guild Committee has the power of co-operation for the purpose of securing adequate representation of technical or administrative capacity, or of any particular craft which does not secure representation by the ordinary process of election. The National Board of the Building Guild, in its turn, consists of one representative from each of the Regional Councils, and the Board possesses the same power of co-option as exists in the region.

This is a mere skeleton outline of the organisation of the Building Guild movement, and it is not in the main upon this form of organisation, necessary as it is to safeguard its democratic character, but upon the spirit behind the movement, and the purpose with which it works, that its success depends. Lest I should be accused of giving too partial a view of this success, I will cite, not my own opinion, but that of a competent observer, Mr. Ernest Selley, who was deputed by the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association of Great Britain to make a special inquiry into the work of the Guilds. Mr. Selley's testimony is the evidence of one who approached the question without previous bias, and formed his opinion by actual observation of the work being done upon the various contracts into which the Guilds entered. This is what he says:

An Impartial Expert's View

"There is a notable absence of the lethargic movements which one is accustomed to see on all kinds of building work. Everybody appears to he working with a will, as though the job had to be carried through with the utmost possible speed.

"On one scheme, where 236 men were employed, I took particular care to inspect places where, in normal conditions, workmen might be found 'milking,' e. g., behind stacks of bricks, timber stores, shed, etc. In no ease did I discover anything of the sort. I watched a group of laborers shovelling earth into carts. It was wonderful how quickly the carts were filled. This intense activity was not due to the intimidation of a vigilant foreman. The men were on their honour. As a workman put it: 'It is a question of honour with the men, they want to do their best; and they have every incentive to do so: it is in their own interest that they should.' Another man remarked: 'You won't find any "swinging" on this job. The work goes on just the same whether the foreman is about or not.' I corroborated this for myself.

"In the joinery shop, all the men were working at top speed. I discovered that the shop foreman was 'away queer.' A labourer engaged on digging trenches said, 'things are very fair on this job. You don't get "hunched" about.' Another said, 'We don't want no "dogging" on this job. Where's the need? We shouldn't have volunteered if we didn't mean to do our best.' On one scheme I discovered a variation of what I had come to regard as the Guild standard rate of work. I noticed in my wanderings over the site that there appeared to be a 'sagging' in the speed worked by some of the laborers. Among a group employed on excavation work, only a few seemed to be working with a will. The others appeared to find a philosophical joy in contemplation rather than activity. I overheard one of the hard workers exclaim: 'Come on, mates, you're letting us down!' This remark had the desired effect. The general foreman explained that, as there were large numbers of unemployed in the neighbourhood, many had volunteered merely for a job, and not because they had been inspired by Guild ideals. Besides, it would take time for their minds and muscles to respond to the new stimuli. His experience was that, after a few weeks, two or three keen guildsmen produced wonderful effects on a whole gang.

"Work carried on in such a spirit should result in increased output, and I found expert opinion unanimous on this point I was careful to interview the people best able to decide, that is, clerks of the works. Some were more guarded in their replies than others, but all were pleased with output. Some went no far as to say that outputs on Guild schemes were 25 per cent above the average for similar kinds of work by other contractors.

"Notwithstanding the increased speed, the Guilds are putting forth, none of the work is stamped. The quality of Guild work is of a very high standard. The Surveyor to the Bentley-with Arksey Urban District Council

stated in writing: 'The quality of the work is extra good and far superior to that done by any other contractors in the district.' A high official of the Ministry of Health declared that the work of the guildsmen at the Clayton estate was 'the best in England and Wales.' The Chairman of the Contracts Sub-Committee of the Manchester City Corporation said: 'Work on Guild contracts beats every-thing.' The brickwork on the Clayton estate is the finest I have ever seen. I heard complaints concerning this scheme; production was excellent, but quality was too good! The Guild, of course, could reduce costs even lower by putting in inferior work. But no Guild craftsman would willingly consent to scamp his work. One of the most hopeful signs of the Guild movement is the re-rival of the craft spirit. 'We shall do work worthy of the Middle Ages,' exclaimed one of the Manchester operatives. Every guildsman I talked to appeared proud of the work the Guild was doing. A London operative said: 'We want the people to point to those houses and say, "Those fine places were built by the Guild."' A woodworker of 35 years' experience said it was a real pleasure to work for the Guild. Life was worth living because his craft was 'honoured and not debased.' In the joinery shop the men took pleasure in pointing out the excellence of the work, and how it differed from ordinary jerry building. At Walthamstow, where the men had insisted on doing *all* the joinery work on the site, I examined the cottage dressers. The drawers were made to fit, and were dovetailed not only in the front but at the back. On another scheme a carpenter was at work on the frame of a mansard roof. It is usual to mortice and tenon only the main posts and to 'but in' the intermediaries. On this job all were morticed and tenoned. 'We are craftsmen,' said another, 'and the first thing with us is our craft. We like doing our work well. There's no plea= sure in stamping. Any man who is a craftsman will tell you that.'"

[*Quoted from, the Report of Mr. Ernest Selley, "An Inquiry Into the Working of the Building Guilds," published in "Garden., Cities and Town Planning," issue of June,* 1921]

The Working Class on Trial

In my own observations of the working of the Building Guilds, I have formed the opinion that one of the most powerful influences which is making Guildsmen do their best for the success of the Guild is their feeling that in the Building Guild the working class is on its trial. The trial, it is true, is not a fair one; for there are many obstacles in the way of success, and the Guild is constantly hampered by the opposition of the public authorities, the master builders, and the suppliers of building materials. But the Guild workers are well aware that failure, even in face of these adverse conditions, will be widely interpreted as proving the incapacity of the working class to control industry, and the Utopian character of demands for industrial self-government.

Nothing for Private Profit

Not a ha' penny of private profit can be made on a Guild contract. The remuneration of the individual guildsman does not depend in the very smallest degree on the character or amount of the work which he does. He has, in in the capitalist sense, no "incentive" to do good work; and, if the capitalists were right, he ought to spend his time "slacking" on the job, and to do his work as badly as possible. Yet it is notorious that, where the capitalist incentives to labour – the fear of dismissal, and the prospect of gain from greater output – are present, far worse work, and far less of it, is being done than on the Guild jobs. Clearly, then, there is something wrong with the capitalist diagnosis of the industrial problem, and the condition of an efficient industrial order is not the affording of further material incentives of the old kind, but the provision of a new motive for good work. It is in the presence of this new motive, and in the feeling that the potency of its appeal is under trial in the Guild experiment, that the guildsmen rely for the lowering of building costs, and the improvement of building construction.

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Of course, the evidence of the success of the Guilds is not yet conclusive, and cannot be conclusive until the experiment has been made on a much larger scale, and over a longer period of time. It is still doubtful whether, in face of the growing capitalist opposition, the Building Guild will be able to clear the ground for an adequate experiment. Prevented from securing for the present further public contracts, and driven hack upon tenders for the execution of private work, the Guild encounters fresh difficulties arising out of the necessity for adequate plant and organisation. It cannot secure this plant and organisation without some capital, and the raising of capital inevitably brings with it dangers to the purely Guild character of the enterprise. At present the Building Guild is endeavouring to meet these dangers by asking the trade unions to supply it, at a fixed rate of interest, with the capital which is required for immediate development; and, at the annual conference, this autumn, of the National Federation of Building

Trades Operatives, a resolution directing the trade unions in the industry to consider favourably the question of providing the sum required was unanimously passed.

In a Guild Society, the raising of adequate capital for industrial enterprise would be a social function; and it would not be left for an industrial Guild to borrow as best it could the sums required for development. But there can be no complete or perfect Guild under capitalist conditions. The most that can be secured at the moment is such an approximation to the conditions of Guild working and Guild organisation as the capitalist environment permits. Not even the most devoted admirer of the Building Guild would suggest that it is a National Guild in the full sense, nor that it can hope to apply, save in a very partial way, the principles of Guild organisation. The establishment of these principles in any full sense involves the supersession of the capitalist system, and that supersession is not yet. But I do claim for the workers in the building industry that they are, under very difficult conditions, pointing the way to an alternative industrial order, and that the example of their success is one calculated to inspire other groups of workers to seek self-government, and to pave the way for a more complete supersession of capitalism.

A Final Word On the Building Guilds

G.D.H Cole

Labor Age, February 1922

The conditions of the Guild contract are so important that I set them out in full, with the necessary explanation:

> "It is agreed that the following arrangements would be satisfactory to the Guild and to the Ministry:-
>
> 1. The Guild will give an estimate of the cost of each type of house, which estimate must be agreed as reasonable between the parties and approved by the Ministry.
>
> 2. The Guild will be paid a lump sum of £40 per house in respect of remuneration for disposal by the Guild to provide for continuous pay to those employed on Guild contracts, or for other purposes of the Guild.
>
> 3. The Guild will be paid 6 per cent on the cost (subject to par. 5 below) to cover plant and all overhead charges, salaries of buyers, head-office expenses, and salaries of supervising staff not wholly employed on the site of the individual housing schemes.
>
> 4. Any surplus under pars. 2 or 3 to be devoted to improvement of the service.
>
> 5. The charge of 6 per cent to cover the purposes mentioned in par. 3 will be paid on increased cost due to increases in the rates of wages, but not on increases in the cost of materials.
>
> 6. (a) If the estimates net cost is, say £900, and the actual cost proves to be, say, £800, the actual cost will be paid by the local authority, plus 6 per cent for overhead charges (subject to any modification due to par. 5), and £40 as above.
>
> (b) If the actual cost should prove to be, say, 21,000, that cost would be paid, plus 6 per cent on the estimated net cost of £900 only (subject to any modifications due to par. 5), and £40 as above.
>
> 7. The Co-operative Wholesale Society may be associated in the contract for the purchase of materials. This position to be clearly defined to the satisfaction of all concerned.
>
> 8. The contract to include a "break clause," which shall not take effect for three months from the commencement, allowing the contract to be terminated if the costs exceed the estimate, plus any increases in the rates of wages and standard costs of materials which may have taken place since the making of the estimate.
>
> 9. The Co-operative Wholesale Society will, on being satisfied with the contract, insure the local authority against loss -under the contract for a payment of 2s. 6d. per £100.
>
> 10. A satisfactory costing system shall be arranged."

It will be seen that under this draft form of contract the Guild was to give an estimate of the anticipated cost of construction to the local authority, and that the contract could only be approved if this estimate was regarded as satisfactory. The local authority, however, would not be called upon to pay the amount in the estimate, but the actual cost of construction, whether it worked out at more or less than the estimate. If it worked out at less, the local authority would save on the transaction over and above any difference between the Guild estimate and the rival estimates of the private contractors. If it worked out at more, the local authority was able either

to terminate the contract under the conditions of Clause 8 (which, it may be mentioned, have never been put into force in any instance), or it could insure against loss through the Co-operative Insurance Society. In fact, Guild contracts have hitherto always worked out at considerably less than the estimates which the Guild has submitted; although these estimates have been uniformly lower than those of private contractors.

When I say that the Guilds undertook to build houses absolutely at cost prices, it must be noted that "cost price" in this undertaking bears a slightly different sense from that which is normally attached to it in commercial transactions. This difference rests upon one of the vital and fundamental principles on which the Guild movement is based. One of the first and most emphatic declarations made by the building workers is that labour must be regarded as the first charge upon the product of industry, and that continuous maintenance, at the standard rate of pay, must be assured to every worker engaged upon a Guild job, as indeed, it ought to be assured to every worker in the community. Accordingly, the Building Guilds, and the Guilds which have since been started in other industries, pay all their employees a continuous salary, which is received in time of sickness, or temporary cessation of work (owing e.g., to weather conditions), as well as when actual full-time work is being done. The Guilds desired to include this charge for continuous maintenance in the cost of building, but the Ministry of Health would not agree to this, and finally, by a compromise under Clause 2 of the above agreement, a lump sum payment of £40 per house was agreed upon as a charge covering the estimated cost of continuous pay. This clause, as we shall see, was afterwards a source of great trouble. From the first, strong objection to it was taken by the master builders, who refused to provide continuous pay for their own employees and objected to such payment being made by the Guilds.

Although the Ministry of Health entered into this agreement with the Building Guilds, it was by no means prepared to welcome the prospect of reducing the cost of housing production which the Guild offers afforded, or to allow any large number of Guild contracts to be concluded, even where the local authorities were anxious to adopt the Guild method. The Minister of Health stated that, in his view, the Guild method in industry must be regarded as purely experimental, and that only twenty contracts could be sanctioned in order to allow the experiment to be tried in practice. In reaching this decision, there is little doubt that the Minister was actuated by the opposition the master builders were offering to any recognition of Guilds by the Government. At first the master Guilds as certain, and therefore been inclined to ignore them; but, as soon as they realised that the Guildsmen meant business, and had the labour of the building workers behind them, they began to do their utmost to obstruct, by political influence, the growth of the movement. As their pressure increased, the Ministry of Health became more and more unwilling to sanction further Guild contracts, even at the present time, the twenty contracts promised in 1920 have not all been granted, while all further expansion of Guild activities on public housing work have been refused. More-over, early in 1921, the Minister of Health announced that he would be unable, under any conditions, to sanction further Guild contracts on the basis agreed upon between himself and the Guilds only six months or so before. Exception was taken in particular to the clause providing for continuous pay, and to the refusal of the Guilds to quote a fixed price, thus admitting the principle of private profit.

In order to deal with these difficulties, and also on the basis of their actual experience of working on public and private building operations, the Building Guilds decided, at a National Conference held in the summer of 1921, to adopt a new form of contract, not necessarily to the exclusion of the old, but as one more likely to be acceptable to the Ministry, and also to the private customer. This new contract, known as the "Maximum Sum" contract, differs in certain important particulars from the standard contract drafted in agreement with the Ministry of Health in 1920. Instead of giving only an estimate of the cost of construction, the Guild is now prepared to quote a maximum price, which it guarantees not to exceed under any conditions. If the actual cost of construction works out at less than this maximum, the purchaser, whether it be a local authority or a private person, still gets the benefit, and is only charged the actual cost in the sense above attached to the term. But, in order to cover the risk involved in quoting a maximum price in face of fluctuating costs of production, the Guild now includes in the cost a small percentage charge, varying with the type of work to be executed, and the sums realised in this way are placed in an insurance fund to be used for the making up of any losses which may be sustained as a result of the maximum prices. A further new form of contract, known as the "Guild Labor Contract," is one under which the Guild leaves the purchase of materials and plant to the customer, and confines itself to the provision, organisation and control of the labour required for the job. This form of contract, however, is only likely to be used in exceptional cases; and it may be assumed that for the future the "maximum sum contract," or some modification of it, will be the normal method of Building Guild enterprise.

One reason for the adoption of this form of contract lies in the almost complete abandonment, in 1921, of the Government housing program. The Government had failed to get built the houses which it had planned to build; and, having attempted to cast the blame for its failure upon the building trades operatives, it suddenly revised its housing policy and drastically restricted the

amount of financial assistance which it was prepared to give to the local authorities for the erection of working-class houses. This meant that, if the Guilds were to expand, they must look to the private purchaser fully as much as to the local authorities for future orders. In dealings with the private purchaser, the first question that would be raised by an individual who desired to build himself a house would be: "What is the *maximum* amount that this house will cost me?" Unless the Guilds are prepared to give a fixed estimate of the *maximum* cost, it would be difficult to get the private individual, with his limited means, to enter into arrangements with them. The Guilds, therefore, when they accepted the *maximum* sum policy, were deliberately making preparations for a great expansion of their work in the sphere of building for the private purchaser. This expansion is already to some extent taking place; and a great deal both of constructional and of repair work for private persons is now being carried out.

My Idea of Democracy

G.D.H Cole

The American Socialist, April 1958

This timely essay was written by Britain's foremost labour and socialist historian during World War II, and is reprinted, in slightly abbreviated form, with the permission of the author. – Eds.

To give everyone a fair chance of taking an interest in public affairs, and a fair chance, too, of making his weight felt – that would be democracy. And no society can remain democratic unless a good share of its citizens take an interest in the job of keeping it that way.

SOCIAL institutions have two, and only two, legitimate purposes – to ensure to men the supply of the material means of good living, and to give men the fullest possible scope for creative activity. It is conceivable that these two purposes may clash; for example, if higher production requires from men a subordination to routine processes which leaves no room for the sense of creative freedom. Where such clashes do arise, compromises have to be made. Men have to choose between their desire as consumers for a higher standard of material living and their desire as producers for a less irksome way of life. The best set of social institutions is that which finds the best compromise available under the prevailing conditions.

Who, then, is to settle what is best? Who, but the whole people, who must endure for good or ill the consequences of the decision? If the good life is a blend of satisfactions achieved from consumption and satisfactions achieved from successful creation, the only answer I find tolerable is that men themselves must decide collectively what blending of these elements they like best.

I am thus led to a belief in democracy by two routes. I believe in democracy because I believe that every citizen has a right to play a part in deciding how society can best be organised in the cause of human happiness, and also because democracy is itself one of the fundamental exercises of free creative activity. It follows that I mean by democracy not merely the right of a majority to have its way, but an arrangement of public affairs which is designed to give every man and woman the best possible chance of finding out what they really want, of persuading others to accept their point of view, and of playing an active part in the working of a system thus responsive to their needs. Not that, under any system, most people will take a continuous active interest in public affairs; not at all. But everyone ought to have a fair chance of taking an interest in them and of carrying some weight if he does take an interest. This too I am sure about – that a society, whatever its formal structure, cannot be democratic unless a goodly number of men and women do take an interest in making and keeping it so.

My idea of democracy excludes too much tidiness, too much order, too much having everything taped. I believe every good democrat is a bit of an anarchist when he's scratched.

THAT is my idea of democracy. It involves many other things – free speech, freedom of organisation, freedom to develop the personality in diverse ways. It cannot mean any of these things without limit – for society in itself implies limits – but it means that the limits must be very wide. My idea of democracy excludes a regimented society, an indoctrinated society, a society in which men are not allowed to organise freely for all sorts of purposes without any interference by the police, a society in which it is supposed to be a virtue for everybody to think like his neighbours. My idea of democracy excludes too much tidiness, too much order, too much having everything taped. I believe every good democrat is a bit of an anarchist when he's scratched.

Furthermore, my notion of democracy is that it involves a sense of comradeship, friendliness, brotherhood – call it what you like. I mean a warm sense – not a mere recognition, cold as a fish. I mean that democracy means loving your neighbours, or at any rate being ready to love them when you do not happen to dislike them too much – and even then, when they are in trouble, and come to you looking for help and sympathy. A democrat is someone who has a physical glow of sympathy and love for anyone who comes to him honestly, looking for help or sympathy: a man is not a democrat, however justly he may try to behave to his fellow-man, unless he feels like that. But – and here is the point – you cannot feel that glow about people – individual people, with capacities for doing and suffering – unless and until you get to know them personally. And you cannot know, personally, more than a quite small number of people.

That is why real democracies have either to be small, or to be broken up into small, human groups in which men and women can know and love one another. If human societies get too big, and are not broken up in that way, the human spirit goes out of them; and the spirit of democracy goes out too. What walks in instead is demagogy – a very different thing. Men feel lonely in a great crowd unless there is someone to hustle them into herd activity. In their loneliness they follow the man with the loudest voice, or in these days, the loudest loudspeaker and the most efficient propagandist technique. They suck in mass-produced ideas as a substitute for having ideas of their own: they all shout in unison because they have no one to talk to quietly – no group to go about with, no little world of a few people in which they can count as individuals and work out lives of their own. You can have various kinds of society under these conditions. You can have Fascism, or you can have what the Fascists call plutodemocracy. You can even have Communism, of a perverted sort. But you cannot have democracy. For democracy means a society in which everyone has a chance to count as an individual, and to do something that is distinctively his own.

ROUSSEAU, knowing all this, thought that democracy could exist only in small states. The revolutionary philosophers who followed him thought they had solved the problem of having democracy in large states by the simple device of representation, whereby one man could represent and stand for many men in public affairs. But one man cannot stand for many men, or for anybody except himself. That was where the nineteenth-century democrats went wrong, mistaking parliamentarism and representative local government for adequate instruments of democracy, which they plainly are not. If you think they are, ask the man in the street – any ordinary man who will tell you he is not much of a politician – what he thinks. He does not think Parliament is democratic – even when it is elected by all the people – not a bit of it; and he is right. One man cannot really represent another – that's flat. The odd thing is that anyone should ever have supposed he could.

Of course, knowing your neighbours as real persons is not of itself democracy, any more than a steel ingot is a battleship, or even part of one. But this sort of knowing is part of the material out of which democracy has to be built. You cannot build democracy without it. That is what has gone wrong with our modern democratic societies. All the time we have been broadening the franchise, and increasing educational opportunities, and developing the social services, and all the rest of it, we have been letting the very essence of democracy get squeezed out by the mere growth in the scale of political organisation. It is even true that each successive widening of the franchise has made our system less really democratic, by making the relation between electors and elected more and more unreal.

Men, being men, do not lie down quite tamely under this deprivation of democracy. They keep what they can of it by making, within the great societies, little societies of their own. They form little social groups of friends, or of persons drawn together by a common friendliness – *clubs des sans-club*. They organise for all sorts of purposes – recreative, instructive, reformative, revolutionary, religious, economic, or simply social – in associations and groups or all sizes. But when these groups get big the same nemesis overtakes them as overtakes the political machine. Their natural democracy evaporates and bureaucracy steps into its place. You can see this happening to the trade unions, which are a great deal less democratic when they have grown into huge national associations than they were when they were simply little local trade clubs meeting in an inn or a coffee-house, so that each member knew each other personally.

SUCH little groups exist still – any number of them. But the growth in the scale of living drives them out of public influence. There are fewer and fewer important jobs for them to do, except in the purely social sphere. There they remain immensely important, rescuing countless souls from the torment of loneliness and despair. But they do not, in rescuing these souls, play any part in the more public affairs of society. They do not affect political or economic policies, or give any democratic character to men's behaviour in their collective concerns. As a consequence, men's public and private lives slip further and further apart; and not only artists and other exceptional people, but quite ordinary men and women too, get to despising politics in their hearts, and to saying openly that politics are a rotten game, and thinking of politics as something it will not help them to bother their heads about: so they had better not. Politics for the politicians! That is the last corruption of a democracy that has knocked the foundations from under its own feet.

In such a society, politics is apt to be a rotten game. It is bound to be; for it has no roots in the real lives of the people. It easily comes to be either a vast make-believe or, behind its pretences, largely a sordid squabble of vested interests. In terms of vital ideas, or of common living to the glory of God, or of the City, or of the spirit of man, it loses much of its meaning. That is why, in our own day, so many political structures purporting to rest on democratic foundations have shown neither imagination to create the means to the good life nor power to defend themselves against any vital new force, good or evil, that challenges their supremacy.

Fortunately, there are in the countries which live under parliamentary institutions other elements of democracy which are not so defenceless. The real democracy that does exist in Great Britain, for example, is to be found for the most part not in Parliament or in the institutions of local government, but in the smaller groups, formal or informal, in which men and women join together out of decent fellowship or for the pursuit of a common social purpose – societies, clubs, churches, and not least, informal neighbourhood groups. It is in these fellowships, and in the capacity to form them swiftly under the pressure of immediate needs, that the real spirit of democracy resides. It was by virtue of this capacity that the workers in the factories responded so remarkably in 1940 to the urgent need that followed upon the fall of France, and that, a few months later, the whole people of many great cities found courage to resist the impact of intensive air bombardment. The tradition of British democracy, which goes back above all to seventeenth-century Puritanism, reasserted itself strongly in spite of the immensely powerful forces which have been sapping its foundations in recent years.

The real democracy that does exist in Great Britain, for example, is to be found for the most part not in Parliament or in the institutions of local government, but in the smaller groups, formal or informal, in which men and women join together out of decent fellowship or for the pursuit of a common social purpose

OPPOSITION and persecution are great levellers, and therefore great teachers of democracy. Success and recognition, on the other hand, are very apt to kill the democratic spirit. This is not only because, having won something, men grow less enthusiastic for what remains to be won. It is even more because success and recognition enlarge the scale of organisation, cause it to become more centralised, and diminish the importance of local leadership, local initiative, and the individual contribution of every member. Every large organisation that is able to administer its affairs openly without let or hindrance develops bureaucratic tendencies. It becomes officialised – even official-ridden: its rank and file members come to feel less responsibility for its doings. The spirit of sacrifice and of brotherhood grows weaker in it. Its tasks come to be regarded as falling upon those who are paid for doing them: the duty of the member comes to be regarded as one mainly of acquiescence in the official decisions. In a persecuted body, on the other hand, and to a great extent in one which is prevented by any cause from becoming centralised, each member is under a continual pressure to be up and doing. There must be, in every group, close and constant consultation upon policy, a constant sharing-out of tasks, a constant willingness to help one another – or, in other words, the spirit of democracy must be continually evoked.

Does this mean that democracy is, in sober truth, only a by-product of persecution and intolerance? These evil forces have, there can be no doubt, been vastly important in creating the democratic spirit. It is to be hoped they are at work, re-creating it to-day, all over Europe. But we need not conclude that democracies are always fated to perish in the hour of victory, unless we also conclude that it is beyond men's power to stand out against the forces which impel societies towards bureaucratic centralisation. If indeed bureaucracy is the unavoidable accompaniment of all large-scale organisation – I mean, bureaucracy as its dominant force and characteristic – the game is up. But need this be?

It will be, unless men are vigilantly on their guard against it. For both increasing population, with its accompaniment of increasing concentration in large groups, and the increasing scale of production make for bureaucracy. These forces destroy remorselessly the natural small units of earlier days – the village or little town, the group of workmates in a workshop or small factory, the personal acquaintance that crosses the barriers of class and calling. They convert the factory into a huge establishment in which it is impossible for everyone to know everyone else, the town into a huge agglomeration of strangers. They compel men to travel long distances to and from work, and therefore to scurry away from the factory as soon as the day's work is done, without building up close social contacts with their fellow-workers. At the other end, they send men scurrying from home, which becomes more and more a dormitory rather than the centre of a common life. The

city develops its amusement zone, where strangers jostle; and if a man stays in his own place, the wireless ensures that a large part of his recreation shall isolate him from, instead of uniting him with, his neighbours.

THERE are, superficially, many conveniences in the new ways of living. So many that we may take it for granted men will never willingly give them up. Indeed, why should they, when almost every one of them, taken by itself, is a gain? For the disadvantage lies not in the technical changes themselves, but in men's failure to square up to the new problems of successful living which they involve. The disadvantage is intangible, and not easily seen (though it is experienced) by the individual who is unused to taking general views. The man or woman who has less and less intimate knowledge of his neighbours, less and less intense participation in any small social group to which he feels an obligation, a less and less integrated and purposeful life, and less and less sense of responsibility for his fellows, does not, unless he is a bit of a philosopher, inquire why these things have happened. He may indeed be unconscious that they have happened, and conscious merely of a vague and unidentified emptiness in his way of living. But even so, if I am right in believing that the void is there, he will be very ready to respond to anyone who will offer him the means of filling it up.

He will respond, for good or for evil. He will be ready to join an anti-social "gang," if no one offers him anything else. He will respond to any mass propaganda that blares loudly enough at him with a message of comradeship. He will rally to Dr. Buchman, or to Sir Oswald Mosley, rather than not rally at all, when once he has become acutely aware of his own *malaise*. He wants comrades, even if they be comrades in enmity against something to which he has, at bottom, no real objection. He wants comrades, and the society he lives in offers him only a scurrying loneliness among the scurrying hosts of strangers.

This desire for comradeship is the stuff out of which we must build democracy, if we are to build it at all. Build it and preserve it – that is what we must do. And this means that, in this age of hugeness, we must still find means of resting our society on a foundation of small groups, of giving these small groups a functional place in our society, of integrating them with the larger organisations which are indispensable for modern living, of encouraging a continual proliferation of new groups responding to developing needs, and, last but not least, of countering every tendency towards bureaucratisation of this quintessential group life.

How can we rest a society as huge as ours on a secure foundation of small, intensively democratic groupings? This society of ours is based of necessity on large-scale production: it involves, at any rate for a long time to come, the existence of huge cities; and it is in need, in many respects, of even huger organisation on a supranational scale – for the prevention of war, for example, and for the fuller development of international trade and exchange. We cannot turn our backs on these forces; we have to accept them because they are to-day as much a part of the given environment as sea and land, mountains and river-valleys, heat and cold, and all the other things which form part of our natural environment. The task before us is not analogous to that of draining the ocean; but it is analogous to that great victory of man which turned the ocean, heretofore a barrier, into a means of communication between land and land. We have to turn the very hugeness of the modern world into a means for the higher expression of the human spirit.

We cannot do this by changing man's stature; for man remains little, and is destined so to remain always. The Superman is a vain notion; and "Back to Methuselah" is another. Mark Twain once wrote that if it were possible to educate a flea up to the size of a man, that flea would be President of the United States. It is not possible to inflate humanity up to the size of the organisations it has made. But it is possible so to arrange our affairs that little men are not merely lost in a world too big and directionless for them to find their way.

Men's easiest ways of grouping are 'round the places they live in and the places they work in. These are two bases of natural human relationship which can be used as bases for democracy. Take the factory. It is not enough for factory workers to belong to a trade union, which will represent them in negotiations about wages, hours of labour, and general working conditions throughout their trade. The trade union, under modern conditions, is necessarily much too remote from their working lives. Even if it is broken up into branches, these seldom coincide with the personnel of a particular factory or workshop, and are as a rule much more concerned with matters of national policy than with immediate workshop affairs. Side by side with the trade union, and perhaps largely independent of it, there needs to be a workshop group, consisting of all the workers in a particular shop, irrespective of their trade or degree of skill. This group ought to have a recognised right of meeting on the factory premises, its own chosen leaders, and – here is the main point – a right to discuss and resolve upon anything under the sun, from the conduct of a particular manager or foreman to the policy of the national Cabinet, or anything else about which its members happen to feel strongly.

Observe that I say "workshop group," and not "factory group." In the case of small establishments, the factory may serve as a unit; but the large factory is much too big to function as a primary neighbourhood group, or to have in it the essential quality of basic democracy. The shop stewards' movement that grew up between 1915 and 1918 was feeling after just this basic democracy. But it always found the trade union bureaucracy against

it, because it seemed to, and did stand for an alternative basis of social organisation. It was truly democratic; and accordingly the bureaucrats were eager to knock it on the head. They did not object to shop stewards who kept to their "proper" functions – that is, acted merely as subordinate agents of the trade union machine. They objected strongly to a shop stewards' movement which laid claims to any independent initiative or showed signs of assuming a "political" character.

CONSIDER now the places in which people live. Here in my mind's eye is a street of houses – or rather several streets. This one, a row of nineteenth-century working-class dwellings, all joined on, short of light and air and comfort and even of elementary requirements. This other, a street on a post-war housing estate, immensely superior in lay-out and amenity and capacity to afford the environmental conditions of healthy living. This, again, a street of shops, and this, not exactly a street, but a great block of flats housing more people than many streets.

The shop stewards' movement that grew up between 1915 and 1918 was feeling after just this basic democracy. But it always found the trade union bureaucracy against it, because it seemed to, and did stand for an alternative basis of social organisation. It was truly democratic; and accordingly the bureaucrats were eager to knock it on the head.

What is odd about these places? The oddest thing, to my mind, is that the people who live in them, though they are neighbours with a multitude of common problems, hardly ever meet in conclave to consider these problems, and have in hardly any instance any sort of common organisation. It is true that the shopkeepers may just possibly have some rudimentary association among themselves – but even that is unlikely. It is true that, here and there, struggles between landlords and householders have brought into being some sort of Tenants' League, for a narrow range of purposes. But in the vast majority of streets there is not even the shadow of a social unity, joining these people together on the basis of their common neighbourhood.

A second thing, not so odd but well worth noting is that, of these bodies of street-dwellers, those who know one another best are pretty certain to be those who are living under the worst housing conditions. There is a comradeship of the street in a poor working-class quarter: there is usually much less on the model housing estate or in the model block of flats.

I am suggesting that there ought to be for every street, or little group of streets, for every block of flats, and, of course, for every village and hamlet, a regularly meeting, recognised, neighbourhood group, with a right to discuss and resolve upon anything under the sun. I am not merely suggesting that this ought to happen: I say it ought to be made to happen. Every new group of streets we build ought to have its little Moot Hall for such assemblies of its people, ought to have its little centre for their communal affairs. Personally, I think this Moot Hall should be also a communal restaurant and bakehouse, and a social club. I think it should include a place where children could amuse themselves, and be left in charge of somebody when their parents are away. I think, as we rebuild out cities, there should be open space round these centres – space for games, for sitting about, for children's playing. I think we should make our Community Centres, not merely one to a big housing estate, but one to every street, or group of streets, of, say, a hundred or at most a few hundred households.

BUT to enlarge on all this would take me too far from my immediate purpose. Whether these other things are done or not done, I am sure there must be really active neighbourhood groups in every street and village before we can call our country truly a democracy. One reason for this is that there is no other way of bringing the ordinary housewife right into politics without interfering with her duties as housewife and mother. Workshop organisation may come first in the minds of the men and young women who work in factories: neighbourhood groups are the key to the active citizenship of the wife and mother.

It is of no use to think that we can have these groups and confine their activities to the specific affairs of the little places to which they are directly attached. They must and will deal with these affairs, and they should be given a positive and assured status in dealing with them. But this is not their sole, or even their main, purpose. They are wanted most of all to serve as basic and natural units of democracy in a world ridden by large-scale organisation. Their task is one of democratic education and awakening – of ensuring democratic vigilance through the length and breadth of the great society. Therefore they must be free, like the workshop Soviets, to discuss and resolve upon what they will.

But – I hear the bureaucrats and their friends objecting – but it is altogether a fallacy to suppose that the ordinary man wants, either at his workplace or in the neighbourhood of his home, to be for ever talking politics. For proof that he does not, go into the pubs and see. Go into the Women's Institutes, the Community

Centres, listen in tubes and trains and restaurants. Go where you will, and hear for yourself. It is not politics that interests the ordinary man. The nearest he got to politics even under war conditions was air raids; and that was not politics: it was sheer personal concern *plus* sporting interest.

Well, I know that. Most men and women are not deeply interested in politics because (a) they could not do anything much about them even if they were, given society as it now is; (b) politics are not interesting usually, until one has already some very strong reason for being interested in them, and a tolerably clear notion of what they ought to be about; (c) the politicians, or most of them, do not want most people to be interested, except at election times, and do not do anything to get them continuously interested; (d) the bureaucrats want most people not to be interested, and will do their best to stamp out any organisation likely really to express the ordinary man's point of view; (e) the vested interests do not want to have ordinary people prying too closely into their various concerns; (f) it is simpler to govern a society when most people are not interested in its government, and no politician or bureaucrat quite knows whether the people, if it took to having a mind of its own, would agree with him or not. It is therefore safest to let sleeping dogs lie.

NEED we wonder that ordinary men and women, under these conditions, are interested in politics only at rare moments when politics visibly and unmistakably come and make havoc of their lives? There has never been since the great days of Athens (save perhaps for a very brief while in Calvin's Geneva) a state, or even a city, whose rulers thought it part of every citizen's right and duty to take a continuous and active interest in political affairs.

I do not go so far as that. All I ask is that we should set out so to organise our new societies as to encourage every citizen to become politically conscious, and to believe in democracy as a precious possession of the people. And I assert that, in these days of huge States and huge-scale production, there is no way of doing this except by building upon a foundation of small neighbourhood groups, territorial and economic, because such groups alone have in them the essential qualities of unmediated, direct democracy based on personal contact and discussion, and on close mutual knowledge and community of small-scale, immediate problems. That only is democracy's sure foundation: given that, we can, I believe, safely raise upon it what towering skyscrapers we please.

Foreword

G.D.H Cole

Branko Pribićević, *The shop stewards' movement and workers' control, 1910-1922* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959)

The author of this book is a Yugoslav scholar who worked wider my supervision at Oxford on a research thesis of which it is only a pan; for it covered the mining and railway industries as well as engineering. I feel no doubt that this pan of it at any rate is a remarkable piece of work, the most reliable and comprehensive history of the subject it deals with, showing both a remarkable understanding of British conditions and a most acute judgment of the strength and weaknesses of the movements it describes. With some of cline movements I was myself closely connected at the time; and in the main I have to endorse Mr. Pribićević's judgment. The movement for workers control was in truth at many points ill-defined and impractical about means; and it was also at bottom sharply divided about the ends in view. On the one hand were the out-and-out revolutionaries, most of whom passed into the Communist Party of Great Britain – and some of them quite speedily out of it again; on the other were the idealists of workers control, who were never extreme revolutionaries, but only left-wing reformists who, however opposed to state control and bureaucratic centralization, wanted to build on social institutions as they were, rather than to subvert them utterly and did not believe that a violent revolutionary upheaval in Great Britain was either practicably on the cards, or even desirable. For a time, adherents of these divergent views were united in a common movement for workers control with many others who belonged to neither group; but presently, mainly under the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, they fell apart, and it became clear that the first group wanted revolution *à Ia russe* more than it wanted workers' control in any real sense, and that the second group was hardly less sharply divided into those who utterly repudiated revolution and those who tried to steer a middle course, defending what had been done in Russia without being prepared to advocate that it should be imitated under the very different conditions which prevailed in Great Britain.

I myself grew up to manhood during the years of unrest that preceded the First World War. I was highly critical of the Labour Party by 1910; and during the next few years I was much influenced by French Syndicalist ideas and subsequently by Guild Socialism as preached by A. R. Orage and S. G. Hobson in the columns of the *New Age*. But when, in 1913, I published my first big book, *The World of Labour*, I still did not all myself a Guild Socialist, though I shared many of the *New Age*'s ideas. There was still no Guild Socialist organization for anyone to join; and Orage was strongly against any such

organization being founded, preferring to keep the propaganda of Guild Socialism within the confines of his sixpenny weekly, which had an exclusively intellectual appeal. So matters remained until after the outbreak of war, which radically altered the situation by making workers' control an immediate and urgent issue, at any rate in the engineering trades. Then, a number of us felt it was impossible to remain inactive, founded the National Guilds League in the spring of 1915, and set out to do our but to appeal directly to the workers, publishing pamphlets and addressing many meetings, and some of us, despite our middle-class origins and attitudes, becoming for the duration of the war servants of the trade unions in the hope of helping them to become more effective instruments of the movement for workers' control. I myself became for the time being an officer of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers – now the A.E.U. – and continued in its service till the war ended late in 191 8, acting as adviser on questions of dilution and similar issues and sometimes of use as a go-between between the trade union officials and the unofficial workshop representatives whom they refused to recognize officially. It thus fell to my lot to see a good deal of the trade union movement during the war years, in both its aspects, official and rebel, and at the same time to play an active part in the Guild Socialist propaganda by my writings and speeches. Then, when the war ended, I left the A.S.E. and moved over to the Labour Party, for which I drafted an election manifesto in 1918, and which I continued to serve for some years longer, combining my official post as Officer for Advisory Committees with my unofficial secretaryship of the Labour Research Department, in which I had been active ever since its foundation by the Fabian Society in 1913.

I found myself in a difficult position in the post-war years; for I was a left-wing Socialist who was never at all tempted – as many of my friends were – to go over to Communism, because I entirely disagreed with its fundamental approach – as I did indeed with the Labour Parry's. For the basis of my Socialism was a deep belief in the value and free will of the individual, and I heartily disliked any mass movement that seemed to me to underrate or deny his importance. I was against centralism whether it manifested itself in the dictatorship of a class – or of a party supposed to represent a class – or in an overweening advocacy of the claims of the State as representing the whole body of citizens. I believed that democracy had to be small, or broken up into small groups, in order to be real, and that it had to be functional for this to be possible – that is, related to a definite and particular activity and not to an indiscriminate medley of purposes combined in a single body deemed to be superior to and different in its motives from all others. To this conception of democracy I have adhered all my life, and still adhere broadly, though I can see that it led me into a good deal of nonsense in my early days, when I supposed that trade unions, with all their shortcomings and limitations, could be converted into guilds animated by the highest social purposes and could take over the full control of industry by a process of 'encroaching control' that would presently render the employing class function-less and ready for supersession.

I believed that democracy had to be small, or broken up into small groups, in order to be real, and that it had to be functional for this to be possible – that is, related to a definite and particular activity and not to an indiscriminate medley of purposes combined in a single body deemed to be superior to and different in its motives from all others. To this conception of democracy I have adhered all my life

It surprises me now how little thought we gave in those days to the higher ranges of control, and especially to the control over investment, of which we were hardly conscious as a problem. We were, I think, quite right in insisting that control could mean nothing to most workers unless it began at the bottom—in the actual workshops, and that the mere admittance of a few trade union leaders to high positions in industry would avail nothing. But in insisting on this we simply ignored most of the problems of higher control and planning – problems which the Russians were forced to face as a consequence of their very success in winning power. We thus had hold of one end of the stick only, while our antagonists had hold only of the other end – and between us we came to grief and the whole workers' control movement almost perished.

We were, moreover, kicking against the pricks; for the trend of industrialism – and of most things – was in those days towards the dominance of larger and larger units, made up of more and more people, whose individuality was threatened with submergence by the very vastness and complexity of the organization within which they had to work. I am in hopes to-day that that phase of social evolution is drawing to an end and that automation, even if it means operations on a still greater

scale, will bring with it operation by human groups of rational size and will demand from each man a more individual contribution, thus making possible a more human kind of factory control. Unless this comes about, I have little hope of my ideas coming to fruition, for where men have to act in huge and largely undifferentiated masses, I feel sure some sort of dictatorial regime is likeliest to prevail and a healthy state of social organization to be unattainable. But I must not now follow up further the train of my own social thinking. I must get back to Mr. Pribićević's book.

He brings out. I think, very clearly the essential weaknesses of both the main groups which stood forth during and just after the First World War as the leading advocates of worker? control. The Guild Socialists' weakness was that they never faced the fundamental problem of power and of large-scale organization and planning, whereas the weakness of those who led the Shop Stewards' movement was that, though during the war they were occupied largely with day-to-day workshop problems, no sooner was the fighting over than they became exclusively preoccupied with the central problem of class-power and forgot all about control at the works and workshop level, and indeed even denied that such control had anything to recommend it, thus forfeiting the human basis of their appeal. They thus became centralist and totalitarian democrats, and lost sight of the essential purpose of the movement for workers' control in its relation to ordinary men and women.

I am as convinced as ever I was that we were essentially in the right, and that Socialism cannot be soundly built except on a foundation of trust in the capacity of ordinary people to manage their own affairs

Looking back, forty years later, to the movement as it existed when I was young. I am very conscious how much in those days we oversimplified the issues, and how much of the reality we failed to face. But I am as convinced as ever I was that we were essentially in the right, and that Socialism cannot be soundly built except on a foundation of trust in the capacity of ordinary people to manage their own affairs – which requires methods of management on a sale not so large as to deprive them of all possibility of exerting any real control over what is done. Mass democracy, I feel sure, is bound to be unsound unless it can be broken up into units of normally manageable size and complexity. We made, no doubt, many errors; but in that respect we were right and our critics wrong.

G.D.H. Cole

November, 1958

It appears to the Guild Socialists, as to all real Socialists, obviously futile to expect true democracy to exist in any Society which recognises vast inequalities of wealth, status and power among its members. Most obvious of all is it that, if, in the sphere of industry, one man is a master and the other a wage-slave, one enjoys riches and gives commands and the other has only an insecure subsistence and obeys orders, no amount of purely electoral machinery on a basis of "one man one vote" will make the two really equal socially or politically. For the economic power of the rich master, or of the richer financier who is above even the master, will ring round the wage-slave's electoral rights at every point. – G. D. H. Cole, *Guild socialism re-stated*

Marie-Louise Berneri:

Her Contribution to Freedom Press

John Hewetson

The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly No. 21 (January-March 1993)[1]

At the time of her death [in 1949], when she was 31, Marie Louise Berneri had already won for herself' a high place among present-day theoreticians of the anarchist movement, and exerted an influence usually attained only by much older comrades.

Marie-Louise Berneri (1918-1949)

This influence was the product not only of her mastery of a number of subjects, but also of her exceptional personal qualities, which lent to her writings, her public speaking and her private conversation a special distinction that drew immediate attention. These qualities caused her opinions to be regarded with respect also in circles which do not share her social and political views. Her personal beauty reflected her serene and generous nature, and made her an outstanding figure at any gathering.

Her loss to the anarchist movement cannot be measured, for it is not simply that of an outstanding militant; lost also is all that she would have accomplished in the future, in the growing maturity of her powers. And the world in general is also the poorer, for such rare and exceptional individuals enrich human life and make of the world a better place.

M.L.B.'s character and personality had a compelling effect upon those who came in contact with her, communicating a confidence in human nature and in life simply by her bearing and her approach to problems. She herself was quite unconscious of this, for the modesty which was so natural to her always made her underestimate her own influence over others.

This influence was not limited to the circles reached by *Freedom* and its predecessors. Many writers and intellectuals — for example, those who met her through a common interest in the problems of the Spanish struggle — found themselves profoundly stimulated by her ideas, her exceptional powers in discussion, and her vitality. M.L.B. was not content to confine herself to the literary work of anarchist publishing, being quite unsparing of herself in the routine work of the movement – office work, correspondence, street selling, contacting potential sympathisers, lecturing to the movement's meetings and to outside organisations. She was at the centre of all_ the manifold activities which go to make up a movement's life. Her general grasp of international affairs was informed by a profound internationalism of feeling, her sympathies being with the oppressed peoples of the world, and she was utterly incapable of that narrowness of outlook that is called patriotism.

Marie Louise Berneri was a member of a distinguished anarchist family which has influenced the movement directly in Italy, Spain, France and the English-speaking countries. Her father, Camillo Berneri, was a leading theoretician of the Italian movement and an outstandingly original thinker. He

[1] First printed in *Marie-Louise Berneri 1918-1949: A Tribute* published by the MLB Memorial Committee London 1949. John Hewetson (1913-1990). [This is an expanded version of his obituary entitled "M.L.B." which was published in *Freedom: Anarchist Fortnightly*, 30th August 1949 – *Black Flag*]

was assassinated by the Communists during their counter-revolutionary putsch in Barcelona during the May Days of 1937, when at the height of his powers. Her mother and sister are prominent in the movements in Italy and France respectively.

Born at Arezzo in 1918, she went in early childhood into exile from Italy when her father refused to accept the demands laid upon the teaching profession by the Fascists. In 1936 immediately after the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution her father went to Spain. After a short period of active fighting on the Aragon front he took up residence in Barcelona in order to edit the paper *Guerra di Classe*, the most far-seeing and clear-sighted revolutionary anarchist paper to come out of the Spanish revolution. Marie Louise Berneri went to Barcelona for a short visit in the autumn of 1936, and kept up a close correspondence with her father. After his death she came to live in England.

Her interests were not confined to general political matters. Although her university studies in psychology were interrupted by her departure for England, she remained a keen observer of human individuals and their motives, among her special interests being child psychology. And, as always, her great qualities informed her discussion of them. When she spoke on Reich's work and the sexuality of children to an Easter Conference of the Progressive League some years ago, many of her hearers spoke afterwards of the remarkable impression this young and beautiful woman made by her calm and penetrating discussion of matters which the majority even of intellectuals fear to think about. And all this with a charm and level-headedness which disarmed hostile criticism.

Throughout the war she was continually beset with anxiety for friends and relatives in occupied territories, some of them in fascist prisons and concentration camps. Only those who were closest to her understood the depth of feeling which lay behind her serene bearing. With the same courage she bore tragedy in her own life.

M.L.B. was an inspiring and greatly loved comrade. But for the present we must leave more personal accounts to others and concern ourselves with her work as a militant in the anarchist movement. Her spirit infused every activity undertaken by the Freedom Press since 1936. Her influence was ubiquitous, and her personality coloured all our work. Here we can only try to speak of her contribution in general terms.

Her work for the anarchist movement in Britain began before she came to live here. Before the first issue of *Spain and the World* came out in December, 1936, she had discussed every aspect of its launching with her companion and her father, had collected funds to cover the first five issues, and had made the necessary contacts among comrades able to send information and articles. After 1937, when she came to live in London, she took an active part in the production of each issue, even down to dispatching and street selling. She always retained a delight in seeing the whole production through from start to finish, and in 1945, writes to her companion, then in prison: "I am writing from the Press as I am waiting for the second forme to go on the machine. I like being here, rushing up and down, seeing the paper take shape. I think this issue is good and more lively than the last one ..."

As well as the editorial work for *Spain and the World*, there was the *Spain and the World* colony of orphan children at Llansa, in Gerona. For these 20 children, later increased to 40, she collected funds and clothing. Manuel Salgado speaks in another article of her work for the Spanish comrades who came to Britain after the collapse of Madrid in 1939. Later on, in 1945, when over a hundred Spaniards who had spent the war in the German forced labour brigades in France, were brought to England and treated as enemy prisoners-of war, she not only visited them and organised relief parcels for them, but effectively brought their condition and the injustice of their detention to the knowledge of circles in a position to exert pressure on the government. In due course, and, in no small measure as a result of her work on their behalf, they were released either to stay in this country or to go back to France.

When Spain was finally crushed by Franco's victory, disillusionment and the imminence of another world war reduced support for *Revolt!* (as *Spain and the World* had been renamed) and the paper ceased publication after June 3rd, 1939. Many comrades and former supporters seemed to disappear, but M.L.B. was always seeking ways and means to start a new paper, and a small group of comrades issued the first issue of *War Commentary* in November of the same year.

It is not easy to recapture the spirit of those days of gloom and despondency. The complete destruction of the hopes raised in 1936 was enough to extinguish the enthusiasm of most of the comrades; but for M.L.B., although her emotional commitment to the

cause of the Spanish Revolution was of the deepest, the situation simply called for the continuation of the work of the movement in the changed circumstances. It was not that her temperament was particularly optimistic, though she was buoyant enough; her resolution in continuing to give expression to the ideals of anarchism sprang from a certain *steadfastness*, a quality which was like a sheet-anchor to her comrades in critical times.

The full command of language she achieved later also made it easy to forget that in those early days she possessed only an imperfect knowledge of English. Yet in the summer of 1940 she conducted the most exhaustive discussions with two English comrades on the history of the Spanish Revolution, and the fruits of this discussion were then embodied in a course of ten lectures given to a small study circle first at Enfield and later in central London. Though the numbers of sympathisers who attended these lectures were small, yet she spared no pains in preparing the material. The anarchist movement had to be built up again, and she went to work wherever the smallest opening showed itself. Later on, in 1941, when the shop in Red Lion Passage had been destroyed by fire, and the Freedom Press offices moved to 27, Belsize Road, she initiated the weekly lectures which have continued almost without interruption ever since. In the discussions which followed these lectures her contribution would always make sure that the specifically anarchist attitude to the subject was fully displayed, and she would unerringly put her finger on the fundamental questions.

"You have not learned the modesty, the spirit of sacrifice which must animate the propagandist. We must go to the people..."

She was never satisfied, nevertheless, with presenting a "party line", but always adopted an independent and critical attitude. This is well shown in an editorial article in *Revolt!* of 25th March, 1939, which was jointly signed by herself and V.R. It discussed the reports in the Spanish anarchist press on the events in Central Spain when the Communists were finally eliminated from the government. M.L.B. and V.R. could not regard this as a triumph, for it came too late; the Communists should have been rendered powerless two years before, during the May Days in Barcelona in 1937.

"Thus, viewed in this light," they wrote, "we cannot consider the final elimination of the Communists as a victory for our comrades. Rather must we admit that their whole attitude (the C.N.T. more than the F.A.I.) in refusing to make public in Spain and the world at large the nefarious work being carried on by the Communists and other counter-revolutionary elements in general, for fear of breaking up the anti-fascist front, was a serious tactical mistake, partly responsible for the tragic situation in Spain."

M.L. applied her critical intelligence not merely to events in which the international anarchist movement played a part, but also to the work of our own group and to herself as well.

The following extract is taken from a letter written in 1941 to a comrade who was an outstandingly able outdoor speaker. It shows M.L.B.'s fairness and objectivity, and her sense of purpose; but here we are concerned to stress the frankness of her critical approach.

"We are not going to build up a movement on obscure ideas. We shall have fewer ideas perhaps, but each of us will understand them perfectly and be able to explain them to others.

"In order to defend your position you take the example of Bakunin, Emma Goldman, Malatesta — all mystics according to you. But take the example of Malatesta ... Have you ever read his *Talk Between Two Workers* or other dialogues? They are luminously clear. He explains anarchism without mixing it with 19th century philosophy, God, Faith or Knowledge. He knew that if he started introducing metaphysical discussions the workers would not have understood him. No doubt he desired some time to write about these problems, but he had the courage to mutilate his knowledge in order to be understood by the masses. The same applies to Kropotkin. He could have written books bigger than those of Marx around his theories but he had the courage to write penny pamphlets expressing his ideas in the most bare and simple form. He says himself somewhere that he needed a lot of courage to do that work, he envied the Marxist and

> bourgeois theoreticians who were not limited by those considerations in their work. But at least he succeeded in being understood by the most illiterate workers and peasants.
>
> "You, comrade, want to put all your knowledge, all the ideas you have and all the original thoughts which come into your head in your speeches and articles. You have not learned the modesty, the spirit of sacrifice which must animate the propagandist. We must go to the people ... but do you believe that the nihilists went to the people with the ideas they had just taken from the books of Hegel? You must go to the people with simple, clear ideas. You refuse to make that sacrifice, you think it would mutilate you, you do not see it would make you stronger and more efficient."

This extract also illustrates M.L.B.'s views on the form in which mass propaganda should be cast — views straight-forward enough, indeed, but a glance at progressive propaganda will show how often simplicity is forgotten. It should not, however, be inferred that she advised any kind of vulgarisation of ideas for mass consumption. Indeed, the whole spirit of the above letter implies the opposite – the need to express ideas simply instead of in a recondite manner. This is very different from mere sloganizing.

Her spirit of mutual criticism combined with mutual respect helped to develop to the full both the individual qualities of each member of the group, and also the ability to work together in common with complete identification of the individual with the aims of the group. Glancing through the files of *War Commentary*, one is struck by the number of articles to which it is impossible to assign a particular authorship. They were produced after joint discussion, a comrade being delegated to prepare the final script. M.L.'s work extends far beyond the articles over her initials, for she provided an inexhaustible fund of ideas, enriching and fructifying the writing of many comrades on the editorial board. Her hand is thus present in many an unsigned editorial or anarchist commentary. It says much for her influence that our group has developed and worked with such complete harmony and integration.

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Since 1936 it has been necessary to build up the anarchist movement in Britain again from the beginning, and the method of building up has therefore borne the imprint of M.L.'s organisational ideas. She hoped eventually to see a numerically strong movement; but she also knew well that weakness is concealed in mere numbers without a clear grasp of anarchist conceptions or resolute character. For M.L.B. the term "comrade" did not simply mean one who shared the intellectual conceptions of anarchism: it meant someone who also commands respect as a man or woman, who is devoted not merely to the ideas but to the *cause* of anarchism, and expressed that devotion in work for the movement. For her, the term "comrade" was also a compliment and a mark of friendship.

It follows from such conceptions that a movement could only be built up by working in common, by the development of mutual respect and trust. Nothing distressed M.L. more than a failure to maintain this trustfulness between comrades in the movement, for she saw in mere mechanical relationships the seeds of dissension and future weakness which become manifest at just those critical moments when steadfastness and solidarity are most needed. Such a method of building a movement must inevitably be slow; but it creates a solid and enduring structure. It requires laborious propaganda and unremitting work: and it must be able to survive innumerable disappointments, for many are tried in the balance and found wanting. But it derives solace from the good comrades who are gained for the cause of anarchism; and strength from the friendship and comradeship born of common struggle. The tributes to her in this brochure bear abundant testimony to that.

M.L. provided for the rest of us (and indeed for all whose contact with her was more than superficial) the soundest foundation for the movement in her love for the anarchist ideal and philosophy. How moving are these lines about the Russian anarchist, Voline, who died a few months after they were written (May 24, 1945):

> "Last night when I came home I found a letter from Voline. He had been gravely ill and was writing from hospital. He described to me the work he had to do and the sufferings he had gone through and I felt sad after reading his letter, sad and ashamed too because during the day I felt a bit fed up and started thinking I should enjoy myself instead of working (you know the mood one

gets into sometimes) and then I get Voline's letter and I see that, in spite of all the privations he has endured, his first thought is to get better and to go out to carry on with his good work."

Throughout the war, whether she was in the editorial chair or had temporarily relinquished it to other comrades, she was the principal theoretical influence behind *War Commentary*, and afterwards *Freedom.* (And to say this is by no means to belittle the work of other comrades.) In 1945, she was one of the four anarchists associated with *War Commentary* who were arrested and charged with sedition. In the event, she was acquitted on a technical point of law, and did not go into the witness box. But she had wished to defend herself, and only agreed to this more passive role on the insistence of comrades. They pointed out that it would be madness for all the defendants to go to prison when technical grounds would free her. With George Woodcock, she was more than equal to carrying the main burden of continuing the paper until her comrades were released from prison.

"Anarchists believe that strikes must prepare the workers for the ultimate expropriation of the capitalist class. That is why they advocate the occupation of the factories, the direct exchange of goods between the countryside and the towns, the running of all means of communication for the benefit of the community… This would be a truly revolutionary agitation which would give workers confidence in their ability to run production, distribution and transport, through their own independent organisations."

– Marie Louise Berneri, "Futility in France", *Freedom* , 13 December, 1947

To her work for the paper she brought a wide knowledge and insight into affairs, while her visits to Spain and her long and deep concern for the problems of the Spanish Revolution had given to her revolutionary views an actual and practical quality which was of immense service to editorial discussions. Her sense of humour – and of scorn – is revealed in the excerpts from the capitalist (and often, too, from the radical) press which for five years she collected as a regular feature in "Through the Press." As an editor she always insisted on high standards – not always easy to attain in a struggling minority paper. On many occasions she would herself sit up through half the night preparing material for publication rather than take the easier course of passing inferior articles which were to hand.

In addition, she maintained an extensive correspondence with comrades in Europe, Mexico and South America, throughout the war; and this she extended greatly in the post-war period.

It is natural that we should look for those aspects of M.L.B. and her work which, besides the image that her friends will always carry, will survive. Of her writings, the most important is her *Journey Through Utopia* which is shortly to be published, and which illustrates her thorough and comprehensive approach.

We are fortunate in having this work, written in the last year of her life, during the calm of her pregnancy, when the beauty of her character, and her face, seemed enhanced by her sense of biological fulfilment. She did not regret those months even after their tragic sequel (for her baby was born dead) and nor should we.

She was the author of what is probably the most influential of recent Freedom Press publications, *Workers in Stalin's Russia*, published at a time when it was not yet a popular role to expose the Russian system, and which ran to two printings, totalling ten thousand copies. It is not a political book in the ordinary sense, but an attempt to sift out from the mass of conflicting and often suspect evidence, the truth about the situation of the Russian people, and to assess it from the standpoint of human values. Always an indefatigable student of Russia, she brought to her study exceptional intellectual integrity and penetration, and the book amply illustrates her humane and ethical outlook. As with her knowledge of Spain, she kept a strictly critical standpoint, and never permitted the demands of propaganda to warp her judgment. This quality lends a special authority to her work. As she said in her introduction:

> "The destruction of a mirage is an unpopular task. The man in a desert who is trying to convince his exhausted companion that the coveted oasis he sees in the distance is only

a dream is likely to be answered with curses ...

"But if the illusions about the happiness of the Russian people must be crushed, the belief in the need and the right to happiness and justice for mankind must remain."

The greater part of her written work is to be found in the innumerable articles, editorials and reviews, and in her articles in the foreign press and letters abroad. This work may have been hasty, or fragmentary, but was never superficial. Her knowledge and her integral conception of anarchism prevented that, and she brought the same qualities of generosity and sincerity, which gave her such charm as a person, to her work as a revolutionary journalist. It is as impossible to conceive of her indulging in polemical exaggerations or substituting slogans for reasoning as it is to think of her displaying a lack of honesty in her personal relationship.

Her attributes as a writer are typified in two essays in the magazine Now. They take the form of reviews of Reich's *The Function of the Orgasm* and Brenan's *The Spanish Labyrinth*, but she contributed so much of herself to her book reviews that they stand in their own right. Her long discussion of Reich's work, the earliest appreciation it received in this country, ends thus:

MLB speaking in Glasgow, 1945

"...To the sophisticated, to the lover of psycho-analytic subtleties, his clarity, his common sense, his direct approach may appear too simple. To those who do not seek intellectual exercise, but means of saving mankind from the destruction it seems to be approaching, this book will be an individual source of help and encouragement. To anarchists the fundamental belief in human nature, in complete freedom from the authority of the family, the Church and the State will be familiar, but the scientific arguments put forward to back this belief will form an indispensable addition to their theoretical knowledge."

Around her examination of Brenan's book she wove a picture of the history and struggles of the Spanish people which is full of human feeling and understanding. She disagreed with the author's conclusions but she summed up his work in these words:

"Brenan, who lived so long in Spain, seems to have been influenced by its communal institutions, and has written his book in the spirit of the craftsmen of the Middle Ages. Like them he has produced his *chef-d'oeuvre* which is the test of his love for his art and his respect for his fellow men for whom the book is written. *The Spanish Labyrinth* has been created with that painstaking and disinterested love which characterises all lasting works."

The qualities she admired in this work are strikingly revealed in her own writings.

During the last few months of her life she had projected a book on the unpublished writings of Sacco and Vanzetti, which she had hoped to issue both in England and America, and also in Italian. She had, too, begun work together with George Woodcock on the translation of Bakunin, and was preparing for publication her father's notes on sexual questions. She had also started to collect material for a study of the Marquis de Sade.

The conflict between the desire to express one's own potentialities and the urge to play a part in effecting social change is neither so simply nor so inevitably concluded as is sometimes suggested. For the apathetic or for the narrowly fanatical it does not exist, but for these who, like Marie Louise are so richly endowed by nature and by parentage, it may present a terrible dilemma. There are some who, while accepting much from our common heritage, offer so little to it, and some who, in their devotion to causes, have extinguished themselves. It may be argued either that he who develops his own attributes to the full, regardless of the world in which he lives, has by that very act enriched society, or on

the other hand, that he "that loseth his life shall find it", but neither of these is wholly true. The ultimate dissatisfaction of the ruthless individualist and the frustration of the completely selfless propagandist spring from the same root – the inability to *balance* the needs of the person as such, and as a member of society. Marie Louise was able to achieve this balance. Her serenity and repose were the outward signs of this inner poise. She was not unconscious of the struggle between the continual demands of the movement with which she was so closely associated, and the need for creative self-expression, a need that in a nature like hers must have been very strong, but her life was a witness to the success with which she resolved this conflict.

For her friends and comrades the sense of loss is overwhelming. It is impossible to convey an adequate impression of her influence on the intellectual and personal development of the members of the Freedom Press Group, and there are many others who owe her a similar debt that can never be repaid. We are conscious of the inadequacy of these cold lines to convey an impression of the part M.L.B. played in our group's life. Yet her warm, vivid and truthful personality remains as a part of each one of us.

In Soviet Russia

M.L.B.

Spain and the World, 8 January 1937

All Is Not Well – André Gide's View

A NEW INEQUALITY HAS ARISEN

Retour de l'U.R.S.S. By André Gide (Ed. Gallimard. Paris, 6 frcs).[1]

On the occasion of Gorki's funeral, André Gide was able to visit the U.S.S.R., the land of his dreams for which he always showed both enthusiasm and attachment. We awaited his return with impatience because, certain of his sincerity, we knew that what he would have to say would either dispel or confirm our fears concerning the true conditions in U.S.S.R. He knew what we expected from him, he understood how much we desired to hear the truth with regard to the conditions of life in Russia, about which so many falsehoods have been told; he understood moreover the importance that would he attached to accusations against the system, for which he had always shown so much admiration.

In Russia there is the "excellent" and the "worst." The "excellent" is to be found in the sports grounds, rest houses, camping grounds. healthy youths and children, happy and spontaneous both in that manner and their conversation. The photos of these children and youths are reproduced in hundreds of newspapers and magazines, and this is one of the means of amusing enthusiasm in the youth of other countries. But what is most unfortunate (and those who dare to express this opinion are treated as critics and even Fascists) is the sight of long queues of patient people waiting to obtain foodstuffs, which are scarce and often uneatable because the State does not pay attention to the quality. Why should the State worry: it has no competition, consequently there is no need-to satisfy public taste as is done in the capitalistic state.

One must not expect to find statistics in this book. . . A. Gide does not give us detailed information on the organisations in factories, in the "kolkhoses." He really wished to study the psychology of this new Russian people.

A National "Conformity of Opinion"

Firstly, one learns that "in Russia it is a recognised fact that on anything and everything there cannot be more than one opinion." Besides, the people's minds have been so shaped that this conformity of opinion becomes easy and natural. "Every morning the *Pravda* teaches them what they must know, think, believe. So that whenever one talks to a Russian it is the same as if one were talking to everybody." They are happy, "but their happiness is made up of hope, faith and ignorance." Ignorance because their frontiers are closed to the rest of the world, and as a result they believe that the workers in other countries are even unhappier; ignorance which is accounted for by the very education

[1] André Gide (1869-1951) was a French author. He was awarded the 1947 Nobel Prize in Literature. As a distinguished writer sympathising with the cause of communism, he was invited to speak at Maxim Gorky's funeral and to tour the Soviet Union. There he encountered censorship of his speeches and was particularly disillusioned with the state of culture in Russia. An account of his visit, entitled *Retour de L'U.R.S.S.* (*Return from the U.S.S.R.*), was published in 1936. He later contributed an essay to The God That Failed, a 1949 anthology in which six authors discuss their disillusionment with and rejection of the Soviet Union. (*Black Flag*)

received, which has as its aim the stifling of the critical spirit, and compulsory satisfaction in one's condition at all times. Criticism consists in asking oneself whether such and such a view is admissible or not, without thinking or discussing whether such a view is the correct one. This absolute faith, which is found in the perfect organisation of Russia, gives rise to a superiority complex amongst the people, which makes them always doubt that they are being sufficiently admired abroad. Already they are quite convinced that they have nothing to learn from other countries: France has neither schools, nor trams nor underground trains.

But worst of all is the new inequality which has been created. In Sotchi one admires the rest houses of the best and most trustworthy workers, but near-by workers, who are employed in the construction of the new theatre, live in filthy encampments. After having visited a modern "sovkhose" one crosses a stream and sees hovels where people sleep four in a room.

A New Bourgeoisie

Gide's fears seem justifiable. "I am afraid" – he writes – "that a new kind of bourgeoisie will he formed, made up of satisfied workers (and consequently conservative) comparable with our 'petite bourgeoisie.' With the restoration of the family (as a social unit), inheritance and the liking of money, of private property will overcome the need for 'camaraderie,' of life in common." And one sees formed again the strata of society (we will not yet call them classes), a kind of aristocracy. I am not referring to an aristocracy of personal merit and value, but that of good thinking, and conformity, which, in future generations, will become that of money, and this petite bourgeoise spirit is profoundly counter-revolutionary. "I doubt whether in any other country today, including even Hitler's Germany, the mind is less free, more subdued, more frightened (terrorised), more servile."

Stalin is adored, his effigy has replaced the Ikons.

"A dictatorship of the proletariat we were expecting. We are far from it. Yes, dictatorship, naturally; but that of a single man…"

André Gide concludes by a study of Culture and Art. What is required of an artist in Russia are works which all can understand immediately, but that is not sufficient. The artist is ordered to be "in line," otherwise he is condemned of formalism. But art will lose all its significance and value without liberty, having to follow a given path and having always to be popular.

The Revolution Will Triumph

Despite all the criticisms A. Gide has showered on the Russian regime, he is certain that the Revolution will eventually triumph. He hopes that his book will be of some use to the Russian comrades. We are certain of its utility not only for the Communists who will now understand that the U.S.S.R. is not a terrestrial paradise as they would have us believe, but also for the Spanish comrades who will be able to avoid making the same mistakes which lead, under illusive forms, to the disappearance of liberty and of the powers of criticism, and thus to material and intellectual slavery which will retard for many years the great work of human emancipation.

Paris.

Francisco Ferrer

M.L.B.

Spain and the World, 19 February 1937

Barcelona Memorial to Founder of The Modern School

On Sunday, January 17th, 1937, before the people of Barcelona, was solemnly inaugurated the marble tablet with the effigy of Ferrer and the following inscription:

> Plaza F. Ferrer Guardia
>
> Founder of the Modern School
>
> Shot on October 13th, 1909, for the cause of Liberty.

It is with such a simple act that Barcelona has expressed its gratitude to the one who devoted his whole life to the emancipation of the Spanish people.

F, Ferrer was born in 1856 at Alella of well-to0do parents who saw to it that he received a very catholic education. But at the age of twenty, already he was obliged to leave his father's home on account of his republican ideas. Following a rising in Santa-Coloma de Farners [in 1885], he sought refuge at Paris, where he acquired a very profound culture and exercised the profession of teacher.

It was then that he realised his vocation as a teacher and that he conceived the idea of his modern school. Thus, when an inheritance from Mlle. Meunier, an eccentric spinster who had been interested in Ferrer's schemes, enabled him to put his ideas into practice, he went to Spain and founded numerous schools based a rationalistic and libertarian principles. These schools met with a great success. At that time there existed in Spain only professional schools, generally under the direction of Jesuits. The child's mind was stifled in an atmosphere of hypocrisy and prejudice. Ferrer on the contrary wished to create of the child a man capable of reasoning for himself.

Teaching Absolutely Neutral

Teaching was to remain absolutely neutral. To have trained the child to oppose the government and the Church at an age when he could not yet understand the issues would have seemed to him an abuse of the child's liberty.

"First of all," he would say, "let us make our children young people who are well instructed. Later, when they shall have become men, we shall strive to inculcate in them the ideals of emancipation which are so dear to us."

Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia (1859-1909)

Like the really modern educationalist he was, he had understood that a rigorous discipline prevents the child from developing, and leads to introversion. Thus, as Dr. Motessori afterwards prescribed, he insists that the child should have the utmost liberty. He wrote in the *Renovation de l'Ecole*, "Such progress will be made, in the direction of greater liberty, for I am convinced that constraint is only the excuse of reason and that the educator who is really worthy of the name will obtain all by spontaneity, for he will be aware of the needs and desires of the child, and he will know how to foster his development, merely by satisfying them to the utmost extent."

Thanks to such ideas, Ferrer's work developed wonderfully. Not only children, but adults followed the courses: 120 organisations had been started in the principal cities, spreading the new ideas broadcast. The Modern School had at its head a board of studies, composed of educators, politicians, writers and scholars.

But the success of his school was attended by uneasiness in the Church and the forces of reaction. Thus the first pretext was seized to make the continuation of his work impossible for Ferrer. Such an opportunity was provided by the attempted assassination by Matteo Morral on the day of Alfonso XIII's marriage [in May 1906]. As Morral had been employed three years previously as librarian in Ferrer's publishing office, the latter was accused of complicity. In spite of the faked trial for which he stood, he was acquitted, but the schools were closed.

Then Ferrer devoted all his energies to his publishing house so as to make known throughout Spain the works of the great masters who had guided his thought, Reclus, Kropotkin and others.

The Rising of 1909

But tragic events were soon to come and put an end to his work. On July 26th and 27th, 1909, there were risings in all Catalonia and in Barcelona particularly, to protest against war being waged by Spain against Morocco, the onus of which was heavily borne by the working classes. The general strike became a revolt, there were many dead, innumerable Churches and Convents were destroyed.

The reprisals were terrible, and the occasion was not lost of accusing Ferrer. He was arrested on the capital charge of having caused the revolt. No proof could be found to justify the accusation, so it became necessary to have him tried by military tribunal where no normal judicial procedure was respected. All Europe rose indignant against this outrageous violation of human rights. Thousands of petitions were sent to the Spanish Government, but it had decided that Ferrer must perish, and the Government was regarded with indignation the whole world over.

It was impossible to find proofs against Ferrer, for he had in no way taken part in the rising, not through fear, but because he was not "revolutionary" in the sense of the word then preceding. He did not believe in the usefulness of armed revolts to secure liberty.

"In order to change humanity's condition," he wrote in a letter, "there is nothing more urgent in my opinion than to establish an educational system such as we understand it, and which, bearing fruit, shall facilitate progress and make the realisation of all generous ideals easier. That is why it seems to me that to work at this early date for the abolition of capital punishment, or for a general strike without knowing how we shall bring up our children, means beginning at the end and wasting our time."

As *The Spectator* wrote, one must see in him "a revolutionary such as Tolstoy, a reformer philosopher who wished to overthrow society, not with bombs, but with ideas." In spite of Ferro's obvious innocence, he was condemned to death and executed in a ditch at Montjuich. He cried out before being shot "You there, you can do nothing. I am innocent. Long live the School . . ."

His death, having aroused the indignation of all Europe, brought many partisans to his ideas, and so proved as fruitful as his life. Today the memory of Ferrer animates all revolutionary Spaniards. He wrote before his death "I desire that my friends shall speak little or not at all concerning me, for one creates idols when one exalts men, and this is a great evil for the future of humanity; actions alone, no matter who is the agent, most be studied, exalted or attacked . . ."

This wish, so full of nobility, has been respected; it is the work of Ferrer which our comrades in Catalonia wish to continue; they wish to maintain in the schools that spirit which he had created. 60,000 children now receive the education which it would have been the dream of Ferrer to give them. By this immense educational effort, they are showing as Ferrer had pointed out, that to destroy was useless, unless one could create the real constructors of a future society.

Two books on U.S.S.R.

M.L.B.

Spain and The World, 3 December 1938

I'U.R.S.S. Telle Qu'elle Est by Yvon (N.R.F. Paris 28 frcs)

Au Pays du Grand Mensonge by A. Ciliga (Ed. N.R.F. Paris 28 frcs.)

Yvon has made in his book a complete analysis of the real situation in the U.S.S.R. with the competence of a man who has lived for eleven years in the country, travelling from north to south and working in the most varied groups. He admits with great impartiality that certain results have been achieved, but he also shows that enormous mistakes have been made and he attempts to find the causes of these, which are not to be found in the personalities only but rather in the system itself. Many mistakes are due to the planned economy, which constantly comes up against factors which could not be foreseen and which cannot be attributed to the will of the workers because: "The ordinary man becomes one of the elements of a mathematical equation, the other factors of which arc raw material, tools, transports and time." Not even the peasant escapes this mechanisation of the worker. He tends to become more and more a factory hand, working at piece work, enslaved to the scheme of the five years Plan.

Political life is equally deprived of Liberty as is economic life. Everyone lives in fear of prison or death. "The only explanation, says Yvon, is that the Bolsheviks have always preached a dangerous amoralism, which finally vitiated the life of the whole country. Nowadays the proletariat is gagged and exploited by a class of bureaucrats and technicians. But, Yvon concludes "the social struggle will be reborn in U.S.S.R. simply because the need of justice and of love is as much a part of man as his stomach and his brain."

Ciliga's book is an important document for all who enquire seriously into political conditions in U.S.S.R. Ciliga has had the privilege of seeing at first hand the prisons of the Soviet Union and he enjoyed the unique privilege of returning alive thanks to his foreign nationality. He has seen the methods of the Tcheka, seen the infamous means employed to obtain confessions and the tortures inflicted on innocent men. For, the directing class hides its own weakness and mistakes behind spectacular trials, and by imprisonment and punishment of workers and peasants at the least sign of resistance.

The most interesting part of this book is that in which the author describes the life he lived in the isolation prison of Verkne-Ouralsk, where he was imprisoned for three years with the principal members of the opposition. This political prison was the only place in Russia where people dared to speak freely! The author was able to see and to follow point by point the varied currents of communist opposition and his conclusions where he makes his criticisms are of great interest to us. For example in 1931 Trotsky defined the U.S.S.R. as a proletarian state and reaffirms the socialistic character of the ends and the means of the Five Year Plan. "The Five Year Plan based on the extermination of the peasants and the pitiless exploitation of the town workers was interpreted by Trotsky as 'an attempt of the bureaucracy to adapt itself to the proletariat.' In short the U.S.S.R. was developed on "the bases of proletarian dictatorship ..."

If Stalin says: "We have already realised socialism, Trotsky limits himself to the more exact statement "not socialism but only the first step." Thus Trotsky's revolution, to take the most favourable view would change the personnel of the bureaucrats introducing a little liberalism without changing the system, because for Trotsky the task of the opposition was to improve the bureaucracy system, not to destroy it. To fight against the exaggerations of privileges and the extreme inequality in the standard of life, not against privilege and inequality in general. And later Ciliga says "the quarrel between Stalin and Trotsky concerns party politics and personalities in the party; for Trotsky and for Stalin, the proletariat was a passive mass."

Ciliga after having freed himself from his attachment to Trotsky began to ask himself if Lenin too was not guilty. Was if not true "that he too had preferred power to the interest of the masses? That he preferred

victorious bureaucrats rather than the conquered workers? And that he assisted the former to perpetuate their system of domination. He did not recoil before repression when the masses revolted and he abused them and betrayed the whole meaning of their legitimate revolt. Nevertheless these revolts feeble as they were, crushed by the bureaucracy as they were, were they not essential to the Russian Revolution? ... I began to understand why after his death events moved so quickly. Lenin had shown the way to Stalin." And said Ciliga, "for the first time I understood the meaning of the worker's song:

> There is no supreme saviour
> Neither God, nor King, nor Leader."

It's only anarchists who sing that song nowadays.

A Constructive Policy

[Marie-Louise Berneri]

War Commentary – For Anarchism, December 1940[1]

We are often accused of lacking a constructive policy. People grant that we have made a valuable analysis of the present situation, and that "our paper has a real value in pricking complacency and stimulating thought". But we are asked to put forward "practical" solutions for the struggle against fascism and capitalism.

Needless to say we do not accept the charges made against us. We admit that our readers will not find in our pages prescriptions for curing humanity from all the ills that beset it. What some of our readers obviously would like are slogans, manifestos, and programmes which offer to the working-class in a few lines the means of achieving not only the end of fascism but also of bringing about the era of workers' happiness.

We refuse to adopt such recipe-programmes because we are convinced that the present weakness of the working-class is due to the fact that every party, in order to gain popularity and power, has simplified its programmes, reducing to ridiculous proportions the nature of the struggle that will bring freedom to the exploited.

We cannot build until the working class gets rid of its illusions, its acceptance of bosses and faith in leaders. Our policy consists in educating it, in stimulating its class instinct, and teaching methods of struggle…

Political slogans have become like patent medicine advertisements promising health, beauty, and happiness in exchange for a tablet of soap, or a cup of cocoa. Vote Labour, and everything will be all right! Pay your trade union dues and security will be assured! A workers' government will achieve the revolution! Write to your M.P. or to such-and-such a Minister, march through the streets in a disciplined manner, with a powerful band and shout till you're hoarse, and all your wishes (demands) will be granted!

That is what parties alleged to have a "realist" policy and holding in the greatest contempt the "anarchist Utopians", have been advocating for a quarter of a century whenever a difficulty arose. These remedies have proved useless against unemployment and fascism, Italian aggression in Abyssinia, Anglo-French boycott of the Spanish revolutionaries, rearmament and war. And yet the same methods are again advanced to meet the problems created by the present situation.

The leitmotiv of left parties is that the workers should take as much control as they can of the government. This appears constructive enough. But it only means that Labour leaders will enter the Government by adopting the policy of the Right. For the workers it means sacrifices and the loss of every kind of liberty in order to secure the privilege of seeing "their" Ministers sitting on the Cabinet benches. No improvements are obtained and all official channels for making discontent heard are lost.

Another "practical" solution advocated by the Labour Party is to issue a declaration of war or peace aims. Apparently the world should know of our love of freedom and justice. May we "utopians" suggest to the editorial board of the *Daily Herald* that if the Labour Party is anxious to show the world how "democratic" we are, it could for instance refuse to be associated with a government which imprisons Nehru for four years (may we add that petitions, open letters, etc., etc., will not have the slightest effect?).

It is not by changing ministers – such guilty men! – or issuing declarations that fascism and capitalism will be conquered. The problem is more complex than that. We do not intend to add our voice to those who delude the workers that their "leaders" will get them out of the mess. The problems need a complete transformation in the present attitude of the working class. You cannot

[1] Later included in *Neither East Nor West: Selected Writings 1939-48* (London: Freedom Press, 1952/1988). (*Black Flag*)

change the present regime while there is no revolutionary spirit, while the workers will not understand a few fundamental truths.

1. That workers and capitalists cannot have a common cause.

2. That imperialism is the prime cause of war, and the cause must be eradicated.

3. That governments, Tory and Labour, are always instruments of oppression, and that the workers must learn to do without them.

4. That parties seek power only for their own benefit a small minority. Therefore all power must be seized and retained in the hands of syndicates which comprise the great majority of the men and women producers.

We cannot build until the working class gets rid of its illusions, its acceptance of bosses and faith in leaders. Our policy consists in educating it, in stimulating its class instinct, and teaching methods of struggle. It is a hard and long task, but to the people who prefer such expedient solutions as war, we would point out that the great world war which was to end war and safeguard democracy, only produced fascism and another war; that this war will doubtless produce other wars, while leaving untouched the underlying problems of the workers. Our way of refusing to attempt the futile task of patching up a rotten world, but of striving to build a new one, is not only constructive but is also the only way out.

State Control or Workers' Control?

[Marie-Louise Berneri]

War Commentary – For Anarchism, April 1941[1]

Many of those pro-war-for-democracy-and-socialism people now realise that this war, far from abolishing privileges and inequalities, is putting an increased burden on the shoulders of the working class. Up to now the working class has had to suffer from the loss of its political rights, and on the material side from an increase in the cost of living, rationing, longer working hours, etc., Mr. Bevin's new decree adds further restrictions to the liberty and welfare of the workers. Labour in "scheduled establishments" is to be conscripted. A worker will no longer be able to choose the job he likes or to leave a place where he does not earn enough or where he has been submitted to some injustice by the boss or foreman. He will not be able to leave his job without the permission of the National Service Officer. Furthermore he can be ordered to take an unwanted job as well as prevented from leaving it. The Defence Regulations provide penalties for those who refuse to comply with the orders received.

To give the decree a certain flavour of impartiality the following rules which have the appearance of restricting the liberty of the employer have been laid down.

The employer will not be allowed to dismiss a worker except for "serious misconduct." Now that labour, especially in war industries is scarce, it is obvious that it is in the interests of the employer not to dismiss a worker for a trifle anyway.

The workman will receive a guaranteed weekly wage in accordance with the time wages recognised in the trade, or in collective agreements. This sounds better than it is in reality as in many factories the wages are nowadays higher than those recognised by the Trades Unions, Furthermore, with the rapid increase in the cost of living there is no agreement or contract which can be of any value for any length of time.

Tribunals with representatives of the employers and the workers with an impartial chairman will advise the National Service officers. Considering the results of other Tribunals (Conscientious Objectors' for example) run on similar lines one may safely predict that they will be a farce like the others and that there will be no need to modify the old saying that "might is right."

Now, what do our pro-war-for-democracy-and-socialism partisans advocate against this unjust suppression of the workers' liberties?

Nothing against conscription of labour itself. They think it necessary but they demand equality of sacrifice. And they expect the State to impose that equality. They would like it to take over essential war industries so as to impose some sacrifices on the capitalists. The *New Statesman and Nation* (1st March [1941]) suggests that:

> "If the workman is to be forced to serve in a particular factory, whether he likes it or not, and whether or not he could better his economic position by going elsewhere, the factory in which he is to serve must belong to the State. To compel him to serve the private capitalist is – Nazism and nothing else."

How will the State take over war industries? Will it just deprive the capitalists of their property or pay them compensation? In the latter case it is the workers who will have to make the sacrifices in order to pay that compensation. To what extent this will improve their morale we don't know.

[1] Later included in *Neither East Nor West: Selected Writings 1939-48* (London: Freedom Press, 1952/1988). (*Black Flag*)

To imagine that the State is going to establish equality of sacrifice is to assume that the State is impartial, that it has no interest in favouring one class rather than another. But who forms the State? Who controls it? Who is employed in it if not the representatives of the capitalist class, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie? When people like Mr. Bevin are allowed to join the government it is because they have abandoned all that made them the representatives of the working class (their actions in the government well prove it).

In this country BIG BUSINESS still reigns and the State is an embodiment of it. No political party, no Trade Union organisation has been strong enough to master the State and succeed in controlling the capitalists. This does not mean that Big Business will not have to put itself on rations. It may have to do so if it sees (or is sufficiently alive to its own interests to see) that there is no other way of emerging from the war still on top. It will not be done from an altruistic desire to establish equality of sacrifice but because there will be no other way out.

In this country BIG BUSINESS still reigns and the State is an embodiment of it. No political party, no Trade Union organisation has been strong enough to master the State and succeed in controlling the capitalists.

The same article in the *New Statesman and Nation* refers to the closing down by the Board of Trade, of a large number of factories which do not produce essential commodities for the war. Thus we assume that the factory owners will be compensated for the losses they may have incurred in the closing down or transformation of their factories. This may be the beginning of the restrictive measures that the capitalists have to impose on themselves. But could this be called a socialist measure? Not at all. The factories which will be closed will, most of them, be factories whose trade was declining because of the war restrictions. The owners of big armament factories remain in their privileged situation. In the capitalist class itself the Darwinian law of the disappearance of the weakest still finds its application.

In democratic countries, as we now know them, it is useless to place one's hope in the struggle of the State versus private capital. The struggle cannot exist as the State is in the hands of the capitalists. In Germany on the contrary, the fascist party was strong enough to take control to a large extent, of the State and impose sacrifices on the capitalist class. If, therefore, the New Statesman and Nation wants to find a country where compulsion is applied by the State it has only to look to Germany.

The extraordinary ignorance of the pro-war "socialists" as to the nature of fascism makes them want to fight fascism with exactly fascist methods. We, who are often accused of not opposing fascism in an effective way, want, on the contrary, to fight it with means that have not a fascist nature. We do not want a fascist State to control both workers and capitalists, we want to abolish the State which is always an instrument of domination of one class over another. We want the workers to control the land and the factories as well as the means of distribution, so that they will always be able to defend their rights. This will be the safest way of abolishing any kind of totalitarianism, fascist or democratic.

The End of French C.G.T.

M.L.B.

War Commentary – For Anarchism, March 1941

[The Confederation Generale du Travail (French T.U.C.) was based on the following declaration of principles, accepted at the Congress of Amiens in 1906 and known as the Charter of Amiens.]

THE CHARTER OF AMIENS (1906)

"The Confederal Congress of Amiens confirms Article 2, on the Constitution of the C.G.T. (General Confederation of Labours.

"The C.G.T. group, independent of all political schools, all working men who are conscious of the struggle to be carried on for the disappearance of the systems of wage-earners and employers.

"The Congress considers that this declaration is a recognition of the class-struggle which, on the economic field, opposes the working men in revolt against all forms of exploitation and oppression, material and moral, put into operation by the capitalist class against the working class.

"The Congress makes this theoretic affirmation more precise by adding the following points:

"With regard to everyday demands, Syndicalism pursues the co-ordination of the efforts of the working men's welfare through the realisation of immediate ameliorations, such as the diminution of working hours, the increase in wages, etc.

"But this is only one aspect of its work; Syndicalism is preparing the integral emancipation which can only be realised by the expropriation of the capitalist class; it commends as a means to this end the general strike, and considers that the syndicate, now an organisation of resistance, will be, in the future, an organisation of production and distribution, the basis for social reorganisation.

"The Congress declares that this double task of everyday life and of the future follows from the very situation of the wage-earners, which exerts its pressure on the working class and makes it a duty on all working men, whatever their opinions or their political and philosophical tendencies, to belong to the essential group which is the syndicate.

"Consequently, so far as individuals are concerned, the Congress declares complete liberty for every Syndicalist to participate, outside of the trade organisation, in such forms of struggle as correspond with his philosophical or political ideas, confining itself to asking him in return not to introduce into the syndicate the ideas he professes outside it.

"In so far as organisations are concerned, the Congress decides that, in order that Syndicalism may attain its maximum effectiveness, economic action should be exercised against the employers, and the Confederal organisations must not, as syndical groups, concern themselves with any parties or sects, which, outside, and by their side, may pursue in all liberty the transformation of society."

***

Forty years after the C.G.T. had declared at the Congress of Amiens its will to achieve the emancipation of the working class fey expropriating the capitalists and organising the new society on the basis of the syndicate, its leaders become the allies of Hitler's regime and declare their endeavour to carry out the "economic and social revolution indispensable to Franco-German collaboration."

The military defeat of France does not explain how an organisation which was supposed to be one of the fundamental institutions of the democratic regime, can become overnight an equally fundamental institution of a fascist State, the change being not even followed by a removal of the principal leaders. The general secretary Leon Jouhaux remained at its post, the secretaries of the most important federations are still in office, the only change occurred was that the secretary of the C.G.T., Rene Belin was made minister of labour by Marshal Petain.

This news may bring comfort to the hearts: of the Trade-Union bureaucrats in this country, but to the workers it must appear very strange news indeed. They thought that their French comrades had been expected to shed their blood in the defence of their glorious democratic organization, which they were repeatedly told, would be smashed to pieces if Hitler were allowed to invade France. Most of the French workers marched to defend their country, because it was democratic, because it allowed such organizations such as the C.G.T. to exist. They did not realise, just as the British workers do not realise now, that their trade unions had become the instruments of the State and the capitalist class and that it could therefore work equally well under a Daladier or a Petain-Laval regime.

Renault workers on strike, 1936

We shall recall here how the C.G.T. by a succession of compromises and capitulations and betrayals became an organization whose collaboration Hitler seeks in his "reconstruction" of France.

In June 1936 the C.G.T could, if it had acted according to the Charter on which it is founded, have destroyed the capitalist class or at least weakened it enough to make the advent of fascism impossible. The French workers showed at that time a great fighting spirit. They occupied factories and workshops and organized their own stay-in-strikes. The frightened bourgeoisie was obliged to make some concessions. The eight hour day, holidays with pay, and improvement of working conditions were gained by the workers, and the Popular Front government was put into power. The membership of the C.G.T jumped from 1,300,000 to five millions, but the leaders did their best to stop the revolutionary movement. Instead of relying on the workers and organizing them to resist any attack from the bourgeoisie, they turned to the Popular Front ministers and considered themselves safer with the support of a few politicians than with that of the working class.

Internal struggles between the reformists and the communists weakened the C.G.T. still further. The Communists were a minority at the beginning of 1936 but very soon the situation was reversed. Thanks to the lack of energy exhibited by the reformists, the communists in one year had succeeded in controlling most of the C.G.T. – But neither the communists nor the

reformists were concerned with the welfare of the French workers. The first wanted merely to defend Russian interests which consisted, at that time, in having a strongly armed France confronting Germany. They were therefore the most enthusiastic supporters of rearmament. The reformists were mainly concerned in defending the interests of the French government and the French capitalist class. They believed that a rapprochement with Germany was possible, supporting Daladier at the time of Munich, and did not consider rearmament to the teeth an immediate necessity. Jouhaux, the general secretary, was greatly influenced by the communists, but also had strong connections with the representatives of French capitalists interests.

The only people who could really call themselves syndicalists and defended the principles of the Amiens Charter within the C.G.T were a small revolutionist minority which had to fight its way against both the reformists and the communists. They opposed themselves to every kind of collaboration with the government and the capitalists, and tried to animate the working class with the spirit of class struggle which had won them such important improvements in June 1936. They revindicated the right to use the strike weapon and to organize their self-defence against fascists and exploiters. As Internationalists, they opposed all kinds of chauvinist propaganda, to prepare the workers for war, and they equally opposed rearmament, as being the first step towards an imperialist struggle.

The whole policy of the C.G.T. had come… into complete opposition to the ideas expressed in the Amiens Charter; from an organism of class struggle whose aim was the abolition of class society, it had become the organ of the State

Unfortunately the ideas of the revolutionary syndicalist group did not influence the mass of the C.G.T. and did not succeed in preventing its decomposition. All through the years 1937 and 1938 the masses who had come with such a spontaneous enthusiasm to the C.G.T., began now to leave it, realizing how the leaders were deceiving them. And when the semi-reactionary government of Daladier came into power, the C.G.T., was already too weak to put up the opposition which could have brought the workers back to their strength and freedom of June, 1936.

The general strike of the 30th of November, 1938 offers an example of the confusion and corruption which had invaded the syndicalist organisation. It was called in order to protest against the reactionary decrees enforced by the Daladier Government. Taking as a pretext the necessity to speed up the programme of National Defence, these new laws deprived the workers of their right to strike, established sanctions for workers who refused to do overtime, and instituted a tax of two per cent, on salaries to be paid to the State through the employers Such clearly reactionary degrees produced great indignation amongst the workers, and the C.G.T. decided to call a strike in order to save its face But its leaders did all in their power to sabotage it. They left the government more than a fortnight to organise the repression, and they demoralised the workers by negotiating right up to the last moment with cabinet ministers. Furthermore, they prevented the strikers from taking any action against blacklegs. The strike was of course a failure and Daladier triumphed. The conditions of the workers were then made worse even than before June, 1936. The people who had taken part in the strike was sacked, some being thrown into prison, and no militant activity was tolerated any longer in the factories and the workshops.

The C.G.T., discredited both in the eyes of the Government, who did not fear it anymore, and of the people who could not trust it, was still more weakened by the German-Russian pact which made inevitable the expulsion of the communists and pro-communist elements. The reformists then took complete control over the C.G.T. and when the war started they organised a systematic repression against all communist or revolutionary elements. Many of the reformists leaders, who like Jouhaux had at one time been closely connected with the communist party, suddenly discovered that they were Russian agents and treated them as enemies of their country. These people who had thought until the last moment that an “understanding” with Germany would be possible, now became the most ardent supporters of the war, and employed the most disgusting chauvinist propaganda. Moreover, being animated by that beautiful spirit of *Union Sacrée*, they forgot that the working class was supporting the whole weight of the cost of the war.

This attitude failed of course to gain them the popularity of the working class population, and they were unable to repair the loss in membership sustained after the expulsion of the communist controlled syndicates. In Aprils 1940, Jouhaux declared that the membership of the C.G.T. was now 800,000. With the coming into power of the reformists in the C.G.T. the tendency to collaborate directly with the capitalist class became more apparent. Class struggle, and the vindication of workers’ rights were considered by Belin, the reformist leader and his friends as being old-fashioned. A new formula of syndicalism was sought – that of collaboration with the bourgeoisie and the capitalist class. Efforts had been made already before the war by

the reformist leaders of the C.G.T. to seek a basis of collaboration with some of the big bosses of industry and finance. They had held meetings together, and discussed ways of bringing about "social peace." During the war the idea of collaboration took a more definite shape. It became obvious that what the reformists meant by collaboration was the complete abandonment by the workers of class struggle. In exchange the bosses would grant the workers the right to participate in the administration of a certain number of institutions for the welfare of the workers, such as cheap working-class houses, hospitals and schools, unemployment funds, old-age pensions, etc. Instead of obtaining an increase in salary by the means of a strike or strike-threat, the workers' delegates would discuss with the bosses the possibility of an increase. In other words the reformists wanted to put the worker completely in the hands of the capitalists and reduce them to relying on their own good hearts!

The whole policy of the C.G.T. had come, during recent years, into complete opposition to the ideas expressed in the Amiens Charter; from an organism of class struggle whose aim was the abolition of class society, it had become the organ of the State. It is, therefore, a logical conclusion from the C.G.T. activities in the last few years that it should become an organ of collaboration with the Nazi regime. Those reformists who accused the communists of sympathy with the enemy, who put our anarchist comrades in prison as traitors, find themselves perfectly fit to become the instruments of a fascist State. They will now be able to put into practice their beloved formula of class-collaboration. Under a democratic regime there may be some chance of the workers revolting but under a strong fascist state the workers are unable to move and an "understanding collaboration" can operate perfectly.

"Aid to Russia"

[Marie-Louise Berneri]

War Commentary – For Anarchism, August 1941[1]

In England the various left wing parties who assist the war-for-democracy ideologists by misrepresenting Russia to the workers as a "workers' state," also offer varying policies. The Kremlin lackeys of the Communist Party are vociferating now (after a few initial hesitations) for maximum support for the Churchill Government. The Independent Labour Party on the other hand demands that Churchill and Co. must go, claiming that only a "workers' government" could or would give adequate support to Russia.

We might analyse these policies more deeply; but it is much more important to expose the false and mischievous assumption that underlies them all. That is, the idea that the workers of a class-divided nation can consciously and of themselves extend help to Russia.

Any assistance which goes out from this country is extended by the ruling group in this country, the workers, having no power, contribute only by falling in with its plans. Assistance afforded by a ruling class of any country to another country is intended to further the interests, not of the workers here or there, but of that ruling group itself. There is no altruism in international politics. Furthermore, any assistance which leaves this country, goes, not to the Russian workers, but to Stalin and Co., who will utilize it to suit their ends. All this should be obvious. If the workers wish to send help to the Russian workers they must first achieve their own emancipation here, and then assist the Russian workers to do the same in Russia. And neither of these aims has much to do with the imperialist war. Unless this is done, the whole idea of workers of one country assisting those of another is entirely worthless and misleading. The plain fact is that "assistance between nations" operates only for the mutual benefit of governments, not of workers at all (unless one believes that there is, or can be, a community of interests between exploiters and exploited). Intervention in Spain proved this, and the recent developments relating to the Sino-Japanese war, already referred to, is making it obvious.

We have discussed this question of "workers' aid to Russia" albeit briefly, because it is just one more of those pernicious illusions fostered by the left, which operate to prevent the workers from ever taking effective action to secure international solidarity with their class. It provides another instance of the invaluable assistance afforded by the left wing to the service of the right, in deflecting the attention of the working-class from its central task—the achievement of a classless society here. However much the workers may want to help their class brethren abroad, they must face the fact that it is simply impossible to do so while they are merely tools of the ruling class at home. That is why anarchists emphasize over and over again that class struggle provides the only means for the workers to achieve control over their destiny. To deflect them from this path only serves to foster illusions which continue to prevent the realization of effective, rather than merely wishful, international working-class solidarity. And the continual raising of false hopes can only lead to disillusionment and apathy.

[1] Later included in *Neither East Nor West: Selected Writings 1939-48* (London: Freedom Press, 1952/1988). (*Black Flag*)

Stakhanovism and the British Workers

M.L.B.

War Commentary – For Anarchism, mid-March 1942[1]

War brings the need for increased production and maximum effort on the part of the workers. This is what all the propaganda nowadays tries to impress on the workers. Since Russia has come into the war it is not surprising therefore that the Russian worker should be given as an example to the British workers in order to induce them to produce more. The Russian Trade Union delegation in all its speeches stressed the fact that production could be increased and that workers in Russia produce far more than they do here. The influence of Russian methods is already felt. The *Manchester Guardian* of 8.3.42, under the heading "*Stakhanovites" in Lancashire*, printed the following report:

> *"The Cotton Board's 'Trade Letter' reports the interesting methods adopted by one firm of cotton spinners and manufacturers to increase output. Production boards, especially floodlit, have been set up in all rooms to show daily production and production aimed at. Special badges are being made for wear and by operatives with good or increased output records. These badges have a design of the firm's crest with the words 'War Production Worker'.*
>
> *"Weekly five-minute 'pep talks' are being given over loudspeakers while the workers have meals in the canteen. A weekly or fortnightly letter to the operatives is being compiled to keep them in touch with all the latest developments."*

Production boards and badges – these are familiar methods of stimulating the Russian workers, but since the introduction of Udarnism and Stakhanovism the Russian Government has gone much further in its technique of increasing production. If Russian methods are going to be introduced in this country it may be of interest to the British workers to know what these methods really consist of.

According to Stalin, socialism can and will defeat the capitalist system *"because it can furnish higher models of labour, a higher productivity of labour than the capitalist system of economy. Because it can give society more products and can make society richer than the capitalist system of economy can."* The aim of the Russian Revolution has not been as one would have expected to reduce the working hours of the workers and to improve his standard of life but to make him produce more and more. Stakhanovism was not the first method used by the ruling classes of the Soviet Union to extract more work from the people. Already in 1928 brigades of udarniks were formed. The udarniks being workers who voluntarily undertook to work more and better, "*to set themselves to set the themselves to raise the standard of output, to diminish scrap or breakages, to put an end to time wasting or unnecessary absenteeism, and to make the utmost use of the instrument of socialist emulation."* (*Soviet Communism*, S & B Webb). Udarniks received all kinds of privileges in food, clothes and holidays which put them in a superior position to that of the rest of the workers. Piece work being general in Russia, they also of course received better wages.

The Stakhanovists method is not something new. Ford and Taylor had long before defined means by which the workers would produce the maximum work in the minimum time… The originality of the Russian method was to give a character of spontaneity to the movement, of covering the dirty exploitation of the majority of workers under a heap of socialist slogans.

Udarniks received, like Stakhanovists later, the greatest publicity and encouragement from the government; but such publicity cannot have an everlasting effect and in 1935 a new publicity campaign was launched with the introduction of Stakhanovism. In May 1935 Stalin made a speech telling the younger workers of the USSR that they had a "master technique". This was the signal for a campaign for increased production and, in August of the

[1] Later included in *Neither East Nor West: Selected Writings 1939-48* (London: Freedom Press, 1952/1988) also revised for the pamphlet *Workers in Stalin's Russia* (London: Freedom Press, 1944/2020). (*Black Flag*)

same year, the miner Stakhanov with the help of the Communist directors of the mine established the first record by cutting 100 tonnes of coal in one day (the average coal cut in the Ruhr is 10 tonnes and the maximum 16 or 17 tonnes a day). All over Russia and in every kind of industry, from cotton weavers to shop assistants and trade union officials, Stakhanovists sprang up. The Government insisted on the spontaneity of the movement and explained by the improvement in the conditions of the workers, but it was obvious that it was inspired and supported by the Government machine. Stakhanov's declaration praising Stalin as the originator of the movement can be taken literally more than as a compliment to the leader: *"I really don't not know why this movement is called the Stakhanovtchina, it should be rather the Stalintchina (Stalin's movement)! The beloved leader of the Communist Party and of the peoples of the USSR, comrade Stalin and the Bolshevik Party which he leads, have inspired our victories."*

The purpose of the Stakhanovist campaign soon became obvious. The Central Committee declared the enthusiasm shown by the workers was due to the betterment of their conditions of life and instead of rejoicing at this improvement immediately proceeded to *decree the revision of all norms of work*.

A revision of collective labour contracts was carried out which resulted in the increasing of the norms of work without a corresponding increase of work and in the creation of a labour caste receiving higher wages and privileges. A Stakhanovist miner received 580 roubles in 11 days instead of a month. A Stakhanovist engine driver received 900 roubles a month instead of 400, etc. This created hostility and division among the workers.

The Stakhanovists method is not something new. Ford and Taylor had long before defined means by which the workers would produce the maximum work in the minimum time. Their methods were of course despised and hated by the working people all over the world. When a few years ago the Duke of Windsor wanted to visit an American factory in company with Bedaux, the workers threatened to go on strike if he came with a man who had refined the method of exploitation of the workers. The originality of the Russian method was to give a character of spontaneity to the movement, of covering the dirty exploitation of the majority of workers under a heap of socialist slogans. Stakhanovist workers did not find *new* methods of work, they rationalised production by introducing more division of labour. Stakhanov, for example, was helped by a team which prepared the place and removed the coal while he concentrated on cutting coal. Stakhanovist salesmen quickened their service "*by having already packed quantities usually demanded of the commodities in greatest request*." (*Soviet Communism*, S & B Webb) . . . The records achieved by Stakhanovist workers were obviously tricked (gangs worked at night in order to prepare the work, a gang of workers assisted the Stakhanovist, etc.) This explains how certain Stakhanovist workers have achieved records which have aroused the incredulity of most western workers. Two months after Stakhanov cut 102 tonnes of coal in one day, for example, the miner Matchekin cut in the same time 1,466 tonnes of coal! The Government did not take the trouble to explain these figures – it merely wanted to impress the imagination of the average worker, make him feel ashamed of the little work he did. One should mention here that after having achieved these records, most Stakhanovists were taken into rest in houses or were sent to lecture in universities and factories. They did not go back to work, their job was done; they had *proved* that workers should produce more. In April 1936 an Institute of Work which prepared norms compatible with maintaining good health among the workers was closed as harmful, its scientific norms having been brilliantly demolished by Stakhanovist practice!

As might be expected, the already overworked and underfed Russian workers did not accept with enthusiasm an increase in the norms of production which for many meant a reduction in salary. The Soviet press reported many cases where Stakhanovists met with the hostility of their fellow workers.

"In the factory Krasny Schtampivchik, a Stakhanovist worker found on her loom a dirty broom with the following note: 'To the comrade Belog, this bouquet is offered in order to thank her for having increased by three times our norms'." (*Troud*, 1.11.35)

"'Horses are not men; they cannot follow socialist emulation.' This is what Maximovitch had the audacity to say to Orloff, an official of the Communist Youth, who proposed that he increases the work of horse conductors at the bottom of the mine. When out in Loutch we learned from a local paper that when we asked how the (Stakhanovist) method carried, of 38 pits 35 were opposed to the new method with a more or less open sabotage." (*Izvestia*, 2.10.35)

In a factory where wagons were repaired two workers were condemned to five and three years imprisonment for having stolen the instruments of a Stakhanovist worker. (*Pravda*, 2.11.35)

The locksmith Konovalov killed the super-udarnik Rachtepa. (*Izvestia*, 23.8. 35)

"The military tribunal has condemned the murderers of the Stakhanovist Schmirev, the brothers Kriachov, to the highest punishment for social offence, to be shot." (*Pravda*, 21-22.11. 35)

Outside Russia the Stakhanovist movement was praised only by the communist and russophile press. Workers looked with mixed feelings of amusement and indignation to the 'records' of Stakhanovist workers in Russia. A French miner Kleber Legay denounced the dangerous conditions in which Russian miners

accomplished their exploits. In France, communist leaders had to write to their communist newspapers to stop the publication of records achieved by Stakhanovist workers as they were received with laughter by the miners. The word 'Stakhanovist' was used by many as an insult!

The Stakhanovist movement is, according to Webbs, *"a revolution in the wage-earners mentality towards measures and devices in increasing the productivity of labour . . . (because) . . . in Soviet industry, there is no 'enemy party'... the manual worker in the factory . . . realises that the whole of the aggregate net product... is genuinely at the disposal of the aggregate workers . . . in such ways as they, by their own trade organisation, choose to determine."*

The Stakhanovist movement is nothing of the sort. It is a method whereby a minority of workers stronger and more skilled than others receive a higher salary and privileges at the expense of other workers. The factory management could afford to pay Stakhanovist workers more than others because they helped to raise the norms of production and therefore lowered the wages of the other workers. As Taylor had already pointed out: *"one must pay high salaries in order to have cheap labour."*

If the workers in the Soviet Union really believed that by working harder they would increase *"the whole of the aggregate product at the disposal of the aggregate workers"* there would have been no need to produce more by according special privileges to them. Furthermore, by paying Stakhanovist workers more, the Government made it plain that that the aggregate product was not going to benefit equally each worker, but only a minority.

The only difference between stakhanovism and the old methods of capitalist exploitation consists in the fact that the workers are made to believe that they are not exploited at all but are, in reality, working for the building up of a socialist state. Workers are asked to stop defending their wages and trying to decrease their hours of work and to put the interest of the state before their own.

In Russia the workers are asked to do this under the pretext of building up a socialist country, while in reality it is not socialism which is built on workers' sweat but a class of bureaucrats and politicians. In this country workers are asked to help the Government to produce more, in spite of the capitalist economic system, so that the war can be won quicker. In both cases the workers are asked to defend interests which are not theirs. Socialism is achieved in the factories and in the fields by the workers taking over production and distributing the products according to peoples' needs. It is not achieved by dividing the working class in categories of wage earners, by applying degrading methods of production: piece work and a system of sweated labour.

When, with the pretext of fighting fascism, British workers are asked to collaborate with the capitalists and the government to carry out their own exploitation by such means as setting up production committees or by introducing Stakhanovist methods, they should remember that fascism is fought more efficiently in the factories than on the battlefields. Every defeat of the capitalist class is a defeat for fascism. Every time the workers obtain a reduction in their hours of work and a rise in salaries, every time they affirm workers' solidarity by defending a victimised fellow worker, every time they abolish degrading methods of production, every time they achieve a victory over their boss, they win a victory against fascism and pave the way to socialism.

When the revolution has been achieved there will be no need for Stakhanovist methods. All workers will give society labour according to their strength and ability, not in exchange for wages but for food, clothes, pleasures, to satisfy their needs.

Lessons of the Spanish Revolution

M. L. Berneri

War Commentary – For Anarchism, mid-July 1943

Little has been written about Spain and the lessons of the Revolution have still to be drawn. This is partly due to the fact that all left-wing parties, those who are more likely to seek in the Spanish experience lessons for their future struggles, have committed mistakes and compromised their principles. It is significant that the only book attempting to draw the lessons of the Spanish war has been written by a Trotskyist and there was no Trotskyist movement in Spain.

Another reason is that the work could best be done by Spaniards but it is a well known racial characteristic that they dislike writing about history, especially their own. To do them justice one has to remember that most of them are without documents or newspaper files, that many are not in a position to write in concentration camps or besieged by the difficulties of the exile. The Spanish anarchist militia organiser Cipriano Mera for example, who wrote extensive notes on his experiences during the revolution had those documents seized by the French authorities when he was trying to send them to America.

One can consider, of course, the *attitude* adopted by various parties towards Spain and the *opinions* expressed in articles and speeches.

For the Liberal and Leftists Spain was the first country in which the struggle between Fascism and Democracy broke out. They weep over the mistake of the non-intervention pact as they weep over Munich. They learn from Spain that no compromise can be made with fascism and that Hitler and Mussolini are not to be trusted. The lack of value of these conclusions is self-evident.

The Communists never draw lessons – they justify and praise their own actions and slander their opponents. The Trotskyists point out correctly that it was a mistake -on the part of the revolutionary movements to maintain the bourgeois state but claim that the formation of a workers' state would have saved the revolution.

The Anarchists have not drawn the lessons in any co-ordinated way but it is apparent that some refuse to admit the mistakes made by the Spanish Anarchist Movement and therefore all the lessons they draw are one-sided. They put all the blame for the defeat on the attitude of the Communist Party and Russian Intervention but refuse to recognise that since the anarchists were the strongest force in Spain they should have prevented the C.P. from taking power.

The Anarchists have not drawn the lessons in any co-ordinated way but it is apparent that some refuse to admit the mistakes made by the Spanish Anarchist Movement and therefore all the lessons they draw are one-sided.

Some Spanish, French and Italian Anarchists have pointed out some of the mistakes of the Spanish comrades particularly during the course of the revolution itself. The present war has prevented a deeper and more extensive study being made.

It is from an anarchist point of view and without being hampered by false loyalty or opportunist considerations, but also with modesty and comprehension that we should try to draw the lessons of the Spanish Revolution. I am convinced that our movement will be more demoralised and weakened by bling and uncritical admiration than by frank admission of past mistakes.

The most important and original part of the Anarchist doctrine is its opposition to the State and its conception of a society where all forms of repression and domination have disappeared. These ideas have been put to the test during the Spanish Revolution and it is important that we should consider them first. To do this we must first briefly consider the sequence of events during the Spanish revolution and war.

On the 18th and 19th of July, Franco's forces revolted in the whole of Spain. The revolt had been foreseen by everybody and workers' organizations had warned the Government and organized demonstrations to demand arms. The Government however, persisted in keeping its eyes shut and doing nothing. When Franco's forces began to take one town after the other, to seize barracks and municipal buildings, the only thing which was left for the people to do was to seize the few arms they could lay their hands on and resist the fascists. Workers' syndicates were the main organizers of the resistance. In Madrid and Barcelona columns of militia were formed and sent to the front in a few hours. They set up patrols to fight fascists in the rear-guard and provided for the provisioning of the troops.

The Government did nothing. Cabinet Ministers spent their time trying to form a new Cabinet. There were three different ones in 24 hours. At last Azaña, the president of the Republic, succeeded in forming a cabinet, with Giral as prime minister, composed of liberal ministers who did not in the least represent the Spanish people.

But nobody, except for the few politicians concerned, worried about the Government. There was too much to be done to crush the fascists. The Madrid workers had to get rid of the hidden fascists who shot them from their windows; the Asturian miners were surrounding Oviedo and were sending 5,000 miners (experts in the use of dynamite) to the Madrid front; in Barcelona the C.N.T. and U.G.T. (anarchist and socialist trade-unions) were forming militias which, with Durruti at their head, started to liberate the province of Aragon from the fascists.

Each town, each village was concerned with its own problems. Priests, fascists, and landowners had to be executed, the land had to be collectivized, militias and workers' patrols had to be raised. Production had to be organized to suit the necessities of war. To do all this the workers and peasants did not wait for Government orders or advice. They did not even think of the Government of Madrid, they felt that decisions rested with them, they consulted one another in their syndicates and councils and acted according to the decisions taken in common.

The result was that the workers were victorious almost everywhere. When they failed it was more due to their lack of arms and tremendous military inferiority than their lack of enthusiasm or power of organization. Towns like Oviedo and Saragossa, strongholds of the Spanish revolutionary movements, remained in the hands of the fascists because they were garrison towns where Franco had accumulated arms and men.

In July 1936 the Government was powerless. It had no army at its disposal, the small part of the regular army which had remained faithful to the anti-fascists was amalgamated with the militia.

The police, composed of civil guards and assault guards, had been sent to the front. The assault guards (the police force created by the Republic) often volunteered to join the militia. The whole apparatus of Government bureaucracy had fallen to pieces, State officials were left without a job, everything was in the hands of workers' committees.

The Government was so powerless that it seems incredible that it should have survived at all. But it did survive, in spite of the anarchists' aversion to all kinds of governments, in spite of the people's distrust of a government which had always oppressed them and which had failed to protect them against the fascist revolt.

It survived because it was so weak that the people did not find it necessary to attack it. The politicians, the heads and leaders of the various organizations who where more directly faced with the problem of preserving or suppressing it decided that it was preferable to conserve the legal government. The reason was that the Spanish Revolutionists feared foreign intervention. They thought that by keeping a legal government, by maintaining diplomatic relations with the democratic states and the League of Nations, they would be able to secure the non-intervention and perhaps the help of the Democracies. Many Spaniards were so ignorant of the reactionary nature of the British and French Governments that they naively believed that they would get support from them.

The Government was kept as a facade. As it had no army, no police at its disposal, the Anarchists thought that it could do no harm. But that facade was reinforced by 600 million dollars in gold of the Spanish reserve and which remained in the banks at the disposal of the Government. Just as at the time of the Paris Commune when the revolutionaries respected the property of the banks, the Spanish Anarchists failed to seize the gold reserves of the Government.

With the only arm it had at its disposal the Government started its struggle against the forces of the revolution, it used gold to blackmail them. It succeeded in wringing concessions in exchange for funds, it weakened the adversary by starving it of money. Catalonia, too revolutionary for the Madrid, Government's taste, was prevented from buying material, necessary for war industries. It went further. It sabotaged the revolution by refusing to buy arms abroad. The Non-Intervention pact did not take place immediately after the revolution started. Up to the 9th of September the Government would have had plenty of time to buy arms. The Giral Government was in power for seven weeks and during that period it bought no arms for Spain. Even after the non-intervention pact it was possible to buy arms and planes in the European black market and in America, but most of the offers were turned down or merely used by unscrupulous buyers for their own benefit.

The Caballero Government formed on the 6th of September was more ambitious in its counter-revolutionary role. As it was a labour government it found its task easier than if it had been a reactionary one. It had a certain prestige among the masses, it did not include the Anarchists but Caballero, boosted as the "Spanish Lenin" gave it a vaguely revolutionary tinge.

The Anarchist ministers… failed to see that only by maintaining and extending those revolutionary conquests could the revolution and the war be won. They failed to see the danger of maintaining the bourgeois state in front of their revolutionary institutions.

Caballero put his hopes in French and British democracy. He had therefore to present those two countries with a respectable, disciplined Spain, where the people were ruled by well educated politicians and not led by ardent, revolutionary workers and peasants.

Both the Madrid Government and the Catalan Generalidad started passing decrees limiting the collectivization of the land and industry, suppressing the Central Committee of Anti-fascist Militas, prohibiting the possession of arms by workers in the rear-guard, establishing censorship of the Press, etc., etc.

The bourgeois and reactionary elements started raising their heads. The Stalinists began to organize a series of attentats against the anarchist workers. Already in October 1936 anarchist militiamen were openly attacked and shot at by Communists in Valencia. These incidents were not taken seriously at the time because the Communists were still a small force but they demoralized the masses while they gave new strength to the enemies of the revolution.

On the military front the Government showed the greatest inefficiency. The fall of Toledo smelt of treason. The Aragon front was refused arms because it was manned by Anarchists of all nationalities. Great advances could have been made on that Sector but the Communists did not want to lose a pretext to accuse the Anarchists for their lack of activity. In spite of great courage and sacrifices no progress was made for lack of arms and ammunition.

The only victory which took place during the Caballero Government was the defence of Madrid, *but it was not* organized by the Government which had fled to Valencia. It was organized, as on the 19th of July by the

syndicates, under the proud, slogan: "Long life to Madrid without a Government!"

In Barcelona the distribution of food (of major importance in a revolutionary period), was put in the hands of the Communist Comorera. He suppressed the co-ops which had done the job extremely efficiently and put it into the hands of small businessmen with the result that poor people starved while the black market prospered.

From September 1936 to May 1937 the Government gradually gathered strength and finally crushed the power of the workers during the May Days.

10 WAR COMMENTARY

LESSONS *of the* SPANISH Revolution

LITTLE HAS BEEN written about Spain and the lessons of the Revolution have still to be drawn. This is partly due to the fact that all left-wing parties, those who are more likely to seek in the Spanish experience lessons for their future struggles, have committed mistakes and compromised their principles. It is significant that the only book attempting to draw the lessons of the Spanish war has been written by a Trotskyist and there was no Trotskyist movement in Spain.

Another reason is that the work could best be done by Spaniards but it is a well known racial characteristic that they dislike writing about history, especially their own. To do them justice one has to remember that most of them are without documents or newspaper files, that many are not in a position to write in concentration camps or besieged by the difficulties of the exile. The Spanish anarchist militia organiser Cipriano Mera for example, who wrote extensive notes on his experiences during the revolution had those documents seized by the French authorities when he was trying to send them to America.

One can consider, of course, the *attitude* adopted by various parties towards Spain and the *opinions* expressed in articles and speeches.

For the Liberal and Leftists Spain was the first country in which the struggle between Fascism and Democracy broke out. They weep over the mistake of the non-intervention pact as they weep over Munich. They learn from Spain that no compromise can be made with fascism and that Hitler and Mussolini are not to be trusted. The lack of value of these conclusions is self-evident.

The Communists never draw lessons—they justify and praise their own actions and slander their opponents. The Trotskyists point out correctly that it was a mistake on the part of the revolutionary movements to maintain the bourgeois state but claim that the formation of a workers' state would have saved the revolution.

The Anarchists have not drawn the lessons in any co-ordinated way but it is apparent that some refuse to admit the mistakes made by the Spanish Anarchist Movement and therefore all the lessons they draw are one-sided. They put all the blame for the defeat on the attitude of the Communist Party and Russian Intervention but refuse to recognise that since the anarchists were the strongest force in Spain they should have prevented the C.P. from taking power.

Some Spanish, French and Italian Anarchists have pointed out some of the mistakes of the Spanish comrades particularly during the course of the revolution itself. The present war has prevented a deeper and more extensive study being made.

It is from an anarchist point of view and without being hampered by false loyalty or opportunist considerations, but also with modesty and comprehension that we should try to draw the lessons of the Spanish Revolution. I am convinced that our movement will be more democratised and weakened by bling and uncritical admiration than by frank admission of past mistakes.

The most important and original part of the Anarchist doctrine is its opposition to the State and its conception of a society where all forms of repression and domination have disappeared. These ideas have been put to the test during the Spanish Revolution and it is important that we should consider them first. To do this we must first briefly consider the sequence of events during the Spanish revolution and war.

The Spanish peasant was the vanguard of the revolution.

The Anarchists had been induced to join the Government in November 1936 and collaborated in the setting up of counter-revolutionary decrees. They often tried to put up some opposition, but the arms Russia sent were now used as a blackmail instead of gold. The Anarchist ministers gave in to the Socialists and Communists because of their fear of compromising the issue of the war. They hoped that the war would be won quickly and that they would be then able to regain the revolutionary conquests.

They failed to see that only by maintaining and extending those revolutionary conquests could the revolution and the war be won. They failed to see the danger of maintaining the bourgeois state in front of their revolutionary institutions. Sooner or later one had to rule the other out: the bourgeois government soon destroyed the revolutionary power of the workers.

As Kropotkin has demonstrated in his pamphlet *Revolutionary Government*, the bourgeois State if allowed to subsist for a time will gather round it the forces of reaction. It will strengthen itself and crush the workers. Kropotkin drew this lesson from the experience of the Commune; the Spaniards have to draw the same conclusion from their own bitter experience.

The empty shell of the State was soon occupied in Spain by power-seeking parties. The frail frame of Government institutions was used by the Communists to build a stronghold of reaction.

The peasants of Catalonia and Aragon had understood better than the "vanguard of the working class" how important it was to destroy the representatives and symbols of government in their villages. They eliminated the mayor and his caciques, they burnt all government papers, they killed the lawyers and priests and burnt the churches, symbols of government oppression.

The result was paradoxical. While the minor representatives of the State were suppressed the old politicians, ministers and presidents were allowed to go on living and directing the political life of the nation. The peasants had not trusted petty government officials but the heads of the workers' organizations collaborated with old sly politicians like Azana and Caballero, with men like Companys who had always imprisoned anarchists but who on the 19th of July put himself at the service of the Anarchist movement only to start suppressing anarchists a few months later.

The bourgeois Government not only instituted reaction at home but it was also unable to crush fascism outside. Negrin's government, which was formed after the May Days and which was baptised the "Government of Victory" has not a single victory to its credit. It preferred a fascist victory rather than let the revolution go its way. It tried to defeat Franco by achieving military superiority, by negotiations with foreign powers. But it refused to use the real weapon of the workers: revolution. Complete revolution which would have given more courage to the Spanish masses in Republican Spain, which would have inspired the people under Franco's yoke and awakened the population of the countries surrounding Spain.

Instead, the Government supported the bourgeoisie and thereby weakened the anti-fascist struggle. The enthusiasm of the Spanish masses was due to the fact that they were defending their revolutionary conquests. If those were taken away, their incentive to fight was therefore diminished. Furthermore the bourgeoisie, was a doubtful ally which on more than one occasion went over to Franco.

Outside Spain the alliance with the French and British democracies proved fatal to the revolution and war. Non-Intervention was a farce, which served Hitler's and Mussolini's purposes admirably.

Spain gained nothing from that alliance but lost a wonderful opportunity of winning support among the

working class abroad for fear of displeasing the "democratic" governments.

It was again the fear of antagonizing France and Britain which prevented the Spaniards from declaring Morocco's independence and helping the Arabs to revolt. If the Spanish revolutionaries had carried on fully the revolution they would have completely abolished the Government in July 1936. The "democracies" would have certainly broken all diplomatic relations with Spain and there would have been no question of "loyalists" but only of bloodthirsty reds.

The Spanish people would then have had to rely entirely on the solidarity of the International proletariat to avoid a war of intervention or other hostile steps on the part of foreign powers. But wouldn't it have been better to rely on the contagious power of the revolution than on the Edens, Blums and Stalins who were bound to betray them?

It is possible that the international proletariat gagged and suppressed in fascist countries, doped by Left-wing leaders in the democratic countries would not have responded to the appeal of the Spanish workers and would have allowed foreign intervention to crush the revolution. But it is possible too, that the example of the Spanish Revolution would have roused the European Working class into action resulting in the overthrow of Popular Front and Fascist Governments alike, and the setting up of a new society which would have prevented the world from experiencing the misery and horror of the present war.

Italy After 1918

Marie-Louise Berneri

War Commentary – For Anarchism, September 1943

I

The revolutionary period 1919-1921

The Italian People played an unenthusiastic part during the last war. They had been strongly impregnated with socialist and anarchist ideas and they saw in the war, not a struggle for democracy, but another imperialist conflict. The left-wing parties did not betray their internationalist ideals as openly as they did in other countries. A section of the Socialist party opposed the war through-out while the great majority gave it only lukewarm support. The Anarchist movement refused to take part in the imperialist bloodbath and consistently opposed the war.

Entreprise occupée à Bologne, 1920.

The ruling class, in order to obtain some support from the Italian people, had to bribe them with promises; they assured the workers that they would get better conditions after the war and that they would give the land to the peasants. But when peace came they showed no willingness to keep their promises. The country found itself extremely weakened. It had lost one million men in the war, and those who came back found no work to do. Meanwhile the cost of life had gone up tremendously. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, had done well out of the war and was more sure of itself and arrogant than ever; in particular the agrarians (the landed bourgeoisie) were resolved to do their utmost to prevent the peasants from gaining any concessions. In 1919 the whole country was seething with discontent. The workers and peasants, tired of waiting for the improvements promised them, began to take matters in their own hands. The bourgeois and nationalist elements were frustrated by the Allies' denial of any share of the war booty to Italy. Just as in Germany the Versailles treaty was the stepping stone for the Nazis, in Italy it formed a basis for fascism.

Strikes, looting of shops, occupation of the land began in a sporadic and unorganised way. The general elections which took place on the 16th of November 1919 gave the Socialists 2,846,593 votes while the bourgeois parties received three and a half million votes. The new liberal government showed itself incompetent both to resolve the internal economic problem and to gain Italy territorial aggrandisement round the diplomatic tables. It was, however, resolved in one thing and that was to crush any workers' revolt. It created a royal guard which mercilessly crushed all demonstrations and strikes.

But in spite of the government's repression, the movement of strikes intensified itself. It was merely due to the economic situation and to the disproportionate increase in the cost of life. But already in April 1920 the General Strike of Turin showed that the workers wanted more than economic gains and that they aimed at controlling the industries which belonged to the people by right, because they had built them with their toil and because they were working them. The Turin workers set up factory councils and declared their intention to control the factories themselves. All over Italy strikes of sympathy took place and the railway workers refused to move the troops which the government wanted to send to suppress the revolt. The strike lasted ten days and was finally crushed by over-whelming forces of repression through its having been unable to obtain sufficient support from the rest of the Italian workers. Already we see in the Turin strike the wavering and uncertain attitude which the Socialist Party and the Trade Unions (General Confederation of Labour) were to play all through these years of revolt. Whenever the working-class showed the desire to overthrow capitalist oppression, they used all their power to prevent them from doing so. While the Anarchists and Syndicalists appealed to the Italian people to support the Turin workers by striking and by all other means at their disposal, the Socialists refused to support them by calling a general strike. The Socialist organ *Avanti*, in its Milan edition, even expressed regret that the strike should have taken place.

Workers' strikes and expropriation of the land by the workers, particularly in the South of the Peninsula, continued. Unable to maintain order the Nitti government fell and was replaced by a new liberal government with Giolitti, an old sly politician at its head, and with the socialist Labriola as minister of Labour. The people showed their opposition to the government by increased demonstrations. The most important took place at Ancona, a port on the Adriatic coast, where popular riots took place and a regiment destined to Albania refused to embark. In solidarity with the mutiny a general strike took place in the surrounding provinces and ended only when the government promised to abandon the protectorate of Albania.

On the 28th of August the occupation of the factories by the metal workers all over Italy began. The direct cause was the refusal of the industrialists to put into practice a collective contract of work which had been forced on them by the strikes of August-September 1919, and to raise wages in proportion to the cost of living. Afraid that the police would come to the help of the bourgeoisie and occupy the factories, the workers took possession of them themselves. In vain did the government, through its Labour minister Labriola, attempt a reconciliation. The workers refused all compromise.

The workers showed that the aim of the strikes was not merely to obtain an increase in wages. In many parts they armed themselves to defend the factories they had seized, they formed workers' councils to assure the proper running of industry, and the Federation of Co-operatives paid the wages. The moment seemed ripe to deal a final blow to the capitalist class and establish workers' control all over Italy. The enthusiasm and militancy of the masses was at its height. After a year of local strikes and conflicts the people had in an united effort manifested their resolution to get rid of the old regime. But both the socialists and communist leadership were afraid of revolution. The most extraordinary pretexts were put forward. Italy had no coal, no iron, not enough wheat to suffice to itself, a revolution would be bound to fail. Even Lenin thought that the revolution would be premature and told Angelica Balabanoff, the old socialist militant, that Italy could not make a revolution because she lacked coal and raw materials!

The Socialist Party and the reformist trade unions instead of following the masses and helping them to strike down the capitalist system lost themselves in futile controversies and only offered the workers empty resolutions. On the 4th and 5th of September the General Confederation of Labour and the Socialist Party (who were affiliated in the same way as they are in this country) met and decided to intensify the struggle, but then did nothing. A week later they met again and adopted the solution advocated by the trade union secretary: *to get out of the factories and attack the bourgeoisie in its central organ: the State.*

This fine piece of socialist sophistry had the most terrible consequences for the Italian working class. It marked the beginning of a reign of reaction which led straight to fascism.

On the 15th September 1920, delegates from the workers and industrialists met, under the presidency of the Prime Minister, Giolitti, at Turin. He proposed the formation of a commission of six members representing the Confederation of Industry and six members representing the General Confederation of Labour, which would establish a sort of control on the industry. No compromise was reached at first because of the intransigent attitude of the capitalists. But when the negotiations were resumed in Rome a compromise was strived at. This scheme was a clever move on the part of the astute Premier. The factories were evacuated, the workers lost all their power and the projected law was forgotten in some pigeonhole. But while the Italian workers felt betrayed, weakened and hopeless, the bourgeoisie prepared itself to prevent a similar experience from occurring again. The occupation of the factories which could have marked the downfall of the ruling class was on the contrary the signal for the capitalists to rally their forces. They began to look for a

man who would give them a strong government capable to crush any attempt of revolt on the part of the workers.

The fascists understood that the moment to act had come. On the 21st of November 1920 they launched their first attack against working-class organisations. From Bologna the fascist offensive spread to the Po valley. In the meantime the government reorganised the police, and the royal guard was recruited amongst the youth and well trained. The forces of reaction came closer together; capitalists, royalists, clericals, army men joined hands.

The Socialist Party did not or would not see the fascist danger. It merely concerned itself with internal discussions, being attacked and split by the activities of the Communists who were still in the Party at the time. It was then the most important and strongly organised party in Italy. It counted almost a quarter of a million members and the General Confederation of Labour counted 2 millions. It had 156 members in Parliament and 2,162 communes [i.e., municipalities] were administered by socialists.

The Russian revolution had inspired the Italian workers… But Lenin and the Communist International destroyed the inspiration the Russian revolution had given the Italian workers.

The Communist Party was formed after the Congress of Leghorn on the 15-20th January 1921 when the Socialist Party refused to accept the 21 conditions imposed by Moscow. Its main aim was not to fight reaction but to attack the socialists who, like Serrati, had refused to become the servile tools of the Kremlin. The C.P. was formed of many dishonest elements who had accepted the disreputable role of breaking up long established parties and slandering old working-class leaders in order to obtain the favours and money which Moscow bestowed upon its faithful servants. The Communists had plenty of reasons to criticise reformist socialist leaders like Serrati but they did not choose to carry on the controversy on theoretical or tactical grounds. With their now well-known methods, they tried to discredit them, by attempting to blacken their private lives, they used slander and blackmail, provocateurs and spies. This only weakened and demoralised the working-class so that the growth of Communism in Italy was an important factor in the rise of fascism. The Russian revolution had inspired the Italian workers. At the example of their Russian comrades they had formed workers' councils, they had declared a general strike to protest against intervention in Russia. But Lenin and the Communist International destroyed the inspiration the Russian revolution had given the Italian workers. Seeing that they could not control the Italian working-class movements the Communist International set about disorganising and smashing them. When Lenin died Errico Malatesta wrote in the anarchist daily *Umanita Nova*: "Lenin is dead, long live Liberty!" He was expressing the judgment of History.

The Anarchist movement had always had a strong influence on the Italian masses. Its federalist character appealed to a country which had been only recently united and where the central government was weak and unpopular. Its recognition of the important role which the peasants should play in a revolution won it the support of the countryside. The influence which Bakunin exerted was felt long after his death. The Italian section of the International always refused to accept Marx's dictatorship. The Socialist movement which was formed by the former anarchist Andrea Costa was for a long time influenced by the anti-parliamentarianism of the anarchists and was, under their influence, much more ready to take part in direct action than its German or British counterparts.

The anarchists had also a strong influence amongst the *Bourses du Travail* which grouped all the trades locally and often remained independent of the T[rade] U[union] [Confederation]. In 1912 anarchist-syndicalists formed their own Union.[1] It was very active in 1914 during the June revolt which was called the *Red Week*. At Ancona on the 7th of June in a conflict with the police 3 workers had been killed. Ancona, a republican and anarchist town where Malatesta, then in Italy, exerted a strong influence, immediately declared a General Strike. From there it spread all over Italy, revolts took place at Ancona, in Romagna, Florence and Naples, the army fraternised with the people, town halls were occupied by revolutionaries. The syndicalists led the revolt but the General Confederation of Labour gave the order to its members to resume work.

Of the activity of the [Italian] Syndicalist Union, Armando Borghi[2] who was its secretary from 1919 writes (in a letter):

[1] A reference to the Italian Syndicalist Union (*Unione Sindacale Italiana*) which was formed in Modena by unions and trades councils previously affiliated with the General Confederation of Labour (Berneri uses the better known expression *Bourses du Travail* associated with pre-war French revolutionary syndicalism rather the Italian *Camere del Lavoro*). As Berneri notes, it swiftly grew during the *Biennio Rosso* but calls by it and the Italian Anarchist Union for a united front were rejected during this period and in the rise of fascism. It continues to organise workers to this day and remains a member of the International Workers' Association. (*Black Flag*)

[2] Armando Borghi (1882-1968) was an Italian anarchist who joined the movement at the age of 1916. A long-standing

> "During 4 years from 1919-22 our action was one of a vanguard not only of theory but of action. We often tried and we sometimes succeeded in putting the leaders of the [General] Confederation of Labour in front of accomplished facts, of serious revolutionary movements. But we did not succeed in breaking the tutelage in which the reformist leaders held the masses."

And he adds:

> "I still think that a revolution in Italy at that time was necessary like a natural birth and that the abortion which resulted was a catastrophe. France, Spain, etc. would have altered their course and the whole of Europe would have seen things very different from Mussolini."

The Syndicalist Union was at the head of all the strikes and movements of revolt, as also was the Anarchist Union. They did not carry on in a sectarian way. When the working-class was struggling for the defence of its own interests it joined socialists and trade-unionists in the fight, trying to carry it as far as it was possible. While the members of the Socialist Party left it, discouraged by its reformist attitude, the membership of the Syndicalist Union grew rapidly and reached more than half a million.

They talked of their burned buildings, of the co-operatives destroyed, of their murdered comrades, and they asked for action, but the Socialist leadership remained unmoved and declared its unshakeable faith in Parliamentary tactics.

At the beginning of 1921 the cleavage between the working-class and the bourgeoisie had reached its climax. On one side stood the working-class organisations counting millions of members bound to reformist leaders and revolutionary syndicalist-anarchist minority unable to draw behind itself the masses. On the other side the liberal and catholic parties resolved to defend by all means at their disposal the interests of the capitalist class. Mussolini became their tool; with a handful of fascists, the protection of the police and the complicity of the Government he was able in a few years to disband the working-class organisations and conquer power.

II

The Rise of Fascism in Italy

The Italian workers could during the occupation of the factories in August-September 1920 have seized the opportunity to deal a final blow to the bourgeoisie. They failed to do so and from that moment they fought a retreating battle against the ruling class and the rapidly growing fascist danger. The Government began to imprison working class militants while fascist hooligans could act with complete impunity. Mussolini began an organised struggle against working-class organisations, their offices were burned, their centres destroyed, their members murdered.

The measure of the Government arbitrary power was given when Giolitti, then Prime Minister, ordered Armando Borghi the Anarchist secretary of the Syndicalist Union and Errico Malatesta, the old anarchist militant, to be arrested. The workers had been too demoralised by the defeat which followed the occupation of the factories to put up any serious opposition. The situation was different in February 1920; then the Government had tried to arrest Malatesta at Tombola, a little town near Leghorn. Immediately all the major towns of Tuscany declared a general strike and the railwaymen decided to stop the trains in the whole of central Italy. Before they could do so Malatesta was released.

Anarchists and Syndicalists all over Italy organised demonstrations and strikes in order to obtain the liberation of their comrades but they received no solidarity from the socialist organisations. The organ of the Socialist Party *Avanti!* published in large type the following appeal: "We beg our working comrades most earnestly to pay no attention to any appeals for action until such appeals shall have been duly passed by the Party's central organs and by the economic organisations competent to deal with them". All the Party leaders did in order to show their solidarity towards Malatesta and Borghi was to decide that a *one hour* strike in protest should be called!

Thanks to the complicity of the Socialist Reformist organisations the Government was able to keep Malatesta and Borghi in prison for nine months. When they were released the reactionary movement had gained such tremendous ground that the working-class was unable to react.

On the 15th of May 1921 the Government decided to dissolve Parliament and to call new elections. Elections in such a period of unrest spelt civil war and the

union militant, he was elected the secretary of Italian Syndicalist Union and edited its newspaper *Guerra di Classe*. He visited revolutionary Russia in 1920 and played a key role in syndicalist opposition to Bolshevism both in Italy and internationally. Returning to Italy, he fought against the rise of fascism before being forced into exile in 1923. He returned to Italy after the Second World War and re-joined the anarchist movement. (*Black Flag*)

Government was well aware of it. It used them in order to precipitate the crushing of the left-wing movements. All over Italy acts of violence took place; the Fascists took this opportunity to intensify their attacks. The Socialist Party retained however the same number of votes as it had received at the previous elections, while Mussolini, together with 30 Nationalist and Fascist deputies, entered Parliament. The *Avanti!* declared that fascist reaction had been buried under an avalanche of red votes but in reality the initiative already belonged to the bourgeoisie.

The Socialist Party and the General Confederation Labour refused to take action against the fascists and the Socialist Parliamentary group adopted a policy of wait and see. They refused to join the government, but they equally refused to act against it. While their leaders sat tight in their comfortable armchairs the workers were faced by unemployment, rising prices, government repression and fascist provocations.

On the 6th of July 1921, an attempt was made to unify the working-class forces and to meet the fascists with more than words. A pact of Proletarian Alliance was signed in Rome by working-class organisations and a workers' militia the *Arditi rossi* was formed.[1] The Socialists only gave it lukewarm support; they declared in their paper *Avanti!* that it was no use trying to use force against the overwhelming forces of the Government.

Socialist-Fascist Pact

Unwilling to use force, the Socialist Party preferred to resort to intrigue and compromise. On the 3rd of August 1921, in the office of the President of Parliament the Socialist leaders signed a Peace treaty with the Fascists. They promised to co-operate to prevent any acts of violence and reprisals and to respect each other's right to propaganda and organisation. Socialist and Fascist leaders shook hands across the bodies of the peasants and workers assassinated by Mussolini's henchmen.

This pact was a clever move on the part of Mussolini to gain time and to increase and organise his forces. For a few months Fascist violence decreased but this did not last long. While Socialist leaders severely reminded the rank and file to respect the pact, Mussolini renewed his attacks. At the Socialist Congress of Rome in January 1922 the peasants' and workers' delegates from the regions invaded by the Fascists brought hundreds of proofs of the fact that the Fascist Party had not respected the pact. They talked of their burned buildings, of the co-operatives destroyed, of their murdered comrades, and they asked for action, but the Socialist leadership remained unmoved and declared its unshakeable faith in Parliamentary tactics.

Last Attempt To Resist

Another attempt was made to co-ordinate the working-class forces. A Workers' Alliance between the General Confederation of Labour, the Syndicalist Union and Railway Union was formed. Its aim was "to oppose the alliance of workers' forces to the coalition of the reaction". This alliance might have been able to stop the rise of fascism but it came too late, when the working class was demoralised, weakened and divided.

The Workers' Alliance made, however, a last attempt to oppose Fascism. On the 31st of July 1922, It declared a general strike. The strike was successful and complete but the streets belonged to the Fascists. After 3 days of strike they started to attack; they were defeated in the revolutionary towns of Parma and Forli but they were victorious in Milan and the strike finished with a defeat of the proletariat.

The fascist onslaught continued. From the Po valley the attack spread to Tuscany and to the Puglia. The Socialists went on advocating a return to legal means, to fair competition between parties. The climax of naiveté was reached when the socialist deputy Filippo Turati called on the King to bring him the wish of the proletariat for liberty and to remind him that his duty was to defend the constitution to which he had taken the oath. The King's answer was a few days afterwards to call Mussolini to power!

The March On Rome

Mussolini, once having helped to defeat the workers, set himself to conquer power. He had to win the support of the big capitalists and royalty, who, once the revolutionary danger passed, might have wished to thank him and dismiss him. By a series of intrigues and by declaring himself prepared to accept and defend the King (whom he had always attacked) Mussolini managed to get the support of the capitalists, who gave him 20 millions to prepare the March on Rome, and of the royal family. Sure of his ground, Mussolini declared from Naples on the 24th October 1922: "If they do not give us power we shall take it by marching on Rome."

The Government by that time had resigned but on learning of Mussolini's declaration of war it published a decree putting the country in a state of siege. All civil authority had to be surrendered to the Army which took steps to prevent any armed putsch on the part of the Fascists. Mussolini had only limited forces at his disposal and if the Army had opposed him he would

[1] Also known as the *Arditi del Popolo*, this was a militant anti-fascist group founded at the end of June 1921 to resist the rise of fascism and the violence of its Blackshirt paramilitaries (*squadristi*). It grouped revolutionary syndicalists, socialists, communists, anarchists and republicans, as well as some former military officers. While individual members joined and supported it, the *Arditi del Popolo* was not supported by either the Italian Socialist Party nor the Communist Party of Italy. In contrast, both the Italian Anarchist Union and Italian Syndicalist Union supported the organisation. (*Black Flag*)

have been lost. But the King came to his rescue. He refused to sign the decree putting the country under state of siege. Instead he called Mussolini to Rome to form a new Government. Mussolini "marched on Rome" comfortably installed in a sleeping car.

By the 30th October he had formed his government. In Rome his troops marched before the King and the Royal family; all over Italy his followers celebrated with new violences. Parliament did not put up any opposition; it had been taken by surprise and once again it decided to wait for events.

Mussolini immediately took measures in favour of the bourgeoisie. All legislation favourable to the workers was repealed. Meanwhile Fascist terrorism increased.

On the 18th of December 1922, 12 workers were massacred in Turin. The organiser of the engineering workers, Pietro Ferrero, an anarchist, was killed.[1] Everywhere socialists, anarchists, syndicalists were murdered under the very eyes of the police who never took any steps against the Fascists.

From the March on Rome to Matteotti's murder in June 1924, Mussolini consolidated his forces. He managed to confuse and fool Parliament with clever speeches which kept everybody guessing as to what his intentions were. Meanwhile his bands carried on a merciless struggle against the last working-class bastions. The election which took place in April 1924 only gave the Fascists another excuse for violence. In Parma. the Socialist candidate Piccinini was assassinated.

Matteotti's Murder

On the 10th June 1924, Giacomo Matteotti, a socialist deputy, was kidnapped in full daylight in Rome. This murder could have been just another anonymous fascist crime if a man had not taken the number of the car where Matteotti had disappeared and reported to the police. Matteotti's body was not found until after three months of searches but the inquest led the police to the Government's doorstep. Mussolini in order to clear himself accused all his collaborators; one after the other: Rossi, Finzi, General de Bono and Dumini. They defended themselves by accusing him. No doubt could be left as to Mussolini's having ordered the murder. Public opinion was aroused. Fascist methods were well known and Matteotti's name was just one more in a long list of fascist crimes but this was an unique case ,where the police had by accident found the murderers and where Mussolini's hand was dearly shown. It might have been possible to start a movement at that time which would have overthrown Mussolini's government. Workers' organisations proposed to declare a general strike but the socialist parliamentary group thought such action unwise. Instead it issued a declaration condemning the murder.

Again in January 1925 Mussolini's government seemed on the point of collapse. Rossi, who was implicated in Matteotti's murder, wrote a memorandum on the methods used by Mussolini to crush his political opponents. After such revelations two cabinet ministers felt compelled to resign. Instead of allowing a governmental crisis to take place and a new cabinet to be formed the King hastened to accept two fascist ministers whom Mussolini proposed to replace the others. In October 1925, Mussolini published his version of the murder, the kidnapping was merely a joke, the murder, an accident.

The events which led to Mussolini's conquest power clearly show that reformist and legal methods are of no avail in the fight against reaction and Fascism

The popular reaction to Matteotti's murder which put Mussolini's position in peril made him realise how quickly he had to act to prevent public opinion from expressing itself. All through 1925, particularly after Zaniboni's attempt on Mussolini's life, measures were taken to suppress the right of association and the liberty of the Press.

The only expressions of revolt took from now on [were in] the form of individual actions against Mussolini and his acolytes and of underground propaganda. In both fields the Anarchists showed courage and initiative. Out of seven attempts against Mussolini's life, four were carried out by Anarchists.

Lessons To Be Drawn

The events which led to Mussolini's conquest power clearly show that reformist and legal methods are of no avail in the fight against reaction and Fascism. The ruling class is only prepared to adhere to legality, to respect their own rules of the game as long as it suits them. When their situation is in danger they use violence, corruption and assassination. The Socialist Party in Italy made the mistake of thinking that the capitalists and the Fascist leaders would be prepared to accept fair competition between parties, that they would

[1] Pietro Ferrero (1892-1922) was an anarchist active in the General Confederation of Labour. He was elected secretary of the Turin section of the Federation of Metal Workers Employees in 1919 and played an important role in the strikes and factory occupations during September 1920. On 18 December 1922, he was killed by fascist gangs as part of their three-day terror campaign in Turin which saw 22 labour militants murdered. After being tortured, he was tied to a truck and dragged, presumably still alive, at full speed through the Corso Vittorio Emanuele before his unrecognisable corpse was dumped at the foot of the statue of King Vittorio Emanuele II. (*Black Flag*)

respect peace treaties, that they would be moved by appeals to decency and honesty. All through those seven years of conflict they played into the hands of the ruling class. They continued to rely on election results when the Fascists had brutally declared that if they were not given power they would conquer it, revolver in hand. While Socialists scrupulously respected a Government sold to the capitalist class, the Fascists did not hesitate to assassinate the Socialist candidates whom they could not silence, as for example during the April 1924 elections when the. Socialist candidate Piccinini was killed by the Fascists. They kept relying on the number of seats they had in Parliament as the surest guarantee against Fascism, when it was obvious that Mussolini relied more on political intrigues and armed force than on democratic methods. After the 15th May 1921 elections the Nationalists and Fascists had 30 deputies while the Socialists had 138 members and the Communists fifteen, but this did not correspond to the real balance of forces. The Fascists had the Government, the police and in some cases the Army on their side; they could upset any majority the Socialists had in Parliament. If the Italian workers had relied more on their class weapons, strikes and insurrection, rather than on the voting paper, they would not have been defeated; If, when they occupied the factories, they had taken control of the industries rather than relying on the Government *to give* them control, then the rise of Fascism would have impossible.

The Italian Anarchist Movement understood the danger of disunity and always advocated joint action against Government repression and Fascism

The Anarchists advocated all through the strikes an expansion of the movement and Malatesta's speech to Milan factory workers after they had returned to work shows that he fully grasped the tragic consequences this compromise with the bourgeoisie would have for the Italian workers. This is how he described the pact between the General Confederation of Labour and the Employers Association:

> "You who are celebrating as a great victory the signature in Rome of this agreement are deceiving yourselves. In reality the victory belongs to Giolitti, to the Government, and to the bourgeoisie, who find themselves saved from the precipice over which they had been hanging . . . To speak of victory while the Rome agreement puts you back once more under the exploitation of the bourgeoisie, is a lie. If you give up possession of the factories, do so with the conviction that you have lost a great battle, and with the firm intention of resuming the struggle at the first opportunity and pursuing it to the end. You will then drive the employers from the factories and you will not allow them to re-enter until they come in as workmen on an equality with yourselves, content to live by working for themselves and others. Nothing is lost provided you do not delude yourselves with the fallacy that you have gained a victory. The famous decree as to the control of the factories is to dupe you, for it will tend to the creation of a new class of employees [i.e., officials or bureaucrats], who, though sprung from your bosom, will not defend your interests but the new situation created for them and it will tend also to harmonise your interests with those of the bourgeoisie – the interests of the wolf with those of the lamb. Do not believe those of your leaders who mock you by putting off the revolution from day to day. The Revolution! You yourselves have to make it whenever the opportunity presents itself, without waiting for orders that never come, or, if they do come, only instruct you to give up the fight. Have confidence in yourselves, have faith in your future, and you will conquer."

The Socialists displayed the same lack of revolutionary realism when the working class came to be attacked by the Fascist hooligans. They relied on the police which would never defend them nor prosecute the attackers. An attempt in the right direction was made when a kind of workers' defence corps was formed but it never reached the power and efficiency of, say, the Irish Citizen Army.[1] No serious efforts were made to defend workers' organisations, buildings or Left-wing newspaper presses. When the *Avanti* building was burnt in Milan by the Fascists, no attempt was made to defend it in spite of the fact that such an attack had to be expected at any moment. It is almost incredible to think

[1] The Irish Citizen Army was a small group of armed trade union volunteers from the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) formed by James Larkin, James Connolly and Jack White. It arose as a result of the Dublin lockout of August 1913 to January 1914 when Irish employers tried to break the syndicalist influenced ITGWU. The Dublin Metropolitan Police regularly attacked strikers and their meetings (two were beaten to death and around 500 injured at a rally on 31 August). This State violence prompted Larkin to call for a workers' militia to be formed to protect themselves against the police. The Irish Citizen Army was formed on 23 November 1913 and for the duration of the lock-out was armed with hurling sticks and bats to protect workers' demonstrations from the police. On 24 April 1916, 220 of its members too part in the Easter Rising against British rule of Ireland. (*Black Flag*)

that an organisation with two million members should have its property destroyed without any defence being put up. The Fascists were a very small minority; their strength lay in the fact that they knew the police would not molest them. If the workers had resisted in an organised way they would have been able to crush the Fascist revolt in the bud.

The organisation of workers' defence would have been equally useful when strikes took place. The workers were able to stage general strikes which covered the whole country and lasted several days. But they left the streets to the Fascists, who, while they could not break the strike, were able to burn Trade Union buildings, attack and murder Socialist and Anarchist militants. Unlike them, the Dublin workers understood that danger and that is why they formed their own defences during the 1913 Transport Workers' strike.

The lack of workers' defences was partly due to the lack of unity amongst the Italian workers. While the bourgeoisie presented a united front against the working class the workers' parties lost themselves in endless squabbles.

The Italian Anarchist Movement understood the danger of disunity and always advocated joint action against Government repression and Fascism. At the Congress of the Anarchist Union held at Bologna, July 1-4th, 1920, a union of rank and file members belonging to all parties was advocated. *Freedom*, September 1929, gives the following report of the discussion which took place and of the resolution which was adopted.

> "A discussion took place on the problem of the united front of the Italian proletariat, which is divided on the industrial field into the reformist [General] Confederation [of Labour], the [Italian] Syndicalist Union, and the very class-conscious Catholic Trade Unions. Politically, the workers belong either to the Socialist Party with its different wings, from the reformists to the Communist Parliamentarians, or to the extremely revolutionary Republicans and the Anarchists. The Catholic People's Party is also very strong. Besides these there exist innumerable autonomous groups of all tendencies. Dissensions have hitherto stood in the way of united action. Malatesta has repeatedly pointed out the great need for united action among all parties. In several localities there is today already a common united front, whilst in others the attainment of this object is difficult and even impossible. The following resolution was passed: 'The Congress authorises and advises the formation of small local Groups of Action, outside the parties and existing organisations in the different localities, consisting of all those elements which will declare themselves ready to go into action at the first decided opportunity, and to fight with all their means against the existing institutions'."

When one studies the history of Hitler's rise to power one is struck by the fact that the German workers learnt nothing from the experiences of the Italian proletariat. How long are workers all over the world going to commit the same mistakes, making the sacrifices of their comrades useless and bringing terrible sufferings upon themselves?

The Abolition of Property

M. L. B.

War Commentary – For Anarchism, mid-June 1944

In the mid-March issue of *War Commentary* one of our readers asked us to explain more fully the views of the Anarchists on property. We answered him by reproducing short extracts from Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Tolstoy. From all of them it appeared clearly that Anarchists condemn property as being based on injustice and obtained through exploitation, oppression and violence. They condemned it further, as being "at once the consequence and the basis of the State" and having a corrupting influence on the privileged classes while the poor starve and are physically and morally crushed.

According to the Anarchists the first task of the revolution must be the abolition of property. Both the means of production and consumption goods must be expropriated and put at the disposal of the whole community.

How property is going to be abolished does not seem to be clear to many people. Some confusion has arisen in their minds because of the expressions used by revolutionary movements and the Anarchists in particular who advocate the *seizure* of the land and the factories by the workers. This seems to imply that property instead of being abolished is going to be transferred from one group of people to another.

When the Anarchists advocate the occupation of the factories by the workers and the seizure of the land by the peasants they do not mean that those workers should become the *owners* instead of the capitalists or the State, but that they should act as agents for the whole of society. After the revolution everything will belong to all – which comes to the same thing as saying that nothing will belong to anyone in particular.

When workers expropriate a factory they will not become a kind of shareholders, each owning 1/100th or

1/1000th part of the factory. The factory will not belong to them any more than to the miners or the agricultural labourers who may be working nearby; they will be merely running it for the whole of the community which meanwhile will provide them with the things they need.

If we said that the factories, and land, etc., should become the *property* of the workers (using the word in the sense it has been used up to now) we would be creating a new injustice.

Property "is the right of using and abusing"; there is nothing which prevents a man from destroying his own house, and for years capitalists have destroyed whole crops of wheat, bananas, oranges, or coffee, or thrown fish back into the sea merely because it belonged to them and they could do what they wanted with it. Eccentric ladies have their dogs, their personal belongings, their yachts, etc., destroyed after their death. According to the present conception of the word 'property', workers owning a factory would be able to destroy it if they wanted to, or destroy its products if they chose. This is a very unlikely hypothesis and there are other reasons for condemning property. Collective property is as illogical and unjust as private property. Everything created in society is the result of common labour. A factory which may have taken hundreds of workers to build, which possesses machines created by the efforts of generations of engineers cannot be said to belong to anyone in particular. If from one owner the property passes to a hundred, the injustice would still be there.

Of course, the abolition of property in factories and land must be followed by its abolition in consumption goods, the abolition of money and the abolition of wages. Men value property to-day for the privileges it gives. Shareholders value their shares in a factory because of the profits they draw from them which allow them to live on a better scale than ordinary workers and give them a superior position in society. With the abolition of money and wages, and private property in consumers' goods, "owning" a factory would become a completely meaningless term. The injustice of private property in the means of production is generally recognised, but many people try to draw a distinction between two kinds of property: the factories, land, etc., which would allow men to exploit other people's labour on one hand and the personal possessions like a house, cars, books, etc., on the other. Says our critic, "Surely you don't want a man's hammer or bicycle to belong to the whole of society?"

The answer is yes and no. There are obviously things which can't belong to several people; a toothbrush, for example, is rightly considered by people as an instrument they should have an exclusive privilege to use. But supposing hammers and bicycles were in very short supply; then it would be wrong for a man to say: "this hammer or bicycle belongs to me" and thereby deprive other men from using them. The same principle would apply to a house. There is nothing wrong in a family wanting to have a house to themselves; they are obviously entitled to comfort and privacy. But supposing that after the revolution there were for a time a number of people without shelter, then it would be wrong for a man or a family to have a whole house to themselves and if they refused to share it with other members it would show that the old capitalist mode of thinking is still alive.

Men value property to-day for the privileges it gives. Shareholders value their shares in a factory because of the profits they draw from them which allow them to live on a better scale than ordinary workers and give them a superior position in society. With the abolition of money and wages, and private property in consumers' goods, "owning" a factory would become a completely meaningless term.

We want to abolish property altogether. It might at first seem just that a man should own a house, tools, bicycle or car because it is true that these possessions would not allow him to exploit his fellow workers but it is equally true that by owning these commodities he may be excluding other workers who have an equal claim to them. One cannot share everything and one will still say *my* bed when sleeping in it, *my* coat when wearing it but one will realize that one has no exclusive right to the bed or coat as long as other men go without.

During and after the revolution it will be the job of the communes or the distribution syndicates to distribute the food and other commodities amongst the population. They will start by collectivizing food, transport, clothes and other commodities and will distribute them as fairly as possible. But if there were a shortage of goods it should be the duty of each member of the community to bring to the distribution what "belongs" to him so as to share it with others. If this were not done spontaneously, if a man possessed stores of food while the population starved there is no reason why the commune or the syndicate should not take the goods and distribute them amongst the population. If bicycles

or cars were urgently needed they should be equally requisitioned. This is why we cannot accept the view that only the land and the factories should belong to all.

The method of consumption will undergo a change as radical as that of production. Things like cars, tools, books, records, will generally no longer be used by men individually but will be shared by a group. There is no reason why individuals should accumulate a great number of tools, books, etc., in their own house when they can borrow them from a communal centre. There is no reason why each man should have a car in his garage if he can borrow it, when he needs it, from the communal garage. The lending library system could be applied to most commodities of life. If a family has guests it should be able to go to the communal centre and get the extra crockery, bedding, beds and chairs necessary to accommodate the guests; when these have left, the articles borrowed could be returned to the centre. Vacuum cleaners, washing machines, paint sprayers and a hundred other things could be equally borrowed every time they are needed. In this way even if the production of industrial goods does not expand so as to provide each individual with all the commodities he requires he will be able, nevertheless, to have access to them. The other advantage will be to cut down the amount of furniture and household articles in the house which generally take up a lot of space and complicate housekeeping.

To our minds, influenced by capitalist ideas, the abolition of property may seem rather disturbing. There is in many of us a reluctance to share what we have with others. The isolation of man in present-day society has created in him a strong individualistic feeling. This selfish attitude did not exist amongst savages or 'in primitive societies where men used to feel part of the community. As Kropotkin has abundantly shown in *Mutual Aid*, members of the same community shared all they had, food, clothes, houses, implements of work.

There is no doubt that, after the revolution, the work in common for the good of all, the daily contact with neighbours in factories and at home will give birth to a revival of feelings of fraternity amongst men. It is by no means unpleasant and one likes sharing what one has with friends. When friendly relations will exist amongst all men it will seem a natural thing to put everything one has in common.

One may remind sceptics that relations between men have undergone very deep changes through the ages and that there is no reason why the relation between men and things should not undergo equally deep ones. There were times in history when men thought that they had the right to possess slaves and do what they liked with their lives. This would seem repugnant to most men to-day (capitalists and politicians excepted). Man considered his wife as his personal property which he could treat as he wished. Now he tends to regard her as a companion and admit that she is free to think and. act as she chooses. There is no reason to suppose that once capitalism, money and wages have been abolished our attitude towards property will not undergo a similar fundamental change so that the word will be rendered completely meaningless.

The Spanish Social Revolution

M.L.B.

War Commentary – For Anarchism, mid-July 1944

The most profound and lasting impression which the Spanish people have had of the Revolution of 1936 is the collectivisation of the land and industry which took place in the first months which followed the fascist rising.

The experiences of street fighting, church burning, militia life, bombing and food shortage will all have left their traces but the taking over of the factories, the work in common free from the interference of the bosses and degrading exploitation must have left a far more lasting impression. Too much importance cannot be attached to this aspect of the revolution both because workers in other countries can benefit from the experience of the Spanish workers and because when the Spanish workers rise again they are likely to adopt the same form of economic organisation which has given them such excellent results in the past.

The word collectivisation being often used nowadays in connection with the economic system of Russia, it is necessary to indicate that the collectivisation of the land and industry in Spain was of a completely different nature from that carried out by Stalin. Factories, fields, vineyards and orange groves were not collectivised by order of the Government. Workers and peasants were not faced with the prospect of joining a collective, going to prison or being shot. The collectivisation movement was a spontaneous one and for the first few months of the revolution it developed with very little interference from the State which merely contented itself with ratifying the action taken by the workers.

A. Souchy describes in a book, *Colectivizaciones* how the workers of Catalonia and other parts of Spain took control of the industries. When the fascist rising took place a great number of industrialists took refuge abroad or went into hiding. The workers had declared a general strike as a means to counteract the fascist offensive and it lasted for the eight days which followed the 19th of July 1936. Those days were occupied with street

fighting, the clearing out of fascist elements hidden in the towns and villages and the sending of militia columns to the front line. The revolutionary forces were victorious in about half of Spain and workers' organisations decided to end the general strike. The workers went back to the shops, factories, garages which had been deserted by their owners who had either gone away or perished in the struggle, and found that they had a splendid opportunity to put into practice the principle of common ownership which they had been advocating and fighting for many years.

This is how Souchy describes the movement:

> "The collectivisation must not be understood as the realisation of a preconceived programme. It was spontaneous. However, one cannot deny the influence of anarchist ideas on this event. For many decades the Spanish anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists had considered the social transformation of Spain as their most important aim. In the meetings of the syndicates and groups, in newspapers and pamphlets the problem of the social revolution was continually discussed in a systematic way. What was to be done on the day following the victory of the* proletariat? The apparatus of State power had to be abolished. The workers had to take charge themselves of the direction and administration of the enterprises; the syndicates had to control the economic life of the country. The federations of industry should direct production while the local federations should direct consumption. These were the ideas of the anarchosyndicalists."

The Anarchist syndicates and groups did not lose time in putting these principles into practice, particularly where their influence was strongest – in Catalonia. The National Confederation of Labour (anarcho-syndicalist) started by organising the production and distribution of food. The people had to be fed first and popular restaurants were opened in every district where all those needing a meal could get one free.

The First Stage of Collectivization

Meanwhile in factories, workshops and stores the workers began to take control. They elected delegates who took charge of the administration. Though these men had often little theoretical knowledge they did their jobs and proved efficient organisers. Production was improved and wages went up. But soon the workers became aware that the mere seizing and running of the factories and the elimination of the capitalists was not enough, that more equality among the workers themselves had to be created. This is how Souchy describes the situation existing at the time:

Production was improved and wages went up. But soon the workers became aware that the mere seizing and running of the factories and the elimination of the capitalists was not enough, that more equality among the workers themselves had to be created

> "In the first phase of collectivisation the wages of the workers varied even within the same industry. As the collectivisation limited itself to abolishing the privileges of some capitalists or to eliminate the capitalist profit in a joint stock company, the workers became the exploiters themselves, replacing in fact the previous owners. The change produced a more just situation than before because the workers were able to get the fruit of their labour. But this system was neither socialist nor communist. Instead of one capitalist there was a kind of collective capitalism. While before there was only one owner of a factory or a cafe the collective proprietors were now the workers of the factory or the employees of the cafe. The employees- in a prosperous cafe got better wages than those in a less prosperous one."

It was obvious to everyone that collectivisation could not stop in this phase which had given rise to new injustices. The workers went a step forward. The syndicates began to control the industries as a whole. For example the builders' syndicate in Barcelona put itself in charge of all the building jobs in the city. This was followed by a levelling of salaries in the building industry. But even this was unsatisfactory as workers in the richer industries still received better wages than workers in less prosperous industries.

Co-ordination Between Industries

The Spanish workers realised that they had to coordinate the various industries so that more flourishing industries could help the others. All the incomes of the various syndicates should be concentrated in a single pool which would distribute the funds equally amongst the various syndicates. This co-ordination was never completely achieved partly because the tasks of the war prevented the syndicates from devoting all their energies to the task of reconstruction and partly because the government soon began to tie the hands of the workers.

Co-ordination was however achieved between various syndicates and Souchy gives the example of the transport industry. The Bus Company in Barcelona which had been put under the workers' control had an excess of funds. With it they helped the Tramway Company which was not doing so well. Also when 4,000 taxi drivers were left without work through lack of petrol the Transport Syndicate went on paying their wages.

The Peasants Seize the Land

While the workers took possession of the factories the peasants collectivised the land. The Spanish peasants have for centuries tried to expropriate the landowners and to get back the land which, in many parts, they used to till in common for centuries in the past. Every time a revolt took place the peasants would seize the estates of the landowners and revive communal institutions for the organisation in common with the life of the village. The Anarchist movement tried to give a more definite shape to the aspirations of the Spanish peasantry. - At the Congress of the C.N.T. in Madrid in June 1931 the collectivisation of the land was put forward as one of the most important aims of the rural workers. When the revolution took place these resolutions were carried out and not only was the land collectivised in most places but the industries attached to it.

We shall not deal with the peasants' collectives. Even bourgeois and Marxist writers willingly admit that the agricultural collectives were a great success but they hasten to assert that this proves that anarchism is only practicable in an agricultural, poorly developed country and that it would be a mistake to believe that the same results could be achieved in a modern, industrialised country.

Unhappily for them, facts don't at all back up their argument. Of all the provinces of Spain, Catalonia is the most industrialised; it contains varied and up-to-date factories which employ a large part of the population. Catalonia can stand comparison with the most industrialised parts of France, Italy or England and yet it was in Catalonia that collectivisation was most successful. Furthermore it achieved its best results not in agriculture where the existence of small holdings was not particularly favourable to collectivisation, but in industry.

The Workers Run the Country

There was hardly any industry in Catalonia which was not collectivised. The transport industry including railways, buses, tramways and the port of Barcelona; the textile industry grouping over 200,000 workers; the engineering factories producing cars, planes and war material; the food industry; the public services such as electricity, power and water were all put under workers' control.

The collectivisation decree issued by the Government on the 24th Oct., 1.936, only declared obligatory the collectivisation of industrial and commercial enterprises which, on the 30th June, 1936, employed more than 100 workers as well as those which had been owned by fascists. But when the decree was published the collectivisation had already been carried out much further than that. Cafes and hotels though employing a relatively small number of workers had been collectivised; street vendors, hair-dressers and barbers, shop assistants and actors had all joined a syndicate and were administering in common the industry to which they belonged.

The two unions, the C.N.T. (anarcho-syndicalist) and the U.G.T. (socialist trade union) acted in common, but as the anarcho-syndicalists were, in Catalonia, far more powerful than the socialists and that they attached more importance to the revolutionary conquests of the revolution it was generally on the initiative of the C.N.T. that collectivisations were carried out.

Workers' Committees are Formed

The collectivisation of the Catalan railways was carried out a few days after the insurrection in a swift and efficient manner. On the 24th July the railway syndicates, belonging one to the C.N.T. the other to the U.G.T., met and decided unanimously to carry on the collectivisation of all the services of the General Company of Catalan Railways and to assume the complete responsibility for its administration. Two kinds of workers' committees were set up. The Station Revolutionary Committees dealt with problems arising out of the civil war. They placed guards to defend the stations against any fascist attack, they carried out a check on all passengers, they prepared armoured trains which took the militiamen to the front line, they organised hospital trains for the wounded. These and many other immediate and vital tasks were carried on by the Station Revolutionary Committees with great enthusiasm and efficiency.

Other committees were formed to deal with the more permanent and technical aspects of the railways. Committees were set up to look after the workshops,- the rolling stock, the permanent way, the welfare of the workers, etc. Though it cannot be claimed that trains ran to time, a feat that even the revolution could not achieve, they did run very efficiently under great difficulties.

The textile industry grouping 230,000 workers, of whom 170,000 belonged to the C.N.T. was also collectivised. The organisation of the textile industry under workers' control has been described in detail in a pamphlet issued during the Spanish Revolution, by Freedom Press, Social Reconstruction in Spain. In the engineering industry one can mention the Hispano-Suiza factory employing 1,400 workers which was collectivised by the C.N.T. and which immediately

began to produce the material most needed for the revolutionary forces.

Success and Limitations

All the documents relating to the collectivisation both of the land and industry in Spain prove without the slightest doubt that the workers are entirely competent to run the economic life of a country. Wherever the workers took over, they eliminated inefficiency and waste, profiteering and parasitism, for their own benefit and that of the whole country.

Unfortunately the Spanish workers were not able to achieve the complete collectivisation of the country. They allowed small capitalists to carry on and these later proved to be a dangerous reactionary force. But it was the Government whom the workers had failed to overthrow which put the greatest obstacles in the way of the complete collectivisation of the country and which later, under the influence of right wing elements and of the Communists went as far as suppressing collectives and reintroducing competition and private capitalism.

The first step against the collectives was taken by the Catalan Government (Generalidad) in the middle of December, 1936. The food industry which had been so efficiently organised by the C.N.T. was put into the hands of the Communist Comorera who called back the small business men who sent the prices up and brought in the black market and waste.

If the Government had been abolished the Spanish * workers would have been able rapidly to collectivise the whole country and abolish the wage system and all the inequalities attached to it. The power of reaction overcome them instead. But their attempts to build a society where workers will control the means of production and the goods for consumption will serve as an example in the future revolution not only to the working class of Spain but to the whole world.

Sexuality and Freedom

Marie Louise Berneri

NOW No. 5, 1945

"The problem of sexuality permeates by its very nature every field of scientific investigation." This is too often ignored by revolutionaries who are willing to discuss Marx's economic doctrines or Kropotkin's sociological theories, but who regard with the greatest suspicion the work of psychoanalysts. Yet the existence of mass neuroses is only too obvious today. It is glaringly displayed in the cult of leadership which has taken an acute form in the totalitarian states, but which is equally evident in so-called democratic countries. It has given rise to outbursts of public sadism, in the glamorised versions of Hollywood producers or, in their crudest form, at Buchenwald and Belsen. It appears more obviously in the numerous cases of war neurosis, sadism, impotence and frigidity.

Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957)

To reduce these problems to a question of family allowances, maternity benefits or old age pensions is ridiculous; to resolve it in terms of insurrection, of overthrow of the ruling class and the power of the State, is not enough. Human nature is a whole. The worker is not merely the producer in the factory or the field; he is also the lover, the father. The problems which he faces in his home are no less important than those at his place of work. By trying to separate biological and psychological problems from the sociological ones, we not only mutilate our theories, but are bound to reach false conclusions.

Very few scientists claim to be interested in science for its own sake. Almost all of them want to put their knowledge at the service of mankind, But the specialisation of their knowledge has made this task extremely difficult, one could almost say impossible. They have reached conclusions which, instead of helping man to reach a happier life, have taken him along the wrong path. The more involved and artificial the system, the more harmful it has been. When scientists merely encouraged men to follow their instincts, the effect might not have been very deep, but it was in the right direction. But when elaborate systems of organisation were suggested, the harm done by them was great, as they orientated man towards an artificial way of life completely divorced from his own nature.

The value of Wilhelm Reich's writings is that he is "a socially conscious scientist", and it is as a socially conscious scientist that he is of particular interest to us. His work on psychotherapy, on biology and physiology are too specialised to be considered here. We are unable to judge how successful his clinical method has been, or the value of his experiments in orgone-therapy and cancer research. These are subjects for doctors and psychoanalysts to discuss, but we believe that the less specialised part of Dr. Reich's writings deserve to be

studied by anyone who is dissatisfied with the present system of society and wishes to see a free and happy world. Unfortunately, there is only one book of his available in this country, *The Function of the Orgasm*,[1] and it is from this book that we attempt to give a summary of Dr. Reich's theories.

As a whole, Dr. Reich's work has been ignored by left-wing and revolutionary movements. It has been left to the forces of reaction, both on the right and on the left, to recognise in him an enemy of authoritarian society. A violent newspaper campaign which lasted about ten months was carried out against Dr. Reich in Norway in 1938. He emigrated to America, but even there he was not free from police persecution. On the 12th December, 1941, at 2 o'clock in the morning, he was taken out of his bed by agents of the FBI (equivalent of Scotland Yard) and taken to Ellis Island. Not until the 5th January was he released unconditionally. His publications have been banned by the Communists as well as by the Fascists, by the Socialists as well as by the Li berals. The explanation for this unpopularity is that Dr. Reich has attacked dictatorship under whatever name it disguised itself. In the October, 1944, issue of the *International Journal of Sex Economy* he reasserts his belief that "Even after the military victory over German fascism, the fascist human structure will continue to exist in Germany, Russia, America and everywhere else."

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Though Dr. Reich has been described as a Marxist, he declares, as Marx did before him, "I am not a Marxist," and indeed he bitterly attacks the followers of Marx who have distorted the thought and the scientific discoveries of their master. Reich can be called a Marxist in as much as he adheres to the laws of economics formulated by Marx (in that sense, as Malatesta said, "We anarchists are all Marxists") but his conception of the State is nearer that of Bakunin than that of Marx. In the article quoted above he declares:

> "*State and Society mean two basically different social facts*. There is a state which is above or against Society as best exemplified in the fascist totalitarian state. There is society without a state, as in the primitive democratic societies. There are state organisations which work essentially in the direction of social interests, and there are others which do not. What has to be remembered is that 'state' does not mean 'society.' In the course of 20 years I have not heard one Soviet economist mention this fact. According to Marxian principles, there is, in the Soviet Union, no socialism, that is, *no abolition of market economy;* there is s*tate* capitalism, that is, capitalism without individual capitalists."[2]

Dr. Reich's understanding of the economic structure of society prevented more.[3] What he does not say is that Marx advocated a workers' state as a transitional stage and did not realise that it would give rise to a new privileged class which would use *market economy* for its own ends. However, in the work-democracy advocated by Dr. Reich the state would not exist ("The 'well-ordered legal state' is an illusion, not a reality"), goods would be produced for needs and not for profit, each individual would be responsible for his own existence and social function.

Dr. Reich's understanding of the economic structure of society prevented him from falling into the errors of most psychoanalysts, who have seen in the Soviet Union or in planned authoritarianism the hope of a free and happy society. Reich realised the need to introduce "psychological methods into sociological thinking." Marx had concerned himself with the problem of work in relation to man, Freud with the role sexuality played in the conscious and unconscious of man. Reich tried to solve the conflict between these two scientific systems, or perhaps it is better to say that he tried to find a point of contact between them. In the article already quoted he explains this in the following way:

> "The two basic biological functions of the living, then, '*work*' on the one hand, '*sexuality*' or '*pleasure function*' on the other, were treated apart from each other, in two separate scientific systems, Marx's sociology on the one hand, and Freud's psychology on the other. In Marx's system, the sexual process led a Cinderella existence under the misnomer, 'development of the family'. The work process, on the other hand, suffered the same fate in Freud's

[1] *The Function of the Orgasm*, by Wilhelm Reich, M.D. Orgone Institute Press, New York, 1942.

[2] Individual capitalism also exists on a small scale, and is admitted in a Communist pamphlet entitled *Soviet Millionaires*.

[3] The original text had "mouth" which must be a typo. This sentence was removed completely when the article was reprinted in *Anarchy* No. 105 (November 1969). (*Black Flag*)

> psychology under such misnomers as 'sublimation', 'hunger instinct', or 'ego instinct'. Far from being antithetical, the two scientific systems, their originators being altogether unaware of it, met in the *biological energy of all living organisms* which, according to our functional method of thinking, expresses itself in *work* on the one hand and *sexuality* on the other."

This brings us back to the subject of the book we are considering, *The Function of the Orgasm*. For Reich the central phenomenon of sexuality is the *orgasm*; it "is the focal point of problems arising in the fields of psychology as well as physiology, biology and sociology." The title of the book is obviously chosen in defiance of those who think that sexuality is offensive and the book itself has been written, declares Dr. Reich, not without humour, at an age when he has not yet lost his illusions regarding the readiness of his fellows to accept revolutionary knowledge. Reich had before him the example of Freud who in later years watered down his theories on sexuality, so as to contradict his own earlier work. Reich has been expelled from the Association of the psychoanalysts and their publications have been barred to him, as he was accused of attaching too much importance to sexuality. He knows therefore how the pressure of hypocritical and moralistic society can bring scientists to change their views so as to make them palatable to the general public.

Reich adheres to the basic psychoanalytical concepts, but he refused to follow the psychoanalytic school when it relegated sexuality to a secondary role so as to gain approval even in reactionary quarters. Theodore P. Wolfe, who translated Dr. Reich's book from German into English, points out that:

> "Freud's original theory of sex was revolutionary and evoked the most violent reactions. The story of psychoanalysis is essentially the story of never ending attempts to allay these reactions on the part of a shocked world, and, to make psychoanalysis socially acceptable, sexuality had to be robbed of its real significance and to be replaced by something else. Thus, Jung replaced it by a religious philosophy, Adler by a moralistic one, Rank by the 'Trauma of Birth,' etc., etc."

In America, says Dr. Wolfe,

> ". . . we are witnessing the development of various 'sociological" schools of psychoanalysis. Theirs is, because it misleads so easily, a particularly dangerous argument. Whether explicit or buried in a great deal of academic or neologistic language, the argument is this: 'The important agent in the etiology of the neuroses is *not* sexuality, *but* social factors'. The appeal of such reasoning, because of the prevailing fear of sexuality and a general, though vague and confused realisation of the importance of social factors, is enormous."

Dr. Reich, on the other hand, adheres to Freud's original etiological formula of the neurosis, "*the neurosis is the result of a conflict between instinctual demands and opposing social demands*." In order to understand neuroses therefore one must study both sexuality and social forces.

> "Dr. Reich," says Wolfe, "was the first to study not only the orgastic process itself but also the social conditions which influence this process in such a manner as to produce neuroses *en masse*."

He gathered his material not merely in the drawing room of the psychoanalyst, but also in working class clinics, in mass meetings, by a daily contact with the people. His conclusions were bound to be different from those of psychoanalysts whose patients came from sheltered bourgeois families.

This does not mean that he found that neuroses are petit bourgeois ailments. On the contrary, the working class is as prone to neurosis as the more sheltered classes, and among it the neuroses take a violent and brutal aspect undisguised by intellectual niceties. From this vast clinical experience and from statistics which he obtained, Reich formed the conclusion that the vast majority of the population suffers from neurosis in a more or less attenuated form. All these neuroses are due *without exception* to a disturbance in the sex life of the man or woman. This became apparent to Reich, particularly in the case of men, only when he had strictly defined what healthy sexual life is. "Psychic health," he discovered, "depends upon *orgastic potency*, that is, on the capacity for surrender in the acme of sexual excitation in the natural sexual act."

Before Reich, psychoanalysts had considered men sexually healthy who could have sexual intercourse, and they could therefore claim that neurotics could have a normal sexual life. Reich by analysing in great detail the orgasm reflex found that no neurotic is able to be orgastically potent. He further established that the widespread existence of neurosis today is due to the sexual chaos brought about by a society based on authority. It is not found in human history before the development of the patriarchal social order, and it is still non-existent today in free societies, where:

> "The vital energies, under natural conditions, regulate themselves spontaneously, without compulsive duty or compulsive morality. The latter are a sure indication of the existence of anti-social tendencies. Anti-social behaviour springs from *secondary drives which owe their existence to the suppression of natural sexuality*.

> "The individual brought up in an atmosphere which negates life and sex acquires a *pleasure-anxiety* (fear of pleasurable excitation) which is represented physiologically in chronic muscular spasms. This pleasure-anxiety is the soil on which the individual re-creates the life-negating ideologies which are the basis of dictatorship . . . The average character structure of human beings has changed in the direction of impotence and fear of living, so that authoritarian dictatorships can establish themselves by pointing to existing human attitudes, such as lack of responsibility and infantilism."

How have men succeeded in crushing their instincts for love and life? Are they biologically unable to experience pleasure and enjoy freedom? The causes, say Reich, are not biological, but economic and sociological. It is the compulsive family and compulsive morality which have destroyed the natural self-regulation of the vital forces.

How have men succeeded in crushing their instincts for love and life? Are they biologically unable to experience pleasure and enjoy freedom? The causes, say Reich, are not biological, but economic and sociological. It is the compulsive family and compulsive morality which have destroyed the natural self-regulation of the vital forces. Malinowski's study of the sexual life of savages in the South Sea islands has shown that sexual repression is of sociological and not biological nature.[1] It has further destroyed the Freudian concept of the biological nature of the Oedipus conflict, by showing that the child-parent relationship changes with the social structure of society. The Oedipus complex of the European does not exist among the Trobriand Islanders.

This is an all important point as, if sexual repression is biologically determined, it cannot be abolished, but if it is determined by social factors, then a change in those social factors will put an end to it. Malinowski observed that:

> "Children in the Trobriand islands know no sex repression and no sexual secrecy. Their sex life is allowed to develop naturally, freely and unhampered *through every stage of life, with full satisfaction* . . . The society of the Trobrianders knew, in the third decade of our century, no sexual perversions, no functional psychoses, no psychoneuroses, no sex murder; they have no word for theft; homosexuality and masturbation, to them, mean nothing but an unnatural and imperfect means of sexual gratification, a sign of a disturbed capacity to reach normal satisfaction[2] . . . The Trobrianders, therefore, are spontaneously clean, orderly, social without compulsion, intelligent and industrious . . . At the time when Malinowski made his studies of the Trobriand islanders, there was living a few miles away, on the Amphlett Islands, a tribe with patriarchal authoritarian family organisation. The people inhabiting these islands were already showing all the traits of the European neurotic, such as distrust, anxiety, neuroses, perversions, suicide, etc.
>
> The conclusion from these observations is that, "The determining factor of the mental health of a population is the condition of its natural love life."
>
> A further important fact arises out of Malinowski's studies. Among the Trobriand Islanders there is one group of children who are not allowed sexual freedom because they are predestined for an economically advantageous marriage. These children are brought up in sexual abstinence and they show neuroses and a submissiveness which do not exist among the other children. From this Reich concludes:
>
> > "*Sexual suppression is an essential instrument in the production of economic enslavement*. Thus, sexual suppression in the infant and the adolescent is not, as psychoanalysis – in agreement with traditional and erroneous concepts of education – contends, the prerequisite of cultural development, sociality, diligence and cleanliness; *it is the exact opposite*."

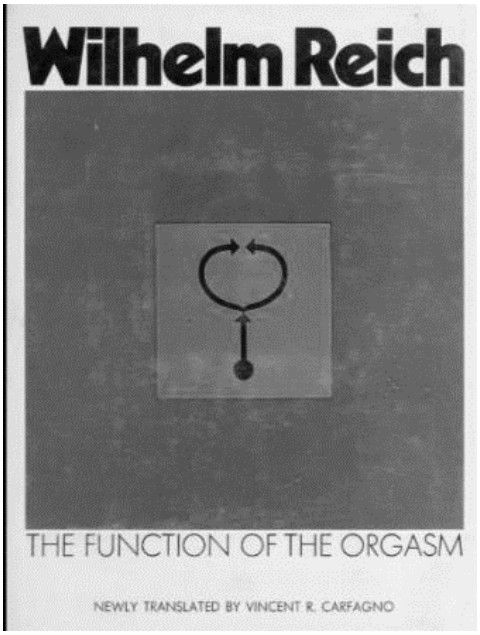
This is corroborated by the observations carried on by Reich on his own patients. When neurotic patients were restored to a healthy sex-life, their whole character altered, their submissiveness disappeared, they revolted

[1] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1922. (*Black Flag*)

[2] It must be noted that Berneri criticised the Soviet Union for making homosexuality a criminal offence in a law "much more severe than that under the Tsars," noting that the latter "shows a more modern outlook than the Soviet legislation" (Marie-Louise Berneri, *Workers in Stalin's Russia* [London: Freedom Press, 1944], 63). (*Black Flag*)

against an absurd moral code, against the teachings of the Church, against the monotony and uselessness of their work. They refused to submit to a marriage without love which gave them no sexual satisf action, they refused to carry on with work where they did not have to use their initiative and creative powers. They felt the need to assert their *natural rights* and to do so they felt that a *different kind of society* was needed.

> "To the individual with a genital structure, sexuality is a pleasurable experience and nothing but that; work is joyous vital activity and achievement. To the morally structured individual, work is burdensome duty or only a means of making a living . . . *the therapeutic task consisted in changing the neurotic character into a genital character, and in replacing moral regulation by self regulation*."



Dr. Reich shows in case reports how this was done. He had observed that "the essence of a neurosis is the *inability of the patient to obtain gratification*" (in the sense of orgastic potency defined above). Freud had declared before him in his earlier works "*the energy of anxiety is the energy of repressed sexuality*," but the psychoanalysts thought that the disturbance of genitality was one symptom among others, while Reich established that it was *the* symptom of neurosis:

> "*The energy source of the neurosis lies in the differential between accumulation and discharge of sexual energy*. The neurotic psychic apparatus is distinguished from the healthy one by the constant presence of undischarged sexual energy.
>
> "Freud's therapeutic formula is correct but incomplete. The first prerequisite of cure is, indeed, to make the repressed sexuality conscious. However, though this alone may effect the cure, it *need not* of necessity do so. It does so only if at the same time *the source of energy, the sexual stasis* (damming up of sexual energy), is eliminated; in other words, *only if the awareness of instinctual demands goes hand in hand with the capacity for full orgastic gratification*. In that case the pathological psychic growths are deprived of energy at the source."

In his description of the formation of actual neurosis (which he calls stasis neurosis) and psychoneurosis, Reich begins by stating that sexual excitation is definitely a *somatic* process and that neurotic conflicts are of a *psychic* nature. A slight psychic conflict will produce a slight somatic stasis or damming up of sexual energy which in its turn will reinforce the conflict, which will reinforce the stasis. The original conflict is always in existence in the sexual child-parent conflict, and if this is nourished by the actual stasis it gives rise to neurosis and psychoneurosis. But the actual stasis can be eliminated by positive sexual gratification, so that the original psychic conflict lacks energy to transform itself into a neurosis. The cycle between the psychic conflict and the somatic stasis must be interrupted, even if it is only by gratification through masturbation. For the patient to obtain sexual gratification, it is necessary to destroy his character armour against his sexuality. Dr. Reich has elaborated a technique of *character-analytic vegetotherapy*. Its fundamental principle is the restoring of bio-psychic motility by means of dissolving rigidities (armourings) of the character and musculature. The term 'rigidity' must be taken literally; it is by a contraction of his muscles, particularly around his sexual organs, by holding back his breath, that the neurotic builds himself an armour against sexual pleasurable excitation.

Considering the tremendous number of neuroses in existence today, it will be obvious that Dr. Reich does not believe that his vegetotherapy can be applied to all of them, but he has attached a particular importance to the development of the *prophylaxis of the neuroses*. His experience in sex hygiene clinics, the statistics gathered in mass meetings and youth groups, convinced him that the situation called for "*extensive social measures for the prevention of the neuroses*." His practical suggestions are very interesting, but it is impossible to discuss them here. Suffice to say that Dr. Reich wants to see the complete liberation of the child and adolescent sexuality from the oppression of the authoritarian family, of the church, of the school. He wants to see the adult freed from compulsive marriage and compulsive morality. He wants a return to instinctual life, to reason, which he qualifies by saying, "*That which is alive is in itself reasonable*."

This freedom of love, of work, of science can be obtained, he thinks, in a "work democracy, that is a democracy on the basis of a natural organisation of the work process." How this work democracy is to be attained and what shape it is going to take, are still left rather vague, but that it will be a free society there can be no doubt. "*Natural moral behaviour presupposes freedom of the natural sexual process*." And again:

> "The social power exercised by the people . . . will not become manifest and effective until the working and producing masses of the people become psychically independent and capable of taking full responsibility for their social existence and capable of rationally determining their lives themselves."

Had Dr. Reich witnessed the formation of industrial and agricultural collectives in Spain during the revolution it is probable that his "work democracy" would have taken a more concrete shape. He also seems to consider the development of industry as a factor in the sexual emancipation of men. This as well is probably due to his lack of knowledge of agricultural countries such as Spain and Italy where neuroses seem to be far less numerous than in industrialised countries.

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The only practical examples he gives of "genuine democratic endeavour" are the "labour management committees" in the U.S.A., where workers participate in the management of production and distribution. The example is unfortunate; it is true that the workers share the responsibility in the management, but they are not their own masters. The capitalist is always there and can dictate to them.

Dr. Reich does not look at the world through pink glasses. He sees all its corruption and misery, all its absurdity and ugliness, but he does not despair. He has confidence in that which is alive because he knows that man is only anti-social, submissive, cruel or masochistic because he lacked the freedom to develop his natural instincts.

The importance of Dr. Reich's theories is enormous. To the sophisticated, to the lover of psychoanalytic subtleties, his clarity, his common sense, his direct approach may appear too simple. To those who do not seek intellectual exercise, but means of saving mankind from the destruction it seems to be approaching, this book will be an individual source of help and encouragement. To anarchists the fundamental belief in human nature, in complete freedom from the authority of the family, the Church and the State will be familiar, but the scientific arguments put forward to back this belief will form an indispensable addition to their theoretical knowledge.

Definitions

Orgasm reflex. The unitary involuntary contraction and expansion of the total organism in the acme of the sexual act. This reflex, because of its *involuntary* character and the prevailing pleasure anxiety, is suppressed in most humans today.

Orgastic impotence. The absence of orgastic potency. It is the most important characteristic of the average human of today, and – by damming up biological energy in the organism – provides the source of energy for all kinds of psychic and somatic symptoms.

Orgastic potency. Essentially, the capacity for complete surrender to the *involuntary* convulsion of the organism and complete discharge of the excitation in the acme of the sexual act. It is always lacking in neurotic individuals. It presupposes the presence or establishment of the genital character, *i.e.* the absence of a pathological character armour and muscular armour. The concept is essentially unknown and usually not distinguished from erective potency and ejaculative potency, both of which are only prerequisites of orgastic potency.

Stasis. The damming up of sexual energy in the organism, thus the source of energy for the neuroses.

Stasis anxiety. The anxiety caused by the stasis of sexual energy in the centre of the organism when its peripheral orgastic discharge is inhibited. Same as Freud's 'actual anxiety.'

Stasis neurosis. Originally the same as Freud's 'actual neuroses,' the concept now includes all somatic disturbances which are the immediate result of the stasis of sexual energy.

Vegetotherapy. The sex-economic therapeutic technique. So called because the therapeutic goal is that of liberating the bound-up vegetative energies and thus restoring to the patient his vegetative motility.

(From *The Function of the Orgasm.* Obtainable from Freedom Press, 25s.)

Does Britain Show the Way?

[Marie-Louise Berneri]

Freedom: Anarchist Fortnightly, 10 January 1948[1]

Demagogues are always willing to take any excuse for changing a propaganda line that has worn itself out, and for Attlee the New Year was as good as anything else. Realising that the workers in Britain are becoming disgusted with both the American and the Russian regimes and are not inclined to be led away into support of either of them, he turned his New Year message into an attempt to represent "Socialist" Britain as being a third camp which alone shows the right way for the world to follow in its pursuit of social justice. Britain and the countries of Western Europe, he claims, are not "in any sense 'watered-down capitalism' or 'watered-down Communism'," but something quite different from either, and, adopting a Solomon-like attitude of self-righteousness, he condemns Russia for its lack of political freedom and America for basing its economy on capitalism.

Britain, by its own attacks on individual liberty and participation in American imperialist ventures, shows itself of a similar nature to the regimes of Russia and America

It is true enough to say that "The history of Soviet Russia provides us with a warning here – a warning that without political freedom, collectivism can quickly go astray and lead to new forms of oppression and injustice. Where there is no political freedom, privilege and injustice creep back."

But privilege and injustice exist equally well where there is no economic freedom, and it is completely inconsistent to claim, as Attlee does, that there can be any real political freedom, in a society where economy is planned by the State, any more than in a society where it is controlled by capitalist monopolies.

In fact, there is only a difference of practice, not of principle, between the various social systems of America, Britain and Russia. All are based ultimately and fundamentally on coercion, and the amount of coercion they use is based on the needs of the ruling class. America has not a State-controlled economy, because private capitalism can still work there for the time being. Britain has as yet no full-scale NKVD because the government can rule without it by means of propaganda and deception. But America has its political pogroms, Britain has its interference with the freedom of workers to find their own employment, and if it were in the interests of the ruling class these institutions could easily be magnified into something resembling the Soviet tyranny. These three political systems in fact are all versions of the same State society, and social circumstances are steadily making them draw together in their internal forms, if not in their external interests.

If, as Attlee contends, it is possible to have political freedom with a State-planned economy, then the first thing he should do is to repeal all the laws and regulations which hamper the freedom of the people of this country. In fact, he could not do this if he wished, since the structure of a State economy depends on compulsion, the degree of which will be dictated by the amount of potential resistance among the people.

Inevitably Attlee's speech has been widely interpreted as anti-Russian. It is true that he criticises American capitalism, but very mildly. On the other hand, he tells us that "America stands for individual liberty...," whereas in fact recent events have shown, through the political persecution of American minorities, that the governing class of the U.S.A. is only willing to recognise individual liberty where this suits its interests.

In the same way, Attlee condemns the Russian sponsoring of tyrannical regimes in Eastern Europe. But he does not say anything about the American support for reactionary governments in Greece and Turkey, which are just as prone to intense political persecutions as are the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. American warships are sailing in Greek waters, American soldiers are in Turkey, to ensure the stability of governments which at no stretch of the imagination can be called democratic, except in the perverted sense used by the Russian puppet States.

In spite of all Attlee's ingenuity of argument, Britain, by its own attacks on individual liberty and participation in American imperialist ventures, shows itself of a similar nature to the regimes of Russia and America – the difference is only in degree, and different social circumstances can readily change that.

There is indeed a third way. But it lies only in opposition to any kind of State, for, where the State continues, the restriction of freedom at home and imperialist ventures abroad are inevitable.

[1] Later included in *Neither East Nor West: Selected Writings 1939-48* (London: Freedom Press, 1952/1988). (*Black Flag*)

Anarchist Morality

Peter Kropotkin

This pamphlet was published in 1889 and serialised in *La Révolte* between March and August the following year. It was translated in *Freedom* between October 1891and July 1892 before being issued as Freedom pamphlet No 6 in October 1892. It has been reprinted many times in many languages.

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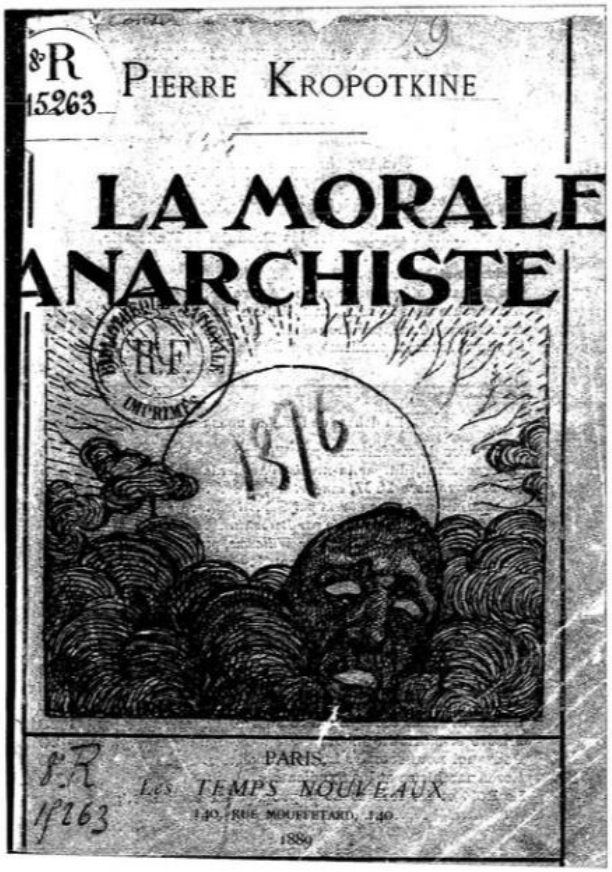


The history of human thought recalls the swinging of a pendulum which takes centuries to swing. After a long period of slumber comes a moment of awakening. Then thought frees itself from the chains with which those interested – rulers, lawyers, clerics – have carefully entangled it. It shatters the chains. It subjects to severe criticism all that has been taught it and lays bare the emptiness of the religious, political, legal, and social prejudices within which it has vegetated. It launches research into unknown paths, enriches our knowledge with unexpected discoveries; it creates new sciences.

But the inveterate enemies of thought – the ruler, the lawyer, the cleric – soon recover from their defeat. They little by little gather their scattered forces; they modernise their faith and their codes by adapting them to some of the new needs. And benefiting from the servility of character and thought that they had cultivated so well, benefiting from the momentary disorganisation of society, exploiting the laziness of some, the greed of others, the misled hopes of still more – especially the misled hopes – they softly creep back to their work by first taking possession of childhood through education.

The spirit of a child is weak, it is so easy to subjugate it by fear; this they do. They make it timid, and then they tell it about the torments of hell, they dangle before it the sufferings of the condemned souls, the vengeance of an implacable god. The next moment, they will speak of the horrors of the Revolution, exploiting some excess of the revolutionaries to make the child "a friend of order." The cleric will accustom it to the idea of law to better make it obey what he calls the divine law, and the lawyer will talk to it of divine law to better make it obey the laws of the civil code. And the thought of the next generation will acquire this religious habit, this habit of submission that we know only too well in our contemporaries, this simultaneously authoritarian and servile habit – for authority and servility always go hand in hand.

During these periods of slumber, questions of morality are rarely discussed. Religious practices and judicial hypocrisy take their place. We do not criticise, we let ourselves be led by habit, by indifference. There is no passionate debate for or against the established morality. We do what we can to make our actions appear to accord with what we claim to profess. And the moral level of society falls more and more. We reach the morality of decadent [ancient] Romans, of the old regime [of pre-Revolution France], of the end of the bourgeois regime.

All that was good, great, generous, independent in man is dulled little by little, rusting like a disused knife. A lie becomes a virtue, a platitude a duty. To get rich, to live for the moment, to exhaust your intelligence, your zeal, your energy, no matter how, becomes the watchwords of the wealthy classes, as well as of the multitude of poor people whose ideal is to appear bourgeois. Then the depravity of the rulers – of the judge, the clergy and the more or

less affluent classes – becomes so revolting that the pendulum begins to swing the other way.

Little by little, youth frees itself, it throws prejudices overboard, criticism returns. Thought awakens, at first amongst the few; but imperceptibly the awakening reaches the majority. The push is made, the revolution erupts.

And each time the question of morality comes up again. "Why should I follow the principles of this hypocritical morality?" asks the mind that has been freed from religious terrors. "Why should any morality be obligatory?"

They then try to account for the moral sentiment that they meet at every turn, without yet having explained it, and which they will never explain as long as they believe it a privilege of human nature, so long as they do not go down to the animals, the plants, the rocks to understand it. We will try, however, to explain it according to today's science.

And – should we say it? – the more we undermine the foundations of the established morality, or rather of the hypocrisy that takes its place – the more the moral level of society is raised. It is especially at such times, precisely when it is criticised and denied, that the moral sentiment makes the most progress; it is then that it grows, raises itself, refines itself.

We saw it in the eighteenth century. As early as 1723, Mandeville, the anonymous author who scandalised England by his "Fable of the Bees" and the comments that he added to it, attacked head on the social hypocrisy known by the name of morality.[1] He shows how the so-called morals are only a hypocritical mask; how the passions which we believe to be mastered by the current code of morality on the contrary take an even worse direction, because of the very restrictions of this code. As Fourier did later, he asked for a free space for the passions without which they degenerate into so many vices; and paying the price for the lack of zoological knowledge of his time, that is to say, forgetting the morality of animals, he explained the origin of the moral ideas of humanity by the interested flattery of parents and ruling classes.

We know the vigorous criticism of moral ideas later made by the Scottish philosophers and the Encyclopaedists. We know the anarchists of 1793, and we know in whom we find the highest development of moral sentiment: amongst the jurists, the patriots, the Jacobins who crowed about moral obligation and sanction by the Supreme Being, or amongst the Hébertist atheists who denied this, as Guyau did recently, and the obligation and sanction of morality…

"Why should I be moral?" This, then, is the question posed by the rationalists of the twelfth century, the philosophers of the sixteenth century, the philosophers and revolutionaries of the eighteenth century. Later, this question returned anew with the English Utilitarians (Bentham and Mill), with the German materialists such as Büchner, with the Russian nihilists of the years 1860-70, with that young founder of anarchist ethics (the science of the morality of societies) – Guyau – who unfortunately died too early; now, finally, the question is posed at this moment by young French anarchists.

Why, indeed?

Thirty years ago the youth of Russia were passionately agitated by this same question. "I will be immoral" a young nihilist would say to his friend, translating into plain action the thoughts that tormented him. "I will be immoral, and why should I not?"

"Because the Bible wills it? But the Bible is only a collection of Babylonian and Jewish traditions – traditions gathered together like the poems of Homer or as we still do with Basque songs or Mongolian legends! Must I then go back to the state of mind of the half-barbarous peoples of the East?

"Must I be, because Kant speaks to me of a *categorical imperative*, of a mysterious command which comes to me from the depths of my own

[1] Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733), was an Anglo-Dutch philosopher, political economist and satirist who became famous for *The Fable of The Bees: or, Private Vices, Public Benefits*. This consisted of the poem *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves turn'd Honest*, along with prose discussion of the poem. He describes a bee community thriving until the bees are suddenly made honest and virtuous. Without their desire for personal gain their economy collapses and the remaining bees go to live simple lives in a hollow tree, thus implying that without private vices there exists no public benefit. (*Black Flag*)

being and orders me be moral? But why should this 'categorical imperative' have more authority over my actions than that other imperative which, from time to time, commands me to get drunk. A word, nothing but a word, just like those of Providence or Destiny, invented to conceal our ignorance!

"Or will I be moral to please Bentham who wants me to believe that I will be happier if I drown to save a passer-by who has fallen into the river than if I watch him drown?

"Or again, because such has been my education? Because my mother taught me morality? But then, shall I also kneel before the painting of a Christ or a Madonna, respect the King or the Emperor, bow before the judge that I know to be a scoundrel, simply because my very good but very ignorant mother – all our mothers – taught us a lot of nonsense?

"Like everyone else I am prejudiced, I will work to rid myself of it. Even if it disgusts me, I will force myself to be immoral, as when I was younger I forced myself not to be afraid of the dark, the cemetery, ghosts and the dead, all of which they told me to fear. I will do it to break a weapon utilised by religions; I will do it, lastly, if only to protest against the hypocrisy they claim to impose on us in the name of a *word*, which they called morality."

It is easy to understand the astonishment of our grandfathers when the English philosophers, and later the Encyclopaedists, began to affirm contrary to these primitive notions that the devil and the angel have nothing to do with human actions, but that all acts of man, good or bad, useful or harmful, derive from a single motive: the pursuit of pleasure.

This was the way the youth of Russia reasoned when they broke with the prejudices of the "old world" and unfurled this banner of nihilist or rather of anarchist philosophy: "Bow before *no* authority whatsoever, no matter how respected it may be; accept no principle as long as it is not established by reason."

Need we add that after having thrown into the waste-paper basket the moral teachings of their fathers and burned all systems of morality, the nihilist youth developed in their midst a nucleus of moral *customs*, infinitely superior to anything that their fathers had ever practiced under the tutelage of the "Gospel," the "conscience," the "categorical imperative," or the "well understood interest" of the Utilitarians.

But before answering the question, "Why should I be moral?" let us first see if the question is well put; let us analyse the motives of human actions.

II

When our ancestors wished to account for what led men to act in one way or another, they did so in a very simple manner. We can still see the Catholic images that represent this explanation. A man walks across the fields and, without being in the least aware of it, carries a devil on his left shoulder and an angel on his right. The devil urges him to do evil, the angel tries to hold him back. And if the angel comes out on top, and the man remains virtuous, three other angels catch him up and carry him to heaven. Everything is thus explained wonderfully.

Our old nannies, well-informed on such matters, will tell you that you should never put a child into bed without unbuttoning the collar of its shirt. A warm spot at the bottom of the neck should be left bare, where the guardian angel can nestle. Without that, the devil will torment the child even in its sleep.

These naïve conceptions are passing away. But though the old words disappear, the essence remains the same.

The educated person no longer believes in the devil, but as their ideas are no more rational than those of our nannies, they disguise the devil and the angel under pedantic waffle, honoured with the name of philosophy. Instead of the "devil," they talk today of "the flesh," "the passions." The "angel" is replaced by the words "conscience" or "soul," "reflection of the thought of a divine creator" or the "Great Architect," as the Free-Masons say. But the actions of man are still represented as the result of a struggle between two hostile elements. And a man is always considered the more virtuous as one of these two elements –

the soul or conscience – achieves more victories over the other – the flesh or passions.

It is easy to understand the astonishment of our grandfathers when the English philosophers, and later the Encyclopaedists, began to affirm contrary to these primitive notions that the devil and the angel have nothing to do with human actions, but that all acts of man, good or bad, useful or harmful, derive from a single motive: the pursuit of pleasure.

The whole religious brotherhood, and above all the numerous tribes of the Pharisees, shouted "immorality." They showered the thinkers with insults, they excommunicated them. And later, during the course of our century, when the same ideas were revived by Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Chernyshevsky, and a host of others, and when these thinkers began to affirm and prove that egoism, or the pursuit of pleasure, is the true motive of all our actions, the curses redoubled. Their books were met with a conspiracy of silence, and the authors were treated as dunces.

And yet, what can be truer than this assertion?

Here is a man who snatches the last mouthful of bread from a child. Everyone agrees that he is a horrible egoist, that he is guided solely by *self-love*.

But here is another man, whom we all agree to recognise as virtuous. He shares his last bit of bread with the hungry, he takes off his coat to give it to someone who is cold. And the moralists, always speaking in religious jargon, hasten to say that this man takes the love of his neighbour to the point of *self-sacrifice*, that he obeys a quite different passion from that of the egoist.

And yet with a little reflection we soon discover that, however different the two actions are in their outcome for humanity, *the motive* has still been the same. It is the pursuit of pleasure.

If the man who gives away his last shirt found no pleasure in so doing, he would not do it. If he found pleasure in taking bread from a child, he would do that; but that disgusts him, he finds pleasure in giving his bread; and he gives it.

If it were not for the inconvenience caused by the confusion of giving words with an established meaning a new one, we could say that both act under the impulse of their *egoism*. Some have actually said this, in order to better emphasise the thought, to clarify the idea by presenting it in a form that strikes the imagination – and at the same time to destroy the myth which asserts that these two acts have two different motives – they have the same motive of seeking pleasure, or to avoid pain, which amounts to the same thing.

Take the lowest of scoundrels: a Thiers, who massacres thirty-five thousand Parisians; take the assassin who butchers a whole family in order to wallow in debauchery. They do it because at that moment the desire for glory or for money prevails over all other desires: pity, even compassion, are extinguished for that moment by this other desire, this other thirst. They act almost as automatons, *to satisfy a craving of their nature*.

Or else, putting aside the stronger passions, take the little man who deceives his friends, who lies at every step, either to worm the price of something from somebody, or from boastfulness, or from guile. Take the bourgeois who steals penny after penny from his workers to buy jewels for his wife or his mistress. Take any petty scoundrel: He again only obeys a fancy: he seeks the satisfaction of a craving, he seeks to avoid what would give him pain.

We are almost ashamed to compare this petty scoundrel to someone who sacrifices his whole existence for the liberation of the oppressed and mounts the scaffold like a Russian nihilist, so vastly different for humanity are the results of these two lives; so much do we feel ourselves drawn towards one and repelled by the other.

And yet, if you spoke to this martyr, to the woman they are going to hang, she would tell you, even when she goes to mount the gallows, that she would exchange neither her life as an animal hunted by the Tsar's dogs nor her death for the life of the petty scoundrel who lives on the pennies stolen from his workers. In her life, in the struggle against powerful monsters, she finds her highest pleasures. Everything else outside this struggle, all the little joys of the bourgeois and his little misfortunes seem to her so petty, so boring, so sad! "You do not *live*, you vegetate," she would reply; "me, I have lived."

We are obviously speaking about the deliberate, conscious acts of man, reserving for later to talk about that immense series of unconscious, almost

mechanical, acts which fill such an immense part of our life. Well! in his conscious or deliberate actions, man always seeks what gives him pleasure.

So-and-so gets drunk and every day lowers himself to the condition of a brute, because he seeks in wine the nervous excitement he does not find in his nervous system. Another does not get drunk; he gives up drink, even though he finds it pleasant, to keep freshness of thought and the plenitude of his powers, in order to be able to relish other pleasures which he prefers to wine. But what is he doing if not acting like the food-lover who, after looking over the menu of a grand dinner, forgoes a dish he likes to gorge himself upon another dish he prefers?

Whatever he does, man always looks for pleasure, or he avoids pain.

When a woman deprives herself of her last piece of bread to give it to a stranger, when she takes off her last rag to cover another woman who is cold while she herself shivers on the deck of a ship, she does so because she would suffer infinitely more to see a hungry man or a woman who was cold, than to shiver or suffer from hunger herself. She avoids a pain of which only those who have felt it can appreciate the intensity.

When the [indigenous] Australian, cited by Guyau,[1] wasted away at the idea that he has not yet revenged the death of his parent; when he withers away, wracked by the consciousness of his cowardice, and does not return to life until he has accomplished the deed of vengeance, he performs an act, heroic sometimes, to rid himself of a feeling which haunts him, to regain that inner peace which is the highest pleasure.

When a troop of monkeys has seen one of its own fall by a hunter's bullet, and comes to besiege his tent to claim the body despite the threatening rifle; when, at last, the elder of the band goes right in, at first threating the hunter, then imploring him, and finally forcing him by his weeping to return the corpse to him, which the wailing troop carries into the forest, the monkeys obey a feeling of sympathy stronger than all considerations of personal safety. This feeling takes precedence over all others. Life itself loses its attractions for them, as long as they are not sure that they cannot bring their comrade back to life. This feeling becomes so oppressive that the poor animals risk everything to get rid of it.

When ants rush by the thousands into the flames of an ant-hill which that evil beast, man, has set on fire and perish by the hundreds to rescue their larvae, they again obey an urge, that of saving their offspring. They risk everything to have the pleasure of carrying away these larvae that they have raised with more care than many bourgeois bestow on their children.

To seek pleasure, to avoid pain, is the general fact (some would say *law*) of the organic world. It is the very essence of life.

Without this quest for the agreeable, life itself would be impossible. The organism would disintegrate, life would cease.

Finally, when an infusoria[2] avoids a current which is too hot and seeks a warm one, or when a plant turns its flowers towards the sun or closes its leaves at the approach of night, these beings still obey the need to avoid pain and seek pleasure – just like the ant, the monkey, the Australian, the Christian martyr or the anarchist martyr.

To seek pleasure, to avoid pain, is the general fact (some would say *law*) of the organic world. It is the very essence of life.

Without this quest for the agreeable, life itself would be impossible. The organism would disintegrate, life would cease.

Thus, whatever a man's action, whatever his course of conduct, *he always does it to obey a need of his nature*. The most repugnant act, like the indifferent or the most attractive act, are all equally dictated by a need of the individual. The individual acts in one way or another because he finds pleasure in it,

[1] Jean-Marie Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* (London: Watts, 1898), 46-7. (*Black Flag*)

[2] This is a collective term for minute aquatic creatures such as unicellular algae and protozoa. (*Black Flag*)

because this way he avoids or thinks he avoids a pain.

Here is a well-established fact; here is essence of what has been called the theory of egoism.

Well, are we any wiser after reaching this general conclusion?

Yes, of course we are. We have conquered a truth and destroyed a prejudice which is the root of all prejudices. All materialist philosophy in its relation to man is within this conclusion. But does it follow that all the actions of the individual are indifferent, as some have hastily concluded? That is what we will see.

III

We have seen that the actions of man, deliberate or conscious – we will speak later of unconscious habits – all have the same origin. Those that are called virtuous and those that are called vicious, great devotions like small swindles, attractive acts as well as repulsive acts all spring from the same source. All are done to meet a need in the nature of the individual. All are intended for the pursuit of pleasure, the desire to avoid pain.

We have seen this in the last section, which is but a very short summary of a mass of facts that could be cited in support of it.

It is understandable that this explanation makes those still imbued with religious principles cry out. It leaves no room for the supernatural; it abandons the idea of an immortal soul. If man always only acts in obedience to the needs of his nature, if he is, so to speak, only a "conscious automaton," what becomes of the immortal soul? What becomes of immortality – that last refuge of those who have known only a few pleasures and too many sufferings and who dream of finding compensation in the other world?

It is understandable that, having grown up in prejudice, with little confidence in science which has so often deceived them, guided by feeling rather than thought, they reject an explanation which takes from them their last hope.

But what about those revolutionaries who, since the last century until the present day, whenever they hear for the first time a natural explanation of human actions (the theory of egoism, if you will) hasten to draw the same conclusion as the young nihilist of whom we were speaking of earlier and who was quick to shout: "Down with morality!"

What about those who, after having persuaded themselves that man acts in one way or another only to answer a need of his nature, hasten to conclude that *all acts are indifferent*; that there is neither *good* nor *evil*; that saving a man who is drowning at the risk of your own life or drowning him to snatch his watch are two acts which are equal; that the martyr dying on the gallows for working to free humanity and the petty scoundrel stealing from his comrades are worth the same – since both seek to obtain pleasure?

If only they added that there must be neither good nor bad odour; neither the perfume of the rose nor the stench of asafoetida, for both are only the vibrations of molecules; that there is no good nor bad flavours, because the bitterness of quinine and the sweetness of guava are still only molecular vibrations; that there is no physical beauty or ugliness, neither intelligence nor stupidity, because beauty and ugliness, intelligence or stupidity are again only the results of chemical and physical vibrations occurring in the cells of the organism; if they added that, we could still say that they ramble but that at least they have the logic of a madman.

But since they do not say that – what can we conclude from this?

Our response is simple. Mandeville who reasoned in this way in 1723 in the "Fable of the Bees," the Russian nihilist of the years 1860-70, like a Parisian anarchist today, reason so because, without realising it, they are still mired in the prejudices of their Christian education. Whether atheists, materialists, or anarchists, they reason exactly as the fathers of the Church or the founders of Buddhism reasoned.

These good old people were saying in effect: "The act is *good* if it is a victory of the spirit over the flesh; it will be *bad* if it is the flesh which has got the better of the soul; it will be indifferent if it is neither one nor the other. *There is only one way to judge whether an act is good or bad.*" And our young friends repeat after the Christian and Buddhist fathers: "There is only one way to judge whether an act is good or bad."

The fathers of the Church said: "See the beasts; they have no immoral soul: their actions are simply done to meet one of the needs of nature; *that is why* there can be neither good nor bad deeds amongst

animals; all are indifferent; and that is why for animals there will be neither paradise nor hell – neither reward nor punishment." And our young friends take up the refrain of Saint Augustine and Gautama Buddha and say: "Man is only an animal, his acts are done simply to answer a need of his nature; *this is why* there can be no good nor bad actions for man. They are all indifferent."

It is always that damned idea of punishment and chastisement that gets in the way of reason; it is always this absurd legacy of religious education declaring an action is good if it comes from a supernatural inspiration and indifferent if it lacks that supernatural origin. It is again and always the idea of the angel on the right shoulder and the devil on the left shoulder, even amongst those who laugh at it the loudest. "Banish the devil and the angel, and I will not be able to tell you whether such an act is good or bad for I know of no other basis of judging it."

The priest is still there, with his devil and his angel and all the materialist veneer is not enough to hide it. And, what is even worse, the judge with his flogging for some and his civic rewards for others is still there, and even the principles of anarchy are not enough to uproot the idea of punishment and reward.

Well, we want neither the priest nor the judge. And we simply say: "The asafoetida stinks, the snake bites me, the liar fools me? The plant, the reptile and the man, all three, obey a need of nature. Very well! I, too, obey a need of my nature by hating the plant that stinks, the animal that kills with its venom and the man who is even more venomous than the creature. And I will act accordingly, turning neither to a devil I am unaware of nor to the judge whom I hate more than the snake. I, and all those who share my antipathies, also obey a need of our nature. And we will see which of the two has reason and, thus, force."

Well, we want neither the priest nor the judge. And we simply say: "The asafoetida stinks, the snake bites me, the liar fools me? The plant, the reptile and the man, all three, obey a need of nature. Very well! I, too, obey a need of my nature by hating the plant that stinks, the animal that kills with its venom and the man who is even more venomous than the creature. And I will act accordingly…"

This is what we are about to see, and so we shall see that if Saint Augustine had no other basis for distinguishing between good and evil, the animal world has another much more effective one. The animal world in general, from insect to man, knows perfectly well what is good and what is evil, without consulting for that the Bible or philosophy. And if so, the cause is again in the needs of their nature: in the preservation of the race and, consequently, in the greatest possible amount of happiness for each individual.

IV

Jewish, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim theologians have resorted to divine inspiration to distinguish between *good* and *evil*. They saw that man, whether savage or civilised, ignorant or educated, wicked or kind and honest, always knows if he is doing good or doing evil, and above all knows when he is doing evil; but finding no explanation for this general fact, they saw in it a divine inspiration. Metaphysical philosophers, in their turn, spoke to us of conscience, of a mystical imperative, which in fact changed nothing but the words.

But neither one nor the other knew to note this so simple and so striking fact that animals living in societies can also distinguish between good and evil, just like man. And, what is more, their conceptions of good and evil are absolutely of the same kind as those of man. Amongst the best developed representatives of each separate class – fish, insects, birds, mammals, – they are even identical.

The thinkers of the eighteenth century had noticed it, but it was since forgotten, and it is now up to us to fully emphasise the importance of this fact.

Forel, that inimitable observer of ants, has shown by a mass of observations and facts that when an ant which has filled its crop with honey meets other

ants with empty stomachs, these immediately ask it for food.[1] And amongst these little insects it is a duty for the sated ant to disgorge the honey, so that its hungry friends may satisfy themselves in turn. Ask the ants if it would be right to refuse food to other ants of the same anthill when one has had its share. They will answer you, with actions that it is impossible to not understand, that it would be very wrong. An ant that selfish would be treated more harshly than enemies of another species. If this happened during a battle between two different species, they would abandon the struggle to fall upon this egoist. This fact has been proved by experiments which leave no doubt.

Or else, ask the sparrows living in your garden if it is right not to inform all the little society that you have thrown a few crumbs into the garden, so that all can take part in the meal. Ask them if a certain sparrow has acted well in stealing from its neighbour's nest those strands of straws it had picked up and which the plunderer does not want to bother collecting itself. And the sparrows will answer you that it is very wrong, by flying at the thief and pecking it.

Ask again the marmots if it is right [for one] to refuse access to its underground store to other marmots of the same colony, and they will answer you that it is very wrong, by quarrelling in all sorts of ways with the miser.

Finally, ask primitive man, the Chukchi for example,[2] if it is right to take food from the tent of a member of the tribe in his absence. And he will answer that if the man could himself obtain his food, it would be very wrong. But if he were weary or in need, he ought to take food where he finds it; but that in this case, he would do well to leave his cap or his knife, or even a piece of knotted string, so that the absent hunter would know on his return that it had been a visit from a friend and not a petty thief. This precaution will spare him the anxiety caused by the possible presence of a marauder near his tent.

Thousands of similar facts could be quoted; whole books could be written to show how the conceptions of good and evil are identical in humans and animals.

The ant, the bird, the marmot and the primitive Chukchi have read neither Kant nor the holy fathers, not even Moses. And yet, all have the same idea of good and evil. And if you reflect for a moment on what lies at the bottom of this idea, you will see at once that what is considered *good* amongst ants, marmots, and Christian or atheist moralists is that which is *useful* for the preservation of the race – and that which is considered *evil* is that which is *harmful* to it. Not for the individual, as Bentham and Mill said, but fair and good for the whole race.

The idea of good and evil thus has nothing to do with religion or a mystic conscience: it is a natural need of animal species. And when the founders of religions, philosophers and moralists speak to us of divine or metaphysical entities, they only rehash what each ant, each sparrow practices in its little society.

Is it useful to society? Then it is *good*. Is this *harmful*? Then it is *bad*.

This idea may be very restricted amongst the lower animals, or it may be expanded amongst the more advanced animals, but its essence always remains the same.

Amongst ants, it does not go beyond the anthill. All sociable customs, all rules of good behaviour are applicable only to individuals of the same anthill. It must regurgitate food to members of the anthill – never to others. An anthill will not consider another anthill as belonging to the same family, unless there are some exceptional circumstances such as distress common to both. Likewise, the sparrows of the Luxembourg [Gardens in Paris], while mutually supporting each other in a striking manner, will wage a fierce war with a sparrow from the Monge Square which dares to venture into the Luxembourg. And the Chukchi will consider a Chukchi of another tribe as a person to whom the customs of the tribe do not apply. It is even permitted to sell to him (to sell is always to rob the buyer more or less; in both [buying or selling], there is always a dupe) while it would be a crime to sell to the members of his tribe: to them he *gives* without any reckoning. And civilised man, at last understanding the close relations between himself

[1] Auguste-Henri Forel (1848–1931) was a Swiss myrmecologist, neuroanatomist and psychiatrist, famous for both his investigations into ants and the structure of the human brain. (*Black Flag*)

[2] The Chukchi are an indigenous people inhabiting the Chukchi Peninsula, the eastern-most peninsula of Asia. Part of the Russian Empire when Kropotkin was writing, they are now part of the Russian Federation. (*Black Flag*)

and the lowest Papuan, though imperceptible at the first glance, will extend his principles of solidarity to the whole human race and even to animals. The idea widens, but its foundation remains the same.

Furthermore, the conception of good and evil varies according to the degree of intelligence or of knowledge acquired. There is nothing unchangeable about it.

Primitive man may have thought it very *good*, that is, useful to the race, to eat his aged parents when they became a burden ([a] very heavy [burden] in fact) to the community. He could also find it good – that is always useful for the community – to kill his new-born children and only keep two or three in each family so that the mother could nurse them until they were three years old and lavish her tenderness upon them.

Today, ideas have changed: but the means of subsistence are no longer what they were in the Stone Age. Civilised man is not in the position of the savage family who had to choose between two evils: either to eat the aged parents or else feed everyone insufficiently and soon be reduced to being unable to feed either the aged parents or the young family. We must transport ourselves into those ages, which we can scarcely evoke in our mind, to understand that, in the circumstances of the time, half-savage man may have reasoned rightly enough.

The reasoning can change. The appreciation of what is useful or harmful to the race changes, but the foundation remains the same. And if we wanted to sum up all this philosophy of the animal kingdom in a single phrase, we would see that ants, birds, marmots and men agree on one point.

The Christians said: "*Do not* do to others that which you do not want done to you." And they added: "Otherwise, you will be sent to hell!"

The morality which emerges from the observation of the entire animal kingdom, which is much superior to the preceding one, can be summed up in the words: "*Do* to others what you would like them to do to you in the same circumstances."

And it adds:

"Note well that this is only *advice*; but this advice is the fruit of a long experience of the life of animals in society and amongst the immense mass of animals living in societies, including man, to act according to this principle has passed to the state of a *habit*. Without this, moreover, no society could exist, no species could have overcome the natural obstacles against which it has to struggle."

The idea of good and evil exists in humanity. Man, whatever degree of intellectual development he has attained, whatever prejudices and personal interest obscure his ideas, generally considers as *good what is useful to the society in which he lives*, and as evil that which is harmful to it.

Is this so simple principle really what emerges from the observation of social animals and human societies? Is it applicable? And how does this principle pass into a habit and continually develop? This is what we are now going to see.

V

The idea of good and evil exists in humanity. Man, whatever degree of intellectual development he has attained, whatever prejudices and personal interest obscure his ideas, generally considers as *good what is useful to the society in which he lives*, and as evil that which is harmful to it.

But where does this conception come from, very often so vague that it can scarcely be distinguished from a feeling? There are millions and millions of human beings who have never reflected about the human race. They know, for the most part, only the clan or the family, rarely the nation – and even more rarely humanity – how can they consider what is useful for the human race as good, or even reach a feeling of solidarity with their clan, in spite of all their narrowly selfish interests?

This fact has greatly occupied the thinkers of every age. It continues to occupy them, and not a year passes without books being written on this subject We will, in our turn, give our view of the matter; but let us note in passing that although the *explanation* of the fact may vary, the fact itself remains none the less incontestable; and even if our explanation was still not true, or it is incomplete,

the fact with its consequences for man will still remain. We may not be able to fully explain the origin of the planets that revolve around the sun – [but] the planets revolve nevertheless and one carries us with it in space.

We have already spoken of the religious explanation. If man distinguishes between good and evil, say religious men, it is because God has inspired him with this idea. He does not have to discuss useful or harmful: he has merely to obey the idea of his creator. We will not stop at this explanation – fruit of the terror and ignorance of the savage. Let us move on.

Others (like Hobbes[1]) sought to explain it by *law*. It must have been *law* that developed in man the sense of *just* and *unjust*, of *right* and *wrong*. Our readers themselves will appreciate this explanation. They know that the law has merely utilised the social feelings of man to sneak in, alongside the moral precepts which he accepts, orders useful to a minority of exploiters, against which he rebels. It has perverted the feeling of justice instead of developing it. So, let us again move on.

Neither let us pause at the explanation of the Utilitarians. They want man to act morally from self-interest, and they forget his feelings of solidarity with the whole race, which exist, whatever their origin. There is some truth in their explanation. But that is not the whole truth yet. Therefore, let us go further.

It is again to the thinkers of the eighteenth century that we are indebted for having sensed, at least in part, the origin of the moral sentiment.

In a superb book [*The Theory of Moral Sentiment*], about which the clergy have been silent and is little known to most thinkers, even anti-religious ones, Adam Smith put his finger on the true origin of the moral sentiment. He does not seek it in religious or mystical feelings – he finds it in the simple feeling of sympathy.

You see a man beating a child. You know that the beaten child suffers. Your imagination makes you feel the harm inflicted upon it; or else its tears, its little suffering face tell you. And if you are not a coward, you fling yourself at the man who is beating the child, you grab it from the brute.

This example alone explains almost all the moral sentiments. The more powerful your imagination is, the better you will be able to imagine what a being feels that is made to suffer; and the more intense, the more sensitive will be your moral feeling. The more you are driven to put yourself in the place of that other person, the more you feel the harm inflicted upon him, the injustice he has suffered – and the more will you be driven to act to prevent the wrong, the injury, or the injustice. And the more you are accustomed, by circumstances, by those around you, or by the intensity of your own thought and your own imagination to *act* in the direction that your thought and your imagination push you – the more this moral sentiment will grow in you, the more it will become *habit*.

This is what Adam Smith develops with a wealth of examples. He was young when he wrote this book which is infinitely superior to the work of his old age, "The Political Economy" [*The Wealth of Nations*]. Free of all religious prejudice, he sought the explanation of morality in a physical fact of human nature, and this is why for a century the clergy with and without a cassock has been silent about this book.

Adam Smith's only mistake was that he did not understand that this same feeling of sympathy, grown into a state of habit, exists amongst animals just as much as amongst men.

With due respect to the popularisers of Darwin, ignorant of everything that he had not borrowed from Malthus, the feeling of solidarity is the predominant trait of the lives of all animals that live in societies. The eagle devours the sparrow, the wolf devours the marmots, but the eagles and the wolves help each other to hunt, and the sparrows and the marmots unite so well against the beasts and birds of prey that only the clumsy are caught. In every animal society, solidarity is a law (a general fact) of nature, infinitely more important than that struggle for existence which the bourgeois sing the virtue of, in order to better stupefy us.

When we study the animal world and try to give an account of the struggle for existence sustained by

[1] Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was an English philosopher best known for his 1651 book *Leviathan*, which established the social contract theory that has served as the foundation for much of later Western political philosophy. Written during the English Civil War, it argues for the necessity of a strong central authority to which all individuals in society cede their rights for the sake of protection and to avoid discord and civil war. (*Black Flag*)

each living being against adverse circumstances and against its enemies, we note that the more the principle of egalitarian solidarity is developed in an animal society and has grown to the state of a habit – the more likely it is to survive and emerge triumphant in the struggle against the elements and against its enemies. The more each member of a society feels solidarity with every other member of the society, the better develops in all of them these two qualities which are the principal factors of victory and all progress – courage on the one hand and, on the other, the free initiative of the individual. And, on the contrary, the more that animal society or this little group of animals loses this feeling of solidarity (which happens as a result of exceptional scarcity, or else as a result of an exceptional abundance of food), the more the two other factors of progress – courage and individual initiative – diminish; they eventually disappear, and the society, falling into decay, succumbs before its enemies. Without mutual confidence, no struggle is possible; no courage, no initiative, no solidarity – and no victory! Defeat is certain.

We will come back to this subject one day and we will be able to demonstrate with a wealth of examples how, in the animal and human worlds, the law of mutual aid is the law of progress, and how mutual aid, as well as the courage and individual initiative that flow from it, secures victory to the species which best knows how to practice it. For the moment, it will suffice to note this fact. The reader themselves will understand its importance for the issue at hand.

Now let us imagine this feeling of solidarity acting through the millions of years which have succeeded one another since the first beginnings of animal life appeared upon the globe. Let us imagine how this feeling little by little became a habit and was transmitted by inheritance, from the simplest microscopic organism to its descendants – insects, reptiles, mammals and man. And we shall understand the origin of the moral sentiment which is a *necessity* for the animal, just like food or the organ for digesting it.

Without going back even further (because then we would have to talk about complex animals, produced by *colonies* of extremely simple little beings), here is the origin of the moral sentiment. We had to be extremely brief to compress this great question into the space of a few pages, but that is enough to show that there is nothing mystical or sentimental about it. Without this solidarity of the individual with the species, the animal kingdom would never have developed nor improved. The most advanced being upon the earth would still be one of those tiny specks swimming in water and barely perceptible under a microscope. Would even that exist, for are not the earliest aggregations of cells themselves already evidence of association in the struggle?

Thus we see by observing nature – not as a self-interested bourgeois, but merely as an intelligent observer – we come to the conclusion that this principle is found everywhere there is society: “Treat others as you would like them to treat you in similar circumstances.”

VI

Thus we see by observing nature – not as a self-interested bourgeois, but merely as an intelligent observer – we come to the conclusion that this principle is found everywhere there is society: “Treat others as you would like them to treat you in similar circumstances.”

And when we study more closely the development or the evolution of the animal world, we discover (with the zoologist [Karl] Kessler and the economist [Nikolay] Chernyshevsky) that this principle, translated by the single word Solidarity, has [played] an infinitely larger part than all the adaptations that have resulted from a struggle between individuals to acquire personal advantages.

It is evident that the practice of solidarity is found even more in human societies. The societies of monkeys, highest in the animal scale, already provide us a most striking example of the practice of solidarity. Man is taking a further step in this direction, and this alone enables him to preserve his feeble race amidst the obstacles that nature places in his way and to develop his intelligence.

When we study those primitive societies still remaining at the level of the Stone Age we see in their small communities solidarity practised to the highest degree towards all the members of the community.

That is why this sentiment, this practice of solidarity, never ceases, not even during the worst periods of history. Even when temporary circumstances of domination, servitude, exploitation cause this principle to be disregarded, it always remains in the minds of the many, so that it causes an eruption against evil institutions, a revolution. This is understandable: otherwise society would perish.

For the vast majority of animals and men, this feeling remains, and must remain, an acquired habit, a principle always present in the mind even though it is often ignored in action.

It is the whole evolution of the animal kingdom that speaks in us. And it is long, very long: it is hundreds of millions of years old.

Even if we wanted to get rid of it, we cannot. It would be easier for a man to become accustomed to walk on four legs than to get rid of the moral sentiment. In animal evolution, it is anterior to the upright posture of man.

The moral sense is a natural faculty in us, like the sense of smell and sense of touch.

As for Law and Religion, which *also* have preached this principle, we know that they simply filched it to cloak their wares – their injunctions for the benefit of the conqueror, the exploiter and the clergy. Without this principle of solidarity, the validity of which is generally recognised, how could they have got a grip on minds?

They both cloaked themselves with it, like authority which also succeeded in imposing itself by posing as the protector of the weak against the strong.

By throwing Law, Religion and Authority overboard, humanity can regain possession of the moral principle which was taken from it, in order to submit it to criticism and to purge it of the adulterations with which the cleric, the judge and the ruler have poisoned and are still poisoning it.

But to deny the moral principle *because* the Church and the Law have exploited it would be as unreasonable as declaring that we will never wash, that we will eat pork infested with roundworms and that we do not want communal possession of the land *because* the Qur'an requires daily washing, *because* the hygienist Moses forbade the Hebrews from eating pork or *because* the Qira'at (a supplement of the Qur'an) wants any land that that has been left uncultivated for three years to return to the community.

Besides, this principle of treating others as you wish to be treated yourself, what is it if not the very principle of Equality, the fundamental principle of Anarchy? And how can anyone even believe themselves an anarchist without putting it into practice?

We do not want to be ruled. But, by this very fact, do we not declare that we do not want to rule anyone? We do not want to be deceived, we want always to be told nothing but the truth. But, by this very fact, do we not declare that we ourselves do not want to deceive anyone, that we commit ourselves to always telling the truth, nothing but the truth, the whole truth? We do not want to be robbed of the fruits of our labour; but, by that very fact, do we not declare that we respect the fruits of the labour of others?

Indeed, by what right can we demand that we should be treated in a certain way, having reserved to ourselves the right to treat others in a completely different way? Are we, by chance, the "white bone" of the Kazakh who can treat others as he sees fit?[1] Our sense of equality revolts at this idea.

Equality in mutual relations and the solidarity necessarily resulting from it – that is the most powerful weapon of the animal world in the struggle for existence. And equality is equity.

By declaring ourselves anarchists, we proclaim in advance that we renounce treating others as we would not wish to be treated by them; that we will no longer tolerate the inequality that has allowed some amongst us to use their strength, or their cunning, or their skill in a way which we would not

[1] A reference to the pre-modern Kazakhstan (the Kazakh khanate) in which the Kazakh aristocracy (called the white bone – *ak suiuk*) traced their descent from Genghis Khan and had special rights and privileges. The general population of Kazakh was known as black bone (*kara suiuk*). (*Black Flag*)

like if used against us. But equality in everything – synonymous with equity – is anarchy itself. To hell with the white bone who arrogates the right to deceive the simplicity of others! We do not want it, and we will get rid of it as required. It is not just on this abstract trinity of Law, Religion, and Authority that we declare war. By becoming anarchists, we declare war on all this flood of deceit, cunning, exploitation, depravity, vice – in a word, inequality – which they have poured into all of our hearts. We declare war on *their* way of acting, on *their* way of thinking. The governed, the deceived, the exploited, the prostituted, and so on, wound above all our sense of equality. It is in the name of Equality that we no longer want the prostituted, the exploited, the deceived, or the governed.

By becoming anarchists, we declare war on all this flood of deceit, cunning, exploitation, depravity, vice – in a word, inequality – which they have poured into all of our hearts. We declare war on *their* way of acting, on *their* way of thinking.

We may be told, perhaps, it has been said sometimes: "But if you think that we should always treat others as you would like to be treated yourself, what gives you the right to use force under any circumstances? What gives you the right to level cannons at barbarian, or civilised, invaders of your country? What gives you the right to dispossess the exploiter? What gives you the right to kill not only a tyrant but a mere viper?"

By what right? What do you mean by that weird word, borrowed from the law? Do you want to know if I will be aware of doing good by doing this? If those I esteem will think what I did was right? Is that what you are asking? In that case, our answer is simple.

Yes, certainly! Because we ask that we be killed like venomous beasts if we invaded Tonkin or the Zulus who have done us no harm. We say to our sons, or our friends: "Kill me, if I ever take part in the invasion!"

Yes, certainly! Because we ask that we be dispossessed, if one day, belying our principles, we seized an inheritance – should it fall from the sky – to use it for the exploitation of others.

Yes, certainly! Because every man with a heart asks in advance that he be slain if he ever becomes a viper; that a dagger be plunged into his heart if he ever takes the place of a dethroned tyrant.

Of a hundred men who have a wife and children there will be ninety who, feeling the approach of madness (loss of cerebral control over their actions), would try to commit suicide for fear of harming those whom they love. Whenever a man with a heart feels he is becoming dangerous to those whom he loves, he wishes to die before he becomes so.

One day, in Irkutsk, a Polish doctor and a photographer were bitten by a rabid little dog. The photographer burns his wound with a hot iron; the doctor limits himself to cauterising it. He is young, handsome, full of life. He has just come out of the prison to which the government had sentenced him for his dedication to the cause of the people. With his knowledge and above all his intelligence, he was creating wondrous cures; the sick adored him.

Six weeks later, he realises that the bitten arm is beginning to swell. A doctor himself, he could not be mistaken: it was the rage coming. He runs to a friend's house, a doctor and exile like himself – "Quick! I beg you for strychnine. You see that arm, do you know what it is? In an hour or less, I will be in a rage, I will try to bite you and friends, do not waste time! Strychnine: I must die."

He felt himself becoming a viper: he demanded that he be killed.

The friend hesitated; he wanted to try an anti-rabies treatment. With a brave woman, the both of them began to treat him… and two hours later, the doctor, foaming [at the mouth], threw himself at them, trying to bite them; then he came back to himself, demanded strychnine – and raged again. He died in horrid convulsions.

What similar facts, based on our experiences, could we not quote! The man with a heart prefers to die rather than become the cause of evils for others. And that is why he will be aware of doing good, and he will receive the approval of those he esteems if he kills the viper or the tyrant.

Perovskaya and her comrades killed the Russian Tsar.[1] And the whole of humanity, in spite of its repugnance at the spilling of blood, in spite of its sympathies for the one who had allowed the serfs to be liberated, recognised their right to do so. Why? Not because the act was [generally] recognised as useful; three quarters still doubt it; but because it was felt that Perovskaya and her comrades would not have consented to become tyrants in their turn for all the gold in the world. Even those who know nothing of the whole drama are certain that it was not youthful bravado, nor a palace conspiracy, nor the seeking of power: it was the hatred of tyranny to the point of self-disregard, to death.

"These there," it was said, "had conquered the right to kill," as it was said of Louise Michel: "*She* had the right to loot,"[2] or again: "They, they had the right to steal," when speaking of those terrorists who lived on dry bread, and who stole a million or two from the Kishineff treasure while taking, at the risk of dying themselves, every possible precaution to clear the sentinels guarding the coffer, with bayonet and cannon, of any responsibility.

Humanity never refuses the right to use force to those who have conquered it – whether this right is used upon the barricades or in the shadow of a crossroads. But, for such an act to produce a deep impression upon minds, we must *conquer this right*. Without this, the act – useful or not – will remain merely a brutal fact of no importance in the progress of ideas. It would be seen as only a displacement of force, a simple substitution of one exploiter for another.

VII

So far, we have always spoken of the conscious, deliberate actions of man (of those that we do intentionally). But alongside our conscious life we have an unconscious life, infinitely more vast and too often ignored in the past. Yet it is sufficient to notice how we dress in the morning, trying to fasten a button that we know we lost the day before, or stretching out our hand to grasp an object that we ourselves have moved, to get an idea of this unconscious life and comprehend the immense part it plays in our existence.

Three-quarters of our relations with others are comprised of this unconscious life. Our way of speaking, of smiling or frowning, getting carried away or remaining calm during a discussion – all this we do without realising it, by mere habit, either inherited from our human or pre-human ancestors (just see the resemblance in the expression of a human and an animal when both are angry), or else consciously or unconsciously acquired.

Our manner of acting towards others thus tends to become habitual. And the man who has acquired the most *moral habits* will certainly be superior to this good Christian who claims to be constantly urged by the devil to do evil and can only refrain from it by evoking the suffering of hell or the joys of paradise.

To treat others as he would wish to be treated himself reaches the status of simple *habit* within man and amongst all social animals, so much so that a man does not generally even ask himself how he should act in such and such a circumstance. He does good or evil, without thinking. And it is only in exceptional circumstances, in the presence of a complex case or under the impulse of a burning passion, that he hesitates and a struggle takes place between the various portions of his brain (a very complex organ, the various parts of which function with a certain [degree of] independence). Then he substitutes himself in imagination for the person who is in front of him; he asks himself if he would like to be treated in the same way, and the better he has identified himself with the person whose dignity or interests he was about to injure, the more moral his decision will be. Or else, a friend will intervene and say to him: "Imagine yourself in his place; would you have tolerated being treated by him as he has just been treated by you?" And that is enough.

Thus, the appeal to the principle of equality is made only in a moment of hesitation, whereas in

[1] Sophia Lvovna Perovskaya (1853-1881) was a Russian revolutionary and a member of the socialist revolutionary organisation *Narodnaya Volya* (*People's Will*). She was executed after helping to orchestrate the successful assassination of Tsar Alexander II of Russia. (*Black Flag*)

[2] Louise Michel (1830–1905) was a French anarchist, school teacher and participant in the Paris Commune. On 9 March 1883, she led a demonstration of around 500 across Paris against unemployment, carrying a black flag and shouting "Bread, work, or lead!" The crowd pillaged three baker's shops and she was arrested and sentenced to six years solitary confinement. Public pressure soon forced the granting of an amnesty in 1886. This act helped associate the black flag with anarchism, with Michel stating that it was "the flag of strikes and the flag of those who are hungry." (*Black Flag*)

ninety-nine cases out of a hundred we act morally by mere habit.

It will certainly have been noticed that in everything we have said so far we have not tried to *prescribe* anything. We have simply *presented* what happens in the animal world and amongst men.

The church once threatened men with hell to moralise them, and we know how that worked out: it demoralised them. The judge threatens the shackles, the whip, the gallows, always in the name of the very principles of sociability that he has filched from Society; and he demoralises them. And authoritarians of every shade still scream about the danger to society of the idea that the judge along with the priest may disappear from the earth.

Well, we are not afraid to relinquish the judge and the sentence. We even relinquish, with Guyau, every kind of sanction, every kind of obligation of morality. We are not afraid to say: "Do what you want; act as you like" – because we are convinced that the great majority of men, as they become increasingly enlightened and rid themselves of the present shackles will and will always act in some direction useful to society, just as we are convinced in advance that a child will one day walk on two feet and not on all fours simply because it was born of parents belonging to the species Man.

All we can do is to give *advice*; more, while giving it we add: "This advice will have value only if you recognise yourself through experience and observation that it is worth following."

When we see a young man bend his back and thus constrict his chest and lungs, we advise him to straighten up and hold his head high and his chest wide open. We advise him to take deep breaths, to fill his lungs, because this will be his best safeguard against consumption. But, at the same time, we teach him physiology so that he is aware of the functions of the lungs and chooses himself the posture he knows will be the best.

This is all we can do by way of morality. We have only the right to give advice, to which we again add: "Follow it if you find it good."

But by leaving to each the right to act as he sees best; by absolutely denying society the right to punish anyone, in any way, for any anti-social act that he has committed – we do not renounce our capacity to love what seems good to us, and to hate what seems bad to us. To love – and to hate; for only those who know how to hate know how to love. We retain this for ourselves, and since this alone is sufficient to maintain and develop the moral sentiments in every animal society, that will suffice all the more for the human race.

We ask only one thing, to eliminate all that impedes the free development of these two feelings in the present society, all that distorts our judgment: the State, the Church, Exploitation; the judge, the cleric, the ruler, the exploiter… In a society based on exploitation and servitude human nature is degraded.

We ask only one thing, to eliminate all that impedes the free development of these two feelings in the present society, all that distorts our judgment: the State, the Church, Exploitation; the judge, the cleric, the ruler, the exploiter.

Today when we see a Jack the Ripper butcher ten of the poorest, the most miserable – and morally superior to three-quarters of the wealthy bourgeoisie – women, our first feeling is that of hatred. If we had met him the day he had slaughtered the woman who wanted to be paid by him the pennies for [the rent of] her slum, we would have put a bullet in his head, without reflecting that the bullet would have been better placed in the skull of the owner of the slum.

But when we recall all the infamies that brought him to these murders; when we think of the darkness in which he prowls, haunted by images drawn from sordid books or thoughts suggested by stupid books – our feeling is divided. And the day we know that Jack is in the hands of a judge who has slain in cold blood ten times more human lives – men, women and children – than all the Jacks;

when we know he is in the hands of those callous maniacs, or [in the hands] of those people who send a Borràs to prison to demonstrate to the bourgeois that they stand guard around them[1] – then all our hatred of Jack the Ripper will disappear. It will go elsewhere. It will be transformed into hatred against a cowardly and hypocritical society, against its recognised representatives. All the infamies of a Ripper disappear before this age-old series of infamies committed in the name of the Law. That is who we hate.

Today, our feelings are continually divided. We feel that all of us are more or less voluntarily or involuntarily accomplices of this society. We do not dare to hate anymore. Do we even dare to love? In a society based on exploitation and servitude human nature is degraded.

But, as servitude disappears, we shall regain our rights. We shall feel the strength to hate and to love, even in cases as complicated as the one we just mentioned.

As for our daily life, we do already give free reign to our feelings of sympathy or antipathy; we already do so at every moment. We all love moral strength and we all despise moral weakness, cowardice. Every moment our words, our looks, our smiles express our joy at the sight of actions useful to the human race, at those we consider good. Every moment our looks and words show the repugnance which cowardice, deceit, intrigue, lack of moral courage inspire in us. We betray our disgust, even though under the influence of an education in "etiquette," that is to say of hypocrisy, we still try to hide this disgust beneath lying appearances which will disappear as relations of equality are established between us.

Well, that alone is already enough to maintain the conception of good and evil at a certain level and to permeate each other with it; that will be all the more sufficient when there is no longer judge nor priest in society – all the more so when moral principles will have lost all characteristics of obligation, and will be considered simply as natural relations between equals.

However, as these relations are established, an even higher moral conception emerges in society and it is this conception which we will [now] analyse.

VIII

In all our analysis so far, we have only presented the simple principles of equality. We have rebelled, and invited others to rebel, against those who arrogate themselves the right to treat others as they would not want to be treated themselves; against those who wish to be neither deceived, nor exploited, nor abused, nor prostituted, but who behave thus to others. Lying, abusing, and so on are repugnant, we have said, not because they are condemned by codes of morality – we ignore these codes – they are repugnant because lying, abusing, etc. revolts the sense of *equality* in everyone to whom equality is not an empty word; they especially revolt he who is truly anarchist in his way of thinking and acting.

But just this so simple, so natural and so obvious principle – if it were generally applied in life – already constitutes a very lofty morality, including all that moralists have claimed to teach.

The egalitarian principle summarises the teachings of the moralists. But it also contains something more. And that something is respect for the individual. By proclaiming our egalitarian and anarchist morality, we refuse to arrogate to ourselves the right which moralists have always claimed to exercise – that of mutilating the individual in the name of a certain ideal which they believed to be good. We do not recognise anyone as having this right; we do not want it for ourselves.

We recognise the full and complete freedom of the individual; we want for him the plenitude of existence, the free development of all faculties. We do not wish to impose anything upon him, and so we return to the principle which Fourier opposed to the morality of religions when he said: Leave men absolutely free; do not mutilate them – religions have done enough. Do not even fear their passions: in a *free* society, they will offer no danger.

[1] Martí Borràs i Jover (1845-1894) was a Spanish anarchist shoemaker and the first director of the anarchist paper *Tierra y Libertad* (*Land and Liberty*). In 1889 he was arrested as one of the organisers of a demonstration in Plaça de Catalunya in Barcelona (which did not take place because of repression). (*Black Flag*)

Provided that you yourself do not abdicate your freedom; provided that you do not allow yourself to be enslaved by others; and provided that to the violent and anti-social passions of this or that person you oppose your equally vigorous social passions. Then you will have nothing to fear from liberty.[1]

We renounce mutilating the individual in the name of any ideal; all we reserve is to frankly express our sympathies and our antipathies for that which we find good or bad. Does so-and-so deceive his friends? It is his will, his character? Alright! Well, it is *our* character, it is *our* will to despise the liar! And since that is our character, let us be honest. Do not rush towards him to press him to our bosom and cordially shake his hands, as is done today! Let us vigorously oppose our active passion to his.

This is all we have the right and the duty to do to maintain the principle of equality in society. It is even the principle of equality, put into practice.[2]

Provided that you yourself do not abdicate your freedom; provided that you do not allow yourself to be enslaved by others; and provided that to the violent and anti-social passions of this or that person you oppose your equally vigorous social passions. Then you will have nothing to fear from liberty

All this, of course, cannot be completely applied until the great causes of moral depravity – capitalism, religion, [Statist] justice, government – have ceased to exist. But a large part of this can already be done today. It is already being applied.

And yet, if societies know only this principle of equality; if everyone, holding to a principle of shopkeeper equality, at every moment taking care not to give others anything more than he received from them – that would be the death of society. The very principle of equality would disappear from our relations, for to sustain it something more grand, more beautiful, more vigorous than mere equity must constantly occur in life.

And this thing happens.

Until now, humanity has never lacked those great hearts overflowing with tenderness, spirit or will, and who used their feeling, their intellect or their force of action in the service of the human race, without asking anything in return.

This fecundity of spirit, feeling or will takes all possible forms. It is the passionate seeker after truth who, renouncing all other pleasures of life, devotes himself passionately to the search for what he believes true and just, contrary to the assertions of the ignoramuses who surround him. It is the inventor who lives from day to day, forgetting even his food and scarcely touches the bread that a women devoted to him feeds him like a child, while he pursues his invention destined, he thinks, to change the face of the world. It is the ardent revolutionary, to whom the joys of art, of science, even of family, seem bitter as long as they are not shared by all, and who works to regenerate the world despite poverty and persecution. It is the young boy who, hearing of the atrocities of an invasion, taking literally the legends of patriotism whispered in his ear, goes to join a volunteer group, marches through snow, suffers from hunger and finally falls beneath bullets.

It is the Paris street-urchin who, more inspired and endowed with a more fertile intelligence, choosing better his aversions and his sympathies, ran to the ramparts with his little brother, remaining as shells rained down and died murmuring: “Long live the Commune!” It is the man who rebels at the sight of an injustice, without wondering what the outcome

[1] Of all modern authors, the Norwegian [Henrik] Ibsen, who will be soon read in France with the passion he is already read in England, has best expressed these ideas in his dramas. He is even an anarchist without knowing it.

[2] We already hear it being said: “And the murderer? And those who molest children?” – To that our response is short. The murderer who kills simply because of a thirst for blood is *extremely* rare. He is a sick man to be cured or avoided. As for the molester, let us first see to it that society does not pervert feelings of our children, then we shall have nothing to fear from these gentlemen.

will be and, while everyone else grovels, unmasks the injustice, strikes the exploiter, [whether] the petty tyrant of the factory or the great tyrant of an empire. Finally it is all those numberless acts of devotion, less sensational and for that unknown, almost always overlooked, which can be continually seen, especially amongst women, provided we want to take the trouble to open our eyes and notice what makes the substance of humanity, which still allows it to manage as best it can, despite the exploitation and oppression it undergoes.

These are forging, some in obscurity, some on a larger arena, the real progress of humanity. And humanity knows it. That is why it surrounds their lives with respect, with legends. It even embellishes them and makes them the heroes of its tales, its songs, its novels. It cherishes in them the courage, the goodness, the love and the devotion which are lacking in most of us. It passes on their memory to the young. It remembers even those who acted only in the narrow circle of family and friends, by venerating their memory in family traditions.

These make true morality – the only one, moreover, worthy of the name – the rest were merely simple relations of equality. Without this courage and devotion, humanity would have stupefied itself in the mire of petty calculations. These, finally, prepare the morality of the future, that which will come when our children, ceasing to *calculate*, will have grown up with the idea that the best use for all things, for all energy, for all courage, for all love, is where the need for this force is felt most strongly.

This courage, this devotion has always existed. We encounter it amongst all animals. We encounter it in man, even during times of the greatest stupefaction.

And, at all times, religions have sought to appropriate it, to make money out of it for their own benefit. And if religions are still alive, it is because – apart from ignorance – they have always appealed precisely to this devotion, to this courage. It is again to this that revolutionaries appeal – especially socialist revolutionaries.

With regard to explaining this, religious, Utilitarian and other moralists have fallen into the errors we have already pointed out. But it belongs to that young philosopher – that thinker, an anarchist without knowing it – Guyau to have indicated the true origin of this courage and devotion, outwith all mystical force, outwith all the mercantile calculations bizarrely imagined by the Utilitarians of the English school. Where Kantian, positivist and evolutionist philosophy have failed, anarchist philosophy has found the true path.

Their origin, said Guyau, *is the feeling of its own strength. It is a life which overflows, which seeks to spread*. "To feel inwardly the greatest that one is *capable* of doing is really the first consciousness of what it is one's *duty* to do."[1]

The moral sentiment of duty, which every man has felt in his life and which they have sought to explain by every mysticism. "Duty is nothing more than a superabundance of life which demands to exercise, to impart itself; it is at the same time the sentiment of a power."[2]

Any accumulating force creates a pressure upon the obstacles in front of it. *Power* to act is *duty* to act. And all this moral "obligation" of which so much has been said or written, stripped of all mysticism, is thus reduced to this true conception: *life can be maintained only on the condition that it is spread*.

"The plant cannot prevent itself from flowering. Sometimes to flower means for it to die. No matter, the sap still rises," concludes the young anarchist philosopher.[3]

It is the same for the human being when he is full of force and energy. Force accumulates in him. He promulgates his life. He gives without calculation – otherwise he could not live. And if he must perish, like the flower when it blooms – no mater! The sap rises, if sap there is.

Be strong! Overflow with passionate and intellectual energy – and you will promulgate your

[1] Jean-Marie Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* (London: Watts, 1898), 91. (*Black Flag*)

[2] Kropotkin's summary and paraphrase of Jean-Marie Guyau: "Duty, from the point of view of facts – metaphysical notions being left on one side – is a superabundance of life which demands to exercise, to impart itself. Duty has been too much interpreted until now as the sentiment of a *necessity* or *compulsion*. It is, above all, the sentiment of a *power*." (*A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* [London: Watts, 1898], 91). (*Black Flag*)

[3] Jean-Marie Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* (London: Watts, 1898), 92. (*Black Flag*)

intelligence, your love, your strength of action amongst others! This is what all moral teaching is reduced to, shorn of the hypocrisies of oriental asceticism.

IX

What humanity admires in the truly moral man is his energy, the exuberance of life which drives him to give his intelligence, his feelings, his actions, asking nothing in return.

The man with a powerful intellect, the man overflowing with intellectual life, naturally seeks to promulgate himself. There would be no appeal in thinking without communicating his thoughts to others. It is only the man poor in ideas who, after having found one with difficulty, carefully hides it so that he can later label it with his own name. The man with a powerful intellect overflows with ideas: he sows them with both hands. He suffers if he cannot share them, cannot scatter them to the four winds: this is his life.

It is the same for feeling. "Of ourselves, we are not sufficient for our ourselves. We have more tears than are wanted for our own sufferings, more joys than our own happiness would justify," said Guyau, thus summarising the whole question of morality in a few so true lines, taken from nature.[1] The solitary being suffers, he is gripped by a certain anxiety, because he cannot share his thoughts, his feelings with others. When we feel a great pleasure, we want to let others know that we exist, we feel, we love, we live, we struggle, we fight.

At the same time, we feel the need to exercise our will, our force of action. To act, to work has become a need for the vast majority of men; so much so that when absurd conditions drive a man or woman from useful work, they invent tasks, futile and senseless obligations to open some field for their force of action. They invent anything – a theory, a religion, a "social duty" – to persuade themselves that they are doing something useful. When they dance, it is for a charity; when they ruin themselves with their [expensive] outfits, it is to match the aristocracy; when they do nothing at all, it is on principle.

"We *want* to help others, to give a lift to the coach which toilsomely draws humanity along; in any case, we buzz round it," said Guyau.[2] This need to lend a hand is so great that it is found in all sociable animals, however lowly they may be. And what is all this enormous activity spent so uselessly in politics every day if not the need to give a lift to the coach or to buzz around it?

Undoubtedly, this "fecundity of will,"[3] this thirst for action when it is accompanied only by a poor sensibility and an intellect incapable of *creating*, will only produce a Napoleon I or a Bismarck – fools who wanted to make the world go the wrong way. On the other hand, a fertile mind devoid of a well-developed sensibility will produce barren fruits, savants who only stop the progress of science. And finally sensibility unguided by a sufficiently large intelligence will produce those women ready to sacrifice everything to some brute upon whom they pour all their love.

To be really fruitful, life must be with intelligence, feeling and will at the same time. But then, this fecundity in all directions is *life*: the only thing that deserves this name.

To be really fruitful, life must be with intelligence, feeling and will at the same time. But then, this fecundity in all directions is *life*: the only thing that deserves this name. For one moment of this life, those who have glimpsed it give years of vegetative existence. Without this overflowing life, a man is old before his time, an impotent being, a plant that withers before it has ever flowered.

"Let us leave to decadent corruption [*pourritures fin de siècle*] this life that is no life," cries the youth, the true youth full of sap who wants to live and sow life around it. And every time a society falls into decay, a push coming from this youth shatters the old economic, political, moral forms to

[1] Jean-Marie Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* (London: Watts, 1898), 84. (*Black Flag*)

[2] Kropotkin's emphasis, Jean-Marie Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* (London: Watts, 1898), 86. (*Black Flag*)

[3] Jean-Marie Guyau, *A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction* (London: Watts, 1898), 85. (*Black Flag*)

germinate a new life. What does it matter if someone or another falls in the struggle! The sap still rises. For it, to live is to bloom, whatever the consequences! It does not regret them.

But without speaking of the heroic periods of humanity, and taking everyday existence – is it life to live at odds with one's ideal?

These days, it is often said that we mock the ideal. This is understandable. The ideal has been so often confused with Buddhist or Christian mutilation, the word has been so often used to deceive the naïve, that a reaction is necessary and healthy. We too would like to replace the word "ideal," covered by so many taints, by a new word more consistent with the new ideas.

But whatever the word, the fact remains; every human being has their ideal. Bismarck has his, bizarre as it is: government by blood and iron. Every bourgeois has theirs – be it the silver bath of Gambetta, the cook Trompette, and many slaves to pay for Trompette and the bath without too much need to drag them by the ears.[1]

But besides these, there is the human being who has conceived a higher ideal. The life of a brute cannot satisfy him. Servility, deceit, lack of good faith, intrigue, inequality in human relations revolt him. How can he in his turn become servile, untruthful, scheming, domineering? He glimpses how beautiful life would be if better relations existed between everyone; he feels in himself the strength to succeed in establishing these better relations

But besides these, there is the human being who has conceived a higher ideal. The life of a brute cannot satisfy him. Servility, deceit, lack of good faith, intrigue, inequality in human relations revolt him. How can he in his turn become servile, untruthful, scheming, domineering? He glimpses how beautiful life would be if better relations existed between everyone; he feels in himself the strength to succeed in establishing these better relations with those whom he may meet on his way. He conceives what is called an ideal.

Where does this ideal come from? How is it shaped, by heredity on one side and the impressions of life on the other? We hardly know. At most we could tell the story of it more or less truthfully in our biographies. But it is there – variable, progressive, open to outside influences, but always alive. What would give the greatest amount of vitality, pleasure of being, is an unconscious feeling in part.

Well, life is vigorous, fertile, rich in sensations only on condition of responding to this feeling of the ideal. Act *against* this feeling and you sense your life is divided; it is no longer *one*, it loses its vigour. Be untrue often to your ideal, and you end by paralysing your will, your force of action. Soon you will not find the vigour, the spontaneity of decision you once knew. You are broken.

There is nothing mysterious in this, once you envision man as a compound of nervous and cerebral centres acting independently. Waver between the various feelings that struggle within you, and you will soon manage to break the harmony of the organism; you will be a sick person without will. The intensity of life will drop and you will in vain seek for compromises: you will no longer be the complete, strong, vigorous being that you were when your actions were in accordance with the ideal conceptions of your brain.

X

And now, before finishing, let us say a word about these two terms, *altruism* and *egoism*, coming from the English School, which continually offend our ears.

Until now we have not even spoken about it in this study. That is because we do not even see the

[1] Léon Gambetta (1838–1882) was a French statesman, prominent during and after the Franco-Prussian War, whose enemies circulated rumours about his palatial apartment and its silver bath. Trompette was his personal chef. (*Black Flag*)

distinction that the English moralists have sought to introduce.

When we say: "Treat others as we want to be treated ourselves" – is it egoism or altruism that we recommend? When we rise higher and we say: "The happiness of each is intimately linked to the happiness of all those around him. By chance you can have a few years of relative happiness in a society based on the misfortune of others; but this happiness is built on sand. It cannot last, the least of things is enough to break it; and it is miserably small in comparison with the happiness possible in a society of equals. Also, every time you aspire to the good of all, you will do well"; when we say that, is it altruism or egoism that we preach? We simply note a fact.

And when we add, paraphrasing a remark by Guyau: "Be strong, be *great* in all your acts; develop your life in all directions; be as rich as possible in energy, and for that reason be the most social and sociable being – *if* you want to enjoy a full, whole and fruitful life. Guided always by a richly developed intelligence, struggle, risk – risk has its immense pleasures – dispose of your forces without counting them, as long as you have them, in all that you feel to be beautiful and great – and then you will have enjoyed the greatest amount of happiness. Be *one* with the masses, and then, whatever happens to you in life, you will feel *with* you the beat of precisely those hearts you esteem, and *against* you the beat of those you despise!" When we say this, is it altruism or egoism that we teach?

To fight, to face danger; to jump into the water to save, not only a man, but a simple cat; to eat dry bread to put an end to the injustices that revolt you; to feel in accord with those who deserve to be loved, to feel loved by them – for a crippled philosopher, all this may be a sacrifice, but for a man and a woman full of energy, strength, vigour, youth, it is the joy of feeling *alive*.

Is it egoism? Is it altruism?

In general, the moralists who built their systems on an alleged opposition between egoist sentiments and altruist sentiments have taken the wrong path. If this opposition existed in reality, if the good of the individual was really opposed to that of society, the human race would not exist; no animal species would have reached its present development. If ants did not find an intense pleasure in working together, for the well-being of the anthill, the anthill would not exist, and the ant would not be what it is today; the most developed creature amongst insects, an insect whose brain, barely perceptible under the magnifying glass, is almost as powerful as the average brain of man. If birds did not find an intense pleasure in their migrations, in the care they take in raising their offspring, in joint action for the defence of their societies against birds of prey, the bird would not have attained the development it has achieved. The typical bird would have regressed, instead of progressing.

And when [Herbert] Spencer foresees a time when the good of the individual will *merge* with the good of the species, he forgets one thing: it is that if the two *had not always been identical*, the very evolution of the animal kingdom could not have been achieved.[1]

It is because there was at all times, it is that there is always found, in the animal world as in the human race, a large number of individuals who *did not understand* that the good of the individual and that of the species are, at bottom, identical. They did not understand that to *live* an intense life is the purpose of every individual, he finds the greatest intensity of life in the greatest sociability, in the most perfect identification of himself with all those around him.

But this was only a lack of intelligence, a lack of understanding. At all times there have been narrow-minded men; at all times there have been idiots. But never, at any time in [human] history, nor even in geological history, has the good of the individual been opposed to that of society. At all times they remained the same, and those who understood it best have always enjoyed the most complete life.

The distinction between egoism and altruism is therefore absurd to us. That is why we have said nothing, either, about these *compromises* that man, according to the Utilitarians, would always make between his egoist sentiments and his altruist

[1] Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was a prominent English classical liberal political theorist of the Victorian era, best known for coining the term "survival of the fittest." He developed an all-embracing conception of evolution as progressive development in biology and society (Synthetic Philosophy), writing on ethics, religion, anthropology, economics, political theory, philosophy, biology, sociology, and psychology. (*Black Flag*)

sentiments. These compromises do not exist for the convinced man.

What really exists is that, in the current conditions, even as we seek to live according to our egalitarian principles, we feel them offended at every step. As modest as our meal and bed are, we are still Rothschilds in comparison with those who sleep under bridges and who are so often lacking dry bread. As little as we give to intellectual and artistic pleasures, we are still Rothschilds in comparison to the millions who return in the evening stupefied by monotonous and onerous manual labour, who cannot enjoy art and science and will die without ever having known these lofty pleasures.

We feel that we have not pushed the egalitarian principle to the end. But we do not want to *compromise* with these conditions. We rebel against them. They burden us. They make us revolutionary. We do not adapt ourselves to what revolts us. We repudiate every compromise, every truce, and we promise to fight all-out against these conditions.

rebel against the inequity, the lie and the injustice. Struggle! Struggle is life all the more intense as the struggle becomes sharper. And then you will have lived

This is not a compromise; and the convinced man does not wish to let himself rest easy while waiting for it to change by itself.

We are finally at the end of our study.

There are periods, as we have said, when the moral conception changes completely. We realise that what we had considered as moral is the deepest immorality. Here, it was a custom, a venerated tradition, but immoral at bottom. There, we find only a morality made for the advantage of a single class. We throw them overboard, and it is written: "Down with morality!" It becomes a duty to do immoral acts.

Let us welcome these periods. These are periods of criticism. They are the surest sign that there is a great deal of thought in society. It is the elaboration of a higher morality.

We have sought to formulate what this morality will be by basing ourselves on the study of man and animals. And we have seen the morality that is already taking shape in the ideas of the masses and thinkers.

This morality will not command anything. It will absolutely refuse to mould the individual according to an abstract idea, as it will refuse to mutilate it by religion, law and government. It will leave to the individual full and complete liberty. It will become a simple statement of facts, a science.

And this science will say to man: if you do not sense strength within you, if the forces are just what it takes to maintain a greyish, monotonous life, without strong impressions, without deep pleasures, but also without great sorrow, well, keep to the simple principles of egalitarian equity. In equalitarian relations you will find, all in all, the greatest amount of happiness possible, given your mediocre forces.

But if you sense in yourself the strength of youth, if you want to live, if you want to enjoy a whole, full, overflowing life – that is to say, to know the greatest pleasure that a living being can desire – be strong, be great, be energetic in everything you do.

Sow life around you. Notice that to deceive, lie, scheme, trick, is to degrade yourself, belittle yourself, to acknowledge your weakness in advance, to act like the slave of a harem who feels inferior to his master. Do this if you like, but then know in advance that humanity will consider you small, mean, weak, and treat you accordingly. Not seeing your strength, it will treat you as a being who deserves pity – pity only. Do not blame humanity, if you yourself thus paralyse your force of action.

On the contrary, be strong. And once you have seen an injustice and you have understood it – an iniquity in life, a lie in science, or a suffering inflicted by another – rebel against the inequity, the lie and the injustice. Struggle! Struggle is life all the more intense as the struggle becomes sharper. And then you will have lived; and you will not give a few hours of this life for years spent vegetating in the decay of the swamp.

Struggle so that all may live this rich and overflowing life, and be sure that in this struggle you will find joys greater than you could find in any other activity. This is all that the science of morality can tell you. The choice is yours.

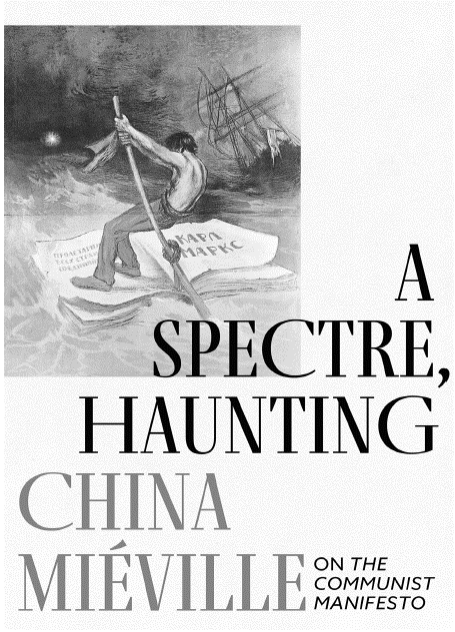
Reviews

Praxis, Lacking:

On *The Communist Manifesto* and its historical context

Iain McKay

The commentary on the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* must exceed the word count of that little pamphlet by a factor of thousands, if not more. To this grand number is added another, *A Spectre, Haunting: On* ***The Communist Manifesto*** (London: Head of Zeus, 2022) by British Marxist fantasy writer China Miéville.



As would be expected from his novels, this is a well written book but it is also marred by a tendency towards fantasy, for Miéville projects *his* politics backwards onto Marx. Yet there is over 150 years separating this book from the pamphlet it seeks to explain and yet, ironically given Marxist claims on the importance of praxis, Miéville's account singularly fails to discuss what activity the *Manifesto* contributed to during that time. He also fails to place it into its historical context and rather than discovering what was almost certainly meant, he projects backwards more appealing notions (usually honoured in the breach by Marxists) whose origins are to be found in another socialist school, anarchism.

To start with an obvious example, the question of democracy. Miéville writes:

> '[T]he first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle of democracy'… The traditional counterposing of democracy and communism is the result of decades of anticommunist propaganda. But in fact the problem for communists has, rather, been that the parliamentary democracy which is the only version on offer is not nearly democratic enough… communism [would be] a new kind of collaborative collectivity, more empowering *and more democratic*, at all levels, than any form of democracy hitherto seen

A few words – "to win the battle of democracy" – are doing a lot of heavy lifting here. It is simply assumed that Marx and Engels had this vision of "democracy" but there is nothing in the *Manifesto* to support it. After all, the "Principles of Communism", written by Engels and which served as a draft for the *Manifesto*, states that a revolution "will inaugurate a *democratic constitution* and thereby, directly or indirectly, the political rule of the proletariat" and notes that "a democratic constitution has been introduced" in America. This is repeated in 1891:

> If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown… the proletariat can only use the form of the one and indivisible republic… How self-government is to be organised and how we can manage without a bureaucracy has been shown to us by America and the First French Republic…

In short, by "democracy" they simply did not mean Miéville's vision at all. As Engels noted in 1895, it meant simply "the winning of universal suffrage".

The root cause of this is undoubtedly that Marx and Engels do "outline the bourgeoisie's capturing of political power and eulogise its political, economic and spiritual impact on the world", which is a problem as Communism is seen as the next stage from capitalism which builds upon – and utilises – what the bourgeoisie creates. It does not ponder whether the structures created by the bourgeoisie (a minority) to secure its position as the ruling class *can* be used by the people (the majority) nor the

fundamental difference that the bourgeoisie had economic power before taking over political power, while the proletariat secures political power to have economic power. Neither does Miéville.

Nor does Miéville query whether concentrating political power into a few hands as the State does really mean popular power. Ironically, in 1891 Engels indicated the reality of America's "democratic constitution" and how it failed to stop societal organs like "the state power…, in pursuance of their own special interests, transform[ing] themselves from the servants of society into the masters of society… in America… there exists… no bureaucracy with permanent posts or the right to pensions, and nevertheless… the nation is powerless against these two great cartels of politicians, who are ostensibly its servants, but in reality exploit and plunder it."

there is no discussion on how the *Manifesto*'s measures produce state-capitalism, the state as boss employing wage-workers, organising their labour, keeping their products and allocating both as it sees fit.

Miéville himself laments the reality of the American system in undermining democracy, such as "the extraordinary anti-democratic power of the Senate" and the "avowedly antidemocratic" Constitution. And yet this is the model Engels had in mind when the *Manifesto* was penned and in 1891 – even after admitting its reality.

The fact is that democracy is used to refer to a wide-range of possibilities – from the nominally democratic (whereby a few leaders are elected to administer a centralised and bureaucratic top-down structure every few years) to that based on meaningful participation and self-government (a self-managed bottom-up federation) – and Marxists have favoured the former and disparaged the latter despite at times recognising the realities of these hierarchical systems.

What of the relationship between socialists ("party") and class? True, there is an admission of "the unedifying elitism of some activists" but this is not allowed to stop the conclusion that "a party model doesn't imply a hierarchical top-down model of persuasion" even though it always has.

This flows from the *Manifesto*, which proclaims that the Communists are "the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties" and have "theoretically… over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement." What happens if the "the great mass of the proletariat" disagree with the policies of the party? Given that there is a State modelled on the bourgeois republic which invests the party leadership with substantial power, this is an important question – and we have the answer as Marxist regimes *have* repressed the proletariat because of the "advantage of clearly understanding" what is *really* in its interests.

Thus class consciousness is equated with how much the class agrees with the party leadership – who appear to be non-proletarians for, lest we forget, "a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class" and this "portion of the bourgeois ideologists" have "raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole." Sadly, Miéville does not discuss whether this could *not* produce the "elitism" and "hierarchical top-down model" which he bemoans.

Nor can economic transformation solve the problem for the economic vision of the *Manifesto* is limited. There is no mention of workers' management of production: nationalisation is the demand, not socialisation. Miéville does not mention this, saying that it "is committed to some model of communal democratic ownership, in place of the existing system of individual private property, profit and competitive accumulation." But what model is being advocated? Not "communal ownership of productive capacity" nor "democratic grassroots control of society's productive capacity", but centralised *State* ownership and control.

The famous ten demands of the *Manifesto* are paraphrased and sanitised – no "industrial armies" (so avoiding having to mention Trotsky's ideas in 1920) and no "common plan" (so avoiding having to discuss its practicality whether then or now) while "the abolition of children's factory labour in its present form" becomes "abolition of child labour". The demands urging the "centralisation" of economic activity "into the hands of the State" are not discussed. It is, rightly, noted that "[s]ome of these now read as remarkably mild" which

"hardly necessitate the overturning of capitalism. Others… even if in the abstract compatible with capitalism in some form, seem highly unlikely ever to be permitted by actually existing capitalists." Yet, most of them can be – and have been – applied under capitalism. State ownership and control is compatible with capitalism and is in no way socialist (nor even has to have socialists in office to be achieved).

Strangely, there is no discussion on how the *Manifesto*'s measures produce state-capitalism, the state as boss employing wage-workers, organising their labour, keeping their products and allocating both as it sees fit.

That this is what was intended is justified by the historical context. In late 1886 Marx's daughter and her husband were touring America and as well as urging using the ballot-box to "conquer political power" in order to then "conquer economic power", they gave the telling example of the "post-office, a great and immense institution is worked… [b]y the community, for the benefit of the community. That is socialism... you have already a socialistic institution, the post-office." Lenin later gave the same example. Yet there is no workers' control in the post office and whatever democracy exists is simply that the representatives elected to govern the people also overview its activities.

Miéville does mention that in the 1872 German preface the authors "discouraged excessive focus on those 'revolutionary measures'" and suggests that "none of these particular measures were shibboleths even as stepping stones", yet this is disingenuous given that *every* Marxist party and regime has used them as a template for what it considered "socialism" and as policies precisely *because* of their place in the *Manifesto* (and lack of alternatives elsewhere).

There is a complete lack of concern about adding economic power to political power. This blindness flows from the *Manifesto* which nowhere suggests that the State itself – and the bureaucracy which any such centralised and hierarchical social organisation produces– has interests of its own, is a class in itself. It is relegated to simply a machine utilised by whatever class happens to "win the battle of democracy" (elect the executive). Given this perspective, it is unproblematic to centralise into its hands more and more functions.

Significantly, Engels' analysis in 1891 of America's woes failed see that the American State then lacked a large bureaucracy simply because it did little beyond protect property and repress proletarian and indigenous rebellions. As its activities increased, so has its bureaucracy. And by recommending that we centralise economic activities into the hands of the State, the *Manifesto* hands them over to the bureaucracy and creates state-capitalism.

Given that Miéville was a member of the British SWP which prided itself in recognising Stalinism as state-capitalism (ignoring both the belatedness as well as the weakness of that specific analysis), it seems strange that there is no mention how the demands of the *Manifesto* mirror the reality of Stalinist Russia, that they simply changed who the workers are exploited and oppressed by, from the boss to the bureaucrat.

It may be objected that Marx and Engels hated bureaucracy and sought to destroy it. Indeed, but their policies made a growth in its size and power inevitable – as shown by the Bolsheviks who likewise railed against bureaucrats while their number, power and privileges grew. Reality will always overcome rhetoric.

This shows the fallacy in the *Manifesto*'s notion that after "all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character" for this "is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another." Yet the "public power" itself remains, after all it has centralised and is managing the whole economic life of the nation (or world). Given this, any change is merely a change of words for it is based on class being defined by ownership of the means of production by individuals rather than by a collective body like a State.

Thus we have the structural and ideological preconditions for the rule of an ever-reducing minority – of the proletariat over the peasant and artisan majority, of the elected party over the proletariat, of the (non-proletariat) leadership over the party. This "one and indivisible republic" which combines political and economic remits (and so power) would inevitably spawn around it a bureaucracy in its attempts to make and implement its decisions and so a new ruling class would be forged proclaiming it knows what is best for the masses.

This, of course, summarises Bakunin's prophetic critique of Marx but unfortunately the chapter "Criticisms of the *Manifesto*" looks elsewhere at more easily refutable critics from the right.

For an ideology which claims to stress praxis, Marxists seem less than keen to discuss Marxism's legacy. This work is no exception. It is noted that "the 1870s began the turnaround for the text in earnest" and "there commenced then forty years of the rise of social-democratic labour parties" while "1917, the Russian Revolution, was a key turning point" when "the leaders of the massive and powerful state… declare[d] their fidelity to the text". Sadly, he does not mention how both these developments had a distinctly negative impact on socialism – the former degenerated into reformism, the latter produced state-capitalism.

So while the "unhappy history of many self-styled Marxist parties in and out of power" is mentioned, this does not dent the "conviction of the necessity of a revolutionary party for a ruptural politic".

Miéville… believes that "top-down and authoritarian politics diametrically opposed to the grassroots democracy of socialism" only "emerged" in Russia when "Socialism in One Country" was raised… in 1925!

Taking the path of "political action", given the failure of Social Democracy, the Greens, SYRIZA (imposing the austerity it was elected to stop) and so many others, can we *really* say "the relationship of the socialist movement to the state is open to debate"? How many times are we to go down the same path and expect to end up somewhere else? Can it still be hoped that rhetoric will defeat reality?

Yet there is no contradiction – as is implied – between the *Manifesto* and its authors "repeatedly moot[ing] the possibility of non-violent social transformation in certain circumstances". These circumstances were twofold – universal suffrage (in the *Manifesto*) and the lack of a bureaucracy inherited from absolutism (post-*Manifesto*). Yet the first factor seemed to outweigh the second, as can be seen when Engels proclaimed France as joining America, Britain and Holland as countries suitable for a purely ballot-box revolution. As such, the *Manifesto* was "blind" – to use Miéville's words – "to the structural opposition to meaningful reform, let alone rupture, baked into bourgeois states" which are also "very often overtly anti-democratic, too, constraining ruptural or even reformist possibilities from without and within." Sadly, the strategy recommended did nothing to cure that blindness and in fact maintains it – as can be seen by this passing attempt to engage with the anti-parliamentarian position:

> "Excepting certain left anarchists and so-called 'ultraleftists', for whom any involvement at all with the existing state is to be shunned, most revolutionary communists, including Marx, consider the push for reforms by whatever means are available to be crucial to the process of gaining strength towards the ultimate aim."

Ignoring the pointless placing of "left" before anarchist (it is like saying Marxists are "left socialists" and Nazis are "right socialists"), shunning the State does *not* preclude "the push for reforms" as anarchists have always argued that these should be won by collective direct action rather than be left to politicians acting on our behalf. This does involve "gaining strength" in a way which electioneering does not, indeed undermines (compare the response of the German labour movement in 1933 with that of the Spanish in 1936). Anti-parliamentarianism does not mean ignoring the State but rather fighting it with the same weapons used to fight capital.

There is the admission that "the struggle may be considerably harder than Marx and Engels imagined" but no acknowledgement that the tactics they advocated ("political action", electioneering) contributed immensely to that. That said, it is right to say that "this doesn't in and of itself invalidate their view of the working class as the 'agent of history' capable of overturning oppression and exploitation." The question is learning the lessons of that struggle, something this book avoids – for obvious reasons. True, in the short-term votes and parties may grow, but in the long-term, socialism – which is the point! – grows ever distant. Rather than socialists conquering power, power conquers the socialists; rather than the State withering away, socialism does.

The underlying fallacy is clear: "by whatever means are available" ignores that what is relevant are means which *result in the objective desired*. If we wish socialism, we need means which take us towards that rather than away from it. Drawing of (elements) of the labour movement into

parliamentarianism may have been inevitable (and far easier than organising militant unions), what was not inevitable was spinning this activity as somehow revolutionary. In this, the *Manifesto* provided a radical camouflage under which reformism grew and constructive socialism withered – as Bakunin predicted.

What of the revolutionary path? If the "dictatorship of the proletariat" refers to a multi-party democratic system then it has only existed for a brief period from November 1917 to around July 1918, a period also marked – in the political sphere – by centralisation of power into fewer and fewer hands, the side-lining of soviet assemblies, bureaucratisation, popular alienation and the creation of armed forces separate from the people (a secret police and an undemocratic Red Army) to repress any expression of that alienation in the shape of protests, strikes and electing the wrong people to soviets. In the economic sphere, the party implemented policies which centralised economic activity and power into the hands of the State, so building a state-capitalism based on state-appointed managers armed with "dictatorial" authority (to use Lenin's word). The vision of "socialism" inherited from the *Manifesto* was used to combat the *genuine* socialistic attempts made by workers to exercise economic power (such as the factory committees) as not being socialist (usually dismissed as "anarchist dreams"). Significantly, this authoritarianism began well before civil war started.

Yet Miéville is right to lament that "strain of showboating machismo within the Left that treats consideration of any revolutionary parameters other than more or less precisely those of St Petersburg October 1917… as effete perfidy", particularly as those who do so fail to understand the reality of that event and its aftermath. This applies to Miéville himself as he believes that "top-down and authoritarian politics diametrically opposed to the grassroots democracy of socialism" only "emerged" in Russia when "Socialism in One Country" was raised… in 1925!

So like most Marxists, he seems unaware how quickly the Bolshevik regime became a State in the usual sense and then a *de facto* one-party state-capitalist dictatorship. Significantly, the ideology of the ruling party quickly and easily adapted itself to this reality, proclaiming to the world the necessity of party dictatorship to ensure a "successful" revolution and urging socialists across the globe to follow their example. Sadly, many did – and we are still suffering the consequences.

The issue of praxis also applies to the 1848 Revolution. While the *Manifesto* played no role in events, Germany saw contradictions between rhetoric and reality.

It is suggested that its authors were "[u]tterly committed to the cause of the working class as the far-left edge of the democratic revolution, they held that, as a bourgeois revolution, this democratic republic had to be ushered in by the bourgeoisie as part of a class alliance against the old rulers", yet in reality they completely subordinated the workers to the bourgeoisie and hid the politics of the *Manifesto*. As Miéville notes, this position eventually changed, and they argued that workers should press their own demands (but still in response to the demands of the bourgeoisie) but then argued workers had to "strive for a single and indivisible German republic, but also within this republic for the most determined centralisation of power in the hands of the state authority", failing to see that this not only allowed the bourgeoisie to abolish the "remnants of the Middle Ages" but also to crush the proletariat for strengthening the bourgeois State would make the overthrow of capitalism harder.

Likewise, it is strange to read that, "[f]or the *Manifesto*, internationalism is a sine qua non of the workers' movement, and of any successful revolution" but no mention that there was not a war in which Marx and Engels did not take sides, nor of their warmongering during the 1848 Revolutions – war with Russia and Denmark, wars to "civilise" or "wipe out" *non-historic peoples* – nor their casual racism (mostly against Slavs but Engels also found time to be happy "that magnificent California was snatched from the lazy Mexicans, who did not know what to do with it" by "the energetic Yankees"). As well as a rejection of Internationalism in practice, there was also an opposition to the right of national self-determination as advocated by Bakunin.

Given this, in spite of its many merits which Miéville ably summarises, perhaps if the *Manifesto* had gone "the way of all the hundreds of other angry radical documents of the nineteenth century", then we would be closer to socialism now. After all, why something which should be self-contained – a pamphlet – needs such clarification is an indictment in itself. That there is a whole series of books explaining "what Marx

really meant" is significant. Indeed, this review will be met with complaints that some obscure passage in a text published long after both Marx and Engels were in the grave has gone unmentioned – for some, anarchist critiques of Marxism fail because they do not take into account such writings (this does not stop the likes of Lenin and Trotsky, equally unaware of these texts, from being true Marxists). However, we need to look at what was written in the text and determine what it would mean then.

Which is why it is important to understand what readers at the time would understand by the words used. Terms like "association" or "democracy" have a wide meaning. It can mean a federation of self-managed workers' associations in which managers are elected and decisions made by workplace assemblies. It can also mean a situation in which everyone amongst millions or billions get to elect a central body once every few years which then creates a "common plan" which its appointed managers tell the workers to execute. One is obviously more appealing than the other, but both do fit the same term. That the *Manifesto* does not indicate what it means suggests that we need to take the most likely meaning, the second vision.

The evidence of over 150 years of praxis inspired by it is clear – it did not, *for it cannot*. To make that vision a reality, we need to turn to another socialist tradition, that of anarchism.

Another complaint may be the lack of discussion of the Paris Commune. Indeed, it is true that the Commune is "crucial for later readings of the *Manifesto*" but that does not mean failing to understand what was meant in 1848 – particularly as this work rather than *The Civil War in France* informed the actual practice of Marxists. Nor should we forget that if the Parisian workers had listened to Marx then the Commune would never have happened and so he would never have enlightened us on what he "really" had in mind.

Yet even that is not quite right, given that most of *The Civil War in France* is simply *reporting* on events by people with other ideas. That many of the Communards were influenced by Proudhon should go without saying – and his rival's influence *does* go unmentioned by Marx while its manifestations are praised. It may have "inaugurated radical innovations to maintain organic links between the administrative apparatus and the working class" but it did so by applying libertarian ideas which had been circulating within the French working class for years. Moreover, the robustness of any "organic link" simply cannot be asserted – Marx can be forgiven as he was writing in London based on limited knowledge but anarchists have been exploring the limitations of the Commune since Kropotkin's earliest articles, limitations relevant to subsequent revolutions.

What of the political and economic forms praised in 1871? Is it unfair to Marx and Engels to expect them to anticipate in 1848 such future developments? No, for Proudhon's election manifesto of the same year included calls for mandates and recall, the fusion of executive and legislative functions as well as democratic associations to run industry. This also shows why any suggestion that ideas like workers' control were a given for Marx and so did not need to be stated is unconvincing, given for that Proudhon publicly raised such ideas in order to differentiate his ideas from what passed for socialism then.

As for the lesson "that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes', but must transform it", this does not address *how* that transforming would take place – social democrats like Kautsky and Martov considered it obvious that this would be done in-line with the *Manifesto*, by electoral means. Nor can it really be said that these much-quoted words from *The Civil War in France* really present "a new focus on questions of politics and political form, by which economic change might be attempted" for the *means* suggested to secure political power are not mentioned at all. In this, Miéville – like Lenin in *The State and Revolution* – ignores or misreads far too many comments by the *Manifesto*'s authors.

Whether in the degeneration of social democracy or the transformation of the hope of the Russian Revolution into the reality of state-capitalist party dictatorship, the *Manifesto* looms large – for it paved the way for both. Yet its vision of "the fulfilment of human need and the flowering of human potential, on the basis of communal, democratically controlled social property" *is* appealing. The question is whether the *Manifesto*

can secure that or not. The evidence of over 150 years of praxis inspired by it is clear – it did not, *for it cannot*. To make that vision a reality, we need to turn to another socialist tradition, that of anarchism.

Anarchism *is* mentioned when Miéville discusses the *Manifesto*'s bizarre labelling of Proudhon's *Philosophy of Poverty* as "an example" of "bourgeois socialism". Indeed, he is right to say that this "is questionable. Proudhon was and is famous as an anarchist thinker committed to fundamental social change, and profoundly opposed to the bourgeois state." Not only that, Marx had suggested in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (when not seriously distorting what Proudhon had argued) that he was a "petit bourgeois" – why this insult was changed just for the *Manifesto* has never been explained and Miéville's suggestion (that it "was designed as much as anything to troll Proudhon") is as good as any. Of course, Marx being "deeply opposed to anarchism in general and Proudhon in particular" never stopped him from borrowing, without acknowledgement, many of his ideas (albeit placing them in an alien context which nullifies their benefits, like the "infallible" recall Engels pointed to in 1891). This can be seen from the *Manifesto*'s discussion of property – ably summarised by Miéville – which is a straight lift from Proudhon's *What is Property?*. This can be seen from the reporting in *The Civil War in France*.

For an anarchist, it comes as no surprise that a serious engagement with anarchism is missing from the book – after all, the critiques of Bakunin and other anarchists were proven right and mentioning this would be hard to square with positively evaluating the *Manifesto*. Sadly, space excludes further discussion but hopefully this review will prompt an investigation of what anarchism stands for based on what anarchists – rather than Marxists – have written about it. *An Anarchist FAQ* would be a good starting point, particularly as it discusses in Section H all the issues raised here.

The Mistakes of the Guildsmen

Workers' Dreadnought, 1 April 1922

"Guild Socialism Re-stated," by G. D. H. Cole, Leonard Parsons, Portugal Street, Price- 6s.

In this book, Mr. Cole has made a woefully unsuccessful attempt to visualise a non-capitalist system. He cannot rid 'himself of the ideology of the shopkeeper, the banker and the employer.

In his "Self-Government in Industry," published in 1917, Mr. Cole sketched out his idea of Guild Socialism. It was a combination of Syndicalism and State Socialism. Apparently the scheme he then propounded seemed to him fairly complete, for he said:

> "We are the world's builders; and, unless we lay down our foundations truly, the whole structure which we rear will come tumbling to the ground, no matter how fine our architecture may be. *Guildsmen are well pleased with their architects*; they have now to make equally sure of their builders."

In his present work, "Guild Socialism Re- Stated," Mr. Cole has made substantial changes in the architecture with which he was so well pleased. This is all to the good; perhaps he will at last arrive at the Communist goal, though he is still exceedingly far away.

In his book of 1917, Mr. Cole's Guild Socialism demanded a National Guild Council and the (retention of Parliament and the present local governing bodies. Should there be a dispute (the "Guildsmen," as Mr. Cole and his followers call themselves, are always anticipating disputes), a body representing both Parliament and the Guild Council, would settle it.

Mr. Cole then thought that the Trade Unions and Parliament were analogous bodies; for he regarded them as both having begun as "a half-articulate challenge to autocracy, the one in the industrial, the other in the political sphere. He observed that "gaining recognition a s a critical force," Parliament became, after centuries of struggle, the legislative body and subordinated to itself the executive.

It seems to us that Parliament has by no means "subordinated to itself the executive"; but let that pass. Mr. Cole indicated that the Trade Unions in their own sphere would pass through similar stages. They would develop from a critical force to "direct and positive power," then Parliament and the Unions now called the Guilds, would reign side by side.

In his latest book he has changed all that. Previously he went a-borrowing to the Fabians and the Syndicalists; now he has borrowed also from Soviet Russia. To do so is becoming popular. Mr. Cole has decided to Russify his Parliament, or, to be more accurate, to Soviet- Governmentise it. He does not exactly copy the Russian patchwork, and he uses some different terms; but he comes very near to it. Instead of Parliament and the local governing bodies, he substitutes National Communes and Local Communes: Village Communes, Town Communes, Township Communes, Regional Communes – the larger bodies being formed of delegates from the smaller.

In his earlier book, Mr Cole made the general ballot of members in given districts, or in given trades, the main method of election in his Guilds. But now he chooses the Russian method, saying he approves indirect election, if checked by the recall. He even boldly cuts the roots of popular election away by dictating that if a delegate be appointed by a committee to represent it as a delegate, he will cease to represent and be subject to recall by the original electors. Only the committee which has sent him to sit on another committee can now recall him.

Still more Russian is the basic composition of Mr. Cole' s Commune. He explains how it would be formed in a single town – Norwich:

> "(a) A number of Industrial Guilds, organising and managing various industries and economic services, united in a Guild Council of delegates or representatives drawn from these guilds;
>
> "(b) A Co-operative Council;
>
> "(c) A Collective Utilities Council;
>
> "(d) A number of Guilds organising and managing various civic services – Civic Guilds;
>
> "(e) A Cultural Council;
>
> "(f) A Health Council."

This mixture is called the Commune, and acts as the counter-balance of the Guild Council in Mir. Cole's scheme; the Commune representing the individual as consumer, the Guild Council as producer, according to the favourite Guild Socialist fallacy.

It should be explained that the Cultural Council consists of representatives of the Education Guild (composed of teachers) and of representatives elected by all the citizens. The Health Council has a similar dual composition, and other such Councils are foreshadowed, as beside the railway guilds, electric guilds, etc., there may be organisations of railway users, electricity users, and so on. Moreover, there are the Cooperatives, representative of domestic consumers, and the Collective Utilities Councils representative of collective consumers.

he proposes that the Guilds should draw up wages scales, and these should be submitted to the Guilds Congress, and then further submitted to the National Commune. Red tape will certainly be the most plentiful commodity in Mr. Cole's Guild Society.

As you see, dear readers, a complicated array. But let us come now to the real crux of the matter. Is Mr. Cole proposing a Communist State, or is he not? Has his brand of Guild Socialism any claim to be called Socialism at all?

In his earlier book Mr. Cole had a section entitled *The Abolition of the Wage System*. That title read 'hopefully, but it turned out to mean merely this:

> "(1) Recognition and payment as a human being, and not merely as the mortal tenement. of so much labour power for which an efficient demand exists.
>
> "(2) Consequently, payment in employment and unemployment, in sickness and in health alike.
>
> "(3) Control of the organisation of production, in co-operation with his fellows.
>
> "(4) A claim upon the product of his work, also exercised in co-operation with his fellows."

This, of course, is not the 'abolition of wages at all! Poor M. Cole cannot conceive of really abolishing wages and money and buying and selling; the air of the counting-house hangs about him.

In his present work he proposes that the Guilds should draw up wages scales, and these should be

submitted to the Guilds Congress, and then further submitted to the National Commune. Red tape will certainly be the most plentiful commodity in Mr. Cole's Guild Society. He further says "equality of income cannot, and must not be made a condition of the establishment of the Guild system." He does not appear to favour equal wages; but he believes that eventually the national income will be divided "among the members of the community, without regard to any particular work or service."

One would have liked to believe Mr. Cole means by this, that all will be entitled to the free, unmeasured use of social products. Evidently, however, he contemplates an actual division of money – a really foolish idea.

Everything is to be bought and sold in the Guild Socialist Community. Individuals and Guilds will buy and sell, and the Communal Councils will regulate the budgets of the Guilds. In the present book this is clear, but the details are less explicit than in the earlier volume; perhaps Mr. Cole feels less sure that he will remain satisfied with his architecture.

Mr. Cole does not contemplate the complete socialisation of production, ether industrial or agricultural. He does not propose the complete abolition of hired labour. He says:

> "I simply do not feel that it is practicable to deny to the small-scale producers, whether individual or associative groups, all right to employ others."

That is because you still ding to the wages system, Mr. Cole. If we all lived as brothers and sisters, taking what we required of the common produce, a man could confidently ask: "Will you help me to get in my hay before the rain comes?" without any question of payment, because his hay would be something in which everyone would be interested, and because brotherly relations would obtain between the people.

Mr. Cole observes that the community will, under Guild Socialism, prevent men from exploiting the labour of wives and children.

If he were abolishing wages and buying and selling, a man would have neither incentive nor power to exploit the labour of his wife and children, nor of anyone else.

Mr. Cole further suggests that a man may work as a member of the Agricultural Guild on a large-scale farm, and also work a small-scale farm of his own. He would undertake the double work to earn double wages, we suppose, and probably he would sell his produce at a lower price than that asked by the Guild.

Oh, Mr. Cole, what a foolish morass you have got yourself into, all because you cannot get away from the shopkeepers' frame of mind. Have you ever read Kropotkin's "Conquest of Bread," Mr. Cole? Study that book. We believe, when you have done so, you will not template that a man living in a free society choose to spend all his day planting cabbages for the Guild, and then go home in the evening to plant more cabbages in his own little patch, in order to earn a little more money.

Mr. Cole does not agree with Kropotkin that we should all take a hand in the productive work not done by the black-coated fraternity, Mr. Cole's Communes are to control the Army and the police. These will be needed, of course, in the community of his desire, for private property and wagery would continue.

Book Review: Comrade Morris

G.N.O.

Freedom: The Anarchist Weekly, 7 January 1956

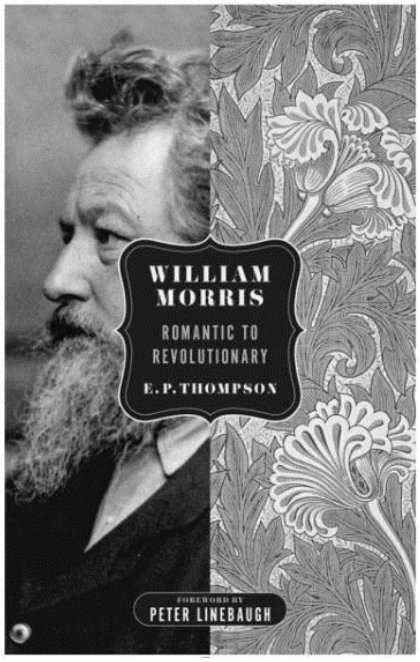
William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary, by E.P. Thompson. Lawrence & Wishart. 50s.

In the history of British socialism there has been no genius comparable to William Morris. Artist, poet, craftsman and revolutionary, he was the embodiment of the socialist conception of the complete man. Among the small but distinguished band of men and women who contributed to the revival of socialism in the 1880s, he stood out as the prophet of a full-blooded, warm-hearted socialist future, of a society in which, as he put it, there would be 'no master high or low'. Even those who disagreed most strongly with his views could not deny his genius.

It is not surprising, therefore, that his life and work should now he surrounded by legend and that each of the several warring sects which call themselves 'socialist' should lay claim to his mantle. One of the most active propagators of 'the Morris myth'

was the self-appointed disciple. Bruce Glasier, who sought to show that Morris's socialism was fully in accord with the mushy sentimentalism of the old I.L.P. Later, J. S. Middleton, former secretary of the Labour Party, found himself 'able to suppose' that those of Transport House were 'the historical heirs to his activities'. More recently, a Mr. Clement Attlee, the former M.P. for Walthamstow, Morris's birthplace, has found it convenient to invoke the name of Morris on many public occasions. The Labour Party, his audiences were told, owes more to Morris than to Marx.

The Communist Party too has not been idle. Twenty years ago Page Arnot published a brief *Vindication* of Morris the revolutionary and now comes Mr. Thompson's 900-page, amply-documented life which seeks to show that Morris was a proto-Stalinist. Naturally, not having had the advantage of being guided by the principles of Comrades Lenin and Stalin, Morris was guilty of certain deviations. He committed the error of 'purism' which led to a divorce between the socialist movement and the masses and, almost to the end of his career, he persisted in the infantile policy of anti-parliamentarianism. But – so Mr. Thompson would have us believe – Morris was continually anticipating the theories of the Bolsheviks in other respects. "Were William Morris alive to-day," he concludes, "he would not look far to find the party of his choice."



There is this much to be said for Mr. Thompson's novel thesis. Unlike the one fostered by the latest addition to the Labour Peerage, it is at least ostensibly based on a wide reading of Morris's own work. Unfortunately for Mr. Thompson -- but fortunately for those who honour the memory of the real William Morris -- the base doesn't support the puerile conclusion. Only the most fanatical adherent of 'the party line' will, for example, see in Morris's innocent, if earnest, plea for individual sacrifice to 'the Cause' what Mr. Thompson sees an anticipation of the Bolshevik doctrine of the subordination of 'individual whims' to the collective decisions of the party. Nor is it easy for those whose minds are not encompassed by the straitjacket of Stalinist categories to read into Morris's passionate plea for socialist education of the workers a tendency to think in terms of a Bolshevik party of working class cadres which in the revolutionary period would assume the leadership of the wider organisations of the working class.

Mr. Thompson's search for Bill Morris, the party card-carrier, is in fact both pathetic and bathetic. The near ultimate in bathos, however, is reached when we are informed that 'Twenty years ago even among Socialists and Communists, many must have regarded Morris's picture of "A Factory as It Might Be" as an unpractical poet's dream: today visitors return from the Soviet Union with stories of the poet's dream already fulfilled'. No doubt, after this, we can look forward to the serialisation of 'News from Nowhere' in *Soviet News* as a prophetic description of life in the Workers' Paradise!

Fortunately, it is impossible even for so crass a writer as Mr. Thompson to fill 900 pages with such insults to the intelligence of his readers. Indeed, there is much in the book which makes essential reading for those interested in Morris's organisation – the Socialist League – a body whose influence has been persistently underestimated by our Fabian-inspired historians for whom the only significant events in socialist history are those leading up to the 1945 General Election.

Thompson's account of the League is, it is true, a Marxist account – which means that its activities are interpreted in the light of the latest party dogmas. The Anarchists, like Frank Kitz and Joseph Lane, who participated in it are dismissed as misguided leftists or as sterile destructivists and no clear picture of their policy emerges. On Anarchism Mr. Thompson is Stalin's Little Sir Echo and the reader is left wondering how a man of Morris's stature could have associated with the Anarchists for so long. Nevertheless. Mr. Thompson has ferreted out the basic facts about the League and has provided material for a more objective appraisal of its work.

In seeking to dispel the current myths about Morris, the author has succeeded only in fostering a new one. The book may however serve a useful purpose if it stimulates the reader to look for the real William Morris himself. Morris was never more than a 'semi-anarchist' (to use his own

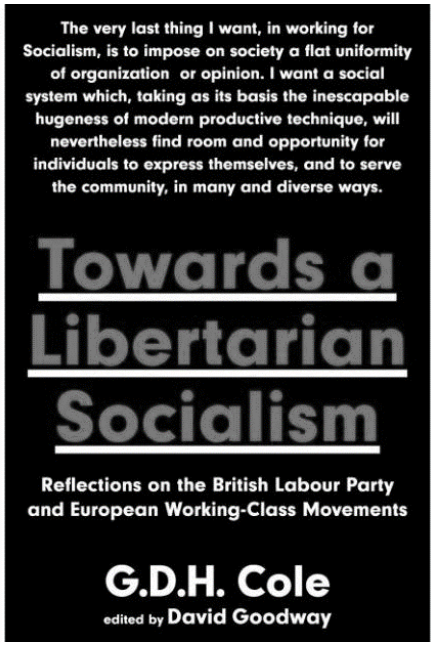
description), just as he was, for all Mr. Thompson's special pleading, never more than a semi-Marxist. He never fully appreciated the force of the anarchist case nor did he attempt a serious rebuttal of it. His conception of anarchism was coloured by its manifestation in some of the more lunatic members of the League who were obsessed by the then current tactic of 'propaganda by the deed'. Nevertheless, Morris's socialism, or, as he preferred, his communism, has obvious affinities to the ideals of anarchist-communists and anarcho-syndicalists.

He was not. it may be said, a great or original thinker. His genius was not that of the intellect but of the imagination. He possessed above all the gift of creative vision. Appalled by the squalidness and greed of the capitalist society of his day, he set before his generation a vision of what society might and could be like if the evils of the property and profit system were abolished. To-day, when the vision of the socialists is limited, on the one hand, to the paltry ideal of Welfare Statism and, on the other, to the more horrifying ideal of proletarian party dictatorship, there is greater need than ever before to recapture something of the warmth and humanity that inspired Morris's vision.[1]

Towards A Libertarian Socialism

Iain McKay

G.D.H. *Cole, Towards A Libertarian Socialism: Reflections on the British Labour Party and European Working-Class Movements* (AK Press, 2021), David Goodway (Ed.)



There are many schools of libertarian socialist thought. The various schools of anarchism (mutualist, collectivist, communist, syndicalist and individualist) are the most famous but there are others, some better remembered than others. Council communism, for example, still has its adherents but others, such as the Guild Socialism of this excellent collection, do not. In this case, this is a distinct shame as the ideas of G.D.H. Cole (1889-1959) should be better known for they address issues still relevant to activists today and, unlike council communism, Guild Socialism is not encumbered by Marxist prejudices nor jargon and was all the better for this.

Beginning in 1906 when Arthur Penty published *Restoration of the Gild System*, the movement reached its peak influence during "the Great Unrest", the massive wave of industrial action between 1910 and 1914 during which syndicalists – not least, Tom Mann – played a significant role. Its most famous supporter was Bertrand Russell and his much-reprinted 1918 work *Proposed Roads to Freedom* discussed Marxism, Anarchism and Syndicalism before suggesting that Guild Socialism combined the best of all of these. While primarily a British phenomenon, Guild Socialist ideas did win converts elsewhere – most notably the Hungarian Karl Polanyi (author of *The Great Transformation*).

The initial idea of Guild Socialism was that the State would own the means of production but that their actual running would rest in the hands of the workers themselves, organising into democratically run national bodies called "guilds" (after the Medieval organisations of artisans although the Guild Socialists stressed they had no desire to reproduce guilds as they were or rejected an industrial economy). They considered it as half-way between the State Socialism (or "Collectivism") of the Fabians (which saw industry as being run by the State as the embodiment of consumers) and Syndicalism (which saw industry as being run by the workers themselves). The role given to the State in this set-up was to ensure that industry was run to benefit the wider public rather than the narrow interests of the workers within it, a danger which Syndicalists themselves recognised

[1] In the second edition, published in 1977 long after he had left the Communist Party as a result of Soviet intervention against the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Thompson revised the work to address this issues raised in this and other reviews. He also admits that he may have under-estimated the influence of Kropotkin in Morris' politics. (*Black Flag*)

with their joint federations of industrial unions and trade councils, the latter seeking to protect wider interests by grouping all unions within a given locality together.

As Cole notes, it aimed to achieve its goals "primarily by economic rather than parliamentary action" (116) and was "a halfway house between old-style trade unionism, with its limited objectives, and the full-bloodied revolutionism of Tom Mann and the Industrial Unionists." (94) Like anarchism and syndicalism, its goal was the abolition of wage-labour by means of workers' control for freedom "could not be real unless it rested on the free organisation of the economic life of society, through self-government at every level, from the workshop upwards… a free society could not coexist with an autocratic system of industrial control". (117-8) Cole repeatedly stressed the important of ending wage-labour, for example in his 1917 book *Self-Government in Industry*:

> What, I want to ask, is the fundamental evil in our modern Society which we should set out to abolish?
>
> There are two possible answers to that question, and I am sure that very many well-meaning people would make the wrong one. They would answer POVERTY, when they ought to answer SLAVERY. Face to face every day with the shameful contrasts of riches and destitution, high dividends and low wages, and painfully conscious of the futility of trying to adjust the balance by means of charity, private or public, they would answer unhesitatingly that they stand for the ABOLITION OF POVERTY.
>
> Well and good! On that issue every Socialist is with them. But their answer to my question is none the less wrong.
>
> Poverty is the symptom: slavery the disease. The extremes of riches and destitution follow inevitably upon the extremes of license and bondage. The many are not enslaved because they are poor, they are poor because they are enslaved. Yet Socialists have all too often fixed their eyes upon the material misery of the poor without realizing that it rests upon the spiritual degradation of the slave.

Cole's solution was to "take all the big industries out of capitalist hands in order, not to transfer them to bureaucratic control but to put them under a decentralised form of management in which the workers on the spot – and not merely their distant full-time officials – will have an effective say." (153) Thus Guild Socialism, like anarchism and syndicalism, recognised the necessity of real workers' control over production to truly destroy wage-labour.

However, like British Syndicalism, Guild Socialism did not survive long after the First World War with many of its supporters embracing Bolshevism ("Guild Communists") in spite of the lack of worker' control in Russia under Lenin's dictatorship. Cole, to his credit, was never tempted by the Bolshevik Myth although – as the essays in this book show – he did call it Socialism rather than the State Capitalism it actually was in spite (correctly) stating that "Industrial democracy is therefore an indispensable part of social democracy – that is, of Socialism." (222) Others moved to a more orthodox social-democratic position and supported the Labour Party and its reformist agenda. Cole was part of the latter faction. The 1930s seems to have seen him embrace a more "orthodox" socialism with an increased stress on economic planning, presumably reflecting the impact of the apparent "success" of Stalin's Five Year Plans on the wider left. However, as these essays show this was not a deep conversion and he was well aware it was "of the very nature of democratic planning to be much less tidy and complete than centralized planning from above can be made to appear, at any rate on paper." (272) His Guild Socialism remained and came back to the fore even if these views did not gain traction in either the Labour Party or the Fabian Society (little wonder David Goodway's excellent introduction is entitled "G.D.H. Cole: A Libertarian Trapped in the Labour Party").

There has been little written by anarchists on Guild Socialism. Hebert Read published his first political article (the two part "The World and the Guild Idea") in the journal of the National Guilds League (*The Guildsman*, edited by Cole) in 1917 but did not refer to the doctrine after he embraced anarchism in the 1930s (although in the early 1940s he did mention that the "self-government of the guilds" was one of the essential features of "a natural society" in *The Politics of the Unpolitical*). In the preface to the 1919 Russian edition of *The Conquest of Bread* (published under the title *Bread and Freedom* in Russia), Peter Kropotkin hoped that the "idolatry" of German Social Democracy

"will weaken in Russia" and "a desire will arise to become acquainted with what is being done in England in the direction of municipal and 'guild' socialism" as well as Pouget's *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution* which outlined "how many syndicalists understand social revolution from the view point of the trade unions."[1] Harry Kelly, an American anarchist, positively reviewed Guild Socialist books the same year in the New York *Freedom*.[2] The first significant account of Guild Socialism appeared in *Freedom* in 1956 as part of Geoffrey Ostergaard's series on "The Tradition of Workers' Control" before disappearing.[3]

A contemporary British syndicalist (whom Goodway rightly quotes, in part, in his introduction) was less than impressed with it:

> Middle-class of the middle-class, with all the shortcomings (we had almost said "stupidities") of the middle-classes writ large across it, "Guild Socialism" stands forth as the latest lucubration of the middle-class mind. It is a "cool steal" of the leading ideas of Syndicalism and a deliberate perversion of them.
>
> We do not so much object to the term "guild" as applied to the various autonomous industries linked together for the service of the common weal, such as is advocated by Syndicalism. But we do protest against the "State" idea which is associated with it in Guild Socialism.
>
> Middle-class people, even when they become Socialists, cannot get rid of the idea that the working-class is their "inferior"; that the workers need to be "educated," drilled, disciplined, and generally nursed for a very long time before they will be able to walk by themselves. The very reverse is actually the truth. The average middle-class person, even if sentimentally a Socialist, knows no more about the real lives and thoughts and aspirations of the workers than of some obscure African tribe. It has been thrown against some of the Syndicalists that they are "middle-class" men. Well, by birth and early education, may be. But circumstances have "declassed" us, so that we are now wage-workers; we are proletarians of the proletariat, and, realising this fact, we are class-conscious. Only one who has passed through the school of economic adversity is completed educated; only he can come en rapport, as it were, with the "soul" of the wage-workers, of whom he is now one himself.
>
> It is just the plain truth when we say that the ordinary wage-worker, of average intelligence, is better capable of taking care of himself than the half-educated middle-class man who wants to advise him. He knows how to make the wheels of the world go round. ("Trite and Tripe: A Collection of Fakes and Mugwumps on the Make", *The Syndicalist*, February 1914)

This somewhat sectarian account, while not without its truths, was written before Cole became a leading Guild Socialist thinker and, as elitist Fabian intellectual Beatrice Webb pondered, "[w]hy he remains so genuinely attached to the working class, so determined to help forward their organization, puzzles me. The desire *to raise the underdog and abuse the boss* is a religion with him, a deep-rooted emotion more than a conviction" (15) That Webb considered these traits as negative ones shows well the damage she and her husband inflicted upon British ideas of socialism. Cole, moreover, introduced to Guild Socialism a more pluralistic and non-Statist perspective:

> The State was to own the means of production: the organised workers were to administer them on the public's behalf. Later, the Guild Socialists fell out among themselves about the structure of the coming society – some holding that the State would continue to exist as the democratic organ of the whole people, while others looked forward to its replacement by some sort of federal structure representing the functional organisations of producers and consumers, and also the civic and cultural bodies standing for noneconomic values. (116)

Cole was a leading light of this grouping. So while the early Guild Socialists envisioned a role the

[1] Included in *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 2 No. 3 (Autumn 2022).

[2] Harry Kelly, "National Guilds", *Freedom: A Journal of Constructive Anarchism* (New York), August 1919; included in *Black Flag Anarchist Review* Vol. 3 No. 3 (Autumn 2023).

[3] This ran for thirteen issues in the anarchist weekly Freedom in 1956 with Guild Socialism discussed between 9 June and 7 July. The whole series was later published in book form: Geoffrey Ostergaard, *The Tradition of Workers' Control* (London: Freedom Press, 1997).

State (suitably reformed), Cole moved belong this and in *Guild Socialism Restated* (1920) argued for a federation of Communes to complement the Industrial Guilds. This development was logical enough for if wage-labour was to be rejected as freedom-destroying then how can the State be considered as any different?

With this new perspective, Guild Socialism came closest to anarchism with Cole advocating a system very reminiscent of Proudhon's mutualism (perhaps unsurprising as both were influenced by Rousseau). Many anarchists viewed the syndicalist position of just unions for all social functions as too narrow and, for example, Anarchist-communists had postulated the need for three interwoven federations – one based on unions for the economy, another on communes for the community and another of social groupings for cultural interests (see Kropotkin's *Modern Science and Anarchy*).

Cole, perhaps unsurprisingly given his position in the Fabians and the general contempt anarchism was and is treated in certain circles, denied he was an anarchist but as these articles show he was clearly sympathetic to our ideas. In his "Reflections on Democratic Centralism", for example, are very reminiscent of Malatesta's analysis of democracy and how it becomes, at best, the rule of the minority of those elected by the majority. In another article, he recounted how the Webbs said that everyone involved in politics was either an A (Anarchist) or a B (Bureaucrat) and while they proudly proclaimed themselves the latter, he was the former and he was happy to labelled an A. (232) Unsurprisingly, then, Cole's 1920 work – with its rejection of the State in favour of federated communes based on federated functional groups – is the closest the doctrine came to anarchism.

This is also reflected in Cole's socialism – like anarchism – being far wider than just a concern over poverty as he "want[ed] each individual man and woman to count, and to have a chance of living a satisfactory life of their own. Valuing individuality, I necessarily value difference, in which it finds expression." (62) The aim was to ensure that "the mass of mankind shall come to enjoy both greater leisure and more interesting employment, which they will be more and more be able to regard, not as unavoidable drudgery, but as an opportunity for creative self-expression." (289) In this, anarchism and Guild Socialism agreed and raised demands which could not be granted within capitalism (unlike, say, a legal minimum wage or welfare benefits).

However, while in general his grasp of anarchism was usually good, he let himself down when he wrote that "[c]o-operation always involves sacrifices as well as gains" and that "the anarchist view [is] that the sacrifices necessarily outweigh the gains". (54) It would be hard to find an anarchist who made such a claim rather than base their ideas on the benefits of voluntary and free association to those currently subject to the hierarchies of capitalism and statism. Likewise, while he often – and rightly – included anarchists within the libertarian (federalist) tradition of socialism he also suggested that those "who have stood out against the acceptance of this [centralising] trend have not been Socialists, but Anarchists such as Kropotkin". (278) However, these are minor points and do not detract from the importance of the ideas Cole was advocating Guild Socialism and its aim "to achieve its large ambitions for the creation of a libertarian Socialist society by building up, rather than uprooting". (139)

Which highlights a key issue with Guild Socialism, namely its gradualism and reformism (which Cole at times rightly bemoans). A social transformation along libertarian lines – rather than certain discrete even if important reforms won by social struggle – cannot be achieved slowly or incrementally but needs a revolution. This can be seen from the British Labour Party and its gradualism, which was reversed quite easily by various Tory governments. Unsurprisingly, a distinct feeling of disappointment permeates his accounts of the British Labour Government of 1945-1951, understandably given the limited nature of its reforms and because Cole had a firm idea of what genuine socialism actually meant. So while it may have alleviated the worse of the poverty experienced by the working class, it did not get to the heart of the issue and transform the relations within production – it addressed the *symptoms* rather than the *disease* as Cole had warned in 1917.

The reality of the British Labour government confirmed that Guild Socialist position that "a truly democratic Socialist society should rest on the widest diffusion of power and responsibility among working people, and that parliamentary Socialism would in practice result in a bureaucratic system which would leave the workers, even under public ownership, still 'wage-slaves' rather than free

men." (117) Moreover, as Cole notes, by the 1930s, the Labour Party adopted "the model" of "the Public Corporation, taken over from the Conservatives who had used it for the Central Electricity Board as well as for the BBC" while its leaders were "strongly hostile" to the idea of workers' control. (99) Unsurprisingly, "the Board system of administration… has led to highly centralised control and to a feeling among many workers that there is no great difference between employment by a public body and employment by a big capitalist employer." (193) Labour's reforms were tolerated by the ruling class because they reflected capitalist ideas rather than socialist ones.

These articles should help those who look back on that period as something to repeat see the errors of their nostalgia. It should also be noted that the articles included on the socialist and labour movements reflect his momentous multi-volume *History of Socialist Thought* (1953-1961) and are very perceptive. Thus, for example, he notes how the "German [Social Democratic] party, though it rejected Revisionism in theory, came more and more to accept it in practice, and to concentrate its efforts on the demand for social reforms" (109) although he does not, sadly, mention how this confirmed Bakunin's prediction of 1867 that electioneering would change these taking part in it rather than society.

Cole's disappointment with Labour in office undoubtedly flowed, like his Guild Socialism, from the influence of libertarian communist William Morris on his thought (Goodway rightly includes a speech on Morris by Cole). Indeed, he became a socialist after reading Morris's *News from Nowhere* and initially his Socialism "had very little to do with parliamentary politics, my instinctive aversion from which has never left me – and never will." (90) The "Labour Unrest" of 1910-14 also influenced him greatly and he was "attracted above all in [the strikes] by anything that involved an assertion of the worker's claim to equality of human rights with his 'betters'. Strikes against tyrannical employers or foremen, strikes for the right to a share in determining industrial policy, strikes for the right of workmen to do as they pleased in their hours of freedom from labour, strikes for trade union 'recognition', sympathetic strikes in which workers asserted their right to refuse to handle 'tainted goods' – all these possessed a human appeal which seemed to us, in comparison with the familiar processes of collective bargaining about wages and hours, to involve an assertion of higher status – a revolt against the 'undemocracy' of capitalist enterprise and of the bureaucratic State." (93-4)

These values are expressed in his Guild Socialism, recognising that a "worker spends so large a part of his working life in the place of employment that whatever occurs during the hours of work is bound to react powerfully on his general outlook" and so shape them "to be worse citizens, worse husbands or parents, and more wary and mistrustful in their everyday personal intercourse". (268, 269) Life cannot be compartmentalised into work and non-work for the social relations we experience in one area will impact in all the others. Thus "who rejects the principle of democracy as inapplicable to workers in his work, even if he calls himself a Socialist, is no democrat in any real sense of the word. As long as industry is run by a hierarchy from above", it "would be foolish to look for a society permeated in all its activities by the democratic spirit. He who is a slave or rebel in his daily working life will be also, in enough cases to affect the working of society, a slave, a rebel, or a tyrant in his conduct as a citizen and a man. Democracy… cannot exist in one aspect of life if it is persistently denied in another." (270)

Yet, as these essays make clear, Cole was well aware "democracy" was used to describe a wide range of systems – from voting every 4 or 5 years to elect a government which can do pretty much what it likes between elections to self-governing associations of equals. The former (bourgeois democracy) "is inconsistent with real democracy because masses so large and amorphous are incapable of acting together except under a top leadership which is bound to substitute its own control for the control of the mass it is supposed to lead. In other words, so-called 'mass democracy' inevitably leads to bureaucracy and bureaucratic control in which the individual is unable to make his voice heard in shaping policy." (282) The latter reflects anarchist values and Cole was completely correct in his support for it. To ensure individuals have as much self-government as possible the associations they form must also be self-governing just as the federations these form must also be self-governing.

Goodway's volume reminds us how Leninism narrowed the socialist vision for decades. Cole's Guild Socialist books, for example, were only reprinted in the 1970s with the rise of interest in workers' control in the 1960s, a development many

Leninists then shamefully paid lip-service to in spite of all their forefathers did to destroy it Russia and as a goal of socialism elsewhere. This shows that radicals must be wary of embracing what appears to be "successful" as all too many did after 1917. Likewise, just because a movement did not "succeed" does not mean that it is without merit – just as apparent "success" does not mean much if you compare the reality of the "successful" regime or movement with the goals it was initially advocating and meant to introduce. Given the reality of Bolshevik Russia or the British Labour Party to the ideals of Guild Socialism, it is clearly the latter which are of note if we are to avoid the failures of the former.

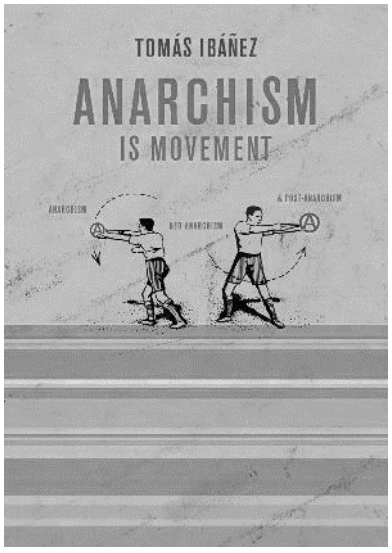
Finally, some may be surprised and disappointed to discover that the book contained no extracts from Cole's *Guild Socialism Restated* (1920), *Self-Government in Industry* (1917, 1920) or *Guild Socialism: A plan for Economic Democracy* (1921). However, this lack is explained by Goodway towards the end of his excellent introduction, namely that shortly before his death Cole was working with an Italian anarchist on a collection of his articles to be published in Italy. This failed to materialise, but Goodway has used the proposed volume as the basis of this collection. Hopefully this collection will provoke some demand for the reprinting of Cole's Guild Socialist books. David Goodway should be congratulated in producing this collection as it will hopefully introduce a sadly forgotten thinker to a new generations of radicals.

Challenging Anarchism

Ben Franks

Tomás Ibáñez, *Anarchism is Movement* (London: Freedom, 2019)
***Thinking as Anarchists: Selected Writings from Volontana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2022), edited by Giovanna Gioli and Hamish Kallin**

These two books examine how anarchism responds to changes in social conditions, such as new techniques of exploitation and oppression, but these volumes also challenge current anarchist theories and practices. These publications are intended as helpful, supportive interrogations from activists from within the movement rather than denunciations and outright rejections.



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Tomás Ibáñez's *Anarchism is Movement*'s questioning of older forms of anarchism generates one of the striking peculiarities of the text. For one of this volume's oddities is that both the foreword-writer, Peter Gelderloos (author of *The Failure of Non-Violence* and *The Solutions are Already Here*), and the afterword, written by the editors (Rob Ray and Scorsby of Freedom Press), disavow key features of the book. Similarly, though this review is going to encourage you to spend some of your limited time on this planet on engaging with this curious short volume (Tomás Ibáñez's material is 115 pages and can be finished by fluent readers in a few hours, but mulled over for longer), it too has major reservations about some of the text's arguments and conclusions. It is precisely because there are questionable features of the book that it is worth reading, even if the answers it produces are contrary to the author's intentions.

On one-hand Ibáñez's central argument could be simply expressed as: anarchism flourishes when it embraces social changes and engages with other radical movements and becomes ossified and ineffective when it becomes fixed by its own dogmas and entrenched ways of doing things. This, as it stands, is largely uncontroversial. Ibáñez points to the revivals of anarchism which occurred when it embraced new cultural developments and seized opportunities opened up by new technologies, whether it was the barricades and protest movements of the 1960s, again in the 1970s with punk, then the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) expansion that enabled the anti-capitalist/alternative-globalisation movement of the turn of the Millenia and 15M and *Occupy!* uprisings of a decade ago (27-8). As a longstanding Spanish anarchist activist, Ibáñez is able to draw on relevant and thoughtful examples.

In doing so, he also provides a short cogent account of 'neoanarchism', which is where anarchist principles interact with and imbue formerly non-anarchist movements, such as *Occupy!*, as well as providing a cogent account of 'postanarchism'.

He develops a subtle account of anarchism, which in his view needs to be in a constant state of struggle to survive and develop, that anarchist movements need to be continually updating and renewing themselves. He draws on his considerable experience of Spanish anarchism, recent postanarchist and poststructuralist theorists – as well as some its critics – to develop his critique of the main sections of the anarchist movement, which he sees as revelling in universalistic dogma and fossilised attitudes to non-anarchist others. A thinner account of anarchism allows for collaboration with other groups (neoanarchism), whilst an anarchism tied to too many fixed principles means it cannot adapt to changing circumstances or make impactful alliances.

There is much that is hugely invigorating and attractive in Ibáñez's book. It is optimistic, and at a time when many anarchists feel increasingly disempowered and pessimistic, it is worth engaging with an enthusiastic, passionate voice. However, there are some areas of concern.

First, there are problems with his general account of anarchism. Though Ibáñez is right that anarchism is not just a set of ideas but the social movement that embodies the key features of anarchist theory, the identification of the embodied theory is problematic. For Ibáñez defines anarchism by the single principle of 'anti-domination' being born out of practical struggles against capitalism and other forms of oppression (12-13). '*Anarchism is constantly forged in the practices of struggle against domination: outside of them, it withers away and decays' (*p.17 *emphasis* in the original). For Ibáñez anarchism is defined solely by antagonism, what it is against (50-51).

This account is problematic, not least on the grounds of consistency. Ibáñez criticises ossified anarchism for claiming universal truths and holding on to universal precepts, but then claims anarchism is based on one universal principle: 'anti-domination'. Indeed, most of the final chapter deals with what appears to be a false binary between either universalism or subjectivism, in which anarchists either have to claim that their principles are true for all time (a claim rightly dismissed as intellectually arrogant and unprovable) or just a matter of opinion, leading to the absurdity of saying that opposing Nazism is *just* a matter of individual choice (114). There are alternatives to such a false binary. It is possible to say that principles, norms and values are constructed by and through shared social practices. Stable, but not permanent, values (particular rules, norms and virtues) are required for social groups and tactics to develop and sustain. They are not simply down to individual choice, though individuals can adapt them.

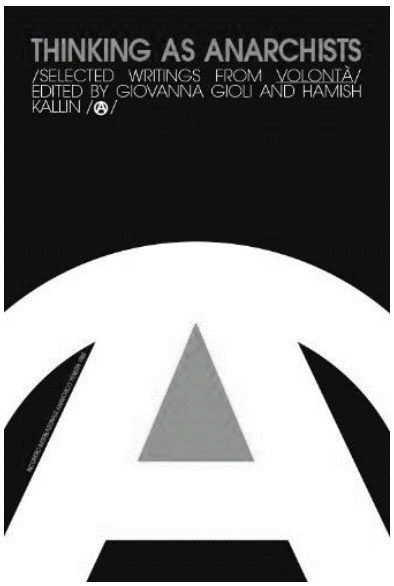
One way of defining anarchism is not by seeking to discover universal principles, but to recognise that there are core, stable, mutually defining features that adjust over time and place. In spaces, such as liberated zones, where domination is not present, one might still pursue anarchist social relations (co-operation, solidarity, mutual welfare, communal self-development and enjoyment) rather than atomised loneliness. As a result, *contra* Ibáñez, anarchism is not defined by anti-domination alone.

A further problem is Ibáñez's view that anarchism is solely understood through *opposition* to domination. This position is not unusual, and understandable given that the prevalence of so many oppressive forces, in particular, but not solely, capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism and racism. But seeing anarchism only in terms of what it opposes, omits its positive vision. Imagined but realistic alternatives, although maligned by opponents from liberals to Leninists as merely *utopias*, play a vital role. These radical goals inspire anarchists from Kropotkin and Rocker to present day activists who try – and sometimes with temporary success – to make the 'impossible' real in their everyday struggles.

Inspired by postanarchism, Ibáñez considers all talk of goals to be repressive. Anarchists 'need to abandon "illusions of an endpoint"' (39). If this means rejecting a single universal goal, then Ibáñez is right, but it drifts into lack of future ambition for immediate realisation of anarchist values (78). Concentrating on just the present, means that choices of tactic and organisation neglect future generations. Offering alternative goals to those of national chauvinism and neoliberalism, does not mean these end-states are fixed for all time, but provide a guide which evolves.

Whilst Ibáñez is mostly right that anarchism was born out of, develops and renews itself, through struggle. But struggle does not necessarily lead to the further success of anarchism, but can lead to its

collapse, as oppressive forces overrun it. There is also the risk of the genetic fallacy, just because something arises out of a particular origin, it does not mean that it requires that source to pertain. Seeing anarchism solely in terms of antagonism to oppression and domination, suggests that it can never fully succeed, that there always has to be continuing domination which anarchism can only temporarily or locally resist. Further it suggests that stable anarchist groups lack the internal resources that help them renew and evolve, which runs against the experience of anarchists' predilection for self-reflection which sometimes dips into naval-gazing, self-absorption.



Further Ibáñez's account of stable anarchist movements, which are often associated with the postanarchist account of 'classical anarchism,' is dubious. Whilst aware of divergences, he tends to portray stable social anarchist groups as having fixed universal principles, and a resistance to rethinking organisation, strategy and agency (59). This may be due to peculiarities of the Spanish anarchist movement, with perhaps the overly totemic historical role of the CNT. Whilst there are certainly examples of anarchist movements ossifying into dogma and insular talking shops, this is not unique to, nor especially particular to, anarchism. However, most ideologies, including anarchism, survive and develop by engaging with and adapting to changes in social circumstances.

Social (or class struggle) anarchist groups are on-the-whole adaptable, diverse, reflective of their membership, their histories and the current problems they are facing and resisting. Many of the existing movements UK have adapted over time, incorporating (re-incorporating) features of feminism, ecologism, black liberation and queer theory to further develop. This stands in contrast to the movements which Ibáñez celebrates, the non-ends-driven 'neoanarchism' of *Occupy!* and the alternative-globalisation/anti-capitalist movements. In many cases they have neither adapted nor survived. They have left no institutional resource for future and current generations. As the editors of one of the oldest and most established anarchist organisations, Freedom Press, pointedly remark, that it is they that produced and distributed the English language version of his book. It is another long-established anarchist institution – *Black Flag* – which is reviewing (and recommending) it.

Ibáñez's marginalisation of more sustained anarchist movements is evident in his criticism of classical thinkers which founded and inspired them. He is right that few people are won over to anarchism by reading the great thinkers but by seeing anarchism in action. Anarchism makes most sense when it provides practical resistance. Ibáñez's criticism would equally apply to writings outside the canon too. But there are other uses for anarchist literature, like his book, rather than just recruitment. They provide a language for identifying, analysing and resisting oppression, as well as practical tactics for day-to-day survival (from Émile Pouget's *Sabotage*, Attack International tips on shoplifting, to Scott Branson's *Practical Anarchism*). They can reassure us, that dark times have existed before, that we are not alone, nor never fully defeated, and that resistance continues and can spectacularly grow.

There have been material changes since Ibáñez first authored the book (in the Spanish edition about a decade ago) that have subsequently indicated areas of over-optimism. The author was highly enthusiastic about the role of new information technologies and global communications in real-time. It allowed for social interactions consistent with anarchist anti-hierarchical norms of more participatory decision-making and information sharing, the development of new cross-border solidarities. Initially these interactions were harder to police (46) and led to successful surprise mobilisations. But most of these positives have been undone. The main platforms have been captured by multinational organisations and profit-maximisation. ICT development is increasingly in the service of state and capitalism, rather than contesting it, as Ibáñez acknowledges (57). Their algorithms mitigate against anti-capitalist movements and actively promote reactionary ones. States are now better able to monitor activism as every webpage visit can be traced and whole internet libraries of radical literatures lost as servers are seized or closed.

Give these criticisms, why is the book well worth the read? Well first, its provocative stance prods us

into thinking critically about what constitutes anarchism and with which other movements to engage, and how. As Ibáñez demonstrates, commitments to anti-domination are a very good starting point. He rightly raises the questions of what sorts of values should be central to anarchism and what priority should be given to longer term aims. I disagree with his answers but appreciate his raising these questions and why they matter. Similarly, Ibáñez's reminds us of the risk of group inertia, that in the future new organisations will necessarily develop and there will be new sites of struggle opening up, that innovative, creative tactics will arise that will be harder for the authorities to deal with.

However, these are not alternatives to existing anarchist organisations, but something that mutually assists. By questioning the role of anarchist institutions, Ibáñez has perhaps inadvertently indicated their relative importance. Institutional stability and growth are not contrary to new movement development but often important factors in their development. It is not uncommon for post-left and poststructural anarchist writers to claim that their contributions are provocations aimed at saving or assisting anarchism, though in many instances they simply misrepresent or belittle it, but this book is a genuine, thoughtful and knowledgeable effort at supportive critique.

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Thinking as Anarchists is another book whose origins come from scholars and activists wanting to challenge anarchism, but this is from a much older vintage, showing that such ambitions are part of anarchism's constant efforts to engage in self-critique and renew itself: a transition, which as the editor's note, is still ongoing (10). It is a collection of essays drawn largely from the International Anarchist gathering (*incontro*) in Venice 1984, a 'libertarian Tower of Babel', which hosted anarchist activists and thinkers from across the world, including Murray Bookchin. In an act of serendipity, one of the editor's found the initial draft of a manuscript of collated articles English translations in an Edinburgh bookshop.

Whilst many of the original Italian and French contributions had been disseminated in their national anarchist journals, anthologies, pamphlets – and later made available online – the translations were unpublished. In addition, the editors have supplemented the discovered manuscript with other texts from Italian and French anarchists that engage with the 1984 contributions.

There is also a long and informative editors introduction by Gioli and Kallin, which as well as discussing the volume's genesis, gives fascinating insight into the mechanics of the *incontro*: the intense labour of organisation by Milan, Genva and Montreal-based groups in developing and coordinating the gathering and overcoming political opposition to use public squares. It includes photographs of events and participants as well as publicity materials and aesthetics, the most noteworthy being the poster by Enrico Baj and the appearance of Roberto Ambrosoli's 'Anarchick' figure (whose appearance features unaccredited in many anarchist texts). There are also illuminating anecdotes including an account of the discussion-enhancing alcohol (3000 bottles of wine) provided by noted gastronome Luigi Veronelle. There is also a lively and personal preface from noted environmental anarchist and critic John Clark who was an attendee.

The collection is of interest because it commemorates a particular event – the Venice gathering – and a key moment in Anarchist history and the wider milieu that generated these analyses. A period that marks the intensification of political backlash following a previous period of relatively intense radicalisation; the start point being the killing of Giuseppe Pinelli by the police in 1969 (commemorated in Dario Fo's play *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*) and the strategy of tension. The gathering was a tactic to counter this reactionary flow.

Like Ibáñez's book – and Ibáñez is a contributor to this volume – this text raises significant questions about new formations of anarchism and their interactions with the old. These are both *methodological* questions (how are we to understand these developments? How should the different groups and movements be classified? How do they arise? Why are they important or relevant? To what extent are they still part of anarchism?) and *practical* (how should they be supported? When they identify different priorities and agencies how should existing groups respond?) Many of the papers, such as Amadeo Bertolo (44-6), Giampietro 'Nico' Beriti (207-08) and Ibáñez (61-2), point to the need and desirability of new forms of anarchism, some seeking an explicit break with historical precursors.

With regards to classification, the editors highlight how the contributing chapters illustrate the rise of *new anarchism* and an emerging *Postanarchism*. *New anarchism* prioritised ecological, feminist, gay liberation and peace movements and the linkage coming from anti-hierarchical principles informing organisation, but with a de-prioritisation (but not an absence) of working-class, anti-capitalist goals and objectives. As such they note, it is a precursor to the Ibáñez's neoanarchism and David Graeber's small 'a' anarchism of the alternative-globalisation movements and *Occupy! New anarchism* like Ibáñez's 'neoanarchism' marks its departure from large-A anarchism and autonomous Marxism, (which had long intermingled and intersected with anarchism), as these latter two have a strategic vision for libertarian-egalitarian reorganisation of society. The editors discuss Richard Day's advocacy of *new anarchism* on the basis of rejecting such an ossifying and hierarchical hegemonic revolutionary ambition (26-8). Here the criticisms of Ibáñez's rejection of goals similarly apply to Day. Strategies need not be (indeed are rarely) fixed and immutable but goals are necessary to many benevolent tasks. Nor *contra* Gramsci are wider revolutionary objectives necessarily centred on the control of central power, so whilst for *new anarchists* large-A anarchists remain fixated on the state and so remain within the dominant hegemony, though for large-A anarchists resistance to state-power is necessary (but not sufficient) to undermine the dominant hegemony.

A point of interest is that many of the features on *new anarchism*, which for many contributors and editors were recent developments in the Continent of Europe (25) had already formed a noticeable sub-current in the United Kingdom. Colin Ward, Alex Comfort and Herbert Read had been developing similar *new anarchist* orientations adjacent to large-A anarchism from the end of the Second World War (see for instance Carissa Honeywell's *A British Anarchist Tradition*) and with greater impact from the 1960s with Ward's *Anarchy* magazine. Many of the problems associated with *new anarchism* (as well as a few misinterpretations) were anticipated by Albert Meltzer and Stuart Christie in earlier iterations of *Black Flag*.

Similarly, the texts show some of common features with, or nascent features of, *Postanarchism*, although the editors consider it problematic (29). Areas of enquiry associated with poststructuralism are evident in many contributions: changes of agency and identity in the subject of revolutionary change, with emphasis on gender dynamics (e.g. Codello 250-52; Di Leo, 173-98); the fluid, evolving nature of oppressive powers (e.g. Ibáñez, 62-5; Bertolo, 70-87) and the economics of desirable alternative societies (e.g. Colombo, 90-109; Lanza 112-20) and the revolutionary imaginary (ideas, concepts, feelings that shape social understandings, aspirations and *utopias*) (e.g. Bertolo,44-5, Bertolo, 145-70; Ibáñez, 66-7). Although explicit references to poststructural theory are rare – and largely confined to Foucault (Colombo, 108) and Baudrillard (Lanza, 112, 134) – there are allusions to wider theoretical developments such as those that are helpfully picked out by the editors. Full-blown postanarchists are much more overt in their use of the poststructuralist canon and here many key names are significant by their absence such as Derrida, Lacan, Lyotard, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari.

Engaging with the most recent theoretical works is not unusual. Nor are the parallel concerns with and terminologies of poststructuralism a surprise. As Sadie Plant in the early 1990s – and others subsequently – have pointed out, many key poststructuralists had previously engaged with libertarian-left groups and resituated some of their key concepts, in some instances making them more appropriate to the power-struggles of the post-OPEC crisis, with its globalising economy, huge investments in the silicon chip and roll back of the welfare state (though in many instances poststructural theory deradicalised them).

Thinking as Anarchists is not always an easy read. Kallin and Gioli point to the local anarchist groups who did not participate in the *incontro* because it was too academic. However, this volume is a well-constructed and thoughtful set of interventions, the introduction alone is worth getting hold of, for both its historical insight and its wider discussion of key points. The collection is an engaging mixture of the still highly pertinent and the nostalgic.

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The *incontro* was a response to the decline of the counterculture, the degeneration of the *autonomia* movement and growing political reaction later identified as *the rise of neoliberalism*. It is a realisation of changes in social conditions and capitalist strategies of defusing, co-opting and repressing opposition and maintaining economic hierarchies. Similarly, Ibáñez's book rightly warns

against ossification, the assumption that hierarchical forces do not adapt and evolve, and that the existing repertoire of methods are sufficient to succeed against them. Neoliberalism is itself a victim of its own hubris and unresolvable contradictions. Some of the opposition, raised by anarchists and voiced by small-a and neoanarchists have been recuperated by the new rising dominant form of hierarchy – *capitalist nationalism.* Anti-globalisation, which was initially socialist and internationalist has become xenophobic and protectionist anti-globalism; anti-war, anti-colonialism has become isolationist appeasement of militarised colonialism in Ukraine or Palestine, even anti-corporatism has become a Romantic paeon to local capitalists and selective rejection of just 'crony' or 'virtue-signalling' conglomerates (often with a side-order of antisemitism). The spirit of these books is right, to reformulate anarchist methods and organisation to raise to new challenges and seek out areas of collaboration. However, this should be as much through using and adapting the remaining anarchist institutional resources – including anarchist histories – not just looking beyond them.

Parish Notices

Freedom Fundraiser – the Freedom building at 84b Whitechapel High Street is the home of Freedom Bookshop and also hosts a number of organisations, including ASS, Haven Distribution and AFed. Due to dramatic increases in the cost of energy and local business rates, they are in need of more funds and support to keep the building going, and to make key repairs. Donations are welcome, and can be sent via: Cheque made out to "Freedom Press" at 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX; Paypal (please note as "Building Fund" in the 'What's This For' box).

IWW Ireland continues to produce their bulletins, 'Direct Action' and 'Bulldozer' (for prison abolition). PDFs of both are available on their website: onebigunion.ie

Hackney Anarchists are meeting regularly to educate, agitate and organise: network23.org/hackney-anarchists

Workers Solidarity is an online Green Syndicalist webzine published by East Bay Syndicalists: eastbaysyndicalists.org

Red Flare is a group of anti-fascist investigators, using open source and investigative methods to expose and oppose the far right in Britain. They work with journalists to publish stories about far right groups, their organisers and activists. They also share information with groups threatened by the far right as well as those engaged in opposing it: redflare.info

As the old CNT poster declared, 'Anarchist books are weapons against fascism'. Please support Active Distribution (activedistributionshop.org), AK Press (akuk.com) and Freedom Press (freedompress.org.uk). Other Anarchist publishers are available!

For reviews of anarchist books, a good place to start is the *Anarchist Review of Books*: anarchistreviewofbooks.org

Fifth Estate will celebrate 60 years of anti-authoritarian publishing next year. Meanwhile, take a look at their archive of issues published so far, 1965-2023: fifthestate.org/archive

Libertarian or Anarchist?

Henry Glasse

Freedom, January 1899

The term "Libertarian" in place of "Anarchist" seems to be used with increasing frequency. The newer term pleases me better because, while it emphatically denotes our cardinal principle, it admits of no misconstruction nor misunderstanding. We who have long fought under the device of "Anarchy" have naturally acquired a regard for the name and frankly accepted it with whatever stigma might attach thereto, still we must admit that the very word in itself is liable to be taken, quite honestly, in a wrong sense, while our many *dishonest* opponents take care to recognise no other. Anarchy is most frequently taken to mean disorder, confusion, chaos – quite the contrary of that true harmony which we affirm to spring from Freedom alone.

In face of the reaction which has now set in and which daily pretends to improve the world by the imposition of new restrictions upon every branch of the activity of the human will, and upon every tendency of the human mind to transcend the limits of the commonplace and *respectable*, we alone among all parties remain unaltered in our devotion to Freedom, and oppose to all laws and regulations our one demand – Liberty for each and for all; Liberty unbounded.

And this is not because we believe that each man possessed of freedom will necessarily do what we conceive to be right; on the contrary, it is because we admit human imperfection that we refuse to acquiesce in subjection to a government either representing a minority intent on maintaining its privileges, or swayed by a majority imbued with prejudice and bent on crushing the individual will into submission to its own mediocrity.

Our motto: "An-Archy – No Government," is synonymous with Libertarianism[1], but I think the latter name is more expressive and better calculated to win the sympathies of those whose generous instincts we seek to enlist for our Cause and whose noble but wandering, aspirations we seek to direct to the true path – Freedom.

[1] The article has "Libertism," an obvious typographical error for Libertarianism. (*Black Flag*)

Women's Labour in Factories

Charlotte M. Wilson

Justice, 8 March 1884

To the Editor of "JUSTICE"

Sir,

With reference to your paragraph last week on "Women's Labour in Factories," will you allow me to call your attention to the fact, that in pointing out the desirability of "workers" acting from their own point of view, you apparently exclude women from the category of workers, for you go on to speak of women and children as of a separate class whose interests must necessarily be subordinate.

I submit that in the case in question, the Kidderminster strike, women are to be considered in every sense as much "workers" as men, seeing that they have actually been engaged in the same sort of industrial operation, and further, that this work is in this instance a direct advantage to the community, economically speaking, as it is stated by the manufacturers that they perform this labour better than men.

What men have a just right to demand is that women should not undersell them – that they should decline to do the same amount and kind of work at lower wages than men. If instead of agitating for this indiscriminate dismissal the Weavers' Association would help these women, whose interests, could they but see it, are identical with their own. to form a union to protect their interests, they would be doing far more to consolidate the ranks of the workers and weaken the power of the profit-mongers.

Working men all over Europe are beginning to realize this in relation to foreign labour. Their original idea of persecuting and coercing foreigners, imported by employers to undersell home labour, is giving way to the far wiser and more effectual remedy of combining with the working men of all nationalities against the common foe. The habit in each country of conceiving of the dwellers in all others as an inferior sort of animal, with whom it was hopeless to attempt to come to ant effectual understanding, and who therefore must, if possible, be reduced to subjection, is fast disappearing before the spread of general enlightenment, superior knowledge, and the lessons of experience, I would suggest that the feeling shown by some men's Unions towards women-workers is a prejudice of the same nature, and equally doomed to fall before enlightened self-interest and the advancing senses of the solidity of mankind.

In conclusion, pray permit me to protest against the classification of the labour of women and of children under one heading. Surely the case of children sent to work by their elders, whether they like it or not, and usually in great part for the benefit of those elders, whilst their minds and bodies are immature and likely to be injured and stunted, and who are incapable of combining to protect themselves, differs widely from that of women, who, as fully developed human beings, deliberately choose an occupation, and are not only theoretically capable of self-protection, but are beginning to show themselves practically so by the promotion of Unions for the purpose.

Believe me, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

C. M. Wilson,

London, March 4